

Design for freer sexual exploration

Researching the influence of sexual scripts on people's sexual exploration.

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Project Summary

This master thesis report is a deliverable of a six months long graduation project at the master specific track Design for Interaction, at TU Delft. The primary domain researched in this project is the domain of sexual exploration.

Initially, the research started by exploring the uneasiness of sexual exploration. Firstly, the aim was to understand what sexual exploration is and how people sexually explore in the current world. A combination of different DFI specific methods was used. In the first phase, the ViP method was used to understand the context of the domain, the influencing factors, and to, later on, create a coherent story. Underlying mechanisms of human sexuality and additional topics were necessary to understand in this phase as well, on which later design criteria were developed. The project was done with an external client, Ink - a design studio based in Amsterdam, whose previous research in the domain was resourceful as well. Besides the mentioned methods, a continuous process of user interviews, creative sessions and discussions were held as well.

The chosen method provided valuable knowledge and necessary factors in order to create an overview of the current world in the context of the researched domain. Moreover, it supported the additional conclusions of how to approach the found issue and what is required for future world creation. Following the methodological steps in this research, three design iteration cycles were performed as well. Each design concept in those cycles focused on different aspects of uneasy sexual exploration. After their detailed evaluation, the created concepts served as a learning moment to better understand what exactly the final concept should be.

After marking down the potential directions and evaluating design opportunities, it was decided the focus of the final concept should be on sexual scripts - societally created guidelines on sexual behaviour and their influence on people's sexual exploration. Based on the findings and evaluation, a suitable vision statement was proposed as an essential part of the ViP method - encouraging people to be freer in their sexual exploration, by showing them the ridiculousness of

sexual scripts. The mechanism and the intended effect of the statement were tested on several occasions, based on which final concept was then created.

This thesis, therefore, aims to propose a suitable design solution in the domain of sexual exploration. Specifically, the focus of the created concept is on the people who currently feel limited by the sexual scripts they encounter and require additional support in sexually exploring beyond them.

The final concept of this research project is an Instagram profile which aims to raise awareness of sexual scripts in the society by ridiculing them, in order to support people to be freer in their sexual exploration. By using a combination of satirical illustrations and text, the profile serves as a type of an online catalogue of sexual scripts where users have a clear overview, but also as a safe space where alternative ideas can be found. The name of this concept and consequently, the Instagram profile, is The Script Bible, where additional ridicule is present as well, to mock how blindly people sometimes follow mentioned sexual scripts.

The final concept was validated with five potential users, which were selected based on the intended target group - people who sometimes experience a limitation in their sex lives caused by sexual scripts. Furthermore, the validation of the concept focused on a few parts - the directness and understanding, confrontation with personal attitudes, the overall moment of first interaction and the visual language of the concept. Additionally, a comparison with the created product qualities was also validated. Illustrations were tested separately and then with the overall Instagram profile as well.

In conclusion, while this concept only focuses on the first layer of defeating the sexual scripts - the awareness, the validation and reflection both indicate the chosen direction is a suitable one. Moreover, the created concept shows the chosen mechanism is also fitting for this approach and can result in a more open discussion about sexual exploration, breaking the uncomfortableness of the topic and spark further interest in the topic itself.



Image: Taras Chernus, Unsplash

Acknowledgments

Looking at the past six months, graduation was the most challenging project I have ever worked on, without a doubt.

After deciding to move to the Netherlands two years ago and change my life completely, never would I imagine the experiences I have gone through or some insanely tricky challenges I have faced.

Luckily, I was not alone in these two years or during this graduation project, so I believe it is necessary to say some nice words about the people who left a mark.

Firstly, I want to thank my family for never following boring social scripts and letting me do anything I want - and I have, for sure, used that opportunity. Thank you for making me a fierce Bilić.

An academic thank you to my graduation committee for their guidance - Paul Hekkert and Marieke Sonneveld, for pushing me to my limits, challenging me to overcome my fears and having an abundance of understanding for me. Also, for my forever wrongly scheduled Zoom meetings. I enjoyed having you by my side throughout this project. Thank you for all the support, understanding and structure you gave me.

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To my DFI clique - Freddy, Cais and Hannah. Thank you for all those Sunday nights and endless food, laughter and gossip adventures. I am happy to have met you all

and excited to see where life takes us in the future. And thanks for always being my grammar support - even for this paragraph!

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Thanks to all of you who came along and made these two years memorable - Dean, Xavier, Petra, Vino, Signy, Nico, Paulita, Azlaan, Pepe, Iva and everyone else; you know who you are.

But also,

"I wanna thank me. I wanna thank me for believin' in me, I wanna thank me for doing all this hard work, I wanna thank me for having no days off."

I am proud of myself for finishing this graduation, for finding motivation, for pushing myself and believing in my work. These last six months have been an incredible challenge for my mental health, and I am thankful to myself every day for always finding the motivation to make that next step, no matter how hard it can get. Many beautiful moments are waiting for me in the future, and I am happy to have a Klara by my side.

Enjoy reading,
Klara

*“Ti si jedan od lošijih studenata
na fakultetu.”*

- a professor at the School of Design Zagreb

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Ink

Ink is a social design and innovation studio based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. They are recognised by their unique approach, which is a mix of design, psychology and entrepreneurship. Ink is the creator behind some recognisable projects - Open Kaart, a game designed to discover yourself through the eyes of others and Peerby - the world's biggest sharing platform, and many other valuable projects which all deeply touch urgent societal and environmental issues.

Their manifesto resonated with my aspirations as well:

- Never selling stuff that people don't actually need.
- Designing products with people's best interest at heart.
- Creating ecosystems over hierarchies.

Initially, I was introduced to their founder - Anna Noyons, during the elective course Vision in Product Design. There, I found out about their ongoing project in the domain of sexual wellbeing and was eager to know more about it. Consequently, they joined the graduation committee and became a client in this project and decided to support me in my research and teach me everything they know about this subject. Besides that, I also had a direct insight into how impact-oriented design studio deals with intimate topics in the business world. Most importantly, being a part of Ink's team was extremely valuable to me during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, which has helped me to stay focused and always have support both in my project and overall wellbeing at that time.

(ink).

The Approach & Methodology

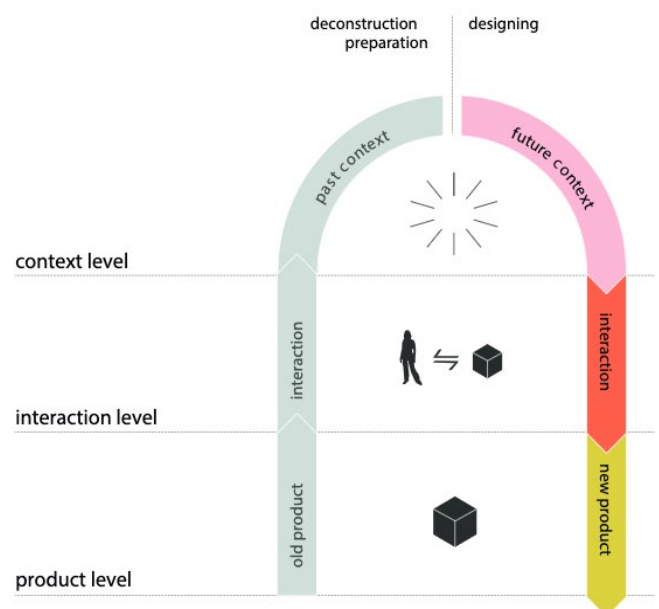
This research started by exploring the uneasiness of sexual exploration. Firstly, the aim was to understand what sexual exploration is and how people sexually explore in the current world. A combination of different DFI specific methods was used. In the first phase, the ViP method was used to understand the context of the domain, the influencing factors, and to, later on, create a coherent story. Underlying mechanisms of human sexuality and additional topics were necessary to understand in this phase as well, on which later design criteria was created. Literature review, desk research and detailed study of Ink's previous research conducted in the domain of sex and pleasure provided me with an overview of possibilities and valuable insights collected at that time.

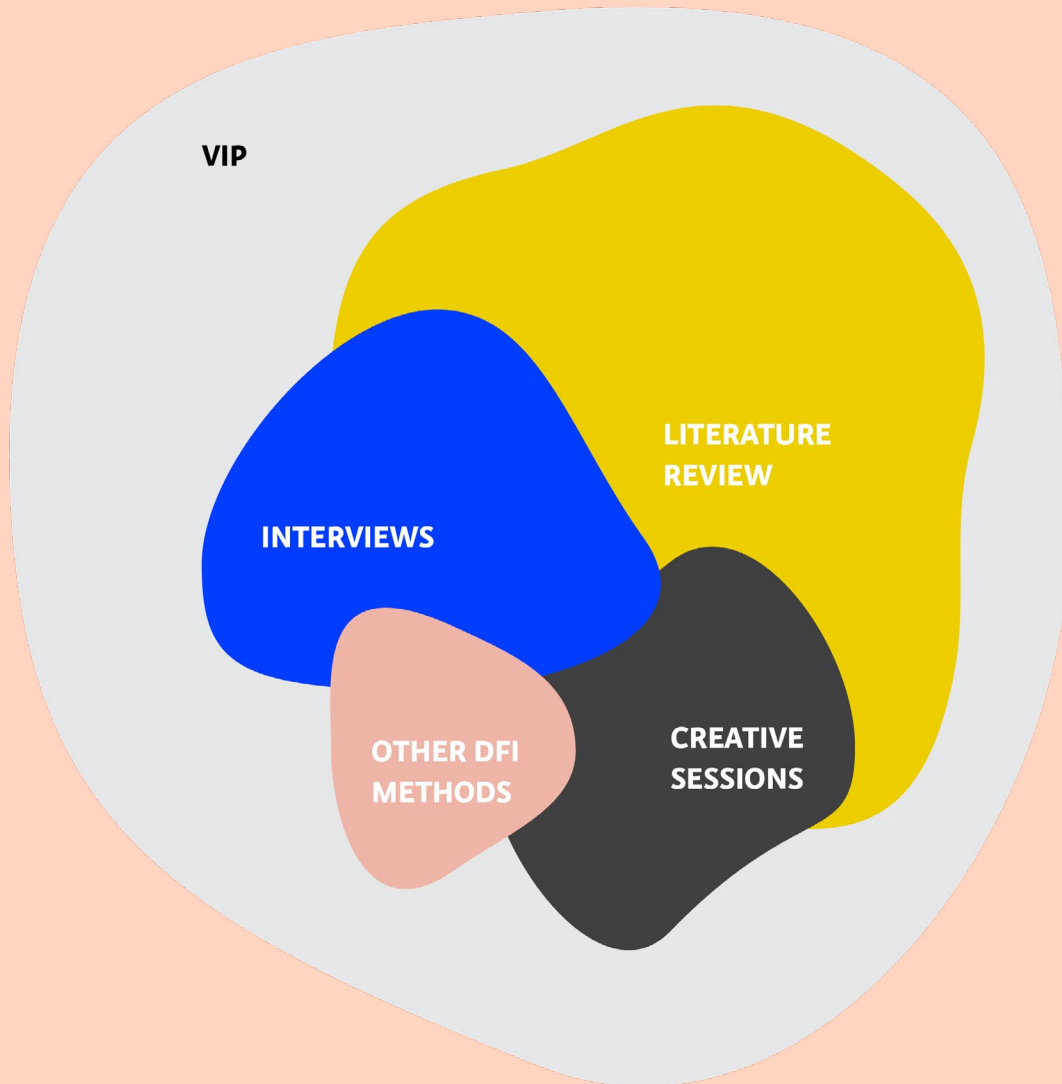
However, the limitations for the first part of the research was the current COVID-19 crisis which started precisely at the beginning of this project. This had a significant influence on reaching out to interviewees and the overall project as well. Nevertheless, the focus remained the same. It was essential to understand why sexual exploration can be an uneasy process. In that stage of research, I soon discovered the complexity and interwoven amount of factors in this domain. With this in mind, I was determined to mark down design opportunities for the next phase of research - the conceptualisation of found data.

After marking down the potential directions and evaluating design opportunities, I decided to focus on sexual scripts - societally created guidelines on sexual behaviour and their influence on people's sexual exploration. I wanted to determine what stops people in freer sexual exploration and what can design do in that case.

Besides ViP, during this research, a combination of other methodologies was used:

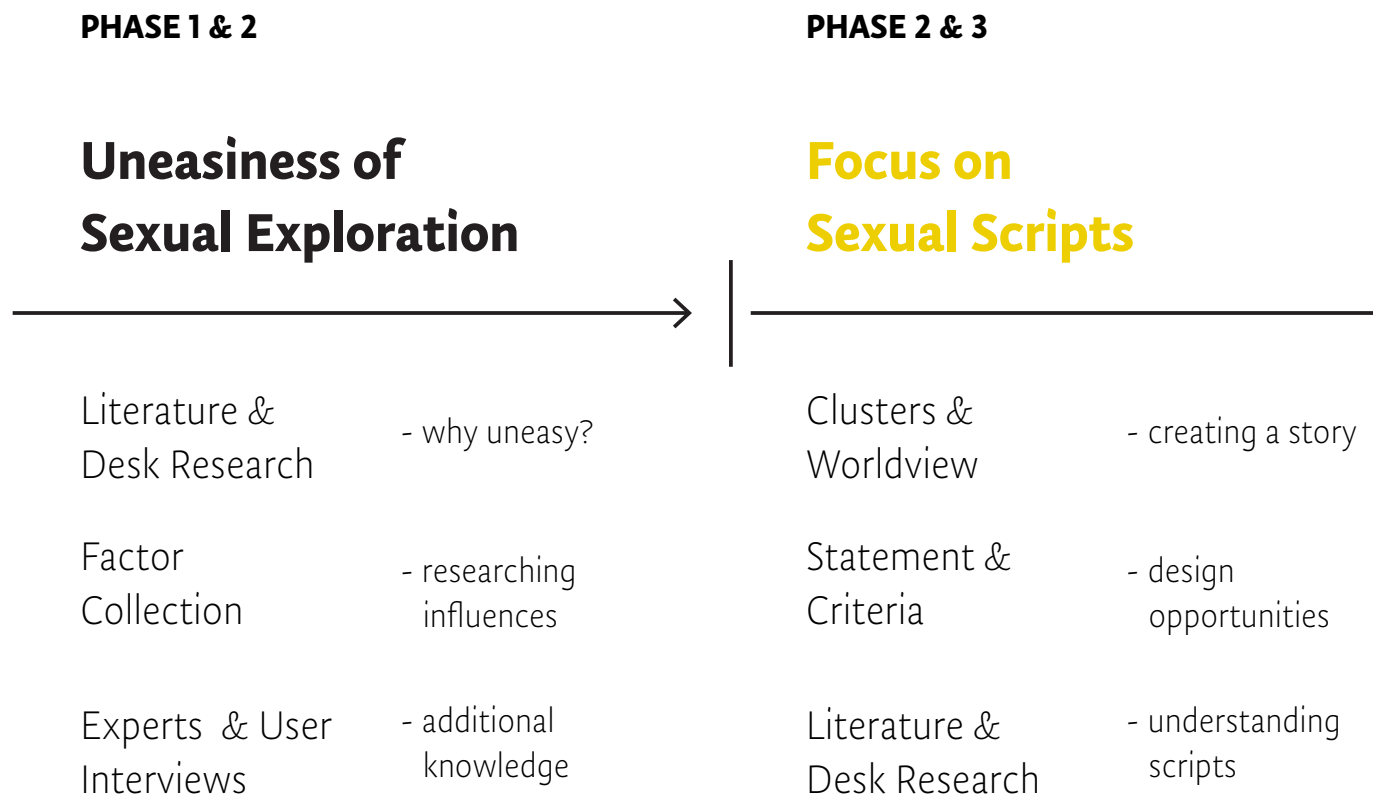
- User & Expert interviews provided me with direct insights and challenged me to learn how to approach sensitive topics while discussing them with others, without getting biased data
- Creative sessions with users - brainwriting, brainstorming and mindmaps facilitated open discussions and supported me in getting different insights, leaving my headspace and observing the topic from different perspectives
- Discussions - talking to other people, colleagues, faculty members, and others was probably the most fruitful approach in this topic. Through conversation in a relaxed setting, I was able to stir an open discussion and get feedback on my findings and thoughts on the spot. Besides, it was an approach which showed me as well how urgent innovating in this domain is.





Even though ViP was the primary method in this research, a combination of other methods supporting the findings and conclusions have guided me through ViP.

Process Overview



PHASE 3

Design Iterations

C1

C2

C3

- prototyping & testing opportunities
- conclusions for the final design

PHASE 4

Final Design

Iteration

Validation

Future Recommendations

Reflection



Image: Charles Deluvio, Unsplash

1 - THE DOMAIN

In this chapter, the first part is an introduction to the domain - the urgency of necessary innovation and an overview of the current world of sexual exploration.

Next, a detailed explanation of the Sexual script theory is presented. Additionally, some main mechanisms and principles about human sexuality are explained, followed by an introduction to sexual exploration, and its representation in the media. These findings supported the development of criteria for the final design intervention later in the process and were essential in understanding the overall context of the domain.

The second part of the chapter covers different influences on human sexuality, which serve as an introduction to better understanding of the found issues.

Main research questions in this chapter are:

- Q1:** What are sexual scripts, and how are they formed?
- Q2:** What are the main mechanisms of human sexuality, and how do people experience their sexuality?
- Q3:** What are some common issues experienced which stop enjoyable sexual exploration?
- Q4:** How is sexual exploration represented in the current world?

- 1.1. Why innovating in this domain
- 1.2. Sexual scripts theory
- 1.3. About sex and sexuality
- 1.4. Sexual exploration
- 1.5. Representation of sexual exploration in the current world
 - 1.5.1. Deconstruction of two products
- Chapter conclusion

1.1. Why innovating in this domain

During this research, I have come across sexual scripts in numerous ways - through user interviews, creative sessions, literature, desk research, movies, documentaries, books. The complexity and power of such unwritten rules of behaviour in society are immensely present. Sexual scripts, directly and indirectly, influence people's sexual behaviours and overall exploration - how to explore, with whom and to what extent. In the first phase of research, I was not able to give them a proper term or even grasp where exactly these narratives come from, but eventually, it became clear that their presence is unavoidable. Most importantly, understanding the broader context of this domain, beyond the sexual scripts and main sexual topics, there were other findings which proved to me why innovation in this domain is urgent.

In this report, I deliberately decided to refer to an individual or partner sexual intimacy as sexual exploration, and not as just "sex". Sexual exploration is a broader term, and people can sexually explore in many ways - through ideas, attitudes, thoughts, relationships, fantasies or individually. Most importantly, sexual exploration is not limited to physical exploration only, nor it is the same for every person.

Sex, on the other hand, as a word, comes with a strong preconception, which can have a slightly different meaning in each culture. However, generally, the word refers to a penetrative physical activity. Even though the word can also imply the biological attributes of a specific gender, in a colloquial language, it mostly refers to sexual activity.

