

# Preserving the Past

Exploring Distance  
Relationships

By: Evy, Jenny, Tracy, Lucia



# Our Team



**Evy Shen**

Symbolic Systems  
Sophomore



**Jenny Duan**

Symbolic Systems  
Sophomore



**Tracy Wei**

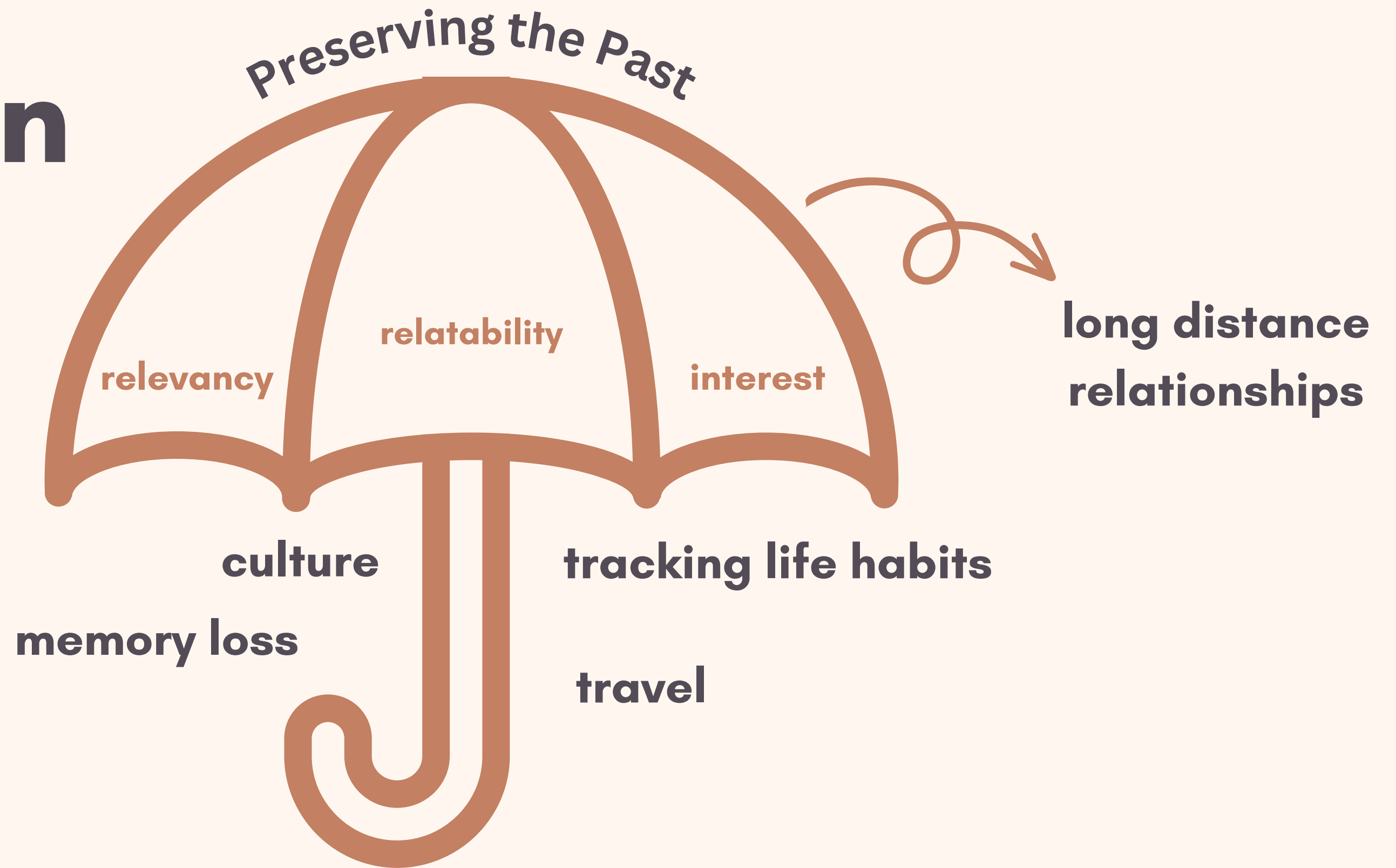
Symbolic Systems / Design  
Sophomore



**Lucia Langaney**

Computer Science  
Sophomore

# Domain Selection



# Our Participants

## Regular Users



**Patty\***

Married mother with two toddlers and family on the East Coast



**Justin\***

Hardware store employee with in-laws in Hong Kong



**Claire\***

High school junior who recently closed the gap in her long-distance relationship



**Janice\***

Grandmother of young grandchildren, Stanford employee

## Extreme Users



**Brian\***

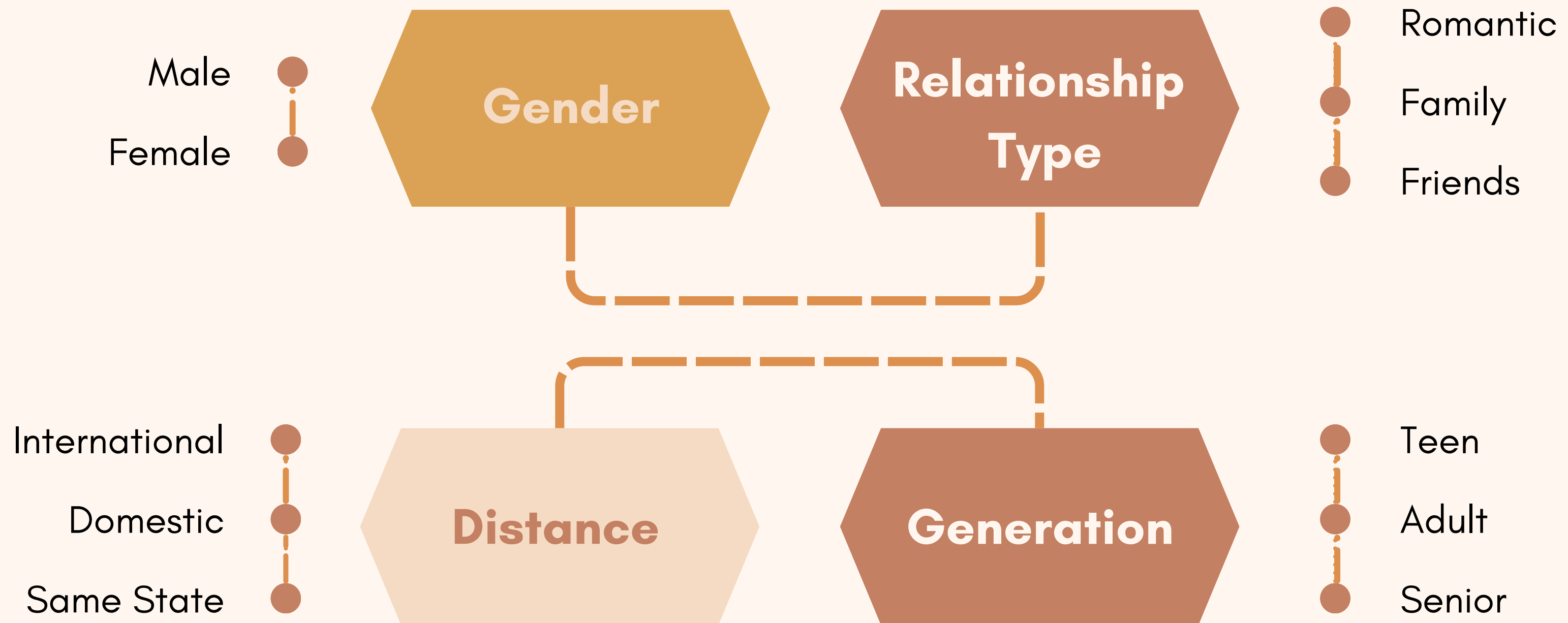
Online college student living in Stanford couples housing



**Kevin\***

Stanford undergraduate who recently broke up with his long-distance international relationship

# Participant Breakdown



# Conducting Interviews



**Cal. Avenue Farmer's Market**  
4 interviewees



**Stanford Dining Hall**  
1 interviewee



**Stanford Couples Housing**  
1 interviewee

# Our Questions

## **Topic 1:** Communication

- How do you typically communicate with your loved one when you are apart?
- What are strategies or tips you've found helpful in making a long-distance relationship work?
- Are there any communication tools or methods that you find particularly helpful?
- How do you and your partner ensure you have quality time together despite the distance?

