



TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

- comfort object – security blanket – transitional phenomenon -

Master Degree Project

Master of Fine Art,
Child Culture Design.

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Abstract.

The starting point of the project was to explore the nature of Transitional Object (Comfort Object, Security Blanket), based on D. W. Winnicott's theory. To explore it from designers point of view I made an online questionnaire to learn about people's memories of comfort objects, both their own and of children they know. Reading articles and discussions with parents and professionals regarding infant care was also a part of my research.

My result is a design proposal of comfort object, designed to obtain the scent of the infant's primal caretaker. Choice of comfort object is very emotional and maybe not possible to design. My result "Baby Bú" has other useful functions for both the baby and the parent and won't be useless if it does not become comfort object. It is a baby-carrier, a ring-sling, adjustable in size for both the child and the parents. It is also super-bunny, a soft friend to hug and play with.

Keywords.

Transitional object,

Comfort object,

Security Blanket,

Baby-carrier,

Baby-sling,

Infant,

Soft-toy,

Super-bunny,

Preface

Best thanks to –

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All photos and drawings are made by the author.

Introduction

Many infants seek comfort in special objects. Most of the times it is some kind of a soft toy or some kind of textile. In my research I try to discover the nature of comfort objects and try to find out which senses are most involved.

Based on the results from my research I will make a design proposal for a comfort object.

Purpose, goals and background

Purpose – Goals

- To find out what makes a transitional object (comfort object).
- To create a link between the mother (primal caregiver) and the infant.
- To enhance feeling of comfort and security to infants and young children.
- To design an object with meaning and function for both the child and the parent.

Starting questions:

Which qualities are needed for transitional object?

Which features create transitional object? Appearance, texture, color, smell, tactile, sound, function, feeling, emotion...

Which senses are most involved? Touch, vision, smell, hearing...

What do comfort objects have in common?

Is there any interesting new technique to build the design on?

(smart textiles, interactive objects, etc.)

Is it possible to design the ideal comfort object?

The core question when narrowed down to one was:

What creates a comforting object and which senses are most involved?

Background

Transitional object (comfort object, security blanket, transitional phenomenon) was my starting point in this project. After reading D.W. Winnicott's theory of transitional object in his book "Playing and Reality" I got very interested in exploring the nature of these objects and their meaning for the infant and its development.

In his theory, Winnicott describes the object as the infant's first "not me" possession. Often some kind of soft toy or blanket, that is in the reach of the infant, in the early stages of infancy. He writes about the object replacing or being a symbol for the mother's breast in the child's mind. It is not always an object, the transitional phenomenon can also be, for example, some kind of babbling or behavioral pattern.

The child's relation to the object is that the child controls it and has full power over the object. The object is to be cuddled, loved and can even be mutilated. It must never be changed unless by the child. It must survive expression of the child's feelings, love, hate and everything in between. It is essential for the child at bedtime and in times of anxiety but by time it loses meaning and importance as the child gradually develops from being dependent on the object and develops other ways of dealing with difficulties.

"It is not the object, of course, that is transitional. The object represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being the relation to the mother as something outside and separate"

(Winnicott, 1971,p.19-21)

Winnicott's approach is psycho analytical, from a clinical point of view and he researches the phenomenon due to its effects on the person's mental health as an adult.

My approach on the other hand, is from designer's point of view, to explore the nature of these objects and try to find out what gives them meaning for the child and find out what senses are most involved in creating the transitional object. I am focusing more on the comforting and soothing elements of the phenomenon and "Comfort Object" is the phrase I will mostly use to describe

it. Many children I know have had some kind of comfort objects and I have had discussion with many people about the phenomena.

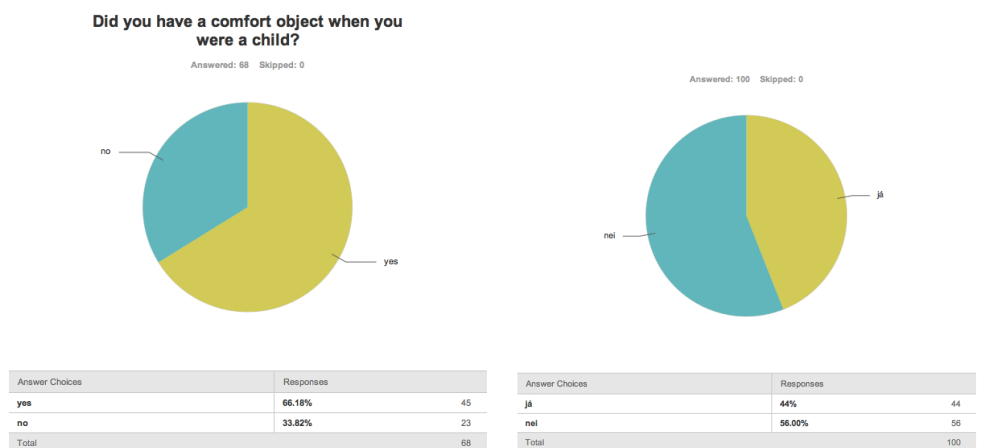
Research analysis and conclusions

To get more information to work from I decided to make an online questionnaire to search for an answer to my core question:

What creates a comforting object and which senses are most involved?

I made two identical online questionnaires, one in English and one in Icelandic using the online tool “SurveyMonkey”. I got over 200 responses and was able to use 168 of them due to the limit of 100 responses for each survey.

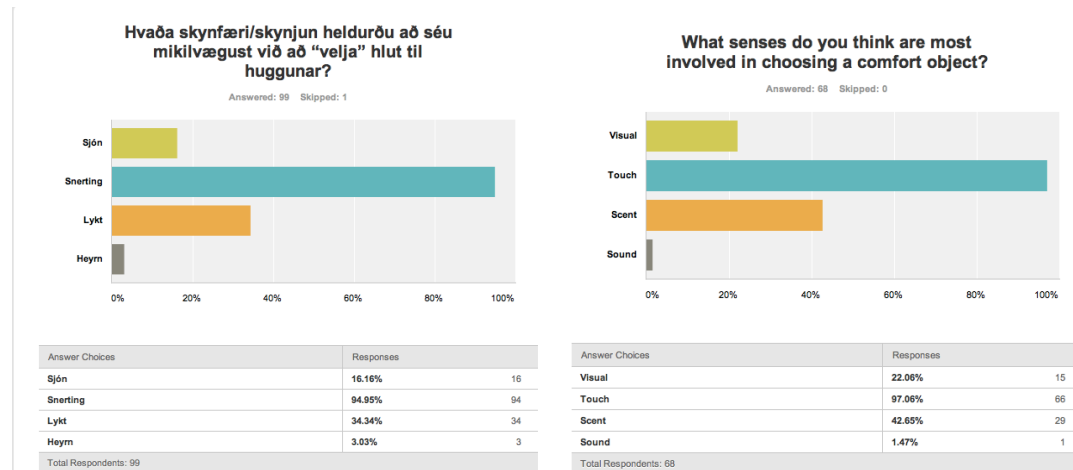
The first question in the survey was to find out if people had a comfort object when they were young. Here are the results visualized:



Majority of the people in the survey had some kind of comfort object. When I asked people to describe their object, I got many interesting stories along with the answers, which added to the base of my design research. More descriptions followed in the next question, whether they knew children who had comfort objects and of what kind. Many of the descriptions contained stories of how a certain detail of the comfort object was the most important one, often a ribbon or label or ear or something with some special texture. The use of the comfort object, was often related to some kind of repeated movements or even some sort of rituals.

