

CS147: Digital Democracy Studio

POVs and Experience Prototypes

Written Report

Team Introduction:



[From left to right, Gen S., Grace W., Garrick F.]

Problem Domain

In our preliminary exploratory and contextual interviews, we chose to focus on the behavior and needs of users between the ages of 20 to 30 (i.e. recent college graduates). Through this needfinding process, we found that our insights were primarily clustered around themes of online news consumption and online political discourse. As a result, we dug deeper into identifying insights and needs surrounding these two topic areas.

Initial POV

The POV statement that we had going into our second round of interviews was:

We met... S, a recent Berkeley graduate and volunteer at a free health clinic.

We were amazed to find... in political discussions, he enjoys playing devil's advocate but does not often change his mind.

It would be game-changing to... enable him to participate in more well-rounded discussions with others.

Additional Needfinding Results

To further test this POV, we conducted five more interviews. We used the initial POV statement to anchor our discussions on the issue of political discourse. Related sub-issues included practices of sharing news stories online on social media, discussing news in real life, and navigating challenging conversations or disagreements surrounding politics. Based on feedback from last week's interviews, we also chose to interview a more diverse age range (our final sample ranged from 17 to 69 years old).

L, a Polish grandmother from Southern California



We met L in Town & Country in Palo Alto. Growing up in a homogenous Polish environment, L initially rejected her mixed-race grandchildren until she "held [her first grandchild] in my arms." L's acceptance of her mixed-race grandchildren eventually caused her family to disown her. For the last 20 years, she has sent an annual Christmas card to her family with updates on her grandchildren; however, these cards have gone unanswered.

D, a Democratic Socialist and veteran from the Bay Area



We met D, an incoming transfer student. D became more engaged in politics and political discussion in the military, where he became interested in Marxist and anarchist ideas. D feels disillusioned with websites such as Twitter and Reddit; he has engaged less with these platforms due to the “one-upping” culture (i.e. someone feeling superior after “winning” an online argument or proving someone else wrong).

A, a radio show host and math Ph.D. candidate from Northern California



We met A, a 38 year old self-identified conservative-liberal. A does not purposefully

seek out news, but believes that important news will reach him. As he has grown older, A has become more able to consider issues from different perspectives; one way that he actively seeks to inform himself is through reading books. Though he views Facebook as an “advertising platform,” he uses Facebook primarily as a personal memory bank, and feels happy if his personal thoughts and content can also inspire others. This way of using Facebook is almost like “advertising happy thoughts and uplifting things.”

J, 17 year old freshman at Stanford from Oregon



We met J, a freshman at Stanford from Oregon. J has stopped listening to NPR since coming to Stanford; the change in environment makes it harder to listen to the radio and read the newspaper. She checks notifications from Apple News and habitually checks Reddit for news. Her daily conversations rarely involve politics and news.

C, a tennis shop employee from Hungary

[C did not consent to a photo.]

We met C, a 25 year old employee at a tennis shop in Town & Country. C repeatedly insisted that he “was not [our] guy” to talk to about issues surrounding democracy. C does not keep up with the news because he believes it is “not healthy”, but also asserts that he is “not in the dark” or “super close-minded” about issues that matter.

Revised POVs



From our needfinding results, empathy maps, and insights, we created three new POV statements. After brainstorming HMWs, we chose the top three (bolded and labelled below).

POV #1 (D's POV)

We met... D, a Democratic Socialist and veteran from the Bay Area.

We were amazed to realize... he stopped engaging on Reddit once he was proven wrong or “one-upped” in an online argument.

It would be game-changing to... remove personal stakes from online political engagement.

Example POV #1's HMWs

- **HMW situate political debates in a human context? [HMW #1]**
- HMW make political debates fun and not stressful?
- HMW give gentler online feedback?

POV #2 (L's POV)

We met... L, a grandmother and nurse from Southern California.

We were amazed to realize... she sends letters each year to her estranged family to try and change their minds about her mixed-race grandchildren and political views on race.

It would be game-changing to... bridge the gap between her old family and her new one.

Example POV #2's HMWs

- **HMW remove insularity from homogeneous communities? [HMW #2]**
- HMW create new traditions to build gaps between family?
- HMW connect politics and humanity in high stakes environments?

POV #3 (K's POV)

We met... K, a student moving from Tacoma to the Bay Area.

We were amazed to realize... she feels guilt from going from actively participating in activist circles in Tacoma to just “keeping up” with the news in California.