## **Topic 2:** Challenges

- What are the main challenges you've faced in maintaining this long-distance relationship?
- What emotional challenges have you encountered due to the long-distance nature of your relationship?
- Are there any specific needs or desires in your long-distance relationship that you feel are not adequately met?
- Are there any strategies or activities that help you maintain your emotional well-being?



**Brian\***

*Romantic*

**21**

Online college student living in couples housing with his Stanford girlfriend

*"Finding ways to stay engaged even when we're so far away from each other"*



Brian\*



21

Online college student living in Stanford couples housing

SAYS

Communication is key in a long-distance relationship

Bad wifi and bad connection over Facetime

His girlfriend is also his best friend

On the phone/Facetime 24/7

“You were the first Stanford people we’ve told about our story”

Time difference made it hard to communicate

Did not have a plan going in to long distance

Words of affirmation were key to maintaining romance

“Finding ways to stay engaged even when we’re so far away from each other”

“We did not know what to expect”

Figured out their relationship as they went

THINKS

His relationship will last in the long-term

Seeing a person’s face is important

Communication is essential

Wants to be close to in-person as possible

Words of affirmation are especially important for long distance

Facetime is the preference for apps

Access to technology is important to keeping LDR alive

L.D. didn’t pose a obstacle to their relationship growing

ignored prospect of going long-distance to live in the moment

She’s the only person he needs in his life

DOES

Smiles at the thought of partner

Used an app to watch a movie/TV show together

Had to figure out how to communicate, how many times

Became more vulnerable

On the phone 24/7, Facetiming or texting

game and play Call of Duty together

Says words of affirmation

Communicates more of his feelings

send each other memes on Instagram

Would Facetime when he woke up, before sleep, and after class

Doordashed every week until he had money to fly out to visit her

FEELS

feels connected to partner when there’s regular communication

feels worried about friends’ perception and stigma

feels confident in his personal choice to move

feels integrated in his partner’s community

feels secure and fulfilled in his relationship

feels willing to make major sacrifices for his partner

feels grateful for his partner’s acts of service toward him

feels worried about family’s perception of relationship

feels difficult to trust

feels dissatisfied by L.D. communication

\*images are generated by AI

**Brian\***



**21**

Online college student living in Stanford couples housing

Communication is key in a long-distance relationship

Figured out their relationship as

Time difference made it hard to communicate

"Finding ways to stay engaged even when we're so far away from each other"

"We did not know what to expect"

"You were the first Stanford people we've told about our story"

Did not have a plan going in to long distance

phone/FaceTime 24/7

Communication is essential to keeping the L.D. relationship strong and growing

Replicating interaction that is as close as possible to in-person interaction is a priority, when it's not always possible to do so because of L.D.

Made a lot of personal sacrifices to be with his girlfriend (giving up job, changing to online school, moving across the country)

Feels unsatisfied by long distance communication methods

**SAYS**

**THINKS**

**DOES**

**FEELS**

His girlfriend is also his best friend

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Wants to be close to in-person as possible

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ignoring prospects going long-distance to live in the moment

L.D. didn't pose a obstacle to their relationship growing

Smiles at the thought of partner

On the phone

Facetime

Would Facetime when he woke up, before sleep, and after class

send each other memes on Instagram

together

Had to figure out how to communicate, how many times

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grateful partner's of service toward him

\*images are generated by AI

# Our Findings



## Tensions

Brian thought it was hard to find activities to do together to stay engaged with his girlfriend while they were long-distance.



## Surprises

Brian explained that verbalizing their emotions felt like a hug with the lack of physical affection during long distance.



## Insight

Current methods of communication can't replicate in person interaction that is sought after.

