Migrants' Reported Use of Communication Behaviors that Enact Family across Distance

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Abstract

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This study investigates reported migrant family communication. It starts by identifying the four key characteristics that combine to distinguish migrant families from other family types: 1) the condition of distance between family members; 2) the reliance on technology to communicate with family; 3) the reliance on discourse for family interaction; and 4) the important role of remittances in migrant family interaction. Then, drawing on in-depth interviews with migrants living in Seattle, WA ($N = 43$), the study identifies and elaborates on the specific communicative behaviors migrants reported they employ that manage and navigate family communication given each of these characteristics. Participants report engaging in a unique combination of technological, transactional, and functional behaviors that, this study argues, enact a sense of family across distance. In the end, this study contributes to our understanding of the complexity of family communication behaviors of migrants in the United States.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

I feel like communicating is not just conversation. There are so many means of communicating, especially I feel like with an elderly relative, for example, who does not have that much going on in his life to just blabber about it for an hour. The way you would communicate with him in real life would be—I don't know, helping him around the house or going for a walk together, going to the forest, looking at his tomatoes that he has grown. All of those things you do not have, and so you just have to come up with some topics of conversation. I have noticed that they do love when I make videos or pictures about how I live. I show them what's going on around here, different places, things I have done. I don't know, that helps, too.
(Participant 20)

The act of migration can be a daunting and isolating experience. It involves individuals leaving their family and friends typically for an unknown and foreign culture. Moreover, it is common and widespread. At the time of writing, 3.3% of the world's population is living in a country other than where they were born. In a 2018 report, the International Organization on Migration (IOM) estimated that globally there are 244 million international migrants (IOM, 2018). That same year approximately 18.5 million individuals were given refugee status (IOM, 2018). Though the European migration crisis[1]—which accounted for much of the dramatic increase in migration over the past decade—has likely peaked, migration across national boundaries will continue to be a global experience experienced by millions of individuals. To that end, the foreign-born percentage of the U.S. population is at its highest since 1910, at 13.5% of the overall population (44 million individuals) (Batalova & Alperin, 2018). Essentially, the movement of people across national borders is likely to be an experience that many millions of individuals are likely to experience. This study is about the challenges and processes of family

[1] Though there is no consensus of the exact timeline for the European Migration Crisis, most scholars consider the unprecedented flow of thousands of refugees and migrants out of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia and into Europe between 2015 and 2016 to have been an international crisis (Collett & Le Coz, 2018). During this time period, The International Organization for Migration (IOM) called the Mediterranean the world's most dangerous border crossing due to large-scale loss of human life as individuals sought to resettle in Europe (IOM, 2014).

communication in the context of the international migrant experience. This dissertation will use the term 'migrant' to refer to individuals who have migrated across national borders. A more nuanced discussion of this term is provided in the following section.

Whereas the movement of people across borders is not a new phenomenon (Thomas, Znaniecki, & Zaretsky, 1984), the record-breaking migration rates of the past decade are linked to a mix of factors that characterize this time period: political unrest, economic instability, increases in mobility, and rapid technological development (Diminescu, 2008; Vertovec, 1999). Moreover, these increased flows of people have contributed to fundamental changes in global, political, and social structures. In light of these significant disruptions, much of the scholarly work on the migrant experience has focused on how institutional structures have changed in response to the movement of people. In particular, researchers have investigated the economics of migration at a societal level, such as the role of remittances on household development (e.g., see Sana & Massey, 2005). This is because migration, and the subsequent sending home of money, has a significant impact on national development in several countries (Rapoport & Docquier, 2006).

This study considers *anyone who has left their country or origin* to be a migrant. It stays away from the legal categories used to differentiate individuals such as immigrant, asylee, or refugee. Crawley and Skleparis (2018) argue that categorizations of individuals who have left their country of origin based on legal classifications often fail to adequately capture the experiences of these individuals and instead are often used to "justify policies of exclusion and containment" (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018, p. 48).

For most individuals, the experience of migration – leaving home for settlement in a new country – is transformative (Waters, 2011). This is because migration forces these individuals,

regardless of motivation for leaving, to learn new languages, cultures, habits, and ideas. To fit into the host country, many migrants feel like they begin losing cultural similarities to their country of origin (Berry, 2005). The act of migrating can also place individuals in a vulnerable state. Once they arrive in the host country, migrants often struggle with issues of legal status, language ability, relevant skill set, cultural adaptation, finding social networks, and prejudices (Bass, 2018); in many cases, they confront these challenges while trying to stay connected to their home country.

Indeed, migrants are often *expected* to maintain a dual presence in both their country of origin and their host country. Such expectations, either by themselves or their communities, may make these individuals feel pulled between their two communities (Berry, 2005). In fact, the increase in migration has created an unprecedented demand for communication tools and behaviors that help bridge the distance these individuals feel so they can maintain contact, and relationships, with those they left behind (Faist, 2000). For example, the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) seems to have presented migrants with the capability of existing both "here and there," although a meaningful presence in both communities may be overly romanticized by scholars who write about these technologies (Madianou, 2016; Vertovec, 2001). Looking closer at the stories migrants tell about how they manage the challenges of distance can help to better understand the migrant experience. *To this end, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the migrant experience in the United States by investigating the communication behaviors that migrants report using to navigate and enact family across distance.*

1.1 ENACTING FAMILY

This study uses the term *enacting family*, common to the family communication literature, to describe the interactional work that people engage in to develop and maintain a family (Nelson 2006). Enacting family is the ongoing process in which family members engage that both develops and maintains a family identity. Importantly, enacting family is done through communication; it is through communication that family members establish roles (e.g., grandparent), create norms (e.g., how they interact at the dinner table), and provide support (e.g., emotional or physical) (Vangelisti, 2008). For example, in a textual analysis of the narratives that adoptive foster parents posted to public websites, Suter, Baxter, Seurer, and Thomas (2014) found that family identity was built through communication rather than through merely biogenetic ties to another person. It is in interactional processes, they argued, that individuals felt connected to family.

Important to this study is the argument that the types of communicative behaviors necessary and sufficient to enact family vary depending on the characteristics of the family. For example, Galvin (2006) predicted that families that fall outside of a normative understanding of family become more *discourse dependent*. That is, as Galvin asserts, families not tied by blood, law or proximity, or in some other way are different from the typical picture of who constitutes family are likely to implement a series of discourse-based behaviors to make their family identity clear. For example, families with adopted children work communicatively to express their status as a family to both themselves and individuals outside the family through communication (Galvin, 2006). Though all families engage in some degree of discourse-driven identity, less traditionally formed families are more likely to use these strategies (Galvin, 2006). This idea also makes sense for less traditionally *situated* families. In particular, families are typically expected

to co-reside with one another (Baxter et al., 2009). If physical *co-presence*, or living together, is a defining feature of normative families, it is likely that migrant families, traditional families now physically separated, would tend to rely more heavily on communication to enact their family.

Additionally, it is possible to identify patterns of interaction associated with varying scholarly understandings of family. Rather than subscribing to the traditional structural understanding of family, which views family as those individuals tied by blood or law, scholars apply *transactional* and/or *functional* lenses to understand how individuals feel or act like family (Segrin & Flora, 2011). A transactional lens to understanding family suggests communication as constitutive in its ability to construct family (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Segrin & Flora, 2011): Family are those individuals that *feel* like family. It is through communication (i.e., interaction) in which that feeling is developed. A functional lens to understanding of family is one in which a family member performs certain tasks in order to perform their identity. These include acts of socialization, nurturing, or support (Segrin & Flora, 2011). As Suter et al. (2014) found, the functional development of kinship is accomplished through doing the things that families do. Those individuals that enact family are literally doing tasks that show their participation in this network.

Most families employ communication behaviors that are both transactional (interaction-based) and functional (task-based) in their on-going effort to enact family. Of interest to scholars is what particular communication behaviors are associated more readily with particular types of family. In other words, enacting family involves various constellations of interactive and task-based behaviors that are dependent on the characteristics associated with that family. So, for example, a multi-racial family, a family with adopted children, a single-parent family, or a

migrant family might each employ a unique combination of communication behaviors that enact family identities. It is the combination of communication behaviors associated with migrant families that is being investigated in this study.

1.2 The Migrant Family Experience

If the characteristics, such as being physically separated, of a family ultimately influence their communicative behaviors, then what are the fundamental characteristics of the migrant family experience? Though there are several types of migrants, it is possible to identify four key characteristics that combine to distinguish the migrant family from other types of family, with the first characteristic giving rise to the remaining three characteristics: 1) the condition of distance; 2) the reliance on technology to communicate with family; 3) the reliance on discourse for family interaction; and 4) the important role of remittances in migrant family interactions. In other words, understanding migrant family communication requires investigating the role and influence of these characteristics intrinsic to the migrant family. Each of these characteristics may influence what and how migrant families communicate.

To elaborate, the first characteristic that defines the migrant family experience is the *condition of distance*: the physical separation of families across borders. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, distance is the antithesis of how societies define what is "normal" for a family. Baxter et al. (2009) found that when individuals seek to define family, they often privilege intact heterosexual marriages, with children, and who are co-residing. The normative ideas of family are changing, however (Pew Research Center, 2015). It is for this reason that the idea of distance plays an important part of this dissertation. As Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla, and Wilding (2016) argue, distance and separation should be considered intrinsically constitutive of family relationships and processes within the context of migration. As such, migrant families no

longer fit the normative conception of a co-resident family. In order to maintain contact, if that is desired, migrants must learn to navigate the impact that the distance from their home country may cause.

Because of the physical separation of migrant families (the condition of distance), the second characteristic that defines the migrant family experience is the necessary and ubiquitous *reliance on information and communication technologies* (ICTs) to engage with family, along with the capabilities and constraints that those technologies afford (Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2011; Ros, 2010). ICTs, which are available to most immigrants, have transformed the ways individuals who have left their country of origin experience time and space – and family (Harvey, 1990). For instance, as noted , historians have argued that the rate of global migration has significantly accelerated due to the development of these ICTs (Wang, 1997). This is due in part to the ability of migrants to maintain ties, and thus support networks, in their country of origin. Moreover, the communicative behaviors of migrants as they relate to the use of ICTs has been well documented and will be reviewed in more detail in Chapter Two. For example, Madianou and Miller (2012) demonstrate how migrants exploit the differences between different media platforms, like video calls or text messaging, to express feelings and manage their relationships in unique ways. In this way, these technology choices play an important role in generating the "fragments of daily life" meaningful to maintaining family relationships despite distance (Morgan, 1996, p. 160).

The condition of distance also contributes to the third characteristic that defines the migrant family: the *reliance on discourse* – generated through both words and images – for family interaction. Migrant families typify the argument that family is, to a large degree, a "set of practices" rather than the static structure determined by blood or law (Morgan, 1996). Instead

of in-person family interaction being a natural part of their daily lives, migrants must make an effort to engage in communicative behaviors in order to participate as a member of family. This characteristic of the migrant family experience favors a transactional view of family and, as will be discussed, offers another way to think about Galvin's (2006) idea of discourse dependency. Of course, this effort is dependent on the circumstances of the individual. Not every migrant seeks to maintain contact with their family in the country of origin.

Lastly, the condition of distance sets the stage for the *important role of remittances* in migrant family interaction. Sending money home, also known as remittances, has been used increasingly as a tool to pull families out of poverty: In 1989 $75 billion dollars were sent globally; in the mid-2000s $125 billion were sent; and in 2011 more than $350 billon were sent home to families (Ratha & Mohapatra, 2014). The ubiquity of these transfers can be seen in the sheer amount of money flowing from migrants to family members. Important to this study is work such as that of Carling (2014) that demonstrates that remittances are not just an act of economics but also a communicative and emotional act that helps enact family while physically separated. The communication surrounding remittances suggests that migrants send home money to provide more than just material support. The money is often imbued with emotional meaning which conveys participation in the family. Essentially, the flow of money provides care to family members when migrants are unable to enact traditional support duties (Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla, & Wilding, 2016). This characteristic of the migrant family experience favors a functional view of family.

1.3 A Study of Migrant Family Communication

Given this combination of characteristics unique to the migrant family experience, this study investigates how migrants living in the United States report enacting family in ways

influenced by the shared experience of migrant families separated by distance. It is guided by two research questions: RQ1: *How do migrants discuss experiencing separation from their families? And* RQ2: *What are the communicative behaviors migrants report that enact family?*

In-depth interviews were conducted with 43 migrants living in the greater Seattle, Washington area in order to examine their stories and experiences related to family communication. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns of behavior that migrants report using in order to interact with family. In the end, this study hopes to provide insights into unique aspects of migrant family communication and the ways in which migrants enact family across distance.

1.4 Rationale for Study

Migration is not a contemporary phenomenon. History is based on the movement of humankind: the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, the Barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire, the forced migration of slave trades, the multiple mass migrations from Europe to North America, Syrians currently fleeing their war-torn country, and the soon-to-be massive resettlement of people due to climate change, just to name a few. The world, as we know it, is a result of migration (Lucas, 2016). Further, if the pattern of global migration continues on its current trajectory, the experience of enacting family while being geographically separated will become increasingly more commonplace. It is for this reason that the experience of contemporary migrants is likely to become the lived experience of many more millions of individuals. It is still rare, however, for scholars to investigate these lived experiences.

Despite access to ever-improving communication technologies, maintaining family across national borders remains a difficult task. This study serves as a foundation to understand how individuals navigate the experience of being separated from their kin geographically. In

particular, the current study contributes to filling this important gap by responding to Scharp and Dorrance Hall's (2019) call for further investigation into what distance means to families and how they behave as a result of it. This is because co-residence if frequently considered a stipulation of what it means to be a family (Baxter et al., 2009). Migrants, however, violate this expectation by living away from family, but oftentimes they still desire a close relationship with their family members in the country of origin. It is possible that by identifying the communicative behaviors that result from the inherent characteristics of the migrant family, we may better understand both the migrant *and* family experiences.

1.5 Outline of this Dissertation

Chapter One has provided an introduction to and rationale for investigating migrant family communication. It makes the case that distance complicates the enactment of family and thus likely engenders a novel combination of behaviors to manage that complexity. Though the context of distance is unique, the experience of enacting family while no longer being co-present may be experienced by many individuals with a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. This study seeks to better understand the communication behaviors that migrants report using as they navigate distance from family members. This rest of this dissertation is organized as follows.

Chapter Two reviews three key areas of literature relevant to an understanding of migrant family communication. First, the scholarship on migrant use of ICTs as a means to attain a sense of family, particularly through ICT-based co-presence, is discussed. This literature underscores migrants' reliance on technology for family interaction. Second, the chapter turns to literature in family communication that provides insights into different ways to view and build family, including non-traditional families. This literature supports an expectation for varied types of communicative behaviors, including a dependence on discourse, in family interaction. Third,

given the ubiquitous nature of remittances to the migrant experience, the scholarship regarding the transfer of money and its impact on migrant family structures is presented. In particular, it lays a foundation for how and why the act of sending remittances can be thought of a communication behavior. Finally, research questions are posed.

Chapter Three describes the methodology and research design used to complete this study. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide participants the ability to report their lived experiences. Information regarding the demographic characteristics of all participants and their recruitment strategy is provided. Additionally, the methods for the thematic analysis are outlined.

The findings of this research are presented in Chapters Four through Seven. To answer the first research question, Chapter Four summarizes key themes from the stories of the migrant families in this study that set the context for the circumstances and challenges these migrants report facing when communicating with family. In particular, it introduces the shared set of feelings described by participants in this study that help to explain the communicative behaviors that they engage in with family. The following three chapters answer the second research question by outlining the communicative behaviors participants reported that enact family. While in reality these behaviors are interwoven, for the purposes of analysis and discussion, they are presented in three distinct clusters to align with the characteristics associated with migrant families described earlier. Thus, Chapter Five focuses on participants' discussions about their selection and use of technology to mediate communication between themselves and their family in the country of origin. Chapter Six focuses on discourse-based behaviors (both in terms of frequency and content) participants reported that helped them recreate a feeling of familial co-presence. Chapter Seven focuses on reports of behaviors involving the sending of remittances

and gifts. Finally, Chapter Eight reunites these clusters of communicative behaviors to summarize what was learned about how migrants enact family.

Chapter 2. MIGRANT FAMILY COMMUNICATION

This chapter begins with a review of key literature regarding information and communication technologies (ICTs)s in the contemporary migrant experience, highlighting in particular the concept of "ICT-based co-presence" (Baldassar et al., 2016). This is followed by a visit to the literature on family communication for its helpful articulation of different approaches to understanding family and why communication behaviors might vary based on family type. Lastly, key research about migrants and remittances is presented with an emphasis on the multiple meanings embedded in this transfer of money from migrants to their families at home. The chapter ends with a restatement of the research questions that guide this dissertation.

2.1 ICTs IN THE CONTEMPORARY MIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Scholars typically consider individuals who move away from their country of origin, but have maintained social ties in that nation, to be "transnational" (Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 1999). The ability to live in one country but maintain relationships in a different country is essential to the idea of transnationalism. This concept is understood in relation to nationally defined boundaries as evidenced by the "nationalism" in the word transnationalism. For this reason, scholars of transnationalism frequently investigate social behaviors that are salient to a national identity (e.g., civic engagement).

In his empirical assessment of research on transnationalism however, Waldinger (2008) argues that the actions that typify transnationalism are in actuality features of migration at large. He states that actions to maintain relationships in the country of origin may be "large flows of remittances, migrant associations raising funds to help hometowns left behind, and trains or airplanes filled with immigrants returning home for visits to kin and friends are features

encountered wherever large numbers of international migrants are found throughout the contemporary world" (Waldinger, 2008, p. 8). The distinction of national identity, as opposed to, for example, identity based on local or community ties, may be less important to understanding the contemporary experience of migration. Thus, the term "migrant" may be considered somewhat synonymous with the concept "transnational." Given that this study seeks to identify patterns of communication behavior generally associated with migrant family communication regardless of nation of origin, the only salient experience for this study is that an individual has migrated. Thus, this study uses the term "migrant" for these individuals rather than the term transnational.[2]

Additionally, the classification of "migrant" was chosen because it supersedes the various legal categories for individuals who have left their country of origin. The legal categories of immigration (immigrant, asylee, refugee, etc.) are dependent on contemporary political situations and often lead to a biased understanding of the migrant experience (Sajjad, 2018). *A migrant, in this study, is any individual that has moved away from their country of origin (home) to reside in a new country (host), in this case the United States.* The concept of, and contemporary research surrounding, transnationalism speaks to the contemporary migrant experience, which is fundamentally a negotiation of being both *here* and *there* (Vertovec, 1999; Waldinger, 2008). This idea suggests that individuals who have left their country of origin can still be active participants in that community, despite the distance of physical separation.

[2] The collapse of culture, community, and nation is often debated by scholars, and no clear consensus has been reached (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). I would like the terminology of this dissertation project to reflect the broadest possible conception of migration to capture an authentic understanding of the migrant experience.

2.1.1 *ICTs Allow for Connection*

As noted, important to the concept of transnationalism, and thus the migrant experience, is that ICTs have facilitated a new era of connection (Benítez, 2012; Diminescu, 2008). In 2004, Vertovec labeled access to cheap phone calls the "social glue" of the migrant experience. He argued that low-cost calls allow for small-scale social formations regardless of distance. Rapid developments in ICTs have facilitated new means of connection between migrants and their family in the country of origin (Diminescu, 2008). Thus, rather than the paradigmatic figure of the uprooted and isolated migrant, individuals who have left their country of origin are capable of feeling like participants in both host and home communities.

Several studies have investigated the way that migrants are able to negotiate connections in both places. For example, in a case-study of Salvadoran families who maintain regular communication with their relatives living abroad, Benítez (2012) found that ICTs played a crucial role. According to this research, ICTs provide migrants and their family still living in the country of origin a way to maintain relationships through the ability to engage in frequent and regular communication. This frequent engagement helps to support cultural values and forms of cultural expression by allowing individuals to communicate with individuals (generally family) from their culture. It also allows for emotional support when it is needed. Benítez concluded that ICTs offer migrants increased access to family, which in turn results in sustained participation in the larger home community.

Similarly, in a qualitative study of immigrants from Mexican-heritage and their children living in the United States, Gonzalez and Katz (2016) sought to understand the motivation for the adoption of costly ICTs by migrants as they lived abroad. They found three primary motivations that are reflective of Benítez's (2012) uses for ICTs. Gonzalez and Katz (2016) discovered that

the desire for virtual intimacy, emotional support, and transnational caregiving were the three primary reasons for their participants adopting new technology. Interactions through ICTs were thought to allow more intimacy, because migrants can hear and see their family on the other end. In turn, this sense of greater intimacy facilitated a more meaningful connection with family in Mexico.

ICTs also allowed for the transmission of increased emotional support. This is, in part, because access to technology can lessen feelings of social isolation through increased communication. The participants could more easily contact their family when experiencing duress. ICTs were also adopted because they provided a valuable tool for migrants as they attempted to provide care while physically separated, labeled by the authors as *transnational caregiving*. Though ICTs were expensive to set up initially, this study of Mexican migrant families found that they provide an affordable technology (compared to costly phone calls) that allows participants to check-in during a family emergency and engage in communication that may ease concerns regarding the family.

Research into migrant use of ICTs also reveals the shortcomings of the reliance on technology to maintain family over distance. For example, when interacting with relations in the home country, migrants can feel the tension between being physically absent yet socially present (Carling, Menjívar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012). The use of ICTs in an attempt to be "here and there" can exacerbate the stress of managing two disparate communities. Goodnight (2004) argued that a migrant identity "ever occupies a border position, temporarily divided between the self that was formed in the old world and the forming self of the new. Displacement, not security, is the immigrant's lot" (n.p.) (as cited in Galvin, 2006). As this quote demonstrates, though technology may be considered a vital tool for connecting family members, feelings of insecurity and

displacement among migrants remains pervasive. Rather than feeling like a part of two communities, ICTs often feel pulled between them.

Essentially, the ties of family in the country of origin may continue to pull the migrant back home, even as they seek adjustment and life in the host country. This pull can be exacerbated when a migrant has left a home country in turmoil. While conducting ethnographic fieldwork with Iraqi refugees living in Jordan, for example, Twigt (2018) found that Internet-based social networking sites (SNS) were the source of significant stress, because connecting with friends and family still in Iraq often meant hearing of death and loss. Often news of family on these SNS was accompanied with messages of death about loved ones who had stayed behind. Similarly, connections to Iraq evoked unpleasant memories for people in the study. Despite the stress generated being in two places at once, these studies confirm that most migrants rely on technology to maintain contact with their family in the country of origin.

2.1.2 *Technological Affordances*

To sustain relationships with family in the country of origin, migrants often select technology that meets their relational needs. The *features of different ICTs or Internet-based platforms* (i.e., affordances) allow migrants access to various communicative cues from their family in the country of origin. Research suggests that migrants often choose to communicate through specific platforms or ICTs in order to leverage these affordances. For example, migrants use satellite television to access soap operas from their country of origin and thus feel more culturally connected to their home (Georgiou, 2012). They use social networking sites to maintain both strong and weak ties in the country of origin and thus lower the difficulty of migration through reducing uncertainty (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). They may also use websites to create a sense of intimacy through written updates to a family on public platforms

(Castro & González, 2014). Additionally, migrants use the ability to see family through video technology as well as the use of asynchronous communication to participate with family in the country of origin (Ling & Campbell, 2009). It is also important to note that affordances can limit certain actions. According to Hutchby (2001) technological affordances, for example, "constrain the ways that they can possibly be 'written' or 'read'" (p. 447).

2.1.2.1 Video Technology

Most of the time, real-time and multimodal aspects of video-based ICTs allow migrants a more seamless interaction with their family. Pearce, Slaker, and Ahmad (2013) suggest that the increased use of Skype by Armenian households was motivated by the desire to facilitate technologically mediated co-presence, or feelings of being physically present with family, with family members living outside the country. The researchers analyzed the Armenian data of a survey administered by the Caucasus Research Resource Center. They found that the increased use of this platform supports the argument that Skype generates substantial feelings of connection amongst physically separated family members. In particular, the co-presence facilitate by Skype did not occur in the same way through text or voice-only ICTs.

In fact, the affective response to video communication is so important that Francisco (2015) argues that visual aspect of technology, as offered through Skype and Facebook, has created a different quality of relationship that was never before possible for migrants and their families. Francisco conducted a multi-sited ethnography and qualitative research (interviews and group interviews) between 2008 and 2011 with mostly undocumented Filipino migrants living in New York City. As many participants were undocumented, visiting home, or their family visiting the USA, was often not possible. Thus, technology was the only option, as considered by participants, for engaging in meaningful communication with family. According to the

participants, video communication was as close to face-to-face conversation as they could achieve.

Additionally, participants reported leaving their web camera on just to feel like they were participating in the household in the Philippines. One participant said, “I just like hearing them move around” (Francisco, 2015, p. 181). According to Francisco’s participants, the most difficult aspect of migration was the inability to see family. This difficulty was relieved somewhat through the use of video communication. Fundamentally, the author argues that the ability to see family in the country of origin produces an effect of *presence* and *surveillance*. Surveillance in this context is the ability to monitor the action of family members. In turn, feeling present results in the creation of greater family identity through feeling like an active participant in the family.

2.1.2.2 Asynchronous communication

For migrant family communication, real-time interaction is not always possible or desired, whether because of time zones, busy schedules, or other constraints. In these cases, asynchronous communication, communication that does not happen at the same time, provides a way to contact family in the country of origin. Text-messaging, emails, photos, and social networking sites have all been documented by researchers as ways that migrants participate with family, but at the time convenience of the user. For example, text messaging can be done at any point and is thus an easy form of communication to fit into a migrants’ daily life. Lee and Katz (2015) found that text messaging played a key role in Korean immigrants’ social network structures. The researchers surveyed Korean immigrants living in New Jersey, USA about their cell phone and texting habits. They found that heavy text messaging with close contacts living in the country of origin was an indication of network centrality and strength. Additionally, amongst Filipina domestic workers living in Hong Kong, Mckay (2007) found that expressing intimate

feelings through text messages may be easier for migrants than using a real-time channel of communication.

Importantly, static and asynchronous communication provides a "durable" form of communication. Text messages and photos are static (and durable) because they can be saved and reopened whenever the migrant would like to recall the relationship. No scheduling or synchronous communication required. Photos are ubiquitous within the ICT landscape (Madianou, 2012). To investigate the importance of static and asynchronous communication formats, Mckay (2017) conducted an ethnography of Filipino migrants living in London. She interviewed a subset of nine participants who had sent their children home to the Philippines while they remained abroad. For these participants, photos and other forms of static communication were presented as valuable aspects of communication with their children. Photographic evidence, in this case, showed how the children were developing. It also helped parents ensure that the child was all right. Posting photos to social networking sites while physically separated was also a way for parents to demonstrate their allegiance to the child and show the world their connection. Importantly, Mckay's participants discussed being able to return to these photos and conversations whenever they wanted. The durability of static or asynchronous communication, provides "material proof" of the relationship that can be accessed whenever the migrant needs to do so.

2.1.3 *ICT-Based Co-Presence*

An understanding of feeling connected despite physical separation has been developed primarily through the concept of *ICT-based co-presence*. According to the scholars such as Baldassar et al. (2016), ICT-based (or mediated) co-presence is the feeling of "being there" for family despite physical separation. As described, studies have shown that migrants often use

ICTs, in particular mobile phones and social media, to maintain strong ties to the country of origin through a feeling of being socially present. A sense of co-presence can be developed through leveraging the particular affordances of a given technology. In fact, within the body of scholarship related to ICT-based co-presence, researchers have identified differing types of co-presence, a few of which are particularly relevant to this study. The following section discusses two of these: ambient and ordinary co-presence.

2.1.3.1 Ambient co-presence

Madianou (2016) argues that the ubiquitous use of ICTs allows migrants to be "always on". That is, the portability of new technologies allows individuals the capability for near-constant communication with family members in the country of origin. Madianou engaged in ethnographic fieldwork with Filipino transnational families between 2011 and 2014. The research was conducted during a time of rapid development in the capabilities of ICTs, and many participants were in the process of adopting new technologies. Based on observation and interviews with 106 Filipino migrants living in the UK and their family in the country of origin, Madianou found that the constant connection to family produces a peripheral awareness, or what she called ambient co-presence, in which migrants are capable of regular monitoring and even a strong sense of participation in activities in the country of origin. Ambient co-presence is "the peripheral, yet intense awareness of distant others made possible through the affordances of ubiquitous media environments" (Madianou, 2016, p. 183).

The author also discerned that visual forms of communication, such as photos, play an important role in the building of ambient co-presence in that photos may sent in real time but viewed asynchronously. Thus, individuals in differing time zones can engage in this form of communication with relatively little stress. Madianou's research points out that surveillance

afforded by co-presence has significant emotional consequences and their family members—both good and bad. Individuals with weak relationships in the country or origin reported having increased conflict. Migrants with strong relationships, however, often reported emotional reassurance from their ambient co-presence. Overall, those migrants with strong relationships with family in the country of origin found the information rendered from ambient co-presence reassuring and beneficial to their relationship. Alternatively, those individuals with difficult or struggling relationships reported that this kind of co-presence only made tensions more salient for them.

Francisco (2015) likens the concept of ambient co-presence to parents' use of a webcam to watch their children get home from school. The video presence, without an explicit discussion, provides the parent a chance to peek into the lives their children. According to Francisco, engaging in this type of interaction is the closest that migrants are able to get to being physically present with family.

2.1.3.2 Ordinary co-presence

Prior research has also documented that migrants seek to develop co-presence through participating in the routine or ordinary aspects of their families' daily life, such as morning coffee or meal time. Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) conducted qualitative interviews with Romanian migrants living in Switzerland. They found that migrants often sought to recreate the mundane aspects of daily life through ICT use. For some of their participants, the act of communication was ritualized. The regularity, for example a phone call every Saturday, was meant to develop co-presence through becoming a regular part of their family's schedule. Nedelcu and Wyss argue that this form of ritualized, "ordinary" co-presence is related to, yet distinct from, the "always on" form of ambient co-presence suggested by Madianou (2016).

Relevant to the present study is the idea that migrants not only rely on technology, but they select technologies (ICTs) based on the affordances they provide. This selection process is so integral to migrant family interaction (indeed, to contemporary social interaction more generally), it can be considered a form of communicative behavior in itself (Madianou, 2012). Once set up, ICTs allow for affordable means to maintain regular communication with family, an important feature of staying connected. The affordances offered by different technologies serve a variety of purposes in migrant relationships, ranging from enhanced feelings of intimacy to the ability to communicate across time zones. In particular, the ability to communicate has facilitated ICT-based co-presence, which is the idea that migrants strategically use technology to feel like they are with their family despite being physically separated. This feeling is most often achieved through a mix of ambient and ordinary co-presence. Still, whereas ICTs offer many features that help migrants connect with families, ICT use comes with drawbacks as well.

2.2 Family Communication

For such an important part of human relationships, "family" is a difficult concept for scholars to define (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Families play a fundamental role in the lives of most individuals, in both positive and negative ways. While discussing the definition of a "normal" family, for example, Bourdieu (1996) argued that though there is nothing "natural" about family; indeed, it often feels to be the opposite.

The definition of family is ephemeral but "we know it when we see it." Because it cannot be defined easily as having certain characteristics, family may best be considered a socially constructed concept (Bourdieu, 1996). As part of this is the understanding of the relationships between family members as deeply embedded in the socially constructed conditions in which we live: What we expect family to look like is often derived from what is seen around us. A social

constructivist perspective on family also acknowledges the formation of family as a fluid and complex entity (Braithwaite, Abetz, Moore, & Brockhage, 2016).

An understanding of how families are defined, both in research and by lay understandings, is important in part because it informs why some families must use communication more heavily than others for their management of membership and validation to outsiders. A brief review of the theoretical discussion surrounding the construction of family as it relates to the non-normative situation of migrant families is discussed below.

2.2.1 *Concepts of Family*

There are three primary definitions of family discussed in literature: structural, transactional, and functional (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004; Weigel, 2008). These distinctions are primarily used for scholarly analysis because, in daily life, enacting family in some way involves all three (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004). Each is described in the following section.

2.2.1.1 Structural family

Arguably the most prolific and engrained understandings of family are still those based on individuals connected by blood or law (Suter, 2008). These structural definitions of family are not concerned with the affective product of relationships but, merely, who counts as a member (Segrin & Flora, 2011). These definitions are focused on the presence or absence of individuals that are generally considered family, such as parents or children (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). In his cross national study of families from more than 250 families, Murdock (1949) coined the term *nuclear family* and described it as:

> A social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a

> socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabitating adults. (p. 1)

This definition of family has been adopted as a common perception of family throughout societies (Baxter et al., 2009a).

A common example of the structural lens to understanding family may be found in the government's need for a discrete picture of its population. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau, (2019) defined a family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together" (n.p.). When being viewed through a structural lens, then, a family consists of those individuals bound by blood, law, or proximity. Likely, this is because the structural definition sets the clearest boundaries as to who is a family member. Still, this perspective excludes the experiences of many individuals who have families that do not fit the institutionalized conceptualization of family. It is for this reason that scholars have suggested alternative social groupings be understood as family.

2.2.1.1 Functional family

The functional definition of family is a group with, "at least one adult and one or more other persons *who perform certain tasks of family life* such as socialization, nurturance, development, and financial and emotional support" (Segrin & Flora, 2011, p. 7, emphasis added). This functional conception of family affords flexibility in its understanding, but still emphasizes the normative actions of family. From this perspective, the *actions* of family provide the basis for inclusion in the group. It is through the performance of typical tasks (e.g., taking their children to school) that family is enacted. Importantly, these actions can extend feelings of family to those individuals not related by blood or legal ties.

An example of understanding family through a functional lens may be seen in the research surrounding the concept of "fictive kin." Through analysis of the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) collected between 1979 and 1980, Chatters, Taylor and Jayakody (1994) grounded their study in the idea that family can consist of individuals not bound by blood but who *perform the actions of family*. According to these researchers, when a family member does not provide or is incapable of providing satisfactory emotional support, an individual may turn to their fictive kin: those people who are designated as family but are not related by blood or legal ties (Chatters et al., 1994). It is the ability of these fictive kin members to provide the actions expected by family members that designates them as family. Unlike a transactional perspective, the idea of fictive kin suggests that family may require more than just a "consideration" of membership. According to this functional perspective the proof of family membership can be found in the actions people take that demonstrate family.

2.2.1.2 Transactional family

As an alternative to the limitations of the structural lens, several scholars have sought to understand family instead through a transactional definition. This approach to conceptualizing family gives importance to the subjective feelings of the individuals involved (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Galvin, Braithwaite, and Bylund (2015) argue that families may be defined as "networks of people who share their lives over long periods of time bound by marriage, blood, or commitment, legal or otherwise, who consider themselves as family and who share a significant history and anticipated futures of functioning in a family relationship" (p. 8). The "consideration" in this definition highlights the importance of what family members believe to be important when conceiving of their group identity. In this view, connections by blood and law

are less important criteria for inclusion in a family than the feelings members have towards each other.

Importantly, in a study of the lay understandings of family, Weigel (2008) found that participants most commonly identified characteristics that support a transactional understanding. Weigel asked undergraduate students to free-list features of family, resulting in 70 features. He then completed a second study that asked another undergraduate student sample to rank the importance of the identified features. The features that were found to be the most central to the concept of family were love, trust, respect, support, honestly, acceptance, encouragement, caring, and values, all affective features of what it means to be family. These data suggest that individuals see family largely through a transactional lens, one that ties individuals together based on the emotions that unite them.

Scholars using this understanding of family often seek to emphasize the role of communication for the construction of those affective ties. The focus of a transactional lens is often on the way people interact with each other (Floyd, Mikkelson, & Judd, 2006), and the boundaries of family are seen to be formed through communicative strategies. Thus, it is not merely completing a familial task (e.g., picking a member up from the airport) that makes a person family but, rather, one's expressed desire to do so with authentic sentimental intention. It is the emotional experience that generates a sense of family (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002).

In a study of the online narratives of foster adoptions, Suter, Baxter, Seurer and Thomas (2014) found that there was a discourse of constitutive "kinning" that happened amongst parents. By analyzing the stories posted by foster parents to various websites, the researchers revealed that these parents considered communicative interactions *at least as important* as the construction of their family through biological ties. Specifically, they found evidence that

individuals constructed family through the use of communication that made them *feel* like family. More specifically, the story narratives analyzed in this study made it clear that "real" families were those people that communicated care and love in various ways. These data help reveal that transactional definitions suggest that families may be enacted by communicatively negotiated affective ties, interdependence, and long-term commitment.

