

S. COTTEN, A. WARR, W. ANDERSON, V. WINSTEAD, L. YOST, R. BERKOWSKY. *Using technology to decrease isolation from social ties and social places. Gerontechnology 2010;9(2):276;* doi:10.4017/gt.2010.09.02.175.00

Purpose Although an increasing amount of research focuses on using technologies to decrease loneliness and social isolation among older adults, less research has examined the importance of using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to decrease isolation from places among older adults. Given that older adults often move into different types of care environments, some of which may be far from their hometown, further research is needed to examine how ICTs can be used to decrease isolation from place as well as social ties. The purpose of this study is to examine these issues of isolation within a sample of older adults. **Method** We use data from an on-going ICT intervention study designed to teach older adults in assisted and independent living communities how to use computers and the Internet. Participants receive eight weeks of training in the use of ICTs and are followed for one year post training. Through a combination of qualitative field notes, focus group interviews, and surveys, we examine the roles ICTs play in decreasing isolation from social ties and social places. **Results & Discussion** Results of this study support other research^{1,2} showing that using ICTs can help older adults in assisted and independent living communities communicate with social ties. Email is the preferred ICT among this sample of older adults. Most are reticent to use social networking sites, even though many of their family members use these sites. In addition, however, the use of specific technology applications can also help individuals remain connected to social places, such as prior hometowns, churches, and neighborhoods. During one session a participant was taught how to use Google Maps and found her 'old home place'. She then used Google Search to find the website for her former church. At the end of the session she said: "Thank you, I felt like I visited home today". Another participant who looked at paintings on the Museum of Modern Art website told us that she was very thankful that she could look at art online, because she doubts she will ever be physically able to travel again to museums. Other participants used ICTs to find detailed information about friends' and relatives' places of work, learning about what children, nieces, and nephews were doing and where they were living, thereby making connections with places they may never have visited physically. Although ICTs can be important for helping older adults stay connected with others, researchers should not ignore the importance of place for older adults, and the ways that technology can enhance and help maintain those connections.

References

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