(Im)migrant Well-being & Technology Project

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Our Big Question

How are immigrant women in US accessing social support via technology?

• Interviewing in urban centers of Seattle & SF Bay
Who we’ve interviewed

Group 1:

• 28+ immigrant women in Seattle & SF Bay Area

Group 2:

• 17+ staff at immigrant services organizations in Seattle & SF Bay Area
Immigrants only today
Basic assumptions true enough

1. Interviewees own gadgets (limited sample)
2. They access social support through gadgets
3. Gaps in support systems exist
They are accessing social support

Person19: “I definitely used a lot of immigrant forums. When I was filing for my adjustment of status I was using ‘it’s a journey.’ And it’s a great forum where you learn so much, because you know I couldn’t afford a lawyer so I had to fill out all those documents myself, so I was using it. So I feel like I guess like legal support for new immigrants is great but should be even better.

...one time I did not know at all how to answer one question and I remember I was so anxious I was so stressed out, because you know with those forms you are always afraid to say something that is, you know, like not right because you know they say they can put you in jail and stuff on there and I was so afraid. ... No those forms are very stressful and forums? You post something and people respond to you like don’t worry about it that’s actually nothing!”
Gaps Exist

- discomforts accompany developing cultural literacy
- little time for making social connections
- language barriers
- racism
- sexism
Gaps Exist

Person19:

“I think [therapy], it's very important because that, because you know like you don’t like learn it right away that….in order to adjust here you need to forget a lot of stuff that was there you try to hold on to some of the stuff, but then in order to adjust here you also need to make sure that you hold on to some of the stuff. And it’s very difficult to figure out which stuff you let go and which stuff you have to keep. It’s very complex. Another thing that is um that is very helpful is actually talking to people that you know like that uh language discrimination and stuff it exists, even though you know like people don’t talk about it, but it actually does exists, so not to take like some stuff personally.” [emphasis ours]
Co-presence

Person6:
“I think that today, technology has [helped] a lot. Because I still feel close to my mom, although we are super far away from each other. And so it would be much more difficult if we hadn’t this stuff to communicate.”
Co-presence: Synchronicity

Person8:
“When we have like, birthday parties or something like that, when they’re cutting the cake or something, we always Skype them [my parents] and so they’re here.”

Person25: “What can I cook today? And my sister is answering ‘this food’. ‘How can I prepare?’ So she is explaining to me.

…..
Yea, sometimes Facebook chat...Whatsapp.”
Co-presence: Frequent, mundane interactions

Person 8:
“[My mom and I] talk all the time. And then sometimes when I’m doing something, I leave my phone on and [my kids] start to play. ....kids can’t sit in front of Skype, right? They have to just run away. They’ll be doing their thing and my mom would, you know, even she will be sipping coffee, but she will be like ‘just leave it on, I just want to watch them play.’ And she’ll just do that.”
Co-presence: Not enough

- These practices alone don’t guarantee social support.
- When there are decreasing technical barriers, why don’t people reach out to loved ones?
Protecting Faraway Loved Ones

Person5: “I try not to. If I have something personal, I try not to discuss it with my parents so they won’t get worried and feel like they can’t do much because of the distance.”

Person28: “If, let’s say, something bad happens to me, I wait for a couple of days and then I will tell them. I will never scare them. Because they can not do anything about it. So honestly, the problems or the situations of problems that are more like relevant to the context here, I talk to my American friends.”
Protecting Faraway Loved Ones

Person6:
“Back in Brazil...it wasn’t something common for me to talk about my problems, so it’s the same here. But I think it’s a little bit worse because I don’t want to worry my mom. You know, I don’t want her to think that I’m sad here and she would be worried about me.”

(cont’d) “Oh I never share, like if I have an argument with my husband, I never share that with her. Because he’s the only person I have here, and if she keeps thinking that we are not fine, yeah, she would be worried.”
The best services are...not services

Instead, they are

- Informal (cultural) ambassadors
- People in similar circumstances
The best services are...cultural ambassadors

Person5: “So [my mother-in-law]...she’s also from a different country. But she just took a liking to me, like quickly, which is lucky. And she just showed me around, like she gave me rides, she told me how to use BART, all those little things would help me, like go to the bank, understand all that stuff. Or like get like a cell phone plan...so that made it easier. Like taxes, she would be like, oh you could do them through this...She would like find the best price for everything so that I didn’t have to worry. So she was like a huge help.”
The best services are...cultural ambassadors

Person5: “I feel like if you’re all alone, or if your significant other is not from here, like both of you have to learn, you know it’s so much more difficult. So for that reason, I feel like I had a huge advantage, huge. Like in college, my masters program, my husband really helped me because academic English is very different.”
The best services are...people like YOU

Person4:
“There’s also a local [WeChat] group – you can have an anonymous identity, so it’s just a group of other parents with new babies that are in the Bay Area.”

Person5:
“When I first came here in 2009, because I was really worried that I would be isolated, so I went on Facebook and there’s this group that’s called “[People from Country X] in the Bay Area,” [with] like 2000 members....now I don’t need the group anymore...but it kind of helped. It’s a resource that helped me meet people quickly.”
"The best services are...people like YOU"

Person5:
“I would think most of my friends, they do have the South American connection...I do feel somewhat more connected in our style or sense of humor...there’s something we shared about certain cultural traits...there’s a cultural commonality that maybe is not necessarily shared with Central or North America even though I do have friends from [there] as well.”
The best services are...people like YOU

Person11:  
“And then the Black Student Union, actually because there are...so few Black students, if we see each other, we’d be like, ‘hey’ you know, it just feels like you know them even if you don’t because they’re so few. So they reach out to each other and they told me. The person who is the president is one of my closest friends.”
Acculturation vs. Assimilation

“‘Acculturation’ refers to the changes that groups and individuals undergo when they come into contact with a different culture. ...Acculturation is a two-way process, where members of both cultures (the migrant and the host) do change.” (p. 125)

“‘Assimilation’ indicates the loss of the cultural identity of origin, replaced by identification with the dominant group. It is therefore a unidirectional adaptation process, where the migrants adopt the language, laws, religion, norms and behaviours of the dominant culture” (p. 125)

Acculturation vs. Assimilation

Person2:

“But so because there is an Eritrean community,...like my friends, more of them are Eritrean, I only have my school mates, my dormmates that I know. Aside from that I don’t really go like, go out with them, so I feel like I still need to learn how America is...Because I have [Ethiopian and Eritrean] friends, I feel more comfortable. When I was in San Francisco, where we lived, it was away from the Eritrean community....But...when I start coming to church, all Eritreans there. So all my friends are Eritrean and stuff. They help, the pitfall for that is that I didn’t force myself to learn America. So I guess it goes both ways...” [emphasis ours]
Acculturation vs. Assimilation

Person19:

“I think [therapy], it’s very important because that, because you know like you don’t like learn it right away that….in order to adjust here you need to forget a lot of stuff that was there you try to hold on to some of the stuff, but then in order to adjust here you also need to make sure that you hold on to some of the stuff. And it’s very difficult to figure out which stuff you let go and which stuff you have to keep. It’s very complex. Another thing that is um that is very helpful is actually talking to people that you know like that uh language discrimination and stuff it exists, even though you know like people don’t talk about it, but it actually does exists, so not to take like some stuff personally.” [emphasis ours]
Next

- Finish interviewing immigrant service providers, ensuring range
  - direct services
  - advocacy/policy
  - leadership development/organizing
- Synthesize learning
- Is there a match?
Thanks!