Though it can be argued that transactional and functional conceptions of family more likely resemble the lived experiences of individuals, structural understandings are perhaps the most ubiquitous. Blood, law, or co-residence are the dominant discourse surrounding family membership (Baxter et al., 2009). Participants in several studies expressed an inevitability of family based on blood relations (e.g., Tasker & Delvoye, 2018). The inevitability of family produced by structural definitions often reinforces the popular conception these relationships are inescapable or non-voluntary (Hess, 2000; Scharp & Thomas, 2016), creating a tautological cycle of family.

Migrant families, however, sit at the center of these norms. They are often related by blood or law, but violate the expectation of co-residence. Thus, though migrants could reduce interaction more easily with family, because of the distance, they often seek to maintain relationships. What we can take away from the transactional (interaction/feelings-based) and functional (task/action-based) approaches to defining family is the important idea that people engage in and value different types of communicative behaviors when enacting family when the traditional structural of family no longer exists.

2.2.2 *Discourse Dependency*

Discourse dependency provides a useful framework for understanding why migrants rely on discourse to enact family. To explain this connection, it is necessary to state that conceptual

understandings of family are often attached to the belief of co-residence. In 1993, Newman, Roberts, and Syré investigated children's perceptions of family. The researchers asked children ages 4-15 how they would help someone else define family. *Affective ties* were overwhelmingly the most critical to defining a family member (60% of the children mentioned such ties). The second most frequently mentioned criterion was *co-residence* of individuals (38%). The findings of this research suggest that children believe family are both the people who love one another and the people who live together.

More recently, Baxter et al. (2009) found likewise that *sharing a geographic location* was one factor that increased the likelihood that participants would label a group of people as a family. These findings indicate that people are more likely to perceive individuals who live with or near each other as family. The perception of co-residence as vital to people's understanding of family may be because it is likely that individuals who live near those they care about are also engaged in performing other filial duties, as suggested by functional approaches. Thus, co-residence may act as a confounding variable for duty and relational closeness in common conceptions of family.

Communication is asserted to be essential for all families; it helps create personal, relational, and family identities (Galvin & Braithwaite, 2014). According to Baxter (2004), "[f]rom a constitutive perspective, then, persons and relationships are not analytically separable from communication; instead, communication constitutes these phenomena…Put simply, relationships are constituted in communication practices" (p. 3). This perspective suggests that communication is more than just the transmission of ideas but, rather, that family identity develops out of interaction (Baxter, 2004). Relationships are thus *spoken into being* rather than communication merely existing *in* relationships. Moreover, the discourse used to create a family

identity is reflective of their shared experiences (Galvin, 2006). A social constructivist perspective highlights communication as a tool for investigating an individual's reality.

Galvin proposed the discourse-dependent framework to describe how family members navigate both their internal and external identity boundaries. Members of a family must establish the meaning of family amongst themselves (i.e., internal) as well as define their family to the outside world (i.e., external). She argues that certain families are particularly dependent on language-based strategies—discourse—to maintain their identity. These families must often *legitimize* their relationships to themselves and outsiders through communicative behaviors. That is, as discourse-dependent families are often counter-normative, they must create an identity through communication, because existing, traditional cultural models cannot be tapped as verification. Instead, these individuals engage in unique communicative strategies to corroborate their claim of family.

Galvin suggested some key strategies that such families use to maintain their external and internal boundaries. External boundary strategies involve communication with non-family members (outsiders) that construct valid family identity. These strategies are 1) labeling, the creation of titles or position to indicate membership in the family; 2) explaining, helping others understand the validity of the relationships; 3) legitimizing, showing custom or official ties to justify the relationship; and 4) defending, justifying the relationship against skepticism or attack of others. Discourse-dependent families also seek to manage internal identity boundaries through communication. Galvin identified four primary strategies: 1) naming, adopting specific names for people considered part of the family; 2) discussing, talking about the relationship with other family members; 3) narrating, telling stories that propagate the family identity; and 4) ritualizing, regular family actions.

Relevant here is that Galvin states that physically separated families, or those enacting family over distance, also engage in these strategies that create a family identity. When co-residency, characteristic of normative families, is violated through physical separation, migrant families may lean more heavily on discourse to maintain family identity. In addition (and practically speaking), migrant families' physical separation requires a reliance on discourse (whether words or images) if individuals want to interact with family.

To summarize this section, the concept of family may be understood through several different lenses. Primarily, researchers couch their understanding in structural (biological or legal definitions), functional (tasks/actions), or transactional (feelings/interactions) perspectives of family. Each lens constitutes the idea of family in a different way. Most relevant to this study is that functional and transactional approaches to family suggest that individuals can engage in a wide array of behaviors that enact family even when the expected "structure" of family is violated. Within this idea, the scholarly work related to discourse dependency alerts us to the importance of studying discourse-related behaviors when investigating migrant family communication.

2.3 REMITTANCE

As noted in Chapter One, a characteristic common to many migrant experiences is the sending of remittances to family in the country of origin (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994; Horst, Erdal, Carling, & Afeef, 2014). Remittances are "the funds or other assets that migrants send home to their countries" (Pew Research Center, 2019, n.p.). Still, money is not the only thing sent home by migrants. They also send new ideas, knowledge, and attitudes (de Haas, 2010), which are referred to as *social* remittances (Levitt, 2001). These social remittances are found to have a significant impact on people living in the country of origin (Levitt, 2001). Though not

under investigation in this study, when combined, the transfer of remittances and communication that surrounds them has become a ubiquitous aspect of the migrant experience.

Though scholars, policy makers, and migrants themselves often praise remittances as a tool for development, remittances may have negative effects. Remittances may foster economic dependency and inequality, create unrealistic standards of living, and intensify competition between community members (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Despite these possible problems, however, remittances are an integral part of the migrant experience and, as will be discussed below, are often at the center of communication that migrants have with their family in the country of origin.

2.3.1 *Migrants Leave to Help Family*

Foremost, migration is considered to be a familial arrangement in that migrants often leave their country of origin with the explicit agreement that they will help family who have stayed behind (Rapoport & Docquier, 2006). Income stability for the household in the country of origin is frequently cited as a primary motivation for emigration (Isaksen, Devi, & Hochschild, 2008). Parreñas (2001) conducted interviews with Filipina domestic workers, one of the largest groups of female labor migrants, living in Rome and Los Angeles. She found that the growing need for low-wage service labor (e.g., housekeeping or in-home nursing) in postindustrial nations incentivized her participants to leave the Philippines through the possibility of significantly larger income. In turn, the increased income offered a chance to provide for their family economically. Indeed, income stability for family still in the Philippines was the *only* reason that the mothers in this study migrated. If migration occurs with an expected economic benefit for the family in the country of origin, it should be no surprise that the transfer of money to the country of origin plays an important part in the migration experience.

Overwhelmingly, research has found that economic opportunities motivate individuals to leave their country of origin (Borjas, 1989; Hatton & Williamson, 1998). While investigating the remittance practices of Bangladeshi migrants in Japan, Mahmud (2017) learned that, though family need for remittances served as the initial motivation to leave their home country, the changes in familial relationships resulted in changes of remittance behavior. Essentially, though migrants left their country of origin with the purpose of sending home remittances, as their relationships adapted to the distance, so too did their remittance patterns. This pattern change suggests that relationships with family members in the country of origin plays a pivotal role in remittance behaviors. Generally, the willingness to remit was influenced by the strength of familial relationships (Mahmud, 2017). If access to a higher and more stable income for the family is the incentive to leave, it is clear that increased economic well-being is meant for the betterment of the whole family (Taylor, 1999).

2.3.2 *Use of Remittances*

Remittances are often used by migrants to help family members who remain in the country of origin. Research has investigated the use of this money at both the macro, or global level, and micro, or household level. The transfer of money may serve many different relational and economic functions and is often considered to have an important role for both senders and receivers. According to Cohen (2005),

> [w]e should not discount the importance of the goods that migrants send home, the knowledge that they bring, and the networks that they create. In other words, the concept of remittances as a wide array of resources that any migrant has to offer to his or her community of origin is critical. (p. 91)

Given broad implications of remittances suggested by Cohen (2005), it is important to understand how previous scholarship has investigated the use of remittances by both senders and receivers. Ultimately, an understanding of the use of remittances for migrants and their family informs the motivation to and impact of sending money home.

2.3.2.1 Economic development

Scholarly enthusiasm for the research topic of remittances is likely due to the correlation between these transfers and economic development of the receiving nations (Ratha & Mohapatra, 2007). When viewed from a macro-perspective, these capital transfers have a large impact and are considered vital to many developing economies. Economists and practitioners generally believe that global remittances are a valuable tool for local and national development. The World Bank tracks the money flows between countries based on the assumption that remittances play an integral role in economic development. According to the World Bank, in 2017 global remittances reached a record high of $613 billion sent to low-and middle-income countries (World Bank, 2018). In 2016, approximately $138 billion were remitted from the United States to developing nations alone (Pew Research Center, 2019). In absolute dollars, India received $69 billion, China $64 billion, and the Philippines $33 billion (KNOMAD, 2018).

It is difficult to measure the actual rate of global remittances, however, as money is sent frequently through informal channels. As such, the true amount of remittances is likely much higher than recorded. Though migrants may be unaware of their participation in this global phenomenon, these transfers of money are so important to global economies that the United Nations has made the reduction of transmission costs – which are currently about 7% of the funds sent – a sustainable development goal (World Bank, 2018). Each of the statistics speak to the growing importance that remittances are playing at a national level. When congregated,

migrant remittances exceed official development assistance (Quartey, 2006). When viewed from this global scope, sending home money can, as a whole, be considered a tool for pulling nations out of poverty.

2.3.2.2 Household help

Despite the massive impact that migrant remittances have at a macro-level, they are often sent with the intention of providing help to just family members. At a micro-level, remittances have been found to provide help paying for education expenses (Isaksen et al., 2008), care of children still in the country of origin (Madianou, 2012), or even as an investment (Adams & Cuecuecha, 2010). Though remittance strategies and expectations may vary by culture, scholars have argued that these transfers generally provide a buffer against economic uncertainty for migrants and their family (Lucas & Stark, 1985; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2009). Thus, remittances have been found to be primarily a source of income security for family members still in the country of origin.

Doyle (2015) investigated the role of remittances on social spending for individuals living in Latin American democracies. Based on data analysis of the Latinobarómetro public opinion survey, the money migrants sent home resulted in income security for family members. In turn, this security reduced spending on social security and welfare programs. The income security that resulted from remittances also made family members less likely to approve of redistribution or higher taxes. Additionally, Quartey (2006) investigated the determinants of household welfare by family left behind in Ghana through a multi-wave (1987/88, 1988/89, 1991/92, 1998/99) study using the Ghana Living Standards Survey. As the living standard in Ghana deteriorated, the need for remittances from family increased. This research suggests that,

as the family need for money increases, the likelihood of migrants sending money also increases. Families use the income provided by remittances as a source of stability and to help ends meet.

2.3.2.3 Money materializes feelings

There are times when migrants send money not out of need but to demonstrate their participation in family. In these cases, remittances are being used as a symbol of feelings toward family members. Often, mothers leave children behind as they migrate in search for higher or more stable income. In these cases, remittances have been found to be a mechanism to materialize feelings of love when these mothers are unable to perform typical mothering duties.

In support of this argument, Isaksen, Devi, and Hochschild (2008) discussed Devi's (2003) unpublished interviews with 22 mothers from the Indian state of Kerala who had migrated to the United Arab Emirates. For each woman Devi interviewed, there was an average of five family members back in Kerala, including their children, spouses, parents, and siblings. As a state, Kerala has a strong educational system but a weak economy. Thus, there are not enough jobs, particularly well-paying jobs, for the number of graduates. In accordance with the research discussed earlier, individuals may need to migrate in order to provide a stable income for their family. The women in Isaksen et al.'s study often reported struggling with the desire to be an "ideal mother" while they were living away. Importantly, remittances and gifts became a way for the women to express devotion while being physically separated. Isaksen et al. (2008) explain, "[t]he migrant mother was also forced to 'materialize' love- to express through money and material gifts that which she could not express through talk and hugs" (p. 414).

Overall, the uses of migrant remittances are discussed at three levels: national development, household support, and to materialize individual feelings. The latter two uses of remittances are of particular importance for this study. To provide support to the whole family

and to be used as proof of feelings toward family members both speak to the communicative behaviors that may relate to the processes of enacting family.

2.3.3 *Motivations for Remittances*

The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) approach emerged in the 1980's as a leading theory to explain how migrants weigh the impact of their remittances (Carling, 2014; Lucas & Stark, 1985). Lucas and Stark analyzed survey results from the National Migration Study of Botswana, 1978-79 to generate a model of remittance motivations. They found remittances were a result of more than just altruistic love of family. According to NELM, the decision for a given family member to remit is often reached through a broader, and conscious, familial consensus (Lucas, 2016; Lucas & Stark, 1985). Lucas and Stark argued that migrants are rational individuals, and NELM suggests that the motivation for remittances are driven by either altruism or self-interest. NELM was eventually updated by adding 'mutual altruism' to its model. Despite being restrictive in its possible motivations, the NELM approach is still the dominant assumption in theorizing migrant remittance. Each of these possible motivations for remittances is discussed briefly below.

2.3.3.1 Altruism

The motivation found most commonly for remittances in academic literature is altruism (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2009). Migrants who send remittances to increase the welfare of their family and friends in their country of origin are considered to have altruistic motivations (Lucas & Stark, 1985). Agarwal and Horowitz (2002) argue that if migrants transmitted remittances for purely risk-reducing reasons, such as sending money to a savings account in case of future problems—as is often cited as the rationale for emigration—the rate of per-migrant remittances in a household would remain constant. Their survey of Guyanese households found that

remittances were *negatively* related to the number of migrants a household reported living abroad, suggesting altruistic motives for remittances. If increased wealth were the only motivation, economists argue that each family member would send equal amounts to speed their ability to return home. Additionally, Ghosh (2006) found that length of stay was negatively associated with migrant remittances. The author suggested that this may be because family has come to join the migrant abroad, or the migrant has become estranged from family living in the country of origin. In either case, the desire to increase goodwill, what Ghosh considered *altruism*, was no longer present, and there was a decrease in remittances.

2.3.3.2 Migrant self-interest

Though altruism frequently motivates remittances, it has not been found to explain remittance behaviors comprehensively (Czaika & Spray, 2013). As Argawal and Horowitz (2002) suggested, an alternative explanation is *migrant self-interest*. Self-interest may be considered the perceived utility for self, derived from the transfer of remittances (Czaika & Spray, 2013). This motivation for remittance is generally associated with migrants who have left areas with high urban unemployment and wish to help family brace for future difficulty (Cai, 2003), with the explicit purpose of making the migrants' own life better upon return.

In an analysis of the Indian National Sample Survey (conducted between July 2007 and June 2008), Czaika and Spray (2013) found that there are three types of self-interest motivations. First, migrants may send back money to ensure that property or investments in their country of origin remain in good condition. This may also include remittances to ensure continued care for a child left behind (Czaika & Spray, 2013). It is money that is sent home with the purpose of maintaining their own assets (including family) while they work abroad. Second, a migrant may feel motivated to remit to invest in new assets or build social capital that may be used upon

return. In these cases, migrants have decided to send money home in an effort to increase assets rather than merely maintain them, as is the case with the first type of motivation. Attempting to increase personal assets is reflective of the desire to better social standing and the explicit purpose of bolstering social capital (Fransen, 2015). Third, a migrant may wish to maintain good relations or even prestige with family and friends in their country of origin. The prestige aspect of this type of motivation is generally considered to be informed by self-interested desire. In this case, goodwill (which is discussed as altruism above) is a result of the desire to improve the migrant's personal image. In particular, this motivation may be the case in cultures that, particularly, have high filial obligations, such as India. In these cases, remittances are a gesture of goodwill *meant to demonstrate care* for family members. Common to each of these motivations is the desire to increase the household income or status (Rapoport & Docquier, 2006). What is good for the family becomes helpful for the migrant. It is for this reason that altruism and self-interest are often conflated in migrants' perceptions of remittance motivations.

2.3.3.3 Mutual altruism/tempered altruism

Because remittances are tied so closely with feelings and family, Lucas and Stark (1985) acknowledged the difficulty of distinguishing altruistic motives from those of self-interest. Thus, the term *mutual altruism*, or tempered altruism, was suggested to describe the dually beneficial nature of some remittances (Stark, 1995). In these cases, a migrant may remit for purposes of helping the family, but they also internalize altruistic attitudes (Cai, 2003). For example, Thai (2012) found that transnationally married daughters remitted to help their families in Vietnam but also to fulfill their duty as "good" daughters. Through in-depth interviews with Vietnamese women who have married citizens of the United States, Thai found that remittances were an important aspect of both providing altruistic care for family and also ensuring that their family

duty was met. Often remittances are part of mutually-beneficial social contracts between migrants and their family in the country of origin (Carling, 2008).

It is unlikely that the semantic difference between motivations may ever actually be untangled in real world situations. In fact, motivations for remittances often go uncommunicated, existing instead as internal attitudes held by the migrant (Carling, 2008). Still, an understanding of these motivations is important because they speak to the understudied relational ties that not only prompt, but are necessary for, remittances. The NELM approach to understanding the motivation for remittances places the migrant family at the center of these actions. Regardless of motivation, migrants are sending their money home, often to family. It is important, then, to better understand how migrant families make relational meaning from these transactions.

2.3.4 *Cultural Prescription of Remittances*

Though scholars have found some generalizations about the uses and motivations for remittances, it is important to remember that these transfers are bound by culture and situation (Brown, Carling, Fransen, & Siegel, 2014). Fundamentally, remittances are grounded in the systems of norms and obligations that are bound by traditional processes of identity formation and social meaning (Gutierrez, 2018; Mckenzie & Menjívar, 2011). Though the migrants are ultimately making the decision to emigrate and send remittances home, they are still influenced by institutional factors, such as culture, education, and gender. A family-centered approach to understanding remittance motivations is meant to bridge migrant agency with the structural impositions of culture (Abreu, 2012).

While interviewing migrant workers in a London hotel and hospital, Batnitzky, McDowell, and Dyer (2012) found that migrants used remittances specifically as a tool to fulfill cultural expectations. Participants in this study cited “tradition” as a primary reason for sending

home money. The decision to remit was often couched in the cultural norms of their country of origin. For example, a Saudi-born participant was able to perform the typical expectation of masculinity in his culture by providing money for his sister's education. Through this money, he could remain part of the decision-making activities of his household. It was also the assumption by family members that providing for family, particularly female family members, is a "masculine" task.

Additionally, in a three year study of international marriages in Malaysia and Singapore, Yeoh, Leng, Dung, and Yi'En (2013) found that women often called upon the norms of a "dutiful daughter" or "sacrificial sister" (p. 448) when explaining their motivation for marriage migration. According to these participants, arranged marriages to Singaporean men were culturally acceptable and a way to raise the social status of their family. Additionally, access to their husbands' resources was a way to provide support for their family still in Malaysia. In turn, this "generosity" was actually culturally prescribed by the common understanding of a daughter's filial duty. Thus, remittances can embody the expectations and meanings of both the receiver and the sender (Carling, 2014). This suggests that migrants and their families are often aware of the social capital being built by these transmissions, not just the economic stability provided by remittances. Given the understanding that culture and meaning are imbedded in these transfers of money, the motivation then extends beyond merely providing for family to being able to culturally participate in family. Money often provides a mechanism for retaining relational bonds with family in the country of origin.

2.3.5 *Remittances facilitate a relational bond*

In addition to providing material support to family in the country of origin, remittances help migrants maintain affective bonds in their absence (Thai, 2012; Yeoh et al., 2013). It is for

this reason that Peter (2010) argues that remittances may be the most emotionally powerful object for modern transnational families. As long as migrants seek to maintain social relations in their country of origin, they will likely continue to remit. Remittances are often considered by migrants as a means to secure ties that bind migrants with their family back home (Parrenas, 2001, 2005; Yeoh, Leng, Dung, & Yi'En, 2013). In a multi-sited ethnography of Ecuadorian migrants in Italy and their family still living in Ecuador, Boccagni (2010) found that transnational relationships were fueled by the combination of remittances and frequent communication. It was through participating in both of these actions that Ecuadorian migrants were able to keep in touch with family while separated physically. Similarly, Thomas (1999) investigated the experiences of Vietnamese migrants living in Australia as they sought to develop a sense of home in a foreign country. For these migrants, sending home gifts and money were important tools that were meant to strengthen the social ties weakened by distance. The ability to provide for family still living in Vietnam served as an additional mechanism to feel like an affective participant in their physically separated family.

As can be seen in this research, remittances have been found to communicate relational meanings and are often not just material transfers. Through interviews with the 18 wives of Honduran immigrants in the United States, McKenzie and Menjivar (2011) learned further that remittances symbolized expressions of love and fidelity. The wives were left behind as their husbands emigrated abroad in search of higher wages. According to participants, the remittances served as a symbol that their husband had not forgotten them. It is for this reason that Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) refer to remittances as "modes of materializing the family" (p. 14). Essentially, remittances provide a tangible connection between a family and the migrant. Though

communication provides an ephemeral tether to family, remittances act as a physical performance of and to their family.

The desire for affective relationships with individuals in the country of origin can persist over long periods of living away. In an analysis of the 2002 Pew Hispanic Survey, Waldinger (2008) found that migrants' affective attachment to their country of origin remained strong regardless of when they emigrated initially. Though migrant identity, or identity with the country of origin, remained durable, the respondents often did not take concrete actions to maintain relationships in their country of origin (e.g., remit, visit home, or vote in home elections). Long-term loyalty to their social ties at home attenuated as their stay in the United States lengthened. Social incorporation in the host country was found to reduce material support in the form of remittances because of these weakened allegiances.

Still, multi-generational remittance structures exist. Second-generation migrants have been found to remit to their parents' country of origin as gifts or to fulfill social obligation (Gutierrez, 2018). These findings suggest that more research on the role remittances play in creating and maintaining relational ties is needed. Waldinger's (2008) study found that migrants often have the desire to maintain ties to their country of origin, and remittances sometimes provide that link. Viewing remittances as a social act, rather than only a financial transaction, allows researchers to more fully understand remittances' consequence for relationships. To understand the emotional and relational importance of remittances to migrant families, it is important to understand the commonly used mechanisms for communicating about remittances (Gutierrez, 2018).

2.3.6 *Relationship between communication and remittances*

There has been relatively little scholarship into the communicative practices surrounding remittances and even less on the act of remitting as a communication practice in itself. Despite the various motivations, contexts, and meanings surrounding, and embedded in, remittances, scholarship suggests that there is an overarching heuristic that shapes communication about and attitudes towards remittances (Carling, 2014). Remittances are inherently social in that they require interaction between two or more people, and, thus, migrants have created common patterns for managing the relational communication associated with these transfers (Carling, 2014) in that they often have a seemingly inherent (though likely culturally and personally informed) desire to remit to family.

In 2014, Carling proposed a conceptual framework for studying the communicative interactions surrounding migrant remittances. His model integrated the disparate research conducted by economists (NELM) and ethnographic social scientists (the relational meaning of remittances). Based on a literature analysis Carling suggested the concept of a "script," which is akin to a common narrative that migrants negotiate as they communicate with family about remittances. Scripts represent implicit knowledge that structure the expectations for a specific situation. Carling (2014) argues that migrants follow similar "structures of expectations for specific types of situations" (p. 220). He defines remittance scripts as the following:

> Remittance scripts make up a repertoire of generalized representations of remittance transactions that are recognized by social group, but might not be explicitly expressed. Each script specifies, at a variable level of detail, the transaction's constituent roles, actions, and statues, and the relations between

these elements. People engage in scripts in flexible ways to make sense of and direct specific and recurring remittances transactions. (Carling, 2014, p. S221)

Importantly, Carling points out that both the sender and the receiver play active roles in creating remittance scripts. The transfers of remittances, and the subsequent scripts, are culturally-bound and therefore dependent on the context of remittances. Carling identified 12 typical scripts for remittances: compensation, repayment, authorization, pooling, gift, obligation and entitlement, sacrifice, blackmail, help, investment, and donation. A single interaction, however, may combine or blur these scripts to create a unique interaction. Interactions may include only part of a script's characteristics or layer multiple meanings into a single transaction. It is for this reason that Carling also identified four prominent themes across these scripts: relinquishment, requitals, gratitude, and positioning. They are each discussed below. It is worth discussing these themes, as it is in themes where the meanings of remittances for families are found. Additionally, these themes may provide a lens for participants as they think about their own remittance behaviors. These typical conversations provide a scaffolding for migrants to understand their own relational meaning of remittances.

2.3.6.1 Relinquishments

The transfer of money, or *relinquishment*, is vital to remittance scripts. Relinquishment of remittances is considered to be whether and how migrants give up ownership of the transferred money (Carling, 2014). Migrants may transfer capital for safe-keeping by a trusted advisor or out of filial duty. In both cases, money has been transferred, and the communication may follow a relinquishment script. The negotiation of money transfer is frequently not discussed by the sender or receiver. Rather, remittances typically become *an unspoken assumption of migrant relationships* (Åkesson, 2011). Still, the relinquishment of money or capital is clearly a theme of

remittance communication. Even in the absence of explicit communication of the monetary transfer, Åkesson (2011) suggests that peripheral communicative practices may inform this script. Though money must be exchanged for a remittance to occur, the rationale for remittance may change. These types of conversations may center around the actual amount or logistics of sending home money.

2.3.6.2 Requitals

If migrants believe that they are receiving something in return for their remittances, this is understood as a *requital* of remittances (Carling, 2014). Requitals may be implicit or explicit exchanges for the capital being transferred. Requitals happen to various degrees and with various levels of expected reciprocity. For example, Poirine (1997) argues that remittances are typically a mechanism to repay intergenerational educational loans. In the two-period theoretical model suggested by Poirine, repaying educational loans are a way to explain the time variation of remittance behaviors. This empirical model shows that many migrants follow a common curve between arriving in the host country, receiving education, and being able to pay family back for the loan. The direct reciprocity of remittances for asset care or loan repayment is rarely articulated, but is often the case nonetheless.

In support of this contention, Åkesson (2011) conducted an ethnography of individuals in Cape Verde who received remittance from family members who had migrated abroad. She found that participants considered culturally inappropriate to express gratitude to the family member sending the remittances. Additionally, this study found that family members observed a strict time buffer between receiving money and giving a gift in return. Essentially, family members waited to give a gift so the interaction did not seem like a quid-pro-quo. The researcher argued

that a long-term and implicit understanding informs requital communications between migrants and their family.

2.3.6.3 Gratitude

Feelings of *gratitude* are likely the most common remittance script (Carling, 2014). Feelings and displays of gratitude are often considered to mediate migrant relationships. Scripts that engage gratitude do so in three ways: expressing thankfulness for their family and friends, migrants receiving gratitude, or the lack of gratitude within the interaction. Much of the research into the motivations for sending remittances describes migrants as being grateful for the support of their family, and thus sending money is a way to demonstrate this feeling. Carling also suggests that migrants may use remittances as a way to elicit gratitude from family at home. That is, sending money can be considered an act of goodwill and sacrifice of the migrants' own material wellbeing to help family. The decision to communicate this gratefulness has an influence on the communication surrounding the transfer of money. For example, Åkesson's (2011) research found that expressing feelings of gratitude implied that the sender of the remittances did so with requitals in mind rather than out of pure altruism. To suggest this would be insulting to the family member sending home money (i.e., lack of gratitude).

2.3.6.4 Positioning

The last remittance script Carling (2014) discussed is the *positionality* of the individuals involved. From a sender's point of view, remittances may help confirm their membership in the community of origin (Carling, 2014). The transfer of money may also raise his or her social capital within the network. This idea of remittances as a tool to tether migrants to their community of origin was discussed above. The ability to remit, however, may also wedge families apart by creating wealth discrepancies within communities. Communication regarding

positionality may reference the status of an individual, whereas requital is the negotiation of the actual change in status.

Given that the communicative behaviors surrounding remittances are often understudied, Carling's framework of script lacks additional empirical examples. Still, this model suggests that the importance between remittances and enacting family may be couched in the communication that accompanies or in embedded in the meaning of these transfers. Most relevant to this study is the knowledge that remittances clearly play an important role in the migrant family experience. The desire to help family is a major driver of emigration. Migrants often leave their country of origin with the implicit agreement that they will help the family members who have remained behind. Thus, remittances have been shown to be used for many prosocial familial benefits. These include helping the household and providing a material demonstration of love. Most commonly, research has found that migrants may consider their motivation to send home money a form of altruism, though money may also have the self-serving impact of maintaining membership in the family. Still, the use and motivation of remittances are culturally bound. That is to say, they often reinforce previously held hierarchical structures rather than creating new norms.

Still, remittances are considered a tool for migrants to keep relational ties with family alive despite physical separation. In particular, migrants tend to follow common scripts when communicating about remittances. Though not true in all circumstances, the connection migrants have to their family seems somewhat expected given the crucial influence that kinship has on the creation of identity, beliefs, and attitudes (Akanle & Adesina, 2017). Additionally, in light of the pervasiveness of remittances, it seems that the desire to provide for and maintain ties to family plays an important role in the migrant experience. Remittances often serve as relational tools for

migrants to participate in their family and scholarship suggests that migrants have established unique communication surrounding, and embedded within the act of making, these transmissions. Still, more research is needed to understand the role that remittances play in the development and understanding of family membership for individuals who have emigrated away from their home community.

2.4 Research Questions

As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue, "[r]esearch questions are open-ended probes that, with the benefit of theoretical reasoning and some scene casing, orient the investigator's interest to the scene" (p. 88). Though much about the modern migrant experience has been studied, the role of communicative practices of migrant families has yet to receive much scholarly attention. That said, we know that migrants strategically use technology, specifically ICTs, to connect with their families while separated physically. In particular, migrants may strive to achieve a sense of family co-presence by using the affordances of technology. When these technological strategies alone are not enough to bridge the distance, however, migrants may turn to alternative forms of familial identity construction.

In particular, the transactional and functional lenses of understanding family suggest some of those alternative mechanisms. The transactional lens of family suggests that individuals use communication – such as the content and frequency of interaction – to make members feel like family. Additionally, the functional perspective of family finds that individuals enact a family identity through demonstrative actions. This perspective suggests that members of a family are those that engage in tasks that are expected of family members. When family members are physically separated, however, it may be possible that alterative actions, such as sending home remittances, are used to perform these tasks.

This study argues that technological, transactional, and functional behaviors are all forms of communication behavior. It further argues that the ways in which migrants communicate with family will be influenced, in large part, by the unique characteristics that define the migrant family experience. Thus, this study is guided by the following broad research question:

RQ_1: How do migrants discuss experiencing separation from their families?

RQ_2: What are the communicative behaviors migrants report that enact family?

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

To generate data from which a deeper understanding of physically separated migrant families may be better understood, in-depth interviews with migrants living in the Pacific Northwest of the United States were conducted over a nine-month period. The methodology used to implement this study is described below.

3.1 METHOD RATIONALE

For this study qualitative interviewing was employed. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue, "qualitative interviewing is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to unravel complicated relationships" (p. 51). Given the multi-faceted nature of migrant family communication, qualitative interviewing is well suited to help better understand the complex experiences of participants.

3.1.1 *Narrative Interviews*

In particular, narrative interviews—the collection of personal narratives that reveal how a human life has constructed meaning—were chosen as an appropriate mechanism to collect participant stories (Atkinson, 2012). Atkinson argued that, through narrating a story, individuals are able to provide context so as to recognize the meaning of various life events. By recounting stories, participants are able to highlight important aspects of that experience. Additionally, an individual's reality is considered a construction of his or her own making (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). If the "truth" is subjective to personal experience, a narrative approach is helpful when seeking to untangle the messy nature of real life. For example, emotions are often felt but difficult to put into words. The telling of personal stories allows participants to reveal certain feelings to the listener without fully understanding their own meaning-making of that experience.

In this study, participants were asked to discuss their "story" of migration, which was meant to reveal their experience with and perceptions of their migration experience, the key relationships in their lives (before and after migration), and their remittance activity. The interview approach was intended to develop a nuanced and contextual understanding of participants experiences through their stories.

3.2 Study Participants

Though the definition of "migrant" varies by organization or data source, this dissertation focuses on international migrants and so considers a migrant to be any individual who is foreign born and lives outside their country of origin. Of course, each participant in this study came from a unique cultural context, which influenced their attitudes and behaviors towards remittances and relationships. For example, migrant women from Vietnam may feel a greater pressure to remit than their British counterparts due to differences in cultural filial expectations (Thai, 2012). This study sought to identify and understand the communication experiences common to the migrant experience that transcend cultural boundaries.

Participants were required to meet the following criteria: 1) are at least 18 years of age, 2) have lived in the United States for at least a year, 3) still have family in the country of origin, and 4) speak English at a proficient level. It was necessary that participants still have family in the country of origin to understand the communicative behaviors that happened when physically separated. Additionally, living in the country for at least a year allowed participants to establish communicative patterns. Lastly, given the language restrictions of the researcher, it was necessary for participants to speak English during interviews.

3.2.1 *Participant Recruitment*

Prior to recruitment, the University of Washington Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. See Appendix A for the IRB form. Participants from a variety of backgrounds were recruited using a purposive sampling approach. This approach included seeking individuals who vary by migration motivation, socioeconomic status, education level, relationships with family members, and by remittance rates, including those who have never remitted. The necessity of participants to speak English may have biased the data toward wealthier, well-educated migrants who have lived in the United States for some time. This bias is a limitation of this dissertation. According to the American Community Survey, however, 44 percent of the foreign-born population who arrived in 2000 or later reported a high ability to speak English (Gambino, Acosta, & Grieco, 2014). Thus, a substantial number of migrants to the United States speak at least conversational English. Still, language expectations may have introduced some challenges to data collection and analysis. As described below, steps were taken to mitigate these experiences.

Due to the difficult nature of recruiting migrants, several recruitment strategies were employed. First, recruitment was conducted primarily through snowball sampling from personal contacts. This consisted of direct requests to the researcher's own social contacts. The contacts then forwarded the research call to their own social contacts. This resulted in 33 interviews (76.7%). Additionally, a research call was also posted to websites based in the Seattle area that were dedicated to migrants or providing social services to migrants in the area. These public research calls resulted in 10 interviews (23.2%). Recruitment through both methods happened simultaneously. In total, 43 in-depth interviews were conducted between February and October 2018. See Appendix B for recruitment messages.

As previous scholarship has noted, it is difficult to define *a priori* the sample size needed in qualitative research. There is a "balancing act" (Bryman, 2012) between recruiting enough participants and drawing conclusions with confidence while also understanding the amount of data that a single researcher can manage in the course of a study (Gaskell, 2000). The goals of sufficiency and saturation guided this research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), where sufficiency is the recruitment of enough participants to reflect the intended population. This was managed by recruiting a variety of participants as noted above. Corbin and Strauss (2008) find that saturation is the point, "when no new categories or relevant themes are emerging" (p. 148). Once no new themes emerged from the stories recalled by participants, recruitment was concluded. Though saturation was achieved on interview 30, an additional 13 interviews were conducted.

3.2.2 *Participant Overview*

Given the political climate at the time of data collection, as little identifying information was collected as possible. Immigration or visa status was never requested or recorded. Additionally, several researchers have acknowledged that current political trends have made research with migrants more precarious (Yarris, Heidbrink, & Duncan, 2016). In fact, nearly all participants referenced the difficulties generated by contemporary U.S. culture, regardless of their own legal status. Thus, only information immediately relevant to the study was collected. For example, length of time living in the country is an important factor to maintaining family relationships, however the legality of a participant's migration is likely not as important.

Participants in this study were all migrants to the United States, based on the definition of migrant used in this study. Each currently resided in the metropolitan area of Seattle, Washington. According the American Community Survey, Seattle, WA has approximately the

average rate of foreign-born residents, 18% compared to the national average of 13.4% (US Census Bureau, 2018). Therefore, the experience of migrants in Seattle likely reflects many of the broader experiences of those who migrate to the United States, particularly those individuals who have moved to a large urban area. Each participant remained in contact with at least one family member in the country of origin. The length of time living in the United States ranged from 1-32 years, with a mean length of 10 years. Twenty participants identified as women (46.5%), and 23 identified as men (53.4%). The geographic distribution of sample, represented in Figure 1, was largely Asian (n = 13, 30.2%), European (n = 11, 25.6%), and North American (Canada and Mexico) (n = 10, 23.3%), with some African (n = 6, 14%), South American (n = 2, 4.7%), and Oceanian (n = 1, 2.3%).

