

Luca Sabelli

CART310

Main Question:

How might we be more connected to our identities?

Script for Interviews (semi-structured):

- Can you tell me a little about your family heritage? How does this shape your sense of identity?
- Do you sometimes feel disconnected from your identity? * If so, what contributed to that feeling? *
- Have you ever felt pressure to hide parts of your identity? Why?
- Are there spaces where you feel more or less comfortable expressing your identity?
- How do you connect with your identity?
- Do you feel like your connection with your identity has evolved over time?
- Do the people around you influence that connection?
- Do you use any platforms or community resources to help you feel more connected?
- Has the use of technology ever affected that connection? Whether it be positive or negative
- Do social media platforms influence how you engage with your identity?
- Have you ever used technology to explore your identity? What was that experience like?
- If you could design a platform that helps people to connect with their identities, what would you want included?

Interview 1 (Luigi 60y M):

Luca:

So first, I would just like to make sure I have your consent to record.

Luigi:

Yes, I do.

Luca:

Yes, I do. Awesome. Well, first question, can you tell me a little bit about your family heritage?

Luigi:

Well, my ancestors come from Italy. My parents came here when they were teenagers, so I guess I'm first-generation Italian, Canadian.

Luca:

How does this shape your identity?

Luigi:

Well, basically shaped the way they were brought up in Europe, in Italy. So I share a lot of the culture of the Italians. And at the same time, I grew up in a very Italian neighborhood, even though we went to English school and watched English TV and were surrounded outside of our neighborhood by English and French. We were mainly Italians.

Luca:

Awesome. Do you sometimes feel disconnected from your identity? If so, what contributes to that?

Luigi:

I don't feel disconnected. I'm in my Italian heritage every day. Very fair. It's my job.

Luca:

That was very nice. Have you ever felt pressured to hide parts of your identity?

Luigi:

Growing up, yeah. When you're in different environments, let's say, French. A lot of the people that were maybe against our culture were French, so I would want to hide it. Then maybe just because my name is so Italian, I wanted to always use the Anglo-sized version.

Luca:

Are there spaces where you feel more comfortable expressing your identity?

Luigi:

Oh, yeah. Family situations and neighborhoods. Yeah, family situation and let's say Italian neighborhoods. Very nice. At work because I'm surrounded by everything that I make. Yeah, that's fair.

Luca:

How do you connect with your identity?

Luigi:

Well, I look up Instagram and social media posts regarding people who are like me, Italian-Canadians, Italian-Americans. Talk to my relatives.

Luca:

Do you feel like your connection with your identity has evolved over time?

Luigi:

Yes. Deepened as I got older, I started to appreciate it more and not want to hide it or pretend that I'm not what my background is. That's why I went to university and realized, even though I... In English culture, I'm deeply Italian.

Luca:

Well, do the people around you influence your identity?

Luigi:

Well, the only ones that really influence my identity are my parents and my relatives, but my older people who are older than me. I see.

Luca:

Well, do you use any platforms or resources to help you feel more connected?

Luigi:

Yeah, Instagram, YouTube.

Luca:

Would you say technology has had a positive effect on your connection with the identity?

Luigi:

Yeah, because I can go online and see what people are doing in Italy and other Italian areas. I see. As well, my Canadian side, what other Canadians are doing because I still feel deeply Canadian.

Luca:

I see. Since you use technology to explore your identity, what's that experience like?

Luigi:

It's informative more than anything. Just keeps me informed.

Luca:

Awesome. Last question. If you could design a platform that helps people to connect with their identities, what would you want included?

Luigi:

I don't know. Do you have any examples?

Luca:

I'll say other people have said journaling, journaling prompts. Our Q&A with experts was another example. Somebody said recipes, so you could see other recipes, stuff like that.

Luigi:

I guess I would like Maybe like translation, instant translation. If you have only... Well, I'm not limited, but let's say there are people who are limited, they have trouble

connecting with with, let's say, their immigrants. So they only know things culturally. So there's not just a translator or a dictionary, but something that actually knows what certain cultural things are.

Luca:

There are certain things that- Like colloquially terms? Colloquially, that's it. I see.

Luigi:

Yeah.

Luca:

Awesome. Well, you.

Luigi:

No worries.

Synthesis of the Luigi's Interview:

- Does not feel disconnected from identity because he is surrounded by it
- Feels connected through food and speaking the language
- Uses social media platforms like instagram and youtube to look at people with similar backgrounds as him (italo-canadian)
- Feels like his connection to his identity deepened with age
- Finds technology to be a positive impact on his connection, using it learn new things and connect with his culture
- Would like to see a translation aspect in this new platform
- Suggests it would have to be a translator that can understand many dialects and sub-dialects

Interview 2 (Lina 55y F):

Luca:

So first I'd just like to make sure I have your consent to record

Lina:

No

Luca:

okay Can you say yes?

Lina:

Okay. Yes, you have my consent.

Luca:

Thank you.Thank you.

Lina:

Barely have my consent.

Luca:

Okay, great Can you tell me a little about your family heritage? How does this shape your sense of identity?

Lina:

That's a really good question. I Would say my family heritage. I'm from Syrian background first-generation immigrants So I was actually born in Damascus and then my parents came over in 1969 It shapes me even though I look Canadian It just there's a lot more to me than meets the eye like what like Don't worry, it's fine Like what like Culture so my dad was Muslim when my mom was Catholic. So we were always kind of like my family was considered not accepted necessarily from either side because we were combined religions if you will But I did feel connected to my family and family through food My Arabic isn't great. I can't speak the language very well because I've been here so long And I'm not really connected to either religion.

Luca:

All right Do you sometimes feel disconnected from your identity? If so, what contributed to that feeling?

Lina:

I think being assimilated in Canada I believe in the core values of being Canadian. So I can't really relate to the culture of My homeland where I was born

Luca:

Have you ever felt pressure to hide parts of your identity ?

