

New(b) Adults: A Needfinding Study

Mayowa Adesina, **Esaw Adhana**, Butch Nasser, Tina Zheng

But first, who are we?

But first, who are we?

Mayowa
Adesina

CS, Class of '27



Esaw
Adhana

CS, Class of '27



Butch
N

CS (HCI), Coterm



Tina
Zheng

SymSys, Class of '26



Our problem domain:

Our problem domain:

“Individuals *transitioning to independent living* for the first time”

Our problem domain:

“Individuals *transitioning to independent living* for the first time”

Includes:

New grads (ie. individuals leaving the school system)

Our problem domain:

“Individuals *transitioning to independent living* for the first time”

Includes:

New grads (ie. individuals leaving the school system)

AND

Our problem domain:

“Individuals *transitioning to independent living* for the first time”

Includes:

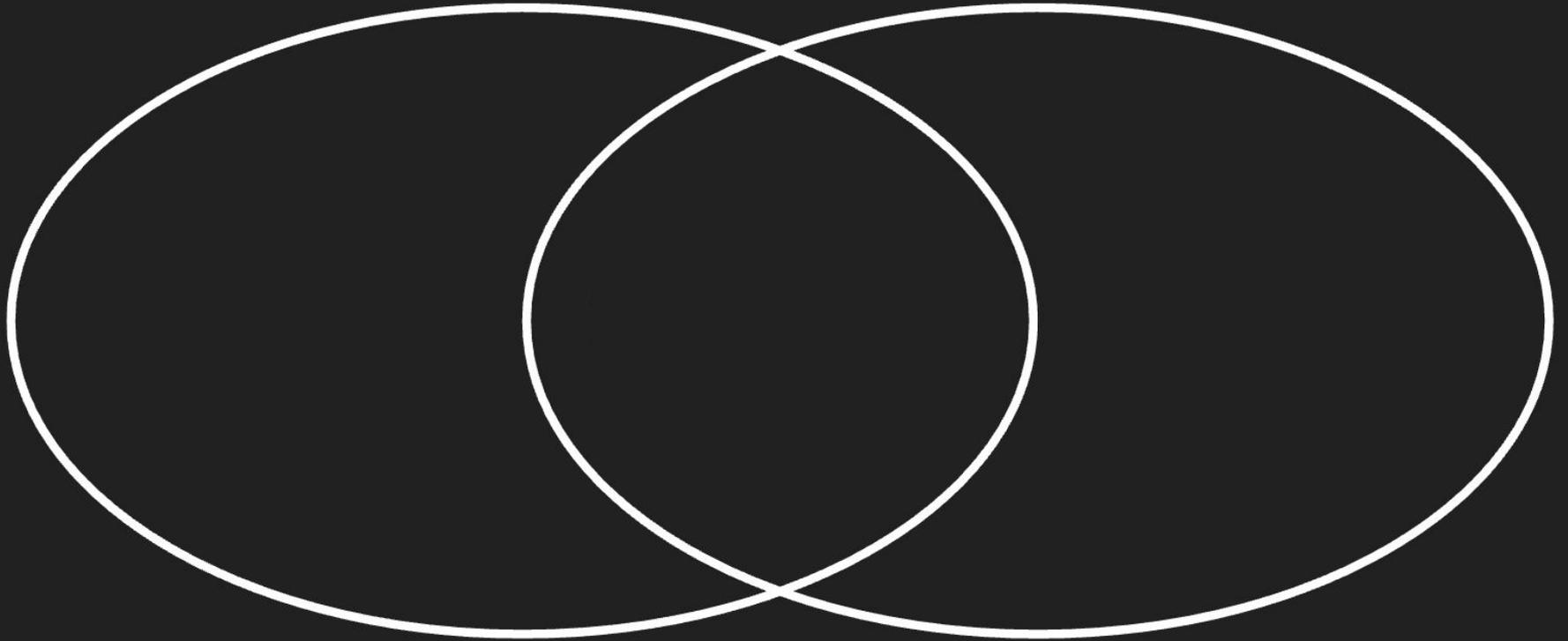
New grads (ie. individuals leaving the school system)

AND

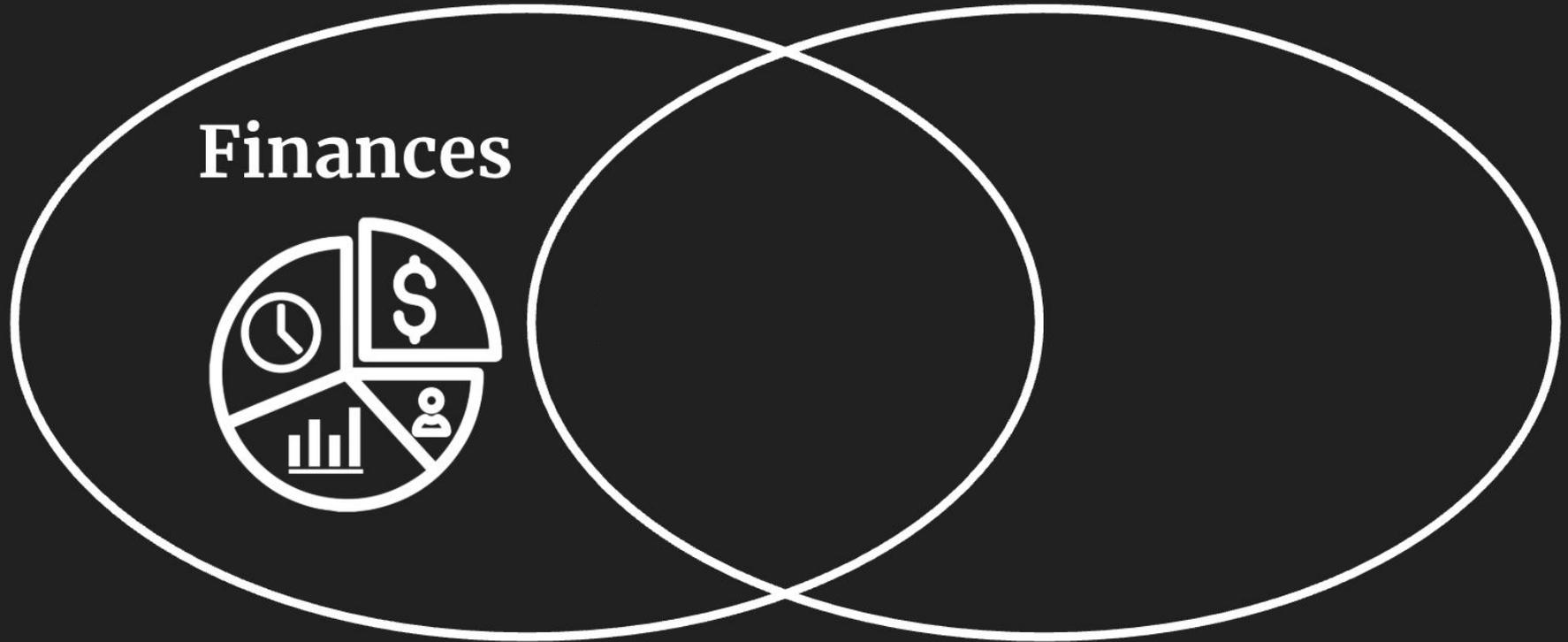
Individuals who *didn't* attend/graduate from a 4-year college