My questionnaire also gave me answers to which senses people considered were the most important in comfort objects for infants and young children. The touch and tactility got the highest votes, over 95% of people thought that it was important and over 40% mentioned the scent and around 20% the visual part. Only 1-2% suggested hearing or sound.

Below are the answers visualized.



I was not surprised that most people mentioned the touching as the most important, but more people mentioned the scent than I had expected. It made me curious to look deeper into the sense of smell in infants, which led to the finding of researches focusing on infant's sense of smell at birth. One paper described, how infants use their sense of smell to find the mother's breast and it seems to be something all mammals have in common. (Nishitani et al, 2009) Other researches showed that infants, who were near a scent they were familiar with, seemed to cope better with pain and stress than infants that did not. In some cases it was the smell of mother's breast or amniotic fluid, but even scents like vanilla or chamomile could help if they were familiar with it. (Rattaz, Goubet & Bullinger, 2010) (Varendi et al. 1998)

It is not possible to decide beforehand what will become the child's comfort object because it will eventually be the child's choice. It is too emotional to be predetermined for the child. According to my questionnaire I found out that what the comfort objects had in common was that they were soft, almost all

were made of some kind of textiles and were in a close reach of the child. They were often a gift from someone who deeply cared about the child or belonged to some of its beloved ones, often a parent. More information about the questionnaire is to be found in the attachments.

Project results and process

Before I started I knew that my design would only be a proposal for comfort object, I could never guarantee it functioning as such. I used my research to as a base to maximize the ability of my design proposal. I decided to implement more functions into the project both for the child and the caretaker. After a lot of thinking and evaluations I decided to design a “comfort object” that was also a baby-carrier and a soft toy to cuddle and play with.

The process.

In the design process I decided to focus on the most involved senses, according to the answers to my questionnaire, the touch and smelling. For more comfort I wanted to find a way to capture the scent of the parent into the object. Research show as mentioned earlier that infants seem to cope better with pain or anxiety if they smell a scent they are familiar with. The most familiar and comforting scent is then very likely a scent related to the mother, father or other primal caretaker. The question was how to capture the scent from the parent into a soft toy.

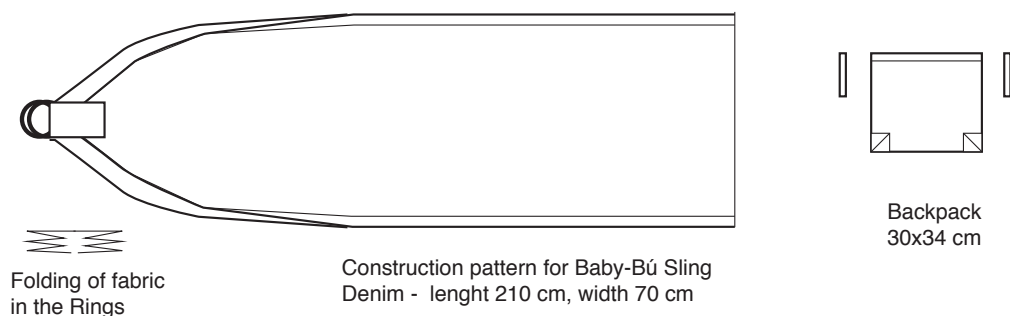
First I thought of something the parent could wear or something to keep in touch with the body. The artifacts that went through my mind were for example, a scarf or a shawl, T-shirt, blanket, pillow, pillowcase or some sort of a baby carrier. Combining a soft toy with clothes for adults might make it unappealing to wear. Clothes with some bulky lumps or bumps are usually not looking good on people and not appealing to wear. These thoughts led me to consider designing some kind of a baby carrier. It fits both genders and can be used by both parents and also by other caretakers.

After the choice of making a baby-carrier I researched the existing types, from various cultures. Both more industrial and complicated ones, and more simple forms used in many different cultures.

I decided not to design a baby-carrier from scratch since that was not the main core in my project. I decided to use as a base some of the existing types and improve it according to my project. I wanted to keep it simple, safe and well functioning. Some kind of wrap or sling I found most appealing.

I used the web to explore different types from different cultures, focusing on security and functionality. I made tests of Pouch Sling and Ring Sling.

I chose to base my design on a Ring-Sling a baby-carrier used in many cultures. The reason for my choice is it's simplicity, adjustable sizing, security (when used correctly) and the ability to transform it into something else when needed. It has a simple shape, which I changed slightly to improve and make it more suitable for my project. The basic construction pattern is a length of fabric with two rings sewn on one end. I added padding on the edges to increase comfort for the baby, which can also give some support for the head. I also changed the folding structure around the rings to fit better to the soft toy attached and the soft toy makes a padded shoulder piece for the parent.



My choice of material was denim, because that is quite “universal” material and wearable for both genders and accepted in most cultures and classes. It is also strong and made of natural fibers, usually cotton or rich cotton blend. In my research I found out that cotton and cotton blends are most suitable to capture scent and obtain it for longer time.

“Contact sampling with cotton material has been shown to be the collection method that yielded the greatest number of volatile compounds and the highest scent mass amounts” (Prada, Curran & Furton, 2011)

I tried many different types of denim, cotton and cotton-blends. My tests showed that a thinner kind of fabric would be suitable for my project since it has to be possible to fold it into the soft toy. It was not easy to find the right material, one was the right color but too thick, another was the right thickness but 65% polyester and too glossy. I tried out stretch denim as well, but that can be dangerous because the baby is more likely to fall out of stretch fabric. It could have worked if the linings would have been made of different non-stretch fabric but it was also too thick. After several try-outs I found the “right” material or very close to what I had in mind when I started.

The rings need to be the right size suitable for the material, strong and safe. I found an online shop in USA selling secured rings to use for Ring-Slings.

They were available in plastic or aluminum. I ordered both types and prefer the color in the metal ones but the material in the plastic ones.

Testing showed me that this was the solution I was aiming for.



The other main part of the design was the soft toy. The baby-carrier needed to be able to fold into the soft toy. I made different mockup 3d sketches of animals, the ones I tried out were fish, bird, teddy, monster and rabbit.

My final choice of an “animal” was a rabbit. Rabbit is an animal that very few children are afraid of, it is innocent and friendly, has got long ears to fiddle with and soft fur for petting and hugging.