Lina:

Not really I have the luck of not looking Arabic if you will Typically people think I'm Italian or European, not necessarily an Arab. So I've gotten away with not having racial Discrimination where's some of my cousins who are veiled or some of my cousins who look more Maybe may not have had the same kind of treatment All right, are there spaces where you feel more or less comfortable expressing your identity I guess More or less comfortable up to you either one I Would say maybe sometimes less in the workplace and you don't want discrimination I will I'll speak to it in general. No School, I guess too when I was younger. Maybe I didn't want to let people know Having garlic for breakfast is not a typical thing for Your you know, white bread America

Luca:

Yeah, were there spaces where you feel more? Comfortable sharing your identity or I guess expressing it.

Lina:

I guess more in my circle of friends versus other formal areas.

Luca:

All right, how do you connect with your identity?

Lina:

Time with family Travel occasionally. That's it.

Luca:

Nice. Do you feel like your connection with your identity has evolved over time?

Lina:

I Would say over time. I feel a little less connected So More Canadian eyes if you will. I consider myself more Canadian than Syrian.

Luca:

How does that make you feel?

Lina:

Pretty good I feel lucky and privileged to be in Canada.

Luca:

Do the people around you influence that connection?

Lina:

Yes Canadians are awesome

Luca:

Very cool. Do you use any platforms or community resources that help you feel more connected?

Lina:

To my Canadian culture or my Syrian to your own identity Not really. No Well, actually, no, that's not true on Instagram. I follow people who cook Arabic food now. Oh, that's recent After my mom's passing It's like the one connection she had is food So now I'm following people and trying to learn to cook some of the recipes so food is really like this Vessel for you to share your identity or yes, or even I guess like familial love. Yes, because it brings a Memory It's very nice, isn't it? Partly your heritage too sir. Yes, it is

Luca:

Has the use of technology ever affected that connection whether it be positive or negative?

Lina:

Well Being of Syrian heritage and maybe through some of the political situations over the years and people's opinions Yeah, so it can be very negative more than positive

because people Are posting I try actually to stay out of politics because they it gets too heated So yes, I'd say negative People are very polarized when it comes to that

Luca:

That's good to know

Lina:

Well, yeah it is

Luca:

Do social media platforms influence how you engage with your identity?

Lina:

No, I'm not a big social media Consumer.

Luca:

No, not even LinkedIn.

Lina:

Not really. No and LinkedIn is about workplace I keep it workplace related

Luca:

Have you ever used technology to explore your identity and if so, what was that experience like

Lina:

Are you talking about my sexual identity?

Luca:

Whichever identity you feel comfortable sharing

Lina:

Not really, no.

Luca:

Then the last question: if you could design a platform that helps people connect with their identities, what would you want included?

Lina:

Definitely food Snapshots of history perhaps Common facts or myths just something quick like sound bites

Luca:

Well, thank you for your time. And thank you for your participation.

Lina:

You're most welcome young man

Synthesis of Lina's Interview:

- Grew up half catholic, half muslim. Very frowned upon in the Syrian culture
- Feels more comfortable sharing identity amongst friends and family
- Cannot relate to syrian culture because she feels as though shes been fully assimilated to Canada and aligns her values thusly
- Says that over time she feels less connected to her heritage but more connected to Canada
- Uses instagram to watch syrian cooking videos to learn more about her culture
- Tends to stay away from using social media to explore identity because she feels like there are a lot of negative comments associated with Syrian culture
- Would want this new platform to be able to share recipes and see family history. Also share common myths or facts about their identity

Interview 3 (Sarah 21y F):

Luca:

So first, I just want to make sure I have your consent to record this.

Sarah:

Yes, you do.

Luca:

Thank you so much. First, can you tell me a little bit about your family heritage?

Sarah:

So my dad is born and raised in Jamaica and moved to Canada when he was 19, and my mom is half Swiss and half Canadian, and she's born here. So I'm half Jamaican, quarter Swiss, born in Canada.

Luca:

How do you think this shapes your sense of identity?

Sarah:

So it's definitely been a little bit confusing growing up, because I realized in my school, especially in elementary, there was a time where everyone started befriending each other based off of their race and their ethnicity. So all the Greek girls would come together and things like that. And there were no half Jamaican, quarter Swiss people out there. And since I'm also mixed race, it was, you know, I was too white for the black kids and a little too black for the white kids. So it was definitely very confusing growing up to find my identity in my race.

Luca:

Yeah. So do you sometimes feel disconnected from your identity? And what contributes to that feeling?

Sarah:

It was more when I was growing up that I felt disconnected. Now I've got it pretty much figured out. But yeah, like when I was growing up, it was just hard because it was hard to fit in and hard to befriend people and relate to people on that level. And also when

you're growing up and your parents control a lot of what you do, kids are raised differently, right? So some kids were raised, like, for example, a lot of black kids I knew had very, very strict parents and my parents were less strict. So I couldn't really relate to the things they could do and the things they couldn't do and their meals and things like that. But yeah, so that would contribute to a little bit of a difficulty in finding my identity. But now, especially since I'm an adult and my parents don't tell me what to do anymore and neither do my friends, it's a lot easier to befriend people. And exchanging things about culture is more of an interesting conversation than it is wanting to fit in.

Luca:

Awesome. Have you ever felt pressure to hide parts of your identity? If so, why?

Sarah:

Definitely. Yeah. So like, for example, once my English teacher asked if their parents had ever hit them, like to all the students, and everyone raised their hand, and I didn't raise my hand because this never happened to me before. And then one of the kids was like, what? But she's black. And in that case, I mean, I shouldn't have felt ashamed that my parents didn't hit me. But I definitely was like, I felt isolated a little bit. And there's a lot of other situations like that. Like, for example, I used to identify strongly as Quebecois because I'm born and raised in Quebec. And one of the, like, this was elementary school, one of the boys said that I couldn't be Quebecois because I was black. And in that case, I wanted to hide the fact that I was black, even though it's very much visible, and I cannot very much hide it. And I also like, it was confusing to me because I also wanted to hide the fact that I was Quebecois. So yeah, it was very, very confusing when I was growing up.