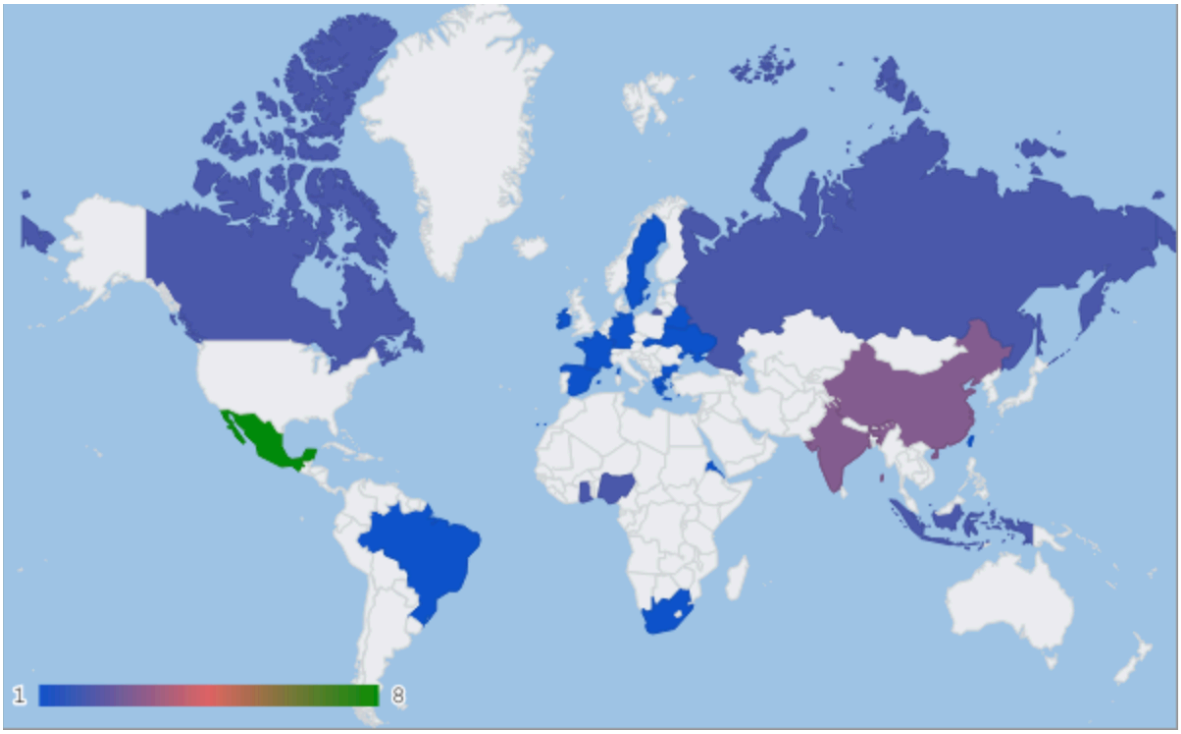

Figure 3.1. Participant count by country of origin

The geographic distribution of participants generally reflects the national percentage of immigrant visa issuances by region. In 2017 the United States government issued visas the

following amount of visas by region: Asia (38.3%), North America (37%), Africa (11.2%), Europe (7.8%), South America (5.4%), and Oceania (.3%) (US Department of State, 2018). There was an oversample of European participants. However, data analysis confirmed that experiences were similar across regions of origin.

Participants' ages ranged from 21-62 with a mean age of 33.5, with 20 (46.5%) identifying as women, and 23 (53.4%) identifying as men. The length of stay in the United States ranged from 1-32 years, with a mean of 10.1 years. Additionally, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, many participants (n = 37) reported that they migrated in search of better economic and educational opportunities. All but one participant was considered to be a voluntary migrant. Importantly, several of these participants migrated to work at one of the large technology companies that are headquartered in the Seattle area. Eleven participants were students (ranging from undergraduate to Ph.D. students). Likely, the participants interviewed in this study have higher income and education levels than average immigrants to the United States. Given this possible bias in participants, the reported experiences may reflect only a subset of migrant experiences. This is a limitation of the study and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

Finally, over half (n = 24, 55.8%) of the participants reported sending some form of remittances. Of the participants, 88.3% (n = 38) sent or brought home gifts for family members. Additionally, all participants 100% (N = 43) of participants engaged in communication with family in the country of origin. Just over half (55.8%; n = 24) of participants engaged daily communication with family, 27.9% (n = 12) of participants engaged in weekly communication with family, and 16.2% (n = 7) of participants made no mention of the frequency of their communication. For a full list of these participant demographics see Appendix C. These characteristics and communicative behaviors will be revisited in the following chapters.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 *Interview Set Up*

Individuals who responded to the research call were screened for eligibility. Those who qualified arranged a time to meet for an in-depth interview. All meetings were scheduled at the location and time convenience of the participant. Interviews were conducted in person ($n = 39$) or via video chat ($n = 4$). Differences in environment were noted and accounted for during data review. Before beginning the interview, the goal of the study was explained and consent was provided by each participant. See Appendix D for the consent form. Participants also provided consent to being audio recorded. Participants were encouraged to tell their stories for as long as they needed, and there was no time limit to the interview.

3.3.2 *Questions*

Open-ended and in-depth interview questions, with as minimal prompting as possible, were posed to each participant. Atkinson (2012) points out that interviews generally follow a unique path based on the needs and interests of each participant. It is for this reason that there were only four guiding questions that were posed to each participant. Each interview began by asking participants to "Please describe the story of your migration." Following their description of the migrant experience, participants were then asked to "Please tell me about your family," followed by a request to "Please describe typical communication with family." The last overarching question asked participants "Do you send home any money or presents?" If they said yes, participants were asked to describe that process. All participants were asked these primary questions in an identical sequence, but probing questions were customized as needed.

It was made clear to participants that the researcher held no judgment on the decision to remit or not to remit. Each interview ended by asking participants if they had anything that they would like to add or if there was something else that they would like me to understand about what they discussed. Participants were allowed to interpret the question as they considered appropriate. See Appendix E for the interview instrument. Following the completion of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and provided a contact sheet for any further questions.

Importantly, as little prompting as possible was used. Minimal question prompting helped to minimize the cultural bias embedded in questions by the researcher and allowed the participant to situate the narrative in the way most comfortable to them (Massey et al., 1998). As noted, however, for each primary question, the instrument provided several possible probing questions if needed. For example, preparation was taken to ask about the use of communication technologies if the participant did not bring this up, because ICTs often play an important role in the migrant experience. This topic always arose without prompting, however. Also, several participants discussed sending home money before the final question was asked to them. This suggests the ubiquity of technology and, to a lesser degree, remittances to the migrant experience.

To ensure greater data validity, following the completion of each interview, a separate set of field notes were written to clarify, elaborate, or reflect on anything in the content or process of interviewing that could be relevant to analysis of the interview transcripts. These research memos later proved helpful to my ability to connect the experiences of participants.

3.3.2.1 Pilot testing

Prior to conducting the present study, a pilot test of five interviews with migrants who met the study criteria was implemented to check the appropriateness of the interview protocol. Pilot interviews tested the instrument quality in terms of understandability, duration, response to the narrative approach, and more specifically to their willingness to share about their migrant experience. These interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, a reasonable length of time. They were not transcribed or included in final analysis. This resulted in some changes to language to make both primary and probing questions clearer. Pilot participants reported that the questions were sensitive to their experiences. Though the discussion of their experience migrating may be difficult or negatively valenced, participants reported feeling comfortable with the questions.

3.3.3 *Interview Stages*

The interviews were conducted in stages, each consisting of ten interviews. Each stage served as a reflection point for protocol, data validity, and robustness.

Stage 1: After the first ten interviews, the reliability and validity of interview questions and procedures that were changed as a result of the pilot test was confirmed. These interviews served as the initial basis to identify themes in the data. Prematurely identify any findings was done at this stage.

Stages 2-4: These stages consisted of another 10 interviews each, with 13 interviews conducted in stage four. Following every 10 completed interviews, the data were reviewed for themes and evidence of saturation. Additionally, in these stages more detailed responses from participants was sought to provide nuance for the broad themes recognized in stage one. Data collection ended when saturation – or the lack of any new themes – was achieved (n = 30). An

additional 13 interviews were conducted past saturation. Additionally, this multi-stage process allowed me to engage in data validation. In these stages, I was able to ask participants if the experiences of previous participants "ring true" for their own behaviors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validating the perceptions of experiences is a crucial part of qualitative data and establishing credibility. No dictionaries were ever needed during interviews, though rephrasing of questions or clarification of experiences was occasionally requested.

3.3.4 *Data Transcription*

Following the completion of each interview, audio recordings were uploaded to a password locked computer and individually transcribed by either the researcher or a trained transcriptionist. Interviewees 22 and 28 asked that the recorder be turned off as they recounted sensitive information. Notes were taken throughout all interviews, and memos were written when completed. All identifying information was redacted, and names were replaced with the assigned identification number. Throughout the rest of this study, all participants will be referred to as P [Participant #]. This process also included replacing names of family and friends and locations with generic descriptions (e.g., [fiancé] for name of partner or [university] for name of school). Transcriptions resulted in 417 single-spaced pages. Importantly, the process of transcription served as the first level of analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Given the difficulty of recruitment and the pace of transcription, this process was conducted throughout the interviewing process. Interviews ranged from 15:51 to 59:57 minutes with an average length of 33:34 minutes. This length of time allowed for rapport building between participants and the researcher.

3.3.5 *Ethics*

A project of this nature involves important ethical decisions. The power asymmetry between my participants and myself forced me to gain their trust while also maintaining some independence. Building rapport with the participant while remaining independent was difficult, but necessary, to conduct this research. Three important ethical considerations were made when considering the design and integrity of this study: 1) informed consent, 2) the right to privacy, and the 3) the protection of participants from harm. While some of the specific protocols are described above, further elaboration on the approach to research is done here.

3.3.5.1 Informed consent

All participants took part in this research knowing my role as a Ph.D. student, conducting research on their communicative behaviors with family in the country of origin. The process of informed consent made participants aware that this research was seeking information regarding their opinions and experiences and that, given their consent, all interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary and no incentives or compensation were provided. Additionally, participants were told that they were free to end the interview at any time. See Appendix D for Consent Document.

3.3.5.2 Privacy

As little identifying information was collected as possible. Importantly, this meant that no data regarding their legal status was requested or recorded. If participants mentioned their status, it was redacted in the final transcript. Given the sensitive nature of migration, no personal or sensitive information was required before asking them to join the project. Thus, the authenticity of their response to my recruitment call was trusted. Additionally, though participants were living in a city, identification based on their unique characteristics is still possible. Any

identifying information was redacted from the transcript in an attempt to protect participants. It is also for this reason that data on race and socio-economic status was not collected. Though, this information may have been helpful, given the inability to randomly sample, it is not possible to compare experiences based on varying demographic information. In an effort to protect participants' privacy as little demographic information as possible was collected.

3.3.5.3 Protection from harm

Importantly, this study was conducted as immigrants living in the United States were facing a volatile political climate. Most notably, during data collection the President signed an Executive Order which banned immigrants from several, predominantly Muslim, nations. Due to the growing anti-immigrant sentiment spreading across this country, several participants cited growing issues of prejudice that made their time the United States more difficult. Given this difficulty, it became paramount that participants were shielded from any potential harm. Though beneficial to an understanding of enacting family while physically separated, the harm that may come from sharing an undocumented legal status or illegal remittance pathway was significant for participants.

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

A comprehensive thematic analysis was conducted following the completion of the final interview.

3.4.1 *Thematic Analysis*

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (p. 79). The authors lay out a 6-step method for conducting thematic analysis: 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating

initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This 6-step process of thematic analysis was adapted to fit the structure of this study. This process is meant to provide insight into the experiences reported by participants and enhance the clarity of findings (Boyatzis, 1998). The final result of this form of analysis is to highlight the most salient constellations of meaning that are present in participants' discussions (Joffe, 2012).

A theme is, "a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vii). There is no concrete percentage of participants that must perform a practice or hold an understanding before it constitutes a theme. Instead, the researcher is left to determine what establishes a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, though only three participants engaged in the virtual introduction of a new romantic partner to their family members, it represented an important type of communicative event that video-based ICTs allowed for in the migrant experience, so it merits attention. When quantification was possible or relevant, I supply the count of participants to describe prevalence. Due to the nature of interviewing, the conventions of describing prevalence when exact quantification (e.g., feelings of guilt amongst participants) was not always possible. Terms like "most participants" or "a few participants" were meant to provide a sense of frequency within the data. Additionally, a textually-rich account of the themes is provided through exemplar quotes which speak to the idea being described. These quotes are meant to present the complexity of the of the experience and to justify the salience to the individual.

3.4.2 *Data Coding and Theme Development*

Given the social constructivist framework of this study, an inductive approach to data analysis was used to produce manifest and latent themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that manifest themes are those that emerge explicitly from the participants' words. Latent themes are those that identify the "underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 84). Essentially, latent themes require the researcher to interpret the meanings discussed by participants.

All initial codes were created through identifying salient words and phrases used by participants to discuss their communicative behaviors with family. For example, "distance," "guilt," and "stress," were all terms that were often used by participants. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) contend that "[c]oding can be thought about as a way of relating our data to our ideas about these data" (p. 27). In these cases, the terms used by participants were ways of processing common language that may eventually be collapsed into a more holistic sentiment of the experience. In this initial phase, communication behaviors that participants reported. This resulted in a list of similar, though subtly different, forms of communication. For example, references to "phone calls," "video calls," and "Skype calls" were each noted. Additionally, communication was coded for frequency and types of content (e.g. "talk about day"). Also, any references to actions (e.g., "I send home money") as well as participants interpretations or opinions of that action (e.g., "I feel like it's my duty") was coded. At the end of this process, there were several similar codes that utilized participants' own language.

Next, the initial codes were clustered into potential themes. This was an iterative process, which involved returning to the initial codes several times. The initial codes served as the

building blocks for the emerging themes. Sentences, thoughts, or ideas conveyed by participants could contain multiple codes or themes. A theme was considered any content that spoke to the research questions, regardless of the number of participants who voiced the idea (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). For example, several statements coded within "frequency of contact" suggested informed that regular communication was important to participants feeling like they were at home with the family. Additionally, the code "talking about nothing" also seemed to relate to participants feeling like they were recreating their presence at home on a daily basis. Thus, the theme "daily communication enhances a sense of home" emerged from these codes.

Once themes were identified, an iterative review of the themes was conducted. This was the process of checking to see if the coded excerpts were present throughout the data. Some themes were rejected for not having enough data to support them, whereas others were collapsed into a broader idea. This was a two-step process. First, the quotes within each theme were reviewed to confirm that they did indeed belong there. If the data within the theme were incoherent or poorly placed, the theme was re-evaluated. For example, when reading through the theme of "cultural obligation to send home remittances," it was confirmed that each statement coded within that theme informed the idea of sending home money out a cultural duty to family. Then, I determined if the theme reflected the experiences of the participants as a whole. Once the process was no longer adding substantial meaning to the understanding of the themes, the process ended (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Lastly, themes based on the fundamental experience expressed by participants in that code were created. This was meant to provide a clear and concise understanding of each label so that readers immediately understand the what it is about. Themes will be presented in Chapters Four through Seven as italicized sentences. For example, *remittances were described as a means*

to ease stress and need, enhance comfort, or provide physical care describes the how participants reported using remittances to as a tool for emotional and physical support. Additionally, in this phase each theme was placed in conversation with each other to better understand how they create an ecological reality for participants. These themes describe the reported experiences of participants and thus must be understood as part of a greater whole, rather than compilations of isolated data points. For example, the theme *remittances were seen as mechanism that can communicate feelings of love, appreciation, and respect* was clearly influenced by the understanding of remittances as a tool to provide physical care.

As noted, given the multi-stage process of this dissertation, coding of the reported experiences of participants was confirmed with the next set of interviews. Participants were asked if the experiences of other participants were salient to their own understanding of communication and enacting family (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is an adapted triangulation method used by qualitative researchers to validate data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Although, it was not possible to conduct a full member check with the final set of themes, confirming participant experiences was done throughout stages two through four reflected that my analysis of the experience was correct. For example, sending home money for family to afford medical expenses was a prevalent behavior reported by participants in the early interviews. Participants in the later interview stages confirmed that this was, in fact, common to their experiences, and they were able to explain more in-depth the rationale for this behavior.

To validate the data and analyses further, the process of peer debriefing was used. This is another form of triangulation that asks another researcher to review the data and themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This procedure ensures credibility, as exposing the data to another person requires transparency. To complete this process, a colleague who is familiar with thematic

analysis was asked to review a sample of the data and perform an analysis. Though the codes assigned to participants' statements varied somewhat, they were semantically the same. There was a discussion of how to better label the communicative behaviors discussed, and the revised coding emerged with terms that represented our mutual understanding. Labeling the themes using the language provided by participants was negotiated.

3.4.3 *Data Presentation*

In order to present vivid and rich accounts of the data, exemplar quotes that speak to the themes found in the data were found. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain that quotes "are fragments that 'stand for' a larger phenomenon by demonstrating its practical dimensions. Because they are evocative, exemplars also stimulate readers to consider what is being demonstrated and this anticipate the writer's impending interpretation" (p. 297). In other words, quotes that are used should provide a picture of the essence of that theme. The quotes presented in the following chapters were chosen with this understanding of exemplars in mind. For example, one theme that emerged is how migrants value talking about mundane topics in order to create a sense of co-presence and living "daily life" with their family. This quote from P 9 is selected to reflect this theme. He said,

> So it's usually just 1 or 2 messages like I did my hair different or look everything is snowy today or my brother asking me for something to look up here. It's very sporadic and everyone answers at their own times but at least we are communicating and we know we are okay. (P 9)

Answer to the research questions posed in Chapter Two are presented in the following four chapters. To help make sense of the data, it is important to understand the landscape of participants' experiences with migration, so my presentation of data starts there. In response to

the first research question, Chapter Four responds to RQ1: How do migrants discuss experiencing separation from their families? It presents the common stories and feelings that participants described regarding their migration experiences. These experiences may influence how participants experience separation from their families. The context provided by this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding participants' reported behaviors that enact family.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven respond to RQ2: What are the communicative behaviors migrants report that enact family? Each speaks to conceptually distinct sets of communication behaviors – technological, transactional, and functional – that migrants use in an attempt to overcome those challenge described in Chapter Four. It is important to note that though these sets of behaviors are divided into separate chapters, they often overlap in the practice of participants' daily lives. That is to say that these behaviors reflect complex constellations of communication behaviors and are somewhat artificially separated for the purposes of presenting this research.

Chapter Five presents the technology-related behaviors that participants reported using that enact family. This includes the communicative impact that the adoption and affordances of technology may have on the way participants could engage with their family. In turn, given the ability for communication that the behaviors in Chapter Five describe, Chapter Six presents findings on the transactional behaviors that reported using that enact family with particular attention to migrant reports of the frequency and content of their family interactions. Finally, Chapter Seven presents the functional behaviors that participants reported using that enact family. Importantly, participants reported using remittances and giving gifts as tools that provided support and enacted family. In Chapter Eight a synthesis of these behaviors is presented to provide a comprehensive image of how migrants enact family despite distance.

3.5 Researcher Reflexivity

Though I use the terminology "emerge" when discussing the data of this project, it is important to note that these themes discussed throughout the following chapters are reflective of my personal experiences. Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) argue that "[i]f themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them." (p. 206). I acknowledge that the process of identifying the patterns is done through my own framework of the world. Both a benefit and a challenge of qualitative research is that it comes from the "personal nature of the relationship between data and the researcher" (Silver & Lewins, 2014, p. 631). This connection between researchers and their experiences provides both an interesting insight of the phenomenon while also biasing analysis.

I am a human being, with my own life experiences, and this shapes the way that I reacted to the data. This exercise of being aware of my position – a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, female, Jewish – researcher was important to be aware of while interacting with participants and data and guided my work throughout this project. I recognize my position as a U.S. American graduate student investigating the migrant community. I am in a position of privilege regarding my access to education, support, and resources. My immediate family (mother, uncle, grandparents) emigrated to Canada under the family reunification program allowed briefly in 1965. I spent much of my childhood interpreting arguments incorrectly (understandably, since they were often conducted in Czungarian, the confusing language mix of Hungarian and Czech) and waiting in line for salami at the Hungarian grocery store in Toronto. As a child of immigrants, my network and community has always consisted of immigrants. It is why, here in Seattle, I continue to participate actively in migrant communities. This has taken the form of social activism (located just south of Seattle is the largest migrant detention center on the West

Coast) and volunteer work. Additionally, I have conducted previous research that has tapped both the local migrant community and individuals who provide social services to these individuals (Barta, Fesenmaier, & Perry, 2017; Fesenmaier & Barta, 2017).

My family history and network ties helped me to understand, in some part, the migrant experience. Being raised from a young age in the U.S. precludes me from ever fully understanding the experience of the participants in this study. Though some stories seemed familiar to me, others are clearly out of my capacity to truly understand. I tried to overcome these barriers and recorded in detail the experiences described by participants. Additionally, when possible, I sought to relay the experience of participants in their own words. Sharing their stories, rather than only my interpretation, is an attempt at expressing an authentic representation of their experience. I acknowledged and limited my personal biases to the best of my capabilities.

Chapter 4. THE CHALLENGE OF DISTANCE

I kind of feel helpless that I cannot be there for her because just yesterday… she said that she'd been sick, and then she was dizzy, and she was throwing up. And then, she's all alone because we don't have anybody there, so that kind of makes you feel helpless, that you cannot be there for them.
(P 31)

You have really good moments, really good times in your life and you are so happy to be here and also there are downs where you're like why'd I come here? I think it has a lot to do with what you're experiencing in the moment and also what is happening in Mexico or a different country and how you are connected with your family.
(P 18)

The migrant experience is defined inherently by the condition of physical distance. It is the act of moving away from family, friends, and one's country of origin that creates a migrant. Given this fundamental characteristic of migration, this chapter answers the first research question posed in Chapter Two: *How do migrants discuss experiencing separation from their families?* In this chapter participants' stories of migration are presented: their self-reported motivations, challenges, and benefits of moving to a new country. Overwhelmingly, theses participants moved to the United States in search of better economic and educational opportunities. These two motivations were often accompanied with the desire to help family members still living in the country of origin. Migration to the United States resulted in several reported challenges, which included difficulty navigating legal borders, feeling like an outsider, experiencing a negative political climate, and a compromised ability to help family. Still, living abroad provided increased political freedom and a way to help family through tangible (or monetary) support.

The feelings participants reported navigating as they live away from family members is presented in this chapter. Participants reported sharing the feelings of displacement, isolation,

guilt, and fear. It is important to understand the felt impacts of distance, because they often become the catalyst for the various communicative behaviors that migrants engage in that manage or cover that physical distance in ways that help preserve their family connection.

4.1 STORIES OF MIGRATION

Migrants in this study reported their own unique stories. No two participants migrated with exactly the same context, background, or situation. And, factors such as socioeconomic status, education, and strength of relationships ease or worsen the stress of migration. Despite the differences in individual migration stories, an analysis of the interviews generated a broader and more unified narrative of migration, revealing patterns of experience and feeling remarkably common to them all.

4.1.1 *Who We Are: Demographic Profile*

Participants in this study came from a broad range of nationalities and backgrounds. The largest region represented in this study is Asia (30.2%). Roughly similar number of participants was interview from Europe and North America (Canada and Mexico; 25.6% and 23.3% respectively). Only nine participants interviewed were from Africa, South America, or Oceania. (African 14%; South American, 4.7%; and Oceania, 2.3%). On average, participants had lived in the United States for about a decade, but length of stay ranged from 1 to 32 years. Additionally, participants' age ranged from 21 to 62, the average of which was 33-years-old. Approximately half of the participants identified as male (53.4%) and the other half as female (46.5%).

Several participants reported moving to Seattle to work for companies associated with the large technology industry in this area. Still, participants had a wide variety of occupations, from students to nannies to computer engineers. Though never asked explicitly, 27 participants

mentioned having a romantic partner. Of those participants with partners, 13 were with American citizens, and other 14 were partnered with other immigrants (both from their country of origin or elsewhere). Three of the participants moved specifically because their partner accepted a job in Seattle. See Appendix C for full list of demographic information.

4.1.2 *Why We are in the United States: Motivations for Migration*

Each participant began the interview by responding to the prompt, "Tell me about the story of your migration." This analysis, likewise, begins with the reporting of participants' stories of their decision to migrate. The reason for leaving the country of origin is often an important aspect to consider when seeking to understand the story of a migrant, because these stories inform the context of their migration. For example, individuals who leave their country of origin under explicit duress, often in the form of war, oppression, or famine, may function, adapt, and feel different than individuals that leave their country to seek economic freedom or stability through migration. Even in the latter case, the decision to emigrate is usually the result of institutional factors (e.g., a poor economy at home) that push an individual towards that decision. In other words, most migrants do not want to leave home and family but are influenced by a mix of factors that drives them to do so. Still, for the purposes of this study, only one participant (P 28) considered herself a forced, versus voluntary, migrant.

4.1.2.1 To Access Economic and Educational Opportunities

One key theme that emerged from the interviews was that *migration was primarily motivated by access to economic and educational opportunities*. Nearly all (n = 37) participants in this study reported leaving their country of origin in search of better economic or educational opportunities.

Many participants cited the better job opportunities in the United States as a motivation for emigration. As noted, Seattle is host to several large corporations, primarily within the technology industry. These firms heavily recruit international employees. P 29 argued, "We just don't have as big of an industry in Canada. A lot of software engineers in Canada leave because we don't get paid much there relative to other countries. So, having access to the States is amazing." Though not all participants worked for these large companies, the technology industry promotes a growing economy and other work opportunities in the area. When asked if he may ever move home, P 38, a biological lab technician, responded, "No. I don't think there's anything for me there, especially with my field. If you call home the broader Europe, maybe. Slovakia? Unless they step up their game, no." Importantly, these participants reportedly made the decision to leave their home country in order to gain access to resources that were otherwise not possible in their country of origin. As a result of the economic opportunities in the United States, and Seattle in particular, participants reported having a substantially larger income than would have otherwise been possible at home. For many participants, the strength of American industry is a pull away from their country of origin and the stated reason for their migration.

Many participants said that they sought access to educational opportunities through the act of migration. In particular, several participants were enrolled as graduate students in local universities. In these cases, participants explained a similar motivation for leaving their country of origin as those that left for economic purposes. Graduate students in particular applied to schools based in the United States for both the possibility of funding and the higher prestige associated with the degree. Essentially, access to better education would result in later access to higher paying jobs. Nine participants migrated for education initially and then stayed for career opportunities in the United States. This ranged from coming as a high school exchange student

(P 16) to working towards a PhD (P 39 and P 40). Access to education was often associated with ability to work in American industries and significant motivation for migrating.

4.1.2.2 To Help our Families

Importantly, each of the motivations discussed above – migrating for work or education – revolved around a broader desire to help family members. So, another key theme was that *migration was motivated by the desire to help family still living in the country of origin.* Migrating in search of economic certainty for family is consistent with previous scholarship (e.g., Isaksen, Devi, & Hochschild, 2008). Participants' discussion of migration was often tied to the ability to provide financial help for family and friends in the country of origin. P 35 expressed the link between the importance of educational opportunities and her ability to provide for family living in the country of origin:

> I like living here because you can work and earn, but in India it's kind of hard to find a job. I don't know…For myself, it was a good move migrating to the US because of the money exchange rate—I was able to help my family, and with my niece and nephews' education. So, if you don't have money—I finished high school and I couldn't go to college because we didn't have any money and it's very expensive to go to college and hard to get loans. So, for me it's really good. I'm glad that I could come because—I can still go back and see them. (P 35)

According to P 35, her career in the United States affords the ability to provide financial support for her family still living in India. She sends a significant portion of her income home to subsidize family expenses. Several other participants reported being in similar situations with their own families. Often, participants migrated with the explicit expectation of sending home money. Thus, though career or educational advancement was the initial catalyst for migration,

the ability to help family given that increased opportunity was often the ultimate goal for participants.

4.1.2.3 To Follow a Partner

Whereas not a predominant theme for this particular participant group, migrating with a partner was also discussed as a reason for leaving their country of origin. Each of these participants (n = 3), all women, were in a committed romantic relationship with someone who migrated to the Seattle area for work or school. A few other participants, all men, told stories of bringing their significant others with them to the United States. The stories of participants that brought a partner with them often centered on the emotional aspects of accompanying a spouse as they migrate and will be discussed below. For the women who came along with a partner, however, it was because the partner was seeking/was given the opportunity for work or education in the United States.

Though migrants leave their country of origin for several reasons, participants in this study primarily reported migrating in order to access more economic and educational opportunities. Additionally, a few participants came to the United States because their partner wished to migrate. In these cases, it was the desire to remain physically close to their significant other that motivated leaving their country of origin. Despite these primary reasons for leaving, participants also discussed the desire to provide material support for their family as secondary motivations for leaving their country of origin.

Again, it is important to understand the motivations for migration. Given that work and education played a prominent role in the decision to migrate, it makes sense that these participants would seek to maintain relationships with family in the country of origin. And in fact, no participant reported being pushed away by their family. Most participants reported

healthy relationships with family prior to migration and lamented that the opportunities afforded by migration pull them away from family members. All 43 participants reported seeking a continued relationship with family, and most of the communicative behaviors reported were intended to minimize the feeling of distance from their family. That does not mean the experience is easy. The following section presents participants' discussions surrounding challenges and benefits that migrating to the United States brought.

4.2 What We are Experiencing: The Challenges and Benefits of Emigration

Migration posed several challenges and offered benefits for participants beyond economic and educational opportunities. These are the most common themes to emerge.

4.2.1 *The Challenges*

Distance from family and the country of origin reportedly created several challenges for participants, most prominent of which were navigating legal borders, feeling like an "outsider," confronting a negative political environment, and experiencing a compromised ability to help family. These challenges made living in the United States difficult for participants.

4.2.1.1 Navigating Legal Borders.

It is not the number of miles from the country of origin that creates a migrant. Rather, people become migrants once they move away from their community of origin. Most typically, and in the case of this study, a migrant crosses an international border. The legal ramifications of crossing borders, no matter what a migrant's status or circumstance, had a reported impact on these participants. My analysis found that *the challenges posed by legal barriers permeate the migrant experience.* Borders reportedly played a significant role in the migrant experience

because participants discussed that they had to deal with bureaucratic regulations that accompany crossing borders. Legal issues surrounding movement to a new country were reported overwhelmingly as stressful and difficult to navigate. Some participants said they had assistance from their workplace, however most had to negotiate the processes on their own.

The restrictions placed on immigrants resulted in adaptations, or at least considerations, that may not be necessary by non-migrants. For example, P 31 discussed planning for her mother's eventual care. According to this participant, the legal barriers to bringing her mother, who currently lives in India, to the United States were too significant. P 31 was also hesitant to return to India to care for her mother. Thus, the restrictions on movement across borders put P 31, along with several other participants, in a precarious situation. In particular, participants expressed concern of the care their elderly parents still living in the country of origin could receive in their absence. The legal system, however, restricted the ability to provide support for their parents. These participants were unable to bring family to the host country primarily due barriers imposed by legal requirements (e.g., government issuances of visas).

The impact of crossing national borders was also discussed in the relation to participants' own abilities to conduct daily activities. Participants' status as migrants meant that the government could constrict their movements and access to work. For example, human error while processing P 39's intake paperwork at a new job meant that she was unable begin work when expected. Moreover, the gap in employment that this mistake created nearly put her at risk for deportation. She explained the stress of navigating these issues:

> Just the fact that I need to go bring paperwork now because there was basically a glitch in their system and they send me emails being like, "It's going to be illegal for you to work by August 31st if we don't get all these papers." (P 39)

As a result of the problem, P 39 reported that she had to drive a significant distance to deliver physical copies of her paperwork. In addition to this inconvenience, there was an added layer of fear due to the possible change in her legal status. The difficulty of this situation stemmed from her status as a migrant. It was because she was in a foreign land that P 39 had to navigate the legal restrictions meant to monitor migrants living in the country. In a more severe case, P 22 described being stuck in an abusive relationship, because ending the relationship would have meant immediate deportation. The participant discussed having to weigh her desire to live in the United States against staying in an unhealthy relationship. Though she was able to extricate herself from this relationship, it was only after finding another, legal, way of staying in the country. Thus, interaction with the legal system and all the paperwork and restrictions that accompany this system was reported as difficult for participants to navigate, although many ultimately did so.

4.2.1.2 Feeling like an "Outsider"

Another common theme that emerged was that *migration made participants feel like outsiders in the host country.* The process of migration, and subsequent interactions with the United States legal system mentioned above, made participants acutely aware that they were "not from here." P 22 explained the negative experiences she had while completing the paperwork required to stay in this country. She said,

> And it was really strange. It was very difficult because I feel like all my life, I was kind of that earnest person, sometimes, like the series, and then bam—suddenly you have the interesting label to you that you're potentially a fraud and stuff. I remember it was—I just recently started working through it because it was hugely traumatic. (P 22)

The scrutiny experienced throughout the legal experience highlighted participants' identity as outsiders. This was first because participants were forced to go through this process – something that American citizens did not need to worry about. A sense of otherness was also generated through often harsh and intrusive investigations. Legal paperwork often requires providing precise information (including previous addresses, descriptions of relationships, and access to social media accounts). As was the case with P 22, participants said they believed that the process assumed sinister motivations for the desire to live in the United States. Thus, following interactions with the Unite States legal system, participants generally believed that migrants were perceived as criminal outsiders coming to damage the nation. The internalization of this processes often left participants aware of their otherness.

4.2.1.3 Experiencing a Negative Political Climate

To compound their sense of "otherness," study participants reported that *a national political agenda hostile to immigrants amplified hardships.* At the time of and subsequent to data collection, migrants were a prominent topic of debate in the U.S. media. In the midst of this study, the Trump administration closed all migration from several key nations (Gerstein & Lin, 2018). In response to the growing bias towards migrants, several participants mentioned the political climate as a challenge to their life in the United States. Often, the actions of the government were reported as an additional source of othering. Upon arriving in the United States participants moved from being insiders amongst their fellow countrymen to being an "alien." It was having this identity of "migrant" that participants blamed for their experiences with bigotry.

P 28 explained the misconceptions of her home country and the subsequent ideas (blatantly expressed to her by clients in a nursing home) that refugees were poor, lazy, and stupid. Often, she argued, it was the color of her skin accompanied by a foreign accent that made

these clients feel uncomfortable. Participants felt that these experiences were tied directly to their status as an outsider. P 6 explained a time when people yelled racial slurs at him while he walked home. No participant reported physical harm because of their status as a migrant. Negative attitudes specifically towards migrants, and people of color in general, made participants feel unsafe. P 23 explained,

> I think it's a great country, and I really like the educational system, but in terms of security-wise, I am really not a fan because in 2016 when there were mass shootings of black men, it was really scary, and at the time—even now, when I'm walking and my hands are in my pocket and I'm just walking and facing a cop, I really find it difficult to know whether to keep my hands in my pocket or to remove them, show them that I don't have a gun. That has always been a challenge for me as an international student as well as being a black immigrant in America. (P 23)

P 23 explained his process of adapting to the United States. Prior to migration, a member of his church forwarded a video that taught migrants "How to Be Black in America." P 23 said that the idea of being targeted by skin color was scary. As with several other participants, American racial bias was well known to participants. Though migrant-targeted violence was rare, participants reported that it was always considered a possibility. Thus, participants said they went from being one of many insiders to being a clear outsider when they migrated. Their identity changed at the border, and this was often reported as difficult to manage.

Additionally, it was because of the negative political climate that many participants reported experiencing a constant internal debate between staying in the United States and the desire to move home. For example, despite identifying as Caucasian and speaking fluent English,

P 36 had a difficult time with the negative political climate. In his interview, he reported feeling personally safe but appalled by the government's actions. He explained that discussions with his wife about returning to Australia were related directly to the changes in U.S. immigration policies. This idea of feeling safe, but worried about the growing negativity towards anyone considered a migrant, was reported by several participants.

