Classism, Aspirations, and Closeness: Designing for Latino Immigrant Parents in the US

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Abstract

Parents acting as learning partners in their childrens
education is key to children's academic success and social
development. This entails parents being skillful in
managing information. For many parents, especially those
from non-dominant groups, cultivating those skills remains
a challenge. Information and Communication Technology
(ICT) could be helpful to bring parents the needed
support, but there is still work to be done in the design of
ICT for parents from non-dominant communities.
Focusing on low-income Spanish-speaking Latino parents,
with a strong grounding in Participatory Design methods,
we propose a research study to design and deploy ICT
that supports parents in diversifying and strengthen their
information-seeking strategies with regards to learning
resources. In particular, we seek to harness three aspects
our formative research has revealed as key for this group's
information practices: classism, aspirations, and closeness.
Our goal is to positively impact parents abilities to foster
their childrens learning experiences.

Author Keywords

Parenting, education, Latino immigrants, design

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m [Information interfaces and presentation (e.g.,
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Introduction

Parents acting as learning partners in their children's education is key to children' academic success and social development [1, 2, 6]. This entails activities such as exchanging information with other parents about learning opportunities for children, and providing children with resources that can fulfill educational goals such as books and software [1]. Our previous research with parents from diverse socioeconomic strata and cultural backgrounds in the United States has shown, however, that becoming learning partners is especially challenging for parents from non-dominant groups such as low-income and low-educational ethnic minorities [9, 16]. Digital technologies have the potential to enhance parents' opportunities to access relevant information [9]. However, to do so, the design of such technologies has yet to enable parents to actively participate with regards to their parental purposes, as well as broaden their access to diverse voices and perspectives [31]. We tackle these pending design challenges by focusing on the case of low-income Spanish-speaking Latino parents in the United States. In particular, we propose a research study *to design and evaluate information and communication technology (ICT) that diversifies and strengthen parents' access to learning resources by harnessing cultural and social aspects of these parents' everyday reality.*

Despite their prevalent and increasing presence in the U.S., Latino families face numerous challenges directly affecting their children's academic performance, such as a high rate of poverty [29], and discrimination due to their ethnicity and immigration status [24, 26]. Our formative research on the information management practices of low-income Spanish-speaking Latino parents suggested three cultural and social aspects for the design of future technologies to consider: Latino historical classism, parents' aspirations for their children's future, and physical/emotional closeness as a requirement for building communities with others. With a strong grounding in Participatory Design methods, our goal is to explore how the design of ICTs for parents can harness these aspects to better respond to parents' cultural ans socio-economic context, as well as to their information and technology practices.

The following section describes existing work on the role of technology in how parents, particularly parents from marginalized groups, participate in their children's education. We also review previous work on describing the parenting and information practices of Latino immigrants in the United States. We then offer a brief overview of findings from our previous research with Latino parents, which lays the foundation for our current research. From there, we present proposed research questions and potential methodologies for designing ICTs that support Latino immigrant parents as they engage in their children's academic life. We conclude with a reflection on opportunities and challenges for doing research in LATAM.

Background

Technology, Parents and Education
Parents' support to children's education is an emergent topic in HCI. Existing work has proposed the introduction of technologies for enhancing the classroom experience, such as videotapes [13], social networking sites [35], and learning suites [34] to help parents, teachers, and children participate in classroom-based activities. However, such technologies have not focused on addressing parents' information needs. Further, there is a dearth of work on

the needs of parents from non-dominant groups with regards to participating in their children's education. In terms of improving parents' information access, two studies are particularly relevant to our work. DiSalvo and Khanipour's research on parents' practices when seeking educational information for their children [9, 16] suggested that new parent-school communication technologies should facilitate parent-led initiatives rather than only school-authored ones. Wong-Villacres et. al's make further design design recommendations [31]. Our proposal to design ICTs draws on their work by committing to: 1)support equitable interactions for all parents and teachers, 2) provide a unified and organized source of information, and 3) enable access to relevant information.