Luca:

Oh, well, it's tough to hear. Are there spaces where you feel more or less comfortable expressing your identity?

Sarah:

I usually feel comfortable all the time expressing my identity. I don't really code switch or anything like that, just because, well, like, growing up, I was also told a lot that I, like, even in high school, I was told that I sound white often, actually, especially by other black kids. And I didn't really know what that means, especially since I was, like, it was pretty much implied that sounding black is to sound less well-spoken and sounding white is to form full sentences and sound more well-spoken, which I thought inherently

was very racist to say that, especially as a black person, you should be able to understand the nuances. But yeah, sorry, what was the question?

Luca:

I guess if I'm trying to highlight something specific, maybe, like, are there places where you feel more comfortable expressing your...

Sarah:

Places where I feel comfortable. So definitely at home with my friends and where I'd feel less comfortable, it would definitely be, like, with strangers and in a work, you know, in a work environment or a professional school environment, where I would definitely just try to be as ambiguous as possible and kind of be, like, flat, you know, nothing different and just staying the same as everybody else. Yeah.

Luca:

Great. Well, how do you connect with your identity?

Sarah:

Well, I definitely try to connect with my identity through food and Jamaican cuisine, Canadian cuisine, Swiss cuisine is great. I have a lot of options. And other than that, like, I try to have a very nice, diverse friend group, but that can be a little bit difficult, especially where I live in the West Island. It's always been very white. So I definitely do try and make friends with everybody so we can talk about our identities and our culture. And that helps me connect as well.

Luca:

Great. Do you feel like your connection with your identity has evolved over time?

Sarah:

Definitely. Like, when I was a kid, it was a lot more difficult to connect. And I have so many stories, actually, so many. Like, well, this one's definitely a little more sad. But when I was a kid, like, maybe eight or seven, I went to a friend's house on a play date. And she was, I think, half Persian and half Quebecois, but that doesn't really matter. And she actually ended up locking me in a closet and saying that her uncle had come because there was a ring at the doorbell. And she said her uncle was home and her uncle kills Black people. So I was, like, in this closet, fearing for my life. I was very scared because, in my mind, I didn't even know that racism was a concept. And I was

also scared because my dad was supposed to pick me up, and he's Jamaican. And I'm like, is this uncle going to attack my dad? Like, what's going to happen? So yeah, that was a very difficult question.

Luca:

How does your identity evolve over time?

Sarah:

Yeah, so it made me very ashamed as to how I identify and scared as well, in case other people would disagree. And with the other stories of kids telling me that I couldn't be a certain race or identify a certain way, it was all very confusing. But now, I feel a lot more confident in the way I identify. And I've done a lot of research on the topic. I can understand that as being mixed race, that I have a lot of privilege from the white side historically. And I also have similar judgments and stereotypes that a non-mixed Black person would receive as well. So I can understand my privilege from the Black community and also the discrimination I feel as well. I understand where it's coming from, and I can deal with it a lot easier than when I was a kid.

Luca:

Awesome. Well, do the people around you influence that connection?

Sarah:

Yeah, I definitely say so. Like, I always make sure I'm with supportive friends and who help me feel proud of who I am. And if someone were to make a comment that I disagreed with about like racism, or if they were racist towards me or someone else, I would absolutely cut off that person. That person would be dead to me because I do not tolerate it at all anymore.

Luca:

Do you use any platforms or community resources to help you feel more connected?

Sarah:

That's a good question. I do, in a sense that I follow people on Instagram who are from the Black community, who are what I thrive to be. So I follow a lot of doctors and OBGYNs who are Black and talk about their experience as a Black doctor. Of course, these people suffer a lot more discrimination than white doctors, also Black women. So they still suffer a lot, lot more discrimination. So they talk about this and it's something

that I'm learning about. And I now know more what to expect as someone going through that path. So Instagram has been a big help for that.

Luca:

Has the use of technology ever affected your connection to your identity, whether it be positive or negative?

Sarah:

Um, yeah, definitely affected. But whether it's positive or negative, I think it's a bit of both. Like for example, during the Black Lives Matter protests, I saw a lot of things that affected me both negatively and positively. Like I saw a lot of people posting very traumatic videos of people getting lynched, of people getting attacked on the street, or a lot of police brutality. All these videos were very hard to watch as a Black person. And they were just there. There was no trigger warning or anything. It was just people posting. And I know they were trying to show their support, but it was a lot to see. And of course, there was a lot of people supporting in more positive ways that were just asking Black people about their opinions on the subject, signing petitions and going out to protests, which I thought was really positive. And it showed that there was a lot of, you know, solidarity now compared to before. So it's, yeah, it's negative and positive. I had someone who texted me and asked, like, well, she didn't actually ask. She just texted me to boast about the Black shows she was watching. It was completely out of the blue. It was a little bit odd, actually. And she was like, yeah, you know, I've been watching, what was it? It was like the show Dear White People. And I was like, yeah, it's a good show. But I didn't have any strong opinions on it. I didn't, I wasn't telling her to watch it. I wasn't telling her not to watch it. I definitely wasn't the kind of person that she should be asking for opinions on shows to watch about the Black community. She could have just looked it up. Or, you know, I'm sure there's a lot of accredited people with university degrees on the subject who made articles that she could have looked. So I was a little confused by that, too. It wasn't negative or positive. It was just strange.

Luca:

So do you feel that people maybe use you to validate themselves through your identity?