4.2.1.4 Experiencing a Compromised Ability to Help Family

As discussed, helping family still living in the country of origin was reported as a primary catalyst for migration for these participants. Another theme that emerged was that *distance made participants feel like they were unable to provide adequate care to family still living in the country of origin.* Often, distance meant that participants were unable to provide traditional forms of support, like caring for a sick relative. P 31 described the realization that she would be unable to help her mother in emergency situations. Her mother recently fell ill, and she described what the situation felt like to her:

> I kind of feel helpless that I cannot be there for her because just yesterday—or, when did I speak to her? —she said that she'd been sick, and then she was dizzy, and she was throwing up. And then, she's all alone because we don't have anybody there, so that kind of makes you feel helpless, that you cannot be there for them. (P 31)

Many participants reported that distance was a major constraint on their ability to physically perform acts of support. As was the case of P 31, her mother was sick, and someone else needed to provide the support that she otherwise would have enacted. Several participants mentioned that the inability to help was stressful but focused on the ways that they *could* provide support. While describing her reason for remitting, P 18 said, "I'm far away, I'm not there. If they get

sick, I can't be there. I think it's my way to say I love you and even if I'm not there I support you the way I can."

Chapter Seven discusses the role of remittances for communicating; however, what is important at this point in the analysis is that distance, or physical separation from family members, was considered to impair the support that participants performed for their family. The compromised ability to provide support to family was reported to be a challenge to participants experience living abroad.

4.2.2 *The Benefits*

In addition to the challenges, participants reported several benefits from their migration. In particular, participants said that they were able to live with relative political freedom and provide material support to their family.

4.2.2.1 Political freedom

Though they cited career and educational opportunities as the primary catalyst for immigration, participants also discussed the added benefit of living in a society such as the U.S.. They reported that, *the political freedom allowed in the United States made life easier.* For example, P 27 described his preference for the openness of information,

> I really appreciate being here in the US, and part of it is I see the politics in China with what they call a "Great Firewall." You have to be careful what you say on the Internet. Some things, you can't access from over there unless you jump over the wall. So, from just kind of a freedom perspective—it is a lot freer here. (P 27)

Though freedom of information was not the initial motivation of migration, it became an aspect of living abroad that P 27 now reportedly enjoys. Additionally, this freedom of information was explained to aid his career as a researcher. P 27 argued that when considering future relocation to

his country of origin, he will weigh political freedom against other important factors such as family and economic stability. The restrictive conditions in his country of origin, particularly possible censorship, may limit possible career opportunities after graduation. Thus, he said he is likely to stay in the U.S. to find work. Some of the participants considered access to political freedom a benefit to living in the U.S.

4.2.2.2 Provide Help to Family

While at times a challenge, participants reported that a significant benefit was that *migration allowed participants to help family living in the country of origin.* As was discussed in the motivation for migration, the ability to help family was a primary reason people reported for leaving the country of origin. It was this ability to provide material support for family, particularly parents, that seemed most important to participants. In particular, the ability to send home money served as a key benefit to the migration experience. It was through the increased salary afforded by economic opportunities in the United States, that participants could help parents pay for both the necessities of life (e.g., medical bills) and luxuries (e.g., a new car or vacation). As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven on remittances and gifts, participants reported feeling proud of their contribution to family in this way. P 30 argued that rather than stress, he feels pride in his ability to pay for his sister's education. Participants considered the ability to help family a major benefit to moving away from family and something that several participants enjoyed.

Migration posed several challenges and benefits for participants. It is important to underscore that the themes that emerged were common across participants despite varying backgrounds and countries of origin. For example, crossing national borders changed the political reality for several participants. Most participants engaged in intrusive legal processes

that left them acutely aware of their status as outsiders. Additionally, the growing anti-immigrant political climate also made several participants feel like outsiders in this country. The distance also made providing support to family still living in the country of origin quite difficult. The political freedom and ability to provide material support for family countered some of these challenges.

4.3 WHAT WE ARE FEELING: THE FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH DISTANCE AND SEPARATION

Interesting to this study is that the challenge of navigating distance was often tied to common experiences and feelings reported across the participants. A feeling is "a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labeled" (Shouse, 2005, n. p.). As participants come from a variety of native languages, their preferred words to describe feelings may differ for the same experiences (Tsur & Rappoport, 2007). It is for this reason that the experiences participants are clustered into the report of feelings.

Previous scholarship has found that migration saturated with many feelings. For example Burrell (2008) argues, "[f]or migrants, border spaces and journey times are heavily imbued with all the emotions of moving. They can be familiar, frightening, unsettling or exciting, heralding the promise of new life, or reminding of the loss of an old one." (p. 354). The stories recounted by participants often highlighted the personal impact that being physically separated from family had on them. For example, P 37 discussed his experience navigating the difficulty that distance from his family had created. When asked how being away from family made him feel, P 37 responded with the following statement,

> At first, obviously—the first year you're out, it's a little bit difficult. All of my family is basically in Mexico, and I'm the only one that's here. So, the first year or

so is the toughest. It's like the first time you don't spend Christmas or your birthdays with your family, and it's a little bit difficult. But then as you start making friends and knowing more people and stuff, you start getting used to it and making your life here. (P 37)

According to P 37, adjustment to the feelings of distance were challenging. He struggled to be separated from family particularly as they engaged in holiday rituals. It was only after P 37 began building his own community that he also began to feel less distant from family. The participant only adjusted to the separation; he never fully stopped missing family. The feelings associated with the difficulty of moving away from family in the country of origin was expressed explicitly by nearly all participants.

It is important to note that the categorization of these feelings is grounded in my cultural understanding of feelings. In the following section, the categories of experience are described and they are labeled with the feelings consistent with my own cultural narrative. Four major categories emerged as participants discussed their feelings throughout the process of migration: displacement, isolation, guilt, and fear. Each is discussed in the following sections.

4.3.1 *Feelings of Displacement*

Overwhelmingly, feelings of distance "decentered" participants' conception of home and created a sense of displacement. Participants considered their country of origin "home" but also struggled with the desire to more fully embed themselves within their community in the United States. A pull between allegiances to these two places resulted in reported feelings of displacement. As discussed above, several participants debated when the appropriate time was to return to their country of origin. Often the initial motivation for migration (jobs, education, or partnership) were enough of a pull to keep the participant in the United States but not enough to

make them feel truly at home. For example, despite living in the United States for 30 years, P 41 expressed the desire to retire in Ireland and "live alone in a bee-loud glade." Though she had lived in the United States longer than in Ireland, she still considered her country of origin "home."

Many participants discussed the desire to create a home in the host country, but they could not get past the fact that this was not their country of origin. P 39 provided an example of trying to make a home in the United States, but not feeling like that was entirely possible. She said, "This is the part that's really fucking hard, not feeling that you're at home. It feels like home, but—but you're not fully welcomed." This statement came as she described navigating the legal restrictions on her ability to work. She explained how the hassle of paperwork and fear of deportation results in never truly feeling at home. P 3 echoed the inability to create a true home in the United States. She explained,

> And you feel like you can't actually establish your life because you know what's going to happen. They can kick you out in a day or something. It hurts that you are so far apart from your family. And that you can't go and visit them, because maybe if you'll leave you can't come back. Even if you have a job here. Right? So...it's just... It's a combination of it. Sometimes it really sucks. And just the fear and the... Any time you're going to get throw out of the country or whatever. It just sucks. (P 3)

P 3 explained that she was unable to truly develop a life in the United States because the fear of uncertainty was always present. This fear was present and pervasive regardless of legal status. Even though she was in an ideal situation with stable work and partner, part of her felt insecure. Essentially, despite being having a life in the United States, it could never truly be her "home."

Somewhat ironically, having two homes is what left P 3, and several others, feeling like they didn't have any home. Additionally, in their interviews both P 39 and P 3 argued that being away from their elderly parents further enforced the feeling that her home was actually in the country of origin. Still, neither participant wished to move back to their home country.

Instead they were in a *liminal space* between being pulled between two homes, fitting into neither. Goodnight's (n.d.) idea that "displacement is the migrant's lot" speaks to the reports by participants, feeling divided between their old and new worlds. Thus, with several participants, home felt like it was both in the host and home countries, ultimately rendering participants with a feeling of displacement. Having two homes: the first which feels comfortable, but where they are unable to live and the second where they currently reside, but feel unable to fully

Additionally, participants reported feelings of displacement when they discussed keeping the possible return to the country of origin as a safety plan in case of emergency. Several argued that they could always return home if something went wrong with their life abroad (e.g., rejection of visa request, loss of job, or break-up). Thus, the country of origin was sometimes considered a lifeboat in case of a disaster. While discussing fears associated with the growing anti-immigrant sentiment P 32 said, "I guess given the political situation with Trump and all of that, you think about it like that – 'Do I really want to stay here?' When is the right time to escape if something bad is happening?" Similarly, P 33 was struggling with uncertainty around her legal status. She argued that, though she enjoyed the career she had begun in the United States, she could always return to India. Her family home became a mental sanctuary to buffer the fear of uncertainty surrounding her request to extend her visa. The idea that home was in the country of origin to which they could return was common to many participants. Though this idea

of possible return provided an ease to uncertainty, it also served to pull participants concept of home back to the country of origin. The warmth associated with this emergency plan further reserved the country of origin as place to escape the challenges of migration.

Importantly, feeling displaced in the host country was reported to persist regardless of length of stay in the host country. While discussing her feeling as an outsider in her new home, P 22 explained,

> Yeah. I don't think it will ever go away, and that's the part that I am talking through with my therapist—that it's actually, I would never be able to fully fit in, and because when you have an accent, in many cases you're disqualified from many conversations because for some reason your knowledge is considered to be non-relevant. (P 22)

Despite permanently settling in the United States, marrying an American citizen, and earning a graduate degree from a U.S. institution, P 22 reported that she still feels like she cannot belong in her new home. Her settlement here means that she may never permanently go home. The experience of being pulled between host and home is abundant in reports of the migrant experience (e.g., Sonn, Ivey, Baker, & Meyer, 2017). Thus, migrants, regardless of legal status, can have a sense of displacement (Bonini, 2011). As will be discussed in the following chapter, this is primarily due to the rise in new information and communication technologies (ICTs). It is the ability to maintain connections with the country of origin that that has made this pull between two places more significant for migrants (Diminescu, 2008). Still, though participants have the capabilities to maintain contact with family, communication home does not always relieve all of the symptoms of distance.

4.3.2 *Isolation*

Given the physical separation from family and friends, participants also described feelings of isolation and loneliness. Even those participants that migrated with their partners, isolation or lack of community was a common challenge that participants said that they felt while living in the host country. This may be because migration often necessitates leaving the support network in the country of origin. In response to the isolation generated by migration, P 41 said, "My greatest fear is that I'll die in a cardboard box underneath the Ballard Bridge." Despite living in Seattle for quite a long time, and developing a support network in the United States, this participant expressed a deeply embedded feeling of being alone. She described worrying that the people who are meant to always take care of her, her family, are all in the country of origin. Thus, her death could go unnoticed by her non-family community in Seattle.

Feeling alone or isolated was often reported by participants as they described health issues they navigated without family. For example, as P 26 managed a chronic illness, she found the lack of family made the physical separation from family more salient. She said,

> I've been away with them for a while. I think when I moved here in high school, it was a lot harder because I was just—I was away from my mom since I was 14, and not just that but being in this different culture, even though I come here every summer. Being in school and interacting with people was really different, and the way people interacted was different—socially…I'd say in the last three years, since I moved out here and since I started experiencing a lot of the health stuff, it's been pretty isolating at times just not really having that kind of support network. That's been an interesting experience. And [partner's] family's not here, either, so I feel like that's even a little more

> isolating because when you're not doing well—[partner] was kind of my main support, and other friends, but family is pretty important. So, that was more—I felt it more, and also in the last few years I just feel like more of my family has been getting sick, and my uncle passed away, and I just feel like—I don't know. I feel the distance a little more. (P 26)

The support provided by her family was reportedly less salient to P 26 until she was placed in a situation to need their help: The physical separation between P 26 and her family has made the impact of their care obvious. Though she expressed appreciation for her family's support, the actions they can actually take are limited by the distance. As with other participants, though the support through such health experiences was reported as being helpful, it also further increased feelings of isolation. No cause was cited amongst participants for these feelings, but the experience of feeling isolated from family in times of poor health was discussed by several participants.

Feeling isolated from family was also reported by participants when they attempted to protect family from worry, which resulted in the participant being forced to navigate difficult situations without support. Several participants reported shielding family from negative experiences during migration. For example, P 8 recently began having seizures and noted that she refused to inform her parents. P 8 argued, "I never tell them. Because they're going to be very worried. And I know they do the same thing. Which is...I prefer if I know...they prefer if they know. But we both don't want to worry each other. You know?" Keeping this secret is only possible due to the physical separation between this participant and family living in Greece. By protecting her family from her situation, she is also reported feeling more separated from her

primary support network. This feeling of protecting family from worry was common to participants and often seemed to result in furthering feelings of isolation.

4.3.3 *Guilt*

It became very clear from these interviews that migration resulted in feelings of guilt through the perceived inability to perform their role as a supportive family member. This reported result is consistent with several studies which found that migration produced feelings of guilt (Baldassar, 2015). Several participants mentioned feeling immense guilt at being away from family in their country of origin. For a few participants, the guilt stemmed from merely living away, as was the case of P 1. Just the act of leaving seemed like enough to produce feelings of guilt. Most participants did not cite missing specific events or family rituals as the source of their guilt. Instead, participants argued that it was missing the daily life of their family that was the foundation of their feelings. Given that participants, even those only meant to only be sojourners, have created a life in the United States, being away caused guilt for missing both ritual events and daily aspects of their families' lives. For example, P 24, a graduate student, discussed her desire to drive home to celebrate Mother's Day despite the significant hassle it would cause. She explained,

> Normally, in my first few years, I was going home—sheesh, every other week, every third or fourth week, every weekend in my first—not every weekend, but sometimes even twice a week…Then, as you know, I've had health issues, and so I've had to—what's the word?—minimize everything else--just offload anything that could take my energy or time...I can't even go for three or four days or a week because I always feel guilty about the work that I have to be doing while I'm here, and so I'll go and spend a day with my mom and a day with my grandma and stay

> overnight with them, each one night. Then I usually come back. So, I had hoped to go home this weekend for Mother's Day, but I think there's a 90% chance, if not a 98% chance, I'm not going to be able to. (P 24)

As explained by P 24, participants were often put in situations with no beneficial outcome. In this case, traveling home would relieve guilt about being away from family and missing this celebration. A new layer of guilt, however, was added by her inability to finish school work due to the lengthy drive home. Often, guilt was felt no matter which physical location the participant was in. Leaving the country of origin gave birth to these feelings to which there was little ability to relieve. This is likely why guilt was such a prominent part of participants' discussions surrounding family.

The desire to help family was a prominent theme amongst participants' discussions of guilt. Participants overwhelmingly associated the guilt they felt by living away from their family with their inability to provide care for their family. As discussed above, P 31 navigated immense amounts of guilt for being away from her elderly mother. P 31 described her struggle to provide care for her elderly mother despite living in a different country. Her inability to provide traditional forms of support to her mother made the participant feel powerless. P 39 provided another example. She said, "because when I was melting down and feeling super guilty about living away and I was like, 'What's going to happen when something happens?'" This intense concern about missing potential emergencies produced guilt, primarily because it would be impossible to return to the country of origin in a timely manner. P 39 continued to weigh the possibility of moving home, bringing her parents to the United States, and the ability to take extended periods of time off of work. Given that there were no perfect solutions, each scenario produced a unique set of guilty feelings. Importantly, it was only once they moved away, or

distance was created, that these feelings emerged. The desire to relieve feelings of guilt was reported to initiate several communicative behaviors that enacted family. These behaviors are described in Chapter Six.

4.3.4 *Fear*

Finally, distance was frequently associated with the fear of being in an unknown culture or place. Several aspects of life in the United States generated novel situations for the participants. As has been suggested by previous research, the fear associated with situational novelty was created by the uncertainty migration naturally produces (Artiga & Ubri, 2017). In particular, the legal process was a significant source of fear for participants and their family, because the system is opaque. P 16, a human resources employee specializing in immigrant employment, reported increase in questions by employees surrounding their legal status. He said, "Now, the fear is, 'Do I really want to travel? Am I going to be able to come back? What's the administration going to do? What's next?'"

Overwhelmingly, the migrants living in the United States in this study are unsure about the legal processes surrounding their status. For example, P 22 asked that the audio recording be paused as she described her process navigating the system. Her fear of the legal system, and its possible repercussions, forced to stay with an abusive partner. Nearly every participant mentioned the difficulty navigating the legal system and the fear it produced. In particular this was because so much information was required, but very little explanation of the process was given to participants. Deadlines, forms, and requirements all seemed to exist without a logical rationale for their meaning. The uncertainty produced by the lack of intuitiveness of the legal system was a significant source of fear.

The challenge of distance gave rise to several shared feelings in this study. Themes of displacement, isolation, guilt, and fear were woven through these participants' stories of migration. Each of these feelings challenged participants' ability to create and sustain lives in the host country. It was because of these feelings and in search of tools to navigate these feelings that participants adopted behaviors to better engage in communicative behaviors with their physically separated family.

4.4 SUMMARY

To better understand the first research question, this chapter presented participants' reported experiences as they lived separated from their family. Though each of the participants in this study have different backgrounds, cultures, education, and relational status, similar themes emerged from their migration stories. One theme was that all participants reported being *motivated to migrate in search of better economic and educational opportunities*. This theme was linked inextricably to a common desire to provide for their families. The idea that individuals leave the country of origin for better opportunities and in an effort to help family is consistent with the previous scholarship (Peter, 2010).

Another theme that emerged from these stories was that, *for these migrants, "distance" is not a quantifiable measurement, but rather a feeling to be experienced.* It did not matter how far participants had travelled to get to the United States. Participants from Canada reported similar challenges, benefits, and feelings associated with migration as participants from South Africa. For example, migrants are often forced to navigate difficult legal systems that generally make them feel like an outsider. The act of crossing the border changed the political reality for participants and forced them to acknowledge their status as "others" living in a foreign country.

Additionally, a growing anti-immigrant political climate resulted in a significantly deleterious effect on participants' experiences.

There were several benefits to moving to the United States also reported by the participants. The political freedom afforded to individuals in the U.S. was considered beneficial, particularly by those participants coming from nations that engaged in government censorship. Also, the ability to help family in a material way a significant benefit to migration. As several other studies have shown, the capacity to send home money is a means for turning feelings into material demonstrations of love (Mckay, 2007).

The experience of distance created a set of common feelings that participants were forced to navigate. Through the telling of their stories, participants expressed *feelings of displacement, isolation, guilt, and fear*. This is consistent with other research which has documented that feelings of displacement and guilt, in particular, are integral to the migrant experience (Baldassar, 2015; Christou, 2011). For example, while investigating the mechanisms that Italian immigrants living in Australia used to manage both their own feelings and those of their family in Italy, Baldassar (2008) found that the feelings associated with migration (e.g., stress, worry, or guilt) often motivated migrants to develop coping mechanisms which often involved, in part, behaviors for how they chose to interact with family members at home. The following chapters will present how the participants in this study reported using communication behaviors that bridge the distance to their families at home.

Chapter 5. TECHNOLOGICAL BEHAVIORS THAT ENACT FAMILY

For me, technology keeps people close without needing them to be in the same physical place (P 32)

The use of information communication technologies (ICTs) is a key characteristic of the migrant family experience. These tools provide families the space and means to overcome physical separation by allowing interaction between family members. For that reason, it comes as little surprise that references to Internet-based platforms and applications, ranging from Facebook to WhatsApp to Skype, were woven throughout all participant interviews, and were discussed as providing families a meeting place to engage in family building while still being physically separated. This chapter contributes to understanding the second research question posed in Chapter Two: *What are the communicative behaviors migrants report that enact family?*

An understanding of the technological behaviors reported by participants is important because these behaviors inform how participants enact family at a distance. This chapter reports the technological choices that participants discussed that enact family while physically separated. It starts with a discussion of how participants selected technology. In some cases, participants said that they continued using ICTs with which family members were already familiar. Often these already established technologies were reported to be used to avoid problems with technological literacy. Still, some participants adopted new technology to communicate with family members.

The decision to use technology, either new or those that are familiar, was often based on the affordances offered by that technology. In particular, participant discussions suggested that video, voice, and text-based platforms each offered a unique way to communicate with family. It

is for this reason that many participants adopted a polymedia approach. That is to say, participants reported using several technologies concomitantly. Despite participants often considering technology as useful tools that enact family, they reported several challenges in implementing the behaviors that enact family. In particular mediated communication was associated with feelings of disconnection and stress. Additionally, lack of technological literacy by loved ones in the country of origin occasionally made it difficult for participants to engage in communicative behaviors that enact family. This is because participants were unable to use the technological affordances of the unfamiliar technology. Similarly, some participants or their family reportedly lacked access to technology and thus could not use those tools to engage in behaviors that could facilitate the enacting of family. Several key themes emerged related to technology selection, use, capabilities, and constraints and are discussed next.

5.1 Selection of Technology

As was discussed in Chapter Four, physical distance created material changes in the frequency, content, and quality of family communication for these migrant families. For most participants, distance was considered primarily to be an obstacle to communication, and thus enacting family, that needed to be overcome through technology use. In other words, the meaning of distance was not conceptualized as the quantifiable space between the participant and their family members but, rather, became the act of overcoming separation. Thus, the traditional understanding of distance, as a denomination of space on a map, was less salient to participants than was their being away from family. Participants who lived three hours from their family reported similar experiences with technology use as those twenty three hours away from family. The technology-related behaviors that bridged the distance and enacted family can be summarized as a set of behaviors employed by participants in this study to manage the

challenges and difficult feelings associated with the physical separation from family discussed in Chapter Four.

Given that participants often considered distance to be an obstacle for participants to perform family in traditional ways (those done prior to migration), it is understandable that participants frequently discussed their use of technology as a means to repair (or at least deal with) their sense of separateness. *The use of technology was overwhelmingly used to facilitate easy and more intimate communication with family*. Though P 32 held a more extreme position than most of the participants, he made the explicit argument that the use of technology was a mechanism to bridge feelings of distance,

> I've met a lot of people that miss their family so much that they go back because they say they want to be close to their family, and that's something I don't understand. You can be close by other means. For me, technology keeps people close without needing them to be in the same physical place, but I think other people do have this sense of needing to be physically there. (P32)

P 32 acknowledges that, for some, distance from family members may be a significant barrier to enacting the closeness of family ties. But, he argues that technologically-mediated communication ultimately makes the distance feel less significant. According to P 32, technology facilitated a sense of closeness when physically separated from his family. It is this idea that enacting family is still possible, despite distance, that many discussions of technology were centered.

That said, participants also articulated the need to consider both their own and their family members' comfortability with technology. As a result, there were two primary decisions regarding technology use that participants reportedly made. First, participants maintained the use

of the same technology that the family was already using prior to migration. Second, participants also sought new technologies to meet the change in communicative needs brought on by their physical separation. The actual impact of the communications used via these technologies are discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

5.2 Staying with Familiar Technology

One theme that emerged from the data around ICT use was that *family members' comfort level with technology influences its selection.* Most participants continued to use the same communication platforms that they had employed before deciding to migrate. The consistent use of technology meant that participants were meeting their family in a technological space in which they are already comfortable. Thus, the use of these known technologies could be seen as offering two key advantages: a sense of normalcy and reduced digital literacy issues. For example, several participants reported using WhatsApp group chats as a way to maintain regular contact with their family. Most group chats were already being used by the family prior to migration and were something with which participants' families were already familiar. Upon migration, participants continued engagement with these forms of communication. P 34 described his group chat with family communication:

> Before I left Brazil, I created a WhatsApp group for my family, and we just send each other photos and messages every day, multiple times a day. With my cousins, it's a little bit more sporadic. I would say every two days, every two or three days, maybe, we talk. In my "cousins" group, my brother's also in my cousins' group. So, he's in my family group but also in the "cousins" group. (P 34)

Not only was this group chat created long before P 34 decided to migrate to the United States, the rate and consistency of messages did not change after his migration. The family had already established this platform as a central mode of communication, and this continued despite his physical separation. This consistent use of technology before and after migration was common to many participants.

Using technology with which family members were already familiar was a common behavior amongst participants, as it was said to create a sense of normalcy. Several participants reported that, through daily communication, they were able to maintain "normal" interactions with family as no special accommodations for their distance were needed. This desire for normal communication often reported to manifested in daily, "low stakes" communication. For example, the daily communication provided by WhatsApp, in the form of group text messaging, created a sense of ambient co-presence (Madianou, 2016) that minimized the perceived distance by participants and their family. Participants reported that they could contribute to the messaging thread no matter their location or the time. Platforms like WhatsApp also created normalcy merely by the type of the information being shared. Many participants discussed sharing small and somewhat mundane details of their lives. The implications of the messages included in daily communication are discussed in Chapter Six. Still, it is important to understand that the mode of communication was reported to better generate normal interactions.

Staying with already established communication technology behaviors was also a way to minimize issues with digital technological literacy. P 37 explained that WhatsApp was much more popular in Mexico than was Facebook messenger. Thus, despite both platforms having similar features and capabilities, his family chose WhatsApp as a tool for communication because its popularity was already known. The popularity of a platform for people often means

that individuals may have more awareness of that technology and thus feel comfortable with its adoption (Sun, 2013). In a similar way, P 3 explained using many different technologies to communicate with her family. Her grandfather, however, was only comfortable with e-mail, so that channel became their only mode of communication. Though she expressed appreciation for the ability to see and hear family when they communicated through other channels, her grandfather's literacy rendered e-mail the only option for communication. By selecting a technology with which their family feels comfortable, participants were troubleshooting potential problems understanding the technology. Additional issues with technological illiteracy are discussed at the end of this chapter.

5.3 Decisions Based on Affordances

By using technologies that were already in use by family members, participants were able to reportedly mitigate feelings of distance by sticking with their families' established normative behaviors. Where the need for familiarity was not present or pressing, new technologies were adopted by participants. In these cases, *participants' reports suggest that they select new technologies based on the affordances they offer*. Affordances of a technology are those characteristics that constrain or facilitate possible uses of that technology (Hutchby, 2001). For example, the choice between platforms that privilege video, voice, or text communication is a decision that will influence the communication patterns of migrant families.

In this study, participants reported being aware of the affordances of each technology and leveraged those differences in technological features in order to meet specific informational and emotional needs for family communication. The findings in this section are consistent with previous literature that suggests multi-sensory engagement with "things from home" is vital to maintaining a feeling of connection to their home (Svašek, 2010, p. 868). Often, hearing and

seeing family members, which is afforded through some ICTs, provides this experience and allows migrants to connect with their absent homeland. A discussion of why participants were required to adopt new technology is presented next. Following that, I provide a brief overview of the affordances video, voice, and text-based technologies that were each important to participants' decisions to adopt technology.

5.3.1 *Need for new technology*

For several participants, the adoption of new communication technologies was primarily reported as being required or desired to maintain satisfactory communication with their family in the country of origin. Thus, the behavior of technological adoption was, in fact, a mechanism that enacted family. Participants reported that finding and adjusting to a medium was a process specifically undertaken by family members and was generally done in an attempt to meet their needs, emotional and informative, through communication with family. Thus, in addition to the technologies that were already in use, participants encouraged family members to learn new ICTs.

Often, participants reported that family members in the country of origin needed to learn new technologies because in-person interactions were the primary method of enacting family prior to migration. Once physical distance was introduced, participants required an alternative way to meet the emotional requirements of participating in family. In cases like this, new technology was required. P 32 explained how his family learned to use Internet-based technology. He said,

> Everyone had their own laptop. She [mother] didn't know how to use it. She asked me to show her. I'm not a good teacher. I get desperate really quick. But at time I had a girlfriend who was very patient, and she was, "Okay, you teach her," and

> she taught her how to use Facebook, how to load photos in a week. Then, yeah, she got really obsessed with Facebook. My mom wasn't sleeping, like 2:00 a.m., just browsing it. It was really funny… and then they started using WhatsApp, and I guess it's not as easy to share things there, or I don't know. But recently, in the past year, somehow, they just started sharing more and more images, video—the things you used to see in Facebook, they're sending through WhatsApp. (P 32)

Prior to migration, P 32 and his family relied on in-person interactions. When he decided to leave Mexico, his family bought a laptop for each member, and P 32 left behind an older smartphone. His parents learned both how to access the Internet through a laptop and how to send text messages. Though his mother has increased her competency with the computer and smartphone, she still struggles with some conceptual understandings of the technology. Still, both P 32 and his family consider the adoption of these new technologies important for their ability to communicate while physically separated.

The ways in which characteristics of various technologies facilitate communication behaviors is discussed below. That these characteristics form a constitutive circle, in which they inform the decision to adopt technologies while the adoption of technology also informs interpretation of the features by users. Essentially, because participants perceived various features to be helpful in enacting family, that is, in fact, what they said they did. The following sections describe how participants weighed the affordances of technology for their communication with family.

5.3.2 *Video and Voice platforms*

Video and voice-based platforms, such as Skype or Facetime, generate a sense of closeness between participants and their family in the country of origin (Twigt, 2018). Voice of

IP (VoIP) are technologies that deliver voice and multimedia communications through the Internet, and participants reported using VoIP channels to both voice and video chat with family. The ability to hear and see the physical expression of family members while talking to them provides individuals with affective information (Siegman, 1987; Twigt, 2018). Specifically, voice and video technologies allowed participants to transmit nonverbal emotive cues that are not as available through text. In turn, the ability to notice behaviors suggesting emotions was said to minimize feelings distance and increased intimacy despite being physically separated because they generated a reported sense of security and feelings of co-presence.

A few participants reported that hearing the voice of their family member, or vice versa, was a way to better understand the affective state of their family members. Cues, such as tone of voice, were transmitted through video and voice platforms. Research has found that vocal cues are important to decoding the feelings of a conversational partner (Scherer, Banse, Wallbott, & Goldbeck, 1991). Participants reported that they understood the vocal cues provided through video and voice-based platforms to be an important tool for maintaining relationships. For example, P 40 described calling his mother in Nigeria and the importance of hearing her voice. He said,

> Yes. Like, if she's sick, I know before they know. That's how close we are. Yeah. So, if she's sick—generally, if I call her and I hear her voice, I know she's sick or if anything is wrong. Then I have to probe her to tell me what is wrong, and then sometimes I'll call my sister and be like, "Hey, you should go and see this woman [his mother].” Yeah. (P 40)

This understanding of a family member’s emotional or mental state through voice communication was echoed in several interviews. P 40 believed he heard that something was

wrong in her voice. This ability to hear indications of trouble was considered important, as several family members refused to inform participants of problems explicitly. In these cases, it was not just the information being transmitted that provided clues to the bigger picture, but rather the tone associated with the words being said was necessary. Participants reported that there may be several non-explicit clues embedded in messages that can lead to a greater understanding of their family members. Thus, participants considered using technology that transmitted video and voice communication an important mechanism that facilitated behaviors that enacted family. In particular, video and voice technologies afforded participants the ability to communicate more intimately was through easing the sense of uncertainty common to migration. Much of the migrant life is unknown: They are in a foreign culture with (usually) unfamiliar norms and often without a strong support network. By providing a tether capable of transmitting affective information, video and voice technologies allowed participants to more successfully tap their support networks as they search for certainty. Networks – frequently composed of family members, in the case of this project – are generally important to provide emotional support during difficult situations (Bacigalupe & Cámara, 2012). The need for a communication channel that transmits emotion was important for participants when requiring support from their network.

The ability to see and hear a participant attenuated uncertainty by participants' family. For example, P 3's mother prefers to video chat so she can confirm her daughter's security. P 3 explains,

> Mostly it's WhatsApp, or previously when I didn't have a WhatsApp, I used to Skype call or Google G-Talk. So, that's—Skype was, because of the video, we used Skype a lot, and then I switched to WhatsApp video. Also, IMO, if you have heard of that. It's one of the, maybe, Android app… Sometimes, if I'm busy or if

> I'm in the middle of something, or if I'm not able to answer her or pick up her call, then I'll just text her, or otherwise I'll answer her call and just say that "I'm busy. I'll talk to you after five or ten minutes." Then I can…What she says is, 'At least I want to see your face, even if it's for two seconds. So, could you just show me that you are fine? Then I can sleep.' (P3)

When describing the use of video communication with family, "seeing is believing" was a common reported sentiment. As with P 3's mother, the ability to see a participant was enough to confirm that they were secure. Many scholars (for example Gelder & Vroomen, 2000) have found visual cues to be as important and voice cues to decoding emotions in a conversational partner. Thus, the visual image afforded by a video platform allowed participants, and/or their family members, to take in an entire scene and access affective information. The function of this kind of nonverbal communication is consistent with previous literature (Baym, 2015). As a result, the perception of health or security was considered possible through the transmission of these cues. Essentially, participants asserted that visual and voice cues were incapable of being hidden through these channels and thus created a sense of security for knowing what their family members were experiencing.

Lastly, the cues afforded by video and voice technologies facilitated strong feelings of co-presence amongst participants. P 8 used video and voice chatting with her family in Greece twice daily. She explained that she would call her sister and nephew as they were driving to school. This form of communication mimicked her presence in the carpool. In fact, making phone calls while driving to and from work has become commonplace (Esbjörnsson & Juhlin, 2003). Thus, the addition of vocal cues allows family members to feel like they are along for the ride. The ability to see and hear a family member increased this sense of co-presence. Riding

along for carpool was something that she would participate in if she lived with her family in Greece.

P 36 also provided an example of co-presence from video and voice technologies. He discussed the importance of video chatting with his family in Australia,

> It's mostly just mundane stuff—what happened during the week, what we did, whatever. I try to fill them in a little bit on work and all of that, and so it's just a catch-up time thing. When we lived there, we used to go over for dinner once a week, and so this has been—I guess we've got a pretty close family unit, and so it wasn't too difficult to make that leap almost. It's sort of similar to what that was only now it's over Skype rather than over the dinner table once a week. (P 36)

This participant engaged in a regularly scheduled Skype call with his parents living in Australia. Though, he later argued that not being co-present for major family events was an issue in his relationships, this regular family call was the equivalent, in his mind, to sitting down for an ordinary family dinner. This experience would not be the same if it were through a different platform. Instead, the ability to hear and see family members was what allowed this call to take the place of a regular family supper. Thus, the cues that were afforded by video and voice-based platforms enabled the communication of affective cues, security, and co-presence. The ability to see and hear family allowed participants access to communicative cues beyond text, which provided a more nuanced understanding of family members' feelings.

5.3.3 *Text-based platforms*

Alternatively, communicating through text-based platforms, such as email or text messaging, was considered important to enacting family. In particular, WhatsApp was used widely by participants and their family to send text communication. WhatsApp has

approximately 1.5 billion users in 180 countries, making it the most popular texting service in the world (Farid, 2019). This platform is a free instant messaging service that also allows people to send photos and recorded voice messages. Text-based communication is generally considered to lack many of the affective cues present in video and voice technologies, rendering it a more "distant" technology (Baym, 2015; Twigt, 2018). Nevertheless, text-based communication was reported as essential to enacting family despite being physically separated, in several ways.

First, text-based platforms were reported to be an easy way to communicate mundane information because they could be used on a daily basis and were often asynchronous. Text communication was overwhelmingly facilitated by a group chatting platform (most often WhatsApp), which helped participants create a regular sense of co-presence without communication becoming overwhelming. Nine participants mentioned the use of these group chats explicitly to navigate regular communication with family. Like several other participants, P 9 reported daily communication with family via a group chatting platform. This channel facilitated asynchronous communication that was adapted to each person's unique lifestyle (e.g., a time zone change or a brother's rigorous medical school schedule). The transmission of this information was made possible through text because participants could engage when was most convenient for them.

Additionally, this chatting was created with the purpose of transmitting information that would otherwise be known if the family members were all still co-present. These messages were a mix of mundane and crucial wellness updates. P 9 explains,

> So, it's usually just 1 or 2 messages like I did my hair different or look everything is snowy today or my brother asking me for something to look up here. It's very

> sporadic and everyone answers at their own times but at least we are communicating and we know we are okay. (P 9)

As with several other participants, P 9 expressed appreciation for the ability to respond to messages on his own schedule. Through the asynchronous platform, he could enact family, through small updates which built feelings of intimacy, while still living his own life in a different time zone. These small updates provided family with the details that would be known if the family was co-present. The difficulty of navigating synchronously with family at home was a significant barrier to enacting family and will discussed in Chapter Six. Text-based platforms, however, allowed participants an easier way to bridge the time and distance that physical separation created.

