



Needfinding

Culture through Cuisine

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Our PotLuck



Defne

Potluck
item: 




Kyla

Potluck
item: 



Janet

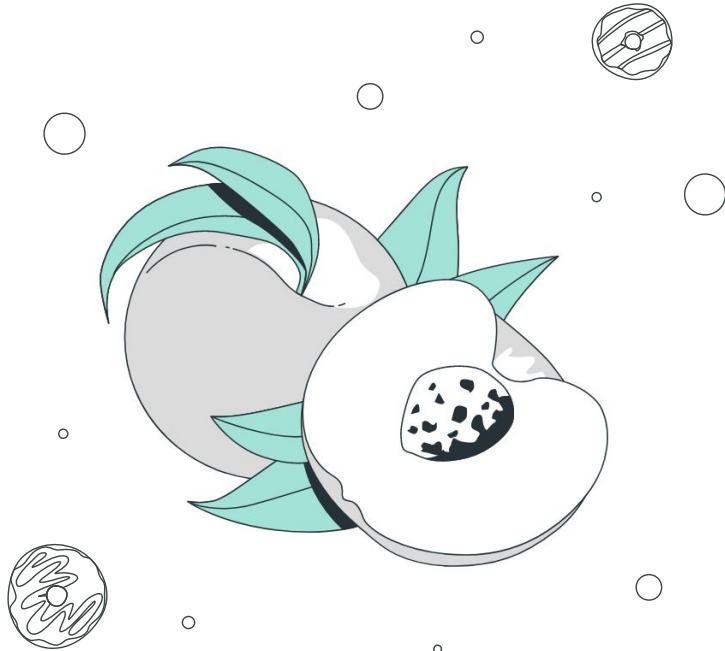
Potluck
item: 



Amrita

Potluck
item: 

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Problem Domain

Food as a means of connection
and a measure of vitality.