(eg. college dropouts, trade school grads, direct high school → military enlistees, etc.)

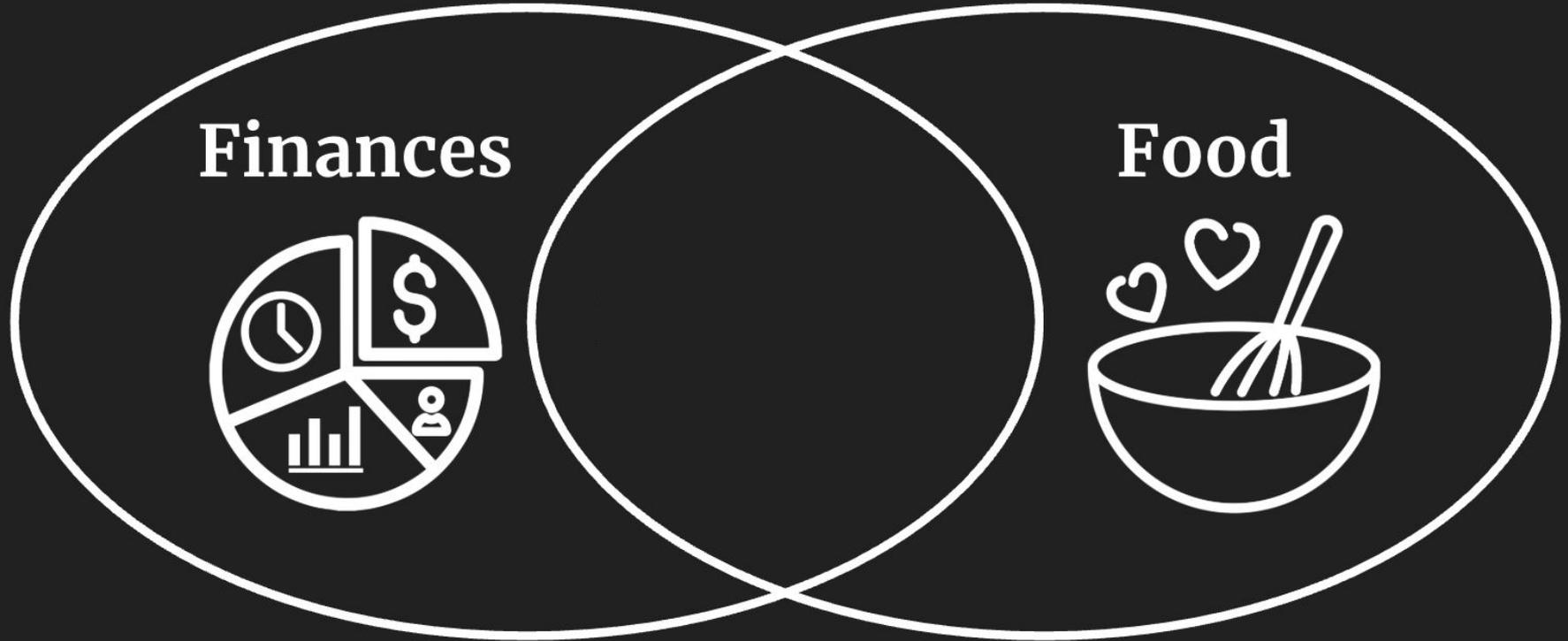
Our problem *subdomains*:



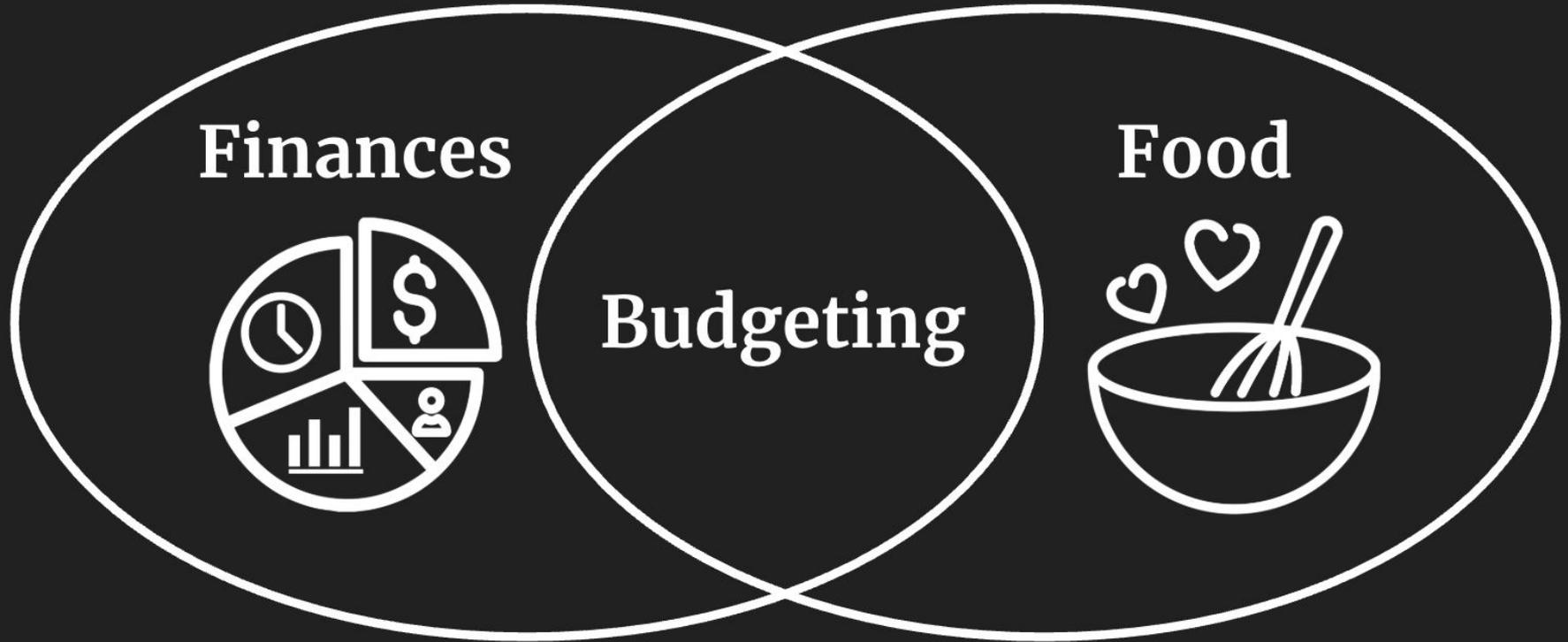
Our problem *subdomains*:



Our problem *subdomains*:



Our problem *subdomains*:



(Some of) **What we asked:**

If you eat out, what usually leads you to eat out instead of cooking?

What were some surprises you encountered when first providing food for yourself?

Are you currently financing any large purchases? Any remarks?

What are your thoughts on debt?

How do you decide which groceries to buy each week?

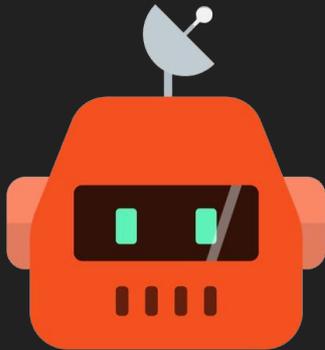
What do you wish you knew earlier about finances?

Where do you usually shop for groceries, and how did you pick that place?

Our participants

“Lillian”

Class of '25, in music/entertainment industry, lives in Richmond district in SF



“Nora”

Class of '26 (UC Berkeley senior) studying film, studied abroad in Japan for a year



“Lucy”*

Class of '25, current startup co-founder, international student, attended boarding HS



*extreme user

“Samantha”

Class of '22, current software engineer at Pinterest (full-time), lives in SoMa district in SF

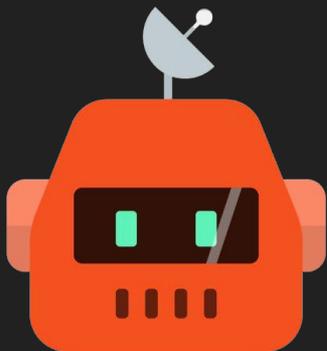


Participants were audio-recorded.

Recruitment + Compensation

“Lillian”

Recruited through
coworker from a former
internship.
Compensated with a
drink from a cafe.



“Nora”

Recruited by a Berkeley
friend in a technical
discord server.
Compensated with a
meal prior to interview.



“Lucy”

Recruited from WeChat
through help of an
international student.
Compensated with a
meal prior to interview.

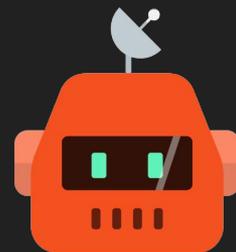


“Samantha”

Recruited through
girlfriend’s sister
(through Tina).
Compensated with a
drink from a cafe.

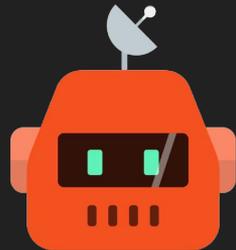


Notes from Lillian



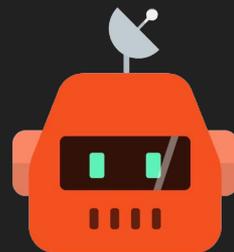
Notes from Lillian

- Chose to conduct interview at cafe known for creativity/design



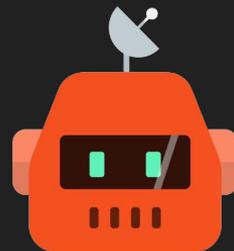
Notes from Lillian

- Chose to conduct interview at cafe known for creativity/design
- Grew up in Alameda
 - Parents handled everything



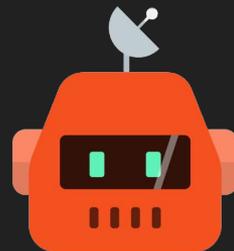
Notes from Lillian

- Chose to conduct interview at cafe known for creativity/design
- Grew up in Alameda
 - Parents handled everything
 - Admitted being “stagnant” and “sheltered”
 - College was a *harsh* transition



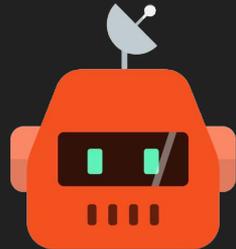
Notes from Lillian

- Chose to conduct interview at cafe known for creativity/design
- Grew up in Alameda
 - Parents handled everything
 - Admitted being “stagnant” and “sheltered”
 - College was a *harsh* transition
- Felt very welcomed when studying abroad in Italy



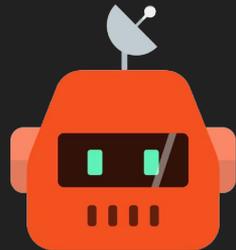
Notes from Lillian

- Chose to conduct interview at cafe known for creativity/design
- Grew up in Alameda
 - Parents handled everything
 - Admitted being “stagnant” and “sheltered”
 - College was a *harsh* transition
- Felt very welcomed when studying abroad in Italy
 - Helped her experiment more/try new things