Sarah:

Oh, yeah, I've seen that a couple of times. It's not something that happens all the time at all. It's just actually this one person. The person that I mentioned who had texted me about the shows, she's the same person who has made very strange comments to me about my race. For example, she said I was like an Oreo because I was black on the

outside and white on the inside. And then she went on to claim that she was a reverse Oreo because she was white on the outside and black on the inside. And this was like a friendship. We weren't best friends or anything, but we still hung out after school and things like that. So I didn't really know what to say about all of this. And I have a feeling now in hindsight that she was definitely using me for my race to appear, I don't know, more inclusive. But it was definitely like there was something going on there. If it wasn't something that was going through her mind, she would not have brought up these subjects in conversation.

Luca:

Well, how did that make you feel? I guess somebody using you just because of your race.

Sarah:

It didn't hurt me. It wasn't a situation that was serious enough to hurt me. I found it confusing. And honestly, that specific comment I thought was very funny because there was other people there, like it was in a classroom. And looking around to my friends, like my other friends, I was kind of laughing about it. Cause I'm like, how do you even respond to a comment like that? Like, there's really no way. And she has made other comments that were similar. Like for example, in a classroom, she, there was like a debate on Quebec culture. And she is Quebecoise. And she was talking about how people don't like to identify with Quebec. And I commented on how, like the story that I had said, how people told me I couldn't identify as Quebecoise because I was black. And other people had similar stories. Other black girls had similar stories. And yeah, and one girl was talking about how difficult it was for her to be told that she couldn't identify as a certain thing. And then the girl who was talking about responding was like, yeah, but this is my country though. Implying that the black girl is not her country was really messed up. So yeah, I definitely do think she was using me. And I didn't care that much. It was like, at the time, I didn't really think about it. Now that I'm thinking about it, it's not something that has affected me seriously in my life. It was just a really strange situation. You know, in high school, people just say things. And it's like, you see this person every day. You can't really form like some big drama off of it. You just kind of let it slide.

Luca:

Have you ever used technology to explore your identity? And what was that experience like?

Sarah:

Have I ever used? That's a good question. I don't think so. I don't know. I'm trying to think of examples. Other than look up people who I look up to, like doctors who are black women, like people who are like me, who have done very good things and who are very successful. I haven't really used the internet to look up my identity. Or like technology in general. Because I come across things on the internet that validate my identity. Like, you know, TV shows and movies that like, you know, Steven Universe, for example, has a very great, I guess she's not technically black, but she also is a black representation.

Luca:

You talking about Garnet?

Sarah:

Yeah. And things like that. Like, I also like to cosplay black characters. So I guess in that sense, it's, you know, technology is on, it's on the TV, it's on the computer and things like that. But I've never actively like looked it up.

Luca:

So you find yourself connecting with your identity through, let's say, cosplaying characters you look up to that have a similar identity to yourself.

Sarah:

Absolutely, yeah. It's not easy either because there's not that many. And when they are, especially in anime, it can be racist. It can be very racist.

Luca:

Yes.

Sarah:

Not on purpose. I really don't think it's on purpose, but I definitely don't want to promote that by cosplaying the character. So yeah, I absolutely try to find characters that I identify with. Like when I was younger, I cosplayed Missy from Big Mouth because she looks like exactly like me when I was her age, like exactly the same. And we also had very similar personalities. Garnet from Steven Universe I've cosplayed. And I'm trying to think of others. It can be, I cosplayed Spider-Man. This was before Miles Morales. And even at that, it was like right before Into the Spider-Verse came out. And I went to ComicCon having a great time. And then someone, I was with my friend and someone

asked to take a picture. And he wanted me to stay out of the picture and just take a picture of my friend because he said I wasn't canon. I was like, there's infinite universes, come on.

Luca:

You weren't canon, Sarah.

Sarah:

It's just like every time, it's like the microaggressions, you know, there's a lot of them. But it's like, you know, they only affect me if they pile up and it's such, it's kind of rare. I don't go out that much either. So it's not very common. And I really make an effort to surround myself with positive people. So it doesn't affect me all that much anymore.

Luca:

All right. So last question. If you could design a platform that helps people to connect with their identities, what would you want included?

Sarah:

I would want professional advice included. You know, I really do enjoy the show, Big Mouth. I know it's a very controversial show. But the reason I enjoyed it is because the character, Missy, is so well-written and I really identified as her, like with her when I was growing up, because I started watching the show when I was like 15 or 14 and she was like 13. So it was the same thing. And in this show, they really addressed a lot of things like code switching. And I thought it was a really well done. All the black characters are well-written and they address things that black people face, especially teenagers that they don't know how to address. So I would want that in this piece of media or website that would help other people. I would want professional advice, but also advice for things like what do you do if someone says the N word? Like it's happened a lot. It's happened very often, especially those, you know, edgy teenage boys. It's like I never knew what to say. And I just said nothing and I just like didn't really address it. And like, it was weird. It was very weird. So this is one of the things I wish like was more present. Like, what do you say? Do you say it's hurtful? Do you ignore it? The person isn't, they're trying to be offensive for the sake of being offensive. Like they don't hate me for being black. They just say it because they're quirky and edgy and 14. You know what I mean? That was weird. So it was like, so like I'd have that kind of advice, like an advice column. And I'd also like a lot of like professionals who are very successful, who could inspire younger generations. For example, my school did like a black success where people who had graduated from my CGIP came in and talked about their professional

fields. And there was a bunch of different ones. I thought it was really great. So I'd have like that sort of thing on the piece of media as well, like on the website, I guess. And yeah, and I think it's important to remember that everyone's circumstances are different. Like, you know, someone who has like African heritage isn't the same as someone who has Caribbean heritage and who's born in Canada and has like, like it's all different. Everyone's culture is different and they all have different experiences. So I think it'd be important to include all of them or at least an advice column that welcomes everything and all of the questions you might have. Because like going back to like the N-word thing, like it's what are you supposed to say, right? Like it's all great to go on a movie and the guy gets beaten up if he says it in public or like on a TV show, but that's not real life. That's not what people do. And if it's a professional thing, then obviously you go to like a superior and you tell them off or you go to a teacher. But like as a kid, you're not going to go to a teacher. You're not going to snitch or anything. You're not going to be that guy. So it'd be interesting to learn how to deal with that. So just the kind of awkward questions that people have where there's like an expected answer, but it's never going to be the answer that you're going to do. Like, yeah.