Needfinding

Methodology, Location, and
Extreme Users

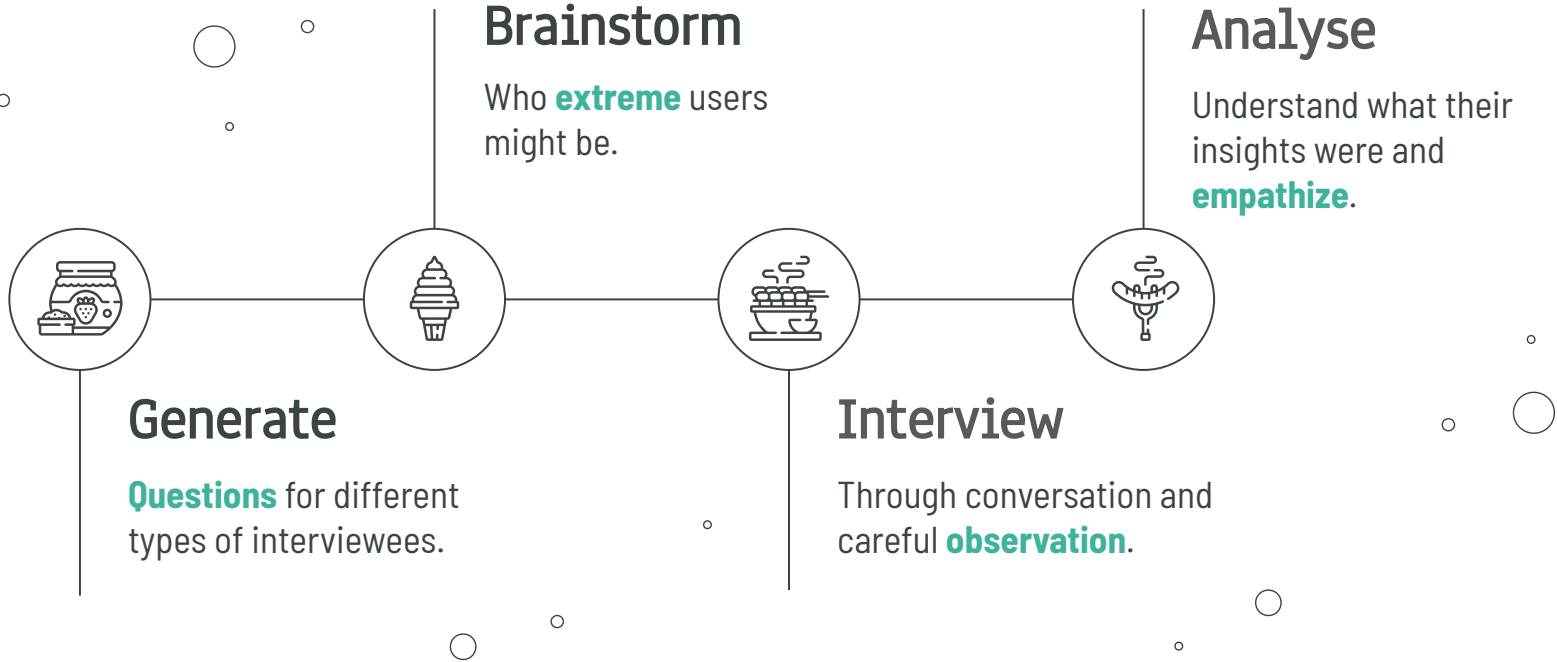


Analysis

Selected empathy maps and
Key Findings



Methodology



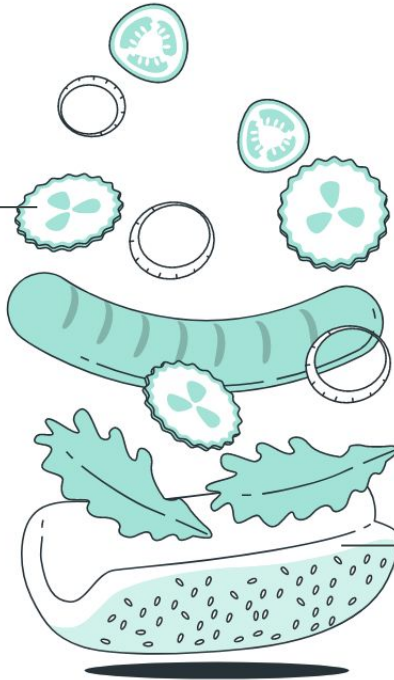
Questions

How often do you cook, and what dishes do you make?

Traditions or rituals you have around food?

Strong memories you have around food?

What were mealtimes like for you growing up? How has that changed?



What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced when cooking from a recipe?

What does food mean to you?

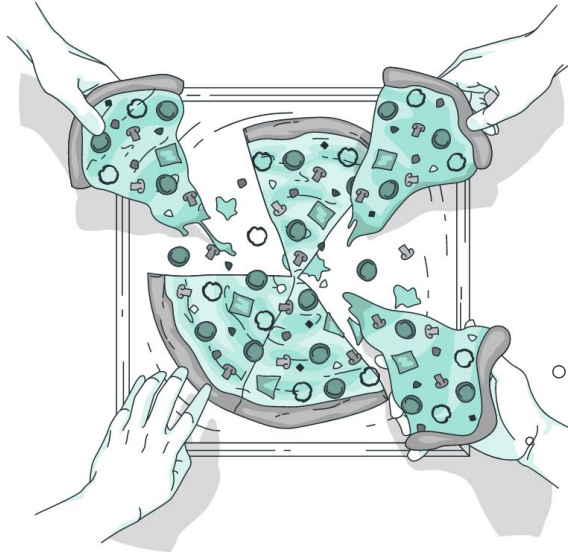
How have you replicated food that feels like home?

Tell us about your first time making food for someone else?

Our PotLuck-ers

Interviewees

- Average users (consumers), extreme users (chefs), non-user (industry expert)
- Non-Stanford students



Perspectives

- Diverse backgrounds: immigrants from different countries
- Variety of job roles
- Variety of motivations behind cooking
- Variety of cooking experience and interest levels

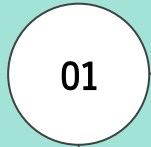
Meet Our PotLuck-ers

Food Consumer

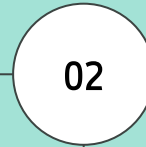
Shop Owner

Chef

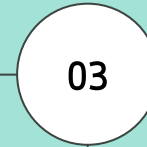
Chef



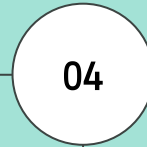
Martin



Grace



Jaclyn
(Extreme)



Sofia
(Extreme)



01

Martin

Real estate developer from Oakland

Interview conducted at Verve cafe while taking physical notes

Context & Observations

Who is Martin?