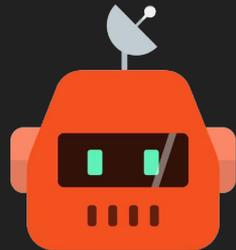
Notes from Lillian

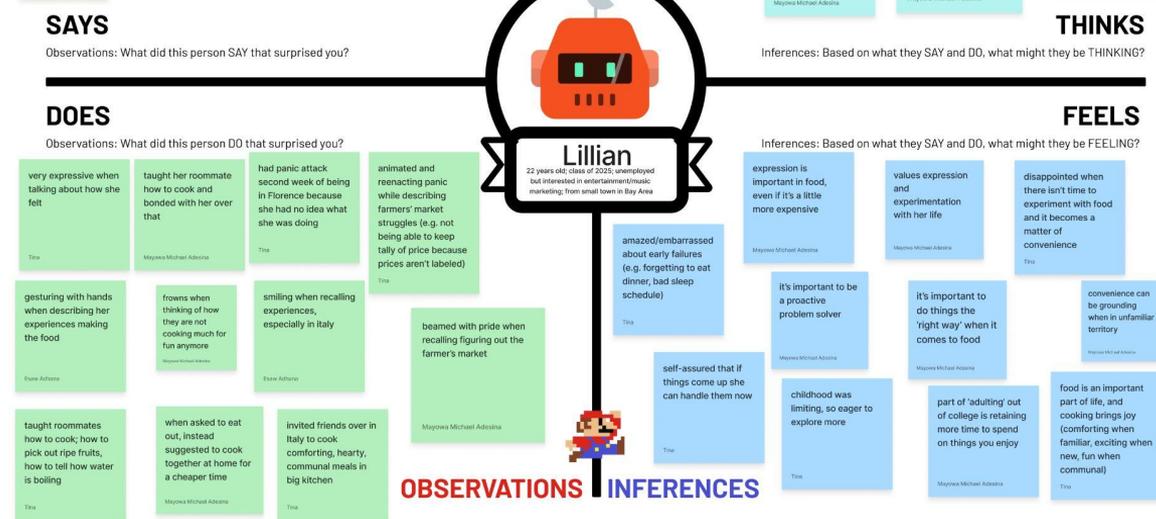
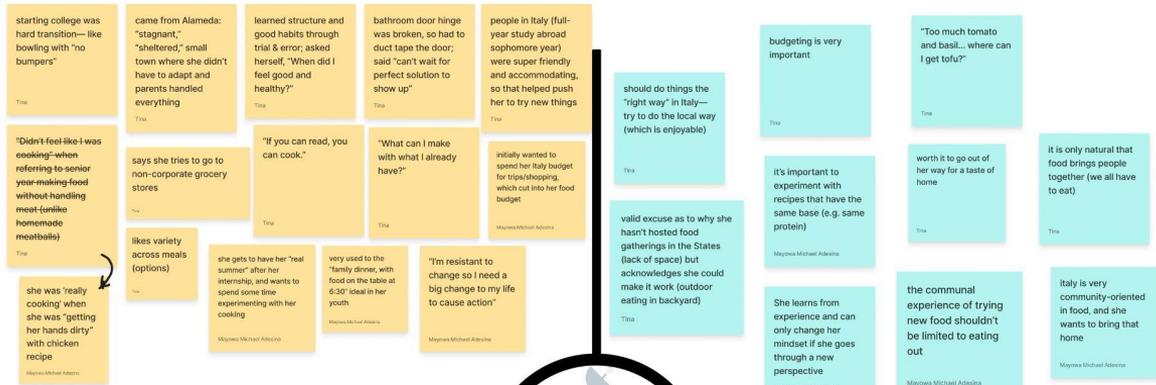
- Chose to conduct interview at cafe known for creativity/design
- Grew up in Alameda
 - Parents handled everything
 - Admitted being “stagnant” and “sheltered”
 - College was a *harsh* transition
- Felt very welcomed when studying abroad in Italy
 - Helped her experiment more/try new things
 - **Contradiction:** After enjoying trying a lot of Italian food, went out of her way to find more familiar food



Notes from Lillian

- Chose to conduct interview at cafe known for creativity/design
- Grew up in Alameda
 - Parents handled everything
 - Admitted being “stagnant” and “sheltered”
 - College was a *harsh* transition
- Felt very welcomed when studying abroad in Italy
 - Helped her experiment more/try new things
 - **Contradiction:** After enjoying trying a lot of Italian food, went out of her way to find more familiar food
 - Interested in bringing the community aspect of food in Italy back to the States