## Need

People in long-distance relationships want to feel like they can **interact like they do in-person.**



# Patty\*

Family

## 30

Mother with toddlers, her family on the East Coast

*"It's hard for them [her mom and her kids] to have real interactions. I mean, there's not much for them to do. And if they do talk, they talk very quickly."*



Patty\*

30

Mother of two toddlers

SAYS

kids were "bouncing around" during Facetime

parents and extended family live in Maryland

kids talk so loud "sometimes grandma doesn't understand them"

it's hard for her parents and grandparents to get to know her kids

It's hard for them to have real interactions

"I wish there was a way to organize all of them [photos]"

this way for her parents to get to know her own kids is sufficient

her husband's side of the family doesn't know their children well

"I feel like nowadays you just take so many pictures"

also suggests that this communication may not be sufficient

"there's not much for them to do"

photos are stored in just her camera roll

THINKS

hard for her parents and grandparents to get to know her kids

Interactions are difficult to foster long-distance

form of communication is sufficient while kids are young

her kids don't have a close relationship with grandparents

kids are not interested in talking on the phone

she wishes there was a way to organize the photos

current form of communication won't be sufficient when kids grow older

her memories are mixed with other random noise in her album

photo album is not the best way to organize her memories

needs a better way to keep track of her children's milestones

DOES

She sends photos of her kids to her parents once a week

She doesn't communicate as much with her in-laws

Talks to her mom every day

Communicates with family on special occasions

Uses video chat or group chat with friends

Uses Facebook messenger with grandparents

Uses video chat or group chat with parents

takes pictures of random events to update family

not organize her photo album

keep photos of her memories on her phone

sends parents photos of interesting events

FEELS

Overwhelmed by amount of photos

Guilty that she can't connect her kids with her husband's parents more

feels disconnected from her in-laws

mixed feelings on sufficiency

frustrated that she cannot get a good interaction between her kids and their grandparents

helpless with being able to preserve children's memories adequately

confused on whether she should be doing more to help kids' communicate

anxious that her kids will grow up without knowing their grandparents

desire to stay connected to inlaws despite the physical distance

emotional attachment to photos

\*images are generated by AI



Patty\*

30

Mother of two toddlers

it's hard for her parents to get to know her kids

her kids don't have a close relationship with grandparents because of the distance and communication methods

Uses chat to communicate images of her children's milestones with family

frustrated that she cannot get a good interaction between her kids and their grandparents

SAYS

THINKS

DOES

FEELS

kids were "bouncing around" during Facetime

parents and ex fam Ma

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her photo album

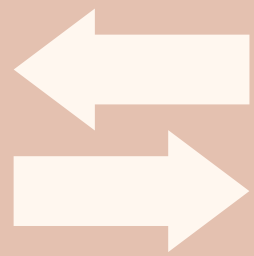
otos of her memories on her phone

their grandparents

ire to stay nected to ws despite physical distance

\*images are generated by AI

# Our Findings



## Contradictions

Patty says that her current communication with her long-distance family is sufficient, but she also says it may not be sufficient because she wishes they had more interaction.



## Tensions

Patty wants her children to know their grandparents on both sides of the family, but she doesn't really interact with her in-laws.



## Surprises

Patty thinks that video chat is sufficient given her children's young age, but her children are in an age where they need nurture and connection from their family.





## Insight

People want their children to have a strong connection with their grandparents and/or extended family.

## Need

Parents want their **long-distance families to be involved in their childrens' lives** even without in-person interaction.



**Kevin\***

*Romantic*

**19**

Stanford undergraduate student with failed international LDR

*“Communication, that exchange of happiness, sort of dropped a lot in long distance”*



Kevin\*

19

Stanford Undergraduate with failed LDR

Values deep conversations

Facetime didn't allow for meaningful conversations

Communication and empathy issues became exacerbated through long distance

"I admit that I am not the person to have like, really high level of empathy. But at least I can offer hugs, right? But I cannot offer hugs, over FaceTime"

Had inherent communication differences

Never tried apps for couples

Timezone difference didn't allow information to be shared in real time, especially important news.

therapy (the emotion wheel) was helpful in identify his emotions

(of emotional wheel) "it tells you like how to identify precisely locate your emotion in a big wheelbase...that helped me a lot because I was not able to express my emotions correctly"

SAYS

Doesn't consider himself an empathetic guy

he was unable to provide the verbal support his gf needed

relationship veered away from original purpose

there's not enough time to spend together because of time difference

relationship didn't bring him fulfillment

it's easier to give a hug than to offer words of affirmation

It's hard to understand gf feelings

"But I'm FaceTime only possible way just communicating. That's really bad."