- Avid biker in his mid-30s
- Can recognize “well-made food with high-quality ingredients”
- From Oakland, **no strong cultural ties** outside the Bay Area
- Puts together very simple meals on most days and eats out twice a week

Surprises:

- Holds “no traditions or rituals associated with food” and enjoys trying food from other cultures that are prepared traditionally
- Describes himself as **not particularly “food-motivated,”** sees exploring food as a hobby

Contradictions:

- Doesn't consider food a passion/hobby of his
 - Cares about the **quality** and **cultural authenticity** of his food, but doesn't feel that replicating more complex dishes is worth it when only cooking for himself
-

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OBSERVATIONS

SAY

- "I only make super basic dishes, I wouldn't really call it cooking"
- "My dad loves to cook and is a great chef, so I've been exposed to what good, well-made food is like"
- "I didn't at the time, but looking back, I now appreciate the time we spent eating well-made food as a family in my teenage years"
- "When we get together as a family for holidays, food is secondary, but I appreciate the effort and time put into the dishes"
- "After a certain threshold, as long as it's well made, it doesn't really matter how good the food is"
- "As we've gotten older, it's become harder to wrangle the family together. I appreciate the opportunities in the holidays to get together over food"
- "I'd trust a cookbook over some YouTube video because you know more about the author's style, background, and story"
- "I'm not really food-motivated. For some people it's a hobby, but that's not necessarily the case for me"
- "Until about middle school, we never really ate dinner together as a family...we don't have many cultural traditions or rituals around food"
- "I'd like to cook in theory, but just haven't made that interest a priority yet"
- "I'd want any recipes I tried to make to be authentic so I can understand how a dish is traditionally made in a culture"
- When asked about memorable food experiences, "...Nepenthe. The food was okay, but that visual experience of the view sticks with you"

DO

- Laughs when asked if he can cook
- Makes simple dishes for most meals
- Occasionally spends meals with his family during holidays
- Tries out food from a variety of different cultures and cuisines
- Rolls eyes when gesturing to "hip" restaurants that don't focus on serving well-made food
- Gestures animatedly when talking about the visual experience of Nepenthe
- Cycles recreationally (e.g. from Fremont to Palo Alto and back)
- Mainly focuses on simple pasta dishes because the carbs help him with cycling
- Tries out some new restaurants in diverse cuisines
- Distinguishes when chefs have used well-sourced, high-quality ingredients

THINK

- Novelty and "hip" trends aren't important in choosing what to eat
- Food should be high quality and use great ingredients above all
- Cooking for others, like family or people you care about, is a more worthwhile time investment than just cooking for yourself
- The people and places associated with a meal can be more important than the meal's taste itself
- Being able to cook is an important life skill
- You can trust the food someone makes more when you know their story
- Cookbooks and individuals you know are more reliable sources of information for authentic recipes
- Cooking is a passive interest rather than something he prioritizes
- You appreciate mealtimes and togetherness more as you get older
- Food matters a lot more to the people who prepare it
- Food should be cooked authentically, the way it was originally meant to be consumed

FEEL

- Admiration for his father as a talented cook
- Appreciative of moments where his family is together over food
- Pride in his ability to discern good, well-made food
- Curiosity about the history of ethnic foods
- Distrust for recipes presented without the context of the creator and their culture
- Regret for not appreciating shared food experiences growing up
- Less concerned with food itself than the stories behind it (as long as the food is high-quality)
- Excitement about visual experiences that come along with food
- "No strong cultural ties" to specific ethnic food
- Hesitant about the time and skill investment needed to cook complex meals for himself alone
- Interested in the cultural context of food and its creator

INFERENCES

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OBSERVATIONS

"I'd want any recipes I tried to make to be authentic so I can understand how a dish is traditionally made in a culture"

"I'm not really food-motivated. For some people, it's a hobby, but that's not necessarily the case for me"

Distinguishes when chefs have used well-sourced, high-quality ingredients

Laughs when asked if he can cook

Cycles recreationally (e.g. from Fremont to Palo Alto and back)

Makes simple dishes most meals

Mainly focuses on simple dishes because the carbs I hit with cycling

Rolls eyes when gesturing to "hip" restaurants that don't focus on serving well-made food

Gestures animatedly when talking about the visual experience of Nepenthe

Regret for not appreciating shared food experiences growing up

Pride in his ability to discern good, well-made food

Hesitant about the time and skill investment needed to cook complex meals for himself alone

Cooking for others, like family or people you care about, is a more worthwhile time investment than just cooking for yourself