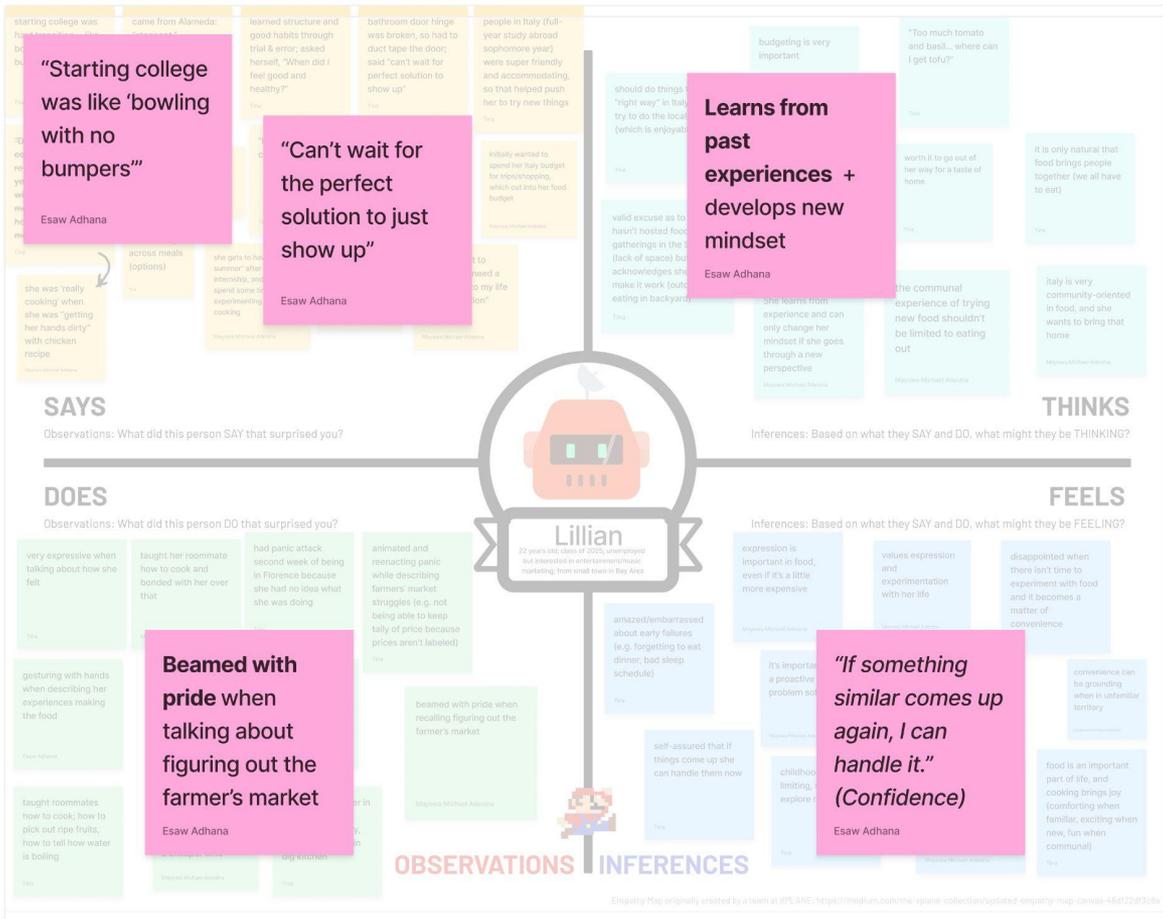


Lillian
22 years old, class of 2020, unemployed but interested in entertainment/music marketing from small towns in Bay Area



OBSERVATIONS INFERENCES

Empathy Map originally created by a team at XPLANE: <https://medium.com/the-xplane-collection/updated-empathy-map-canvas-46fd22155c8a>



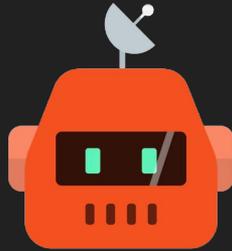
Notes from Lillian

“I’m *resistant to change*, so I need a big change to my life to cause action.”



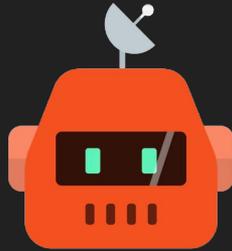
Insight:

Lillian values her independence and being able to try new things, even if they don't go right the first time.



Insight:

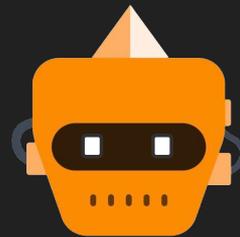
Lillian values her independence and being able to try new things, even if they don't go right the first time.



Need:

People want to try new things/experiment (eg. with food), but don't want to take big risks (eg. wasting time/money).

Notes from Nora



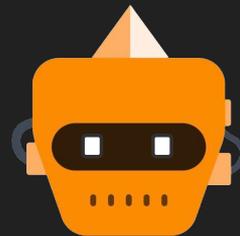
Notes from Nora

- Chose to conduct interview at quiet courtyard on Berkeley campus



Notes from Nora

- Chose to conduct interview at quiet courtyard on Berkeley campus
- Originally from Oregon (no family in area)



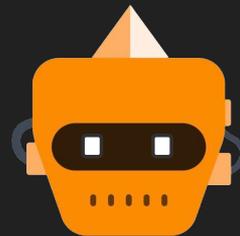
Notes from Nora

- Chose to conduct interview at quiet courtyard on Berkeley campus
- Originally from Oregon (no family in area)
 - Freshman Year was a large transition
 - Lived in a dorm on meal plan



Notes from Nora

- Chose to conduct interview at quiet courtyard on Berkeley campus
- Originally from Oregon (no family in area)
 - Freshman Year was a large transition
 - Lived in a dorm on meal plan
 - Off-campus Sophomore Year
 - No meal plan
 - Anxious about living alone; cooking alone



Notes from Nora

"I have anxiety... [and had] a weird fear of having to cook for [myself]"



Notes from Nora

- Chose to conduct interview at quiet courtyard on Berkeley campus
- Originally from Oregon (no family in area)
 - Freshman Year was a large transition
 - Lived in a dorm on meal plan
 - Off-campus Sophomore Year
 - No meal plan
 - Anxious about living alone; cooking alone
- Developed some habits regarding food
 - "Definitely [prioritizes] cost"
 - Developed budgets or works more to balance \$ spent on food
 - Purchases bulk foods (rice/pasta) for cost



Notes from Nora

- Chose to conduct interview at quiet courtyard on Berkeley campus
- Originally from Oregon (no family in area)
 - Freshman Year was a large transition
 - Lived in a dorm on meal plan
 - Off-campus Sophomore Year
 - No meal plan
 - Anxious about living alone; cooking alone
- Developed some habits regarding food
 - "Definitely [prioritizes] cost"
 - Developed budgets or works more to balance \$ spent on food
 - Purchases bulk foods (rice/pasta) for cost
- **Contradiction:** Values food they can take/heat up quickly
 - Granola bars, snack foods, even if more expensive.