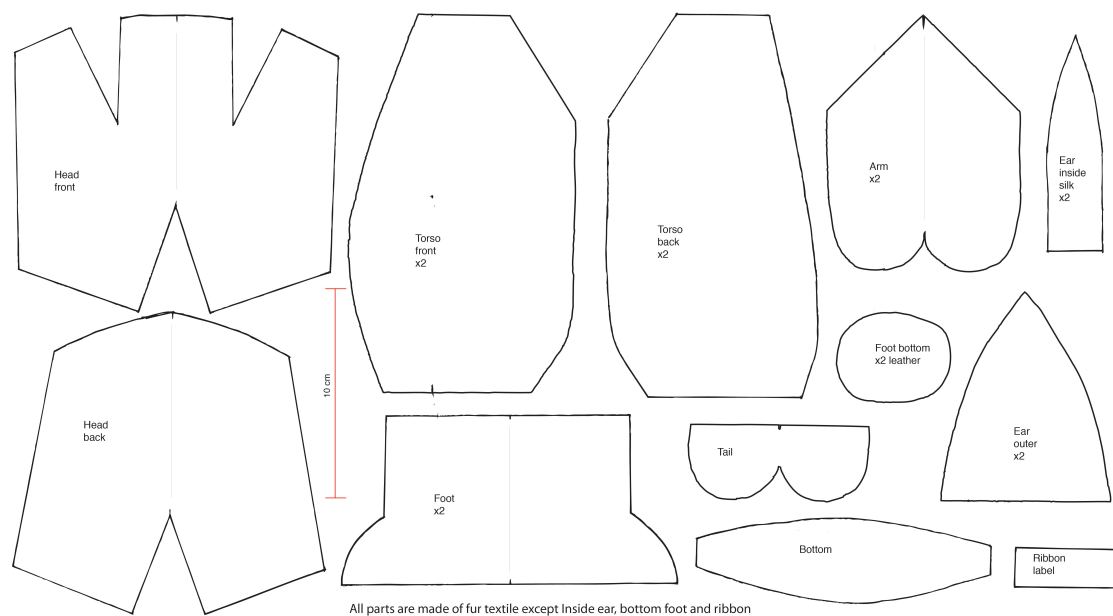
I had to make a construction pattern which made it possible to contain the baby-carrier. First attempts were to fit it in it’s belly, but it got too bulky and it’s size had to be quite big to make sense. Then I tried out a dress and an overall to fit the carrier in, which worked better but I was not satisfied with that solution. My end result was a kind of a backpack made of the same denim as in the baby-carrier.

I tried out many different materials for the rabbit and found at last a soft furry material I was satisfied with. I wanted some variations of tactility, since my questionnaire guided me into that direction. The inside of the rabbit’s ears is shiny satin, one pink and one baby-blue, as a little tip on gender aspects. Under the rabbit’s feet are leather soles, in order to give more types of tactility. The eyes, nose and mouth are sewed in for safety reasons, not likely to be “eaten off” by the child. The rabbit facial expression is meant to show kindness. The sling can either be folded completely in the rabbit’s backpack or with some part left out to be a cape to create a super-bunny.



The backpack has ribbons to tie around the rabbit’s neck to keep the cape in place and to add variety in tactility. The ribbon is sewn tight leaving out about 25 cm, that is within safety standards for the youngest children. The rabbit and the sling are attached by a piece of fabric and it is possible to cut the “umbilical cord” between the rabbit and the baby-carrier so they can be used

separately. If that is done it is possible to fill the backpack of the rabbit with something soft so it will be more “fluffy”. If it is cut apart, it is not meant to be attached again. The length of the rabbit’s cape can be decided by the user, depending on how much of it is stored in the backpack. It can be folded in completely or with some length left out, suitable for the Super-Bunny. Longer versions of the cape can become a blanket to wrap around the baby. It can also be laid over a pram or baby’s car seat to make it more comfortable for the child to take a nap when it is bright and sunny. There are also many other possibilities of use and/or play, changing pad, peek-a-boo etc. Below is a photo of the construction pattern for the rabbit.



The current name of the object is Baby-Bú the Super-bunny. The choice of the name is because when most young children start babbling it is a sound easy for them to say and learn.

Reflections

- a. Design issue(s)
- b. Relevance to situation and stakeholders
- c. Sustainability aspects
- d. Process, method and learning results.

Reflections a – Design issues

I found it challenging to approach psychoanalytical theory from the field of design. It was, at least for me, a completely new design method.

Digging into a field you don't know and using each step to explore the area. Product design is in my opinion a feasible way to create a comfort object. Begin by exploring the nature of comfort objects in the research phase from different angles and then using the information gathered as a base for the design. Approaching the phenomenon from many different angles should increase the possibility to reach the goal of the design proposal.

Design is a big part of our everyday life. Majority of our world is designed in one way or another. Multidisciplinary approach in design often creates new ways and opportunities. From a different point of view, we can sometimes find a new perspective on well-known phenomena.

Using design issues to approach psychoanalytical theory might sound weird, but psychology plays, in my opinion, an important role in design. The better we understand the human nature, the better equipped we designers are to develop products with meaning and functionality for people. Trying to understand the source of emotions and acceptance of the senses.

My project has many layers and functions and will probably be difficult to communicate. The core idea is very conceptual and not easy to test, it could take years to find out if it becomes a transitional object or not. Furthermore tests to evaluate the importance of the parents' scent for comforting which is difficult to prove. The other functions of the product I have tested and got positive feedback from both the children and the parents that have tested it.

I am wondering whether I have some strange passion for multifunctional objects in my designs. Many of my former projects relate to that. I don't know why it happens so often in my work but maybe because I like the user to have some impact on the use of the product.

Reflections b – Relevance

It is clear to me that my project is difficult to communicate. It has many layers of purpose since it is multifunctional and meant to fulfill different needs.

It's main purpose is in my mind to give comfort and feeling of security to young children. I can never guarantee that it works like that since the choice of comfort object is so emotional and personal for the child, and not all children use comfort objects.

The other values are more functional and easier to test, the use of the baby-carrier and young children's reaction to the super-bunny.

Tests showed that the baby-carrier works very well. I tried it out with mothers with 3-6 months old babies and tried it myself with 2-5 years old children as well. It is most useful to carry babies the first year, since after they start walking themselves and become more independent, they are usually not too keen on being carried like a baby. But the strength of the material chosen allows for use for toddlers as well. They sometimes like to be carried, when tired and then the baby-carrier leads to less strain on the back and arms of the parent.

There are of course many types of baby-carriers on the market, both sling-types similar to this one and more structured. What this has that the other on the market don't, is the play-function and the comforting proposal of which I would be interested in investigating further later.

The role as a soft toy is obvious and has similarities to many similar on the market. In my questionnaire many people mentioned some tiny details of the comfort objects that became important in soothing rituals, ribbons and parts with different tactility or materials for example. I kept that in mind when designing the soft toy. My choice of figure was a rabbit, because it is friendly

and it is one of the animals least likely for children to be afraid of. My tests with children showed that they liked the appearance, the older children 2,3 4 and 5 years old, started playing with it. I tried to hold it about 30 cm away from the face of a 3 months old boy and that sight was very pleasant because he really tried to “talk” to it. Looking directly at it’s face waving his arms, moving his mouth and trying to make sounds, it was really rewarding for me to see his reactions.

It is a question whether the world needs my product. Needs are often created by market and media today. I believe my product could be very useful for infants and parents. Modern parents in western societies usually have many obligations. It is sometimes difficult to harmonize infant care with other obligations in the speed of modern society. Baby-Bú creates opportunities for parents to carry their infant close to their body or to leave their parental scent with the baby when they need to be away.