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INFERENCES

Key Insights

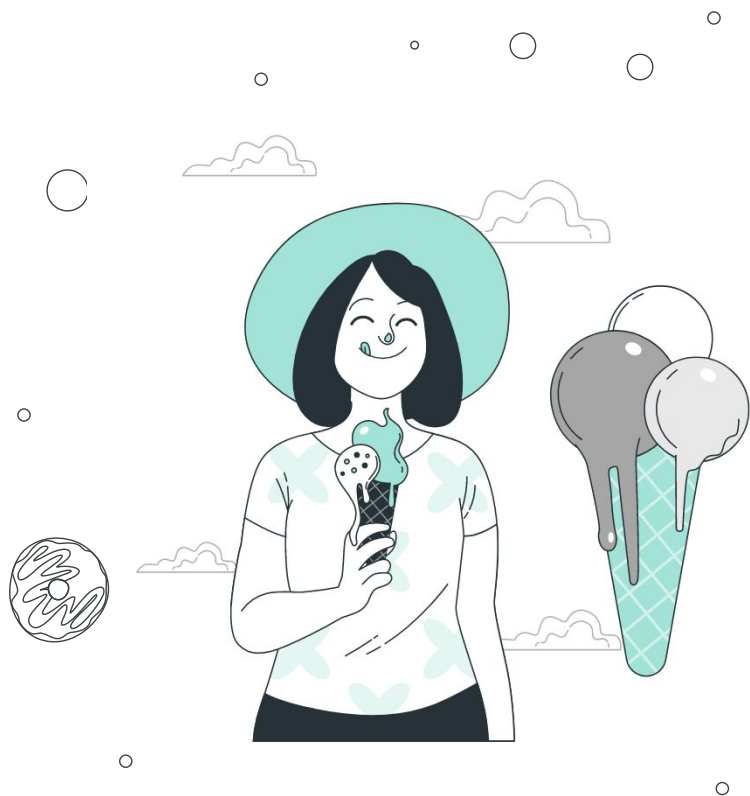


Key Insights:

- Some people see food as a **passive interest** rather than a passion or hobby
- People can appreciate well-made, high-quality, home-cooked food and still feel that making such food for themselves is **not worth** the difficulty

We wonder if this means...

- People need to understand the **story, cultural context, and experience behind food** in order to be connected to it and appreciate it further
 - Cooking for others may feel more meaningful than cooking for yourself
-



02

Grace

Manager of 99 Ranch (Asian Grocery)

Interview conducted at 99 Ranch while taking physical notes

Context & Observations

Who is Grace?

- Immigrated with her husband and children from Taiwan 10 years ago

Surprises

- Some immigrants feel a lot of **comfort** at an Asian grocery because it **reminds them of home**
- The Asian grocery also has western products, so can help **bridge cultures**
- When people bring recipes of a cuisine they are not used to, they are not always authentic

Contradictions

- She misses Taiwanese food culture, but also enjoys American food culture



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"Sometimes we miss Taiwanese food culture, but I am used to the living style here in America. My kids are probably more used to it here"

"Shopping here can be a comfort if it reminds them of home"

"It can also help bridge cultures as we have Western products too"

"I learnt how to make western dishes through YouTube or google"

"The demographic of 99 Ranch depends on location, about 40-50% Chinese, 20-30% Japanese/ Korean, so about 80% is Asian, 7-8% Caucasian"

"I normally cook Taiwanese food for my family, but we have also slowly starting incorporating Western dishes"

"Workers in ethnic groceries probably can't help with recipes as it is so subjective, but can certainly help with navigating more general questions such as which soy sauce is best"

"When we cook western dishes like pizza, it normally incorporates Asian elements too"

"The Asian recipes people bring in when looking for ingredients are not normally that authentic"

"There is sometimes a language barrier for non-Asians shopping at 99 Ranch"

SAY

The internet is a good place to learn cross-cultural dishes

Sometimes westerners learn to cook Asian recipes that are not that authentic

At 99 Ranch, we can't teach you how to cook, but we can help with general advice on ingredients

99 Ranch can be a bridging place for different cultures

Her kids will probably have a different perspective on what culture of food they prefer

I like to cook a mix of eastern and western dishes

Everyone has a different perspective of what food culture is satisfactory

You cook what you are used to eating when you were growing up (Taiwanese food)

There is some hesitation for non-Asians shopping at 99 Ranch, due to language and unfamiliarity