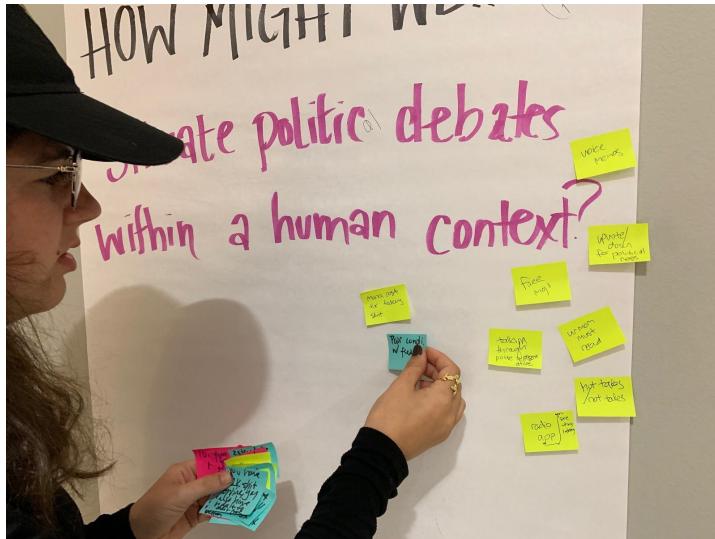
It would be game-changing to... help her realize the community that she wants.

Example POV #3's HMWs

- **HMW remove feelings of guilt over one's level of engagement? [HMW #3]**
- HMW make keeping up with news like Netflix?

- HMW bridge communities across space?

Best Solutions



After choosing the top three HMWs that we wanted to tackle, we brainstormed solutions for each HMW and selected our top three solutions.

HMW situate political debates in a human context? (from D's POV)

Solution #1: Enable users to hold a political conversation with people who are geographically close by.

HMW remove insularity from homogeneous communities? (from L's POV)

Solution #2: Create intelligently-matched groups of people that have (1) similar levels of engagement and (2) different perspectives or political affiliations.

HMW remove feelings of guilt over one's level of engagement? (from K's POV)

Solution #3: Celebrate small acts of political engagement.

Experience Prototype

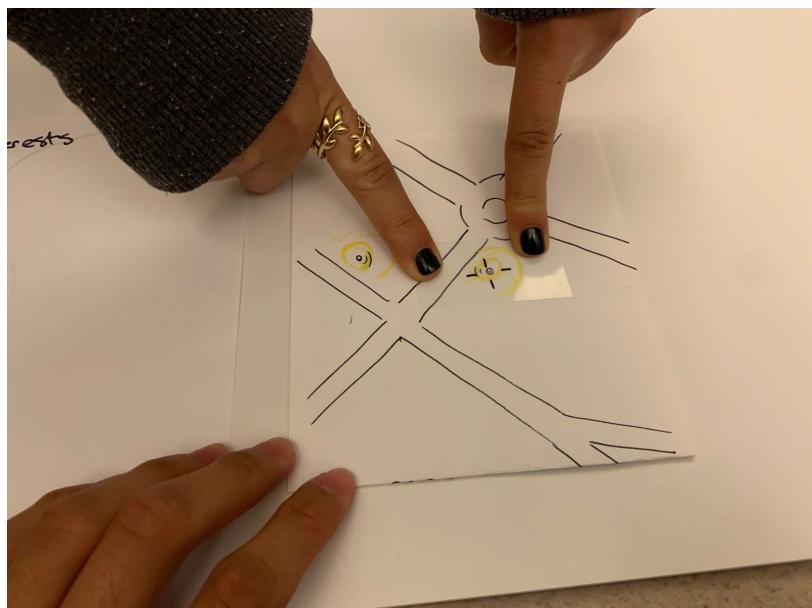
We tested EP1 (Map) with 3 people, EP2 (Conversation) with 4 people, and EP3 (Slider) with 5 people.

EP1 (Map)

Enable users to hold a political conversation with people who are geographically close by. (D's POV)

Assumption: knowing you are geographically close-by to others who are willing to talk about politics reduces the activation energy of reaching out.

Method: we created a map showing two users in a nearby location who are open to talk about shared interests involving the news or politics. Participants could 'select' these users to find out some more information about them, and then decide if they wanted to engage with the other users.



Results & Insights: Users thought it was nice to see people nearby; it got them to think about when/why they engage with political dialogue. However, they weren't necessarily willing to meet the people in the EP; one person remarked, "If I wanted to have an argument, I'd go on Twitter." These conversations are taxing and high-energy for many—**our assumption that knowing people are close by would lower the barrier for entry to political conversations with others didn't pan out.** That being said, we did get some interesting new questions and ideas: for one thing, what is the purpose of political dialogue? We wanted to promote political dialogue, but we haven't thought enough about *to what end*. One person remarked that they would be more engaged if the nearby people were focused on pushing each other to organize and protest. Also, we learned that people would prefer lower-energy and safer features, such as chat rooms or pre-screened people.