The difference between the two is crucial in this research because the presented findings strongly indicated how the powerful definition of the word sex and the meaning behind it, the connotation of the word, influences people's approach to it and consequently, limits the whole exploration. After understanding this phenomenon and the influence of sexual scripts in it, as well as the overall domain, I have concluded a few critical arguments on why the mentioned innovation is necessary.

1. Sex is still a taboo topic

An open discussion about sexual health and pleasure has become acceptable in the current world, but only to some extent. There is a precise categorisation of approved sexual behaviours and those who fall under unacceptable and taboos. This was evident through literature research, observations and user interviews as well. There are multiple design interventions, products and services which try to stir a sexual revolution in the domain, however, it became evident that the consequence of still being a taboo is a polarisation between the more traditional and progressive sexual currents. A more remarkable change in this domain will unlikely happen if the status quo of sex remains in a form it is now.

2. The domain lacks inclusivity

Sexual exploration should not exclude people based on their sexual identity or type of love. A rising trend in this domain is the sexual wellness businesses; whose focus is on supporting people in their sexual pleasure, confidence and overall wellbeing. However, the majority of such businesses predominantly focus on women. By doing so, there is a clear prioritisation of specific user groups and products offered on the market. While there are fair and justified arguments why the sexual pleasure of women had to have its revolution, the approach started excluding other users, denying them access to information through specific product qualities and consequently creating a more significant information gap. The value of such products and services is in reframing the status quo of sex - it should not only represent a heterosexual penetrative activity.

3. We have never known so much and so little about sex at the same time

During this project, I have noticed there is a significant lack of information when it comes to understanding the overall domain of sexual exploration. Some are a consequence of insufficient sexual education, while others are a byproduct of unchecked sexual facts available online and offline in different media. The stream of mentioned content is mainly providing people with generic answers and supports the sexual

scripts approved in society. On the other hand, there is an overall curiosity to know more, understand better and merely, explore the domain, which is an ample opportunity. Therefore, the current world is in an exciting position - slowly shifting away from the traditional ideas of sex, and at the same time introducing more progressive ones.

In conclusion, while there is infinite other reason why this domain requires innovation, this report will hopefully inspire the reader (you) to research for yourself as well and perhaps, get inspired to approach this domain from a different angle.

The next few paragraphs cover some main principles, phenomenons and ideas about human sexuality, sexual activity and representation of sexual exploration in the media. Understanding those elements of the domain were crucial before the design phase of research came.



1. 2. Sexual Scripts Theory

Tomkins first introduced social scripting theory in 1954, providing theoretical explanation on how different social scripts are embedded in people's cultural contexts with defined appropriate behaviours, expectations, roles and general guidelines.

Scripts can be interpreted as mental structures, which consist of a series of activities or functions necessary to achieve a goal (Erasmus, Bishoff & Rousseau, 2002). Meaning, they are abstract unwritten rules which people often intuitively follow. Specific social scripts provide social roles for people, which indicate what behaviour is expected of them or how they should behave. For example, how to appropriately behave in a restaurant - how to order food, when to pay the bill, how to interact with the staff. While these "rules" are not necessarily written somewhere, they guide people in familiar situations, reduce confusion and make sure the behaviour goes smoothly. Social scripts are, therefore, forms of social agents which indicate what is appropriate, normative behaviour within a particular social environment (Wiederman, 2005).

Gagnon and Simon applied the scripting theory to a sexual context in 1973 and defined it as:

"the approved norms regarding sexuality that individuals embrace, internalise, and endorse through a process of socialisation."

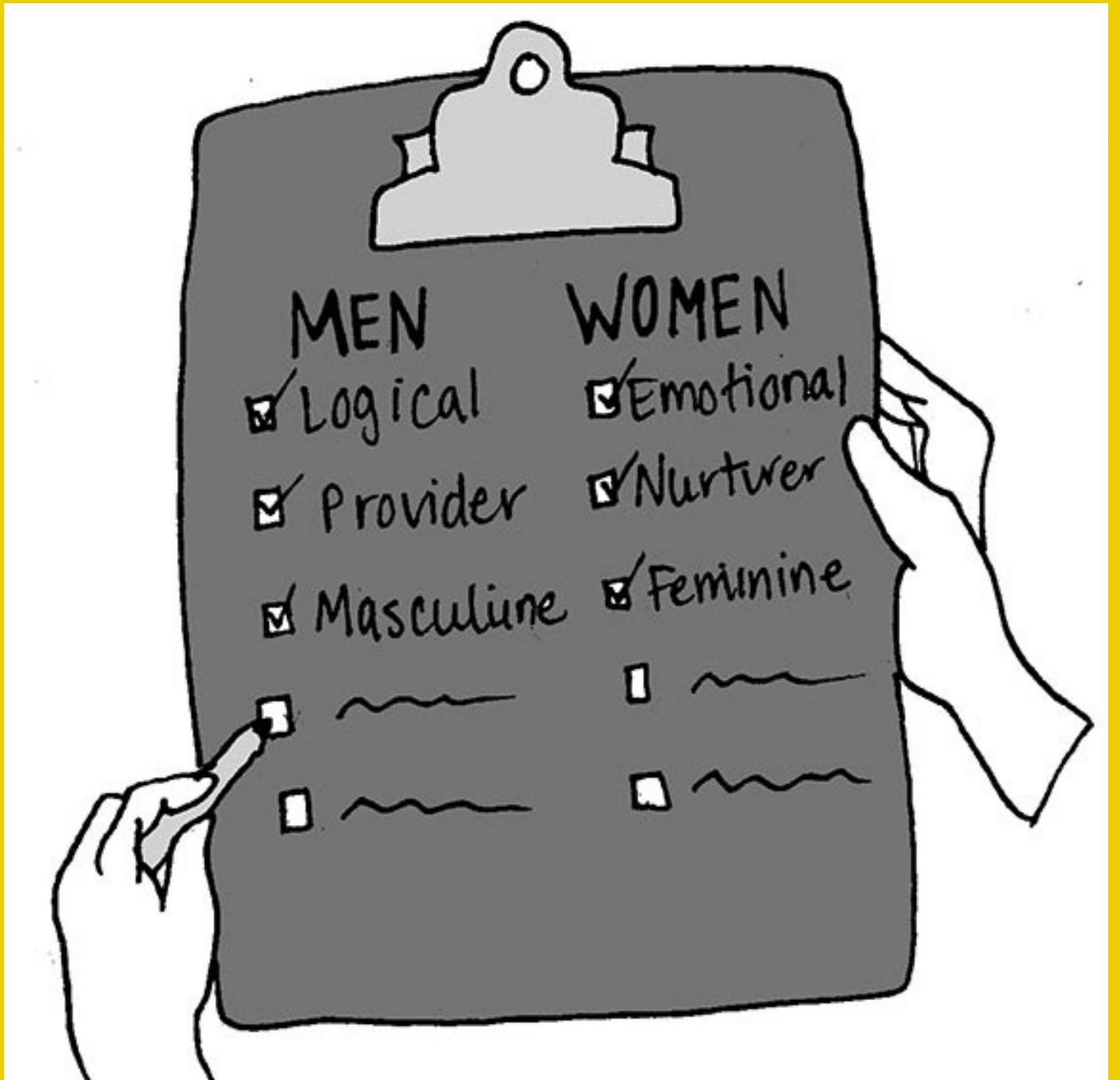
(Rutagumirwa & Bailey, 2018).

Sexual scripts theory, consequently, explains specific sexual cues and behavioural patterns people follow or act upon in a sexual context. Sexual scripts can be observed as conceptualised metaphors through which individuals make sense of their sexuality and sexual interactions with other people (Rose and Frieze 1993; Simon and Gagnon 1986).

These scripts are not precisely formulated rules, rather beliefs, attitudes and norms given to people through society. Mass media, government, the law, education, work environments, religion and other spheres of social life, all have an essential role in formulating and conveying those scripts (Wiederman, 2015). They all communicate to people what is allowed, appropriate or desired, and what is not. The unwritten element of scripts makes them especially challenging to scale or directly locate, regardless of their universal acknowledgement. Each culture, therefore, will have specific sexual scripts for its society and individuals in those cultures will likely develop their sexual selves based on those scripts.

Sexual scripts can be interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal sexual scripts are present between people interacting with each other, while intrapersonal scripts are "within a person", on an individual level. Interpersonal sexual scripts can be mutually followed sexual rules, roles and behaviours between partners, which could reduce uncertainty and support all partners in feeling in control in sexual activity. However, they also might have a contra effect.

For instance, in a heterosexual intimacy, there might be an active script between two partners which states a man should always initiate sexual intimacy first. The reasoning behind this could be because that is how it was usually presented in the partners' culture, regardless if the woman wishes to start it as well. If that type of script continues repeating, a woman might fall into a pattern of specific behaviour and never initiate sex first with her partners in the future. A man might believe he always has to. At that moment, the experienced script becomes intrapersonal for both.



Another familiar sexual script is the notion that only men are predominantly interested in sexual activity, while women are more reserved. This sexual script can differ and is more of a generalisation; however, it is a byproduct of particular historical, social scripts, which indicate clear gender roles and appropriate behaviours for each gender (Wiederman, 2015). Such scripts also contribute to the mentioned status quo of sex - defining it as a penetrative activity between heterosexual partners. Still, sexual scripts also go beyond the gender roles, and research in this project pointed out there is an abundance of sexual scripts influencing various types of relationships, love or gender, through defining specific behaviours and norms, rather than only focusing on the sexual acts. Additionally, sexual scripts can support partners in knowing how to behave and at a specific moment. On the other hand, scripts can also be limiting, essentially if some partners prefer a sexual interaction different from the script one.

It is also essential to state that not all sexual scripts are harmful. In the current world, there are many new, progressive and non-normative approaches to sexual exploration, which are also informed of scripts. An example of this is a mindset that sexual pleasure and preference are in the centre of people's sexual selves. This is the opposite of a more traditional, normative approach to sexuality, where the centre of someone's sexual self was mainly reproduction, not pleasure (Cocks, 2006). Sexual scripts have helped introduce more progressive ideas about sexual exploration in the world, but at the end of the day, they are still scripts. Mainstream pornography is one of such script makers, while its initial idea was to make sex less of a taboo. With that in mind, it also created sexual scripts which influence people's depiction of their sexual experiences, how they approach sexual exploration or even express themselves sexually.

Hence, this is the premise of this graduation project - understanding the influence sexual scripts have on people's sexual exploration, to then provide a suitable design intervention which supports the statement of this project, explained in Chapter 2.

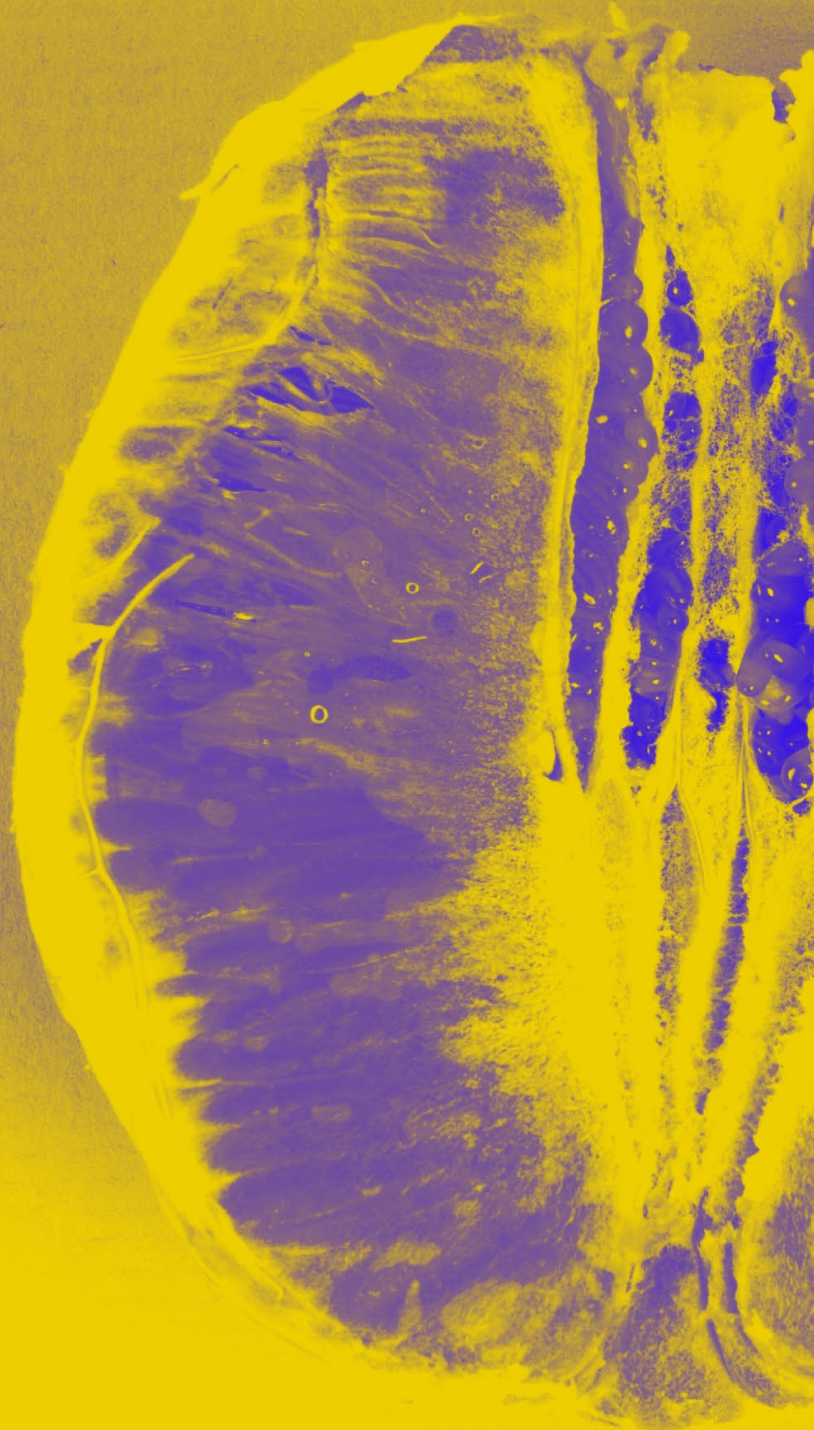
The chosen direction became evident at the end of the second phase of this project, where the analysis of different topics discussed in Chapter 1 provided clear insights and strong arguments. Following the chosen direction, further investigation of how exactly sexual scripts influence people's lives, how they are displayed in the society and to what extent.

1. 3. About sex and sexuality

Even though discussions about sex are still quite reserved, sex seems to be one of the most intriguing topics to talk about. Nevertheless, it comes with a few different connotations. When it comes to the definition of sex, or more specifically, the definition of the word sex, it has a few meanings. It can refer to the biological term of sex, where it relates to psychological, biological, physical or genetic factors that can define a person, which is different from gender identity, where gender identity expresses what an individual's sense of gender is, usually influenced by culture. It can also refer to a strictly anatomical characteristic of a person, their sex or sexual organs. However, most common preconception of the word sex is the sexual activity between people, including their sexual organs (Nagosky, 2015).

When it comes to sexuality, Bandcroft defined human sexuality as sexual interest or attraction to others or oneself, expressed by sexual feelings and experiences (2008). Meaning, sexuality is how people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. The biological part of our sex is just one of many other components out of which sexuality is built. How people perceive their gender, body, sexual activity with others, how they express these components - all this and many more, collectively forms human sexuality (Bandcroft, 2008.) As Nagosky explains, all people are made from the same parts, just organised in different ways (2015).

Sexuality can, therefore, be expressed, experienced and explored in various ways - through ideas, attitudes, values, thoughts, relationships, fantasies and many other channels. One of the universal characteristics of sexuality is variety, which states that human sexuality is unique for each person. Consequently, there are countless diverse ways an individual can approach their sexuality, and there is no universally right or wrong way. Still, sexual activity or the term sex is often acknowledged as the primary expression of human sexuality.



MAIN MECHANISMS

There are other terms commonly connected with sexuality and how people experience or express it.

Sexual arousal is one of such essential terms. The pleasure centre, located in the brain, is a vital mechanism in sexual activity which determines sexual arousal. The pleasure centre relies on the context people are in and decides which stimuli they find sexually pleasurable and which not. Based on that analysis, people will either feel sexually aroused or not (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2013). In principle, the pleasure centre tells a lot about the context to people, and context is one of the primary factors that stirs sexual arousal. Context is made out of two crucial factors. First one are the conditions of the present moment we are in - are we alone or with others, where, is that situation familiar or unknown to us, do we feel safe in it. The second one is the state of our brain is in that moment - are we relaxed at that moment or stressed, with a loving or abusing partner, is there something else stressful or happy happening in our life. This process is out of an individual's control, and it consistently runs in the back of the brain, without direct awareness. Hence, it is not spontaneous, nor do people have direct control over it.

Still, despite this understanding, sexual arousal is often depicted in public as a spontaneous process (Nagoski, 2015). A common misconception categorises or frames arousal in such a way that all people are supposed to respond to the same sexual stimuli correspondingly, or that all people share the same sexual context. On the contrary, **the Dual control model of sexual response**, developed by Erick Janssen and John Bancroft in the 1990s gives an additional explanation of why this is false and how exactly context determines the outcome. The model consists of two parts: Sexual Excitation System (SES) and Sexual Inhibition System (SIS), where we treat SES as an accelerator and SIS as a break in our nervous system (Bancroft et al. 2009). The accelerator receives various relevant sexual stimuli from our environment and sends those signals from the brain to the genitals, with the main message to "turn on".

SES performs its duty without us being aware of it, and it persistently searches relevant sexual stimuli around us. SIS, as a break, differentiates between those stimuli and decides what would be the reasons not to get sexually aroused at the moment.

SIS does that in two ways, and this is a process that is out of human control as well. It instinctively searches for potential threats among the stimuli in the individual's environment. It tries to locate everything that might be interpreted as unwanted. For instance, this break is the reason why someone will not get sexually aroused in church or the middle of a big meeting. Because even though SES did a scan for potential stimuli and maybe found something to be "turned on", the break signalled that this context is sexually inappropriate.

Another way SIS works is in a more chronic, long-term way. It is a form of a break that worries more often about a specific fact continuously, such as not being able to reach orgasm in a certain amount of time, fear of performance failure, pressure to perform, partner's opinion (Nagoski, 2015). This type of stress often starts before sexual activity and is present throughout a person's everyday life. The design research presented in Chapter 2 also indicated the presence of these issues, which served as a starting point of understanding sexual scripts as well. Consequently, if an individual is experiencing high levels of stress or worries about a particular issue, that stress will remain during sexual activity or even become more vigorous, and SIS will inform about it. However, because this knowledge is not familiar to most people, it is an often situation that people continue performing sexual acts, despite them not feeling thoroughly relaxed, in which way the sexual arousal is not achieved as well.

ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE YOU TO THE:

Dual Control Model

YOUR SEXUAL RESPONSE SYSTEM, LIKE EVERY OTHER DOMAIN OF YOUR CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM, IS MADE UP OF A PARTNERSHIP OF INHIBITION AND ACTIVATION:

BRAKES AND GAS.

THE SEXUAL EXCITATION SYSTEM (SES) NOTICES ALL THE SEXUALLY RELEVANT INFORMATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT

TURN ON!