Luca:

So like a Q&A with professionals. Yeah. Awesome. Well, thank you for your participation. I very much appreciate it.

Sarah:

Thank you for the interview.

Synthesis of Sarah's interview:

- Feels more disconnected from identity because of mixed heritage. (Felt excluded from being white and being black)
- Wanted to hide heritage but couldn't because its visible
- Feels more comfortable to express identity at home and surrounded by family and friends
- Connects to identity through food and making new friends of diverse backgrounds to share their culture
- Time has increased the connection to her identity. Shared a story about how disconnected she felt from her heritage when she was a kid. Has a better understanding overall now.
- Uses instagram to explore identity through following creators with similar backgrounds and interests to her.
- Finds that while social media platforms allow people to express identity and share struggles, however it also can create a space for more hate speech
- Uses cosplay of favourite black characters to feel more connected and empowered by their identity
- Would like to have a Q&A with professionals to help with difficult questions surrounding their race, maybe a forum?

Interview 4 (Yasmine 29y F):

Luca:

I just want to make sure I have your consent to record.

Yasmine:

Okay

Luca:

Thank you. All right, so, uh, can you tell me a little bit about your family heritage? Yes, I know, I know.

Yasmine:

Can I tell you a little bit about my family heritage? I'm half Syrian on my mom's side and half Italian on my dad's side. Born in Canada, my dad was also born in Canada, but my grandparents are from Italy, two different areas. Yeah, and my mom was born in Syria in Damascus and came to Canada when she was like one years old.

Luca:

All right, uh, how does this shape your sense of identity?

Yasmine:

Oh God, I wish I could prepare for this. How does this shape my sense of identity? Um, well, I guess growing up with the culture, those two cultures, um, the values that those cultures hold, like family togetherness, um, being loyal, being generous, definitely being generous, a lot of things that were instilled in me at a young age that I've carried through today.

Luca:

Very nice. Do you sometimes feel disconnected from your identity?

Yasmine:

From my identity? Yeah, all the time.

Luca:

What contributes to that feeling?

Yasmine:

Uh, I feel like I don't think I will ever know who I am because it's like you're ever evolving, you're changing every day, every interaction that you have, every experience that you have changes who you are, so how could you ever really know who you are, you know?

Luca:

Yeah, I see what you're saying. Have you ever felt pressure to hide parts of your identity? If so, why?

Yasmine:

Um, parts of my identity, probably, probably when I was younger, I felt, um, like my Syrian Arabic heritage was like something I was like guilty or ashamed of because it was different than like people in my elementary school, but as I grew older, I was exposed to more people with different cultures and became comfortable with it.

Luca:

Yeah, very cool. Are there spaces where you feel more or less comfortable expressing your identity?

Yasmine:

Um, well, I feel more comfortable with people that have known me for a long time versus people that I don't know that are strangers or people that are in my family or people of similar that I have common interests with because it's easier to like talk about things that make up who you are with those people.

Luca:

Do you ever think about like, let's say, separating it from work and like personal life? Do you think that there's a, there's a way to, a more, a higher pressure for you hiding it at work or hiding it?

Yasmine:

Uh, I feel like I just, at work, because I work in HR, I don't really try and get personal with people in general. Um, because it's like, that's not really my job. Um, and because I'm like dealing with confidential things. So with my like team members, like I'm comfortable sharing things, but I already like tried and keep that level of professionalism. Um, so that is kind of like ingrained in like my career, I would say. So

it's just part of the job. Yeah. Like I don't really think I can make friends with my employees. You know what I mean? Because I'm their HR person. I kind of have to keep that relationship, not like a friendship.

Luca:

Makes sense. Uh, how do you connect with your identity?

Yasmine:

I feel like having interests that are just my own, like having hobbies or just like things that I'm interested in, um, that makes me like, feel like an individual, um, instead of like, I always do this thing with this person or I do this because this person likes it. And always feeling like searching for things outside of myself. Like what do I actually like to do by myself and having a long time?

Luca:

Yeah. Do you feel like your connection with your identity has evolved over time?

Yasmine:

Yeah. I feel like even though, like I said, I never, I'm going to know who I am. I feel like as I get, as you get older, you get to know yourself better and you become more confident and secure in yourself and you search for external validation less, you can validate yourself more. So even though I know I'm going to forever like change, my identity is forever going to be like ever changing. I feel more secure in who I am and know the things I like, what I don't like.

Luca:

Makes sense. Uh, do the people around you influence that connection?

Yasmine:

Um, I feel like if you're surrounded by people who are more negative, then your mindset will become more negative in everything. If you have people who are like positive, supportive, or like bring good energy to your life, then that will like change your mindset as well of like how you think and live your life, like the people that you surround yourself with. So I think that falls into your identity as well. Like if you're constantly around people that are speaking negatively about you or like judging you, that's going to fall into your identity, you know?

Luca:

That's very true. Uh, do you use any platforms or community resources to help you feel more connected to your identity?

Yasmine:

I feel like for my identity, I, I don't have any social media, but I, I have Pinterest, which is more just like for my interests. So like, like things like my hobbies are like just looking at like recipes or whatever that help like is interesting to me and helps further my hobbies and interests, but any other platforms, I don't know, can I say like journaling platform?

Luca:

I mean, yeah, why not? It's a medium for sure.

Yasmine:

Journaling. I use a meditation app. I meditate, um, almost every day. So like things like that are like practices I do that are within my interests and also like help me feel good within myself.

Luca:

Yeah. Like self-awareness, right?

Yasmine:

Yeah.