EP2 (Conversation)

Create intelligently-matched groups of people that have (1) similar levels of engagement and (2) different perspectives or political affiliations. (L's POV)

Assumption: people want to engage with different perspectives on shared political interests.

Method: we asked participants if they wanted to talk about their views on a political issue they were interested in. If so, the interviewer would take a slightly opposing stance to whatever their viewpoint was, or recommend something for further reading. No props were used for this prototype.



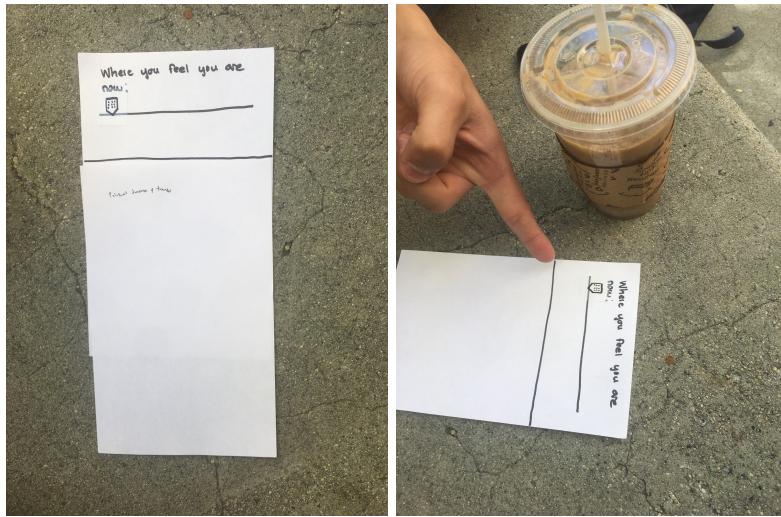
Results & Insights: Users gave **neutral to positive feedback** on the EP; one user remarked that "this got me thinking about the issue in a different way." Others felt like the conversation format was nice, but didn't provide anything beyond what one could already get on the internet (one person talked about getting opinions and book recommendations more easily from Twitter). One big learning was that with people we didn't know, the impact and the way people acted was more positive. Someone whose views we gently challenged thanked us "for taking emotions out of the conversation." Our assumption was neither validated nor invalidated; participants seemed open and willing to engage with differing perspectives, but also didn't see great value in having these conversations.

EP3 (Slider)

Celebrate small acts of political engagement. (K's POV)

Assumption: recognizing and validating small acts of political engagement makes people feel happier with their level of engagement.

Method: we asked participants to rate their current level of political engagement. After this, we asked them to list out ways in which they have engaged politically in the past month. Then, the interviewer would read out their engagements and give validation for those actions.



Results: for most of our interviewees, the validation of political engagements resulted in a higher scoring of their political engagement (thus, our assumption was validated). One interviewee said, "When I listed my engagements, even if it wasn't influential...I feel more active." However, one interviewee who expressed no political engagement left his slider at no engagement after the experience. It was interesting that all participants expressed uncertainty of what counted as engagement, and most participants were relatively flexible with what they labelled as engagement (e.g. classes, music, flags, being at Stanford). It seemed that on the whole, making time to acknowledge small political acts is rewarding.

Insights: for the most part, our assumption was validated. Most participants felt like they got something from having their small accomplishments validated. There was one participant who didn't move the slider because they "weren't concerned" about politics, but for that person, it seemed the precondition of feeling guilt over one's level of political involvement wasn't met. This lead us to realize a hidden assumption

baked into our solution design: we assumed that folks feel guilty about their level of political engagement

Most Successful Prototype

After reflecting on the process of designing and implementing our experimental prototype, we decided that both the slider prototype (Prototype #3) and the map prototype (Prototype #1) were the most successful prototypes.

The slider prototype received positive feedback, was easy to understand for users, and also validated our initial assumptions. On the whole, participants felt more positively about their level of political engagement after the experience.