The previous quote by P 9 also demonstrated that text-based platforms were used as an easy way for participants to confirm their security with family in the country of origin. Through engaging in daily communication, made possible through such "low-stakes" forms of communication, family members felt more secure in that their loved ones were healthy and happy. Sending text messages implied that participants or their family members were healthy enough to engage. Conversely, if participants did not respond, their lack of communication could be perceived as too sick or sad to communicate, causing worry to the family.

Lastly, text-based technologies provided a static form of communication that produced a more tangible artifact from which participants could draw relational information. Text communications were something that participants could return to and from which they could derive comfort. In these cases, technology that enabled text communications was something that was introduced and managed by participants and their family intentionally so that they could

minimize feelings of distance. P 30 explained how his family decided to use text communication rather than video and voice channels. He explained,

> It [Skype] felt pretty ephemeral, and it's not something that my parents checked. They sit down to talk to me on Skype, using it more like a telephone, like it's just a facility, as opposed to WhatsApp felt like a long-lived place where we can post pictures and stuff, and people can go back to it. You can search it and go back. We just have a better experience around that…We did create ourselves a new communication medium with that. I kind of started, and I see them all using it now. (P 30)

It was the static form of communication that provided P 30 and his family something tangible to relate to. Along with other participants, communication that could be searched was helpful for bridging distance. As discussed, participants could engage as their schedule allowed and still feel (largely) like part of the family. The affordance of *persistence*, or ability to return to messages multiple times, meant that conversations were captured within the technology (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). It was with this intention that participants engaged with platforms that afforded this possibility. Ultimately, communication via text served as a less-restrictive form of interaction that was still able to develop relationships through tangible communicative acts. Participants could engage in texting whenever they were free and without an expectation of sustained conversation. Text communications served as a mechanism that engaged family in communication, but without the restrictions of synchronous voice and video platforms.

Texting groups were often supplemental to more irregular and time-consuming forms of synchronous communication. Though the group chatting discussed by participants was able to generate a sense of daily presence, it was the video and voice calls that were able to provide a

more nuanced understanding of a family members and their emotional state. Given the benefits and drawbacks associated with the affordances of each medium, most participants described utilizing many different platforms to communicate with family in the country of origin.

5.4 Use of Polymedia

Participants create a polymedia environment. Participants in this study reported combining technologies to form a more holistic form of digital intimacy. The layering of various technologies provided family members with the ability to enact family despite being physically separated. Rarely did a participant engage in a single medium to communicate with family. Madianou and Miller (2012) argue that polymedia is the contemporary new media landscape, which has been created by an individual's access to many different forms of media. Often individuals used various technologies to complement each other, as the affordances of each technology used by participants met their differing relational needs. The specific communicative behaviors derived from these technologies are discussed in the following chapters. In order to understand those behaviors, however, it is important to understand that participants wove the use of various technologies together to meet their needs and those of their families. For example, P 30, mentioned earlier, encouraged his family to adopt new technologies that supplemented their traditional use of video and voice communication after seeing the effectiveness of a polymedia approach used by his fiancé's family. P 30 explained that his family continued to use video and voice communication (Skype) but also adopted a text-based platform after his fiancé demonstrated the functionality with her own family. He said,

> We're on WhatsApp. Actually, my entire family is on WhatsApp. We used to all be on Skype, and we used to do just that, and then actually I saw [my fiancé]—her family, they're all on WhatsApp, so I copied that. She started a group for my

> family, and now we use that…Because it—it was more permanent in a way. Skype was kind of built around phone calls and video calls, and it didn't feel like it had—the groups was not a first-class thing. It felt pretty ephemeral, and it's not something that my parents checked. They sit down to talk to me on Skype, using it more like a telephone, like it's just a facility, as opposed to WhatsApp felt like a long-lived place where we can post pictures and stuff, and people can go back to it. You can search it and go back. We just have a better experience around that…We did create ourselves a new communication medium with that. I kind of started, and I see them all using it now. Before it was *just* Skype calls, emails, and the occasionally sending each other photos. (P 30)

He explained that his family continues to use Skype and calls but now includes small chitchat via WhatsApp. As with several other participants, multiple platforms were implemented to communicate with family. Generally, the polymedia environment resulted in a mix of video and voice platforms with text messaging.

Some participants were able to access several technological features through a single platform. WhatsApp, for example, allowed for the transmission of voice through audio messages that were sent within the same application. Users could mix audio with text communications but were only required to learn one platform. The mixing of technological affordances was used as an accessible way to remain relevant to their family living in the country of origin. P 41 explained the use of a family website that allowed access to variety of technological features.

> We have a website for the family only. So, we're all on that. We communicate every day...We have a website on that where we get free calls and free Facetime,

and it really does help. It helps me keep in contact with the daily goings on in family life. You don't have to catch up on as much when you get home. (P 41)

Combining multiple features into a single platform, a family website, allowed P 41 easy access to multiple tools for enacting family. The ease enabled by this technology facilitated daily communication with family was also a way for participants to stay relevant while living away from family. P 41 was able to keep up with the family gossip, which meant that in later conversations she could weigh-in when discussing these issues. The use of a group chat facilitated her access to this running conversation and helped her maintain a presence in the family drama.

The development of new ICTs provide a range of affordances (Ros, 2010) that participants could leverage so that they could enact family while physically separated. The particular communication behaviors facilitated by technology will be discussed in the Chapter Six and Seven. The selection of technology based on the affordances offered was a key choice undertaken by participants, since these affordances informed the behaviors that could be used to enact family. According to participants, video and voice-based platforms facilitated affective information, a sense of security, and provided a sense of co-presence. Text-based platforms were often reported as easy and low-stakes communication that created a daily presence with family. In turn, regular communication helped participants feel like a participant in the family despite lacking co-presence. Overwhelmingly, these technologies were used in concert to provide participants with both a daily presence and access to more nuanced information about family. The affordances of technology were used to meet participants' specific needs. The transactional and functional behaviors enabled by technology are discussed in further detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

5.5 The Challenges of Technology for Migrant Families

Though technology is essential to these migrants' ability to communicate with family in the country of origin, it also created several barriers to process of enacting family. This is because the challenges of associated with technology attenuated the use of those technology for communication with family, which as will be discussed in the following chapters was important for enacting family. Engaging in communicative behaviors with family was often a way that enacted family while physically separated. Though access to technology often helps families feel more present with one-another, however, at times digital co-presence, or the ability to feel together despite distance, can actually *increase* feelings of longing (Baldassar, 2016). The constraints of enacting family through technology resulted from issues surrounding dependence on mediated communication, technological literacy, and access to technology.

5.5.1 *Constraints of Mediated Communication*

Several participants struggled with the tension that the communication through mediated channels caused. Feelings of disconnection between participants and their family were occasionally developed because the performance of family was forced through mediated channels of communication. This was generally the case for participants who disliked mediated communication prior to migration. For example, P 19 described his mother's disapproval of his communication habits,

> I don't know. I don't—I'm not a social media type of person. I'm not a—if you're going to phone me, you need to phone me and tell me within the first minute or two what the purpose of this call is, otherwise I'm really not interested in spending hours on the phone just talking about nothing. That's just not who I am. I don't do it with my wife. I don't do it with anyone. So, no. I get it. I get these messages

> from my mom that's like "I haven't spoken to you in two weeks. Are you still alive?" and yes, I get it, but it's not in me to try harder. I don't mean that in a way. I mean it like I shouldn't have to force myself for her to understand that I miss them, and I love them and all of that. (P 19)

Despite P 19 reporting satisfaction with his communication and performance of family, he reported feeling frustrated with the expectations of his parents. He believed that his love, and thus his place in the family, was evident regardless of communication and that this knowledge should be enough to satisfy his family members living in South Africa. His parents frequently sought more communication from him, however. Interestingly, this tension between communication preference of the participants and their families was reported for each of the participants that reported satisfaction with family communication. In cases like these, the issues stemmed from the necessity for mediated communication.

Additionally, migrants often feel dependent on technology to communicate with family (Kaufmann, 2018). The dependence on mediated communication was often discussed as stressful for several participants, which often resulted in furthering feelings of distance. Part of this difficulty stemmed from the desire for the cues afforded by video and voice technology but also trouble with the synchronous engagement required for these communicative behaviors. P 11 explained the stress of relying on mediated communication while living away from family. When explaining why she felt stress of communication, she said,

> I found it really stressful when I was in community college because the workload is not that heavy. It's kind of more chill but once I transferred to uni I have a lot of assignments. Sometimes I don't really have to sleep, let alone time to talk to my parents. At the same time, they ask me, don't you miss your parents? It's really

> stressful, they give me the burden. That's why I always try my best. Even though it's stressful for me, at least I want to make them happy. (P 11)

P 11 explained that the stress of her life, combined with the difficulty of navigating mediated channels, made engagement with family more difficult. The chaos of her life resulted in little sleep and a busy schedule. In turn, the extra layer of mediated communication made it difficult for her engage in communicative behaviors with family. She explained that she felt pressure, and ultimately did engage in communication, but it produced stress due to the requirement to schedule and engage in synchronous communication. Her busy schedule made it difficult to schedule and fit conversations in with her family. The idea of scheduling time with intimate relationships was often challenging for participants, which violated the relational expectation that family is always, or at least casually, available. In addition to issues around scheduling, P 11's family did not consider text-based communication intimate enough. The experience of negotiating the dependency for mediated communication was common to most participants. Ultimately, participants reported frustration with the constraints of both the need to schedule time with family and the lack of cues rendered from mediated communication.

5.5.2 *Technological Literacy*

Technological literacy was the primary technological barrier that participants encountered when enacting family. Most often family members in the country of origin lacked the ability or understanding to successfully engage with new technologies. As a result, several forms of communicative behaviors were unavailable to participants. For example, P 7's family used WhatsApp, rather than other more convenient technologies, because it met his parent's digital literacy needs, as they were already familiar with the WhatsApp platform. He said, "We talk over text but even though they have online message. My parents don't really get the whole

iMessage thing, so they prefer WhatsApp." Thus, this technology became the primary mechanism for communication with his parents.

In particular, some elderly relatives were discussed as having a difficult time navigating technology. Often, this was a result of their illiteracy towards technology. P 20's grandfather lives in Lithuania, and they Skype call a couple times a week. His inability to understand the Internet or Skype results in frequent problems with their communication.

> It's a little tough with older generation because you're able to install the program or something, teach them certain things, but then once things go out of that range of the thing they know how to do- like how to turn on Skype- then they have no clue what to do. He has no idea how to open an attachment in an email, and things like that. Sometimes he's like, "Oh, Skype disappeared from my phone," or something – some update will come…and he will be unable to open in. (P 20)

P 20 uses Skype to communicate with her grandfather. As described earlier, he struggles with navigating technology. He is unable to understand the processes required by the different platforms, such as opening the application or troubleshooting Internet problems. As a result, the scheduled communication between P 20 and her grandfather can become a frustrating process. This issue of elderly family lacking the literacy to use technology was discussed frequently by participants.

Often family members were gifted technology as a tool to communicate with the participant, but a lack of understanding of that technology produced frustration. In these cases, technology was adopted quite slowly, if at all, and with several instances of misunderstanding. This may be because the technology was "forced" upon family members, rather than chosen. For example, prior to migration P 32 left both his parents' smartphones, so they could communicate

more cheaply than through costly phone calls. Much of his communication with parents then occurred via Internet-based applications. He explained his parents' experiences learning to use the smartphones:

> They sometimes don't understand how Internet works, so they feel frustrated, like "I tried to send you a message, but it was not working." It's like, "No, mom, you can only do that with Wi-Fi." Or they go on a trip- they went to Costa Rica and they were trying to use it. It was always at night, I'd receive 20 messages, was because they were sending messages all day long, but it was only when they arrived to their hotel that actually they got online and were able to send them. (P 32)

A complete understanding of how both the phone and its use of the Internet worked were somewhat beyond the comprehension for P 32's parents. Though he reported that his parents are getting savvier with technology use, the process of learning was taking many years. Their literacy regarding the technology often sabotaged communications that might have otherwise been afforded by technology. Technological literacy therefore had a detrimental impact on the ability of some participants to use technology for enacting family.

5.5.3 *Access*

Lastly, some participants described lacking access to technology that could facilitate enacting family effectively. As discussed, technology often facilitates feeling of connectedness through enabling communication. Several participants reported that lacking access to communication technologies resulted in weakening their ability for enacting family. This is because several of the communication behaviors described in the following chapters are dependent on mediated communication. If family members in the country of origin lack access to

the tools that make communication tools possible, participation in family becomes significantly more difficult. For example, P 20 had a positive relationship with her sister. Following her sister's move to Siberia, which resulted in a lack of telephone and Internet access, their relationship began to suffer. She explained,

> My sister is still in Russia, but she is doing the volunteer program in Siberia—she was doing it for a year-and-a-half. That's also a little different now, but she's in Russia…Right now, it's tough. We used to—with my sister, it was pretty easy because we're the same age. We would keep in contact via all means of social media, basically. We would chat, we would phone, and I think speaking—we might speak at least once a week, but we would pretty much be in contact throughout the whole week, just chatting and making little messages, sending each other pictures, and doing all that kinds of stuff. Right now, her rules of her program that she's doing in Siberia, it actually only allows her to have internet for one hour a week, so…So, we are only communicating once a week, but that's only because of that. (P 20)

As P 20 explains, prior to her sister's migration to Siberia, the frequency and dependability of interaction helped to enact their relationship. The consistency of conversation was described as important to communication with family and was difficult to navigate when access to technology that facilitated regular communication was limited.

The ability to access technology constrained the use of various forms of media, which, as will be discussed in the following chapters, may have changed the way participants are capable of enacting family. For example, P 1 had poor Internet connection in his apartment building. The weak connection required that his family rely on text-based communication more than video or

voice. He was only able to Skype from work, which increased the difficulty of engaging in synchronous communication, as, in his lab-based setting, it is difficult to find privacy for a call with family. Additionally, the time difference created an unusual schedule, which "threw off" other parts of his life. Though these are perhaps slight inconveniences, they increased the barriers to engaging in communication. As a result, this participant rarely engaged in video or voice communication with family in the country of origin.

5.6 SUMMARY

This chapter highlighted the essential role of technology to the migrant experience for the participants in this study. In particular, the communication behaviors regarding the selection and use of ICTs were presented. Following migration, all communication with family in the country of origin is mediated. The importance of technology can be seen in the systematic way in which participants decided to use technology. Many participants reported deciding to maintain use of those ICTs with which the family was already familiar. This was an attempt to create a sense of normalcy, since these behaviors were already in place, and a preemptive attempt to mitigate issues of technological literacy.

To better navigate the situation created from physical separation, participants also reported adopting new technologies. The adoption of these new ICTs was intended to access characteristics embedded within technology that were not necessary to re-create (such as hearing tone of voice) when previously co-present. The communication transmitted through both old and new technologies leveraged the unique affordances associated with each. Video and voice communication helped participants cue into affective information, sense of security, and feelings of co-presence. Alternatively, text communication platforms allowed for easy and daily communication, generating a sense of security, and providing static messages. Nearly all

participants decided to implement a polymedia landscape, in which they used various technologies with many varying affordances to best meet their needs.

Though each of these technologies were considered vital for enacting family, technology posed some barriers. The constraints of mediated communication, problems with technological literacy, and lack of access to technology each created a barrier to enacting family while physically separated. Still, participants argued that family was in fact enacted despite distance. The communicative behaviors that informed both transactional and functional behaviors are discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 6. TRANSACTIONAL BEHAVIORS THAT ENACT FAMILY

What she says is, "At least I want to see your face, even if it's for two seconds. So, could you just show me that you are fine? Then I can sleep."
(P 33)

After talking, sometimes you would have a sleepless night because you were thinking about what you just talked with your sister and how things were.
(P 35)

The overarching goal of communication behaviors for the migrant family is to facilitate a sense of family across the physical and emotional challenges of distance, as described in Chapter Four. Chapter Five reported on the technology-related communication behaviors used by the migrants participating in this study as they sought to manage these challenges. Importantly, there were also challenges created by the ICTs that meant enacting family was less possible. This chapter turns to the transactional behaviors engaged by migrants that enact family.

Though participants overwhelmingly identified family by their blood and legal relations, they also worked hard to generate a sense of home that would bridge the physical distance with family and maintain a shared future. To accomplish this, participants enacted family in ways that align with a transactional conception of family. As defined in Chapter Two, a transactional approach to migrant family communication focuses on the way people interact; it privileges the role of communication in the enactment of family (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Again, technology served as the medium through which the communication behaviors reported by participants were enacted.

Particularly relevant to this study, a transactional approach considers aspects such as the frequency and content of communication employed in ways that "generate a sense of home and group identity" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 71). In the absence of physical presence,

migrant families rely on words and images to create a sense of familial co-presence across physical distance. Considering these limitations, what are the ways migrants use communication behaviors that enact family? This chapter presents the transactional behaviors participants reported using to enact family.

Three key types of behaviors were reported: 1) the use of daily communication on mundane topics; 2) scheduled time to communicate; and 3) communication that created a shared image of life abroad. Still, these behaviors were not comprehensive enough to fully bridge the distance. At times virtual presence was inadequate to fully enact family. Additionally, despite communication, feelings of disconnection and guilt, as well as missing members of their social network were reported. Finally, some participants cited language barriers as the reason for being unable to engage in behaviors that enact family while living abroad.

6.1 Transactional Behaviors that Enact Family

A transactional understanding of family privileges the role that communication plays in the construction of family (Scharp & Thomas, 2016; Segrin & Flora, 2011). According to this perspective, families are considered, "a group of intimates who generate a sense of home and group identity and who experience a shared history and shared future" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 71). Participants in this study enacted family through daily communication on mundane topics, scheduled communication, and creating a shared image of life abroad. The following section presents participants' discussion of communication behavior. Again, given the physical separation, these nearly universally happened via ICTs. It is important to remember that technology was the tool which facilitated these communication behaviors.

6.1.1 *Daily Communication on Mundane Topics*

Daily communication about mundane topics help family members feel like they are occupying the same space or re-enacting familiar family processes. Overwhelmingly, participants reported engaging in daily communication with their family in the country of origin. This is consistent with Duck's (2011) assertion that much of relationships with other people is based on sharing "ordinary" information (p. 45). Twenty four participants reported talking, in some form, to their family on a daily basis. P 18 said, "My family in Mexico, I call my mom almost every day. It's really rare when I don't call her. Even if it's just to say, hey, how was your day? Good, bye. I do that." This participant also reported that her daily communication was only for her "close" family members. Often, friends and more distant family members were contacted on a weekly or monthly basis.

Participants that engaged in the more frequent and regular communication often reported discussing mundane and general life activities with family. Typical conversations centered around basic aspects of daily life. P 27 described a routine call with her mother,

> Usually it's just catching up on life, so I will typically ask them about their health, ask them what's happening during the day—especially with the grandparents. Their life is a little more routine, and so they might go on a vacation somewhere, so I might ask them about that. With the aunt and uncle, my cousin actually just finished at Drexel University, so she just went back. So, I might ask them about how she's doing or whether she's found a job, that sort of thing, just kind of the day-to-day stuff. They'll usually ask me about, how's my work going? How's [Partner]? Am I losing weight? You know, all those sort of questions. (P 27)

Several participants reported these forms of mundane and/or informational conversations with family at home. They were often reported as quick chats that provided a picture of their routine life. As will be discussed later, this was particularly important for family members who had not visited the United States, providing participants' families a foundation for understanding the foreign environment in which they were living.

According to these participants, daily communication was a critical part of creating a feeling of family ambient co-presence. As described in Chapter Two, Madianou (2016) defines ambient co-presence as "the peripheral, yet intense awareness of distant others" (p. 183). Often these feelings were generated by communicative behaviors that facilitated a sense of ubiquitous connection. Essentially, by consistently engaging family in mundane information throughout the day, participants were creating a tether that made participants and family members feel like they were occupying the same space.

Often these communicative behaviors were done when in down time between other activities. For example, P 3 sent a quick message to her mother as she walked to our interview. She described typical interactions with her family in Columbia. She said,

> So like I talked my mom, dad and sister every day on WhatsApp. We have a group. We always text in the morning and good afternoon. We chat about the random things of the day... Actually, she just texted. So I texted, like yeah like when I was walking. And we were talking about. How the situation is in Colombia. There was something happening in the news. And my mom was saying that she's going to go and meet, some kids... like my school friends had a baby and so she's going to go and meet the baby...I mean it's just, so because, WhatsApp you can do voice messages. So when it's really long, my mom just

> starts driving, instead of calling me which she can't. She just leaves voice messages on WhatsApp. So it's like, like if we were just on the phone... I receive every morning, like... this. I have another group with the whole family, like aunts and everything. And they're always sending this videos. Every day. And these chains and photos. It's like "good morning" "good afternoon" "good morning" Like this one it just says, "Hello, I hope you have a great Thursday." (P 3)

P 3 expressed the general feeling that many other participants recounted: Maintaining contact with family was about more than just communication about big life events. Rather, the familial routine of "good morning" was something that facilitated an important sense of connection. These familial behaviors were to be respected despite being in a different time zone and physical separation.

Many participants reported engaging in communication behaviors that mimicked the behaviors that they would have otherwise engaged in if physically present. As noted, participants often described calling family as they drove to school or made dinner. This made daily communication more accessible through the reenactment of familial processes that occurred prior to migration. Subsequently, communication of mundane topics had an impact on participation with family. P 8 expressed a similar routine:

> I talk every morning and every night. I always talk with them on the bus on the way here. And then night time I talked to them for 10 to 15 minutes. With my sister, we usually talk on Viber. We send messages. Lately the last few months she calls me every morning from Viber when they drive to school with my nephew. Because I'm very attached to my nephew and he is very attached to me. So we talked for like 2 minutes or something. (P 8)

Again, based on the experiences reported by participants, it seems that these talks created continuous presence of each family member. P 8 has a regular check-in with family each morning. She also reported having a more in-depth Skype call with the entire family every Saturday morning. It is possible that these mediated family meetings may help maintain a sense of normalcy and, because they often mimic behaviors that existed prior to migration. The behaviors reported by participants are consistent with previous research that suggests that relationships are "founded in everyday life communication" (Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991, p. 231). Essentially, the daily interactions reported by participants allow them to mimic the routine communication that would likely happen if they were living in the same space.

The regularity of the updates and their mundane nature also seemed to mirror the communication that occurs when family members are co-present. These daily check-ins served as behaviors that enact family, not only by creating a sense of intimacy, but also because it showed that participants and family cared enough to spend time engaging in what might be considered non-essential communication. Yet, it was perceived to be essential. Although participants periodically engaged in "more important" conversations, this daily form of mundane communication was considered by participants just as important.

When asked why such mundane conversations were essential to feeling like a participant in the family P 2 said, "For me because I feel alone here. So, it is important to feel...the, well. My family is worrying about how I live here." It was not the information being transmitted that mattered, but the relational meaning attached to this form of communication. P 2's family sought a continued presence in her life and showed this desire through persistent daily contact. In a similar way, P 32 described using this communicative behavior with his family in Mexico:

> Sometimes I feel I have nothing new to tell them, and I feel like sometimes they just want to see me, so they keep asking me the same questions or things they already know, and I'm like "You already asked!" But they just want to keep the conversation, I think. Yeah, they are more into that than I am. I think they text me every other day…. Usually—I don't know. They learn how to resend stuff to share stuff, so now the kind of things they send are inspirational quotes and videos and things that I don't even watch, so I'm like—I check them, it's "Oh, it's one of those things." But important stuff, maybe once a week or one every week and a half… I don't know. It's funny. It's like, when I started using the computer, the Internet 20 years ago, maybe—you received one of those emails and it was exciting to resend them to everyone. But that is a phase—like, phase one of getting on the Internet. And I guess we are way over that, but then parents—at least my parents took a long time to get into that. And now that they are, they feel like everything is shiny and they should share everything. They see a wise-sounding quote and it's like, "Oh, yeah. I have to share this. Everyone should see this. They don't realize that it's—there's so much out there that everybody has probably already seen it. (P 32)

This participant's parents' desire for contact, regardless of the conversation topic, demonstrates the larger experience that several of the participants reported. Often participants that described mundane communication felt like the conversations they engaged in were imbued with more meaning than mere transfer of information about their day. This is evidenced by participants finding the actual information shared by their parents to be relatively trivial (i.e., mocking the inspirational chain emails). The actual information being shared was mundane and not considered important. Communication occurred daily as a way to maintain a presence. This is

evidenced by the lack of quality information being discussed in the case of P 32's conversations with his parents. The inspirational quotes were not considered valuable for their practical sake but rather a means of contact with family. Again, this daily contact acted as a relational tether. Thus, these communication behaviors enacted family through a mundane sense of co-presence.

Images also play a role in communicating the mundane. Another participant mentioned receiving photos to keep up to date with the daily happenings around the home. As P 39 discussed feeling missing her parents she said, "We send each other pictures—like, today, they were finally finishing the pool, so she sent me a picture of the pool being filled up, or they send me videos." The pictures being transmitted from family to participants were often discussed as providing a *sense of home* in that they gave a physical image so that participants could see the changes happening to the places they left. In these cases, the shock of changes at home may be attenuated by being able to see them while still living abroad.

Even in the absence of a conversation or image, emojis could suffice to communicate with family. Due to the distance, and the functional scheduling issues that accompany migration, finding a time to talk with family was often difficult. In response to this struggle, participants developed behaviors that mimicked the in-person negotiation of expressing their busy schedule. P 22 explains how she negotiates communication with her mother during demanding times,

> Oh, yeah. I feel like sometimes my mom sends me something on Facebook, and I don't have time to respond, and sometimes I send her something and she just wants acknowledgement of receipt, and you know how Facebook has that little emoji—sometimes it's thumbs up, but you can change it to something else? We have something cute set up there, so we just press on that. I can show you. I'm not

going to name this emoji because it's personal, but I can show you how it works. (P 22)

This participant has developed a special signal with her mother and sister that acknowledged a message without engaging in further communication. Though no actual information transfer has taken place in instances like this, there is still a relational meaning in this interaction. In this case, understandings of wellness signaled by merely responding. Kaufmann (2018) found likewise that small and regular interactions helped migrants maintain relationships with family while physically separated. The use of brief check-ins, such as the one described by P 22, was a mechanism to transmit information that, if living together, the family members would understand.

The sharing of mundane information through daily communication was a communication behavior overwhelmingly reported by participants. According to Duck (1994) mundane conversation establishes shared knowledge and meaning, which is vital to relationships. Participants discussed engaging in daily communication about the regular aspects of their lives. Previous research suggests that such daily communication behaviors is the scaffolding that sustains relationships (Wood & Duck, 2005). In fact, engaging in everyday talk has been correlated with relational satisfaction (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008). The everydayness of their conversations was a result of engaging in daily communication behaviors that enact family.

6.1.2 *Scheduled Communication*

Scheduled interactions reduced stress while communicating the importance of family. Though participants reported feeling co-present with family members through their regular interactions, which mimicked daily life in the country of origin, scheduling more in-depth communication was also discussed by participants as an important communicative strategy.

Making time for scheduled family interaction underscored the importance of family communication for participants. It appears the communicative act of scheduling a time for each other is a way that participants reported enacting family. P 35 recounted how her family initially engaged in communication: “Before, like when I first came, it was just a phone call—and even the phone, we didn't have it at home, so we had to call ahead, make an appointment, and then call again the next day or two.” This act of scheduling a phone call allowed her to engage in contact with family, while seeking to minimize stress or effort that communication home often required. In the case of P 35, scheduling a call meant a commitment because she had to be somewhere at a specific time in order to reach her family. This is consistent with previous research that suggests that communication in this form may signal the importance of the connection to the people within the relationships (Wood & Duck, 2005). By demonstrating that the participant is making communication with family in the country of origin a priority, they were also able to demonstrate the importance of that that relationship.

Of the participants that engaged in scheduling communication, several argued that this was to make conversations less hectic for themselves and family. For example, P 5 has a standing Skype call to his family in Belarus every Saturday morning. He said, “We have a standing phone call every Saturday at whenever I wake up and ready to talk.” Many participants used scheduled interactions as a complement to their communicative behaviors of daily presence. P 34 supplements his messaging via group chat with a regular Sunday video call with his family. He explained that the time difference between Seattle and Brazil was too big to make synchronous communication viable during the week. Thus, scheduling communication was a tool to reduce stress around contact with family because he knew when and how they would have time to talk.

P 4 described the disruption that unscheduled communication sometimes caused. She described texting her family in Indonesia,

> I mean it's not that I don't enjoy it. The time difference is like crazy. And if I text them like a morning here it's like night time for them. They sleep early. They text me in the morning and it gets here and I'm like doing my homework. It's hard. Sometimes it's annoying I mean the weekends it's like more enjoyable because I don't have much to do. My dad like, sometime extends the conversation, which I don't like. Because I'm like too busy for this. (P 4)

Though she expresses interest in her family and a desire to remain in contact, the time difference between Seattle and her parents in Indonesia caused issues communicating. P 4, a college student, reported her preference for asynchronous text messaging was due to the time difference and her busy schedule. Still, her family requested some phone calls. Thus, much like other participants, scheduling became an important part of their communication. Frustration with the incoming text messages or calls was repeated in several interviews, and scheduling was frequently cited as the solution to this tension.

Other participants that engaged in scheduled communication created a typical time for family to call, but the actual regularity of these communications was less rigid. Essentially, the time was carved out for family communication, but it did not necessarily happen each time. P 39 explained how she called her parents in France,

> So, we used to talk—I want to say four times a week, almost every other day. But now because of the time difference, I usually call them around 11:00 – 12:00, because it's 9:00 p.m. for them. That's when I work, and usually when I call them, we talk for an hour and I tell them about everything that's going on in my life, and

> they tell me about what they do, too. But it's rare for me to have them on the phone and talk less than an hour. If it's less than an hour, it's because I'm running to something else…. But what they did in France, though, because at first, we had just one phone and they would put me on speaker, but they couldn't hear me very well. So, my parents decided to buy a two-phone—what is it called? A two-handle? It's like you have one line but you have two phones. So, basically, they're both on the phone, basically, when I talk to them. They're sitting on the couch and each of them has a phone, so they can both talk or listen to what I'm saying. So, it's pretty—when I talk to them, it's usually to both of them at the same time. It's rare that I just talk to one of them. (DI39)

Though P 39 and her parents did not have a regular day to call, she developed a general time period for their communication: She was able to expect their communication between 11am-12pm each day. This regularity was then able to facilitate the in-depth conversations without too much rigidness. If there was no regularity to their communication, then her parents would be less likely to use the double-phone mechanism for their conversation and render interactions less frequent. The scheduled timing allows all family members to be on the same page about communication and make this a priority in their schedule, in turn communicating the importance of family.

P 36 explained the commitment he made to call his parents once a week:

> Pretty much for the entire time we've been here, I will Skype or Facetime or some other visual video conferencing type thing pretty much once a week. There'll be some weeks where we don't or whatever else, or some that might be a bit more, or just a phone call. Especially now, with the kids, it's hard to have an actual

> conversation with them, so sometimes we'll just do it late afternoon here or early morning there or something like that. But pretty religiously, right from the get-go, there was a commitment from both parts to maintain that, and I think that's actually been really important and really helpful. Friends, it's harder. I've still got very close friends in Australia, and every time we go home it's just, we pick up as we left off—but with most, don't speak often… I guess we've got a pretty close family unit, and so it wasn't too difficult to make that leap almost. It's sort of similar to what that was only now it's over Skype rather than over the dinner table once a week. (P 36)

The weekly communication was a way that this participant could enact family. Calling his family was considered to be a surrogate for the regular family supper. Though promising a regular schedule was difficult, he explained the importance of communication to the maintenance of his relationships in Australia. P 36 also made the distinction between his commitment to family and that to friends. Though the comparison between friendship and family relationships is not the focus of this study, it is important to note that the commitment to communication was primarily extended to those considered family.

6.1.3 *Creating a Shared Image of Life Abroad*

In addition to using the behaviors of daily and more mundane communication and scheduled interactions, *participants communicated about their life abroad so that the family can move through life events together.* Practicing this strategy helped families at home better understand participants' day-to-day life, as well as incrementally reveal the changes migrants go through living abroad. This use of communication was particularly necessary for the participants

who had spent significant amounts of time abroad, though all participants engaged in this behavior.

Although an extreme example, P 5 has siblings who he has never met because he has been unable to visit home, and the cost of traveling to the United States is too much for his family. The inability of his family to picture his life made it difficult to fully connect with them emotionally. He discussed the development of a mediated relationship with his siblings,

> Yeah, well with the younger guys I think...So my 11-yr-old brother, our relationship is really good. Because, like, I feel like he trusts. He tells me things he probably doesn't tell his parents. And he knows he can reach me pretty much any time. But with the younger siblings, they think I live in the TV. (P 5)

This participant's relationship with his eldest brother is different than the younger siblings, because the younger two have yet to meet P 5. To develop these relationships, P 5 reported using one-on-one communication with each family member during their regularly scheduled Skype call. They would chat as a family before passing the computer around to each individual member.

It is particularly difficult for the children to conceive of life in another country. His siblings, "think I live in the TV" (P 5). According to his interview, this participant spends quite a bit of time discussing routine aspects of his life that generated a more complete mental image for his family. He continued to explain using communication that helped develop an image of his daily life. He said,

> Tell them about my life. I tell them what I'm excited about. Recently I switch jobs so I told them about like my team. Where I work and because my dad my brother has already been here. So I can kind of roughly tell them where it is. And then we

> talk about some of the cool stuff that happened this week and some things I would want to do with the future. So for example, my kitchen remodeling. My pulling wisdom teeth and like getting brace. Pretty much like daily stuff. And then, I get to talk to pretty much each individually with my parents or them together… But they don't really fathom what does it mean to live abroad right now. (P 5)

This use of communication in service of providing a clearer understanding of life in the United States was common for many participants. Additionally, previous research has suggested that relational history is an important part of any conversation and that individuals engaged in a conversation speak based on this shared understanding (Duck, 2002). That is to say, an understanding of the other person in a conversation is often dependent on previous interactions. Thus, participants developed a shared image of their lives abroad so as to provide a common understanding to future interactions with family members (Licoppe, 2004). In part, the communication of life experiences contributed to a sense of daily presence discussed above. It was also created a more nuanced understanding of life in the U.S. for family who had never visited, including how that life impacts the migrant family member. P 8 discussed how trying to communicate about her life was important, challenging, and tiring. She said,

> I'm going to say, "How are you? Tell me about you and what happened." You know I'm usually the person who asks questions. So that's why usually I ask them questions more than... not that they don't ask me a lot of questions. She really wants to know. She is very very wanting to know. It is just that it's not so easy for me. Also, it's something that when somebody is here and knows your everyday things, you don't have to give a lot of details. So, it's easy to catch up. When

somebody is away you need to give a lot of description of the context for them to get it. And that sometimes is tiring. (P 8)

Though this participant speaks to her family daily (often twice a day), she reported being tired by having to fill in many small details about her life. Additionally, an extra layer of detail is required because family members are often lacking the cultural understanding of life abroad. As was the case with P 8, her family had yet to visit Seattle. This same participant, however, explained her excitement over her mother's impending visit. When asked if she thought communicating with her mother following the visit will be easier, P 8 said, "Yeah, it's gonna become definitely easier. Because for example telling her, 'Oh my god I want to kill my boss'. But she doesn't have even a visual image. Even to meet him or know how the lab is. It's kind of different." Though this participant has tried to create a shared image of her live in The United States through communication home, it was something she felt will certainly be generated once her mother visits. It is clear that this participant is eager to create a shared image of her life with family. Again, images were used to help written and visual communication to explain the context of their lives. Eleven participants reported that sending actual pictures of their lives abroad alleviated some of the lacking context. The images transmitted were able provided cues to their family about daily processes in the United States.

Participants reported implementing other innovative forms of communication. An example of the desire to provide context for family living at home can be seen in the monthly newsletter developed by P 14. He said,

All my family is in Spain. When I came here, I started something that I called the Weekly Mail or the Weekly Report. I will send to family and close friends an email every week telling them how things were here—also, because at the

> beginning, everything is very different, so things that I found very different from here than from Spain that I thought they would find funny from—I don't know. There's bigger things, like how different education or healthcare is here and there to more random things like how here, in Bothell, how most of the streets in Bothell have very little streetlights, while there, everything is perfectly lit and things like that. Telling them those things. I started weekly, then moving to monthly because there were not that many new things to tell, and it was starting to get repetitive in the way it's like "Oh, work is good. Life is good. I am doing this. I am doing that." I started doing monthly. The last year, I have been a little more flakey, maybe I have sent three or four in the whole year. I think I have sent back, right now, 91 emails, and they are pretty long emails. (P 14)

Each of these mass-emails generated a one-time discussion of his current situation. It was through this forum that he could both describe his life in the United States to family and avoid repetition of mundane interactions. Thus, the audience for his newsletter was able to gain the context that was necessary for more intimate communication, without exhausting the participant by having to relate redundant information. Participants reported engaging in this context building as way to secure their position in the family. By having a clearer picture of life abroad, participants reported feeling life family members were able to contribute to their lives in a meaningful way.