99 Ranch plays an important role for immigrants as it brings comfort

THINK

Initially refused to interview as she did not want to speak on behalf of the company

Kept her body language quite professional throughout

Does cook different cuisines at home (such as an Asian-style Pizza)

Tell her workers to help newcomers feel welcome in 99 Ranch

Slowly worked her way up to manager after immigrating

Notices the different demographics in 99 Ranch and how they feel

Opened up more emotively when talking of family/ immigration story

Is motivated to learn and adapt to new cultures since moving to America

Doesn't try to force Taiwanese food culture on her kids

Cook for fun for her family with ingredients from 99 Ranch

DO

A degree of responsibility/ professionalism as manager

Expresses warmth when talking of cooking for her family

Responsibility or usefulness that 99 Ranch can feel homey for immigrants

At peace living with a blend of cultures

Misses Taiwanese food culture but does not wish it to be different

Empathetic to newcomers shopping at 99 Ranch and barriers/ uncertainty they face

Understanding that her kids may have different cultural identities

Duty that 99 Ranch can help bridge cultures

Concern when some people face language barriers at 99 Ranch

Proud of her position as manager at 99 Ranch

FEEL

OBSERVATIONS

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"Shopping here can be a comfort if it reminds them of home"

"The Asian recipes people bring in when looking for ingredients are not normally that authentic"

99 Ranch can be a bridging place for different cultures

There is some hesitation for non-Asians shopping at 99 Ranch, due to language and unfamiliarity

Does cook different cuisines at home (such as an Asian-style Pizza)

Tell her workers to help newcomers feel welcome in 99 Ranch

Responsibility or usefulness that 99 Ranch can feel homey for immigrants

Concern when some people face language barriers at 99 Ranch

Key Insights

Key Insights:

- There is some **difficulty in finding authentic recipes** from different cultures due to language barriers and where to find these resources
- Familiar and unfamiliar foods can lead to feelings of comfort/ belonging or discomfort/ hesitation

We wonder if this means...

- There are **more barriers** to cooking cross-cultural dishes than we realized (logistic / language difficulties as well as self-consciousness)
 - **Authentic ingredients** can have a big impact on one's connection to culture
-



03

Jaclyn

Owner and Head Chef of Comida Peruana

Interview conducted at Farmers Market and transcribed using with **Otter.ai**

Context & Observations

Who is Jaclyn?

- Immigrant from **Peru**, Mother
- Dreams of opening up a Peruvian coffee shop one day

Surprises:

- To experience authentic Peruvian food, Jaclyn believes you must visit Peru.
- Jaclyn was incredibly knowledgeable about the **historical traditions** that the food represented: e.g. Chasqui Peruvian messengers gaining strength through quinoa
- What you eat is a representation of your health and discipline

Contradictions:

- Wants to expand her business and scale, but is scared to teach other individuals and let go of “her way” of cooking



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OBSERVATIONS

SAY

- "What you eat represents who you are and where you come from, and represents how you treat your body"
- The Incan people ate quinoa because they used to be the "Fedex" of the olden days
- Wants to open a coffee shop that sells Peruvian food items.
- She always knew she wanted to be a chef one day.
- She knows how it feels to fall asleep hungry
- She has not found somewhere in the Bay Area that carries as authentic Peruvian cuisine as that found in Peru.
- People should visit Peru to experience the culture
- Shared that her family was poor growing up
- Favorite thing to cook would be too hard to replicate at a farmer's market
- The best Peruvian food is in Peru itself.
- Bay Area Peruvian food is too commercialized from English influence.
- "Food means health... Food means care"
- She is a perfectionist
- Began during the pandemic
- "I really believe that you become whatever you eat."
- She already feels like she is living the dream

DO

- Wore Peruvian apron
- Had vegetarian options
- Described the cultural aspects of Peruvian food deeply
- Offered samples
- Wanted more social media presence
- Used homemade containers to store cooked food for sampling
- Very prideful in Peruvian culture
- Was jubilant at the site of any new customer
- Carried a pencil case from Peru
- Knew the history behind each dish she served
- Asked how to increase the exposure of her business within Stanford
- Displayed aprons for gifts you could purchase

THINK

- Piece of culture is missing from our generation and this side of the world
- The context behind the food makes the experience meaningful
- What you eat shows who you are
- Commercialized food does not fully represent the culture and tradition where the food comes from.
- When food is made with love, it can feel nourishing not only for your taste, but also your health and wellness.
- Food represents general wellbeing.
- She feels scared to "let go" in the kitchen, but knows she has to be open in order to scale her business
- Understanding the context behind the food incentivizes us to make healthier decisions about what we consume.
- Only her and her family have the ability of achieving the similarity to Peruvian dishes.
- More people should visit Peru for even just taste her authentic meals to truly understand the historic roots of the foods that we consume.
- The way you eat reflects who you are and the healthy/unhealthy habits you build.
- She needs to adapt in order to grow and expand.