Luca:

Has the use of technology ever affected your connection?

Yasmine:

Um, well, whether it be positive or negative, I feel like when you have Instagram or TikTok or anything like that, cause I used to have those for me, it was first of all addicting, but also you comparing yourself constantly. If you don't, not everyone does that. But for me, at least I was comparing myself like, oh, this person is doing this. I should do this. Oh, why don't I do that? I need to look like that or do this or like, so I removed myself from those. And like, I feel, I felt a big difference.

Luca:

So you're saying like social media has a large comparison culture.

Yasmine:

Yeah. But I think it's, I think some people can interact on social media and not have that mindset. It maybe it's just, it's more prone to girls or I don't know, but for me, I definitely felt it. Um, but I'm not saying everybody will feel that way if they're on social media.

Luca:

Wow. I mean, I guess we already answered this question, but, uh, do you, does social media influence how you engage with their identity?

Yasmine:

Does it influence how I engage with my identity? I feel like I say it like right now I'm using it to like further my things I'm interested in or like give me ideas and inspiration. So in that way, it's like positively influencing, engaging my identity, but it could also do go the opposite way. If I was like thinking, comparing myself to all the, all the things I see.

Luca:

Um, awesome. Uh, if you could design a platform that helps you, that helps people connect with their identities, what would you want included?

Yasmine:

I feel like, um, like prompts like journaling prompts or like just self-reflecting prompts to like ask questions about like that, dig deeper into like who you are, what you like, or, you know, who do you want to be? Kind of thing that would help you connect. Cause I think some people don't reflect on those things often. Like, so having prompts would be good. Something more personal. Like, yeah.

Luca:

I feel like a lot of people who I asked this question were more like thinking about it as a social media platform, but you're saying it too, as like, it's like a platform as self meditation as well. So you can reflect on your own identity.

Yasmine:

Yeah. Like meditation or just like, like I'm thinking of like, let's say certain people have like structured journals where it's like, Oh, I'm grateful for this. Or what did I like doing today or whatever? Like something where it's like questions every day that you can like, that'll pop up that you wouldn't think in your own head. Like I should ask myself this

question. So it does it for you. And then you can respond and then you, you would be self-reflecting like doing that.

Luca:

Yeah. Very interesting. That was a good one. All right. Well, that's it.

Yasmine:

Thank you. Did you come up with these questions?

Luca:

Yeah, I did. Thank you.

Yasmine:

Thank you. Well, thank you for the interview. Appreciate it very much.

Synthesis of Yasmine's Interview:

- Finds that being of mixed heritage shapes identity by mixing cultural customs
- Is more comfortable engaging with her identities when surrounded by friends and family
- Does not necessarily see a reason to hide identity at work, but since she works in HR it is already customary
- Connects to her identity through hobbies and self-exploration, "Like what do I actually like to do by myself"
- Says that her identity will forever change with time, and that as time goes on she'll become more confident in who she is
- She talks about surrounding yourself with people who have positive mindsets to feel more comfortable sharing her identity
- Does not have any social media platforms, and only uses pinterest to look for recipes or personal hobbies
- Uses journaling and meditation to connect with herself internally
- Talks about how she got off social media because of the comparison culture it creates, "I need to look like that or do this or like, so I removed myself from those. And like, I feel, I felt a big difference."
- Finds her main use of technology to explore identity is to only research her interests
- Would like the platform to have its own prompts for journaling, specifically questions to dig deep
- I find it very interesting that her focus on exploring identity was so centered towards the self, most the other interviews focused on external feelings

Interview 5 (Sabrina 27y F):

Luca:

Okay, so first, I'd just like to make sure I have your consent to record. I have your consent to record. Okay, well, can you tell me a little bit about your family heritage?

Sabrina:

My father is first generation Italian, born in Canada, and my mom was born in Syria.

Luca:

How does this shape your identity?

Sabrina:

It makes me feel like I am a Canadian with a diverse cultural background, parents from two various cultures, two different cultures.

Luca:

Do you sometimes feel disconnected from your identity?

Sabrina:

Yes.

Luca:

What contributes to that feeling?

Sabrina:

Not being in touch with my Syrian heritage, not speaking the language, and not understanding the language, but my Italian, I understand. I can passively communicate, and I worked at my dad's Italian store for a long time.

Luca:

Have you ever felt pressure to hide parts of your identity?

Sabrina:

I always feel ashamed that I that I say that I'm Syrian because I know nothing about Syria or my culture or my language. Only the food, really. So yes, I don't want to tell other Arab people that I'm Syrian.

Luca:

Are there spaces where you feel more comfortable expressing your identity?

Sabrina:

No.

Luca:

Okay, fair. How do you connect with your identity?

Sabrina:

I eat the food.

A lot of food.

Yeah, is that okay? And I'm learning Italian.

Luca:

Learning the language, too. Okay.

Sabrina:

Why do you keep looking at me? Why do you keep looking at me? We're recording.

Luca:

It's for him. Yeah, it's fine.

I'll fix it.

It's for class. I'll fix it. No, it's fine.

It's gonna be a transcript anyways. Do you feel like your connection with your identity has evolved over time?

Sabrina:

No, yes. I'm very young. I feel like it's hard for me to say. I feel like my name is very Italian, so I've always felt Italian, and then I worked at my dad's store, so I felt even more Italian. The answer is I don't know. I'm sorry.

Luca:

Time will tell, I guess, right?

Sabrina:

Only time will tell. I'm sorry, Luca.

Luca:

Do the people around you influence your identity?

Sabrina:

Maybe. My family... No.
No.
They don't.
I don't think so. Okay. But should they?

Luca:

I mean, that's up to you. I think identity is something very personal, right?

Sabrina:

We're talking about cultural identity, though, right?

Luca:

I'm talking about identity broadly, but cultural identity is what I'm getting at. Do you use any platforms or resources to help you feel more connected?