Another interesting aspect of providing verbal context for their life abroad is that it helps families more thoroughly participate in life events together. Three participants (P 29, 30, 37) facilitated a mediated introduced of their family to a romantic partner. This, of course, was necessary given their situations. Clearly, meeting the parents serves as a relational milestone

(O'Sullivan, Cheng, Harris, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). P 37 explains how his partner will manage traveling to Mexico for the first time. He said,

> I think they got to know him from Skype calls and things like that, so they know him and sometimes he will call, he will speak when I'm calling them and things like that. I think there's—my family likes him, and he likes my family. I don't know—when they're together, that might be a different story, but I think he will still bring some chocolate or invite people—I think he's more like, "I'm inviting you all to dinner," or have a nice dinner over there or something like that more than bringing presents. (P 37)

Though this was a unique case for a select few participants, their mediated introductions speak to the larger issue of providing a common understanding for family to help create smoother transitions through life events. Meeting the partner, even when this is accomplished through getting pictures of the couple's activities, was reported to allow family members to have a virtual relationship with a loved one's partner. Thus, this strategy eased the feeling of disconnection between family members and served as a significant addition to their mental image of life abroad. In each case, the parents communicated, mostly via text messaging, with the partner directly. They had developed a relationship with these individuals, much like they might if everyone lived in the country of origin. In these cases, participants' families are using communicative behaviors that create understanding of their family member's new situation. Mediated introductions drew on the cultural expectations that family meeting the significant other is an important ritual.

According to some participants, providing context, which was at times challenging, was deemed important because it generated a greater sense of understanding of their lived experience

for their family. In turn, this contextual understanding of their lives often facilitates intimacy between individuals (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). Several participants noted that communication with family was made more meaningful when the family had a more comprehensive understanding of their lives. Importantly, the desire to provide context drew on both the wish for future ties and deference for historic relationship. An understanding of life in the United States was then used to bolster both the historical and future ties to family members.

Each of these transactional behaviors – daily communication, scheduled communication, and providing context – was reported as an important aspect of migrant family communication. These communicative behaviors allowed participants a meaningfully way in which they could enact family while physically separated. Still, at times, there were limits to the efficacy of these behaviors. These barriers are discussed below.

6.2 Barriers of Enacting Transactional Family

The communication behaviors of daily and scheduled communication, and communicating about the routine events at home and abroad to provide context in the host country, were key transactional behaviors pursued by these participants. Still, they did not always succeed. Participants reported confronting several barriers to fulfilling interactions: virtual presence as inadequate, feelings of disconnection and guilt, missing members of their network, and language barriers.

6.2.1 *Virtual Presence is Inadequate*

Relying solely on words and images to replace action and physical presence often feels inadequate, adding undue weight to family interactions. To start, P 20 explained, in part, why communicative behaviors were not able to be fully negated through distance. She said,

> Communication-wise, I think it just makes me feel like it's hard to—it's weirdly—it feels like it's hard to connect to the people from the older generation…With [the] older generation, I feel like there's a big—I don't know how to phrase that—a big amount of communication that's getting lost in the distance, if that makes sense? The quality is much worse... but older relatives, those are [my] grandfather and my mom, so I don't have a long list. Both of them don't have much to do, I'd say, and they're not very busy. They're always happy to hear from me…I feel like communicating is not just conversation. There are so many means of communicating, especially I feel like with an elderly relative, for example, who does not have that much going on in his life to just blabber about it for an hour. The way you would communicate with him in real life would be—I don't know, helping him around the house or going for a walk together, going to the forest, looking at his tomatoes that he has grown. All of those things you do not have, and so you just have to come up with some topics of conversation. (P 20)

Participants like P 20 readily communicate with their families. They also recognized the significant difficulties this type of interaction may have on their relationships. According to this participant, and a sentiment echoed by several others, communication cannot fully bridge the distance to form successful emotional bonds. Though communication with family is necessary for relationships, some participants explained that it is not able to fully address the challenges and emotion that happen while living abroad.

Many of the communicative behaviors migrants used that enact a transactional family were rooted in their desire for normalcy. Creating daily contact, supplemented with more in-depth scheduled conversations recreated the types of relationships participants had prior to

leaving their country of origin. Though participants often reported success with this type of communication, there were also several instances when the "cracks" in these behaviors were made apparent. For example, P 8 reported feeling very close to her family. She engaged in daily calls and text chatting that minimized feelings of distance and participate in the lives of her family members. Still, she reported, "For me it has been a huge struggle. Huge, huge, struggle." P 8 reported engaging in the most communication of any participant, but also still felt an immense challenge to maintain healthy familial relationships.

Additionally, a sense of normalcy derived from communication may be impossible due to the expectations that participants and their family place on that communication. If enacting family rests on the ability to facilitate communication behaviors, then those acts are forced to carry more weight. As discussed, all participants reported that they engaged in conversations about mundane daily activities with family. These conversations, however, may have more relational power to enact family than they otherwise might if family members were co-present. This may be because each bit of information is stored as contextual clues. In light of this imbalance, communication is privileged as a tool for enacting familial. In these cases, conversations with family were considered to be very important and meaningful to participants. In particular, participants reported the weight that speaking to family had. P 35 explained,

> After talking, sometimes you would have a sleepless night because you were thinking about what you just talked with your sister and how things were. It could be good or bad—like, sometimes, my cousin might not be doing too well, and we would hear that. But other times, like my nephew is doing really well in school and my niece is doing really well in school. So, it depends on what you hear, but it's not the same all the time. (P 35)

This participant reported replaying conversations in her mind. Though she also engaged in daily text messaging with family, these conversations were an important source of familial connection. It was these conversations where she would both receive information and “hear” if someone was doing okay.

Not being able to achieve normalcy may also be helpful to some relationships. The distance between some participants and their family was reported to dampen some of the negative aspects that typified their relationships prior to migration. In these cases, participants were able to either forget or ignore the parts of their family that they did not like. For example, P 39 described how her relationship with her parents suffered when they were co-present for too long. While discussing coping with the distance of migration she said,

> I've had a time where I felt really guilty about it. I felt guilty about living here and felt guilty—because I'm an only child. I felt guilty about having moved away, and then I go back to France and I spend two weeks with my parents and I'm like, "Oh, yeah. This is why," because we get along fantastically when I'm not there. So, over the phone, I can tell them about—at the time, I would tell them about my dating life and we'd laugh about stuff. In person, I would not do that. It would—yeah, I would tell them stuff, but definitely not as much details. So, yeah, we get along way better with me being here because my mom can't tell me what to do with my life, and she doesn't know when I go out, so she can't be like, "Well, call me when you get home," or "Be careful," or "Don't drive," or don't do the things I already don't do, but just—I don't want to have my mom repeat them to me. (DI39)

In cases like P 39, it may be beneficial that their relationship cannot mimic their pre-migration status. Instead, they are able to make their relationships stronger by using the lack of context or cues to their advantage. Less contact, in this case, was reported as beneficial to the relationship. Still, overwhelmingly recreating normal communication and relationships with family living the country of origin was a goal for participants. Given the distance between migrants and their family communication that truly mirrors their pre-migration communication may not be possible.

6.2.2 *Feelings of Disconnection and Guilt*

Even with frequent communication, it is difficult to overcome feelings of disconnection and guilt caused by the physical separation of family. Several participants reported that, despite enacting communicative behaviors, they still felt disconnected from family. Transition to enacting family through mediated communication was difficult for several participants, especially in the early stages of separation. P 17 has moved past the initial stage of migration, she explained that at the beginning of her time in the States being only able to communicate via telephone was difficult. She said, "I told you, the first months and years is so hard. Now I feel they're okay and I'm helping and I feel okay just with the talk and feel better than before." (P 17). Much like P 17, feeling disconnected from family was a spectrum that could shift in intensity over time.

Participants discussed their experience navigating the feeling of disconnection with family. Being unable to fully understand the lives of family at home was one way that participants described being unsatisfied with their communication. For example, P 24 explained why she was disappointed that her mother refused to Facetime by recounting an experience she had with a friend. She said,

> Because there's an aspect of actually physically seeing the person—because I had a friend—she's from where I am, and we did our undergrad together, but she was in the University of Oregon for two years and the same thing—we were constantly texting, and I would be the one to take the initiative to set up a Skype, and I would insist every two or three weeks. I would have done it twice a week or every week, but she was just always so busy, and I'd be like, "No. We're going to—I need to see your face. I need to hear words coming out of your mouth. I cannot just keep seeing little snippets of words on a screen." It's just—you can't fully know a person's experience that way. So, being sad about not Facetiming, because we've never tried that before, but then I could just drive down the road and go visit her, so it didn't matter. But just being able to see her would help. (P 24)

Importantly, she stresses that it is not possible to gain a full context of an individual's life through any one channel. Her family prefers texting and phone calls. As such, her communication is constrained by the medium choice of her family members. In turn, this constraint left her feeling some disconnection from her family.

Feelings of disconnection and guilt were particularly noticeable when participants were forced to miss family rituals. P 36 explained the impact that being physically missing from family holidays and rituals had on his closeness to family at home. According to this participant, his absence had a compounding effect, which meant that with each holiday he was being tugged further and further from his family.

> I don't know about emotionally, but it would be nice to have more contact with some of these people, but even when you're there you don't see them that often.

> It's just you're missing out on these two or three times a year that you would get if you're in Australia. So, multiply that over 10 years and now that's 30 occasions that you missed out on, and what does that do for a relationship? More of an abstract thing more than anything. It's not something I can say I'm feeling emotionally—a deficit over it or something like that, but it is just something you start to think about. (P 36)

Essentially, P 36 is describing his struggle to maintain a shared future with his family. He is afraid that by missing too many social events, particularly large familial gatherings, his place in the family may be diminished. Though the participants are enacting a transnational family, it is participation in these major familial events that typically reminds members of past and future participation. Given that their relationships to family are dependent on long-distance communication, these events hold even more meaning for some participants.

The uncertainty of the future that often typifies the migrant experience also generated some disconnection between participants and their family. P 22, who reported being very close with her family, discussed pulling away from her family emotionally during times of difficulty. This was not in an attempt to shield her family from worry. Rather, she was struggling to adjust to her life in the United States, and communication home became too difficult. She explained,

> I didn't really talk to my parents during that time, and my therapist told me that it's quite common for people who just immigrated to break communication with the former place because in some ways, it's a phase of adjustment not to be talking, and then once you're more or less adjusted, you start talking again. She said that it's quite common. My therapist, she works a lot with the immigrant population. (P 22)

The uncertainty of migration and the difficult adjustment often results in stress for the migrant (Tsai, 2003). Though P 22 was the only participant to discuss her period of migration adjustment explicitly, several participants echoed her disconnection during difficult times. In these cases, the act of communicating was very difficult, and they reported less engagement with family. Thus, if a transactional family involves communication to enact and these bonds, times of disconnection attenuate their connection.

Additionally, feelings of disconnect overwhelmingly seemed to be associated with feelings of guilt. Nearly all participants mentioned a sense of guilt for living away from their family. Many times, this emotion manifested in interviews as the desire to be closer to family, but with the inability to do so. Again, though mediated communication facilitated connection, it is not possible to fully bridge the gap of being away. This negotiation of guilt, connection, and communication generally manifested in participants feeling close to their family but still expressing a desire for more communication. For example, P 39 expressed significant feelings of guilt for living away from family. Much of her interview expressed her struggle to live her life in Seattle while also engaging with her family in France. She said,

> So, these days, it kind of bums me out to not talk to them very frequently, but I don't really have a solution because I'm trying to cater to everything else that's going on in my life, and it's not like we're disconnected. (DI 39)

Her final statement expresses feeling not disconnected explicitly. Still, the struggle for connection was present throughout much of the interview. It was clear that she was trying to mentally weigh feeling separated from family with her enactment of transactional behaviors. She stated her desire for more communication with her family frequently. This was also balanced,

however, with her obligations and daily duties in Seattle. Several participants reported negotiating similar feelings.

Frequently, these feelings of guilt are accompanied or made worse by feelings of helplessness. A few participants mentioned the fear of failing to help family in their time of need. Most often these feelings were discussed when participants wished to engage in behaviors that provided support for a family member. For example, P 31 discussed her mother feeling sick. She said:

> I kind of feel helpless that I cannot be there for her because just yesterday—or, when did I speak to her? She said that she'd been sick, and then she was dizzy, and she was throwing up. And then, she's all alone because we don't have anybody there, so that kind of makes you feel helpless, that you cannot be there for them. (P 31)

P 31's mother lives in India with the participant's sister. Despite being given adequate care, the feeling of not being able to help was mentioned several times throughout her interview. This feeling, particularly in emergency situations, was pervasive throughout the data. Participants often felt that their physical separation from family meant that they could no longer provide in-person or tangible support. As will be discussed, these feeling of helplessness and guilt were significant enough to spur participants into developing supplemental forms of family: means other than just communication. The desire to ease the guilt felt by leaving suggests that discursive communication was not considered enough to fully enact family at a distance. The supplemental tasks participants used in addition to communication are discussed in Chapter 7.

6.2.3 *Missing Network Members*

Participants turned to host country support systems to combat the effects of physical separation. Though communication is vital for enacting family, it was often not sufficient enough to meet the needs of most participants. Many participants reported creating a local community to compensate for the lower levels of family support available when distance impeded the process. In part, this was the stated reason to adopt alternative behaviors to combating the effects of physical separation. In addition to feeling guilt and helplessness, participants also reported that separation from their family resulted in loneliness. Even when participants came with a partner or family, they were separated from their established social network. As one participant described:

> At first, obviously—the first year you're out, it's a little bit difficult. All of my family is basically in Mexico, and I'm the only one that's here. So, the first year or so is the toughest. It's like the first time you don't spend Christmas or your birthdays with your family, and it's a little bit difficult. But then as you start making friends and knowing more people and stuff, you start getting used to it and making your life here. So, that's what I've been doing. (P 37)

In fact, a few participants noted that they chose to migrate to a city where a pre-existing network of family already existed. For example, P 18 moved to Seattle because her distant cousin helped her find work. Though they were not close initially, their ties were fortified by the support they provided each other. Additionally, P 7 explained that one of the deciding criteria for his schoolwork was the presence of family nearby.

> Yeah, one of the major reasons why I chose [my college] for example was because I knew family was close by. Why I chose Seattle was I knew family was

> close by. It also puts my parents' mind at ease that if there is an emergency, that if I do need something, whether it's financial support, because it takes a while for money to come to you, or if something happens and somebody needs to fly down, then there's somebody there to help out. I had to have knee surgery in [college] because I tore my meniscus and I couldn't walk for a few months. I had cousins come down and they helped me out...Yeah, they came once a month, they helped me get groceries and things like that because I couldn't do any of that. I didn't have a car so I had to get a ride with a friend or take a cab and go get stuff, because of that I couldn't. They would come once a month and bring stock and supplies and things. It was helpful. (P 7)

Both P 18 and P 7 both reported extensive use of communicative behaviors and feeling strongly connected to family members in their country of origin. Still, both participants, along with several others, mentioned that their support needs were strained by the distance.

6.2.4 *Language Barriers*

Barriers to family communication can increase as time progresses. Lastly, participants spoke frequently about the impact of language on their familial relationships. In fact, several participants struggled with speaking the same language as their family. Most often this barrier was between the participants and their extended family. For example, P 4 explained,

> I don't really talk with my mom's family…And if I do go to my mom's village, I can't really communicate with my grandparents because we don't speak the same language. They speak Balinese, it's like a regional language. And the only one word my grandma can say is "eat". So whenever I go back to my mom's village all I do is eat. (P 4)

She discussed that this language barrier reduced the communication possible between herself and extended family. She said she would only communicate with her direct family (parents and siblings). In turn, family members that did speak the same language were tasked with passing along information about her life in the United States.

In particular, as reported by participants, the problem of language barriers seemed to be exacerbated by increased involvement with the host country. For example, P 38 has problems communicating with his parents. His parents immigrated to Slovakia from China and still prefer to speak Chinese. P 38, however, attended Slovakian schools and was never fluent in Chinese. He said,

> There's a language barrier between me and my parents, so that kind of complicates things. We cannot text because I'm illiterate in Chinese, so that's that, and my Chinese vocabulary is on the level of a 10-year-old, so there's a language barrier between me and my parents. That, combined with the time change, makes it really hard to communicate with my parents…We kind of managed, sometimes. Sometimes we speak with dictionaries on. Somehow when you combine Slovak English and Chinese, you can really get the message across, but most of the time the communication is pretty frustrating. (P 38)

Though these participants reported being able to communicate, their language barriers placed significant stress on their relationships. He is unable to communicate all thoughts or feelings, which he reported having a negative impact on his feelings of closeness to his parents. Also, because he is illiterate in Chinese, P 38 is unable to engage the tactics described above which help enact transactional family for other participants. The participant noted that the longer he

stays in the United States the better his English becomes, but at the detriment of Chinese or Slovakian.

Lastly, only six participants (P 16; P 17; P 19; P 28; P 35; P 36) reported having children. Each of them (with the exceptions of P 19 from South Africa and P 36 from Australia) reported engaging their children in cultural or linguistic schools. For example, P 16 found an immersive Swedish school that his two daughters attended each Sunday for several years. P 35 helped to create a Tibetan Sunday school which her children attend each week. She said,

> We have Sunday school. On Sundays, we have three hours of class, and my husband actually is the curriculum director. He makes the—prepares the teaching, what they're going to teach this day. So, he kind of have to arrange everything for that. Yeah, both my kids go to Sunday school, and then they learn how to read, how to write. They're not that good yet, but they're learning, and they're learning from Grandma, too, by listening to her stories…And I tell them—if they don't speak Tibetan, then they won't be able to communicate with Grandma from my side or my husband's side, and then relatives in India. I said, "They don't speak English, so you can't communicate." I say, "You had a good time because you were speaking Tibetan and you could play with the kids because you spoke Tibetan. Otherwise," I said, "you won't be able to have a good time because there will be a language barrier." And they were like, "Yeah." (P 35)

P 35 was explicit that she is afraid her children will be unable to communicate with the rest of the family. As such, she speaks Tibetan at home with the children to help them develop their skills and sends them to Sunday school to gain a more in-depth understanding of their culture. Again, the potential language barrier of her children with her family is made worse by

time spent away from the country of origin. It is for this reason that P 35 sent her eldest son to India for several months to live with her mother. This trip was essentially to "reset the clock" and provide her son with time to be embedded in the culture of origin. Primarily, the fear for each of these participants is that their children may not be able to connect fully with their family in the country of origin due to barriers in language. Additionally, the longer participants and their family stay away from the country of origin the greater these barriers seem to participants.

In sum, there were several barriers to the efficacy of transactional behaviors that enact family. Often, communication was unable to fully replicate physical presence and put an undue weight on familial interactions. Communication was also generally unable to fully bridge the distance which left participants with feelings of disconnection and guilt. In turn, many participants turned to support networks in the host country, which created even further emotional distance between themselves and family. Lastly, the longer participants stayed in country the greater the language barriers became.

6.3 SUMMARY

Participants overwhelmingly discussed the use of transactional behaviors as part of their portfolio of communicative behaviors for enacting family while physically separated. Daily communication developed a sense of co-presence and a sense of home which helped to tether participants to their family in the country of origin. Through communication of mundane topics, family members were able to feel like they occupied the same space. Scheduling times to communicate also enacted family, as it demonstrated participants' commitment to the family. Additionally, for these communicative behaviors to succeed – that is, for a family to maintain a sense of equilibrium – family members in the country of origin needed to have a realistic picture

of the participant's daily life abroad. This also helps the family move forward through life changes and events.

Despite the importance of these transactional behaviors for enacting family while being physically separated, several barriers were reported by participants. The shortcomings of long-distance interactions to truly recreate face-to-face communication, persistent feelings of disconnection, the inability to ease feelings of guilt, feelings of missing network members, and language barriers constrained enacting family through communication. Given these findings, Chapter Seven presents data that suggests that participants used the performance of tasks to supplement their familial needs.

Chapter 7. FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORS THAT ENACT FAMILY

It's kind of just a—I don't know, an act of love? I don't know—because I don't really see them very much…It's just a nice thing to do.
(P26)

I cannot give them as much attention as they would want, but I can give them more money than I probably would have been able to in Russia.
(P 20)

Whereas transactional approaches to family focus on communication and subjective feelings of connection, functional approaches emphasize the importance of providing for family members through the performing of tasks. Functional definitions of family are those that privilege the tasks that family members perform for each other (Scharp, 2019). In the context of migration, performing tasks is made exceedingly more difficult by distance. The virtual togetherness afforded by technology and the communication behaviors discussed in Chapters Five and Six can “fall short" when more tangible support is required. For example, individuals living abroad can no longer perform typical filial duties like taking care of elderly parents, helping with chores, or taking family member to the doctor.

Still, migrants do provide a significant tangible support for their families, largely through the provision of remittances, a $613 billion in financial support sent globally (World Bank, 2018). Important to this study, however, is Carling's (2014) work on remittance scripts, demonstrating that remittances can also be considered a form of communication behavior employed for a variety of relational and communicative purposes. This chapter reports how migrants in this study enact family through sending remittances and, to a lesser degree, the giving of gifts. As a complement to the technological and transactional behaviors described in Chapters Five and Six, remittances and gift-giving serve as a novel tool used by migrants to

communicate family through functional means. As with technological and transactional behaviors, these functional behaviors are a way that migrants enact family as well.

This chapter begins by presenting participants' reported motivations for sending remittances. Many participants argued that sending home money was a way to provide emotional and physical support while living away from family. In turn, these monetary transfers communicated relational messages to family members. Importantly, the transfer of money was often accompanied with both explicit and implicit communication. The reported results of these conversations are discussed. Additionally, gift giving served as a demonstration of love between participants and their family members. This was, in part, because participants had a greater access to these resources than did their families. Participants also discussed gifts as a tool to provide material support that offset familial expenses. The behavior of gift giving was used particularly when family member refused to accept remittances. Participants were forced to negotiate typical familial roles, which often dictated that children should not provide money to their parents. This made it difficult for several participants to send home money. Additionally, some participants discussed their partners being unable to support or understand sending money home. Sending of money and gifts, however, created stress for several participants.

7.1 REMITTANCES

Participants described both frustration and guilt at not being able to assist family with specific tasks at home. While living abroad, completing typical filial duties or tasks became more difficult. For example, demonstrating support by accompanying a family member to the doctor is no longer feasible. It is for this reason that transactional behaviors of communicating with family were often supplemented with other forms of interaction. Specifically, *participants sent money and gifts as an alternative to assisting family with in-person tasks at home*. Based on their

reports, sending home money and gifts was an important tool used by participants that enacted family. Whether expected or not by family, giving money and gifts were seen by these participants as a way to fulfill functional aspects of family. Though not all participants sent home money (n = 24 participants remitted), some of the remaining participants (n = 5) discussed the expectation that they someday will send home money.

7.1.1 *Motivations for Remittances*

Participants revealed that they felt both culturally-bound and personally responsible to provide financial support for family members. The cultural and personal motivations for remittances are difficult to untangle. Participants noted feeling both culturally-bound and personally responsible to provide for their family members. Although the personal and cultural are linked inextricably, participants often talked about them as distinct ideas. Understanding why participants sent home money provides important clues as to the significance of these transfers for the enacting family.

7.1.1.1 Cultural expectation to remit

Remittances play a significant role in migrants' communication and relational maintenance with family in their country of origin (Massey et al., 1993). Several participants mentioned that there was a cultural expectation that they send home money to family. P 7, who emigrated from India, discussed the expectation that he sends back income. He said,

> I don't know how to say this, it's one of those things where because your parents, in that culture, support you so much that it almost feels natural to do the same. I'd also like to do that because I know that they don't retire because they like the luxuries that they have and so to support that they want their regular income. Of course, they have assets, they've invested and things like that. I think it's also one

> way of knowing that I'm taking care of them. Like I was saying before, the family is super important in our culture so it's just something that is almost natural. I don't have to think so much about it. (P 7)

P 7, a graduate student, was unable to send home money at the time of the interview. He expressed both the desire and expectation to provide for his family through money. This participant provided a clear description of the role that remittances can play within a geographically separated familial context. The cultural expectations that surround sending money suggest that doing so functions as more than just the tangible transfer of money. Rather, there is likely an additional cultural meaning embedded in providing resources for loved ones.

Importantly, money may hold a particular cultural significance for participants. Remittances, or giving family money, may be part of a tradition. For example, P 35 explained the process of leaving her sister money when they would visit. Rather than a way to help family fill gaps in their salary, this money was a mechanism to pay her sister back for the many gifts and food that was required by their culture. She explained,

> No, not the—when we lived there, we lived there as a guest, and we don't have to pay for anything. But, I do leave money for her because I know how expensive and how much expense she has because when we go home, our culture, people will come to see you and they will bring fruits and juice and stuff, but then we're supposed to give something back. So, then I would take something, but that's not enough. My sister would serve something from India and then she would add that on top. That's an expense for her, for us coming over, so I would always try to leave money for her because I know how expensive—it's very expensive in India. (P 35)

The money being paid while visiting was a way to help P 35's sister fulfill her responsibility as dictated by the culture. Often, extended family members would visit P 35 when she stayed with her sister in India. As the host, P 35's sister was responsible for providing refreshments and meals to visitors. Given the size of their family, this responsibility added up to a significant amount of money. Thus, this participant felt responsible to help off-set some of those costs. Even in this case the money itself was not explicitly considered a "cultural expectation"; however, the motivation to give the money came from related expectations embedded within their culture.

As with several other participants, cultural expectations were felt internally, primarily. Most participants argued that it was their duty to take care of family, particularly parents. They rarely, however, cited culture as a reason to do so. In fact, when discussing remittances, "culture" was only discussed explicitly by six participants, perhaps because a cultural influence is harder for participants to recognize. Culture can, of course, play an important part in shaping the norms and expectations surrounding the desire to send or give money (Mckenzie & Menjívar, 2011).

7.1.1.2 Personal motivation to remit

Personal motivations to remit were discussed the most by participants. For example, several participants cited an internal motivation to send money home to their family. Often this was expressed as the "natural duty of family." For example, P 18 argued that her motivation to send home money is both because of her "responsibility" and because she would like to help her parents. She said,

> I think it's the responsibility because I remember that before I got into this, me saying I'm going to help my parents, I'm going to do this, I was not stressed about

it. Now every month when I am breaking down my expenses, my parents are in the line. My parents are in front of the items. (P 18)

As seen in this quote, P 18 sends money home to her family regularly as a way of meeting her familial responsibility. Like many participants, P 18 never mentions her culture as a source for this responsibility. Rather, the motivation to send money is something that stems from her personal desire to help the people she loves.

Several participants argued that their families, or at least parts of their family, wished they would not feel the personal expectation to send money. P 24 expressed the struggle to help her family afford basic necessities. She explained,

> That's another reason why I do so many scholarships because I have—well, have to—but I help out some of my family members financially, three or four of them, I guess. Have to as in, is anybody forcing me to? No. It's just because this is something I've discussed with—I don't know who. My grandma? My mom? My grandma, I guess. She's just like—she'll encourage me. It'll be like, "[Name], you got to be tough. You can't always be helping people. You have so much compassion, but you're just putting yourself in debt and under more stress because you're always so giving." If anybody asks for something, I'll just give it to them… I mean, I'm not from a high socioeconomic status, my family, so when basic essentials are needed, I can't not help, even when I'm just putting it on a credit card and paying interest myself. So, I do that—help out with expenses or—yeah. I do that. (P 24)

In this quote, P 24 explains how her grandmother tries to talk her out of providing money to the family. Despite being told to stop providing financial support to her family members, P 24

continues to send home money and gifts. She described feeling the pressure to help family financially when they do not have enough money to pay for necessities. Given her grandmother's blatant request that she stop providing this support, it seems that the locus of this pressure comes from her own feelings of duty to the family.

Duty and obligation were overwhelmingly the most discussed reason for participants to send home money. Again, this was rarely presented as mandated by culture but rather as their own personal feelings towards family. P 11, an undergraduate student, says that she will send home money eventually to pay her family back for her education. She explained,

> In fact, it is way more expensive than at the time when my siblings came here. I know how hard my dad worked for her. Especially [because], it's only my dad working. My mom doesn't work. I feel like I have an obligation to pay him back because he worked really hard for me so that I can study here. It's really difficult, especially [because] I don't have any scholarships or anything like that. He has to pay a lot. He tries to save a lot of money. I think if I'm already working I think it's a good thing to pay him back. Maybe not as much as…but at least give some. (P 11)

Like many others, P 11 believes that her family worked hard to help her throughout life. Once she graduates and has work, she plans to begin to repay her father. For very few participants was repayment an actual expectation by their family. Rather, this seems to be an internal feeling of pressure to help family that many of the participants report. P 35 echoes a similar sentiment about her mother. She said, "Now I can do something for her to make her life easier…but we try to do everything for her." This desire to help family because the family had provided support and love previously was a significant motivation for participants to send home money.

Often, the act of sending money was considered a substitute task for their ability to provide in-person care for family. Much of the personal expectation to send remittances was rooted in the feelings of helplessness described in the previous chapter. For example, P 23 is a graduate student who sent home part of his stipend each month for home improvements. Though the loss of this money to his income is quite impactful to his lifestyle, he still insisted that it was his obligation to send home money. He said,

> Yeah, I cannot live the way I want to live, and I cannot also forget home. I cannot—I know the situation in the family, and so I wouldn't turn a blind eye on them and try to live how I would want to live here. The eventual goal is to bring everyone up so that everyone can be economically independent, and so that is why I have to do that, so that everyone will be independent eventually… There's a time for everything, and I hope that in the shortest possible time we will be able to overcome that. That is kind of a consolation, but sometimes I get a bit irritated when they ask for money, money, money, but I also understand the situation at home, that there is no other alternative, or there's no place to turn to. I have to shelve that responsibility. (P 23)

For P 23, the obligation to sacrifice for his family was generated from his inability to physically help them. Unlike his brother, the participant was unable to help physically replace the roof to corrugated zinc. Instead he is providing the funds for the renovation. He argued that there was no alternative solution to their needs; his income was the only source of financial development that they were capable of accessing.

So, for several participants, the personal desire to mediate feelings of helplessness often led to sending money home as a mechanism that provided support. This was taken as a personal

decision and functioned as an alternative way to perform familial tasks. The emotional fulfillment that sending money home is capable of achieving is discussed next.

7.1.2 *Remittances as Emotional and Physical Support*

Whereas remittances provided tangible support, they were most often described as a means to ease stress and need, to enhance comfort, or provide physical care. Overwhelmingly, financial remittances were discussed as a way to provide tangible help to family for the purpose of easing stress, need, or difficulty in family members' lives. These reports are consistent with previous research into remittances, which finds that, for migrants, money is often seen as a medium for enacting care (Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012). Participants in this study ranged in how they provided this help to family. Some provided their family a copy of their credit card (n = 2) so family could purchase what they needed as they needed it. Others sent home regular amounts of money through pre-determined transfers (n = 5). Most commonly, however, participants sent home money as it was needed or requested (n = 17). Whether regular or infrequent, the sending home of money was in direct response to alleviating some challenge or need the family faced. P 17 noted the material need of her family while explaining her remittance behavior. She said,

> Because my mom, she's not thinking only about herself. She's thinking about my sister. She lives with her and she [has] a son and the son is going through school. Everybody's working, but I tell you the money is not enough. Sometimes she needs something for school for the buses or something. My mom, she's working right now and my sister, too. (P 17)

The income of P 17's mother and sister was not enough to provide a comfortable life. Thus, P 17 seeks to supplement their income with her own salary. She did so through semi-regular

remittances. Several other participants sent home money for material reasons, the most common of which was to help with medical expenses (n = 13) and is discussed below. Other reasons that participants cited for sending money was to help family invest money (n = 9), improve access to technology (n = 2), education (n = 5), accommodate travel expenses (n = 3), or to meet regular fixed needs like groceries (n = 4).

Migrants often knew how money was being spent. Though the communication surrounding remittances was not always explicit, the impact that the money had on their family was generally well-known. Even when money was sent on a regular basis, remittances were often sent with a specific purpose. For example, and as discussed briefly above, P 23 sends home money to help his mother build a more modern home. He explains,

> We just finished a building project. My village has really grown, and so even until this year, it was only my room in the house that had corrugated zinc. The rest of the rooms were thatch—like grasses. They would use grass to do the roofing. So, I was able to send money for us to rebuild the entire house except my room. We destroyed all the rooms and rebuilt them, but even though it was mud, we have roofed it with corrugated zinc so that our house is now corrugated zinc. I really sent a lot of money for that project, and I pay for my brother's fees at college…So, I do send a lot of money home, and then money to my moms, and—yeah. (P 23)

The project being funded by P 23's remittances is important to helping his family live a more comfortable life. Thus, the participant reported feeling the obligation to send money. Providing for the material needs of his parents was also the remittance strategy for P 38. He discussed helping his parents buy a house in the United States. The participant puts the rent money for the

property they bought as a family into a designated savings account that will eventually provide an additional income for his parents upon their retirement. He said,

> I wouldn't have to pay rent, and since I'm the only child, you see—we treat finances as family finances. We don't quite have a strict line between your money and my money, things like that. That's kind of weird, but we understand that because I'm the only child there's—I want to make sure that they are taken care of. Making an investment like this kind of helps that. And every cent that I save is going to their future, kind of a thing, because if one day they are not able to take care of themselves, I have to be sure that I can take care of them, and vice versa. So, it's one pool of money, but I guess they have the final say in that they will support me in any endeavor. (P 38)

As P 38 explained, he is an only child and thus expected to provide care for his parents when they retire. The money that is generated from the house they purchased together will provide that support for his parents upon their retirement. Using the money from the house is particularly important because his salary is not enough to both live off of and help his parents. P 38, like many other participants, believed providing support to his parents is his duty as an adult child. Thus, when distance is introduced to their relationships, money was reported to be discussed amongst family members as a mechanism that provided support without the participant being physically present. The money they sent home was a way that participants could help their families meet material (functional) needs.

7.1.2.1 Paying for medical expenses

The most common material support that remittances addressed were to help family pay for medical expenses. 13 participants (n = 13) sent home money to help their family afford

medical care. There were several iterations of this form of care: Some paid for a one-time event (e.g., surgery), whereas others helped their family with fixed or recurring medical issues (e.g., in-home nursing care). These remittances were interesting because they provided both material support for family experiencing difficult circumstances and replaced the familial tasks that were expected in these situations. A primary example of this can be found in the substantial amount of participants who provided money for family members in cases of medical expenses. The importance of being with family when they are sick was discussed by several participants. P 3 discussed the feelings she had when her father was hospitalized with cancer:

> So when my dad got cancer, that's when I should just go. And maybe just find a job there. That's when you actually question being far away... Especially in a country where you don't know if you're going to be able to come back. If my dad gets sick and I go, maybe I won't come back. So maybe I should just take the decision and just go with him. Leave everything and just go with him…I was able to go 15 days and then come back. I was able to be with him and help...Make sure that he was fine. And he was fine, not fine...That he was stable enough that I will be ok leaving. (P 3)

The timing of her father's illness coincided with legal restrictions on P 3's travel home to Columbia. She felt, however, that being at home with her father was important enough to risk possibly not being able to return the United States. This feeling of "being there" for family, particularly as they experience health issues, was very important to participants. Frequently, participants that were not able to be co-present with family would send home money to ease the expense of medical care and thus create a sense of one form of presence.

It is likely for this reason that so many of the participants that sent money home did so for family that were experiencing health issues. P 37 explains that the obligation of caring for family is particularly salient when death is a likely possibility. He said,

> So, my oldest brother got a—my oldest brother got a pulmonary attack. So, he went into—he went to the ER and all that stuff. That was almost three weeks in the hospital. So, I did send some money over there…I do feel obligated, like I have to because it might be something that's life or death. So, yeah. They will not—people will feel very comfortable asking for money if it's for medical reasons, and I'm okay if I'm—like, direct family, if I can help. (P 37)

Though this participant did send home money for other reasons as well, this was his first thought when asked about remittances. These money transfers were often discussed as being "justified" for similar reasons as discussed by P 37: that it was possibly "life or death." The fear of not being with family in these times of need, particularly if it could be the last, was a common theme discussed by participants. When they were not able to travel home in these cases, money was used as a tool to care for family in their absence.