Reflections c – Sustainable aspects

The product has many layers and functions and is designed to be meaningful for both the child and the parent. It could replace both a baby-carrier and a soft toy and therefore lead to less consumption. In real life, in our culture, we know that most children have many soft toys. So even though theoretically it could promote less consumption it is not likely to happen.

The multifunctional value should lead to longer lifespan of the product and if my design proposal would succeed in becoming a comfort object it should have a long lifespan.

The materials used are durable even though they might become worn by time. The baby-carrier and the rabbit can be separated by cutting the link, piece of fabric, between them, and have independent “lives”.

The use of baby slings is common in many countries, often used to make it possible for the mother to keep the child with her while working. It creates opportunity for using both hands and carrying the child at the same time.

In western cultures children are sent to daycare centers or playschools when parents need to go back to work after maternity leave. If Baby-Bú scented with the loving parent would become a comforter or soother it could make the separation more tolerable for the child. Then the function would be completely different in different situations. On one hand it would make the separation easier and on the other make the togetherness easier.

That leaves us with the interesting question of which is better for the child. If or when this artifact will go into production I would like to have impact on production methods. It is important for me as a designer and a responsible human being, to do everything I can, to encourage good working conditions for the labor working in the production. Fair trade is an aspect I would like to use. Nontoxic materials and sustainable production methods would be my preference in the production.

Baby-Bú can be used for a very long time and has many layers of function and meaning which is one way of sustainability.

Reflections d – process, methods and learning results.

Wrong thinking is most of the time the beginning in my design process. I like to allow my mind to fly freely high up in the sky of ideas without any boundaries of rational thinking.

After that phase I evaluate and sort out something I find useful and/or interesting and process it further in my mind. I do sketches in my mind, which often are very detailed and I can visualize it very clearly in my head but don't make them physically. Sometimes, I get fascinated with certain concept, now the concept of transitional object. Then I start digging to find everything that relates to it in one way or another. In the beginning I try not to keep too focused. Every stupid idea or illogical connection is allowed at the start. Playfulness is always important for me, not only when designing for children. After the research phase and the concept has become clear in my mind, I start sketching three-dimensional. That is more natural way of working for me than drawing. I make mockups and material tryouts that develop on the way

when building. When the basic shape is ready and choices of material, I start working on details, still keeping my mind open for ideas of improvements.

Then it is important to make tests and discussions with focus groups, tutor or other designers. Keeping the mind open to critics and other's opinion is always a step towards improvements, whether it is used or not.

I am grateful for the right questions from my tutor in the design process, which often opened my mind into aspects I had not thought of, or given too little attention in my process. For example he asked why the baby-carrier and the soft toy were not separable. I tested it and decided to open for that possibility, but if it will be cut apart it would not be possible to reattach it, in a way like the umbilical cord between a mother and a baby, which fits my concept.

I never got really stuck, but often had second thoughts on if I my project was too absurd. I sometimes wondered if I should have chosen some other issue, but that never lasted long because I find this issue very interesting.

Usually I am more interested in toddlers than infants and I was in a way surprised by my choice of age group. My experience with both infants and toddlers was very useful in the design process as well as being a parent.

In the final presentation I got really good questions and comments that I evaluated and used some of them to improve my artifact. To mention some, a comment about the size of the soft toy compared to the infant and the length of a string according to safety standards. I had safety standards in mind in most aspects and after the presentation I searched for regulations about length of string according to a safety and made minor changes to adjust my design. Comments about the size were understandable. The rabbit was bigger than I actually wanted, because the carrier part of the artifact needed to fit in the rabbit. At first I tried to fit it in the belly of the soft toy, then in it's clothes at first as a dress and then in t-shirt and trousers. I kept digging for solutions and managed to make the rabbit smaller by making a kind of backpack to store the baby-carrier part of the product in.

I also got the question why I didn't design a new kind of baby-carrier. Since it was not the main issue of my task I decided rather to look into existing ones,

than designing a new version from the scratch. After my choice of basic baby-carrier I developed it further and made slight improvements, in my opinion.

I did not do my best at the final presentation, I was too stressed and not focused enough, but managed to make most of my thoughts clear.

Maybe I should have, in the process, asked for more help of some sort, but it is very strong in my character to try to manage and do everything I can myself. Despite that, I always keep my mind open to others opinions and advices and do changes, if in my opinion, it is improving the project.

In the research phase I learned many interesting things about the human senses. How many researches show that a newborn infant is like other mammals using the sense of smell to identify the mother and use it to search for “food” and feeling of security. I found it very interesting.

I have had a lot of thoughts about presenting the artifact. This object is difficult to communicate and exhibit. The nature of it is complicated, almost too many “layers”, combining functioning artifact for parents and a toy for infants, meant to comfort, among other uses. When I say that I am “collecting” scent from the parent into the object it may sound bizarre to some people.

It would probably be difficult to convince baby product manufacturers to buy this design. The best way of marketing Baby-Bú would probably be direct sale, based on user’s experience.

I realize that the world does not desperately need this product, which actually is the case with most offspring from designers today. It can though be useful for some people at least as a baby-carrier and a soft toy. The ultimate result would be, if it would succeed in becoming the comfort object I am aiming for in my design proposal.

Unfortunately I cannot test it now, but hopefully later.

I hope that my main design proposal will succeed since it could have positive impact in the lives of our youngest people. If my design could make the life better for only a few children it would be worth the work put into the process.

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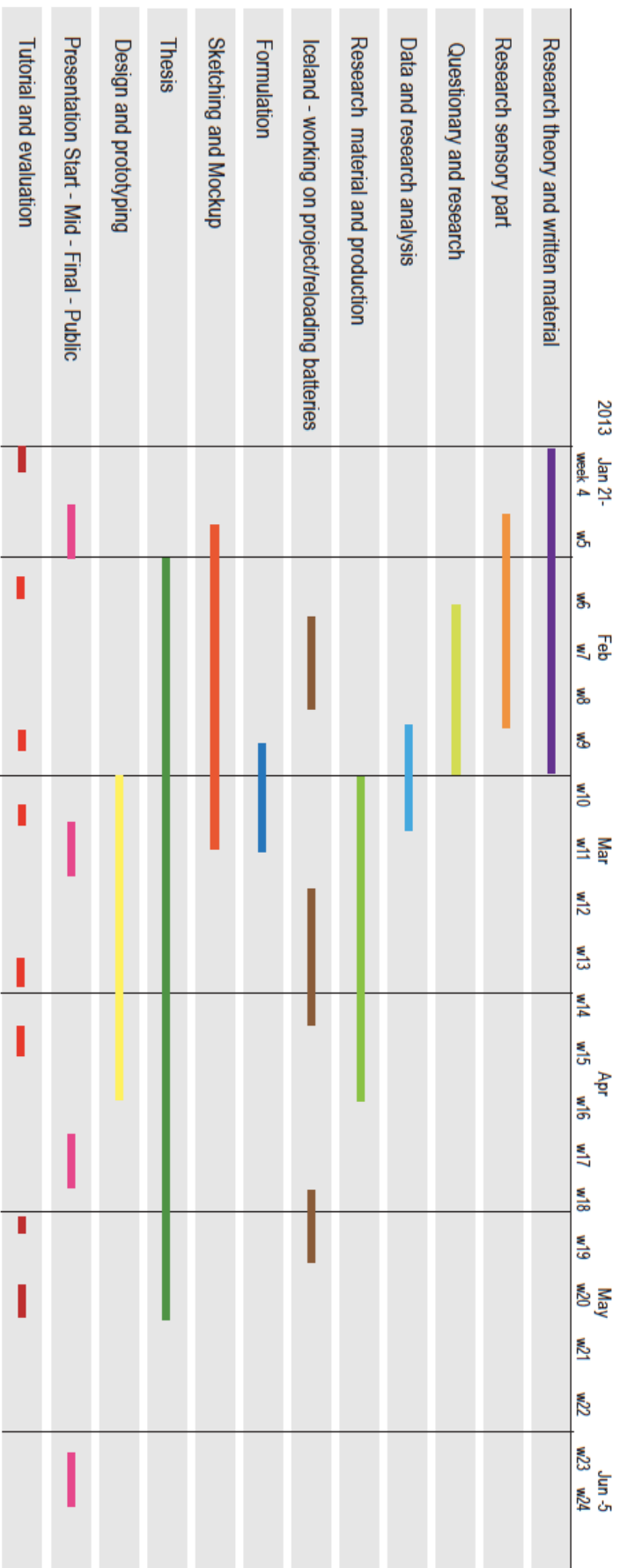
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All photos and drawings are made by the author, except for Winnicott's explanatory figure in synopsis, in attachments.