Notes from Nora

- Studied abroad in Japan Junior Year
 - First time couldn't even contact family
 - Described as "first real-year of being an adult"



Notes from Nora

- Studied abroad in Japan Junior Year
 - First time couldn't even contact family
 - Described as "first real-year of being an adult"
- Described many "adult issues" shielded from being a university student
 - Opening a bank account
 - Losing a wallet and canceling a credit card
 - Opening a cellphone plan
 - Plumbing Issues (no hot water)



Notes from Nora

- Studied abroad in Japan Junior Year
 - First time couldn't even contact family
 - Described as "first real-year of being an adult"
- Described many "adult issues" shielded from being a university student
 - Opening a bank account
 - Losing a wallet and canceling a credit card
 - Opening a cellphone plan
 - Plumbing Issues (no hot water)
- Learned that "If you don't do it, it's not going to happen"
 - Wished they could have human-interactions to learn things before they happen.
 - When rules are "not explicitly out there... having to learn the rules myself is difficult"



Notes from Nora

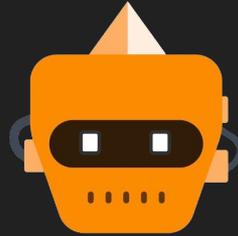
(Regarding learning how to adult)

"I wish that there had almost been a big rulebook I could read on how to just adult... better."



Insight:

For a lot of newly transitioned students, it's hard to feel prepared for the financial burden food can create.



Insight:

For a lot of newly transitioned students, it's hard to feel prepared for the financial burden food can create.



Need:

People need to feel confident in their financial decisions buying food in order to enjoy food.

Notes from Lucy



Notes from Lucy

- Chose to conduct interview in their backyard (at their house in SF)



Notes from Lucy

- Chose to conduct interview in their backyard (at their house in SF)
- Originally from China, but attended boarding schools and college in US



Notes from Lucy

- Chose to conduct interview in their backyard (at their house in SF)
- Originally from China, but attended boarding schools and college in US
- Currently co-founder of an SF-based startup
 - Lives with multiple roommates/coworkers
 - Share cooking duties (but no schedule/rotation)



Notes from Lucy

- Chose to conduct interview in their backyard (at their house in SF)
- Originally from China, but attended boarding schools and college in US
- Currently co-founder of an SF-based startup
 - Lives with multiple roommates/coworkers
 - Share cooking duties (but no schedule/rotation)
- Hates Cooking
 - Prioritizes (in order): time (including cleanup), taste, then cost
 - Orders food frequently
 - Sees time spent cooking as time could've been working



Notes from Lucy

- Chose to conduct interview in their backyard (at their house in SF)
- Originally from China, but attended boarding schools and college in US
- Currently co-founder of an SF-based startup
 - Lives with multiple roommates/coworkers
 - Share cooking duties (but no schedule/rotation)
- Hates Cooking
 - Prioritizes (in order): time (including cleanup), taste, then cost
 - Orders food frequently
 - Sees time spent cooking as time could've been working
 - **Contradiction:** Even if time-saving, avoids meal kits
 - Why: Removes agency/control
 - Cares about agency more than cost



Notes from Lucy

"Adulthood is... [dealing with the] many small, annoying things you *have to handle*."*



* Paraphrased

Insight:
Ordering food or other quick-to-make foods can increase the value of the food, even when sacrificing taste for convenience.



Insight:

Ordering food or other quick-to-make foods can increase the value of the food, even when sacrificing taste for convenience.



Need:

People want to feel agency in their food choices, and that is not always dictated by taste.

Notes from Samantha



Notes from Samantha

- Chose to conduct interview at the cafe closest to where she lives



Notes from Samantha

- Chose to conduct interview at the cafe closest to where she lives
- Prioritizes convenience and saving time
 - Conceded that money/budgeting isn't too much of a worry



Notes from Samantha

- Chose to conduct interview at the cafe closest to where she lives
- Prioritizes convenience and saving time
 - Conceded that money/budgeting isn't too much of a worry
 - Enjoys food and agency from cooking for self, but takes a lot of effort



Notes from Samantha

- Chose to conduct interview at the cafe closest to where she lives
- Prioritizes convenience and saving time
 - Conceded that money/budgeting isn't too much of a worry
 - Enjoys food and agency from cooking for self, but takes a lot of effort
- Also gets food provided for her at her office
 - Started off good, but has started lacking in options



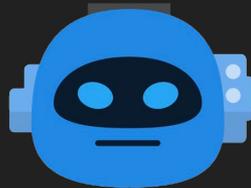
Notes from Samantha

- Chose to conduct interview at the cafe closest to where she lives
- Prioritizes convenience and saving time
 - Conceded that money/budgeting isn't too much of a worry
 - Enjoys food and agency from cooking for self, but takes a lot of effort
- Also gets food provided for her at her office
 - Started off good, but has started lacking in options
 - **Contradiction:** Enjoys complexity in food given to her in the office, but is okay with simple recipes when she's cooking for herself



Notes from Samantha

- Chose to conduct interview at the cafe closest to where she lives
- Prioritizes convenience and saving time
 - Conceded that money/budgeting isn't too much of a worry
 - Enjoys food and agency from cooking for self, but takes a lot of effort
- Also gets food provided for her at her office
 - Started off good, but has started lacking in options
 - **Contradiction:** Enjoys complexity in food given to her in the office, but is okay with simple recipes when she's cooking for herself
- Sticks to eating out/going grocery shopping at places near her
 - Found a few places that fit what she likes initially and has stuck to them
 - Awkward/inconvenient for her to get food at different places



Notes from Samantha

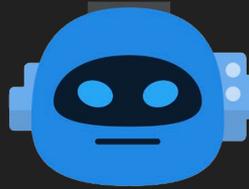
“Cooking takes a LOT of time — getting groceries, cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, storing food — it adds up.” *



* Paraphrased

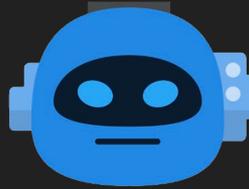
Insight:

Eaters with specific tastes can be isolated by meals or groceries they don't have control over.



Insight:

Eaters with specific tastes can be isolated by meals or groceries they don't have control over.



Need:

Adults need access to food information that is reliable and constant, so they can make individual choices.