Sabrina:

Duolingo to learn Italian. I quit, but because I was beating the game. You don't have to put that in. But I used Duolingo to learn Italian.

Luca:

Has the use of technology ever affected that connection, either positive or negatively?

Sabrina:

Positively, to learn the language.

Luca:

Okay. Do you use social media platforms to engage with your identity?

Sabrina:

No

.

Luca:

Okay. Have you ever used technology to explore your identity? And what was that experience like?

I guess I mean, have you ever looked up things about, I don't know, your family heritage or...

Sabrina:

I had 23andMe. That connected me to relatives, and it's social because you can talk to your relatives, and it clarified where I'm from and the different countries my ancestors are from.

Luca:

How did that experience make you feel?

Sabrina:

Cool.

Luca:

Yeah.

Sabrina:

It made me feel like, whoa, I'm half-half.

Luca:

That's fair. And then last question, if you could design a platform that helps people to connect with their identities, what would you want included?

Sabrina:

Music.

Luca:

Music. Can you expand on that a bit?

Sabrina:

I feel that it would be interesting to listen to music from my parents' different countries. Italian music, Syrian music, because it can connect you to the sounds, to the language, to the culture, current culture, not just old culture, not just history, but present day. I feel like music speaks to lots of people.

Luca:

Well, thank you very much for your time.

Sabrina:

You're very welcome.

Synthesis of Sabrina's Interview:

- Sees herself as a Canadian with mixed background
- Has a harder time connecting with one side of her mixed background than the other (i.e. she feels it's harder to connect with being Syrian than being Italian)
- Explains the disconnection as a lack of information on the Syrian culture
- Connects to her Italian side by learning the language and working in an Italian deli
- Also connects to her identities by eating the food of that culture
- I really resonate with this quote she says: "I always feel ashamed that I say that I'm Syrian because I know nothing about Syria or my culture or my language."
- The only people that influence her identity is her family
- Used Duolingo and 23andMe to explore or strengthen her connection to her own identity
- Found it interesting to learn the exact location of her ancestors and to see all her relatives on 23andMe
- For this new platform, she suggested to have music be a part of it
- Explains "because it can connect you to the sounds, to the language, to the culture, current culture, not just old culture, not just history, but present day"

Design Insights:

Link to User Persona:

<https://www.figma.com/design/HeFPpTzkzssBrP5whRbFxt/User-Persona---Empathy-Map--Community-?node-id=1-1603&t=6TmsnMyHtuJmu73c-1>

- Exploring identity in a multitude of ways (especially through food, language, self, and music)
- Identities change over time and so does our connection to it as well
- Safe and inclusive spaces are necessary for authenticity
- Learning about a culture through educational content could help
- Bridge the generational and cultural gap by sharing stories and recipes of their specific heritage
- Maybe it should encourage to explore identity outside the platform
- Encourage self-exploration and self-validation for understanding their own identities
- Try to avoid labels, they can contribute to identities remaining static
- Make it easy to explore a culture using food, music, language, and customs
- Support social and solitary exploration
- For social communication, maybe work with translators
- Offer tools or forums for people who are struggling to connect with their identities
- Avoid the assimilated approach, where every interaction is the same for every user
- Look into family heritage and our connection to the past

Looking at the immense scope of my question, I realize now how difficult it will be to make a platform or artifact that can combine all of these suggestions and responses. So, since this is a prototyping class, I will make 2 different prototypes and iterate them into a final third prototype that combines the best aspects of both.

Prototype 1: EchoMaps

Link to prototype:

<https://www.figma.com/design/6bB39oFEIrs20vcnJLADiA/Prototype-1--Map-Based-App-?node-id=4-2&t=9TfN91QzCLYmKSM4-1>

This prototype is inspired by the website Queering the Map. I was so fascinated by the idea of self-exploration to understand identity during my interviews that I wanted to focus on journaling in some way for this prototype. So, using the central interaction in Queering the Map, I decided to make an app that displays experiences based on location. I thought that exploring the world map could help people look up stories in places that are associated with their own heritage.

Landing Page:

- Displays the map of users current location
- Has a plus button to let users add stories based on current location, but also has a button that lets users specify a location
- Shows all the marked locations from other users with their own personal story
- Has a search bar to let users look up other locations

Events Page:

- Shows user all events happening nearby to them, with the specific time and date
- When clicked, displays all information with a link to the event

Account Page:

- Lets users see the number of stories they've posted, the number of posts they've saved, and number of likes
- Has a section to see all saved stories
- Has a settings menu
- Has a section called "My Journey" which displays a map of the world with all the locations the user has marked a story

What is the point of this?

Well, I wanted to create a self-journaling app that would allow users to see their own journey. Not only that, but I wanted to focus on making the user engage outside of the app with their community. That is why I put in the events page.

Prototype 2ish: Website Platform (title TBD)

Link to prototype:

<https://www.figma.com/design/WNjtRTaYHccit7KqI3Pfyk/Prototype-2--Website-For-Personal-Culture-?node-id=0-1&t=gFILzASajCNjyN2G-1>

This prototype was inspired by Instagram and Facebook. I wanted to focus on creating a social media platform that centered around the user's cultural identity. This was because of the user data I collected during my interviews. Most of my interviewees mentioned their use of Instagram to research or engage with their identities. Specifically, most of them mentioned connecting through food and recipes. I wanted to try and make a prototype that would emulate this experience while also engaging more thoughtfully to personal identity.

Landing Page (Culture Hub):

- Displays posts that are oriented towards your cultural background. Posts can include images, text, and audio.
- Users can like, share, and follow off posts.

Explore Page:

- This would display posts related to any culture, showing curated posts according to the users following and engagement.

Family Page:

- This page is supposed to allow the user to create their own family tree, one for the mother's side and one for the father's side.
- The goal of this page is to allow the user to see their heritage visually.
- Wanted to add a feature that would show birth places of family members in a map.