Latino Immigrants in the United States
Latino immigrant parents in the United States are in urgent need of support for positively shaping their children's academic outcomes [2, 7, 12], and their emergent technology practices indicate opportunities for technologies to provide such support [11, 18, 19]. Latino children are among the least educated children in the country: they have lower achievement test scores [3], higher dropout rates, and lower college attendance than European American and African American youth [27]. Contrary to the notion that Latino immigrant parents do not value education, research in education show that most of these parents engage in at-home practices to help their children attain a better future through education (*e.g.*, [5, 7, 24]). However, schools tend not to ascribe value to these practices [5, 6, 22]. In addition, these parents' scarce familiarity with English constrains their ability to express their views regarding the schooling of their children, their limited understanding of the American educational system prevents them from critiquing it, and their immigrant condition isolates them from

heterogenous social support networks [5, 6].

Despite the glaring information needs of Latino immigrant families in the US—the largest group of emergent technology users in the country [28]—HCI-related work on technology's role in supporting those needs is still sparse. Existing studies have explored the kind of devices parents and children use [11], emphasizing children's role in how families' use media [15] and access online information[14, 33]. Another area of interest has been the parent-child dyad and its interaction with technology for co-learning and co-searching of information [18, 19, 21, 25, 33]. Our work extends their work by proposing the design of new ICTs for low-income Latino parents that align with these parents' cultural, socio-economic and technology contexts to enhance how they seek and access education-related information.

Prior Research
This work is grounded in findings from research conducted in the last 1.5 years about the use of technology of low-income American and Spanish-speaking immigrant parents for activities relevant to their participation in their children's education. Given the strong role of technology in schools these days, we first studied how technology facilitates parents' engagement in their children's education. Based on interviews with both high- and low-income parents, as well as on observations of parents' online interactions with schools/teachers, we learned that technology (both managed by schools and parents) is not currently supporting diverse groups of parents to connect and exchange information beyond the homogeneity of their networks. As a result, not all parents are given the same opportunities to help their children advance academically.

Drawing on that initial exploration, we then engaged in an ethnographic study of how low-income Spanish-speaking

Latino immigrant parents engage in their children's education. Inspired by educational researchers Carreon et al.'s view of parental engagement as a relational phenomenon among parents, teachers, and communities [5], we studied parents as actors of a sociotechnical system, interacting with a wide range of other actors—including technology—to exchange information that might better support their children's education. In particular, we unpacked the different roles actors enact within the system, and analyzed the quality of existent information channels between those actors, illuminating the often forgotten informal practices that Latino immigrant parents engage in outside of school to support their children's education. Our ethnographic engagement revealed three key aspects shaping parents' everyday information-sharing and community-building practices. First, historical Latino *classsism* prevents middle class Latino immigrants from becoming a resource for diversifying the information-seeking practices of lower income parents. Second, parents' *aspirations* for their children's future are often disconnected from information-seeking strategies. Third, while parents reject public social media for building communities with the school and other parents, they tend to embrace the *closeness* of more private media like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, rather than public spaces such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. These three factors suggest design considerations for future technologies to effectively support Latino immigrant parents.

Proposed Work

Informed by our previous work, we propose a study to design and evaluate ICT that help parents build connections with other networks (e.g., parental networks, school network) so as to diversify and strengthen parents' access to learning resources. In particular, we seek to explore how to harness Latino classism, parents' aspirations, and closeness for shaping the design of such ICT.

To achieve our goal, we will explore the following research questions: *(1) How might ICTs be designed to assist parents' decision-making abilities in relation to their aspirations for children's future?, (2) What modalities might be most effective in fostering closeness among diverse groups of actors—including teachers, school liaisons and middle-class Latinos—so that they can share actionable information about children's learning opportunities?, and (3) How can the designed ICT impact parents' information-seeking abilities, qualitatively and quantitatively?*

Our proposed study will entail three phases—(1) two design cycles entailing Participatory Design (PD) sessions with low-income Latino parents, teachers, bilingual school liaisons, and middle-class Latino immigrants, to produce a refined and working prototype of an ICT for supporting parents, (2) a deployment of the ICT, and (3) an assessment of the deployment. The results of this research will contribute towards technology design for supporting information-sharing ecologies, where these ecologies may include parents, but also, more broadly, traditionally vulnerable and marginalized communities, with a view to engage more equitable participation and wider information exchange in the realm of education. By examining the example of low-income Latino parents as they attempt to shape their children's academic potential, our research aims to identify culturally and socioeconomically acceptable opportunities for technology to integrate learning ecologies so that available resources are effectively leveraged. This research has potential to greatly impact the value that digital channels bring to

vulnerable communities, even after goals of bringing people online have been attained.