Project and Timeplan

MA project - Child Culture Design HDK
Helga Björg Jónasardóttir

TRANSITIONAL OBJECT



Project plan

Synopsis final project.
Helga Björg Jónasardóttir
CCD - HDK

Concept:

Transitional object, (Security blanket,
Comfort object, transitional phenomenon)

Research base:

Theory of Transitional object by Donald Winnicott.
Parents Experience.
Professional advices.
Children's memories.
My own experience with infants and children.

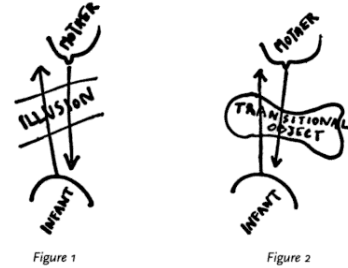


Figure: Winnicott's theory

Purpose: (objectives)

- to find out what makes a transitional object.
- to give feeling of comfort and security for infants.
- to create a link between mother (primal caregiver) and a child.
- to design an object with meaning and/or function for child and/or mother.

Target group:

Infants, young children, parents, caretakers.

Questions:

- What qualities are needed for transitional object?
- What features create a transitional object, look, texture, colour, smell, tactile, feeling, specialities sound, function, emotion.....
- What senses are most involved ? Touch, smell, vision or.....
- What do transitional objects have in common?
- Is it possible to design the ideal transitional object?
- Is there any new technique to build the design on? (Smart textiles, interactive objects, etc.)

Why this concept?

My mind has recently been deeply into the idea of the "transitional object"
I would like to base my research on Donalds Winnicott's theory of the transitional object and then research people's experience by interviews and questions and look into different cultures and try to find out some connections and common characteristics of this phenomenon.
Based on my research I would like to design some kind of transitional object with meaning and/or function for the child and the primal caretaker.
All my life I have been taking care of young children, first my younger sisters and brother, other relatives, babysitting my neighbour's children, raising my own children and then taking care of sibling's children. I think my experience with young children and in design will be useful in this project.

Sketches and Mockups 3D

3D sketches
and mockups.
Super-Bunny and
other soft-toy
superheroes in
development



From SurveyMonkey

Online Surveys in English and Icelandic – charts are in the main text.

1. Did you have a comfort object when you were a child?

yes

no

2. If yes, could you describe it please?

What made it special for you?

If no, why do think you didn't?

3. Do you know children who have had comfort objects?

If yes, could you describe it?

4. What senses do you think are most involved in choosing a comfort object?

Visual

Touch

Scent

Sound

5. How old do you think children are when they stop using objects (if they have one) to comfort themselves?

1. Áttir þú þér uppáhaldshlut þegar þú varst barn? Eitthvað sem þú þurftir að hafa hjá þér, þegar þú fórst að sofa, eða veitti þér öryggistilfinningu félagsskap þegar þú þarfnadist þess?

já

nei

2. Ef já – geturðu lýst þessum hlut?

Hvað gerði hann mikilvægan/verðmætan?

3. Þekkirðu börn sem hafa átt sér einhvern svona hlut?

Ef já, geturðu lýst honum/þeim.

4. Hvaða skynfæri/skynjun heldurðu að séu mikilvægust við að “velja” hlut til huggunar?

Sjón

Snerting

Lykt

Heym

5. Á hvaða aldri heldurðu að börn (sem nota svona hluti) hætti að nota “huggunarhluti” ?

A few answers from the online survey.

People's descriptions of their comfort objects. Copied directly from the file:

It was a white teddy bear, It was given to me by my uncle when I was born, I guess it was special because I always have had it. I didn't have a lot of soft toys, but this was the only one I felt really "connected" to.

my soft blanket

It was a small stuffed toy, it was a light blue elephant. I don't have any specific memories except it looks and the feeling of it. I think I liked and had it as a favorite because I received it when I was very young, and then it became a comfort object because I had always used it, kind of a habit or custom. I didn't have that many stuffed toys but this was the first I received, which I think was the reason for it becoming my favorite. On the other hand, I am not looking back and try to explain this rationally, maybe there was no rational reason for why I liked this toy, or maybe something which is rational when you are very young but not when you are an adult?

I can not remember any special. However I did have a teddy bear, but I do not believe it was more than just that. At least not to the degree that I would name it a Comfort Object.

The tactile feeling was everything for me. One blanket and one teddycat

It was my granddad's very old and washed fabric tissues. They were soft, and I knew he still used the same kind.

I don't remember. Maybe I had, I used to suck on my fingers when I was younger, maybe that was my comfort object.

It was my cuddly toy, a monkey that I called "Lilla vännen" ("Little friend") that had a very friendly face made of rubber and a fur made of fluffy textile.

It was a blanket, with a pale pink/white pattern in form of some squares. The comfort for me was the different smells, I used it and sniffed on it, so it was a big no no to clean it! When I wasn't allowed to use it anymore, because I was too old. I used a soft toy in form of a collie dog instead that I carried around everywhere.

I had more than one stuffed toys that I held while sleeping. But one in one period. I used to have a pingu, another penguin, a cat-like character..... Pingu is my favorite cartoon and character. After sometime co-sleeping with my stuffed toys, they got my smell. This was what I loved most. If I slept without them, I felt empty in my arms.

I had a blanket with pictures of bears on it. I liked it to be cool so I cooled it by waving it around. I love the smell so it was very upsetting when my parents

cleaned it.

it's a monkey. it's soft and cute with very long arms and legs. it's special because my grandfather bought me and i can play with its long legs and arms.

It was a shirt I had worn when I was very small. I loved the canvas fabric of it, it had a red and white checkered pattern. It was big enough for me to hug it at the time. I kept it for many years and had it in my bed till I was 5 or 6 - when my family cruelly threw it away.

It was a teddy-polar-bear that my parents bought me when I was born. It(he) still means a lot to me!