FEEL

- She might be feeling like it is her job/duty to share about her culture in a place that she finds void of culture.
- She might be feeling empowered that this is her role and task, this is what she was put on this Earth to do.
- She might be feeling underrepresented in the Bay Area food culture
- Food is her way of giving back to a country that gave her opportunity and welcomed her.
- Food is her way of caring for individuals and contributing to society
- Food is her way of ensuring that no child has to go to sleep hungry.
- She might be scared that the tradition/stories may get lost when translating to the Western context.
- She might be scared of letting others take the lead in the cooking, but she also knows that it is necessary to spread the tradition further.
- Just because someone is not wealthy does not mean that they should have to settle for cheaper, unhealthy food options.
- Patriotic sense of representing her country by spreading the culture within the US
- Strong sense of purpose in caring for others and supporting others through food.
- Tied with her familial background?
- She also finds sense of purpose in being an entrepreneur and learning every day how to scale.

INFERENCES

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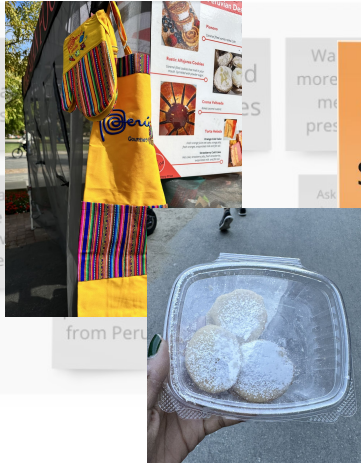
OBSERVATIONS

"What you eat represents who you are and where you come from, and represents how you treat your body"

She knows how it feels to fall asleep hungry

Knew the history behind each dish she served

Offered samples



The context behind the food makes the experience meaningful

Understanding the context behind the food incentivizes us to make healthier decisions about what we consume.

Food represents general wellbeing.

Patriotic sense of representing her country by spreading the culture within the US

She might be scared that the tradition/stories may get lost when translating to the Western context.

Strong sense of purpose in caring for others and supporting others through food.

INFERENCES

Key Insights

Key Insights:

- The **history of a food** can be used to contextualize its health benefits.
- Authentic cuisine is difficult to recreate in a casual setting without the right ingredients and equipment.
- Scaling means more chefs trained with similar recipes—this is a source of worry!

We wonder if this means...

- People need to be informed on the **cultural/historical context** of a food to recognise its health benefits
 - Chefs want to balance **preserving authenticity** with making recipes **easy-to-replicate and scalable**
-

Extreme user!



04

Sofia

Chef at Xanadu House at Stanford.

Interview conducted in Xanadu computer cluster, recorded with [Otter.ai](#)

Context & Observations

Who is Sofia?

- Came to the U.S. from Mexico when she was 16.
- Used to be a hasher before she became a chef at Stanford.

Surprises:

- She hated to cook as a child and learned to cook on the job as a hasher.
- Dislikes the idea of cooking at home and goes out to eat on weekends.
- Goes to English websites even for Mexican dishes.

Contradictions:

- Enjoys the appreciation for her cooking from students, but never cooks for family or loved ones.
 - Says she has more screenshots of recipes than pictures with her family on her phone, yet doesn't ever cook outside of Stanford.
 - Says her mother is the best cook she knows, but also doesn't reference her as a source of recipes.
-



Trending Now



10 Fall Flavors That Are Better Than Pumpkin Spice

By Bailey Fink



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HIGH VALUE

LOW EFFORT

SAY

- her favourite thing to cook is Mexican food
- she rarely cooks for her spouse/family, maybe only at Christmas
- she and her husband only cook eggs in the morning and go out in the evening when eating at home
- some cuisines are harder to master because of the different ingredients and processes
- her favourite part of cooking is when students tell her "thank you" or "it was delicious"
- she has more screenshots of recipes than pictures of her family
- she uses English recipe websites even for Mexican cooking
- seeing a dish cooked in-person is more valuable than a video
- there are some dishes she can't cook even if she has a recipe
- she didn't like to cook as a child
- her favourite dish is Mexican mole