About the First Author

Marisol Wong-Villacres is an Ecuadorian PhD student in the Human-Centered Computing program at Georgia Tech. She holds a BSc in Computer Engineer and a Masters degree in Human-Computer Interaction Design, and has over 15 years of experience as Computer Science faculty at Escuela Superior Politecnica del Litoral in Ecuador. Marisol's research interests lie at the intersection of culture, learning sciences, and social computing, with a specific focus on the design of technology for vulnerable communities. She has considerable experience in conducting qualitative research around topics such as childrens and parents interactions with technology, and social media use after disasters. Her current work focuses on the design of social media platforms for supporting Latino parents' engagement in their children's education. Particularly, Marisol is exploring how to leverage cultural values and everyday activities to help parents improve their information seeking abilities.

Research in Latin America

Like many regions of the world pervaded with social and economic inequalities [10], Latin America (LATAM) would greatly benefit from more CSCW—and in general, HCI-related—research targeting the information-related needs of its more vulnerable groups in areas such as health, and education. However, in this proposal we would like to rather discuss how a study of LATAM's unique cultural and historical context can contribute to CSCW research. We would also like to reflect on three key challenges hindering the delivery of such contribution.

Although often not considered as part of the West, Latin America is one of the most Westernized areas of the world [4, 23], where transnational encounters have been taking place continuously ever since colonization times [20, 23]. The way Western, indigenous and African cultures melted over a period of five hundred years has engendered unique manifestations of racism and classism, challenging traditional understandings of social-racial hierarchies (e.g., black vs white dichotomies) [4, 17, 20, 30]. As racism is mixed with class, region and gendered sexuality, there is little agreement on who is black (or white or indigenous), and on how race relates to class: lower classes can include many whites, and people from African and indigenous ancestry are found in the middle-classes [20, 30]. In an increasingly transnational world, studying how the Western-shaped, blurred racism of LATAM influences technology-mediated communications and community-building can help CSCW expand its understanding of intersecting, marginalized realities across the world. Further, learning about the historical effects of transnational interactions in LATAM can reveal aspects of transnational HCI that need further attention in other Western regions of the globe.

We believe there are three issues that, as Latin American researchers, we need to address so as to deliver such key contributions to CSCW. First, we need to strengthen our qualitative research skills, including our ability to report qualitative findings. HCI/CSCW researchers in LATAM tend to come from a Computer Science background, which enables them to master the technological and quantitative components of research. However, to be able to explore socio-technical issues in LATAM, researchers need to learn how to study people, connect their findings to social theories, and report these findings in compelling ways. Second, as Latin American researchers, we need to move away from a discourse that almost exclusively

stresses LATAM's heterogeneity and fragmentation. Rather, we need to highlight the cultural, racial and social hybridity that makes our region radically different from the rest of the so-called global South. Finally, we need to expand our focus from doing research *in* LATAM to researching about LATAM. Many CSCW/HCI studies in our region describe efficient technological solutions to—often technological but sometimes social—problems [8, 32]. However, those studies tend to disregard the larger context in which they take place. More importantly, they fail to acknowledge how the uniqueness of such context shapes the design and deployment of technological solutions. We must to learn to connect back to the cultural and historical particularities of our Latin American context. The goal must be to articulate why our region is unique and what such uniqueness can do to advance CSCW/HCI research and design.

Conclusion

Our research proposes a study on how to design ICTs for supporting parents of non-dominant communities into finding their way across information traditionally harness almost exclusively by dominant social structures. In particular, we seek to examine the role that technologies might play in assisting parents as they participate in their children's learning experiences. We emphasize the need for harnesing classism, aspirations, and closeness as resources in this process, studying how these aspects can help connect parents, middle class Latino imigrants, teachers and school liaisons. We believe that the challenges and opportunities that underlie the making of these connections among Latino and American actors will resonate with others at the workshop. We look forward to learning from other participants in regards to the

sociocultural boundaries that their work brings unto light.

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