Soft textile pigs. 4 of them. Stuffed with cotton. My mum made them. They smelled nice and safe and made me feel not so lonely.

My little sheep! We r best friend! I told everything with him.

Two teddybears to have in my arms during sleep. It made me feel safe.

Pacifier (napp) it was brownish-yellow at the rubber sucking part and the other part was a soft oval shape, the surface was smooth without a handle or a ring , it was in plastic, pale yellow and white. It was soothing to me because I always had it when I went to bed, a routine. I knew it was mine , my younger brother also has some pacifiers but I knew this was mine.

Wool blanket with silk edging. Rubbed corner around eye nose.

I don't remember anything that gives me comfort, I like my toys, but I can live without them. But I can't fall asleep without holding my grandpa's/grandma's hand until I was 7 or 8 years old.

a white blanket with blue bears on

I had a teddy bear, ugly but all mine. I kept it until I realized that it was childish to have one.

yellow pillow. no special reason why...

I had two-three different pillowcases. They were smaller than an ordinary-sized pillow, made for children's beds. The soft fabric was important (they were washed many many times) and I would rub it between my thumb and fingers.

It was a piece of textile. It was very soft and it was only mine.

It was a blanket which I always brought with me and hugged. It gave me comfort.

Answers directly from the Icelandic survey not translated.
(Use google translate or send me request for translation if needed.)

Ég átti svæfil sem eg kalladi dodda. hann var alltaf með mér. og snudda

Tuskuköttur, heimasamaður. Frekar stór, eins og lítill koddur. Hann var lungamjúkur og mátulega úttroðinn og batnaði bara eftir því sem hann slitnaði og lyktin af honum varð heimilislegri.

Lína langsokkur. Amma bjó hana til.

Bangsi og lítill dúkkustrákur - mér fannst gott að kúra og þeir veittu mér öryggi þegar ég var hrædd við myrkrið.

Þetta var dúkka sem mamma bjó til :) Dúkkan var gerð úr fjólubláu fínflaueli (sagði mamma) svo var hún með voða fallegar fléttur. Ég skírði dúkkuna Fjólú Lindu. Ég var kannski um þriggja ára þegar ég fékk þessa dúkku, en man mjög vel eftir henni.

hornið á sænginni, farið inn í verið og sofnað við að nudda horninu við nefið.

Svæfilinn minn, mýktin (barnabænirnar, sem eru mér ennþá mikilvægar veittu og veita mér mestu öryggis tilfinningu.)

bangsi, mjúkur og viðkunnalegur, vantaði í hann annað augað og svampagnir dattu úr honum

Kötturinn minn, svaf alltaf uppí hjá mér

Ósýnileg vinkona. Hún hét Úlla og var í kjól (annað hvort bláum eða vínrauðum, minningin er ekki nægilega skýr). Hún gerði allt eins og ég, ef ég borðaði, þá borðaði Úlla líka. :-). Það sem gerði hana mikilvæga var líklega það að ég var þá ekki ein, hafði einhvern til að tala við og gera hlutina með.

pumalfingur

Bangsi. Gott að liggja á honum. Mjúkur og góður. hef átt hann frá fæðingu.

Ég átti 2 bangsa sem voru mjög mikilvægir. Annar var heldur minni, kanína með löng og mjúk eyru. Það var svo auðvelt að halda á henni, grípa í eyrun, "hendur" eða "fætur". Ég hafði hana alltaf hjá mér þegar ég var í kringum eins til 2ja ára aldurinn, sést á myndum. Þann stærri var gott að faðma og ég hafði þessa 2 gjarnan báða með mér þegar ég varð aðeins eldri. Báðir voru gjafir frá föðurbræðrum. Veit ekki hvort ég bar skyn á það á 2. aldursári, það varð mikilvægt þegar ég varð aðeins eldri.

Rósu bangsann minn. Hún var eini "vinur minn" þegar ég flutti til útlanda.

Lítill koddi. Hann mátti ekki vera í koddaveri. Ég notaði hornið á honum til að draga út eina fjöður í einu og strjúka andlitið mitt með fjöðrinni. Sem kitlaði smá

Tuskudýr: skunkur. Ég hreinlega veit ekki hversvegna mér þótti hann mikilvægari en öll önnur leikföng/dúkkur. Kannski vegna þess að lengi framan af var þetta eina tuskudýrið og ég fékk hann áður en eg man eftir mér. (Átti reyndar líka ímyndaðan vin/persónu, sem ég bjó mér til sögur um fyrir svefninn, mun lengur heldur en ég svaf með tuskudýrið.)

Bolur af mömmu og snuð

Hvítur kisubangsi. Man ekki hvað gerði hann mikilvægan, kannski sá sem gaf mér hann eða hvað hann er sætur.

Dúkka sem mamma og pabbi gáfu mér, það að þau gáfu mér hana gerði hana mjög dýrmæta.

Það var kanínubangsi sem hét Kanó. Hendurnar hans voru útréttar og föðmuðu mig á móti.

Tuskukall sem mamma saumaði. Hann hét, og heitir enn, Tumi. Hann liggur nú í rúminu mínu ennþá, 40 árum síðar. Ég er ekki að grínast.

Gulur hálmfylltur bangsi sem heitir Gulli og ég á hann enn. Hann var besti vinur minn, en mjög erfiður í umgengni. Hann krotaði á vegg, klippti niður bækur og týndi hlutunum mínum. Svo var mér kennt um allt! Mamma trúði honum alltaf, en aldrei mér. Ég hef enn ekki alveg fyrirgefið honum. Ég man að ég trúði því sjálf að Gulli hefði gert þetta allt saman. Kannski trúí ég því píulítið ennþá :-)

Þetta var silkiborði sem var hnýttur utanum hálsinn á uppáhaldsbangsnum mínum. Silkiborðinn var mikilvægur því hann nuddaði ég milli vísifingurs og þumalfingurs fyrir svefninn. Bangsinn skipti minna máli, og aðskildust fljótlega borði og bangsi, og borðinn fékk nafnið 'slaufan'.

Kanínubangsi sem ég hef átt frá því ég man eftir mér, en þú veist það samt alveg, ég veit ekki hvað það var sem gerði hana merkilega en hún hefur einhvernvegin alltaf verið þarna

kanínubangsi. Hjúkrunarkonan sem hugsadi um mig thegar ég fæddist gaf mér hann.

Blár Bangsi sem ég svaf með á hverju kvöldi

Lítill dúkka sem ég fékk nokkra mánaða og fylgdi mér í vandræðalega mörg ár eftir það

Þetta voru 2 tuskudýr, hundur og kanína :)

Photos of Baby-Bú Super-bunny playing outside



Testing the Ring-Sling



Linda & Rakel



Arna & Ari



Arna & Ari

Pálmi playing with Baby-Bú and his sister Rakel and their mother Linda



Slides from Final presentation.

TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

- comfort object - security blanket - transitional phenomenon -

Child Culture Design HDK
examination project 2013
Helga Björg Jónasardóttir

Slides from Final presentation.

Research base:

Theory of Transitional Object by Donald Winnicott.

Emotional Design by Donald Norman.

Parents experience.

Experience of professional.

Children's memories.

Peoples memories from childhood.