Lastly, it seemed that medical expenses transcended the situation of participants. That is, no matter the participants' financial situation, they often made the case for sending remittances home. Most participants said that there was no significant hardship associated with sending money. Still, a few participants did struggle while living in the United States. Thus, sending money, even for these important situations, was difficult for them. P 41 had never sent money home until her brother became sick. She said,

> I'm actually doing it right now because my brother is not so good, and he's ill, and I just actually—I thought, 'This is interesting. I'm sending money home.' No, my

> family usually send[s] me money [laughter], because I'm always the one who's broke, even though I'm the one in the land of milk and honey. (P 41)

Interestingly, because this participant had never sent back money before, she did not have the infrastructure to help. As she had never sent money with Western Union, the global leader in money transfers, the process seemed intimidating. Instead, P 41 put the money in a greeting card and mailed it to her brother in Ireland. She later expressed that this money was intended to ease the difficulty of her brother's life as he dealt with the illness. Given the small amount, even within a non-US medical system, it is likely that this money was also embedded with meaning for their relationship. The implicit communication of sending home money is discussed in the next section.

According to participants, material support provided family with tangible support while they were physically separated. Often, this came in the form of paying for medical expenses or the immediate needs of family in the country of origin. The material nature meant that family members had something they could see, feel, touch when the participant was physically absent. This is likely a unique product of distance on enacting family.

7.1.3 *Remittances as Messages*

Remittances communicated feelings to family members. Though money was often reported to have a material purpose for family in the country of origin, there were also relational meanings attached to these actions. This is consistent with previous research that has found migrants often send home money as demonstrations of love (Singh, Cabraal, & Robertson, 2010). Sending home remittances was often considered a mechanism to *show* family, rather than just tell, that they are loved, similar to what one communicates by performing familial tasks in person.

According to participants, sending home money was seen has having several different meanings for their family relationships. First, many participants argued that sending money home was a literal way to repay their family for their support. P 18 discussed the many sacrifices her father made for their family before, saying,

> I think that when I was a child and my dad always paid for my living expenses and everything. I don't know, I think I need to pay back.…I'm far away, I'm not there. If they get sick, I can't be there. I think it's my way to say I love you and even if I'm not there I support you the way I can. (P 18)

Her father was the first of the family to migrate to the United States as a farmworker in Louisiana. She discussed the difficulty he had and the role that his money had in making his life easier. When participants discussed repayment as a reason for sending home money, it was meant in more than just a literal way. Some participants, like P 33, were in fact paying family back for loans.

Participants like P 18, however, expressed repayment in a more supportive way. This view of repayment was reported to be a demonstration of their appreciation for their family's previous support. This participant states explicitly that money is the her of showing love when she is not capable of being home. P 39 also found money to be a way that she can repay her family for helping her through the migration process. She said,

> So, I think it's because of the difficult[ies] that come with being an immigrant here and the restrictions that you have that you might need to rely on your family more than I would if I lived in France—way more than I would if I lived in France. So, because of that, I feel like there's this idea of giving back somehow, and there's probably some guilt around having left your family, and that's one

> way—I don't think money's a *good* way to show that you care, but that's *one* of the ways to show that you care (P 39)

Often discussions of repayment were in reference to the previous actions of support taken by parents. The idea of repayment was generally discussed as a reimbursement to family for the emotional, as well as material, help that they had previously provided the participant. It was this past service that suggests an obligation to care for family members remains necessary even after being geographically dispersed. Family was enacted from their ability to provide for each other. Thus, being able to show respect or deference for those previous actions through money was reported to be important to many participants. P 41 is another example of a migrant sending home money to help family for relational purposes, rather than just for the material support that money provides. She explained,

> Nobody's asked me for money. Can I just say that? I was just talking to my sisters, and they were just saying just how he [their brother] is and how he's finding it, and they'd always give him—they help him out, too, immensely. I just wanted to contribute to his well-being. I put it in a card and sent dollars…Three hundred dollars in a postcard, hoping I had the right…But I did that because I didn't want to go through the banks, and he doesn't have a bank account himself at the moment, so it was just too much trouble. I don't know. I just wanted him to open his card and think whatever it was that he might need that day [that] he didn't have, or something he was putting off. (P 41)

This participant sent home money to help both her brother, who was ill, and her sisters, who were providing support for their brother. P 41 expressed the importance of providing this support, as it contributes to his well-being and to her role in the family. Importantly, she sent

home money without being asked for the contribution. In fact, earlier she mentioned that family members had frequently sent *her* money. Again, the actual amount was negligible, when compared to hospital bills.

Ultimately, each of these relational meanings were fulfilling the perceived emotional duty that accompanies being part of a family. Money was sent as a tool to repay family and provide continued support despite living away. P 20 explained how she and her husband considered sending home money. She said,

> Maybe it's kind of a form of compensation. At least that's definitely how my husband looks at it, like 'I cannot be there for them, but I can provide all of these nice things for them because I have this fancy job in America.' I don't think it's the same thing, but I think that since I'm in this situation, then that's how it is. I cannot give them as much attention as they would want, but I can give them more money than I probably would have been able [to] in Russia. (P 20)

Together, P 20 and her husband believed that sending home money communicated their support to family members. In the absence of being physically present, this money was provided resources that could mimic their support.

As with several participants, the material support resulted in a relational meaning as well. Thus, the two concepts are somewhat dependent on each other. The combination of the material and emotional support helped migrants enact a family, reflecting the functional definition used by scholars. In particular, the money was being exchanged for the filial duty of supportive tasks. As each of the exemplar quotes demonstrates, participates used money as a way to communicate feelings for their family while they lived abroad.

7.1.4 *Communication about Remittances*

Though remittances often recreated enacting familial tasks, participants' reports of these actions was often accompanied with discussions of communication home. *Participants engaged in some explicit, but mostly implicit, communication surrounding remittances.* It is important to understand the communication that participants engaged when sending home money as it influences their context for remitting.

7.1.4.1 Explicit Requests

Given the expectation that several participants send home money to provide for family, it is no surprise that explicit requests for remittances emerged as a communicative behavior. It may be that the explicitness of these requests are what generate the feelings of providing for family that were often associated with sending money. For example, P 30 explains the way his family asks for money. He said,

> Yeah, it would be like—one of the first times, and the one time I remember pretty distinctly, is when my dad was like, "I have this business opportunity. I just really need $200 to do something or other," and so he just asked me like that. Then I sent it right away that time. When my mom asks, it usually has to do with a medical expense or some big occasion coming up, like the holidays or medical stuff, usually—for my grandparents a lot of the time. They're old, so they've had to go through multiple surgeries, so I've had to send money for that. (P 30)

In this case, the material outcome of the money was an important part of this communication. His family asked for what they needed. As was common amongst participants who engaged in explicit communication about financial support with family, it was the exchange of money for a tangible support in their country of origin that generated feelings of family. Being able to provide

support made many participants feel like they were still members of their family. That is to say, being able to provide for family was an important aspect of maintaining participation in their family.

As will be discussed in the following section, communication about remittances was not always explicit. Often participants had to "read into" communication with family to understand the need for additional money. Participants expressed an appreciation for explicit communication surrounding money. P 32 explained,

> I don't think people like receiving message of people asking for money. It's not the most exciting message, but I appreciate that it's straightforward, and it's not—they don't need to disguise what they need it for, so that's good. (P 32)

In part, P 32 is making the claim that family feeling comfortable asking for money means that they feel comfortable with each other as a whole. In general, however, explicit communication was appreciated by participants because it took the guessing out of performing support for family. They were aware of what their family needed and were able to perform their role as a family member reliably.

7.1.4.2 Implicit Requests

More common to participants was implicit communication surrounding remittances. Sending home money was something that was "understood" by participants and their family. When asked when P 38 had first discussed remittances with his family he said,

> I don't remember. I don't know. It's kind of always been a thing. I don't think that there was some kind of initial conversation, like, 'Hey, Son. We need to sit down. Hey, we plan to retire where you—' No, it's always been understood that that's going to be how it is, and I never had any objections to that. (P 38)

Several participants echoed a similar sentiment to P 38: The role of money as a tool to provide for family was something that was just a part of their experience. Given the pervasiveness of remittances to the migrant experience, it is possible that this expectation is now rooted in the culture of migration.

Without interviewing family members, it is impossible to say whether the implicit communication participants "heard" about sending money was understood correctly. Several participants, however, reported discussions with family that they interpreted as a request for support. P 40 interpreted some of his mother's comments as hints that she wants him to send money. He said,

> I did send her money sometimes, from my account there, if I can. So, I left a lot of money in my account so that I could always send it to her, sometimes. But I don't do that—So, I only do that when I call her and if she's like, "Oh, I saw this thing and I was like, 'Wow, I wish I had money to buy it.'"… we're just talking about some random stuff and she's like, "There's this thing I saw, and it was so beautiful." And I'm like, "Really? You like it?" (P 40)

In this case, the participant decides to send home money to help his mother for life pleasures rather than for subsistence living. His money is sent through a banking account he keeps in his country of origin for this purpose. His siblings give his mother a monthly stipend, but he receives her hints that she would like to buy fun items as well. He has learned to interpret these implicit messages. Other participants discussed how interpreting implicit messages was also a familial action. Being able to understand successfully what a family wanted demonstrated that participants were still a part of the family. Thus, sending home money without being asked explicitly was "proof" that the participant understood the needs of the family accurately. In

addition to providing money that would facilitate support, it was also evidence of their continued engagement with their family.

Lastly, some remittances were sent to help family avoid needing to ask for money. This tactic was used when family members were reported to be particularly averse to accepting money. Pre-emptively sending money was a tactic implemented to avoid explicit requests for money. For example, P 33 explained the decision she and her twin sister made to send home money to her parents in India. She said,

> No. So, they didn't ask. We were only thinking—because definitely, when we came here, my dad took a lot of—both of us came, not together, but back-to-back. But then he had to take a loan, and it was quite a lot amount. So, I was wondering if they have been able to repay, but she's not going to tell me, I know. They won't tell. So, I was like, "Okay, we should only just send. They should not feel that, 'Okay, it's not being repaid, and what to do?'" So, yeah, I am. (P 33)

According to P 33, she and her sister were not expected to repay the loan her parents provided for their migration to the United States. P 33 and her sister decided to pay their family preemptively to avoid putting them in an uncomfortable position of asking for money. This strategy is neither implicit nor explicit but, rather, a way to avoid communication regarding money altogether.

Participants reports of sending home remittances demonstrate the importance of sending money as a tool for the enactment of family. Participants engaged in sending money home to both provide material and relational support. The intentionality of giving/receiving money is reflected in the way that family members request, or don’t request, remittances. Participants discussed that explicitness was appreciated so that they could provide accurate and effective

support. It was through this type of communication that participants enact their task-based roles in their family. Implicit communication about remittances was more common to these participants' experiences. As such, this implicit form of communication allowed participants to provide more ephemeral support. Rather, these messages were more akin to helping family through a difficult day, because they required interpretation and more context-driven communications. The interpretation needed to provide this support was considered a way that participants enact family, because the participants needed to understand the communication style of their family member. Altogether, remittances served as an important tool for participants to engage in familial actions while still living abroad.

7.2 GIFTS

Remittances played an important role in the ability of participants to provide for family while living abroad. Sending money home, however, was not the only functional behavior that emerged from the data. Gift giving was something done by most participants as a way to enact family. As with remittances, participants discussed the expectations to provide gifts to their family and the material and relational meaning that gifts had for enacting family. For example, the thoughtfulness of bringing, or sending, a gift back home was considered to be a communicative behavior that enacts family.

7.2.1 *Gift Giving Demonstrates Feelings*

Participants believed that gift giving was a mechanism to demonstrate their feelings, particularly when family members rejected acceptance of remittances. Nearly all participants reported sending or bringing home gifts (n = 38). Moreover, participants overwhelmingly

reported gift giving as a relational tool for demonstrating sentiment, whereas remittances were more generally discussed as a desire to provide material support.

7.2.1.1 Gift Giving as an Act

Gift giving fundamentally serves to maintain and confirm social ties (Komter, 2004). This is because gifts are often used to communicate love to another individual (Cheal, 1987). When participants discussed the motivation for sending or bringing home gifts, they generally argued that the impulse came from within themselves. P 26 said, "It's kind of just a—I don't know, an act of love? I don't know—because I don't really see them very much, especially my more extended family. It's just a nice thing to do." Gift giving may be a perceived as a nice thing, culturally. But, the above quote points to the reported internal motivation that participants engage in regarding enacting their family, or participants have generated these behaviors out of their own perceptions of family, not because they were told this is what families "do." Being able to provide gifts for family was, according to participants, was a mechanism for fulfilling a supportive task. For example, P 8 explained,

> I have thought about it a lot. Because sometimes my sister tells me stop bringing so many things. I think it's, both that it makes me happy to go out and shop for them. Because it makes me think of them. This is going to fit. For Petros...my mommy is going to look nice in that. She's going [to] wear it and think of me. But I think, it's part of it, is guilt. That I have to do something for them. And I don't like the part, but unfortunately it is what it is. (P 8)

It was the act of buying gifts that helped P 8 ease the guilt of being away from her family. She reported sending about six packages a year, in addition to the presents she brings when she visits home. This was considered to "do something for them". She sends physical tokens home because

she lives away from them. This participant also reported feeling high levels of guilt for living away from her family. The desire to "be there" for their family was answered partially through sending gifts.

Gifts often replaced remittances as a mechanism for family participation especially when the family in the country of origin did not need money. Additionally, goods in the United States often have a high cultural value abroad, thus participants showed their family that they care, without wasting resources. For example, P 43 explained why he sent home a pair of *Air Jordan* sneakers for his sister instead of money:

> I mean, you have a job, you buy them for your sister. I got it for 80-something bucks. I didn't buy $600—I'm not paying $600. They were 80-some, and she loves it. She still wears it. She told me now she's growing so she wants more… They just want the things. They're good with money. They have jobs. They got pounds, man. They got more money than me. I don't have money…Man, they got more money than me. I'm here in America by myself, paying my own bills and everything. Man, they have their own money. Nah, I never send them money. Never. Ever. Ever, ever. (P 43)

As P 43 explained, even though his family had enough money to purchase the shoes in Scotland (where they immigrated to when he came to the United States), sending this gift was considered providing support for his family because the shoes were highly valued by his sister. It was the act of giving something valued (versus needed) that accomplished the relational meaning in this case.

Lastly, much like remittances, it seemed that gifts were also a mechanism for repaying family for other types of support (financial or otherwise). Several participants said that they

engaged in gift giving because it was a way to reimburse family members for their previous support. P 42 discussed bringing home gifts for her family in China. She said,

P 42: For my mom's side [of the] family, they very rarely ask me to bring things or shop for them. I just bring back chocolates, I bring back dresses for my niece, Legos for my nephews, and chocolates—just all the other stuff.

Researcher: Why are you doing that?

P 42: That's a very hard question [laughter]. They're nice to me, I guess? My whole family, they're very nice to me. I am the—out of all my mom's—I'm a lot more close to my mom's side [of the] family than my dad's side. Out of all of my mom's siblings and cousins, I am the only child that grew up in a single family. I don't feel myself as different. I don't know if they do, so they feel that they need to take care of me and my mom more, but they do. No matter financially. When I'm not there and my mom was not married, she got hit by a bike—a scooter, more specifically. So, she had a—she was fine. She didn't break a bone, but she had to go to the hospital, and I wasn't there. So, it's all depend on family, and now all of my cousins—I don't know because I don't have any [laughs]. So, yeah, they really take care of—and also, it's just family. I don't know. It's not like I make a list and then I think something special and find something special for each of them. I just bring back a bunch of things. Like, I made my mom bring back so much quinoa because my aunt and my uncle—her sister and brother—all has Type 2 Diabetes. I'm like, "Try this. So much better than white rice and tastes

almost just exactly the same. In my opinion, it tastes better than brown rice." So, it's just those kind of things that you may never seen or very hard to see in China. (P 42)

This participant brings home gifts, because her extended family takes care of her mother in her absence. These small, thoughtful presents showed appreciation for their continued support. This is due to a personal and internal desire that she provide these presents rather than a cultural or familial expectation.

Again, much like remittances, the cultural and personal motivations for gift-giving are linked inextricably. Though culture likely did play an implicit role in the decision and implications of gift giving, it was less salient to participants than the personal expectations. Relatively few participants acknowledged culture as a possible motivator for their gift giving. Instead, most participants described being internally, or personally, motivated to provide for their family, which I discuss next. What is particularly important in these excerpts is that migrants have an understanding of what gifts may mean to their family and reported being internally driven to provide this kind of support. Thus, family is both enacted by and results from sending home gifts. This constitutive loop happens because participants have believed that gifts serve as an alternative mechanism to satisfying familial tasks. In turn, that is how the gifts are accepted on behalf of the family. The following sections discuss how giving gifts enact a task-based understanding of family.

7.2.2 *Gift Giving because of Access to the Market*

Participants were asked to serve as a logistical intermediary between the market in the United States and that of the country of origin because they had access to both more and cheaper products. Several products are more widely available and cheaper to purchase in the

United States. This inequality in consumer availability often meant that participants became a resource for accessing cheaper goods. Several participants discussed being asked to bring items back to the country of origin. For example, a few participants (n = 4) were asked to bring home vitamins because of the differing quality between those available in the United States and the participants' country of origin.

Technology was also a common request for family members because of its relative cheap availability in the United States. A few student participants (n = 3) mentioned explicit requests from family members to bring home American brands. While discussing her relationship with her brother, P 4 said:

> We chat on Instagram. He tags me in posts and asks me to buy all this stuff…There's like this one vlogger. Yeah, we end up like watching every day. He posts this video every day. You know Logan Paul?…So we watch it during the summer. Then he posted that stupid suicide video, which I think is very stupid. But still like him sells merch. And there was like one time when it was like free shipping and 50% off. So, I asked my brother. Like, because he always wanted one. And he asked for socks, because he likes cool socks, like I do. And then he asked for shoes and I bought it for him. (P 4)

The ability of P 4 to bring home cheaper, or more novel items, from the United States was a significant part of her family relationship. Providing these items, which resulted in increased social capital for her brother amongst his peers, strengthened their relationship. Being able to provide something for family, in these cases access to the American goods, was significant for several participants. Also, much like the experience of P 4, these gifts speak to an in-person experiences the participants have with family. P 4 and her brother watched the videos together

when she visited, which made the ability to provide the related products more meaningful for their relationship.

Lastly, the various shopping platforms that participants had access to in the United States facilitated easier self-shopping by family members. The ability to purchase items on sites such as Amazon and have them delivered directly to the country of origin is often impossible, either because the company does not ship to the country of origin, or the cost is prohibitively expensive. Still, family members could go onto the websites of these companies, order the item, and send it to the participant's home. The participant would then bring these items with them on their next trip to the country of origin. P 34 explained that when returning to Brazil he only brought back items purchased by his family members online. He said, "I didn't buy anything. I took things that I already had, and the only thing was some people ordered stuff on Amazon and delivered them to my place."

Shopping platforms also allowed participants' families the ability to pick the exact item that would be helpful, but still have the participant give it as a gift. For example, P 33's father found a mirror for his car on Amazon and sent her the link to order and have it shipped to her place in the United States for much less than it would cost to have shipped to their home country. In these cases, the familial task is more akin to picking up items at the grocery store for another family member because it more convenient, or less expensive, for one to do so. Whatever the circumstance, being able to shop for family was considered an essential tool for enacting family. P 24 explained why she shopped for family members in the United States:

> The retail selection, in terms of stores and what's offered and what's available and the prices and everything, it's not as vast in Canada. You know, because you've been there. So, I end up purchasing a lot of retail goods. Some of them are

> specifically requested, and some of them are just, I know these are what people like. So, that kind of adds to the financial burden, which I should be more strict on myself about, but I just end up—it's part of my culture and my family culture, so I've always been giving too many gifts. It's just what I do. (P 24)

The meaning of these gifts for family moved beyond developing relational meaning through the item itself (i.e., I bought this gift because it made me think of you). Gift giving in this sense allowed participants a way to provide for their family. Their ability to give the family access to this market was often voiced as important to participants. They were not just giving gifts, but giving unique items that could only be found in the United States, that helped their family build social capital in their community.

7.2.3 *Material Support to Offset Expenses*

Gifts were used as a tool to offset familial expenses and provide material support. Several participants also discussed the use of gift giving as a way to ease the financial burden felt by family members. Most often participants bought gifts without being asked, intending to provide material support to family while the participant was living away. P 35 spent significant amounts of money to provide for her family. She explained,

> I take everything—shoes, clothes, makeups, bags, hats—everything, from head to toe—especially for my nieces and nephew. I will take two sets of … from head to toe…A lot of money [laughs]. I would say at least $10,000. Just for the presents, and then to give away money to people. (P 35)

Participants discussed bringing necessities, such as clothes or school supplies. Enacting family, in these cases, comes from the support that the gifts provide.

In particular, this was a tool that was used when family did not wish to receive remittances. Thus, it was possible to still help family members, but through more acceptable mechanisms. P 8 used gift giving as a way to provide for her family, but without making her father feel shame at receiving support from his daughter. The rejection of money by family members was common amongst participants who turned to gift giving as a way to provide material help. P 22 explained her process of gathering gifts and her rationale for how much she sent. She said,

> I'm collecting, in some ways, what I call gifts, and it helps my family with some stuff. For example, here, when they mean sales, they actually mean sale. So, at this point, I know what kind of styles they wear, what kind of cosmetics they use, what kind of, sometimes, technology, because it could be cheaper here, and—in that way, I'm just trying to offset the cost to them, because I don't think they would accept money from me right now. (P 22)

The desire to provide material support – or money that was meant to buy access to resources – was important for all participants that engaged in this type of gift giving. Primarily, P 22's gift giving provided U. S. American goods to her family. According to the participant, however, this behavior was also driven to provide material things for her family. Participants who engaged in this behavior argued that the burden felt by family members in the country of origin felt would be eased by receiving these gifts.

At times, participants increased accessibility and to offset family expenses resulted as an explicit request by family members for these items. Even P 35, who brings thousands of dollars worth of gifts back to India, gets input from both her nephew and sister. She explained,

> I will call my sister and I will ask her what would she like, because she lives [in India] and she kind of knows what everyone else brings and what they like and what they don't like. At one point, the thermos from here was very—the stainless-steel thermos was very—now, all my aunt and uncles and neighbors have that because everybody likes that…Then, my nephew who's older would ask what he wants, so I will just take whatever he wants. Now that he's older, he would want a phone or sunglasses that are name brand and stuff. So, yeah, I would just take whatever he asks, because otherwise he won't use it and it's no use. (P 35)

As with many other participants that discussed bringing home gifts for material support, these participants sought explicit input from family members. It was through the explicit requests by family that participants could ensure that the gifts were useful to the family. Thus, participants felt secure that the gift was providing the intended material support.

7.3 Barriers of Enacting Functional Family

The participants in this study have adapted several behaviors to develop a functional form of family. *Participants found that their traditional familial roles, interference by partners, and feelings of stress constrained enacting family through functional behaviors*. Often remittances and gifts were reported to be supplemental to transactional communication tactics that cultivated intimacy amongst family members. Participants noted significant barriers, specifically: the difficulty negotiating traditional understandings of familial roles and issues surrounding the inclusion of partners in their sending habits. Each of these two barriers contribute to a third overarching and more generalized barrier – stress – and will be discussed next.

7.3.1 *Negotiation of Typical Familial Roles*

Perhaps because remittances were an adaptation of familial duties, rather than the typical way that families interact, money caused some relational issues for participants. Many participants sought to provide support to family through sending money and giving gifts. Because these conceptions are somewhat outside the interactional norm for families, however, participants sometimes struggled to engage in these actions successfully. As discussed, some participants turned to gifts as a more "acceptable" way to help family than sending home money.

Several participants discussed having to negotiate feelings of shame by their parents. Some participants had parents or grandparents who did not wish to have their children, or grandchildren, provide monetary support. Due to their inability to be physically co-present, however, participants frequently had no other mechanism to provide support. Thus, remittances were often considered one of the only feasible ways to help family. For example, P 20's grandfather often needed money for medical expenses but felt uncomfortable asking his granddaughter for the funds. P 20 explained,

> You have to almost force them to take the money, especially my grandfather. He would be very desperate if he asked for it. I did notice that over the years, he has become a little better with it. He has just gotten a little used to it and he doesn't feel as bad anymore, like, as prideful about taking money away from us…I'm kind of playing a guessing game of "Oh, you might need this and this. I'm going to send you money," and then sometimes they try to say, "No, no. We don't need it," or, "Don't send money. It's expensive," stuff like that. Then I'm reassuring them that I have money to send them and I'm not starving. Then I just send the money, and sometimes they go for it, sometimes they don't…Sometimes we don't talk

> about it at all. There is generally some kind of sum we just put every month, and we just let them know, and sometimes if I see that my grandfather has not used any I'm kind of reminding him that "There is money on the card. You can use it if you need to." (P 20)

The participant noted that her family may be especially sensitive to receiving money because they had lived in the Soviet Union, where resources were once scarce. Still, as she discussed, sending money disrupted the traditional financial relationship between parents and children. Though sending home money performed the typical relational duties in which these participants were unable to engage (such as driving family to a doctor's appointment or attending a birthday party), some family had a difficult time pushing through the typical roles associated with money. The shame associated with having to accept money from a child or grandchild was a difficult experience for participants to navigate.

Several other participants reported having issues with family needing money or support but being ashamed of asking. For example, P 8 was simply not allowed to send home money because it was "heartbreaking" to her father. Instead, she sent home gifts that were more traditional for her family to accept. Maintaining the customary boundaries was considered important to these participants and often constrained their ability to provide acts of support for their family members.

Often, participants believed that gifts were considered to be a more acceptable exchange between family members. The difficulty of sending something internationally posed a significant barrier to engaging in tasks that developed a functional understanding of family, however. P 5 described his parents' reluctance to receiving money. He explained,

> Yeah, whatever you want for X amount of money. Well I think my parents react better to send[ing] something from the United States. But those have just some ridiculous like taxes on the incoming goods. That are more expensive than 20 bucks. Then it is just not worth it. At this point like if I would send them a pair of shoes they probably just better off just buying them right off in Belarus… I think the main thing I'm frustrated with is that the... how... them excepting some of my help. But that's more personal. Yeah, like for example they say well... I don't know, like every time I talk to my brother I told him it's time for you to learn how to code or whatever. He says, "well, that's great, but we don't have money to put me to school and I'm too late." And I'm like, "OK how much did it cost? You like 150 bucks. Like OK I put [it on] my card." They would never do. And I'm like, "why is he not doing this?" "Well, because it's too expensive." I'm like, "Just put it on my card." And they are like, "nah". That's kind of how it generally works. And the same with books. So, I'm like, "hey buy my brother Harry Potter series. Cause he's about the age of the first Harry Potter. So why don't he start reading it." And then they are like "OK". And then it never happens. (P 5)

This participant provided his parents with a copy of his credit card. As he explained, it was easier for them to purchase what they need in Belarus, rather than having it sent from the United States. Still, his parents did not use the card often, even for what he considers necessities. Instead, he must find ways of providing support that still fall within the traditionally acceptable interactions between son and parents. In order to provide support to his family, P 5 and many other participants explained that they must stay within the typical interactions expected between a parent and child.

7.3.2 *Role of Partnership*

Though not every participant discussed their partner's involvement in the process of remittances or gift giving, several participants did mention that the opinions held by their partners often led to difficulty completing these actions. The supportiveness of partners seemed to have a significant impact on ease of these transactions. Both P 22 and P 35 expressed having their partner's full support. In turn, this made their experience of engaging in actions of support for their family back home more enjoyable for themselves. Several participants also noted a negative impact their significant other had on gift giving or remittances to their families back home.

Primarily, partners were discussed as being unsupportive in the actions needed to create a functional understanding of family in the country of origin. In these cases, participants described their partners as generally disagreeing with the amount or extent being sent home to family. For example, P 30 explained his fiancé's desire for him to end remittances to family in Bulgaria. He said,

> She's always pushing me to make sure my sister can be more independent. She keeps asking, "Well, okay, but one day she's going to have to make her own money, so how long are you going to keep paying for her?" So, it has come up. Yeah. I get very angry…Yeah, because supporting my sister is a big deal for me, and so it comes first, and I think that's why I get upset when she raises it. And she doesn't do it because we're short on cash. That's not the problem, which aggravates me even further. Well, also, she comes from—like you said, a very community-based family, so I'm assuming she may be…You'd think she'd be quite comfortable with the idea because they do help each other a lot in her

family, both her parents sending her money, her sending money back to her family. They actually do that quite a lot on her side. (P 30)

In this case there is an attitudinal misalignment between the participant and his fiancé. As he explained, the money was not the stated reason for wanting to cease the remittances. Rather, his fiancée asserted that she like his sister to be financially independent and is afraid of a lifetime of providing support.

Partners also were described as complicating financial interactions by their desire to be a part of the process. P 21 navigated his wife's desire to be a part of the decision by keeping his remittances secret. He explained,

> So, it's been a testy subject, actually. She wants to know every single thing, and I'm like, that's kind of hard to do. Every single thing is too much information. We've talked about it for a while. For now, no. Sometimes she knows, sometimes she doesn't need to…I just feel some are on a need-to-know basis. I am supposed to share every single thing, but I just feel like she doesn't need to know this one. (P 21)

Though he expects that his wife will also want to send money to her family, they still often argue about the details of these transmissions. According to P 21, these transfers are a private act of family, and his wife had no reason to be involved. It was desire to be a part of the process, which was considered to be an intrusion into family affairs, which caused difficulty, and likely stress, for the participant.

Lastly, according to participants, much of the negative relationship by partners towards remittances or giving gifts was created from a lack of understanding. In these cases, remittances or gift giving was not part of the typical pattern between the partner and his/her own family and

thus difficult for the partner to understand. P 18 explained how her boyfriend related to her sending money home. She said,

> At the beginning he knew, he kind of questioned why. But, he met my parents. He was living in Mexico sometime. Not with me, not with my parents, in a different city. I think since that experience a lot of things changed. Now I feel like it's okay, if you can afford it. (P 18)

Though P 18 informed her partner early in their relationship that sending money was a part of her regular budget, it was only after having his own experience in Mexico that her boyfriend saw their value. This suggests that, even when there is no explicitly negative understanding of remittances, the lack of understanding surrounding their importance to enacting family may cause some small schisms in the relationship between migrants and their partners.

7.3.3 *Stress*

Most participants discussed engaging in gift giving with pride, particularly for being able to support family. There were frequently other comments that presented feelings of stress due to their persistent nature, or, rather, the idea that gifts must be sent or brought back home as long as the participant is living abroad. Though extreme, P 22 explained her recurring nightmare of leaving all of her gifts at home in the U.S. when she visited family in Russia. Likely, the stress is born from the significant relational meaning that money and gifts help her build with her family in the country of origin. These actions were discussed as stressful primarily because the participant had to "guess" at her family's expectations. Despite regular communication with family, buying gifts was still an act of guessing what each member may like or need. For example, P 42 explained shopping for the vitamins her grandmother. She said,

> I bring a lot of calcium supplements and vitamin D supplements. I know my grandma on my father's side needs calcium and vitamin D, and I don't know why my dad insists that the stuff you get in America is better. I don't know if he has the inside scoop because he's a doctor, or whatever that is. But I bring those. I go to Costco and get three of those giant, 1,000-tablet ones, or 500-tablet ones. And I have to calculate—'Is that enough for two years? Enough for three years?' (P 42)

Though she had instructions on the type of supplement to buy, she had to ensure there were enough to last until her following visit. This meant that the participant needed to plan for the future far beyond what she could predict immediately. Gifts like this also took quite a bit of space to be transmitted back to family, both of which caused stress for P 42.

Several participants noted that the expectation, or needs of their family, to remit increased the longer they stayed in the United States. Again, participants often enjoyed providing support for family. The idea of continuing these acts into the distant future, however, caused many participants stress. As P 32 stated explicitly, this expectation to provide for his family was part of a filial duty until his parents pass away. Thus, remittances were presented as a non-negotiable act of family and became a part of their budget for the foreseeable future.

Participants discussed several behaviors used to negotiate the stress of sending money or purchasing gifts. One effective strategy discussed by some participants was having their partner purchase gifts for family members. This was only discussed by male participants (n = 3) who asked their wives to conduct much of the gift buying and communication around gift giving. Participants also reported collecting items throughout the year to alleviate the cost immediately surrounding the visit home.

7.4 SUMMARY

Remittances can serve as powerful tools that enact family. Sending home money was often culturally expected by participants. Participants also discussed the personal motivation to provide for family. Both motivations, though, were mentioned because sending home money was reported to be a way that participants could fulfill their filial duty to family when physically separated. Money was reported to provide material support, particularly in the form of medical expenses. Remittances were also used as a way to produce relational intimacy with family, through the demonstration of support. The communication surrounding remittances was both explicit and implicit.

Gift giving was also a tool used by participants that enacts family while physically separated. Through explicit and implicit requests, participants were able to demonstrate their participation in family through giving gifts that helped or were relevant to family. In part, participants served as a connection to a larger market of goods. The gifts also occasionally offset family costs.

There were several barriers to enacting family through functional behaviors, as well. Importantly, several family members held fast to traditional parent-child roles and refused to take remittances. Thus, participants were forced to find alternative ways to provide for family while abiding by stereotypical family roles. Partners also were discussed as inhibiting sending money. Lastly, there was significant stress involved in sending home money and gifts.

Chapter 8. THE COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS OF MIGRANT FAMILIES

When we lived there, we used to go over for dinner once a week, and so this has been—I guess we've got a pretty close family unit, and so it wasn't too difficult to make that leap almost. It's sort of similar to what that was only now it's over Skype rather than over the dinner table once a week.
(P 36)

Fundamentally, this dissertation is a study about the challenge of distance for migrant families. Distance is both a primary condition and a constraint that impacts the ways in which migrant families communicate. Physical separation from family is a defining characteristic of the migrant family life that, in turn, generates three other influential characteristics. First, the need/desire to manage and navigate family across distance means that migrant families must rely on technology to communicate with family. Second, it also means that they are dependent on discourse with family, as alternative communicative behaviors (e.g., giving a hug to make a family member feel better) are often unavailable. Third, distance between family members gives rise to significant actions such as the sending of remittances as a primary means of familial support.

To investigate the migrant experience in more depth, this study sought to answer the following research questions: *How do migrants discuss experiencing separation from their families? And what are the communication behaviors migrants report that enact family?* Data analyses discussed in Chapters Four through Seven illustrate that the communication behaviors in which migrants engaged – behaviors such as the selection and use of different technologies, the frequency and content of interaction, the use of images, and the giving remittances and gifts – can be thought of as behaviors to maintain an active presence in participants' families.

This chapter begins by describing the ways in which this study builds on existing research relevant to migrant family communication. Then, the communication behaviors reported by participants are discussed, and the central aspects of migrant family communication are suggested. Ultimately, this chapter summarizes how, in the face of the struggles and challenges posed by distance, migrants report employing a complex combination of behaviors that enacts family.

8.1 BUILDING AN UNDERSTANDING OF MIGRANT FAMILY COMMUNICATION

This study sits at the intersection of three areas of scholarly research: ICT-based co-presence, family communication, and the migrant experience, notably the remittance literature. The richness of the stories provided by the participants offers the opportunity to reflect on the considerable range of migrant experiences and their implications for theory.

8.1.1 *ICT-based co-presence*

As Wilding (2006) suggested, the availability of communication technology has changed, not just the mode of communication, but also the quantity and content of those interactions. ICTs have changed the migrant experience fundamentally (Vertovec, 2001). Though the foundations of this study are rooted in several fields, the research that is explored most directly is that of migrant family communication, in particular, the use of ICTs to develop a sense of co-presence (Baldassar et al., 2016). This is because technology is a vital tool that helps migrants enact family while separated by distances. ICTs allow family members to engage in relatively inexpensive communication no matter their geographic location. Consistent with the literature on migrant use of ICTs (Gonzalez & Katz, 2016), participants reported that a key motivation for adopting digital ICTs was the desire to communicate with family in the country of origin.