PARTNER SMELL
PARTNER APPEARANCE
PLEASANT GENITAL SENSATIONS
SEEING OR HEARING OTHER PEOPLE HAVING SEX
PARTNER MAKES YOU FEEL SPECIAL
MAKING UP AFTER A FIGHT
NOVELTY
TRUSTING YOUR PARTNER
NEW LOVE

EVERYTHING YOU SEE, HEAR, TOUCH, TASTE, SMELL OR IMAGINE THAT SEND SIGNALS TO YOUR GENITALS TO SAY "TURN ON".



YOUR SEXUAL INHIBITION SYSTEM (SIS) IS THE BRAKE, IT NOTICES ALL THE VERY GOOD REASONS NOT TO BE TURNED ON RIGHT NOW.

TURN OFF!

BODY IMAGE
TRAUMA HISTORY
SLEEP DEPRIVATION
RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT
REPUTATION
UNWANTED PREGNANCY / STIS
DEPRESSION/ANXIETY/STRESS*
PERFORMANCE ANXIETY
FEELING OBLIGATED

EVERYTHING YOU SEE, HEAR, TOUCH, TASTE, SMELL OR IMAGINE THAT COULD BE A POTENTIAL THREAT.



* FOR 10-20% OF PEOPLE, STRESS INCREASES DESIRE. PEOPLE VARY.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN SIS AND SES

The level of sexual arousal, therefore, pivots on the balance between SIS and SES. That balance, if achieved, creates space for desire - sexual arousal in a particular context. However, for this to happen, SES has to take the pressure of the break first. Most people have the intensity of SIS and SES “*medium*” - not too sensitive or insensitive (Nagoski, 2015). Meaning, most people have a right balance of what they find pleasurable, and a trusting break which helps them acknowledge that. They are unique traits all people are born with and remain more or less stable throughout life. Various research conducted in this area still has not found what factors exactly influence SIS or SES to change or how can people deliberately change them. Why would someone want to change their SIS or SES? Well, suppose a person becomes aware that their SIS (break) is extremely sensitive and almost wholly blocks any sexual pleasure. In that case, they understand why sexual exploration might feel uneasy, uncomfortable or even undesirable. Simply, that person does not enjoy sexual activity with others or with themselves. Then, instead of trying to change the whole mechanism, what research suggests people could do, is change what the mechanism responds to, by analysing the threats and working on their reduction. For example, a common threat might be STIs, unwanted pregnancy, performance pressure - all these are issues on which we can have direct control over. The mechanism itself will unlikely change under our will, but what we feed it with, can (Nagoski, 2015).

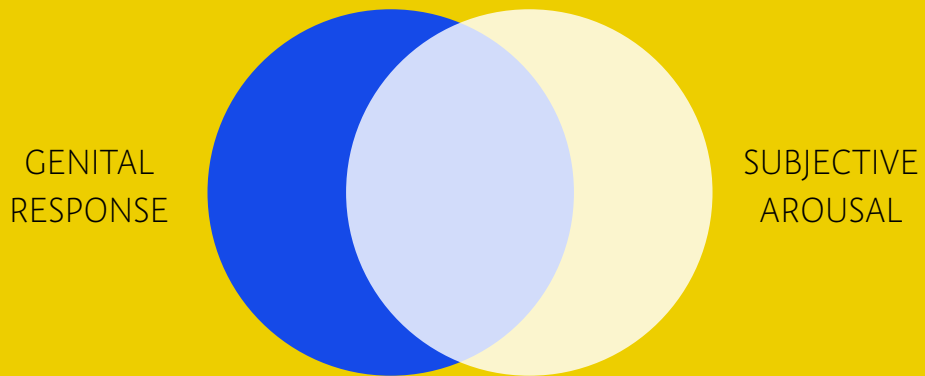
NON-CONCORDANCE IN SEXUAL AROUSAL

Sexual arousal is, therefore, much more mental, rather than a physical experience. Moreover, genital response to an individual’s experience of arousal does not always match and should not be used as the only indicator of sexual arousal. For example, sometimes a man’s penis can be erect, or a woman’s vagina can be wet, without them mentally experiencing arousal. We call this non-concordance, a natural human process which differentiates genital response and sexual arousal (Suschinsky et al, 2009).

Non-concordance explains that genitals respond to sexually relevant stimuli, regardless if we perceive those stimuli as sexually appealing. Anyone can experience non-concordance. However, the term is not publicly discussed enough, so for some people, when experiencing it, the process is unfamiliar. It can be entirely unexpected and even uncomfortable to experience it because it creates confusion between a person’s bodily response and their mental processes. Statistical research about non-concordance has shown that for men, there is about 50% overlap of what they find sexually relevant and sexually appealing. For women, there is about 10% (Suschinsky et al, 2009).

Such findings do not mean that one is better than the other. It only explains that different people rely more on the context of their arousal, while others rely on something else. The unfortunate component about this is the way the public interprets such information, as if women should be able to have a higher overlap or that men should have a lower overlap. Moreover, that the way men and women respond to sexual stimuli is the way all genders should. Consequently, coming back to variety, every person’s sexual experience is unique for them. People can relate to each other’s sexual experience to some extent, but still, each individual’s experience is truly theirs, and only they know and understand their sexuality fully.

Men's arousal concordance



Women's arousal concordance

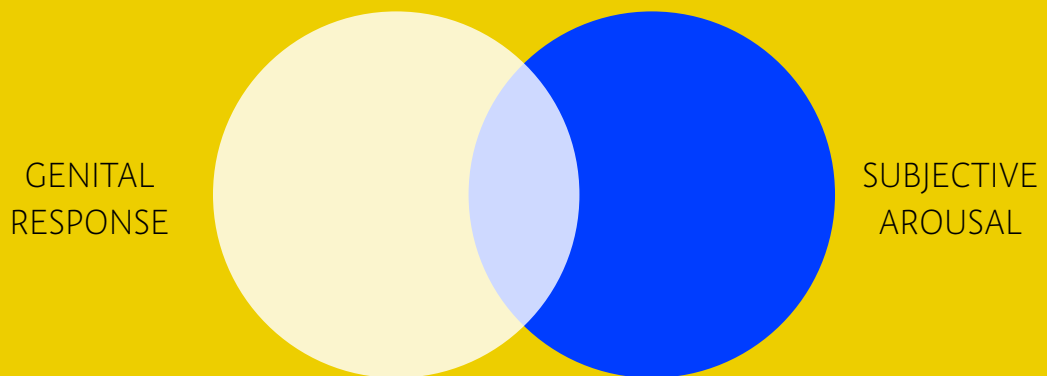


Image: Difference between men's and women's arousal concordance (Nagosky, 2015)

Interestingly, the misconception about genital response can be found in movies, mainstream pornography, books and various other content. Such outlets often depict various sexual mechanisms as spontaneous. Even though it sometimes might feel more spontaneous, it is still responsive and context-dependent (Dawson & Chivers, 2014). Though this is based on individuals previous experiences and their SIS and SES, as mentioned earlier, the overall general process stays the same:

Arousal + The right context (external circumstances and internal state) = Desire

Desire is, therefore, not a drive as often interpreted as well. What characterises as a drive among humans is a biological mechanism that keeps the organism in a healthy balance - not too much or too less of something. For instance, appetite, thirst, sweating, fatigue, all those can indicate in some way what we as humans need to do to avoid dying. Consequently, it might seem ridiculous to state desire is a drive because nobody has ever (yet) died of its lack (Toates, 2014). The same goes for sexual behaviour being characterised as a drive. Variety of sexuality explains again that different arousals, responses, expressions, preferences and other components of sexuality, are normal and common. Unique for every person, depended on their experiences. Still, many sexual scripts rely on this misconception and originate from the point of view where all people share the same sexual enthusiasm or require the same needs (Nagoski, 2015).



In conclusion,

After understanding some of the main mechanisms of human sexuality, I gained an in-depth understanding of what exactly happens in the whole process. This knowledge was crucial for later research as well, because it provided me with scientific facts on why specific social scripts are incorrect. Most importantly, I was able to understand sexual exploration as a process better - when it is pleasurable and when not. With this in mind, I proceeded researching different types of sexual exploration and the depiction of it in the current world, which largely influences the creation of current sexual scripts.

1. 4. Sexual Exploration

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, sexual exploration comes in diverse forms. It is not only a physical process but also a mental one. Erotic fantasies, ideas, physical intimacy, pornography, conversations - all these are some examples of possible ways to explore sexually (Bancroft, 2008). According to its definition, sexual exploration is seen as self-exploratory activities in the domain of sex and openness towards such activities. It can be beneficial for an individual's sexual orientation and is more of an umbrella term used for various sexual acts that can promote positive attitudes towards sexuality (Parent et al. 2015). Considering the limitations of the word *sex* previously mentioned, this chapter serves as an introduction to a better understanding of sexual exploration as a suitable term. Most importantly, how changing the view from *sex* to sexual exploration provides more opportunities, inspiration and different forms of sexual activities for people. While there is an abundance of ways people can sexually explore, in this paragraph, the most common and most essential for further research, are explained - sexual exploration with a partner, individually, through eroticism and pornography.

Throughout this phase of research, the goal was to understand why some forms of sexual exploration are more common than others. Also, parallel to literature analysis and desk research presented in this chapter, user and expert interviews were conducted as well. There, the phenomenon of scripts kept appearing. More specifically, pornography was mentioned as one of the most common individual sexual explorations. However, I also noticed a disturbance in people's reasoning behind their sexual behaviours - most blamed pornography as the primary source of inspiration and sexual cues. In contrast, those cues and behaviours did not fully align with what they would instead prefer. This realisation intrigued me to understand more about the influence of pornographic sexual scripts. Besides that, I have also noticed that most interviewees expressed the desire to feel more connected, explore deeper with their partners, but felt quite ashamed of their needs. This is where an interview with an expert in erotic fantasies enabled clarification.

SEXUAL EXPLORATION WITH A PARTNER OR INDIVIDUALLY

One of the preferred and most common forms of exploration in the current world is with an intimate partner through sexual intimacy or individually, by touch. Sexual exploration with a partner is a societally most acceptable form of sexual expression and is considered as a natural behaviour for all people (Nagoski, 2015).

Still, there are many ways partners can sexually explore together - by merely exploring each other's bodies, using sexual accessories, sharing intimate thoughts or in any other preferred manner. There are also different reasons why some people prefer specific types of sexual exploration, whether those are more physical or mental. Overall, sexual exploration with a partner can have great benefits for the relationship. It can enable a better connection between partners, be a unique way to understand a partner, promote more transparent communication and in general, result with more happiness (Rowland et al., 2020).

Masturbation, on the other hand, is an individual exploration which can, as well, include different additional sexual toys, apps, stories, body lotions, or whatever the individual enjoys. Solo sexual exploration can be a way for someone to understand their body better. It can also have a higher positive impact on that person's sexual wellbeing (Rowland et al., 2020).

In both of these types of exploration, other forms can be included as well—for instance, eroticism.

EROTICISM

Popularly discussed by Esther Perel, a Belgian psychotherapist, eroticism goes beyond societal expectations and ideas about sexual exploration. Through her research, Perel tries to educate and inspire people about different types of sexual exploration in order to show them what else is possible. According to her, eroticism is one of the most important ways through which people should approach sexual exploration. She best describes it as an individual's expression of sexual freedom and sovereignty, a capacity to maintain aliveness and life energy through sexual exploration (2006). It is a state of playfulness, mystery and curiosity. It is a place that one enters inside oneself, sometimes with someone else, and not merely something that is done. The premise of embracing eroticism is to feel comfortable with the unknown, because that is precisely what keeps people curious about sexual acts. It seems like a challenge to bring the uncertain into a familiar space, especially with a long term partner. However, the answer is seldom in a higher frequency of sex or novelty through different sexual positions and toys. It is more about the meaning of sexual exploration, which is, again, unique for every individual. Therefore, erotic intelligence is beyond sexual techniques, but rather celebrates curiosity, imagination and fascination with the hidden and mysterious (Perel, 2006).

EROTIC FANTASIES

Erotic fantasies are one of the ways to get more familiar with the erotic sexual mind. Leitenberg and Henning defined sexual fantasies in 1995 as mental imagery unique for each individual, that is sexually arousing to them. These fantasies can be based on real-life events, or entirely imaginary and are usually kept private. An attempt in making such fantasies reality is pornography - the literal visual imagery of sexual intimacy.

However, pornography and erotic fantasies are not the same. Quite the opposite, eroticism, as mentioned, promotes mysterious, unexplicit while pornography is explicit and direct in how it depicts sexual exploration.

The secrecy of erotic fantasies among people inspired Mariëlle de Goede and Lucas de Man who, recently published a book called “*Yes please!*”, to investigate this in the Netherlands. They focused on researching how people experience their erotic mind, what are the most common fantasies and what is the overall societal role in them. They discovered that, globally, the most popular fantasies among people are:

- **Group sexual behaviour:** threesomes, foursomes, orgies and other public sexual activities
- **Power:** fantasies about control, rough activities, bondage and rape
- **Adventure and excitement:** voyeurism, exhibitionism and copulation in unique places

(Source - Interview conducted with Mariëlle de Goede)

Interestingly, a clear distinction between men’s and women’s fantasies was discovered as well.

Men, according to research, usually fantasise about being the best possible lover, able to deliver multiple orgasms to partners without any effort. They fantasise about being able to last long, without performance pressure. In their fantasies, men mainly focus on their partner’s enjoyment and imagine seeing direct feedback of pleasure on partner’s faces or through body language.

Women, on the other hand, mostly fantasise about being the centre of attention, taking as much time as they wish to enjoy the given pleasures. They focus on themselves most of the time and put their partner’s pleasures as secondary if even imagining a partner.

(Source - Interview conducted with Mariëlle de Goede)

As a more broad goal of the conducted research and interviews, de Goede states it was to support people in getting more comfortable with their erotic mind. She points out an overall shame and guilt that people experience. Often, one’s attitudes or beliefs and what the erotic fantasies depict, differ. They are a combination of different memories and random storytelling created at the moment. If observed through the socially accepted sexual behaviours, rape, racist thoughts or sexually violent acts are not the norms. Therefore, it is understandable why fantasies create confusion and shame. However, no matter how much people shy away from them, these fantasies can be an excellent opportunity to unlock the mysterious and unknown, and they do not have any other meaning than pure arousal (Perel, 2006).

PORNOGRAPHY

Another popular type of sexual exploration in the current world is through pornography. The primary focus of mainstream pornography is depicting different sexual behaviours, in a specific storyline, which is mostly available for free use. Because of its free availability, it is accessible at any given moment and gives full access to its users. Pornography is still considered a taboo as well, but because of that aspect, people's curiosity about it is even higher.

Usually, it is used for pleasurable, educational and business purposes. It offers a particular promise as well - sexual exploration with a positive ending, almost always (Tyson et al. 2013). Sexual content is portrayed generically, regularly without a specific story around it. Today, it is still highly represented by mainstream service providers such as PornHub or YouPorn, where the idea of sexual exploration is very much a heterosexual experience created for the male gaze. It often shows how it should or could be. Sometimes comes across as aggressive and degradative (Bridges et al. 2010). Still, it is straightforward in what it is offering and a free way to get answers about sexual exploration, which are usually dismissed in sexual education, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

The type of pornographic content can tell a whole lot to the internet provider, but actually, what arouses people erotically is seldom represented in pornography. The issue with mainstream pornography is not in the fact that it exists and should be banned, but in the way, it is later on interpreted. The benefit of pornography is its non-judgemental environment; it welcomes kinks and desires, quite explicitly (Tyson et al. 2013). What society would most probably criticise or shame people for, is accepted in the porn world. Feeling alone in one's erotic fantasies often comes from the worry that the same stimuli arouse nobody else. So when searching for the perfect content online, people reduce this loneliness when finding content that supports specific desires.



Image: Charles Deluvio, Unsplash

Furthermore, the fact that porn sites do not care about individuals' real lives and do not go into detail about it, this motivates some to forget all about the reality and focus for some time on what pornography offers (Tyson et al. 2013). To an extent, pornography can be observed as a safe space. Content-wise, frequency of sex, the novelty of experiences and ending with orgasm are mostly presented in pornography as indicators of healthy sexual life. From this view, some sexual scripts strongly originate.

In mainstream pornography, sexual exploration has a strict timeline and precise power dynamics. Roles are regularly gender-based and could consist of high levels of verbal and physical aggression (Bridges et al. 2010). Created content does not give a detailed explanation of who the actors are, what is their daily life like, how did they meet. Most importantly, it does not show the conversation between the actors when they suggest different sexual positions, if someone gets bored or is not in the mood anymore. That is the fruitful ground to create assumptions where trying something new with a partner is a linear process, without discussing it first or ever getting rejected.

A contemporary answer to mainstream pornography is the ethical porn cinema. One of the foremost leaders of this movement is Erica Lust and her team from Xconfessions. Ethical porn focuses on changing the mainstream pornography industry, and Erica's site is based on erotic fantasies of other people as a starting point of stories for her films. Anyone can submit an erotic fantasy which then Xconfessions turn into short films. Erica is a pioneer of the new ethical, popularly called the feminist porn movement, where the emphasis is on mutual respect, diversity and exploration of various sexualities.

Considering the learnt from Mariëlle de Goede and her research, and after analysing the literature, but also talking to interviewees, I noticed that even though sexual scripts are unwritten and could be challenging to locate, pornography seemed like one of the most powerful dictators of such scripts. However, not only that but different visual imagery has an immense influence as well. With this in mind, I wanted to understand how other sources such as movies, the media or online content depict sexual exploration and what is their role in people's experiences. With realisations from this phase, additional investigation of pornography and erotica was conducted.

1. 5. Representation of sexual exploitation in the current world

In the abundance of different content which depicts sexual exploration in a specific way, I decided to surround myself with both traditional and more progressive depictions, in order to grasp the influences of sexual scripts better. During this phase of research, parallelly with the analysis conducted in the previous Chapter, different books, tv shows, documentaries and other content provided me with necessary understanding, but also sparked an avalanche of vital questions to think about before proceeding to the next phase of research - the design.

While this Chapter covers only a brief analysis of some, the mentioned content is crucial in understanding the bigger picture of the researched domain. The complexity of it, the subliminal influence of sexual scripts promoted, the overwhelming amount of such scripts which can be found in multiple sources simultaneously. Besides that, I also got a better understanding of more progressive content, which already tries to challenge current sexual scripts. Finally, to conclude this phase of research, a deconstruction of two products was conducted as well, as an advised step of the primary method in this research - ViP. The deconstruction supported me in zooming in the domain even more, to then zoom out and create a consistent story of this research, necessary for the next steps of the method.

Mass media is as well one of the biggest influencers on people's sexual exploration and sexuality in general. It plays a vital role in sending messages on what sexual behaviour is approved and appropriate, and what is not. Hence, an individual's approach to sexuality will be influenced by those messages and will most likely create a specific sexual context. Context, as mentioned earlier, has a direct influence on what some might define as sexually relevant to them, depending on what the society in that context defines as sexually relevant. For example, if someone's context explicitly states that sexual activity before marriage is immoral and shameful sexual behaviour, that person's sexual self will most likely develop through that idea (Gagnon 1990, Simon 1996).