THINK

- the types of dishes she cooks at school wouldn't appeal to her family
- becoming a chef gave her a better standing as an employee
- If she cooked her favourite dish for students, they may not like it
- there is some distance between what she previously knew about food and what she cooks now
- if a recipe is complicated and she hasn't been shown how to do it, it's hard to approach
- predictable and trustworthy sources for recipes are more reliable than to experiment
- cooking is something that comes from her job and not from her background or her heart
- cooking at home is exhausting after cooking all day at work
- she learned how to cook by doing, and this is the best way for her to learn
- she is as competent as her mother and grandmother at this point in her cooking experience
- foods that require preparation in advance are harder to cook (called Chinese "hard" but Indian "easy" for this reason)

HIGH EFFORT

DO

- say she "didn't know" the answer to follow-ups
- smile when talking about why she loves to cook now
- answered questions about recipes and how she found them with the least hesitation
- would sometimes be unsure of the "why" after answering a question
- sometimes struggle to understand the question or was surprised by them
- break eye contact and look at the window when contemplating her answer
- sit relatively still
- when not looking away, maintained good eye contact
- smile when she was uncertain
- left her phone in the other room before beginning the interview

FEEL

- the appreciation behind students' compliments make her feel valued
- her cooking isn't something for her to share with her loved ones or family
- like she was being asked questions about things she hadn't thought about much
- responsible for finding the right ingredients when given an unfamiliar recipe
- cooking is more of a set of instructions than something that comes spontaneously
- intimidated by more complicated recipes even though she's a chef, if no one's showed her how to cook it
- satisfied that she puts out meals for many people to eat
- it's overwhelming to cook both on the job and at home
- that it's too late to learn from her mother or grandmother, since she hated it as a kid
- hesitant to interact with students extensively

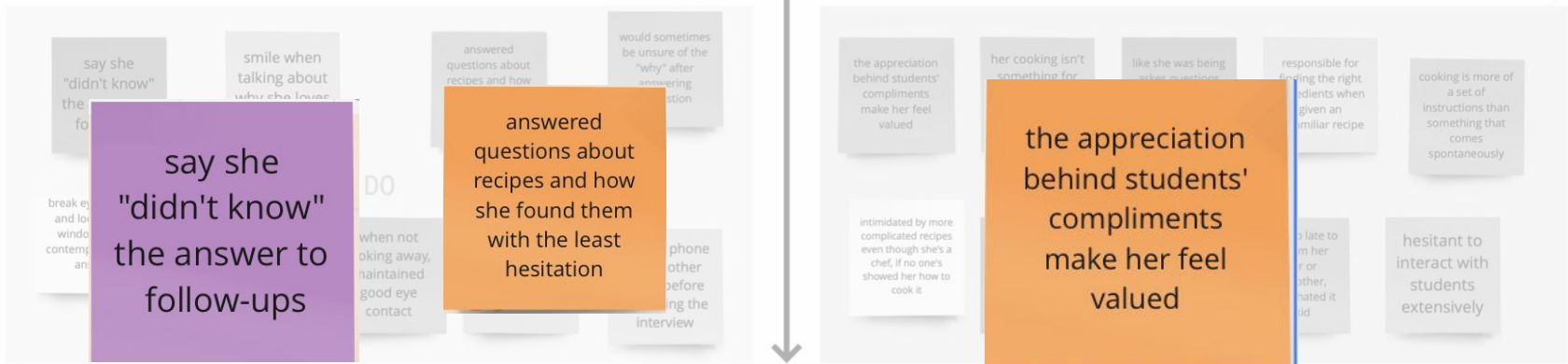
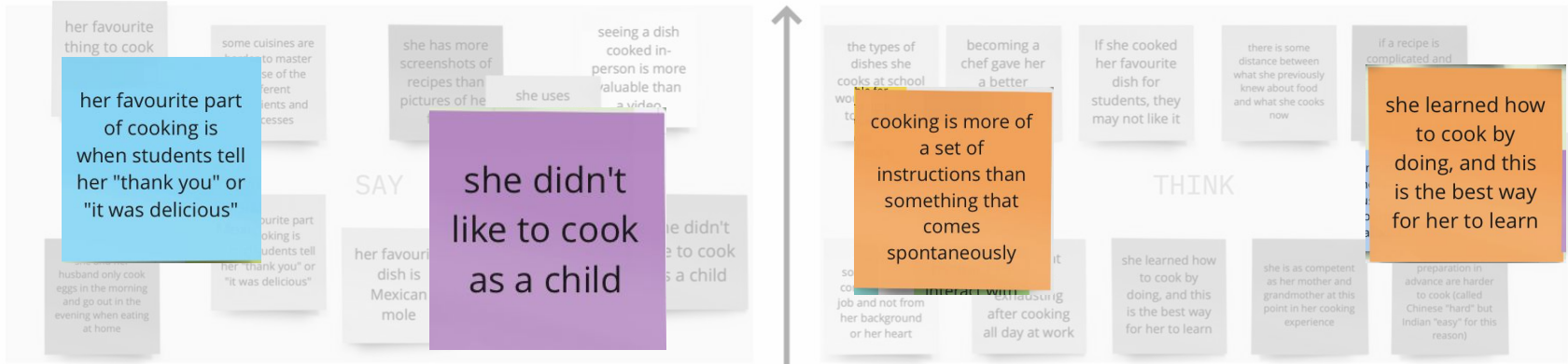
LOW VALUE