In turn, the decision to use a specific ICT was based on the affordances that it offered. For example, richer media, or media that allow for more cues, such as the ability to see facial expressions or hear voice, enabled increases in contextual understanding (Baym, 2015). Most commonly, participants reported that the use of video-based platforms in response to the emotional desire to see family members. Family members could see their home and experience their lives to some degree. Such synchronous communication was often costly for participants, in terms of stress and time, however. Alternatively, the asynchronicity afforded by text messaging was often used as a way to communicate with family without concern for time zones or the schedules of daily life. The reports by participants in this study reveal further detail about how migrants choose technology that best met their personal and relational needs.

Additionally, the ability to communicate with family in the country of origin means that migrants must often negotiate a complicated landscape of feelings. As Baldassar (2008) suggests, feelings of missing and longing are common features of the migrant experience. Indeed, despite being in near constant contact with family members, the sense of missing family was often discussed by the participants. This study delved into the affective terrain by finding that the physical distance between participants and their family in the country of origin manifested in a remarkable shared set of feelings of displacement, guilt, loneliness, and even fear, with little regard to the different circumstances surrounding each participant's migration story. These feelings appeared frequently throughout participant discussions and were a common reported motivation for increased use of communicative behaviors.

Participants often paired the discussion of these complicated feelings with the communication behaviors that managed them. For example, P 8 experienced strong feelings of guilt for living away from her family in Greece. She sent home gifts as a tool to negotiate that

feeling. By providing items like school supplies or trendy clothing she sought to alleviate some of the guilty feelings she had for not living with family in her country of origin. This was a type of communication behavior wielded as a tool to negotiate the feelings that accompany migration.

In particular, the desire to mitigate the negative feelings associated with migration encouraged participants to use ICTs to generate feelings of co-presence. This study builds on ICT-based co-presence literature by revealing more about what the idea of "co-presence" means to migrants. Feeling co-present is more than standing in the same room. Rather, participants suggest that "being there" for family is a complex set of communicative (and other) behaviors. No single behavior discussed by participants that enact family generated feelings of co-presence. Rather, it was the combination of recreating the routines of daily life, providing both emotional and material support, engaging in explicit dialogue with family, sharing nonverbal emotive cues, and providing environmental context that helped to foster a sense of togetherness. These communication behaviors were used in various degrees, intentionally or unintentionally, which developed a sense of co-presence for participants.

8.1.2 *Family Communication*

The scholarly definitions of family – structural, transactional, and functional – contributed a useful approach for the analysis of the interview data. Particularly for the presentation of results, transactional and functional approaches to understanding family provide a useful way to cluster types of behaviors. This study confirms that the primary value of those distinctions may be as a scholarly tool for dissecting complex processes. In this study, participants reported using a combination of all those perspectives and communication behaviors tied to them that enacted family. No participant reported adhering to only one form of family (structural, transactional, or functional). Rather, enacting family was built through

communicative behaviors that tapped into each of these perspectives. Participants often relied on structural – law, blood, or proximity – as an essential foundation for who was considered family. They also, however, described various forms of interaction which helped to create and maintain a *feeling* of their family (transactional). Additionally, though distance constrained the ability to perform familial tasks, participants found alternative ways to engage in this type of functional role, namely remittances and gift giving. It was through a combination of each of these approaches to understanding family that participants felt that they were enacting family.

8.1.2.1 Discourse Dependency

The scholarly literature in the field of family communication also provides the useful concept of discourse dependency. When family relationships do not conform to dominant or normative cultural expectations, individuals often use communication that enact the legitimacy of their relationship (Galvin, 2006). Discourse dependency is when family identity, in part, depends on conversations about familial connections with outsiders. As discussed in Chapter Two, the discourse dependency perspective argues that certain families must negotiate their internal and external boundaries. Galvin predicted that families who are physically separated will need rely more heavily on discourse to enact their family.

This study contributes to the literature on discourse dependency by extending its application to migrant families as a distinct type of family. The physical separation between migrants and their families essentially requires that these families become discourse dependent. The case of migrant families, however, is somewhat different in that needing to identify as a family is not as critical as needing to maintain an existing (internally and externally coherent) family identity. The internal management strategy that resonated most with the participants in this study is Galvin's (2006) notion of ritualizing (e.g., repeating behaviors and events). Rituals

included participating in regular or scheduled communication with family or visiting home. Creating a new ritual, such as regular communication, was a demonstrative act of family. It was also their continued participation in these new rituals that helped maintain their place in the family after they migrated. For example, P 36 equated weekly Skype calls to having a weekly meal with his family living in Australia. More research needs to be done to better understand how the development of new rituals may impact migrants' enacting of family while physically separated. It seemed that the creation and participation in new rituals offered participants an opportunity that enacts family membership when they would otherwise be absent.

The results of this study help to show that different families engage in different combinations of communication behaviors. The lack of discussion of boundary management presented by participants suggests that participants do not see their family as counter-normative. Though not the explicit intent of this study, the findings of this study do not support Galvin's (2006) belief that violating the norm of proximity may result in a more discourse dependent family. It seems that the past experience of being a normative, or co-resident family, persists even after migration. Rather, individuals suggested that they considered themselves to be a normative family in a non-normative context. Participants did not express the need to defend or label their family, for example, because family members did, in fact, conform to the expectations of family.

Much of the discussion surrounding family was about the recreation of typical communication habits. Thus, rather than changing their self-perception of the family form to fit the new situation, participants sought to mimic the communication behavior that occurred when they were a co-resident family. It is possible that this recreation of the norm is a way to navigate their new situation. Rather than becoming reliant on discourse for boundary management, the

participants used communicative behaviors that enact a family that did not need to be legitimized to outsiders. Given this unexpected finding, more research is needed to better understand the boundary management strategies of migrant families and their negotiation of family while being physically separated.

8.1.3 *Remittances*

Much of the scholarly literature on the migrant experience focuses on migrants sending remittances. This is because this act serves a valuable developmental role for both migrant families and their countries of origin by providing an important tool to help lift families out of poverty and meet daily expenses (Koc & Onan, 2004). Existing research confirms that this money has the ability to make fundamental changes at both micro and macro level (Ratha, 2006). Remittances as a behavior to enact family also supports the idea that "context of exit" matters (Portes & Böröcz, 1989): Why and how migrants leave their country has an impact on decision to send home money. Most participants in this study left on good terms with family members and thus sought to provide support to their family while living abroad. When trying to understand the implications of remittances, it is important to look at multiple factors, not just the dollar amount. The results of this study elaborate on this investigation into circumstance by looking more closely at remittances in the context of family interactions.

Consistent with the literature on motivation to send remittances, there was no single reason for the decision to send home money (Sana & Massey, 2005). Despite there being a variety of reasons to remit, these data suggest that remittances play an important role in enacting family. Money is often considered a tool to provide care and support to family, when physical presence is not possible (Singh et al., 2012). Participants often sent home money because they transformed this action into a familial "task" they could perform in the absence of being able to

engage in other types of family tasks. Thus, the money was reported to have been a mechanism to fulfill obligations or provide functional support typically expected of a family member. But participants also reported using remittances as a tool to feel present as a family member. Sending money was often earmarked for specific finances, such as medical expenses, participants often expressed the relational development that was co-constructed by being able to provide support for family. The value of this study is the ability to investigate the feelings associated with this money.

Importantly, this study builds on Carling's (2014) idea of remittance scripts. This study found that the material behaviors of remittance and gift giving may function as a form of communication behavior. The framework Carling suggested argues that remittances are fundamentally a combination of relational and material interactions. Carling's scripts are a mechanism to understand the complicated nature of enacting family while physically separated. Thus, sending home money may fundamentally be a communicative statement. Scripts provide a way to verbalize the implicit meaning in these actions. Instead of considering the transfer of money to be only a matter of economics, remittances reflect a way in which participants communicated their feelings and commitment to their family. Participants overwhelmingly echoed this idea in their discussion of remittances. Through providing money and gifts to family in the country of origin, participants reported feeling that they were able to materially and emotionally support family members — and feel good about their own role in the family.

This section summarized the ways in which this study builds on existing literature relevant to migrant family communication. As suggested by common perceptions of family (Baxter et al., 2009), presence is often understood as the foundation of familial relationships, and this study offers a deeper understanding of what family presence means, or how it can be created

differently, in the migrant experience. This study also confirmed how ICTs have facilitated a more pronounced ability to maintain social relationships despite physical separation. Though the distinctions between definitions of family served as a useful tool for parsing data, this study revealed that participants understood their own family as a compilation of these understandings. Also, because participants often thought of their family as normative, they rarely implemented the behaviors associated with discourse dependency, even though they are somewhat dependent on discourse that enacts family. Finally, the condition of distance necessitates unique ways of communicating with family. Remittances were shown to be primarily a communicative behavior that was used to demonstrate devotion to family members.

8.2 Enacting Family: The case of migrants in the Pacific Northwest

Being "here and there" has traditionally been considered a definitional aspect of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2001). Recent research has thrown this idea of into question, and this dissertation likewise problematizes this assumption. In spite of the technological ability to engage in behaviors that enact family, participants still struggled with the capacity to be a part of both communities. Being a contemporary migrant is now perhaps more about the *struggle* to be a part of both places rather than the ability to do so. In an attempt to retain membership in their family, participants in this study described using *communication behaviors that enact family across distance through a unique combination of technological, transactional and functional behaviors*. Accordingly, the results of these 43 in-depth interviews were presented in distinct chapters, each focused on communication behaviors categorized respectively as technological, transactional, and functional. At this final stage of the analysis, it important to merge these clusters of communicative behaviors and summarize what enacting family looked like for these participants. That is, how do the communication behaviors described by participants combine so

that migrants can enact family while physically separated? The stories of migration and family expressed in this study reveal three overarching approaches that enact family.

8.2.1 *Enacting Family through Routine Interaction*

The use of communication behaviors to recreate everyday, or routine, experiences with family was a prominent behavior. Consistent with Nedelcu and Wyss' (2016) understanding of ordinary co-presence, participants expressed creating routine communication with family through mediated communication. It was through developing daily communication that participants were able to feel the "everydayness" that mimics the actions of family members who share the same space. Participants often reported that through a discussion of mundane topics such peripheral awareness of family members was created. That is to say, by knowing more about the routine, perhaps boring, parts of their family members' daily lives, participants felt like they were in the inner circle. This speaks to the idea that co-presence is more than just "keeping in touch" (Baldassar, 2016). Instead, a sense of intimacy was generated between participants and their family by receiving such mundane information and the emotional attachments that such information carried.

As Duck and colleagues (1991) suggest, routine and mundane communication help to develop intimacy in relationships. For example, P 3 was text messaging with her mother in Columbia as she walked to our interview. Thus, her mother became privy to not just the daily chit-chat, but also about this event she was doing. Being aware of daily events and mundane information is reminiscent of co-resident families. Thus, through recreating the behaviors that facilitate sharing such information participants were generating feelings of co-presence with family. Mundane interaction has been demonstrated in previous research to help physically separated families maintain relationships (Rodriguez, 2014).

Additionally, co-presence was generated through recreating interactions that were typical for the family prior to migration. As P 36 suggests, Skype has become the new dinner table. This statement indicates that talking to family via Skype elicited the same feelings as sitting around the dinner table co-presently. For many participants, rather than sharing life updates over a weekly meal, they recreated a space where those important, though mundane, relational interactions could happen. In turn, it is likely that recreating normalcy through a virtual space helped participants feel like they were occupying the same space as their family (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). Through behaviors like daily communication, scheduled conversation times, or creating a polymedia environment, participants transformed the way that their family could feel like they were together. It was through stitching each of these routine-based behaviors together that participants felt like they were less absent from their family. Again, this helped participants feel like they were home because they were recreating the social interactions that they were already familiar with. Scholarship on co-presence suggests that feeling less absent from family may be similar to feeling co-present (Baldassar et al., 2016).

The use of routinely scheduled communication to facilitate interaction was common to participants' discussion of communication with family. These premeditated interactions were particularly important to communication home because scheduling reduced the feelings of stress amongst participants. The chaotic nature of juggling time zones, access to technology, and daily schedules often made synchronous conversations difficult. Thus, having a regular time to call or video home allowed for this form of enacting of family. Essentially, by reducing the stress associated with communication to family, participants were generally able to do it more often and with greater pleasure. Rather than being just something to get over (as was reported by a few participants), scheduled communication was a way to act as part of the family. The reduction of

barriers to communication through essentiality of participating in family could have developed a sense of co-presence for participants. By making the process more seamless, other behaviors could also be used which allow for participants to feel like there were with family members.

These behaviors, taken by participants that promoted family routines, often leveraged the affordances of technology to increase quantity of communication. The ability to communicate more frequently also meant that there was less pressure on those conversations. Importantly, this type of interacting mimicked the mundane discussions of life that take place when individuals are physically co-present.

8.2.2 *Enacting Family through Cues and Context*

The sharing of mundane information with family members also allowed access to each person's daily context. For example, when living in the same house, individuals are more likely to know what someone had for breakfast or his/her schedule for the week. Sharing this routine information may seem less important when the availability of family interaction is limited. Sharing information through cues and context appeared to recreate the feeling of physical co-presence.

The emergence of new technologies also afforded the ability for participants to perceive a greater amount of cues from a given interaction. This is consistent with some previous scholarship which suggests that it is possible to understand feelings through the process of interpreting nonverbal communication (Ekman, 1993; Manusov & Keeley, 2015). Presence, then, was generated through reading and reacting to the emotional state of family members. Historically, sending letters (as was the primary means of communication in the 1900s) was an act capable of maintaining a sense of family, however it did not provide enough emotive or relational information to provide the support often required by family members (Baldassar et al.,

2016). Instead, the capabilities of ICTs have allowed participants to feel present by giving them access to emotional and affective information, in particular through accessing nonverbal cues (Baldassar, 2015). It is through this information that often allowed for the possibility of *feeling* like a family. Given this, participants sought interactions with family that would provide an awareness of emotion. In turn, this awareness contributed to feeling co-present. As P 40 argues, he can hear when his mother is upset. The cues in her voice give him additional information that may be lacking through other modes of communication. Still, by accessing these cues, he is able to respond in a way that makes him feel as if they were together.

Importantly, the behaviors of daily and scheduled communication behaviors, particularly accompanied with sending photos, also helped provide participants and their family a shared image of life abroad for their family. Communicative interactions were used to develop, both by participants and family, an understanding of the context of life in the United States. An understanding of the context of life abroad was important to making other forms of communication easier. Being able to close their eyes and picture the life of their family member meant that conversations could be more meaningful because less scene-building needed to take place. For example, if family members had never driven on U. S. American roads during rush hour, they could not fully understand the frustration caused by traffic. Participants engaged in explaining everyday aspects of their life, so that family would feel like they had a better understanding of life in the United States.

Additionally, sharing this information was reduced the need to explain things in the future. For example, explaining the highway system in the United States could mean that family members understood traffic frustrations when they happened in the future. In turn, this understanding of life abroad was made the physical separation feel less acute since the

participant and their family member were sharing the same mental image. As discussed in Chapter Six, these communicative behaviors were reported to remove some of the uncertainty of their lives abroad, thus making co-presence more possible. Examples of this were participants engaging in mediated introduction of their significant other to their parents or P 8 explaining her excitement for her mother's impending visit because that is when her mother will finally understand what it is like work in a lab. Pictures were also an important part of developing this context, because they were how participants sent literal depictions of life abroad. Family members also sent pictures of home to help participants feel like they were a part of the changes happening in the country of origin. Again, this provided an actual image that helped both sides envision the life of their family. This in turn allowed participants and their family members to feel like they were together.

8.2.3 *Enacting Family through Support*

The results of this study also suggest a unique way that migrants enact family through providing support. Most notably, the value of remittances and gifts to the creation of co-presence was in their ability to provide something that could be seen, felt, or touched when the family member was not physically present to be those things. Thus, participants' presence was made material by providing a stand-in that is literally material. After all, as Madianou and Miller (2012) argue, behaviors that engage co-presence "can make the absent other 'tangible'" (p. 144).

Importantly, co-presence with family was, in part, because the material support was imbued with relational meaning. The value of the remittances and gifts were not necessarily in their dollar amount, but rather in their ability to facilitate information about the relationship. Gifts, in particular, are often meant to demonstrate love (Komter, 2004): The action of sending home money or gifts communicated something about the participants' feelings of dedication for

those family members. For example, P 43 sending his sister a pair of American-made Nike Air Jordan's was a symbolic action of family. Thus, in addition to providing material support, they were a substitute for the relational meaning that participants were unable to provide while living away. Essentially, these actions became material proof for the support that participants wished to provide. In particular, remittances were discussed as a way to "be there" for family when physical co-presence was not possible.

These results support Mckay's (2007) argument that migrants use money as a communicative tool to show love for family members. Essentially, sending home money demonstrated participants' desire to provide support to family members. Providing money or gifts was a way to make manifest the emotions that often drive family members to care for one another. P 31 explained that she felt helpless when her mother, living in India, got sick. She was unable to perform the typical duties of a daughter: making meals, driving her to the doctor, or ensuring that medications were taken. She was, however, able to pay for someone else to come check on her mother. Thus, though P 31 was unable to be physically present to perform these familial duties, she intentionally supported her mother through providing the money to hire someone. In turn, it seems that being able to provide tangible support through remittances allowed P 31 like she could be a part of her mother's recovery. Providing support served as a proxy to help family members, which is what generated feelings of presence between distant family members.

8.2.4 *Barriers of Enacting Family*

SA virtual presence was, however, reported to never fully replace the feelings of family constructed by being physically co-present. No participant could entirely feel present with family members while living abroad. This is because distance from family still poses several barriers to

the feelings of co-presence. In fact, the end goal of feeling both 'here and there' may never truly be possible for migrants. There will always be issues of time difference, communicative preferences, or differing contexts that will impede the efficacy of communication behaviors. Importantly, even with the use of ICTs to maintain ties, feelings of disconnection persisted. Participants argued that it was difficult to feel fully part of a family which they could not be physically co-present. In turn, participants often reported missing their support network. In these cases, they turned to local support to help them through difficult times. It is possible that the lack of haptic communication (i.e., touch) weakened the efficacy of distant support networks. Digital literacy and language barriers between participants and family members was also occasionally reported as an obstacle of enacting family. In particular, the longer participants were in the country of origin, the greater the impact of language impeding interaction with family. After all, when you are unable to speak with family members, it is not possible to engage the behaviors that lead to feelings of co-presence.

Additionally, feelings of stress represented a common barrier to implementing behaviors. That is to say, finding the right balance of communication behaviors was often difficult for participants. At times, family members were dissatisfied with the frequency or content of communication. In turn, participants often felt guilty about their inability to meet the needs of their family. In stressful situations, participants often felt further disconnected from family. These feelings made co-presence difficult. Participants often felt stress as they sought to negotiate stereotypical relationships. This was particularly true when family refused to accept remittances because the action deviated from the relational norms. Depending on the family or culture, it was considered unacceptable for parents to accept money from their children. Thus,

some participants were unable to send home money. In these cases, participants sought to engage behaviors that could develop co-presence, but were unable to do so.

Despite these barriers, when taken together, the communication behaviors revealed in this study more often than not helped participants enact a sense of family through feeling like they were present with that family. Ultimately, this study provides support for Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla, and Wilding's (2016) argument that distance does not dictate family relationships inherently, only the processes through which they are maintained. Through the use of ICTs to allow for routine interactions, to provide cues and context, and to send support, migrants in this study were capable, and mostly confident, in enacting family by feeling present in their lives.

8.3 Limitations of the Study

The qualitative nature of this study allowed an exploration of the in-depth process that migrants engage that enact family while physically separated, an understudied area of family communication research. It is not possible, however, to make claims about how this experience may be generalized to other types of family or separations. Though the methods and decisions made to complete this study were done with intention, no study is without its limitations.

In particular, the homogeneity of the participants is a significant limitation of the study. My choice to use a snowball sampling as a recruitment method, rather than a random sample, imposes certain limitations on the data presented in this dissertation. All data were collected within the city of Seattle, WA with individuals living in the region. Thus, the findings outlined in this dissertation are based on the experiences, beliefs, and reflections of a group of relatively elite migrants who speak English. The cost of emigrating is often unreasonable for individuals in lower socio-economic class. Thus, by virtue of their ability to migrate, the participants in this study were generally from relatively wealthy backgrounds. The snowball sampling recruitment

method allowed me to build rapport with my participants. In turn, this allowed access to participants that might not otherwise have been possible to interview. This also suggests that the data collected for this study represent a network of individuals who are connected with each other and are likely to share some similar experiences. Though individuals from geographically disparate regions were interviewed, their decision to immigrant to Seattle may mean that they share common experiences.

By focusing on the migrant experience, rather than the particularities of a single culture, this study gained the ability to explore the broad phenomenon of enacting family while physically separated. Though the purpose of this study was to speak to the whole migrant experience, the cross-cultural nature of the participants may conflate some findings. Whereas the distinction between cultures are not analyzed explicitly in this dissertation, understanding their presence is important to providing an understanding of the data. Importantly, data was specifically not collected regarding legal status in the country. This was a specific decision to protect participants. It is possible that the experiences of undocumented migrants, however, may be a factor to be considered when exploring the role of communication behaviors in enacting family. For example, participants who are unable to visit family for legal reasons may adopt alternative communicative behaviors.

Finally, participants self-reported their communication, remittance, and gift giving behaviors. The nature of self-report data is, of course, a limitation. For example, asking participants to report on behaviors that are considered to be familial duties in their culture might have influenced them to respond in ways that protect their face. Participants may have overestimated the amount of remittances or gifts they have provided for family. In fact, participants often said statements like “that may be horrible” or “I should” when discussing their

feelings on remittances. They often perceived their lack of remittances or gift giving as failure to care for family. Given this attitude towards these actions, it is possible that participants inflated the report of these behaviors. This limitation, along with those mentioned above, should be addressed in future studies. In the following section suggestions for future research are offered.

8.4 Future Research

This study provided a foundation for understanding the role of communicative behaviors for migrants as they enact family while geographically separated family. There are several possibilities to build on the findings of this study and to address its limitations. As discussed, there are many opportunities to address the homogeneity of the sample in this research. Future research can and should investigate whether my findings are relevant to all types of migration experiences. For instance, what might be different about migrant family communication under conditions of forced migration? Additionally, it is possible that the implications of this study may extend to other forms of geographically separated family. It is likely that themes of technological, transactional, and functional family behaviors that emerged from this data occur within other physically separated families. By addressing a broad spectrum of contexts and experiences, future research may fully understand the role of distance, and subsequently communicative behaviors, on creating family.

Additionally, much more research is needed to understand the symbolic meaning that communicative behaviors engender through the transmission of remittances. Scholarship can and should investigate the specific communications that surround sending home money and gifts. By gaining a better understanding of the processes used to create meaning of these actions, it is possible to further a more comprehensive understanding of enacting family that is informed by these actions. Understanding the ways that individuals interpret communicative actions can

inform many more areas of human interaction. The communication surrounding these tasks will inform their intent, which in turn may provide a more nuanced clue to their impact for enacting family.

Lastly, though relatively few participants discussed implementing Galvin's (2006) the boundary management behaviors, it is still possible that there are alternative behaviors for negotiating family identity with members are not co-present. Future researchers might want to investigate these behaviors to develop a more complete picture of how individuals navigate the condition of being discourse dependent. In particular, the data from this project suggest that the formation of family informs the desire to manage boundaries. By investigating the behaviors needed by family formation type, a more nuanced understanding of discourse dependency could be provided. It is possible that the families formed through adhesion (joining of unlike entities) rather than cohesion (joining of like entities) require different behaviors to feel like family (Galvin, 2006). Likely, migrants do in fact manage their boundaries, however they are in theoretically unique ways that have yet to be discussed in research.

8.5 CONCLUSION

Given the unique characteristics of the migrant family that results from being physically separated, this qualitative study of migrants living in the Seattle, WA area explored the communication behaviors that migrants used that enact family across distance. The data suggest that the challenge of distance places migrants in a unique circumstance which influences their interactions with family. As a result, participants engaged in a unique combination of communication behaviors that took the form of technological, transactional, and functional behaviors. These behaviors were used, whether overtly intentional or not, in a way that bridges the deficits presented by distance and achieve a sense of familial co-presence.

National Geographic published a special edition on global migration. Midway through one article, the author argues that "[a]ccepting our reality as a migratory species will not be easy. New art, new stories, and new ways of being will be needed. But the potential is great. A better world is possible, a more just and inclusive world, better for us and our grandchildren, with better food and better music and less violence too" (Hamid, 2019, n.p.). As the participants in this study have discussed, however, the difficulty for migrants is great. They face many challenges as they create a new life abroad. These participants, however, found unique communicative behaviors to overcome that distance and thrive in their new home. Though no behavior was perfect, participants were able to engage behaviors that enact family and maintain ties. Though distance may be felt more acutely by migrants, the desire to enact family while being separated can be identified throughout society. This is not just a migrant-based phenomenon. It is this desire and capability of enacting family despite distance that this study has sought to investigate. Thus, likely, this study speaks not just to the migrant experience but to the experiences that anyone enacts family at a distance.

APPENDIX A: IRB FORM

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON
HUMAN SUBJECTS DIVISION

DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

January 31, 2018

Dear Margaret Fesenmaier:

On 1/31/2018, the University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) reviewed the following application:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	The Relational Dialectics of Migrant Remittances
Investigator:	Margaret Fesenmaier
IRB ID:	STUDY00003939
Funding:	None

Exempt Status

HSD determined that your proposed activity is human subjects research that qualifies for exempt status (Category 2).

- This determination is valid for the duration of your research.
- This means that your research is exempt from the federal human subjects regulations, including the requirement for IRB approval and continuing review.
- **Depending on the nature of your study, you may need to obtain other approvals or permissions to conduct your research. For example, you might need to apply for access to data (e.g., to obtain UW student data). Or, you might need to obtain permission from facilities managers to approach possible subjects or conduct research procedures in the facilities (e.g., Seattle School District; the Harborview Emergency Department).**

If you consider changes to the activities in the future and know that the changes will require IRB review (or you are not certain), you may request a review or new determination by submitting a Modification to this application. For information about what changes require a Modification, refer to the **GUIDANCE: Exempt Research**.

Thank you for your commitment to ethical and responsible research. We wish you great success!

Sincerely,

Lisa A. Chartier
IRB Administrator, Committee A
(206) 616-2345
chartla@uw.edu

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT MESSAGES

[Email/WhatsApp Request of Contacts]

Hey there! [Name of Contact] passed along your contact information about possibly being interviewed as part of my dissertation research. Interviews last about an hour and will cover your family relationships and communication. If you're still interested I can be anywhere at anytime!! ;-) Just let me know what's best. Thanks!
Maggie

[Request to Post on Group Social Media Site]

[NAME OF ADMINISTRATOR] Good morning! I am a graduate student at UW and am working on a research project that is trying to understand how immigrants living in the Seattle area communicate and maintain relationships with family still living at home. If you feel comfortable, would it be possible to post a small blurb asking if any of your members in the [GROUP NAME] would be willing to chat? This includes anyone has moved to the US from another country, has lived here for at least one year, speaks English, and is at least 18 years old.

They can reach me via FB or email at [email address]. I would greatly appreciate the help and can come anywhere and anytime that is best. Interviews last about 40-60 min. Please let me know if you're interested or would like more information! Thanks so much again.

[If allowed to post]

I am a graduate student at UW and am working on a research project that is trying to understand how immigrants to the Seattle area communicate and maintain relationships with family still living at home. The goal of this research is to better understand the challenges facing migrants.

If you are interested in chatting about your experience, I can be reach through Facebook or at [email address]. Interviews last about 40-60min and I am willing to travel where ever is best for you. I would greatly appreciate the help. Please let me know if you're interested or would like more information! Thanks so much again.

[Request from snowball sample]

[NAME] Good morning! I am a graduate student at UW and am working on a research project that is trying to understand how immigrants to the Seattle area communicate and keep relationships with family still living at home. The goal of this research is to better understand the challenges facing migrants.

If you feel comfortable, would it be possible to sit down for a quick chat about your experience? I would greatly appreciate the help and can come anywhere and anytime that is best. Interviews last about 40-60min. Please let me know if you're interested or would like more information! Thanks so much again.

[Email to local organizations]

[Name of contact]
Good afternoon! I am a graduate student at UW and am working on a research project that is trying to understand how immigrants to the Seattle area communicate and maintain relationships with family still living at home. Ideally, this work will help non-profits in the area continue to provide vital services to the immigrant population. I've been told my several of my interview participants that [Organization] may be a nice place to seek participants. However, given the currently political climate, I completely understand the difficulty with this recruitment request. A little bit more about my research is below, but I would greatly appreciate any possible help publicizing this study. I will never ask about immigration status and no information about identity will be recorded.

I am conducting interviews with immigrants to the Seattle area. All questions regard their immigration experience, communication habits, and relationships with family or friends still in their country of origin. Interviews typically take about 40-60 minutes and all information, including migration status, is kept totally anonymous. The only requirements are that participants are over the age of 18, were born outside the US, lived in the US for at least a year and feel that they speak English enough to conduct an interview.

If you feel comfortable, would it be possible publicize my research within [Organization]? I can do whatever way is possible and that you think is best. If anyone is interested they can reach me at [email address] or [phone number]. I would greatly appreciate the help and can come anywhere and anytime that is best. Please let me know if publicizing this study is possible or would like more information! Thanks so much again.
Maggie

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION TABLE

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

ID #	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Years in USA	Remittances	Gifts	Communication Rate
DI 1	31	M	Germany	2.5	N	Y	Weekly
DI 2	40	F	Mexico	2	Y	Y	Daily
DI 3	28	F	Columbia	3	Y	Y	Daily
DI 4	21	F	Indonesia	3	N	Y	Daily
DI 5	27	M	Belarus	9.5	Y	Y	Weekly
DI 6	35	M	Mexico	6	Y	Y	Daily
DI 7	26	M	India	8	N	Y	Daily
DI 8	46	F	Greece	15.5	Y	Y	Daily
DI 9	26	F	Mexico	1	Y	Y	Daily
DI 10	21	M	Hong Kong	6	Y	NA	NA
DI 11	21	F	Indonesia	3	N	Y	Daily
DI 12	38	M	Mexico	10	Y	Y	Daily
DI 13	43	M	Ukraine	13	Y	Y	NA
DI 14	35	M	Spain	6	Y	Y	Weekly
DI 15	46	F	England	19	Y	Y	Weekly
DI 16	43	M	Sweden	22	Y	Y	Daily
DI 17	45	F	Mexico	18	Y	Y	Daily
DI 18	38	M	Mexico	11	Y	Y	Daily
DI 19	34	M	South Africa	1	N	Y	Weekly
DI 20	27	F	Russia	5	Y	Y	Daily
DI 21	30	M	Nigeria	5	Y	Y	NA
DI 22	32	F	Russia	10	N	Y	Daily
DI 23	33	M	Ghana	3	Y	NA	NA
DI 24	28	F	Canada	3	Y	Y	Daily
DI 25	28	M	China	5	N	Y	Weekly
DI 26	28	F	Taiwan	14	N	Y	Daily
DI 27	30	F	China	25	N	Y	NA
DI 28	62	F	Eritrea	32	Y	Y	NA
DI 29	29	M	Canada	3	Y	Y	Weekly
DI 30	35	M	Bulgaria	13	Y	Y	Weekly
DI 31	36	F	India	24	N	Y	Weekly
DI 32	28	M	Mexico	6	Y	NA	Daily
DI 33	26	F	India	7	Y	Y	Daily
DI 34	32	M	Brazil	4	Y	Y	Daily
DI 35	44	F	Tibet	22	Y	Y	Daily
DI 36	42	M	Australia	9	N	Y	Weekly
DI 37	26	M	Mexico	14	Y	Y	Daily

DI 38	23	M	Slovakia	7	Y	NA	Weekly
DI 39	32	F	France	8	N	Y	Daily
DI 40	32	M	Nigeria	5	Y	Y	Daily
DI 41	59	F	Ireland	30	Y	NA	Daily
DI 42	24	F	China	8	N	Y	Daily
DI 43	34	M	Ghana	9	N	Y	NA

APPENDIX D: CONSENT DOCUMENT

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
CONSENT FORM
Migrant Family Communication

Researcher: Margaret A. Fesenmaier, Ph.C.
Department of Communication, University of Washington
mfes@uw.edu
610-322-5021

Faculty Advisor: Nancy Rivenburgh, Ph.D.
Department of Communication, University of Washington
nkriv@uw.edu
***Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via email*

Researchers' statement
We are asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of your experience as a migrant. I would like to understand the impact of communication with your family living in the country of origin and the impact that sending home money are goods may play on that relationship.

STUDY PROCEDURES
If you choose to be in this study, I will ask you a series of questions regarding your communication with family, relationship with family, and any money or gifts you send home. Interviews will last about one hour. You may skip questions or end the interview at any time. If you have questions about language or what I am asking, please let me know. You do not have to answer every question.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interview so that I can have an accurate record of what we talked about. I am the only one that will have access to your audiotapes and I will keep them in a password locked file. I will transcribe your interview within six months of your interview, assign a study code and transcript, and then destroy the audio file. Taking part in this study is voluntary and you can stop at any time.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT
Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I have addressed concerns for your privacy in the confidentiality section below. Some people feel self-

conscious when they are audio recording. Some people may feel uncomfortable talking about personal experiences or aspects of his or her identities. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to or discuss any uncomfortable topics.
I will be audio recording your interview and will synthesize the content of these recordings to create presentations or publications.

ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY

If you choose not to be a part of this study, I will not interview you or use any information about you in this study.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Very little research has been conducted to find out the dialectical perspectives of migrants who decide to remit to family and friends in the country of origin. This study seeks to fill this void and explore the vantage point of migrants who navigate these relationships.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

All of the information you provide will be confidential. I will transcribe the audio recordings using a pseudonym and study the content you tell me. I will not maintain any links between your pseudonym and name. Your real name and identifying information will not appear in any publication or presentation.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Margaret Fesenmaier
Department of Communication
January – August 2018

[After Consent is Given]

This is an interview about your migration. As part of a research project, I am interested in hearing your story. Your story does not include everything that has ever happened to you but may include what you would like to share. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, please simply tell me about the important parts of your experience.

You have already given consent, but I want to remind you of a few things on that form. I'll be asking you to answer a series of open-ended questions. This is a voluntary activity, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer for any reason. You can end your participation in this study or move on to another question at any time without any consequences. Also, if at any time you would like to end recording please let me know. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

This interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story.

Q1: Would you please tell me the story of your migration?

Possible Follow-up/Clarification Questions:

- What was the process of you moving to Seattle?
- Why did you migrate?
- Was there family that was important in that decision?
- Where do you feel like your story of migration began?

Q3: Please, tell me about your family.

Possible Follow-up/Clarification Questions:

- Can you tell me a story that explains how your family typically acts?
- Who counts as family?
- Where are your family?

Q4:. Could you tell me about your typical communication with family?

Possible Follow-up/Clarification Questions:

- When was the last time you spoke to a family member?
- How regularly do you speak with family?
- What was the last conversation you have had with family?
- Do you use technology to communicate with your family?
- How important do you think communication is with your family?
- What positive and negative elements do you feel about these relationships?

Q5: Do you send any money or gifts to any family? If so, why?/ If not, why not?

Possible Follow-up/Clarification Questions:

- How did you decide to send these money/presents?
- Do you feel expected to send these things? Why?
- Who was the last person you sent money or gifts to? Can you describe the process last time you sent money or gifts to your family?
- Through which technologies do you send these things home?
- Did someone in your family ask for the money/gift?
- Are there family politics you need to navigate?
- Do you ever struggle to send these gifts? Is it a hardship?
- Is this generally who you send money to?

Q7: Do you communicate about sending these money/gifts to your family? If so, can you describe the last conversation you had about sending money/gifts?

Possible Follow-up/Clarification Questions:

- If it's unspoken, how do you know to do it?
- Is this reflective of typical conversations you have about remittances? Can you recount a common conversation?

Q8: How does sending remittances make you feel?

Possible Follow-up/Clarification Questions:

- Do you ever feel bad about sending/not sending these?
- Do you feel pressure to remit?
- Do you have strategies to manage how you send home money or gifts to family? If so, can you tell me about the last time you used a strategy to manage your family while remitting?

Q11: I have asked you many questions about your migration, familial relationships, and remittances. Is there anything that you would like to add to this interview before we end that you feel is important when considering your experience but that I have not asked you about?

[Thank Participants]

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