Connections, Observations, Findings (Further Analysis)

Connections, Observations, Findings (Further Analysis)

- Our interviewees have systems that work... *BUT*

Connections, Observations, Findings (Further Analysis)

- Our interviewees have systems that work... *BUT*
 - Potentially unideal
 - Relying on convenient / “easy” options
 - Describe inability to explore as much as they would like

Connections, Observations, Findings (Further Analysis)

- Our interviewees have systems that work... *BUT*
 - Potentially unideal
 - Relying on convenient / “easy” options
 - Describe inability to explore as much as they would like

- “Trial by fire”
 - Only way to learn/figure out what works is by first learning what *doesn't*
 - Often lacked resources/ability to learn this in safe, controlled environments

Connections, Observations, Findings (Further Analysis)

- Our interviewees have systems that work... *BUT*
 - Potentially unideal
 - Relying on convenient / “easy” options
 - Describe inability to explore as much as they would like
- “Trial by fire”
 - Only way to learn/figure out what works is by first learning what *doesn't*
 - Often lacked resources/ability to learn this in safe, controlled environments
- Enjoy their autonomy (and doing pretty well for themselves)

Connections, Observations, Findings (Further Analysis)

- Our interviewees have systems that work... *BUT*
 - Potentially unideal
 - Relying on convenient / “easy” options
 - Describe inability to explore as much as they would like
- “Trial by fire”
 - Only way to learn/figure out what works is by first learning what *doesn't*
 - Often lacked resources/ability to learn this in safe, controlled environments
- Enjoy their autonomy (and doing pretty well for themselves)
 - (Don't need a full-180° transformation!)

What's next?

What's next?

- Interviewees are willing to try new things *within reason*
 - Anything we create for them should ideally feel easy/seamless

What's next?

- Interviewees are willing to try new things *within reason*
 - Anything we create for them should ideally feel easy/seamless
- Interviewees focused on idea of “struggle at first, then adapt”

What's next?

- Interviewees are willing to try new things *within reason*
 - Anything we create for them should ideally feel easy/seamless
- Interviewees focused on idea of “struggle at first, then adapt”
 - Potential A2 interview questions:
 - “Describe an experience while living independently where you handled a difficult problem. Would you have done anything differently?”
 - “When you have questions about navigating living independently, how do you seek answers (ie. from who/what resources)?”

Questions?

Mayowa
Adesina
(mayowa13@)



Esaw
Adhana
(eadhana@)



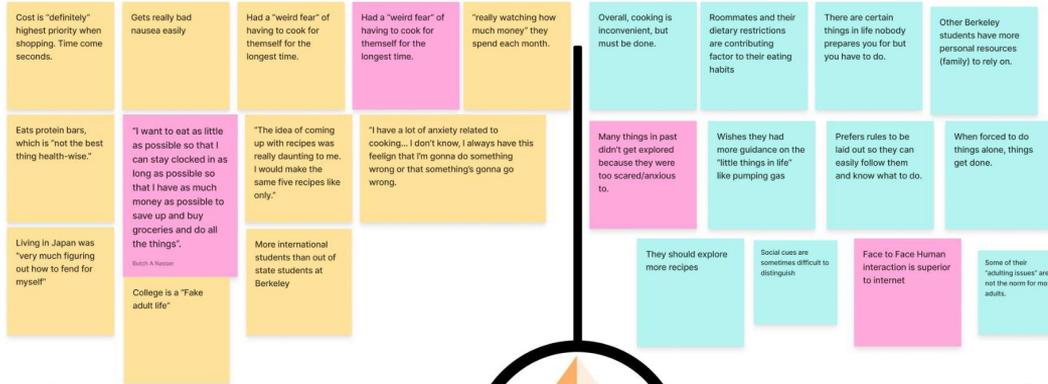
Butch
Nasser
(ban@)



Tina
Zheng
(zhengti@)



Appendix



SAYS

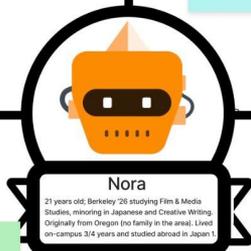
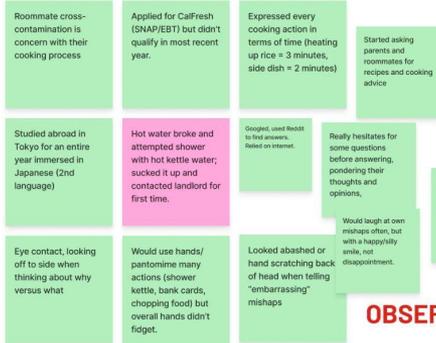
Observations: What did this person SAY that surprised you?

THINKS

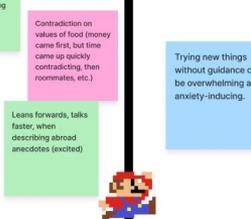
Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be THINKING?

DOES

Observations: What did this person DO that surprised you?



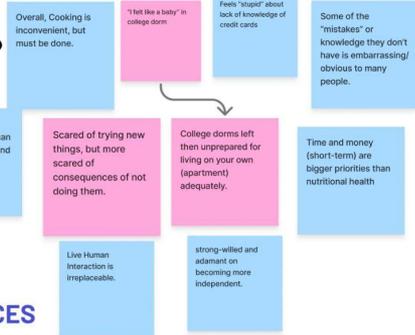
21 years old, Berkeley '26 studying Film & Media Studies, minoring in Japanese and Creative Writing. Originally from Oregon (no family in the area). Lived on-campus 3/4 years and studied abroad in Japan 1



OBSERVATIONS INFERENCES

FEELS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be FEELING?



Empathy Map originally created by a team at XPLANE: <https://medium.com/@the-xplane-collection/updated-empathy-map-canvas-46df226f3c6a>

Being an adult is just being "more things to manage:

"In my case, I don't think that there's a direct resource" like parents (since they are in a different country).

"It's hard to do better than the internet" for answering curated questions.

"Maybe I just happen to be okay with mediocre food"

"Being able to decide what to eat actually significantly makes up for the lack of skills in terms of cooking"

"I'm not very good at cooking so I don't produce very rewarding dishes; but I'm also not willing to put in the time to improve my cooking skills."

"My work is pretty demanding so sometimes I don't feel like I have the energy to cook."

"I feel like... it's hard to know about these small things beforehand."

"It's very rare that I will get/ not get something because of the price" at Trader Joe's, but more price-conscious at Whole Foods.

"Besides household items, food, hangouts," doesn't have many expenses.