If observed historically, human sexuality was interpreted in various ways, and even today, different cultures define sexuality differently. Some say that sexuality is a social construct that changes through history and shapes itself based on the current societal norms (Bancroft, 2008). Those norms influence the way sexuality is often publicly discussed, depicted and what are the societal scripts around it (Bancroft, 2008). Human sexuality is, therefore, a complex behaviour affected by many different factors, and that has a high impact on the individual's perception of their sexuality. Consequently, the way sexual exploration is depicted in society is also influenced by the mentioned factors. In the current world, the movie and music industry follow the trends and developments in society and try to depict sex more realistically.



Image: Sex Explained, Netflix

For instance, *Sex Explained*, a documentary series aired on Netflix in 2020, focuses on explaining the biology of sex, the physical activity of sexual exploration, attraction, the normality of fetishes and erotic fantasies, and it overall wants to bring this domain closer to people. It takes a bit of a different approach without over perfecting the topic, but rather providing some scientific facts and expert's opinions. Furthermore, *Christiane Amanpour: Sex & Love Around The World*, another documentary from 2018 focuses on investigating the cultural influence on sex and its interpretation to again, bring closer the absurdness of media portraying human sexuality as universal.



Image: Sex Education, Netflix

Shows like *Sex Education* (2019) or *Normal People* (2020) try to show the real-life struggles of ordinary people and their sex lives. These types of shows gained their popularity in the last few years including the industry's approach to sexual topics which became novel as well, and humanising the real-life sex on screen is one of the main motivations.

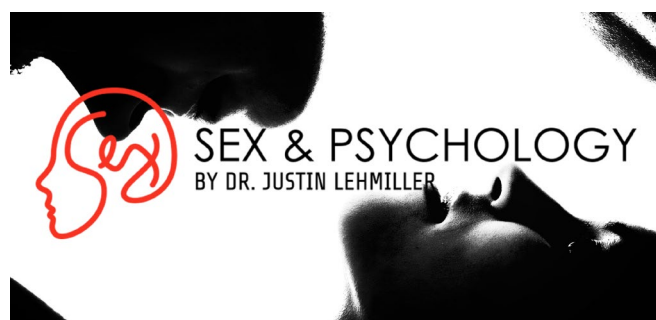
In the Netherlands, Lize Korpershoek made a documentary in 2019 called *Mijn Seks is Stuk*, in which she tries to investigate the reasons behind her low sexual interest. She explores female sexuality through her personal stories, talking to experts, friends and family members. As mentioned in one of the interviews, she began her journey because of feeling isolated in this issue, without knowing where even to start looking for answers.



Image: Mijn Seks is Stuk, Lize Korpershoek

Lize's struggle comes from comparing herself with performers in pornography, her sexual experiences with those of other people or how sex is presented in the movies. With this documentary, she tries to tackle one of the most common sexual scripts in society - that sexual desire or interest is spontaneous and always present. Lize's documentary is a beautiful reflection of first sexual experiences people go through, to some intense sexual expectations in society.

Furthermore, the movie industry, especially Hollywood one, has a specific way of depicting sexual exploration as well. It mainly depends on the plot of a movie, what are some trendy factors in the society while the movie is being filmed and what is the end message sent to the world. Romantic comedy movies usually have a fixed agenda or a specific ideology they promote, which will most likely follow the defined societal norms (Sălcudean, 2015). This is important because romantic comedy movies usually portray single people who no matter what, almost always find a partner in the end and start a happy relationship life (Sălcudean, 2015). The modern era brought societal scripts around love, relationships and family a long time ago, and these norms have stayed in the society through movies and shows which depict them in such a way. Sexual exploration in these movies will most likely be portrayed based on the current sexual trends and will align with the values that the movie is sending (Sălcudean, 2015). This understanding helped me critically reflect on the hidden sexual and social scripts behind various romantic movies I was exposed to throughout my life as well.



On the other hand, I also realised how online content is usually full of sensationalised news articles on sexual trends. The benefit of talking more openly about sex online provided people with answers about almost anything they would like to know. However, most of that content is usually not based on any scientific fact, is primarily manipulated to fit the story that is selling and is written by people who are not sex experts. Lehmiller writes about this issue on his blog Sex & Psychology, one of the first online platforms where sex topics are backed up by scientific research (2017). He points out a common trap people might fall into when reading about

sexual acts online - the desire to immediately change their sex life. Lehmiller states that getting inspired by a suggestion can be a beautiful moment for partners, but trying to lead your sexual life according to sexual trends will not result in happiness in the long run. Even though many are aware of the generic content online, social media and other platforms are still primary sources for most when it comes to sexual exploration. These sources are free, fast with giving answers and available immediately on any device. Lehmiller's blog is one of the great and safe spaces online to research more about sexual exploration.

Next, books - both novels and nonfiction explore this domain as well. While I was searching for scientific literature which can provide me with crucial knowledge, I also came across various sensationalised books. Somehow sex and sexual exploration are continuously being approached as competitions, fitness activities which should be frequent and novel. Often, when such literature discusses these topics, authors try to give tips or directives to readers on how to approach their sex lives, in order to improve them or to "have better sex". In many works of literature, there is a "great sex" sexual script. Again, a quite normative strategy in this domain, which leaves little space for actual exploration. Esther Perel is one of the researchers who are active in changing this phenomenon, and her book *Mating in Captivity* (2006) tackles this challenge from the mentioned erotic intelligence aspect. Following the same aspiration, Emily Nagoski is trying to debunk some stubborn, traditional views on sexuality and incredibly strong gender roles in sex, which she presented in *Come As You Are* (2015), a book which was a major inspiration and source for this research as well.

1.5.1.DECONSTRUCTION OF TWO PRODUCTS

Furthermore, pornography is one of the most influential, quite literal, industries in this topic. After understanding its components in the previous section, I decided to research how sexual exploration is represented and shown in pornography. For this, a combined deconstruction of two representative products was done - Xconfessions as a modern answer to mainstream porn, and PornHub, as one of the most traditional products in mainstream pornography. Both serve as platforms to explore sexual acts and sexuality.

PornHub is one of the leading pornographic video sharing and pornography websites that daily receives 75 million visitors, and an average user spends approximately 10 minutes on the site. The site launched in 2007 and was not offering anything that people did not already see. The difference, though, between PornHub and pornographic content before the mainstream internet era, is that PornHub offers free content online, anytime and whatever preference, with the options of creating a profile and sharing personal content as well. It makes the whole exploration quite simple.

On the other hand, Xconfessions was developed in 2013 by Erika Lust, a filmmaker in the new indie adult industry. The site works entirely differently from PonHub - it relies on people's erotic fantasies which they share online, and those fantasies are turned into erotic films. Unlike PornHub, which hosts and offers an immense amount of different sexual content, Erika's goal was to provide a fresh alternative which is based on real-life and real experiences.

When PornHub started, it was not necessarily targeted to one specific group. However, it was mostly viewed by the male audience. PornHub has its unique sexual content and a way of showing how sex *should* or *could* be perceived. The content is predominantly showing heterosexual sex, with a specific power dynamics between performers. A study conducted for YouPorn, another accessible pornography webpage, discovered that 22% of people visit the site with a specific video in mind (Tyson et al. 2013). For those, a section of "categories" is probably the first step when searching. "Categories" on PornHub consist of precisely 100 of them, all have a thumbnail photo which directly explains what the category is about and how it will look. It gives the impression of an online catalogue, and it is probably a way to navigate the viewer (Tyson et al. 2013).

Most thumbnail photos have explicit imagery, and the visual language is dominant on the site. There are no restrictions in the types of categories, which are detailed, with bold visual stimuli and titles. Under the "Pornstars" category, PornHub only shows female performers, categorising them by their popularity, subscriptions, and top trending. There are tags a viewer can choose in this category, such as four types of breasts, different geographical background, age, and male. This is different from Xconfessions where the category is called "Contributors" and gives you an overview of everyone who participates in the making of videos and other content. This categorisation of preferences could be a way to help people conceptualise a particular erotic fantasy, but also to feel more connected with the content.

PornHub allows the viewer to be satisfied by a potentially large number of videos that somehow fall under a broad interest (Tyson et al. 2013). Predominantly, the homepage will contain a bit of every category and something that either fits or does not fit personal preferences. This makes it an even better clickable moment because the viewer is encouraged to click precisely on new videos and explore what usually might be too challenging. Research conducted by Lehmler (2018) has shown something interesting in the connection between people's kinks and their disgust levels. Often when it comes to porn and the acceptance of visual stimuli, a hypothesis is that, through time, people might become more acceptive of visual content they first considered disgusting or uncomfortable. It is more likely the experience will be enjoyable because the excitement was built slowly, and it slowly lowered the disgust levels, which might result in a more powerful orgasm in the end. Consequently, people might start connecting the intensity of their orgasm with that specific kink in the future. Still, this is merely a hypothesis, and additional research in this field is required.



Short Films

Director

Categories



Image: Xconfessions website

PornHub allows the viewer to be satisfied by a potentially large number of videos that somehow fall under a broad interest (Tyson et al. 2013). Predominantly, the homepage will contain a bit of every category and something that either fits or does not fit personal preferences. This makes it an even better clickable moment because the viewer is encouraged to click precisely on new videos and explore what usually might be too challenging. Research conducted by Lehmillier (2018) has shown something interesting in the connection between people's kinks and their disgust levels. Often when it comes to porn and the acceptance of visual stimuli, a hypothesis is that, through time, people might become more acceptive of visual content they first considered disgusting or uncomfortable. It is more likely the experience will be enjoyable because the excitement was built slowly, and it slowly lowered the disgust levels, which might result in a more powerful orgasm in the end. Consequently, people might start connecting the intensity of their orgasm with that specific kink in the future.

Erika Lust at Xconfessions presents the viewer with the overview of categories first, using thumbnails as well, but with a more diverse visual imagery (including different genders and types of love), rather than with random videos that the viewer might or might not like. As mentioned in one of her interviews, the reason why she structured her page in this way is to directly welcome the viewer's various kinks, desires, and needs. However, PornHub accepts individual's kinks as well, so both platforms advertise themselves as safe spaces for people's sexual desires. The difference, however, is in the overall emotion both websites provoke. The dark, secretive and visually explicit homepage of PornHub supports the taboo of the whole situation as if the viewer knows something shameful is happening in front of them. Xconfessions is bold and direct as well, but the overall feeling is much calmer and accepting, more vibrant colours and more diverse imagery which show the erotic side, but also create a relaxed, safe setting.



CONTENT ANALYSIS

The communication between performers and the preparation for sexual acts are a crucial part of pornographic content. This part is almost always left out of the films PornHub offers (at least those studied for this research), which creates space for assumptions that sexual exploration in pornography is spontaneous or unpredictable. Quite the contrary, most porn studios work with their performers in such a way everyone knows their boundaries and that the sexual acts are discussed openly. During the actual footage, it might seem as if an actor is surprised or immediately interested in an idea, but that was previously agreed on and most importantly, communicated. Now, as much as this is a calming thought, the importance of communication in sexual intimacy should be stated out more publicly, especially by such big pornography services. Otherwise, this approach and representation of sexual exploration support further creation of another strong sexual script - communication during sexual exploration is unnatural and *great sex* does not require it.

Furthermore, PornHub relies on common categories and offers content that is almost always the same, under the same category. The titles of movies on PornHub usually consist of kinky, bold words, and emotions. For example, *“thick ebony yoga girl takes white cock”* describes precisely what is going to happen in the story, who are the main characters, what their physique is, and who has the power. The viewer can immediately decide if this is something worth watching. This is quite different from the premise of erotic fantasies where the mystery of potential arousal is in focus. In that way, the individual can explore different storylines and focus on discovery, rather than limiting themselves onto one specific thing. Hence, content-wise, PornHub’s content is diverse in its categories, but quite limiting visually. There is a specific narration in titles of films, often using sexualised or aggressive words such as *“slut”, “pain”, “shameful”* or *“she takes”, “she gets”, “he gives”, “he doesn’t know”*. Voyeur or an exhibitionist is a famous role on both PornHub and Xconfessions as well. As viewers, we are in that role immediately.

There are multiple reasons why humans enjoy watching someone else *having sex*. One is the arousal itself, simply watching parts of the human body that are connected to what is supposed to “turn us on” (Nagoski, 2015). Other reasons are loneliness, boredom, peer pressure (especially among teens), and pure curiosity. As mentioned in the section about sexual arousal, the idea behind genital response being the same as sexual arousal is present in pornography as well. The clear indication if a woman is sexually aroused is the wetness of her vagina, just like if a man is aroused, his penis is erect. If it is not, then he is not interested (Nagoski, 2015). So Pornhub content supports this physical navigation of arousal. At the same time, Xconfession’s approach to sexual arousal is different, focusing more on the context of the film, where the actors are located, what is on their mind and most importantly - on communication and other physical cues, not just genital response.

Moreover, in pornography, almost all videos end with an orgasm. Orgasm as an indicator of satisfactory intercourse is a central sexual script in pornography. In reality, countless research shows that orgasm is not a typical ending of penetration for many or even a part of intimacy. There are divided opinions about this topic in public.

However, the discussion should revolve around supporting people to enjoy intimacy with themselves or others, in whatever way and ending fit them best. Porn movies do not support this type of thinking.

PornHub’s overall content focuses on the sexual satisfaction of men, and penetrative pleasure quite a lot. What is usually lacking in Pornhub heterosexual video is the emotional side of male actors. The focus is strictly on performance. According to research, men crave an emotional connection with a partner much more than it is acknowledged and do not only think about intimacy from a physical aspect. Their desire is more complicated than it is shown in the majority of content. Feeling wanted and desired, fearing rejection, and craving intimate communication are just a few findings supporting the fact that male sexuality was misunderstood for a long time as well (Murray et al. 2017). Nevertheless, suppose Pornhub is not showing that type of content. In that case, the only relatable content men have are the performance of the actors, exaggerated body language, and vocals, but also an overall approach these actors undertake.



Xconfessions is different in its approach to male sexuality by challenging the traditional gender sex roles. Next, Xconfessions offers content which follows the societal and sexual development of the current world, hiring performers who challenge typical masculinity, or on the other hand, supporting men to express themselves in whatever way they prefer. The reason why they can tackle this in such a way is the initial idea of the site - collecting real-life stories, and then translating them into films. Even though Xconfessions seems to speak more closely to those people who are a bit more comfortable with their own body and sexuality, it also serves as an inspiration or additional encouragement for people to challenge themselves.

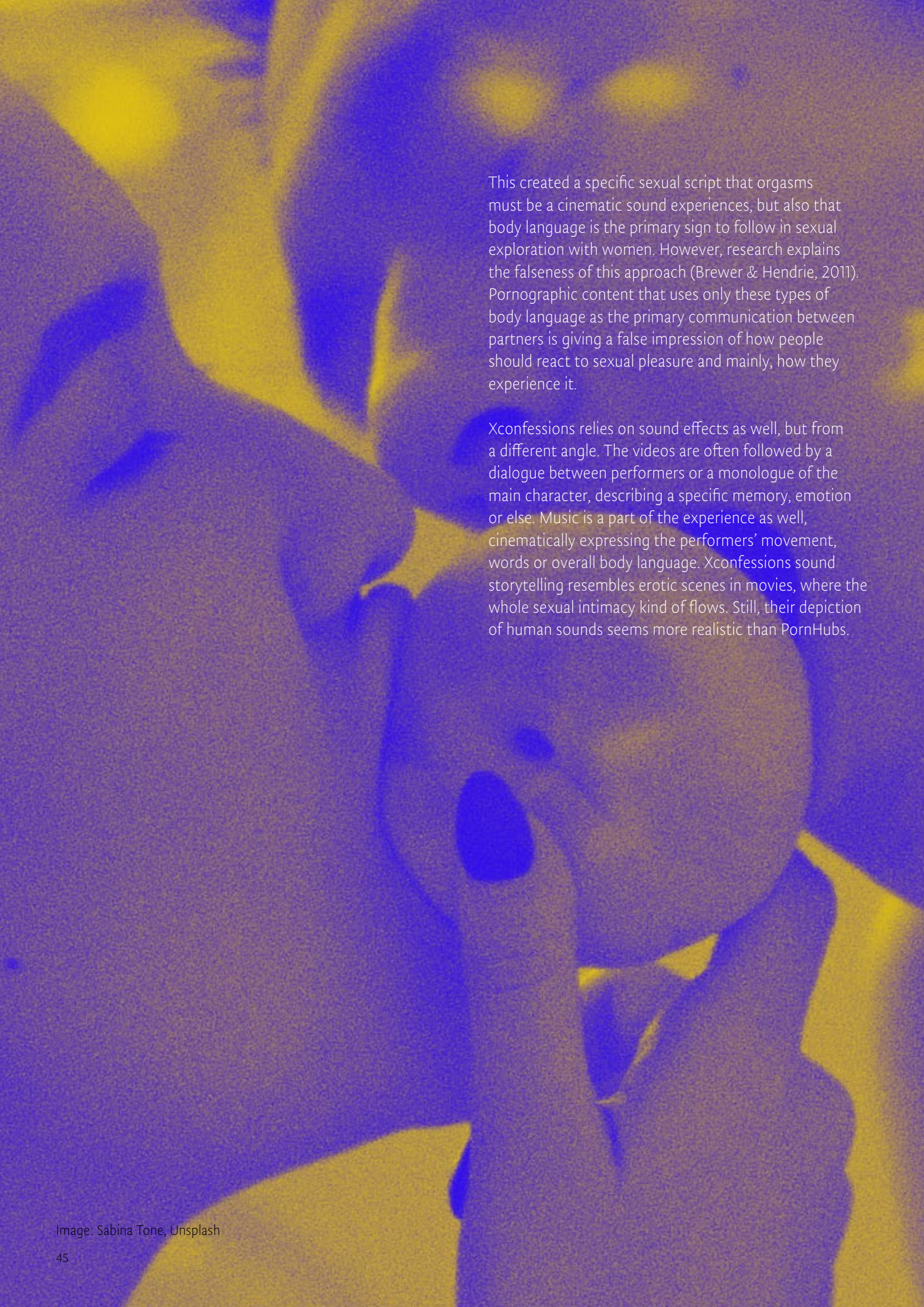
PornHub relies on its yearly statistics where they track down societal trends and developments, popular Google searches, most common events that happened in the world that could have had an impact on people's sex lives. In this way, they can stylise their content according to the market's needs. Their statistics from 2017 published the most famous content categories in the last ten years - lesbian, milf, amateur, and teen. These categories stand for what is, in the majority, considered most sexually appealing by people. That can be a reflection of specific societal movements in the last ten years such as LGBTQ+ rights, female empowerment, deleting the boundaries of age in relationships, or such. Most importantly, these categories somehow remained popular throughout this entire time. However, these categories say very little about the erotic intelligence of its viewers. Meaning, they support the visual preferences viewers enjoy, but not so much the emotional sides of them.