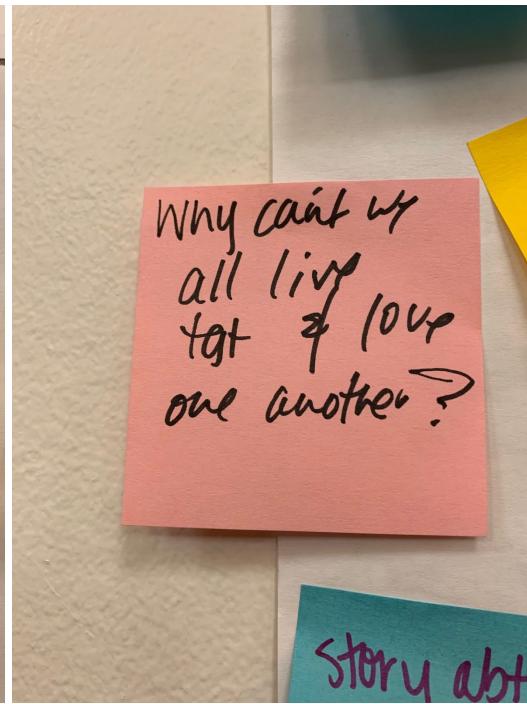
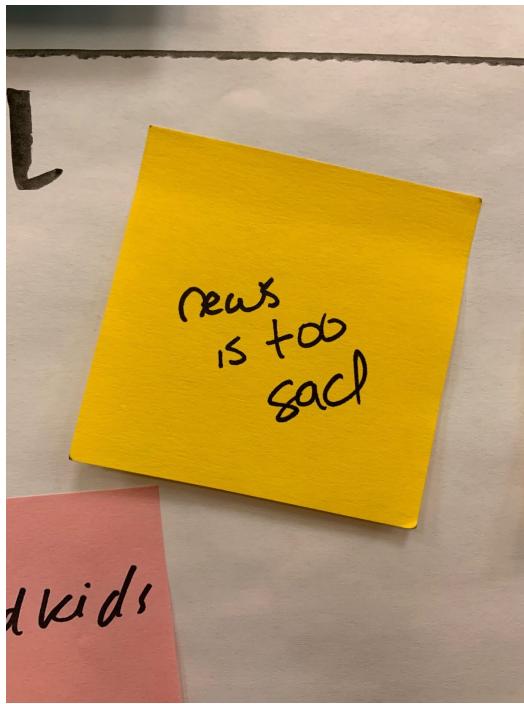
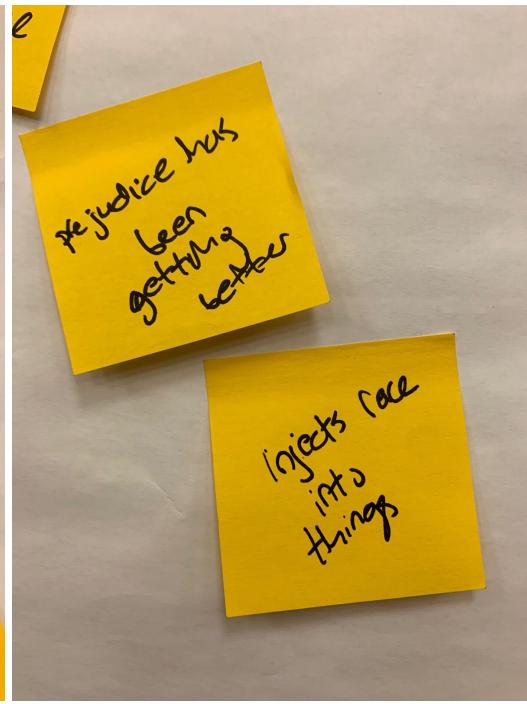
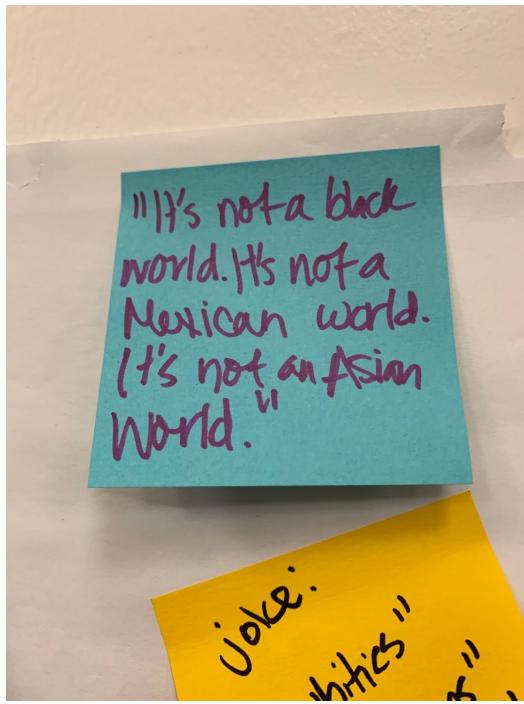
We thought that the map prototype was successful in a different way—it produced more interesting questions and insights into how people might approach political discussions with strangers. Our assumption that knowing people are close by would make people more willing to discuss ideas with others didn't work. We learned that people prefer lower-energy features, and not necessarily in-person conversations. We think it would be interesting to continue to explore how to best connect people in nearby spaces, and also the different ways in which people can be connected (e.g. with the purposes of organizing, etc.).