Precious time was wasted with updates about day

friends would judge him for the situation he is in

THINKS

Used to facetime 3-4 hours a day

rationaly discussed why relationship didn't work out

Takes walks and exercises to clear his mind

Went to therapy to better understand his emotions

preferred video chatting ("80% of the time")

flew to Paris for 20 days to visit gf

Learned to talk through his emotions with an emotion wheel

used imessages, facetime, zoom, wechat, and mobile games

texted when FT was not possible

Spent about the same time talking with his gf per day as before LD

Hesitated to share this experience with friends

DOES

Felt frustrated that he couldn't have deep conversations

feels useless because cannot convey love language due to distance

rushed that he could only share highlights of his day due to limited time

Feels unfulfilled because his emotional needs were not met

annoyed that time zone made it hard to update each other

nostalgic about past deep conversations in person

confused on how to express love through words

finds it difficult to have empathy for his gf's problems

feels bored about trivial conversations over facetime

disappointed conversations became mundane over video chatting

FEELS

\*images are generated by AI



Kevin\*

19

Stanford Undergraduate with failed international LDR

Long distance made empathizing harder

Quality time and satisfying each other's love language is difficult to achieve over long distance

Went to therapy and found other ways to better understand his emotions during long distance

Frustrated at balancing mundane, "catching up" conversation with his desire for deep, meaningful talks during limited time

SAYS

THINKS

DOES

FEELS

Values deep conversations

"just chit chatting about really trivial"

therapy (the emotion wheel) was helpful in identify his emotions

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"I admit the people like, really of empathy, but at least I can offer hugs, right? But I cannot offer hugs, over FaceTime"

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Takes walks and exercises to clear his mind

Went to therapy to better understand his emotions

Felt frustrated that he couldn't have deep conversations

love language became difficult to convey over distance

that when time is limited, he should only share the highlights of his day

Feels that his emotional needs were not met

preferred video chatting ("80% of the time")

Went to therapy and found other ways to better understand his emotions during long distance

needed to talk through his emotions with emotion wheel

Hesitated to share this experience with friends

Feels that the time zone made it hard to update each other

Frustrated at balancing mundane, "catching up" conversation with his desire for deep, meaningful talks during limited time

Feels its hard to express love through words

he doesn't have sufficient empathy for his gf's problems

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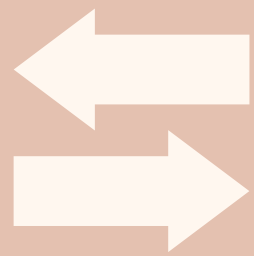
gr per day as before LD

became mundane

mundane over video chatting

\*images are generated by AI

# Our Findings



## Contradictions

Kevin says he wants more deep conversations, but says he is inherently more reserved about his feelings.



## Tensions

Kevin revealed that their conversations were superficial and more centered around updates rather than meaningful.



## Surprises

The differences in their love languages was a challenge in their long distance relationship.



## Insight

Time zone differences inhibit the feeling of connectedness as couples struggle to catch each other up on big events.

## Need

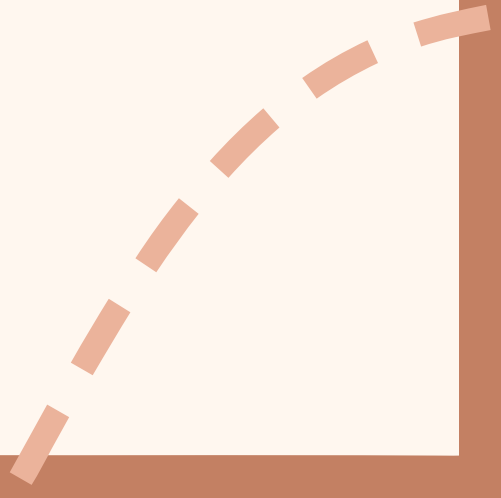
People in long-distance relationships want to express their joys and sorrows **in real time.**

# Summary

- We talked to **6 people** about their long-distance relationships (romantic, familial, and platonic)
- We found that challenges, such as time zone differences and lack of in-person interaction, make it **difficult to foster and preserve** deep connections and memories.
- We learned that in order to overcome challenges faced in long distance relationships, people need to **communicate and engage like they do in person.**



# Next Steps

- Continue analyzing interview data
  - Narrow down our type of long-distance relationship (romantic, familial, platonic)
  - Interview more people who are in our chosen long-distance relationship type
  - HMW statements and experience prototyping
- 





**Thank you!**