The lesbian category was popular among different genders, but the attitudes towards bisexuality and homosexuality still differ in society. Lesbian sex is considered more erotic by PornHub viewers and inviting because of the way women perform it on the camera and because most of those videos cater the viewer, guide through the story and perform for the viewer's pleasure (Stockard & Johnson, 1979). This creates a false impression because it often depicts lesbian sex in a fantasy-inspired way, with objectification and unrealistic

experiences (Attwood, 2004). Perhaps, a more realistic depiction of lesbian and gay sex, in general, would benefit those who are sexually exploring through pornography in order to get more familiar with their sexual orientation. Still, this lacks in PornHub's content, even though education and relatedness are the reason why amateur porn is one of the most popular ones as well - it tries to remove the acting out and makes it seem honest and likeable (Neville, 2015).

Another most popular category is MILF, meaning "*mother I would like to fuck*", which features mature women, usually dominant, confident, and experienced, who know what they want. PornHub often suggests videos in this category, supporting heterosexual men in their desire to be dominated, while the standard sexual scripts in heterosexual sexual exploration suggest the man is the main initiator and dominant. Because this was one of the most popular categories, it seems rather humorous that female domination is still considered a taboo (Vannier, Currie & O'Sullivan, 2014). On the other hand, while MILF is an older woman, dominating a younger man, the teen category is focused around older men dominating much younger women, never vice versa. There is something in the power dynamics of the kinks when it comes to age that people enjoy watching online, and later on, hope to experience the same excitement in real life.

An appealing part of porn content, which is quite present on PornHub is the sound effects. ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response), which stands for a tingling, calming and pleasurable sensation is one of such effects. ASMR occurs in response to certain stimuli and has also been likened to a head orgasm. It is becoming popular outside of pornography as well. Sound effects of wet vaginas, kissing, penises touching various surfaces, and loud women orgasms are only some of the popular sounds on PornHub. "*Female copulatory vocalisations*" are a standard part in offered content. They focus on the overpowering sounds which follow almost everything that women do or experience. "*She screams,*" "*listen to her moan,*" or "*sounds of her vagina*" all indicate that necessarily, women will notify their environment by their body language about the level of pleasure.



This created a specific sexual script that orgasms must be a cinematic sound experiences, but also that body language is the primary sign to follow in sexual exploration with women. However, research explains the falseness of this approach (Brewer & Hendrie, 2011). Pornographic content that uses only these types of body language as the primary communication between partners is giving a false impression of how people should react to sexual pleasure and mainly, how they experience it.

Xconfessions relies on sound effects as well, but from a different angle. The videos are often followed by a dialogue between performers or a monologue of the main character, describing a specific memory, emotion or else. Music is a part of the experience as well, cinematically expressing the performers' movement, words or overall body language. Xconfessions sound storytelling resembles erotic scenes in movies, where the whole sexual intimacy kind of flows. Still, their depiction of human sounds seems more realistic than PornHubs.

In conclusion, while deconstructing the mentioned products, an important question appears: how come PornHub is still the leader in pornography, even though its approach is quite outdated? A reason why more ethical porn content is not yet so present on PornHub might be because that does not align with PornHub's criteria. PornHub only hosts videos and does not create them directly. In this way, they are a platform that offers what sells the most. So if they, as one of the most popular platforms, provide only mainstream content, then that is consequently what will sell the most because it will reach a broader audience. It is kind of a vicious circle which is difficult to break because one side will lose a lot in that process. Therefore, if PornHub is not directly earning from more ethical approaches, the less are the chances for it to change that. Most importantly, Xconfessions offers paid content, while PornHub is free. This is probably the main reason why PornHub remains the number one service in the domain of sexual exploration because it does not require a lot from its users.

Next, research has shown that people make a clear difference between explicit sexual content and sexually suggestive content. The explicit results with higher, faster arousal and usually ends with an orgasm guided through the content (hence so many videos on PornHub where the actors guide the viewer through masturbation, the *"POV - point of view"* videos). The sexually suggestive leaves space for imagination or build-up of a story around it, which is essentially a longer process, not guaranteed with an orgasm and relies on the viewer's imagination as well. Xconfessions is a combination of both but mainly focuses on the suggestive content, followed by a broader storyline and various sexual acts. So if the viewer is used to sexually explicit content, it is much harder for them to tackle sexual exploration differently. What could be a motivation for this behaviour change, is realising that after consuming the explicit sexual content, there is often a feeling of emptiness, disconnection with the body and guilt of orgasming (Willoughby & Busby, 2016). Alternatively, even feeling guilty for watching the content that is directly against someone's personal beliefs supports negative emotions as well.

It is crucial to mention that pornography itself is not harmful, and the curiosity people have towards it is common and expected. There are some assumptions that pornography can permanently damage someone's sexual preferences, but there is yet no actual proof for such claims on an average base. These claims should also not interfere with the actual sexual exploration because pornography can be an inspiring channel to explore through.

Today's new porn movement with Erika Lust and many others focus on changing how pornography is consumed, facilitating a more open conversation about it, which is more than needed. Mainstream pornography has a direct influence on an individual's perception of sexual activity. However, the issue is not in the pornography itself, instead of in how it is later on interpreted. PornHub is still feeding that secretive sexual desire, in a way trying to keep sexual acts a secret, creating a "safe" space with full exploration without consequences. Stories are content relatable (e.g., *"sex after a workout," "public sex," "intimate in the living room,"*) but unrelatable when it comes to experiences and emotions. Most importantly, the sexual revolution of sexual depiction in pornography is still relatively new, so its peak is yet to happen. It, of course, can not only happen by more ethical pornographic sites but also has to be followed by progressive sexual education, more public discussions and an overall switch in the sexual mindset.

Consequently, the way people sexually explore varies and can be possible in many ways. The conducted deconstruction of popular sexual exploration products provided with a clearer understanding of some main patterns of specific sexual behaviours and also pointed out how exactly sexual exploration is represented in the current media.

Chapter conclusions

After conducting a thorough analysis in this chapter, there are some conclusions necessary to mention.

This chapter provided me with an essential understanding of some main principles of human sexuality and its mechanisms. Besides that, conducted research also indicated there is some general knowledge about the mechanics of sexual exploration as a penetrative act, different activities that partners can explore and also some standard understanding of how human bodies work. Still, a lot is missing when it comes to sexual arousal, pleasure and overall body language. The mentioned mechanisms of sexuality are not discussed enough. This is mainly a result of poor sexual education and the abundance of different influences - mass media, pornography, movie industry, unchecked online content.

When it comes to sexual scripts, it became evident that sexual exploration is a discussed topic in public, but often not from an aspect which tries to challenge the discovered sexual scripts. The conversation is mainly around different sexual preferences, how to make sexual penetration better, how to communicate and similar. However, the real understanding of how people experience sexual exploration, what are the scientific facts which explain the process of sexual arousal, potential pleasure, the influence of stress on sexual exploration - this information is not so present. Consequently, without this information, there is no understanding of sexual scripts either. The analysis in this chapter indicates how necessary this knowledge is for a person. Firstly, to understand what type of sexual context makes them aroused and secondly, to understand their own body better.

Additionally, the research investigated in this chapter shows that there are numerous external and internal factors which consequently influence people's sexual exploration. Moreover, these factors influence how people approach their sexuality, how they experience it alone and with others. The deconstruction of the two products showed how embedded these influences are in the current world's depiction of sexual exploration, but also how much societies are not aware of those

influences. Furthermore, not only pornography but also movies, music, books, online content - all this has an influence. That influence is not always negative, but it is often limiting. Also, not all depictions of sexual exploration researched in this chapter are negative either. The deconstruction of two products showed that pornography, for instance, can be a great way to explore what else is out there, get inspired, understand sexual exploration better. There are also different documentaries, panels, movies and other media which try to humanise sexual exploration and show how funny, random, basic it can be and that is okay. Still, the main issue comes from how people interpret that content afterwards. Correctly, how pornographic content is interpreted after watching, which is usually followed by questions such as - *is this how my sex life should look like? Should I also enjoy these things? Is there something wrong with me?*

The findings also suggest that there is much shame surrounding this domain. Most importantly, the consequences of studied sexual scripts and their origin are creating unsafe intimate space, comparison with what is socially accepted as "*great sex*" or prioritises specific sexual behaviours and expressions. While the research also shows people are genuinely curious and interested to go beyond such norms, there is a lack of support on how to exactly do that in the current world.

Consequently, after the conducted analysis and providing necessary argumentation of why innovation is crucial in this domain, I have also understood the urgency of why this innovation has to happen. This chapter presented strong assumptions that societal and sexual scripts stop people from being free in their sexual exploration, even though there are numerous products and services which try to provide alternatives. After analysing some of those alternatives, I have noticed that most focus on the quick-fix of the issue and mainly pamper the user. However, the research suggests this approach is outdated and highly ineffective - it still does not provide people with proper understanding or support of their needs.



2 - THE DEVELOPMENT

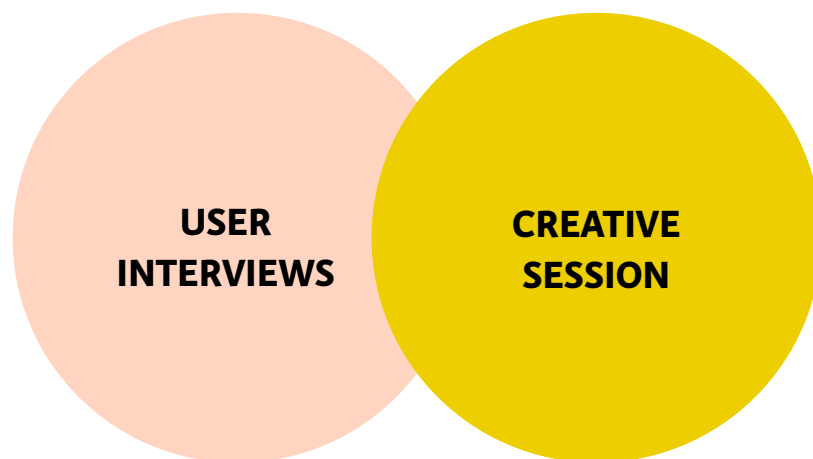
After a thorough analysis of the researched domain in Chapter 1, in this Chapter, the focus is on the methodology, or more specifically, the performed steps which the method requires. Initially, the analysis in Chapter 1 served as an introduction to the domain. Now, the consistency of the story and the reasoning behind it are presented. This Chapter analyses the consequences of examined sexual scripts in Chapter 1 and how exactly they influence people's sexual exploration. Both Chapter 1 and 2 served as a collection of different factors necessary to form clusters and the worldview, as ViP method suggests. Moreover, user interviews are presented, and the main interview findings which support the chosen design direction explained later in the report. Next, an explanation of the analysis of the current world and a statement for the final design intervention, future product qualities and design limitations are shown as well.

Therefore, after understanding the necessary knowledge in Chapter 1, this Chapter serves as a slow transition to the design concept and focuses more on the methodology. The challenge was to find consistency in found data, to create a coherent story next. That story was a premise of Chapter 3, which focuses on the final design concept.

- 2.1. Gathering data
- 2.2. Data analysis
- 2.3. Key clusters
- 2.4. Worldview
- 2.5. Vision statement
- 2.6. Interaction vision
- 2.7. Product Qualities
- 2.8. Limitations

2.1. Gathering Data

Chapter 1 already provided me with an abundance of information which I transformed into factors, a first step of the ViP method. Still, conducted user interviews and a detailed study of Ink's previous research in this domain also assisted me in better understanding of some common issues in sexual exploration and the origins of sexual scripts. This phase of research was collected using two design specific approaches.



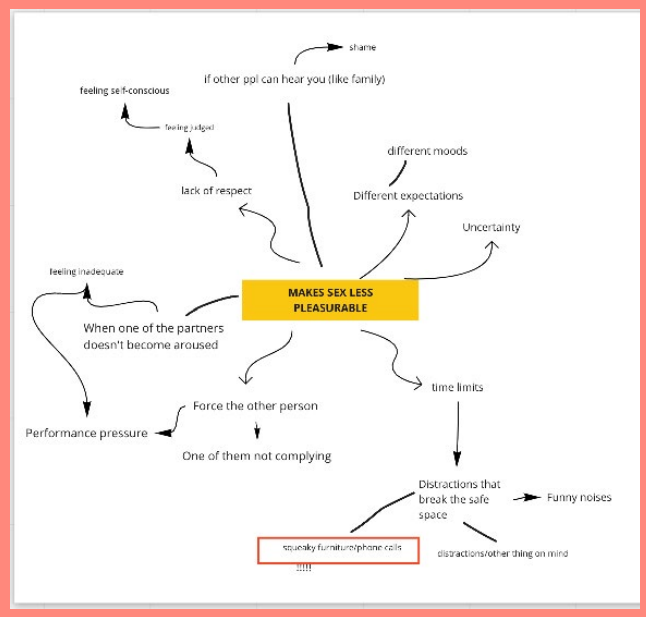
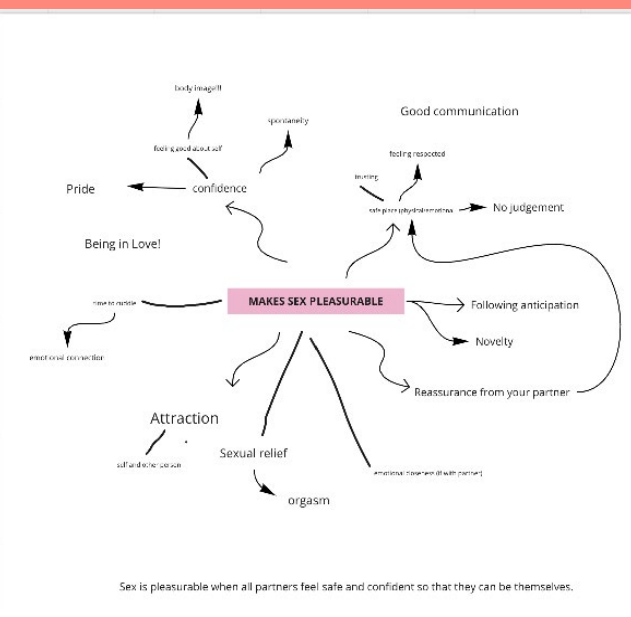
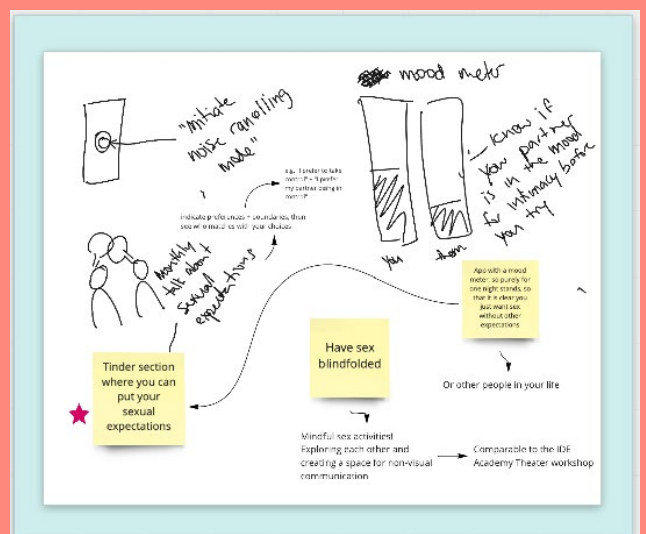
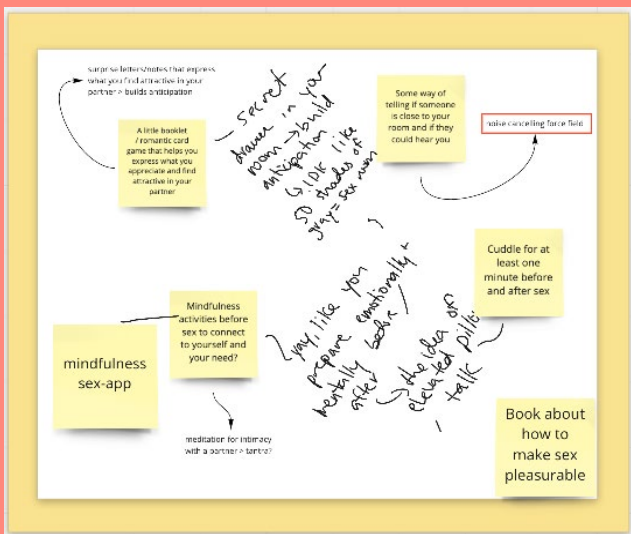
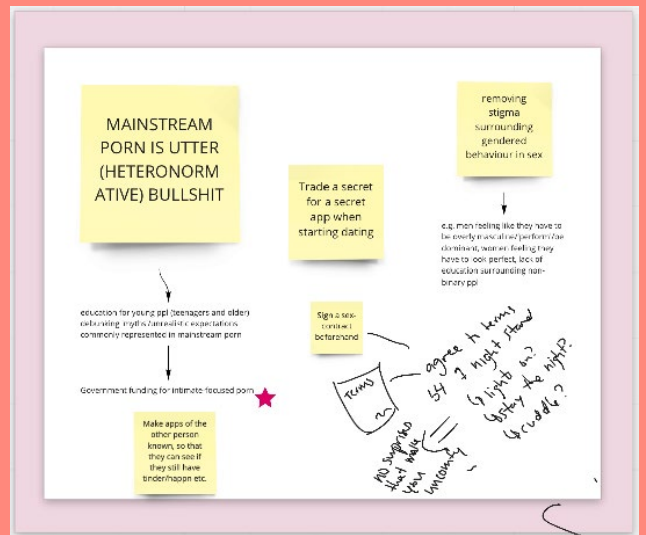
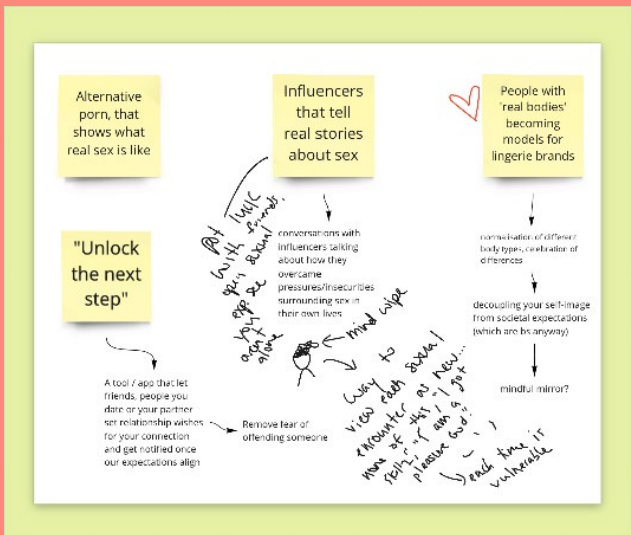
User interviews were held via Skype because of the COVID-19 restrictions. Nine people were interviewed on their experiences, opinions and overall stories in the domain of sex. The participants varied in their sexual orientation, experiences, gender and age. Before the interviews, an additional explanation of the study was sent to participants, in order to prepare for the topic and create a more relaxed atmosphere while sharing intimate details.