While the conversation prototype was interesting, it did not produce as many insights and new questions as the map prototype produced, and the assumption was invalidated.

Appendix

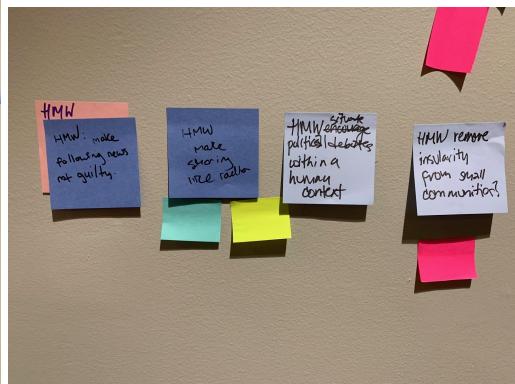
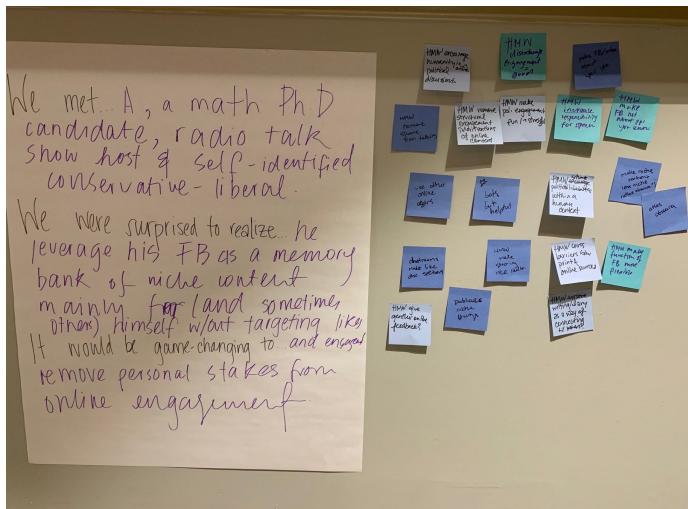
Needfinding II Unpacking