My own experience with children.

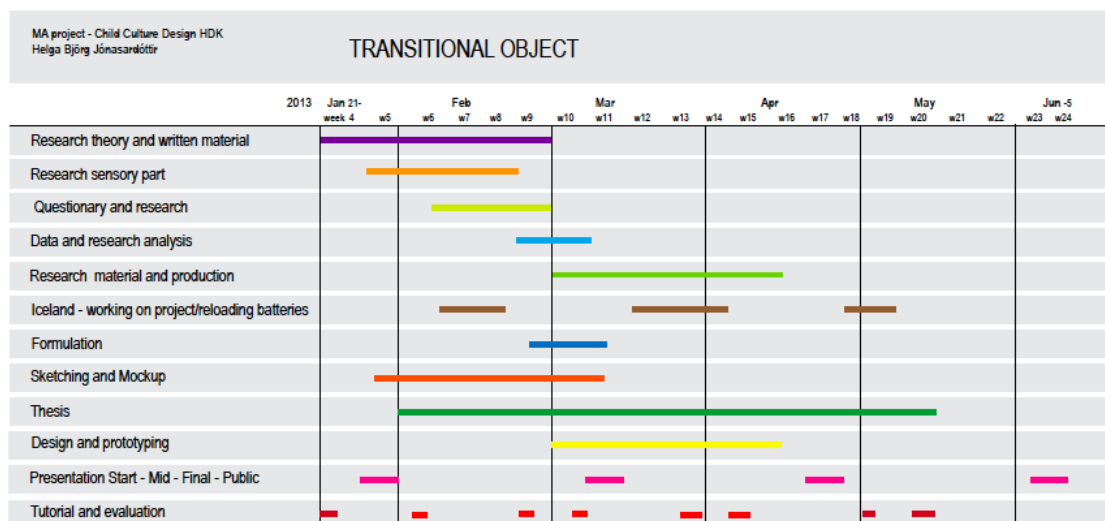
Online questionnaire.

Target group:

Infants, young children, parents, caretakers.

Slides from Final presentation.

Project and Timeplan



Slides from Final presentation.

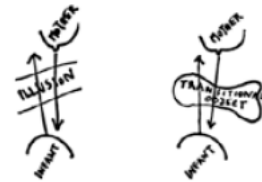
What is a transitional object?

In his theory, Winnicott describes the object as the infant's first "not me" possession. Often some kind of soft toy or blanket, that is in the reach of the infant, in the early stages of infancy. He writes about the object replacing or being a symbol for the mother's breast in the child's mind.

The child's relation to the object is that the child controls it and has full power over the object. The object is to be cuddled, loved and can even be mutilated. It must never be changed unless by the child. It is essential for the child at bedtime and in times of anxiety but by time it loses meaning and importance as the child gradually develops from being dependent on the object.

"It is not the object, of course, that is transitional. The object represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being the relation to the mother as something outside and separate"

(Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 1971; p.19-21)



Slides from Final presentation.



My aim is
to design an object
that gives comfort
to infants and young children
Something to help them to find feeling of security
and to deal with difficult situations in their lives.

My approach is from a designer's point of view, more looking at the features and values of the object to increase the ability of giving comfort while Winnicott's approach is psycho-analytical.

Slides from Final presentation.



Core question:

What creates a comforting object and which senses are most involved?

Slides from Final presentation.

To dig for the answer I used online survey with questions.

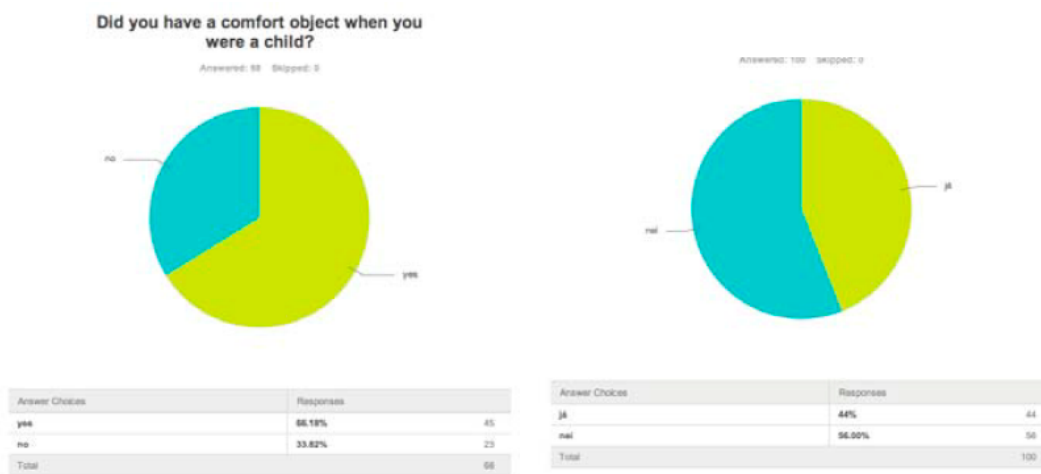


The questions were about comfort objects, if people had one and/or if they knew children who had some and then I asked people to describe the objects.

The other questions were about what senses people thought were most involved and at what age they thought children would stop using comfort objects.

I got more than 200 respondents in icelandic and english.

Slides from Final presentation.

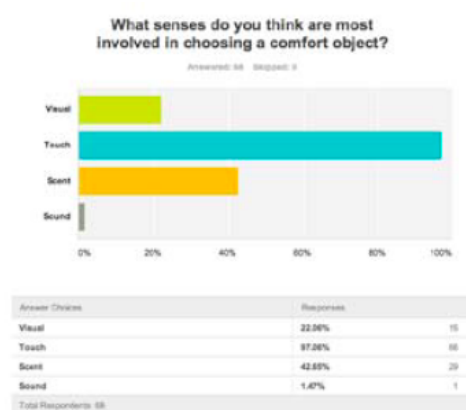


Here is graphical demonstration showing if people remembered having a comfort object they had when they were children.

Questionnaire in English the left side and in Icelandic on right.

The descriptions of the comfort objects gave me many interesting stories which enriched my research.

Slides from Final presentation.



Here are people's answers about what senses they thought were most involved in choosing a comfort object. Touch was mentioned most as I thought it would, but more people mentioned the scent, the sense of smell than I expected. I also expected more votes for visual part.

Slides from Final presentation.

Some kind of soft toy was most common in descriptions. Blankets, pillows, pillow-cases, parents clothes, some textiles were next.

Over 90% of the objects people mentioned were made of textiles of some kind.

Many mentioned some kind of repeated movements or certain details of the objects that were most important.

And many mentioned that they still had their comforting objects now when grown up. Some said that the object evoke good memories.

Slides from Final presentation.

Regarding the senses involved most people mentioned the touching and many described how they touched their comforting object and what made it special.

The scent was the second important. Some textile objects were not to be washed, they got “destroyed” if they were washed.

Some of the objects were homemade, other given by someone important in the child's life. Most people did not know WHY this object became their comfort object.

It is not always the first possession as Winnicott referred to but sometimes it was.

But it was always given to the child or within its reach.

Slides from Final presentation.

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Slides from Final presentation.