The goal of these interviews was:

- Understand how interviewees experience their sexuality
- If experiencing uneasiness during sexual exploration with themselves or others, what do they consider the reason is and how do they react to it
- General openness and attitudes towards sexual exploration

A creative session with other design students supported me in observing the domain from different perspectives and getting inspired by other's ideas. The creative session was held through an arranged Zoom call, and the necessary material was prepared on Miro, a collaborative online platform. Four other design students were a part of this session, and the session was one and a half hours long. Before the session, additional information about the research was sent in order to sensitise and familiarise them with the topic.

The session started with a short introduction, and two mindmaps were created based on which further direction of brainwriting and brainstorming was decided. The focus of the session was on what makes sex pleasurable, and what makes sex less pleasurable. This was the first creative session for me, and also the first one I have conducted online. It was an exciting challenge being the facilitator but also a great experience, especially in guiding the participants in this domain. The overall results were many and extremely fruitful for me to observe other's opinions and leave my headspace.

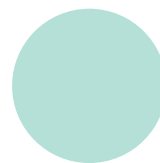


Some shots of the brainwriting and mindmapping during the creative session.

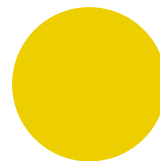
2.2. Data Analysis

The conducted user interviews, Ink's previous research and the creative session exposed some common problems in the domain and further proved the complexity of sexual scripts. However, these problems kept appearing continuously throughout the first phase of research. After concluding Chapter 1, which has provided me with an in-depth understanding of various sexual scripts and their origin, it was inevitable to notice during user interviews, how deeply ingrained these sexual scripts are in people's lives. Considering the significant amount of personal details that were shared in the interviews, the most critical findings are grouped into a few topics. Each topic explains the main issues revolving around uneasy sexual exploration, and are followed by additional literature support.

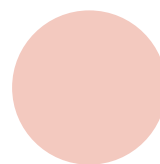
It is essential to mention that there are various other problematic consequences of sexual scripts, which were found during this phase. However, for the easiness of making design decision later in the process, only main issues were included. Also, some of the found issues were not included in the final concept. Still, I find it incredibly crucial to include them in this report and present them as they are. It was frightful to hear and read about extremely negative experiences people have in the domain of sexual exploration, and to then also realise these issues are not discussed enough in public. That why I believe it is my responsibility, as the main researcher in this project, to spread the awareness and hopefully, inspire the reader (you) to research more or reach out for necessary support when needed.



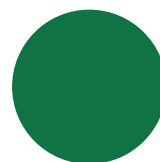
PAIN



FEAR & WORRY



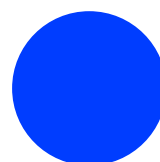
SHAME & GUILT



PRESSURE



COMPARISON & CONFORMITY



COMMUNICATION

PAIN

During interviews, women mainly mentioned pain issues in sexual exploration. It was found out that pain appears in different forms and as a potential cause of particular issues. However, most women expressed they rarely or never stop sexual acts, despite the pain. Also, they seldom express it or research more about it. Hence, a further literature study was examined. A medical name for painful sex is dyspareunia, a condition which refers to various types of genital pain and on a global scale, it affects between 3 to 18% of women (Schultz et al. 2005). Dyspareunia can also be the reasoning behind the inability to orgasm. Another medical condition that results in painful sexual activity is vaginismus, an involuntary spasm of the musculature of the vagina. Both conditions can be a result of various physical reasons such as vulvovaginal and urinary tract infections, STIs, vulval skin conditions and endometriosis (Mitchell et al. 2017). If these conditions are not treated and given importance to find the cause, there is a higher chance for a woman to develop PID, pelvic inflammatory disease.

However, various psychological reasons are causing this, as well. For instance, negative body image, stress, anxiety and depression and possible lack of trust between the partners can have an impact as well. Negative emotions are related to sexual health problems and are directly connected to sexual arousal, desire, more challenging time to relax and being in the moment (Nobre & Pinto-Gouveia 2006). These conditions are not adequately discussed in public, often leaving women feeling alone in their experiences or believing that pain during sexual activity is how it is supposed to be. These issues are a consequence of the sexual script of spontaneity and sexual behaviour being a drive. While the analysis in Chapter 1 strongly suggests where such scripts originate from, these user confessions pointed out how inaccessible basic knowledge about sexual health and pleasure is.

FEAR AND WORRY

Fear defines a person's emotional reaction to something that fears them, makes them feel unsafe, out of control. Fear in the domain of sexual exploration manifests in a few ways:

- Fear of the unknown while being intimate with others
- Fear of others opinion, usually connected with body image
- Fear of missing out on something better

Each of these manifestations is a result of avoiding being vulnerable in front of others, having trust issues from past sexual experiences or a pattern of behaviour which fits in the popular hookup culture in the current world. Being in a state of constant fear sparks continuous worry over possible outcomes. Not feeling comfortable enough with their body image, having unrealistic expectations which are provoked by societal sexual scripts, and many other factors can remove pleasure out of the sexual experience for people. On top of that, a person can also worry because of that worry, so in the end, it is a specifically vicious circle.

"I think I am more closed towards my partners than to my friends. I try to figure it out on my own; I care about what other people think of me. When I talk about sex to my partners, I do not want to make them feel bad or rejected, uncomfortable. Because we are so close, for me it is even more difficult to talk about it maybe."

SHAME AND GUILT

Shame and guilt are rooted in feeling ashamed for one's sexual desires, needs and experiences. Usually, it is a direct result of sexual scripts unique for an individual's context and will almost always create unwanted secrecy between partners. Interestingly enough, the research conducted by Mariëlle de Goede and Lucas De Man explained in Chapter 1, shows how common it is for people to experience personal battles when finding something or someone attractive, which is the complete opposite of what they share with their partner.

Shaming someone for their sexual preferences is never a good reaction, but it is an often one because one partner might get surprised or feel rejected in the moment of sharing. Furthermore, people often feel guilty for sometimes having sexual preferences which do not match the societal expected and approved sexual behaviours. Many interviewees expressed that honesty about actual preferences happens (if it even happens) later in the relationship and most of them would never risk it with a new partner or during a "one night stand". In those moments, the pressure to perform and show off is too high, but also if there is a desire to see the person again, most people would perform according to the approved sexual scripts. A negative self-image is another manifestation of shame, where someone's dissatisfaction with their appearance directly influences intimacy with others.

"I feel a little less connected to myself because of my transgender background. Because what is in my head is not on the outside. This manifests itself strongly in sex life with my girlfriend. We are less likely to try new things because of this because if we do something new, I quickly get embarrassed."

"When my partner finishes, I already think it is over. In my head, I think that I failed to cum. While my partner wants to do his best for me afterwards, in my head, it is just over."

PRESSURE

Pressure revolves around wanting to be intimate with someone, to have frequent sex, to perform and to orgasm with or for a partner. Most of these issues are a result of the societally promoted idea that healthy sex life is a frequent and abundant one, as explained in Chapter 1. For instance, a research published in the Archives of Sexual Behaviour in 2019 showed that pressure to orgasm for a partner, the pressure to experience a simultaneous orgasm with a partner and pressure to agree on having sexual activity are all resulting with an uneasy sexual experience (Chadwick et al. 2019). Many participants expressed the impact such public ideas and expectations have on them. For example, some said that it made them lose the desire for sex, that it harmed their future sexual performance, strained their relationship, or that led to feelings of disgust or frustration. Most importantly, many of them feel alone in their experiences and believe their case is an isolated one. The pressure to perform is another common form. Among women, the pressure to perform reflects in the mindset about when penetrative sex should happen. Most women experience it as a "boy is the benchmark" phenomenon, meaning, man's erect penis is a clear indicator of when penetration starts.

"It does not matter if I am too dry if someone who gets a stiff penis in 2 seconds sits next to you; then you just start."

"I think what manifests the most is how our society says that our identity as a man is directly connected to our performance. Sometimes I feel like if I am not good enough at satisfying her, I experience it, but even though I am aware that this is crap, it is so deep, that it is difficult to change it. Like, was this long enough? Did I perform well?"

For men, the pressure to perform results with two main issues:

- Erectile dysfunction: sometimes called impotence, it is the inability to have or maintain an erection sufficient for sexual functioning
- Premature ejaculation: an inability to delay orgasm and ejaculation, such that it occurs very early in the course of sexual contact, leaving the other partner dissatisfied

The “*delivery boy*” attitude is one of the reasons why the performance anxiety cycle happens. If focused too much on their partner’s experience, men find it challenging to balance their physical condition and their mental state at that moment. Erotic focus can interfere with the performance, ejaculation and the level of arousal. In these situations, SES (accelerator) is scanning for sexually relevant stimuli, but the SIS (break) is continuously stopping sexual arousal. Often, this process happens even before entering the bedroom. Most men believe they are entirely alone in the E/O difficulties. It is a common situation that this topic is difficult for most men to talk about because of the toxic masculine narratives present in the media and pornography especially.

Another issue for men is taking the responsibility to make their partners orgasm. Research categorises this as one of the usual pressures for women - the masculinity achievement for men (Chadwick et al. 2019). It was found that the majority of men reported higher sexual esteem if a woman orgasms during sexual encounters with them.

Overall, masculinity plays a major role in this issue. An identity shapes the way some men perceive sexual experiences, as Chadwick and van Anders (2017) researched. In their research, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual men express the pressure to defend their masculinity through an orgasm because it is popularly considered easy for men to orgasm. Interviewees who express they often consume different pornographic content, also report troubles with differentiating what is expected of them.

“I keep reminding myself that it does not matter. When I see these thoughts are here, I actively try and chill. This is a big issue, how you perform and how often, all these things are ingrained into this idea if you are a real man. People also think that if I do not have sex a lot or for a long time, that I am not lovable or that something is wrong with me. Sex is an important part of my life, but I do not want it to define me.”

“The guy sort of guides, those are the expectations that I expect from myself as well. It comes from society, porn; guys always have to be cool, strong, while sex is something really sensitive and emotional, it contradicts. I think there are way worse cultures than mine, but in the Netherlands sex among guys is a huge topic, like it is important, cool, and you have to do it.”

CONFORMITY AND COMPARISON

Conformity is a phenomenon involving changing one's behaviour in order to fit into a group. It is not necessarily harmful; a social group with positive intentions and attitudes can be quite inspiring for an individual. As Deutsch and Gerard explained in 1955, there are two possible influences why people conform:

- The informational influence appears in situations where an individual is unsure of the correct response and often looks for answers, among others, who are considered better informed or knowledgeable.
- The normative influence appears when an individual is avoiding punishment and receives an award such as likability, respect, admiration, approval or such.


In the domain of sexual exploration, conformity of people is a result of the dictated unwritten rules and overall sexual scripts as well. Conforming leaves little or no space for learning. Interviewees expressed pornography, social media and upbringing as the main influences on why some specific sexual rules stick with them throughout their life. Social media is at the forefront of dictating what attitudes and norms are considered sex-positive and what negative and is slowly turning into a small research incubator, often not based on scientific facts. Pornography, on the other hand, gives explicit material for comparing own experiences with others. If those often appear in someone's social circle and are represented in a specific way, that can also be a reason. These influences serve as a fruitful ground for comparing with others.

COMMUNICATION

Lack of Communication between partners, in the public area and overall approach to Communication, is one of the biggest, more broad issues in the domain. Communicating to a partner about desires, needs, and sexual preferences often seems like too big of a step to make. What usually stops people from communicating honestly or directly is overthinking what the other person might think of them. This can, again, be a byproduct of sexual scripts and clear indication which sexual behaviour is appropriate. Many participants expressed the desire to get better at Communication and that they would like to know they are not alone in their experiences.

"Sometimes, I find it difficult to estimate what someone likes, where do you draw the line. You don't want to be the guy who suddenly does something really weird. Then I rely on body language; I find it uncomfortable to talk during sex, especially if I do not know the person very well."


Public discussion about sex is still limited, but it is slowly becoming more transparent, focused on sexual topics that go beyond tips and tricks and criticise sexual scripts. This depends on a particular society and its culture, as well as the individual and their openness toward sexual topics. However, public discussions about this can be a good example and can also inspire others to do the same. Furthermore, it can contribute to reducing uneasiness around the topic or treating sexual exploration as a taboo. Most interviewees express the fear of being rejected, judged or coming across as weird. However, most of them say they do not expect too much from their partners, while only relying on body language to communicate. Chapter 1 provided various reasons why this issue is so present. Most of the interviewees express difficulty in exposing themselves entirely to their partners and expressing their emotions.



The idea of how sexual activity should be is one of the substantial factors which determines if partners will communicate with each other. Interestingly, interviewees express that they have difficulty communicating while having expectations from their partner at the same time. For some, it is easier if their partner makes the first step, while for others knowing that their partner understands and trusts them, helps.

“I find the use of language quite unnatural in sex. I have the idea that it should run spontaneously and that the body language should run smoothly.”

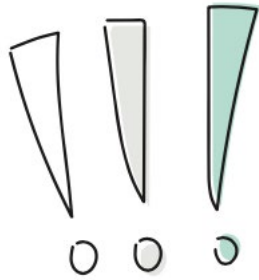
“Communication is important, and I am open to it, but I do have to say it is sometimes hard, it can feel awkward, it can feel like it is not the right time. It is a decision you make at the moment, I have learned to speak up; I did not before. Now a partner with positive feedback helps and someone open to it, who enjoys the communication.”



Analysis of the gathered data also served as a source of various factors which were the first step leading towards the construction of clusters and the current worldview. Even though the collected data shows numerous issues people face in the domain of sexual exploration, which can be an explanation why sexual exploration is sometimes an uneasy process, most indicate that people tend to follow sexual scripts quite often.

There is an apparent script on how to communicate with a partner, how to share sexual preferences and when what to focus on in intimacy, but also many more. During the user interviews, there was evident confusion between how interviewees believe sexual exploration should be and how they would personally like it to go. I was shocked by this insight and surprised how powerful the researched sexual scripts exactly are. With this in mind, I have proceeded to form clusters to show how precisely the current world looks like. Clusters are made out of different factors which all share the same underlying reasoning behind them, and they serve as necessary pieces of a giant puzzle - the future world. Their combination and buildup are what determines the creation of the desired future world.

2.3. Key Clusters



Sex has a strong status quo.

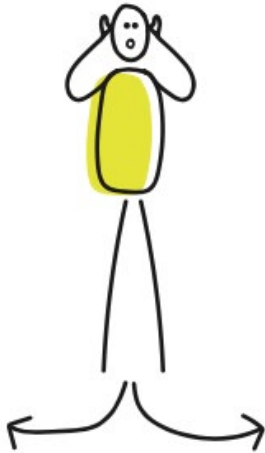
User interviews and literature show that many follow the belief that sexuality is a shared concept. Meaning, their sexual preferences are accepted and valuable only if their partner approves them too. Otherwise, they will most likely not sexually explore those preferences. This is a consequence of the stubborn status quo of sex as a penetrative activity, which is still present in the current world. Strong gender roles and stereotypes, specific ideas on how sexual exploration should be, what sexual behaviour is approved and appropriate. Moreover, it indicates that sexual scripts are mainly the only guidelines people often use for exploring.

There is a significant knowledge gap.

There is a distinct knowledge gap in society about sexuality and sexual exploration. It is best visible when people seek additional advice or help, and the environment can not and does not know how to provide it. Family and friends might be opinionated when it comes to sex, some might be judgemental, and the online content seems too impersonal. It can also appear overwhelming to seek help and answers because of the complexity of this domain and because there is just a lot of content available. Furthermore, sexual education is mainly focused on health and often does not cover other necessary knowledge. The fact that sexual exploration is still a taboo prolongs the knowledge gap as well, where public discussions have a leading role in supporting the society in becoming more open towards it.



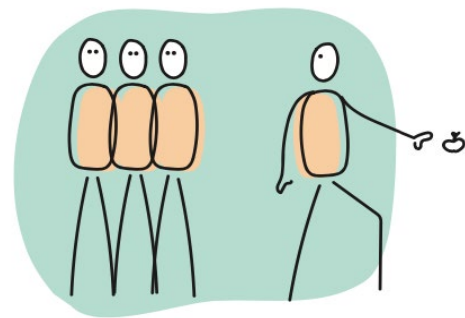
Fear leads to avoidance.



Sometimes it can be challenging to express what is really on our mind, especially in non-accepting environments. If confronted with a situation that is negatively vulnerable for an individual, fear can be the trigger to decide on something or act familiarly. Fear is also a comfort zone for some, and the reason why they act according to specific norms. Fear of being judged by the society because of particular sexual preferences, fearing getting rejected by a partner - all these can be too significant consequences for an individual to explore freely sexually. If not recognised on time, fear can take full control over someone's decisions without them even noticing, because often it is more convenient or comfortable to stay in the safe place, than to be confronted with the unknown.

Familiarity makes people feel safe, but it can get boring quickly.

Regardless of the knowledge gap and lack of proper sexual education, there is overall curiosity present in the current world about the domain of sexual exploration, which is a great opportunity. The more traditional views on sexual exploration and sexual scripts might make people feel in control and safe, but in the long run, it makes sexual exploration with the same partner quite dull. Literature and user interviews indicate that people are searching for new ways to explore sexually and to find answers, especially online.



The online is the new school.

The online platforms are becoming the primary way through which people seem to research about different sexual acts and the overall domain. Whether it is social media, pornography sites, blogs or something else, the information is mainly gathered through these services. The benefits of them are free availability (almost always) at any time, no additional efforts in searching for answers and no fixed agenda or time when the information is searched. However, Chapter 1 provided concerns about content online explaining the often generic insights, sensationalised content and lack of checked facts. Nevertheless, the online community also serves as a support and a safe zone for many who feel rejected by their environment because of their sexual behaviours.

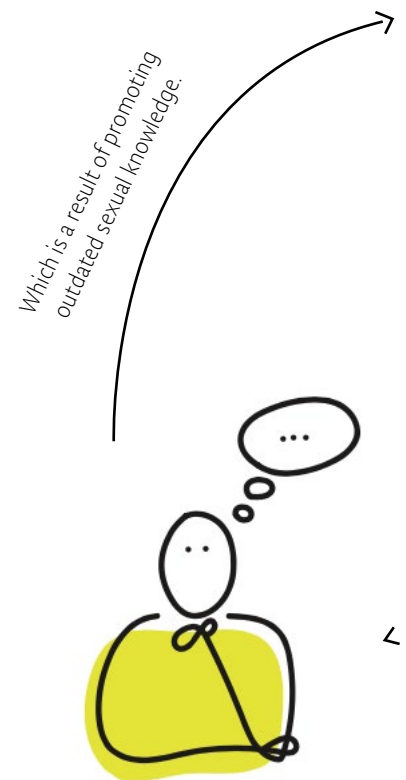


2.4. Worldview

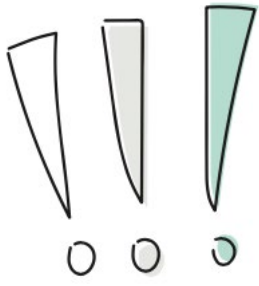
While trying to understand what are the relations between found clusters, I have positioned them in characteristic places to see how and if they influence each other. This step was one of the more difficult ones because I kept trying to look for a potential opportunity for future design. After a numerous amount of trying different forms of the current worldview, I have decided to zoom out and try to create a story out of what I see. Immediately I have noticed that the whole system is complex, interwoven, and there is not exactly one specific entry point on which I believed the focus should be.