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HIGH VALUE

LOW EFFORT

HIGH EFFORT



LOW VALUE

Key Insights

Key Insights:

- Seeing the real-life movements of somebody cooking greatly **accelerated** her learning process. (preferred videos > recipe books)
- She didn't like the idea of cooking until she learned it **on the job**.
- Her favourite part of cooking is receiving **compliments** from students.
- She wouldn't cook the same things for the students and her family, and always uses **English** recipe sites.

We wonder if this means...

- Her perspective on the food she cooks is heavily influenced by **whom** she's cooking it for.
 - Learning how to cook oftentimes **comes from necessity** and not genuine passion or interest.
 - More **widely-accepted** dishes are less **intimidating** to want to cook for others.
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Recurring Themes

Authenticity

Authentic food made from authentic ingredients is hard to come by, but extremely relished.

Outlook

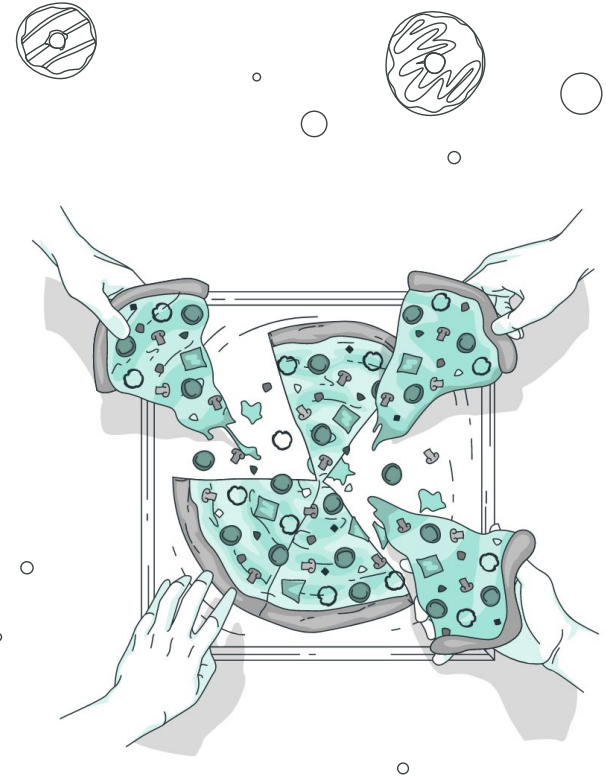
The experience of cooking and eating can be purely transactional (for work, just to be full) rather than deeply personal and intentional.

Hesitation

There is some barrier to sharing food/cooking for others (perfectionism, being unsure if palatable to different cultures, etc.)

Audience

Who they cooked for mattered to most of our interviewees and shaped the way they think about cooking.



Summary: What's Next?

- Diving further into effective ways of **preserving tradition while spreading culture.**
- Diving further into **reducing barriers (effort, language, insecurity)** to authentic cooking
- We've seen common threads of hesitation and with several topics around food- what could help them?
- Interviewing more people and **validating/invalidating** these insights.
- Developing prototypes for re-emerging ideas!

Appendix

<https://food52.com/recipes/84225-mole-sencillo-recipe>

<https://www.allrecipes.com>