"If someone actually compiled an infographic [on adulting tips] I would actually read it"

Being an adult is being exposed to the sheer quantity of tasks that actually need to be done for the first time,

Wisdom of the crowd (internet search) is helpful.

Having roommates is helpful and a positive experience.

Agency in food choice is important to them.

Detests cooking; isn't worth the time and effort for outcome (energy)

Washing dishes is faster and more enjoyable than cooking.

The energy for most adulting tasks do not outweigh the work that could be done during that time.

Money isn't the highest priority when it comes to food or adulting (versus happiness)

Grocery shopping is cheaper than eating out, so small distinctions thereafter are minimal.

Online shopping is superior because generally fast, cheap, and convenient

Shopping is a means to an end, not recreational

Urgent needs occupy minispace so get done

SAYS

Observations: What did this person SAY that surprised you?

THINKS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be THINKING?

DOES

Observations: What did this person DO that surprised you?

FEELS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be FEELING?



Lucy
 24 years old, graduated Stanford in 2025, current startup co-founder working and living in SF. Chinese citizen, been in US since middle school for boarding school and college.

Lived away from parents (in China) at US boarding schools since middle school

Pauses movements upon being asked a question, resumes movement after some thinking

Generally avoided eye contact while talking, but gave eye contact on last 2-3 words of sentence to signal being done with question.

Eyes often dart to upper right when asked "why" questions.

Contradicted self with food values (nutrition vs. time vs. effort)

Sudden realization regarding budgeting and tracking spendings.

Generally fidgets with hands/clothes while talking, but stops when done speaking or listening to questions

Lots of pauses while speaking (possibly translation?)

Actively tried to form a solution to their own needs, despite not being explicitly asked to.

Laughed when mentioning the dorms/ always being there in college.

Most adult issues aren't impossible to find a solution for; it's just a lot of work.

Bothersome and disdain towards dealing with general adult chores

Fortunate to have easy access to frozen and ready food

Drained energy-wise from the need to cook or look for different food options

Grateful for roommates being able to handle some communal issues

Spending more time to cook than eat is saddening.

More comfortable when they are in full control of their decisions and situation

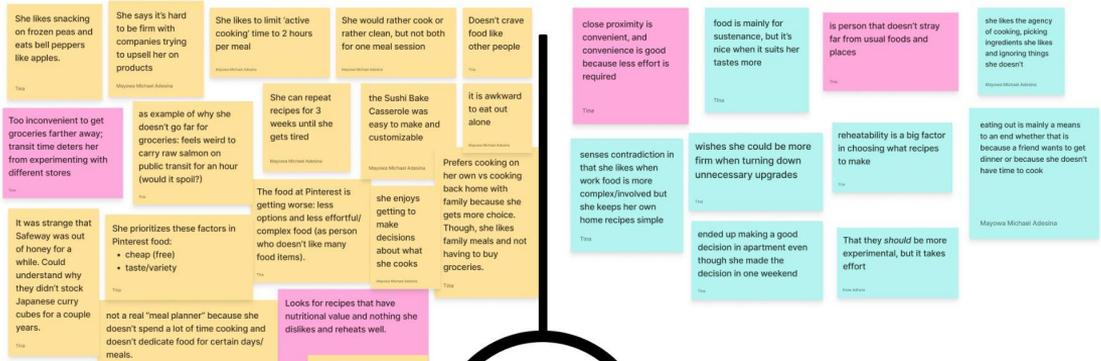
Often tired/exhausted from day-to-day work so any extra effort is substantial.

Content with categorization of spending (a little vs. a lot) rather than exact prices.

Annoyed by quantity of adulthood mistakes, but not the difficulty.

Tired/exhausted by keeping track of necessary tasks.

OBSERVATIONS | INFERENCES



SAYS

Observations: What did this person SAY that surprised you?

THINKS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be THINKING?

DOES

Observations: What did this person DO that surprised you?

FEELS

Inferences: Based on what they SAY and DO, what might they be FEELING?

Samantha
 24 years old; graduated college in 2022;
 currently works at Pinterest (software engineer), from SoCal but lives in SoMa SF



OBSERVATIONS INFERENCE

Empathy Map originally created by a team at XPLANE: <https://medium.com/the-xplane-collection/updated-empathy-map-canvas-46d72d4f3c8a>

Artifact - Lucy and compost bin going missing



Appendix

Lillian:

- Told story about how while studying abroad in Italy, she had a panic attack second week in because she went to a farmer's market and had no idea what she was doing. As someone who was living on a budget, it was stressful that she couldn't tell while picking things out the prices and couldn't keep tally of the total cost and didn't want to keep asking. Also feared she would be overcharged, but the vendors turned out to be very friendly and accommodating.
- Realization: She fondly reminisced about inviting friends over to her big kitchen in Italy to make communal Italian food with local ingredients. She then realized she hasn't really done that since and wants to bring that back (though her apartment has a small kitchen). Thus, the community aspect of food/cooking is important to her. "It's only natural that it brings people together."
- Realization: Taught her roommates how to cook and realized what she thought was common sense wasn't always the case. "How do I tell when water is boiling?" "How do I tell if an avocado is ripe?"
- Interesting how she described that she ping-pongs from comfort and discomfort: "Taste of home" vs "experimentation and exploration of food"; example: while in Italy, she loved trying new local pastas but eventually went out of her way to find tofu (food of her childhood); variety across meals is important to her
- Emphasized that when her apartment bathroom door was coming off its hinges, you just "can't wait" for a perfect fix; thus, she had it duct taped for a while; she feels confident that she can figure out any problem.

Appendix

Samantha:

- Realization: she talked about making a salmon sushi bake/casserole recipe she really likes before (how it was easy to prepare and very customizable) but realized she hasn't made it in a while (potentially because it doesn't reheat well)
- Described process of making turkey white bean chili: walk across the street to Safeway (with list of ingredients), buy can of white beans, can of diced tomatoes, pack of ground turkey; other spices are already at home; very simple to make because you only need to chop one thing (onion) and you can leave it be while it simmers (not much active cooking time). Additionally, it reheats well (she is keeping extra portions in her freezer right now for future dinners).
- described