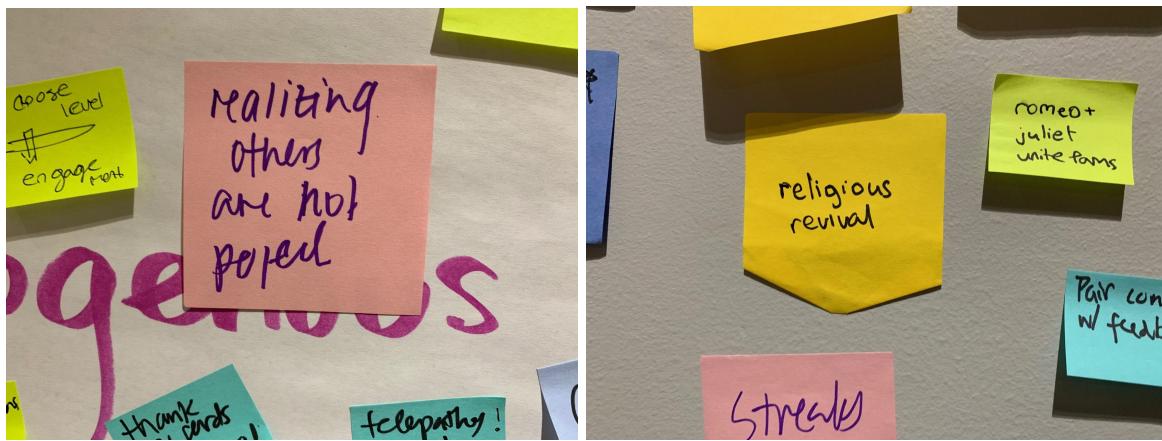
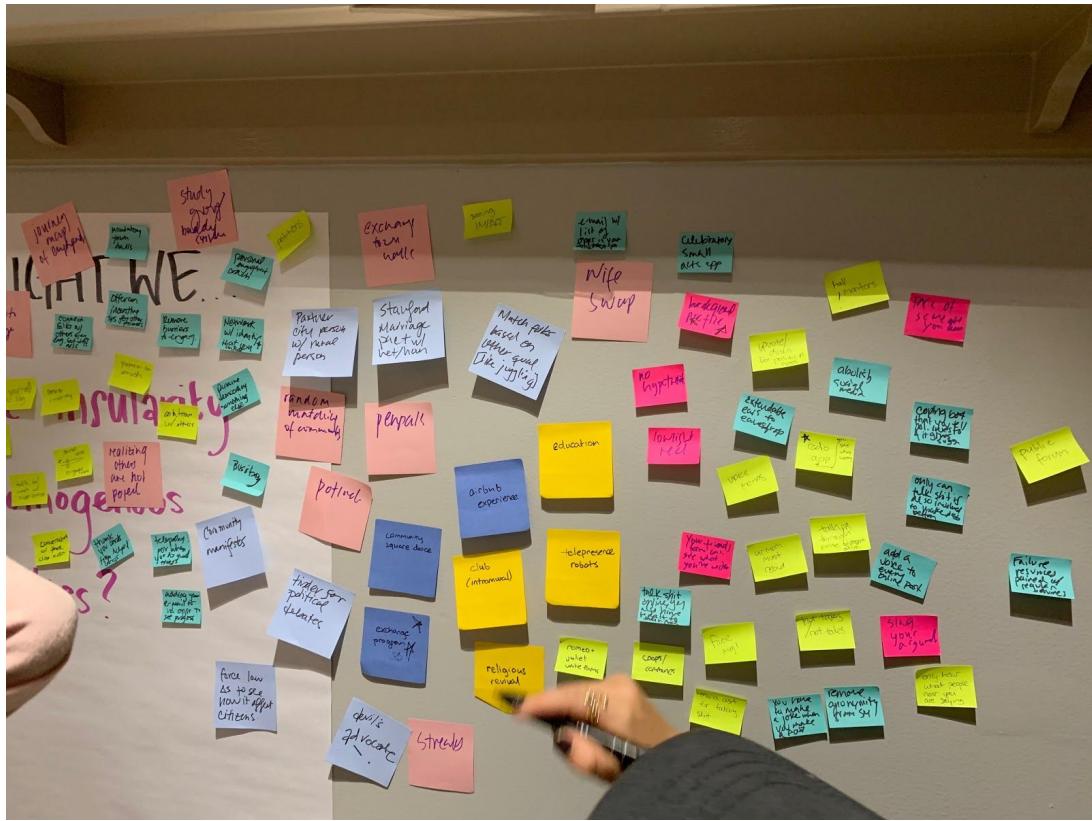


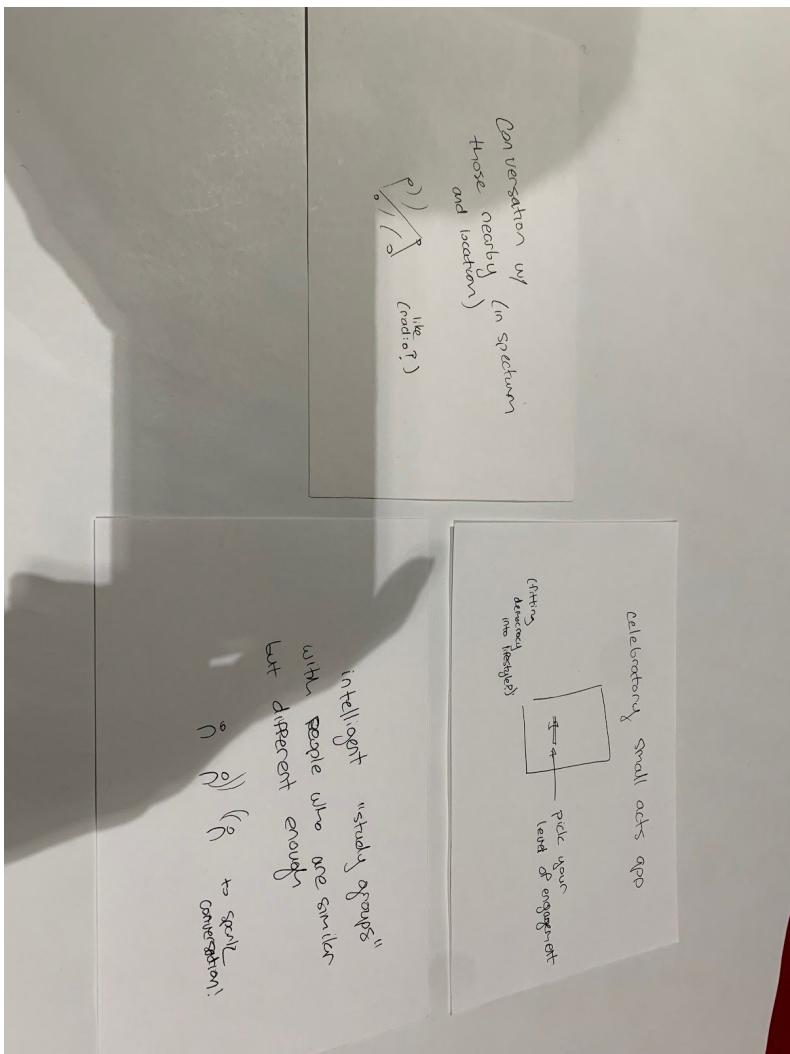
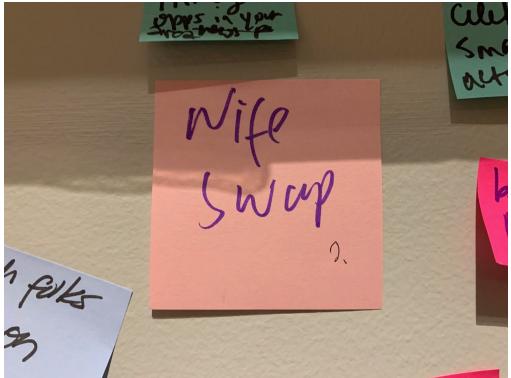
HMW Brainstorming