So I analysed the created worldview and found out that the most significant opportunity I see is to address the sexual scripts which appear. Hence, the already explained analysis of sexual scripts throughout this report. Almost all clusters were notifying me that there is something they represent - either the idea of how sexual exploration should be, how it should look like, what should people strive for in it, where they should look for information. This is what I also noticed during the user interviews - the interviewees kept mentioning unwritten rules of their sexual behaviour. With this in mind, I created an additional scheme which helped me put this abstract phenomenon in a more concrete form and based on which I decided what the focus of the final design intervention should be.

For example, a more traditional view of sexual exploration is that it should only be practised after marriage. However, someone might get interested in trying it out before getting married. Will this happen? It depends - the “online is the new school” cluster will encourage that person to explore and even provide some directions on how to. The person will most likely experience fear of making that step, question themselves is it okay if they do it, what will their environment think of them? Throughout this whole process, the person might encounter other people, which are more open towards sexual exploration and again get interested in exploring. However, will it then happen? Still, it depends. So consequently, for some, it is a constant battle between what they should do, with never fully knowing what the “correct” step is.

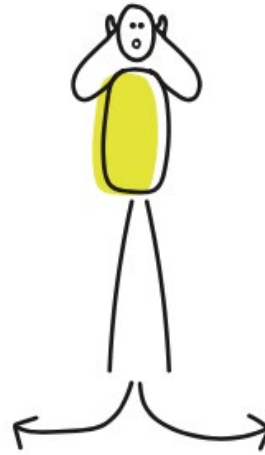


There is a significant knowledge gap.



Sex has a strong status quo.

Which makes people avoid potential new experiences.

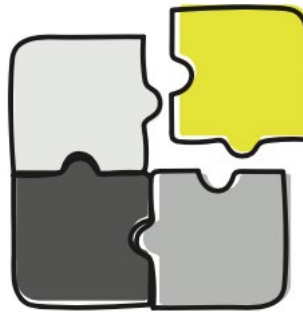


Fear leads to avoidance.

Has an influence on people and creates bigger knowledge gaps.

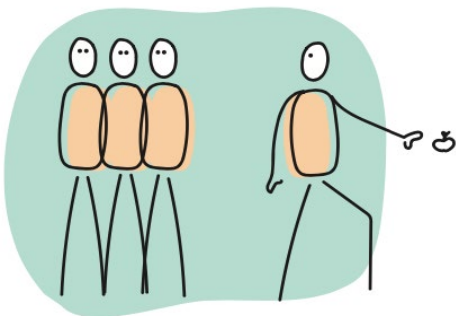
Provides new ideas, additional info and can overwhelm.

Provides new ideas, additional info and can overwhelm.



The online is the new school.

Because the online world constantly tries to change old fashioned ideas and provides more modern sexual scripts.



Familiarity makes people feel safe, but it can get boring quickly.

As it is described in ViP, the worldview of the researched domain is unique for the researcher, therefore in this project, the presented worldview is the one I as a researcher have created, which does not mean it is the only possible interpretation of the current domain. The factors should be original, novel and fit the domain and future world. This reasoning helped me evaluate the collected data and create clusters which served as a starting point of forming a story. I have iterated multiple times on the created worldview until I was sure it represented the clusters, followed a consistent story and supported the final statement.

During factor collection, it was a challenge to stay objective, because that enables the variety of data and improves the potential design opportunities. I encouraged myself to go beyond the typical sexual topics and to investigate critical societal principles, trends and changes which could inspire me for the final design, as it is explained in Chapter 1. Another challenge was to focus on opportunities as well because the approach of the research was initially from a more negative aspect. Investigating uneasiness and discussing the issues, frustrations and difficulties in the current world made me focus only on the negative side of the domain quite often. However, constraint reminders from my mentors to seek for opportunities and find inspiration in it, kept me step aside from the negative headspace.

When constructing the worldview, I tried to look outside of the apparent conclusions in this domain to find a design opportunity. Putting things into perspective and zooming out of the constructed worldview helped me notice and investigate a not so visible phenomenon.

It is the hidden normativity of the progressive sex world. Normative behaviours are those behaviours which follow a specific norm, are accepted and encouraged in the society. Non-normative behaviours are those who do not fall under any specific norm and are considered different, not so usual, novel to some extent. Sex-positivity focuses on an open-minded approach to sexual exploration and full acceptance of human sexuality. It often advocates for systemic changes in

the society, promotes sexual rights, discusses sensitive topics in the domain which are not always present enough. However, the created story about the current world shows how there is a constant battle between two opinionated views on sex:

The traditional normative vs. The progressive non-normative

They are two extremely different mindsets and attitudes, both with strong arguments about how sexual exploration should be and both quite loud in proving their point. They are also both represented in the current worldview. The traditional normative view on sexual exploration supports only those behaviours which follow societal sexual scripts accurately and with little or no exception. The progressive non-normative view goes beyond the sexual scripts and encourages sexual exploration from a more mindful, personal aspect. However, during this research, it was discovered that the progressive non-normative view on sexual exploration is quite similar to the traditional normative one because it applies the same convincing mechanisms, but only in a more modern way. Meaning, it is also a sexual script. Therefore, the shift towards a more open mindset in this domain is not exactly happening as we might hope.

In conclusion, the current world clearly shows the society got in this situation by creating particular sexual scripts that helped familiarise, protect and inspire people. Nevertheless, now that those scripts are still quite present in the current world, conducted research shows most people struggle to find their way in all those influences and sexually explore in preferred ways.

Additionally, we are falling into the same trap - by applying the familiar normative mechanisms in the modern sex world. Understanding this phenomenon was a crucial moment in which I have noticed there is an excellent opportunity in addressing the mentioned sexual scripts. There are, of course, various ways and opportunities in this domain; however, by following the created storyline of this research, this direction is the most suitable one.



Collage created to express the discovered phenomenon of scripts. Sexual exploration is the house that is getting built, and sexual scripts are different materials used. Meaning, it is the same approach, but just different variations of a theme.

2.5. Vision Statement

Following the realisations concluded through the created worldview, a vision statement was formulated. As mentioned, there are many possible ways to look at the problem of sexual scripts in this domain and various opportunities on how to tackle the problem. Different statements have been formulated throughout the project. There is no specific way to decide if the created statement is correct. However, the statement should focus on a specific researched issue and try to solve it through a particular mechanism.

The final statement created for this project is:

I want people to be freer in their sexual exploration by showing the ridiculousness of sexual scripts.

The created worldview has shown people desire sexual experiences which make them feel comfortable in their body, connected with other people, and they want to feel empowered to enjoy such experiences. It also indicated how deeply complex this issue is. In order to create space for behavioural change in this domain, some fundamental issues have to be addressed first. This was one of the confirmations of why the chosen statement fits the worldview - it tackles the first layer of the issue, the sexual script awareness. Furthermore, sexual scripts are a larger group of different influences resulting in sexual exploration sometimes being uneasy. Because they were challenging to locate in the current world, the statement tries to point them down more directly, in order to support the mentioned awareness.

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO BE FREER IN THEIR SEXUAL EXPLORATION

This part of the statement focuses on supporting people to be truly free in their sexual exploration. Research in this report shows people can conceptualise what sexual experiences make them feel free, comfortable and positive, and which not. While focusing on providing the exact mechanism for this, the means is to create free space for sexual exploration and support people in going beyond the predefined sexual scripts. However, the question is, how can we define what freedom means to each individual?

In this project, freer sexual exploration states for more open, playful and curious exploration, which sets free of sexual scripts in its unique ways. The full freedom of sexual scripts in people's sex lives is unlikely to happen in the future world, considering the analysis in Chapter 1 which explains how ingrained social scripts and specific sexual depictions of sex are in people's behaviours. So the goal of this project is not to burn all sexual scripts now, but rather become aware of those and use them as a learning point in order to create a better future world. Nevertheless, choosing the correct mechanism to achieve the intended goal is crucial because behaviour change which this project aims at is for people to become aware of limiting sexual scripts and potentially let go of those while finding the courage to explore in different ways. This is, without argue, a challenging task and the created design concept can only predict so much.

RIDICULE AS A MECHANISM

The mechanism was chosen for a few reasons:

- Ridicule can irritate the public discourse, which has the potential to foster self-reflection.
- Ridicule has the power of embarrassment, which can have a positive impact on encouraging group cohesion.
- Ridicule can also be a tool which supports a group in realising a denial is happening and can provide people with explicit calls for action through irony.

(Afflerbach, 2015).

While humour can mainly be defined as a mood or temper, ridicule, according to Merriam-Webster dictionary, stands for mocking someone or something, criticising it in a satiric way. In the case of this project, the focus is on the definition of the word ridiculous, which stands for "*extremely silly or unreasonable, absurd*". Therefore, ridicule focuses on criticising the current sexual scripts, showing their silliness and absurdness in order to achieve the intended effect.

When doing so, the centre is on mocking different sexual behaviours or norms that some people might follow, without further thinking if such behaviours or norms resonate with them. Ridicule can touch upon many people's experiences, without specifically calling someone out. Nevertheless, humour is often dismissed as a legitimate tool in the context of behaviour change, and ridicule has mainly a negative connotation.

On the contrary, the playfulness of humoristic tools allows people to engage with potentially uncomfortable topics more quickly (Afflerbach, 2015). There are various ways in which the mentioned sexual scripts and norms could potentially be tackled, but using humour as an overall tool seemed to fit because of a few reasons. Furthermore, humour and ridicule can be seen as a universal human experience (Afflerbach, 2015). Almost all people at some point in their life come across ridiculous situations, people, information. Because of this, it is logical that in the domain of sex, which is such universal yet subjective experience, humour, in general, can be an excellent mechanism to achieve desired effects.


While ridicule as a specific tool is already discussed, there is an essential power of humour in general, which needs additional mentions:

- Humour can support people in breaking down barriers and enable them to access more complex emotions.
- To encourage people to become aware of the influences of sexual scripts without creating a pessimistic environment, humour can support the more comfortable realisation of awareness.
- Humour can foster growth and can influence the way people treat each other and see the world.

However, ridicule and humour can also result in prolonging the discussed knowledge gap, if not used correctly. Because of this, the call-to-action of this project has to be clear, direct and inviting to people while making them laugh at what they see, but not scare them off or judge them too quickly.

The tone of voice while using ridicule is equally important, even though the mechanism focuses on mocking. Positively framed messages have a higher chance of capturing people's attention and do not trigger defensive attitudes (Boudewyns et al. 2013). Moreover, a positive tone of voice in created messaging can also encourage people to more easily talk about the ridiculed issue, because it provides them with a more comfortable conversation starter (Brennan & Binney, 2010).

However, as mentioned earlier, using humour and ridicule in conveying messages does not necessarily guarantee behaviour change. It can also easily backfire and have a significant negative consequence, much higher than the initial one. If the communication is not strategically planned, humour and ridicule can trivialise the issue they are focused on. Most importantly, people prefer being a part of the group that ridicules and not the one which is getting ridiculed. Therefore, it is crucial to see ridicule as a tool enabling awareness where laughter is a way to deal with uncomfortable issues. However, the next step has to provide people with clear and achievable action steps in a successful behaviour change.



Overall, the intended time frame for this project is now, a maximum of two years in the future. Because of this, I also decided to think additionally about what future world I would like to create. Ink has encouraged me to step aside from the standard academic view on the ViP method and try to imagine what I would like to see in the future world. This way of thinking supported me in further understanding of what the final concept should focus on, but also helped me learn how to present academic findings for clients and spark interest.

Give sexual wellbeing the importance it needs.

Sexual wellbeing does include not only sexual health but also overall emotional and physical health as well. This will not happen only through external influences but has to become an individual's priority.

Support people in their sexual preferences without judgement.

Sexual scripts stop people from freer sexual exploration, and shame is never the right answer. By minimising the shame and discussing sexual exploration more openly, the acceptance of various sexual preferences will follow.

Ditch the know-it-all mindset and enjoy the unknown.

Sexual exploration should not be a set of instructions and rules. Ambiguity and curiosity can make it fun and pleasurable, so accepting the fact it is out of people's control can support them in that.

2.6. Interaction Vision

ViP suggests finding a suitable metaphor for the future product to understand the essential qualities of it. The interaction vision can support the designer in conceptualising how the interaction between the product and the user should feel like.

A chosen interaction vision for this project is:

Someone is telling a dirty joke.

So the interaction *should feel like when someone tells a dirty joke in our company.*

There are few reasons why this interaction vision seems suitable. Firstly, the setting of this situation does not require anything specific; a joke can be told at any moment. Most importantly, research suggests that humour is a standard part of people's lives on many levels; hence jokes can appear in casual, business and other forms of conversations. The exciting element of this interaction vision is the "dirty" part. This comes as a surprise, a bit unexpected. What can follow after that is either shock that we are present in that situation or laughter which can also ease the whole effect of the joke.

Secondly, these types of jokes are sometimes considered as a taboo or as if they should be discussed only in a particular setting. However, people still find a way to tell them. Because of this, I believe that the element of the interaction vision fits the desired future effect of the researched domain - to discuss sexual exploration more openly outside of the bedroom.

Additionally, this interaction vision has some essential qualities:

Provocative

- The type of a joke sticks out of the standard-setting and language, and it can draw attention as well.

Direct

- Jokes are usually short phrases which can quickly describe the whole setting and mainly end with the central message of the joke. In this way, the attention of

the listeners is also focusing on the end. In the context of the future product, the main message should also guide the user and end with a strong note.

Funny

- Even though some people do not prefer dirty jokes, sometimes the overall context can make them laugh. If not that, then their focus can also go to find reasoning why they do not find it funny immediately. In any way, the joke can affect people in different interaction layers, which also supports the desired interaction for the future product.

Honest

- Humour is often used as a tool to convey more difficult messages or express opinions which are not popular in public. Because of this, it is often a quite honest way to communicate something, while still creating a setting which is not too confrontational with the people in the environment.

The chosen interaction vision, therefore, focuses more on how future users should feel when interacting with the product. Some might laugh, some might experience discomfort, but the overall setting and context is still a relaxed one, playful, a bit satirical, but without directly pinpointing at someone precisely.

Still, it might seem as if the interaction vision is too close to the final concept explained in Chapter 3. This part of the method was iterated several times, and after some consideration, this interaction vision seemed like the most suitable one. It supported me in imagining how all people in the context of it could feel, what would be their reactions and what do they expect should happen next. Because of this, I was able to proceed with the desired product qualities and form the final concept better.



Image: Unknown, Unsplash

2.7. Product Qualities

After defining some aspects of the chosen interaction vision, I focused on defining product qualities of the future concept as well. This is not the design of the actual product. Product qualities support the designer in making a direction, inspiration and help to decide what the product should focus on.

DIRECT

The product should be direct in conveying its message without pampering the user. It should go straight to the point.

HONEST

Through honesty and directness, the product should surprise and shock people at the same time.

INVITING & FAST

The product should invite people to think longer about the conveyed message and inspire further discussion. However, it should not take any extra or additional time from them; the message should be conveyed quickly.

FUNNY

The product should make people laugh.

FEELS PERSONAL

The product should feel like it is saying a specific personal story, as it understands every user. Each message should be based on something personal.

EYE-CATCHY

The product should have an impact and create space for future change, through a visual language which sticks out.

NOT EDUCATIONAL

The product should not seem like an educational tool. It should have checked facts and correct answers, but not try to convey the message through an educational point of view.

2.8. Limitations

One of the reasons why I decided to use ViP as the primary method for this research was its appreciation of “*feeling*”, something that connects the designers’ consciousness and subconsciousness. My previous design education pivoted on such an approach, but Design for Interaction pushed me to find concrete reasoning behind my decisions. ViP challenged me to shift from the past, to present and to the future I would like to create. The most challenging part of the method for me was to step aside from the distinct possibilities and make decisions based beyond the obvious. That decision making was not always the best, nor did I always believe in it, but the reasoning behind my final design is a result of applying ViP throughout the project. It has helped me understand why exactly my research journey went the way it did and why do I believe the final design is the best possible solution following that journey.

However, during this project, I have experienced what I believe every design graduate goes through - I wanted to solve the whole thing. It was inevitable that I will soon realise (or somewhat soon) this is impossible. Every design project focuses on a specific issue, and that enables more significant and more qualitative change. It was difficult for me to accept the fact the project has its limitations. Though, by understanding what positive effect it will inevitably create in the future, I was able to see them as opportunities in the future.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE DOMAIN

As discussed in the previous chapters, the complexity of the domain of sex is overwhelming. During this research, I have heard and thought myself multiple times “it’s just sex.” Well, it is not. The findings presented in this report show how interwoven, personal, specific and unpredictable this domain is. I believe this is not addressed enough in solutions in the current world but has to become the centre in the future one.

IT IS A PERSONAL TOPIC

Whenever design tries to investigate personal topics, some unique limitations appear. Regardless of thorough research and provided arguments on why this solution is the best possible one, the personal aspect of this

domain should be taken into account. There should be space to share personal stories and experiences, but also understand that this is different for every person, and every person does this at their pace.

IT TAKES TIME

Real change takes time, especially changes in society. The design should not focus on speeding up this process, instead predict when and how those changes are possible, to provide essential support during that shift.



Image: Charles Deluvio, Unsplash

3 - THE DESIGN

This chapter presents the final concept; it's characteristic and provides an evaluation of the concept as well as recommendations for the future. It consists of a detailed explanation of the concept and its parts, as well as it provides a reflection on the script theory, the statement of this project and the intended effect.

- 3.1. About the concept
- 3.2. Argumentation supporting the chosen direction
 - 3.2.1. Why Instagram
 - 3.2.2. Who this design is for
 - 3.2.3. Illustration as a visual tool
- 3.3. Concept validation

3.1. The final concept

The final concept of this research project is an Instagram profile which aims to raise awareness of sexual scripts in the society by ridiculing them, in order to support people to be freer in their sexual exploration. By using a combination of satirical illustrations and text, the profile serves as a type of an online catalogue of sexual scripts where users have a clear overview, but also as a safe space where alternative ideas can be found. The name of this concept and consequently, the Instagram profile, is The Script Bible, where additional ridicule is present as well, to mock how blindly people sometimes follow mentioned sexual scripts.



Sexual Script - The great sex idea. The illustration ridicules some absurd rules on what “great sex” means in the current world.



The Script Bible



230 posts

32K followers

809 followings

Follow

Breaking sexual scripts

Showing the ridiculousness of sexual scripts. Let's redefine sex!