Messages Page:

- This is a basic messaging page based on Facebook messages, where the user can share posts and talk to people.

Forum Page:

- This page is inspired by Reddit Q&A forums.
- The purpose was to allow the user to create community messages that could ask experts difficult questions on identity.
- This was inspired by my interviews, because an interviewee asked for a Q&A page and another interviewee wanted specific colloquial translations.

Account Page:

- The goal of this page was to let the user input their cultural background to curate feeds based off it.
- It would also allow users to see their posts, see who their following, and other basic features
- It would've been based off the instagram profile page.

Settings Page:

- Basic settings page
- Would allow user to curate page specifically and also have safety curation that would allow users to stop any triggering posts from appearing on their page.

While my first prototype focused on making the user explore their identity more internally, the focus of this prototype was to allow the user to have a place with many different formats of information that is related to their identities. I also wanted to do the explore page so the user won't remain stagnate in their approach of exploration. I was thinking about allowing the user to connect their 23andMe or other similar websites that allow users to genetically see their heritage, which is where the family tree idea came from. The purpose of this is to let the user stay rooted in family for connecting to their identity.

The reason I put a suffix "ish" in the title is because it is an incomplete prototype. While I could have spent the time and effort into making this prototype more high fidelity than its current structure, I opted to focus on the remaining two prototypes I made. This is because I talked to Rilla in class and she suggested combining my first two prototypes to make a third combo version. I really wanted to make a video prototype, but I would need a figma prototype to show in the video, so I had to make a third and fourth prototype. While this was a bit more time consuming, I'm very pleased with the final result.

Prototype 3: EchoMaps 2.0

Link to prototype (second page of first figma file prototype):

<https://www.figma.com/design/6bB39oFEIrS20vcnJLADiA/Prototype-1--Map-Based-App-?node-id=86-18&t=9TfN91QzCLYmKSM4-1>

This prototype was me trying to connect the previous two prototypes to make a combo version. I wanted to focus on the first prototype (echo maps) because I liked the idea the best between the two. I decided to try to integrate the customized feed from the website prototype with the app. I wanted to also add the multiple types of media that could be shared. Specifically the recording feature. I also really wanted to somehow integrate food into the app, since my interviews mention how interconnected it was to their culture.

Updated Landing Page (Maps):

- There is a new layer feature that allows the user to shift between stories, places, and echoes.
- The stories layer is the same as before but I've made the map more interactable, letting the user scroll on the page.
- The places layer displays culture-specific restaurants and grocery stores that relate to the user's cultural background.
- The echoes layer displays a map with pins that lets users listen to audio clips left by other users (similar to the stories but for audio). It also lets users record or upload audio.
- I've also added stars on the map to let the user see the events from the events page to make it more connected to the app (was from my usability eval).

Updated Account Page:

- I've modified the account page to make the saved posts button more visible and accessible (from usability eval).
- I changed the My Journey section to be its own page and replaced it with daily affirmations.
- These daily affirmations are statements to inspire and ground the user that would change every day.

My Journey Page:

- As mentioned above, changed the My Journey section to be its own page (from usability eval).
- The my journey page displays the same thing as before on the top half of the page (planet earth with pins in every location the user has put)

- On the bottom half of the page, there is now a logs section that lets users see their posts ordered chronologically (from most to least recent).
- If the user clicks on a log, the image of earth changes to a map of the location of that post.

Updated Events Page:

- Nothing changed that much but I tried to make the events more focused on cultural background as well to integrate the unique cultural background aspect.

What were my intentions while making this?

I really wanted to keep the nature of the first iteration. By this I mean how the app was not focused on user retention but more focused on encouraging the user to explore identity outside of the app. The way I kept intention going while also integrating updates was by making the places layer. This would let users explore the map while also incentivising them to go out and check these places out. I also made my journey page separate to focus on the journaling aspect of the app. While the echoes layer seems somewhat out of place, I find that it adds a deeper layer of connectivity for users. The idea was also based off one of the interviews mentioning how music plays a big part in connecting to culture. Some of the other smaller visual changes were made thanks to the usability evaluation.

Prototype 4: EchoMaps Video Prototype

Link: <https://youtu.be/LoWXYJuNeVI>

This is the final prototype I made for this class. I used the Figma app to make it seem like it was a real app in the video. The intention while making this video was to show off all the features the app has while also demonstrating its intention.

1. The issue being probed:

This was probably the most difficult aspect of the video to convey. It's hard to demonstrate someone who's feeling disconnected to their identity since it's something so internal. So, I decided to make the user start off by using Instagram, an app made for user retention. The reason I chose Instagram was because it was mentioned the most during my interviews for exploring identity. I wanted to illustrate the potential dangers of this social media app so I mentioned the comment sections that are filled with hateful content.

2. The user research inspiration:

This part of the video felt very inherent. I already previously mentioned all the user research inspiration when describing the previous prototypes, and that carries through with this video prototype. The main actor in the video is also one of the interviewees.

3. Solution and its core function:

This was demonstrated through the majority of the video. Explaining the functions of the app and how it encourages users to get out instead of remaining stagnant on an app (in this case Instagram). I tried demonstrating how the app encourages users to explore identity externally (events page, places layer) and internally (my journey page, echoes layer).

4. Context of use:

This was another difficult task to convey in the video, but I achieved this by setting up the first and last scene. I initially demonstrated the problem, which was stagnation and negative emotions related to social media platforms, and ended the video with the main actor not even on their phone, shopping at a culture specific grocery store. In the video, the context of use is grounded in everyday life. It's for people who feel disconnected or even just stagnant. This app redirects them to connection.

While the PDF version of my documentation is good, the google docs format is better because I made it so there's tabs for each section and easy access, here's the link for it: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nxNlfHZBLWvzjZ1O7r864WFUf4WG6n1y3yaa0MxmA_Q/edit?usp=sharing