Solution Brainstorming (and some funny solutions)

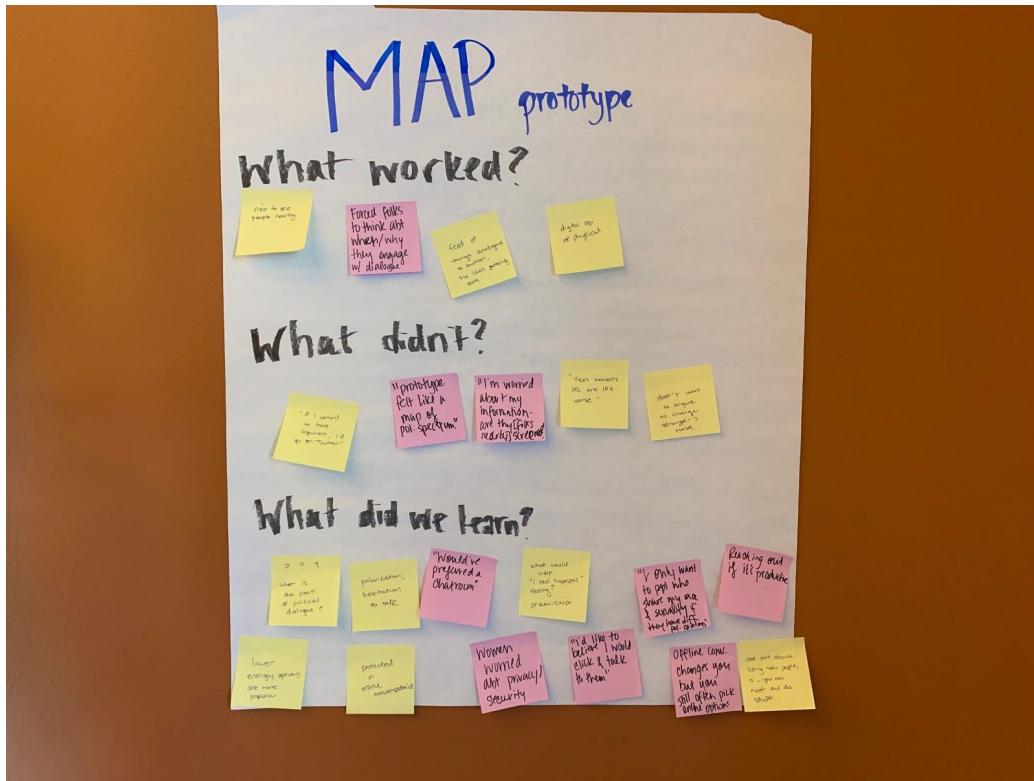






EP Unpacking

EP1 (Map)



- What worked?
 - Nice to see people nearby
 - Force folks to think about when/why they engage with political dialogue
 - Feed of things analogous to twitter, he likes getting recommendations
 - Digital representation of the physical: creating an in-between space and impetus to explore the non-digital
- What didn't?
 - "If I wanted to have an argument, I'd go on Twitter"
 - "Prototype felt like a map of political views rather than the physical world"
 - "I'm worried about my information- are [the nearby people] screened?"

