Hidden Margins: Reflections on Designing with Populations at the Intersection

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1 INTRODUCTION

Two years ago at the CHI 2019 HCIxB workshop, we presented *Hidden Margins: Developing New Ways of Designing for, and with, Older Adult Immigrants*. In this emerging work, we argued for new ways of understanding populations at the intersection who fit neither the typical immigrant nor typical older adult profile. We proposed methodological approaches, which include community-driven participatory research to yield new models of cultural learning for better understanding such marginalized populations.

In this position paper, we offer reflections on our explorations of these new methods. We are employing these methods in an on-going series of projects called *CrossRoads.* CrossRoads aims to investigate the practices and needs of immigrant grandparents and grandchildren surrounding language sharing, cultural exchange, and memory preservation. We engaged with immigrant families across Canada in ethnographic participatory design activities to uncover their design needs. Grounded in this collaboration, we designed and are in the process of evaluating a potential tool with families. Our reflections touch on the transition from in-person to online sessions due to the pandemic, the effect of structural support on project success, and the multiple roles a researcher must adopt within a single session. While such transitions have occurred with numerous HCI research projects in 2020, our reflections here are grounded in both our own lived experiences as immigrants and that of our participants' cultural contexts.

2 REFLECTION ONE: DESIGN PROTOCOL TO ACCOUNT FOR DYNAMIC SHIFTS THAT ARISE FROM CULTURAL VALUES WHEN TRANSITIONING TO ONLINE SESSIONS

After completing the first CrossRoads project which consisted of participatory design activities in families' homes, in-person research was suspended due to the global pandemic. The next CrossRoads project, consisting of a potential tool evaluation, was conducted online via video conferencing. Though from a study protocol perspective there was little difference between conducting this project online or in-person, the dynamics altered substantially in ways the researchers had not anticipated.

The primary dynamic shift arose because with the in-person sessions, the researcher is a guest in the family's home. There is a strong and deep rooted hospitality culture with the heritages of the families we collaborated with. These values manifested in the form of grandparents taking on the role of host and entertainer, often going

out of their way to engage in conversation, and to offer tea and refreshments. This leadership role adopted by the grandparent balanced out the perception of the researcher as an authority figure, creating a space for dynamic, egalitarian collaboration.

However, with the shift online, the researcher is no longer a guest in the family's home. Rather, the meeting is taking place in a neutral third space for which there are no established social conventions. Without the role of host for grandparents to take on, we found grandparents struggled to claim ownership of the process. They were typically more withdrawn compared to the in-person sessions, often deferring completely to the grandchild as they perceived digital interaction to be the child's domain. We found this disengagement could be partially circumvented by incorporating additional time in the protocol for developing rapport. In this time, which was not recorded as part of the study, the researcher asked the grandparent questions and also engaged in self-disclosure. This activity helped recreate the more familiar host-guest dynamics of the in-person sessions, and laid the groundwork for expected roles and contributions for the remainder of the session.

3 REFLECTION TWO: STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS FOR DISENFRANCHISED POPULATIONS SHAPE HOW WE EVALUATE SUCCESS

To provide a contrast to CrossRoads, we briefly introduce an earlier project conducted by the same team. The goal of this project was to uncover the needs of new immigrants improving their English for the primary intention of bettering employment prospects. New adult immigrants learning English were engaged in participatory design activities and the resulting tool evaluation, similar to CrossRoads. However, a key distinction between these two projects is that in the first one, the goal was to support new immigrants in their goal of gaining membership in a clearly defined in-group: that of individuals with strong English skills and promising job prospects. Since this was a goal that also aligned with the goals of the society they lived in (i.e. the government of Canada), there was a plethora of resources on which to base our design. There were many standardized English curricula, teaching methodologies, and testing standards upon which we could measure the success of our tool.

However, the aim of CrossRoads is almost diametrically in contrast. Here, we are working to help families define a new cultural space, a space that is a mix of the grandparent's heritage culture, and the grandchild's present culture. Since this is a space that exists within the private sphere rather than the public one, there is little societal structures in place to direct our efforts. As a result, CrossRoads requires far more intensive engagement and insider knowledge to navigate this space. Additionally, there will be no clear answer to the questions we investigate. Every solution is unique to the family who creates it.

4 REFLECTION THREE: RESEARCHER MUST BALANCE MULTIPLE ROLES TO EQUITABLY ENGAGE ALL PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Another unexpected reflection from CrossRoads is the large number of roles the researcher must take on within a single session. These roles must be carefully balanced to avoid study results disproportionately affected by one party. In the case of CrossRoads, if the researcher engaged too long in conversation with the grandparent in their native language, the grandchild would disconnect from the session (e.g. look visibly bored, start playing a game, talk with a sibling etc.). If the session jumped too quickly into the design activity without the researcher slowly easing the grandparent through warm-up activities and constant prompting, the grandparent would disengage (e.g. leaving the room, talking on non-related topics, sitting in silence etc.). We found it was essential

for the researcher to be aware of subtle cultural nuances, to actively listen and observe, and to contextually switch roles as needed.

5 GOALS FOR THE HCIXB WORKSHOP AND MOVING FORWARD

At the Decolonizing HCI Across Borders workshop, we aim to continue the fruitful conversations we began two years ago with the HCIxB community. We are excited to update the community on the progress we have made with our new approaches and to brainstorm directions moving forward. HCI research methods can be decolonized when researchers take a step back and historically overlooked populations (by immigration status and age - children and older adults) take the lead in the design of their technologies. We look forward to engaging in the collaborations that are crucial to success of research at the intersection, and we aim to continue crossing borders across digital and physical spaces, between generations, and through culture.