First I thought of something the parent could wear or something to keep in touch with the body. The artifacts that went through my mind were for example, a scarf or a shawl, T-shirt, blanket, pillow, pillowcase or some sort of a baby carrier.

Combining a soft toy with clothes for adults might make it unappealing to wear. Clothes with some bulky lumps or bumps are usually not looking good on people and not appealing to wear.

These thoughts led me to consider designing some kind of a baby carrier. It fits both genders and can be used by both parents and also by other caretakers.

Slides from Final presentation.

I decided not to design a baby-carrier from scratch since that was not the main core in my project.

I decided to use as a base some of the existing types and improve it according to my project.

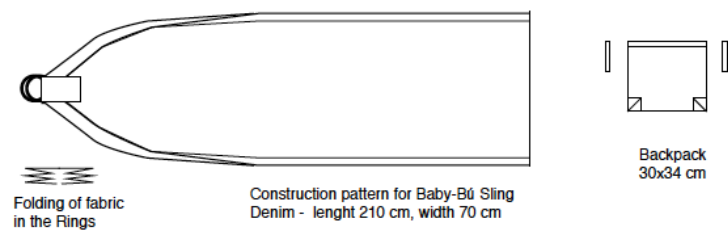
I wanted to keep it simple, safe and well functioning. Some kind of wrap or sling I found most appealing.

I used the web to explore different types from different cultures, focusing on security and functionality.

I made tests of Pouch Sling and Ring Sling.

I chose to base my design on a Ring-Sling a baby-carrier used in many cultures. The reason for my choice is it's simplicity, adjustable sizing, security (when used correctly) and the ability to transform it into something else when needed. It has a simple shape, which I changed slightly to improve and make it more suitable for my project.

Slides from Final presentation.



The basic construction pattern is a length of fabric with two rings sewn on one end. I added padding on the edges to increase comfort for the baby, which can also give some support for the head. I also changed the folding structure around the rings to fit better to the soft toy attached and the soft toy makes a padded shoulder piece for the parent. The Rings need to be the right size and meet safety requirements. I chose navy-blue rings made of aluminum.

Slides from Final presentation.

My choice of material was denim, because that is quite “universal” material and wearable for both genders and accepted in most cultures and classes. It is also strong and made of natural fibers, usually cotton or cotton rich blend.

In my research I found out that cotton and cotton blends are most suitable to capture scent and obtain it for longer time.

Then the next step was the soft toy.
What kind of character, animal or creature?
And how to design the combination and connection between the baby-carrier and the soft-toy.

Slides from Final presentation.

A group of 3D sketches and mockups from the “development phase” of the soft-toy and baby-carrier

My choice of “animal” after the tryouts and thinking was a rabbit, because it is friendly and not many children are afraid of them.



Slides from Final presentation.

I had to make a construction pattern which made it possible to contain the baby-carrier.

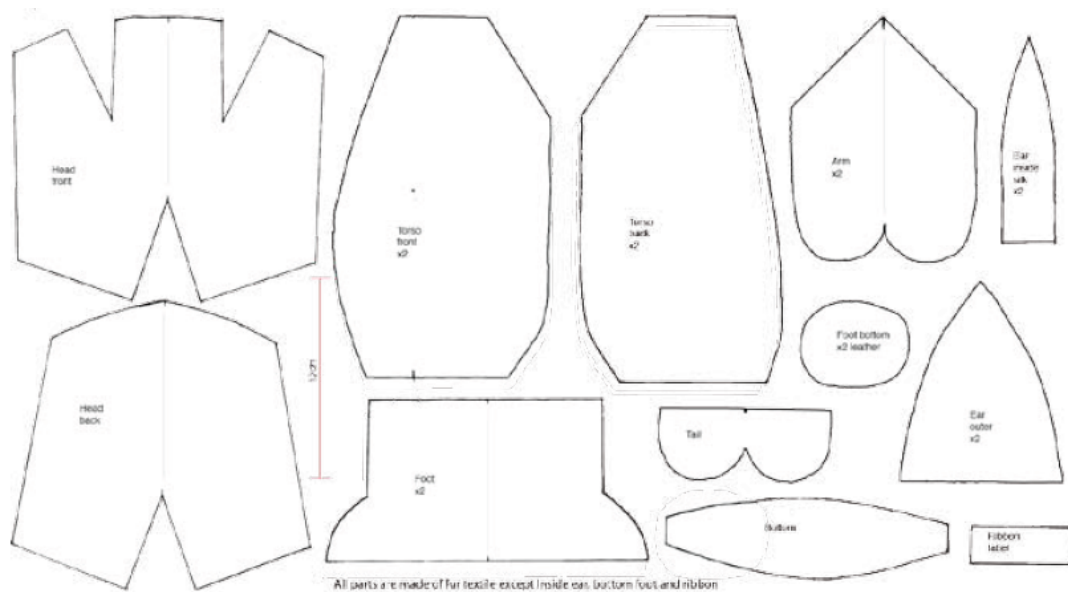
First attempts were to fit it in it's belly, but it got too bulky and it's size had to be quite big to make sense.

Then I tried out a dress and an overall to fit the carrier in, which worked better but I was not satisfied with that solution.

My end result was a kind of a backpack made of the same denim as in the baby-carrier.



Slides from Final presentation.



This is the final construction pattern of the rabbit.
The main material is soft and furry, found after several tests.
Inside the ears is satin, baby blue and pink for a gender hint.
Under the feet is leather to add more types of tactility.

Slides from Final presentation.



This is Baby-BÚ
the super-bunny
A baby-carrier and a toy to cuddle and play with.

Slides from Final presentation.

To test both the baby-carrier and the soft toy I got infants, toddlers and mothers to try and give their opinion.



Slides from Final presentation.



Ína decided to take Baby-BÚ Super-bunny out in the garden to play and try her swing.

Slides from Final presentation.



Linda og Rakel



Arna og Ari

Slides from Final presentation.



Pálmi playing with super Baby-BÚ and his sister Rakel

Slides from Final presentation.

Tests showed that the baby-carrier worked very well. I tried it out with mothers with 3-6 months old babies and tried it myself with 2-5 years old children

There are of course many types of baby-carriers on the market, both sling-types similar to this one and more structured. What this has that the other on the market don't, is the play-function and the comforting proposal of which I would be interested in investigating further later.

My tests with children showed that they liked the appearance, the older children 2,3 4 and 5 years old, started playing with it. I tried to hold it about 30 cm away from the face of a 3 months old boy and that sight was very pleasant because he really tried to "talk" to it. Looking directly at it's face waving his arms, moving his mouth and trying to make sounds, it was really rewarding for me to see his reactions.

Slides from Final presentation.

I realize that this artifact is difficult to communicate.

My result is a design proposal of comfort object, designed to obtain the scent of the infant's primal caretaker.

Choice of comfort object is very emotional and maybe not possible to design.

My result "Baby Bú" has other useful functions for both the baby and the parent and won't be useless if it does not become comfort object.

It is a baby-carrier, a ring-sling, adjustable in size for both the child and the parents. It is also super-bunny, a soft friend to hug and play with.

I hope that my main design proposal will succeed since it could have positive impact in the lives of our youngest people. If my design could make the life better for only a few children it would be worth the work put into the process.

Helga Björg Jónasardóttir