- "Yikes moments IRL are 10x worse"
 - Doesn't want to argue to change a stranger's mind
- What did you learn?
 - Polarization, hesitation to talk
 - "Would've preferred a chatroom"
 - What would help the "I feel hopeless" feeling? Organizing people (e.g. protests)
 - "I only want to talk to people who share [my identities] if they have different political opinions"
 - Reaching out is only valuable if it could be productive (i.e. someone's mind was changed)
 - Lower energy options are more popular
 - Feel more protected in online conversation
 - Women worried about privacy and safety
 - Dialogue is often aspirational: "I'd like to believe I would click and talk to them"
 - Offline conversations tend to be more fruitful and fulfilling but it's still easier/ more likely to pick online conversations
 - Cool part about being near people: you can meet and do stuff

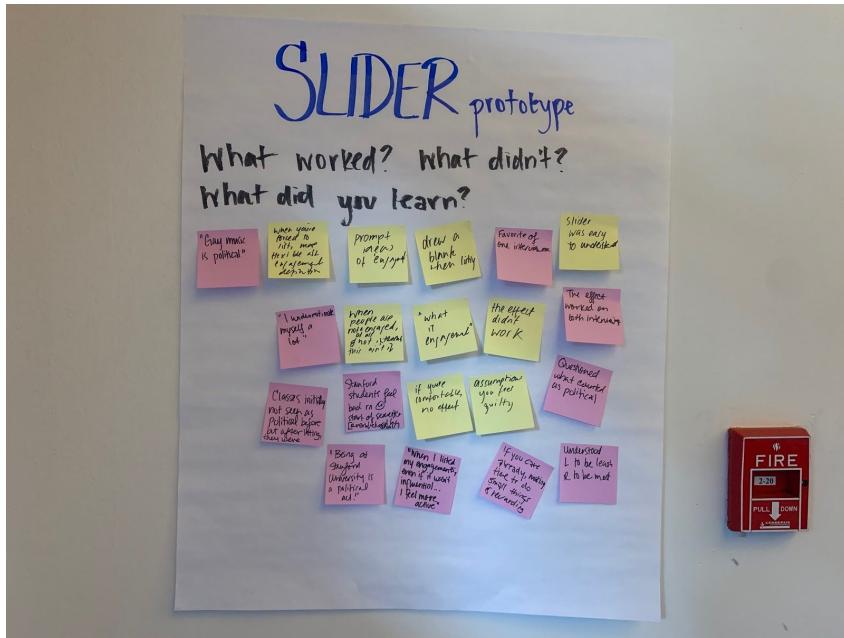
EP2 (Conversation)



- What worked?
 - "This got me thinking about the issue in a different way."
 - People often responded with an affirmation of the opposing opinion
 - "Fine"
- What didn't
 - Hard to prototype a spontaneous disagreement with a stranger.
 - Getting recommendations from a conversation was nice, but this could be gotten online
 - Having a conversation with someone where you only agree on one thing can be tedious
- What did you learn
 - Believes emotions are political tools
 - "Thank you for taking emotions out of the conversation"
 - "I have mixed feelings about taking the emotion out of politics"
 - Face to face conversations with people you don't know make you carefully consider the argument

- How does it work with someone you don't know well? (Gen's experience)
- "I only want to have conversations on issues I'm passionate and knowledgeable about."
- "I'm okay with being wrong, but it impacts me a lot"
- "I don't like offending folks...don't like to make them feel like they're wrong"

EP3 (Slider)



- What worked?
 - For users within the target demographic, the validation and listing of political engagements resulted in a higher scoring of their political engagement. (assumption valid)
 - Slider was easy to understand
 - Favorite of one interviewee
 - "When I listed my engagements, even if it wasn't influential...I feel more active."

- What didn't?
 - However, outside of our target market, one interviewee didn't feel guilty about his low level of involvement. After the listing and validation, he left his slider at low engagement.
 - All participants were unsure of what "counted" as engagement
 - One interviewee drew a blank when listing
- What did you learn?
 - When you're forced to list your engagements, the more flexible you are with what counts as engagements
 - Ex. classes, music, flags, being at Stanford
 - Stanford students feel bad at the start of the quarter bc they are focused on school instead of politics
 - If you care already, making time to do small things is rewarding