IGTV



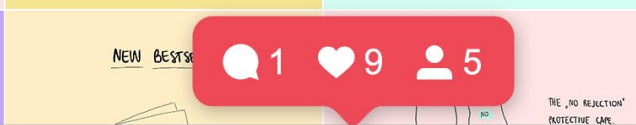
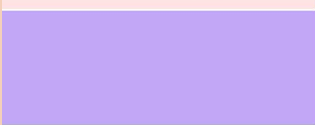
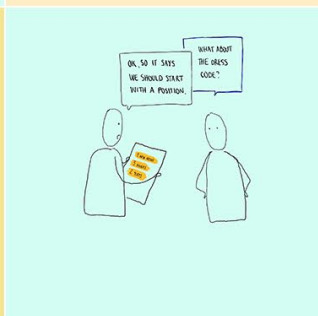
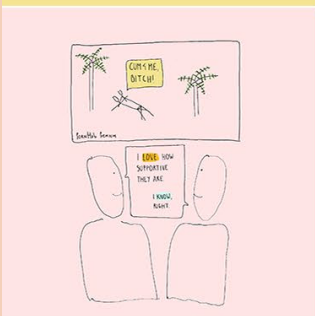
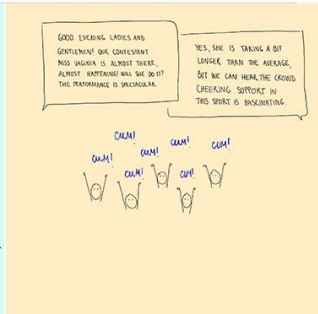
Myths



Performance



Pressure



3.2. Argumentation supporting the chosen direction

3.2.1. WHY INSTAGRAM

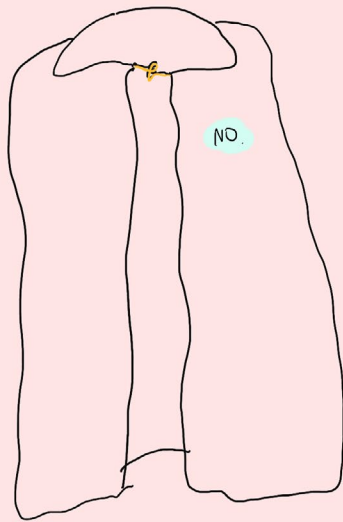
During this research, it became more evident how the current world educates itself about sex and where people seek information. Social media, as discussed in Chapter 1, is one of the leading platforms on which the topic of sexual exploration is discussed, as well as one of the growing platforms that connect people. Social media is a low-cost or free platform which offers space for building personal brands. It also fastly creates a community, speaks to the audience and gives the possibility to share, exchange, or invest in multiple causes. Moreover, social media gives detailed feedback on people's behaviours, desires, attitudes, and allows us better to understand the targeted audience (Dutta, 2010). Instagram was found as one of the most influential social media channels when it comes to sexual education and pleasure.

As a platform, Instagram is therefore used in different ways - for business, self-promotion, education, leisure, travelling and food blogs and many more. When it comes to education and the researched domain - sex and sexual exploration, Instagram can have positive and negative sides. Because of its fast reach and significant influence, it can convey messages to a notable amount of users and in this way, support more open discussion about sex, reducing the taboos of the topic. Moreover, it is also a platform which encourages community engagement and in such a way provides support to people in feeling accepted as a valuable member of a particular group. However, because it is a platform that provides space for anyone, it lacks expertness, checked facts and can result in unqualified people giving advice.

Most importantly, the platform itself bears no consequence in how the content is perceived by the audience, giving full freedom to users to interpret the material in whichever way desired (Wang et al., 2019).

However, the research in this project strongly indicates that people who seek for answers in the domain of sex, often search online via Instagram or other social media channels, rather than through literature. Various research also shows that the world has recognised this phenomenon, so many institutions are using social media to bridge formal and informal learning through online participation (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

To avoid the mentioned barriers and pitfalls of spreading false information, this project proposes a concept which would be led by a collaboration between Ink as the primary client in this project and other organisations in this domain, which provide checked information and are experts in the domain. However, because Ink has already done significant projects in this domain, such concept fits their working philosophy and can be tackled by them easily.



THE „NO REJECTION“
PROTECTIVE CAPE.
AVOID REJECTION
AT ANY MOMENT.

Illustration ridiculing a sexual script which touches upon transparency and intimacy in sexual exploration - people should only follow the approved sexual behaviours and not explore beyond them. In that way, they will never be rejected.



Illustration ridiculing a sexual script of mindreading, one of the essential parts of sexual exploration. Communication is one of the most important parts of sexual exploration between partners, and without it, the experience will likely be unpleasant.

3.2.2. WHO THIS DESIGN IS FOR

Design discipline usually requires a designer to create a specific focus group or personas which support the designer in understanding for whom and how to design. However, ViP method encourages the designer to look beyond such traditional forms of depiction and provides space to mark down the users in different ways. After applying the method and analysing the domain, this concept is for all people who are currently limited in their sex lives by trying to stick to the sexual scripts. Whether those people live in different parts of the world, are of varying age and have different types of relationships - it does not matter. The point is that the statement in this project applies to some people, but not to all. It applies to those people who might experience uneasiness in their sexual exploration and are either aware of it or need a little bit of a push to become aware.

Admittedly, there are people in this world who do not follow sexual scripts or who are not bothered by them to a significant extent, people who freely sexually explore and they have found a way to do that. For them, this concept might not have such an impact as for those who are currently limited by sexual scripts. However, those who are freer and enjoy their sexual lives regardless of what the scripts say can be a source of inspiration, and their way of handling their sexual experiences can also serve as a point of reference in the future creation.

3.2.2.1. USER SCENARIO

Because this concept is located on an online platform, it requires potential users to use Instagram. There, the first moment of interaction would be through Instagram Adds or shared content in the online community. This means that users can discover this content at any given time or in any situation they usually use Instagram. This concept feature enables quite a massive reach and is not limited to a specific time of the day or context the user is in. Also, this concept does not require the actual context of sexual exploration to interact with the user, unlike many other products or services in the domain of sexual exploration. The aim is to raise awareness outside of the context itself and to, consequently, provide space for the user to explore freely in the context when the time comes.

3.2.3. ILLUSTRATION AS A VISUAL TOOL

The chosen visual language and style for the final concept are concise illustrations, with minimal use of decorative elements and a few accented colours. After analysing the various Instagram profiles which cover social issues, the majority of content either conveys messages through short text visuals or through different forms of art expression, where illustration is one of such. Research supports the chosen direction arguing that visual material, in general, can much powerfully convey a particular message because it does not require any additional efforts of people. However, most importantly, visual materials can raise emotions among people. Through its creative intervention, it can inspire the viewer to think deeply about what is seen (Joffe, 2008).

Furthermore, illustration is often used as a powerful tool for tackling different social topics. Overall, visual art is commonly used among people to express opinions or statements which are difficult to express using language because they can immediately get the attention of those around. An illustration is one of the most common tools used in different activistic movements, awareness campaigns and other forms of societal changes.

The illustrations for this concept remain quite simple, where the focus is on the linear sketch they show which is based on a particular sexual script. Instead of telling people what to do, the illustrations mock the current sexual scripts and leave space for the viewers to think additionally about what is seen. Each illustration is followed by a short description below the caption area of a post, which talks about a particular script. Both illustrations and text published with them are equally important. The illustration goes straight to the point and gives a strong emotion, and it is the leading carrier of the mechanism of the statement. The text informs the user additionally, provides a short reflection of the illustrated script and invites for engagement in the comments section. In this way, there are three clear steps of awareness:

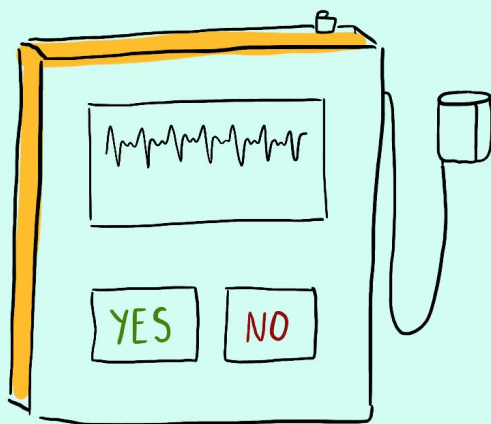
- 1. Grabbing attention**
- 2. Explanation of what is seen**
- 3. Invitation to engage**

Research throughout this project also showed that many products and campaigns fall into the phenomenon discussed in Chapter 2 - applying the common normative mechanisms in the modern sex world. In doing so, these profiles often tell people what and how to do. Even though the product qualities require directness and honesty when exposing social norms in the case of sexual scripts, the exposure and messaging used should preferably not be normative. The normativity of such messaging can become highly ineffective because it can quickly normalise undesirable norms or behaviours (Cialdini et al., 2006). Different sources explain why people do not like someone telling them what to do. A term psychological reactance explains why exactly this human principle is unavoidable. While humans enjoy suggestion and sometimes seek additional guidelines, overall, if someone tells them what to do in situations that are meaningful to them, they see this as a threat to their freedom (Dillard & Shen, 2005). Such a threat can result in anger, hostility and even purposeful resilience to the suggested.

Sex is an extremely personal topic in people's lives and if a third party tries to interfere in it while also explicitly stating what to do and what not, it can easily backfire and result with a continuation of the undesired behaviour, with little or no change. For these reasons, the concept in this research focuses on mocking society overall, rather than calling someone out specifically. The created illustrations cover different actors in the society which tries to show the complexity of sexual scripts - all of us are involved in their creation, continuation and presence. Until this is observed collectively, the intended effect is unlikely to happen.

BUY NOW!

EXCLUSIVE!



PROUDLY PRESENTING
THE "DID YOU REALLY ENJOY IT?"
PARTNER LIE DETECTOR.

KNOW YOUR ANSWER
IN JUST 2MIN.

Illustration ridiculing a familiar doubt - was I good enough? Did my partner enjoy it?

Lack of honest communication is a common consequence of a particular sexual script, which states sexual exploration is a spontaneous process which requires no communication. Often followed by a spiral of doubt, negative self-image and feeling incapable of satisfying a partner, this illustration tries to show how ridiculous it is not to have transparent communication. Research indicated that most people find it incredibly challenging to talk openly with their partner and quite often have doubts whether the pleasure was mutual.

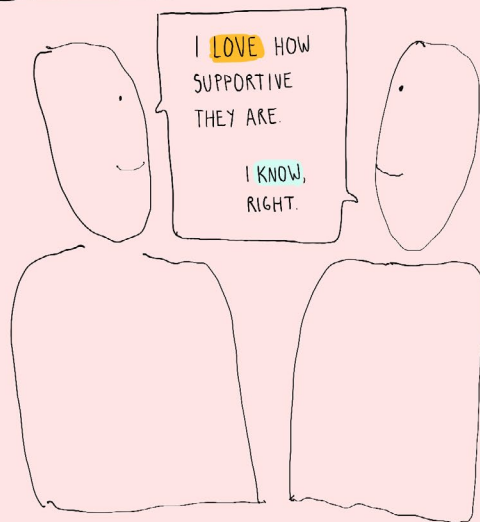


Illustration ridiculing a sexual script which states pornography is the correct representation of real-life sexual exploration.

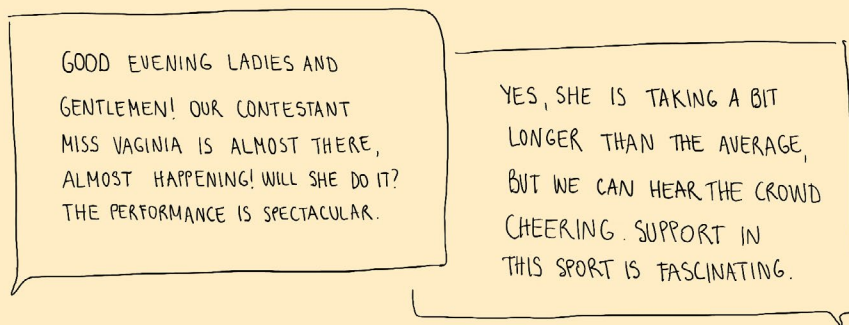


Illustration ridiculing a sexual script of performance and orgasm pressure - one of the most common issues people experience in the current world.

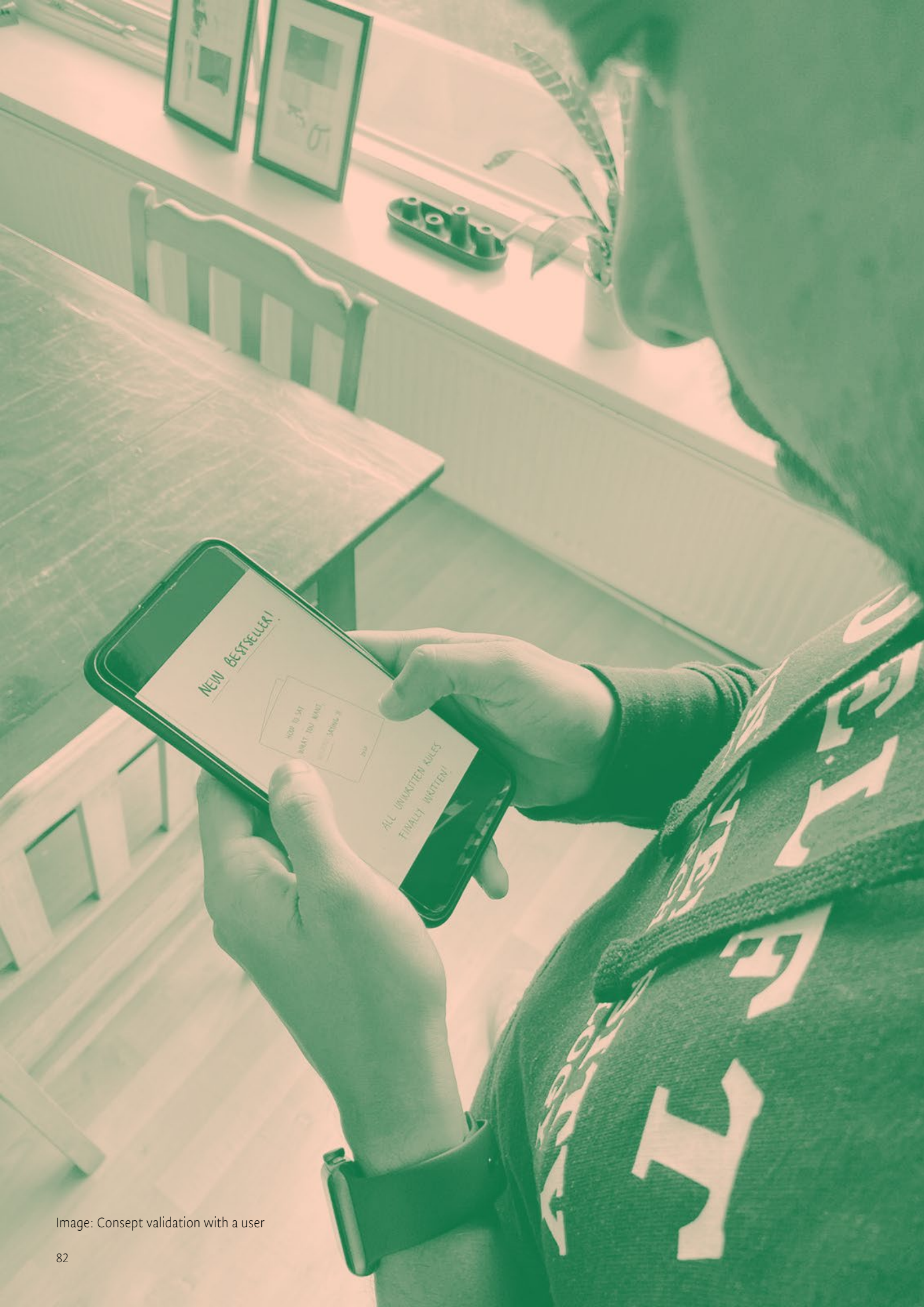


Image: Concept validation with a user

3.3. Concept validation

The final concept was validated with five potential users, which were selected based on the intended target group - people who sometimes experience a limitation in their sex lives caused by sexual scripts. However, some of them also state they are more open towards sexual topics and such, which was useful in testing the overall attitudes the created illustrations target.

Furthermore, the validation of the concept focused on a few parts - the directness and understanding, confrontation with personal attitudes, the overall moment of first interaction and the visual language of the concept. Additionally, a comparison with the created product qualities was also validated. Illustrations were tested separately and then with the overall Instagram profile as well.

The validation was held both online and offline. Because the majority of this project was conducted online, there was no additional need to insist on validation in person. Still, two out of five participants validated the concept in person. It is essential to state that, as mentioned throughout this chapter, the full validation of the success of this concept can be visible over a more extended period, when and if the concept becomes an actual Instagram profile. Nevertheless, the validation with potential users in this phase of the project also provided me with some interesting points and valuable insights for concept improvement and implementation.



Image: Concept validation with a user

Directness & Understanding

Almost all participants found the created illustrations direct in their message and understandable. For the validation, each participant was presented with five illustrations, and all participants rated them according to the level of understanding. This was quite interesting to observe because it turned out; most participants rated the illustrations they relate with as the most understandable ones. Consequently, this aligns with the intended product quality feels personal, but also supports one of the crucial findings throughout this report - all people have unique experiences in the domain of sexual exploration.

When it comes to the visual directness of the created illustrations, two participants expressed that when the visual is not directly understandable, then the additional desire to research more about it is active. Meaning, even though the illustration is evident in its creativity, the underlying message still might be a bit vague, so they would intuitively proceed to find out more about it.

Confrontation with personal attitudes

Because of the chosen mechanism, it was essential to validate if some participants find the created illustrations go entirely against their attitudes. As mentioned, people enjoy being a part of a group that ridicules, and not the one which is being ridiculed. Only one participant found it a bit challenging to explore the conveyed message when confronted with a specific illustration. Still, most participants expressed positive emotions with the overall tone of the concept.

Moreover, some also mentioned that they could relate quite well with some sexual scripts presented. Also, because they have experienced those sexual scripts or noticed them in their environment, they were not shocked or negatively confronted. Quite the contrary, they encourage such interaction, especially with more uncomfortable issues, and would additionally discuss that with other people.

The overall moment of the first interaction with the concept

After providing necessary information about the concept, the participants were asked to evaluate the moment they are presented with the concept itself. For this, a mockup of an Instagram profile was created, to set the context better and to get the participants in the correct mindset - endless scrolling. In general, the overall feedback for this validation part is:

In order to better grasp the concept out of all other content, the illustrations should be more visually powerful. For example, instead of promoting them fully as they are presented on the profile, focusing on smaller snippets of them could be a better choice. In this way, there is less information on the screen to focus on, the visual is more apparent, and the colours can be more vibrant in that case, to stick out even more.

Wording can be more straightforward - instead of presenting the viewer with a chunk of text; the illustration can be followed by a few words instead. Altogether, the illustrations did catch attention in the presented moment and have encouraged participants to discover more.

The visual language of the concept

The visual language of the concept is appreciated for a few reasons. Some participants expressed they were expecting more “in-your-face” visuals, considering the topic of this research. However, after studying them and validating the whole concept, the simple, sketchy visual language of the illustrations conveys the intended message much better. In this way, the illustrations themselves are less confrontational and leave space for the message to be in the main focus. Participants express they feel more human, to the point because of the sketch element in them. When it comes to the chosen colours and their combination with the central message of the concept, validation showed that each illustration should have a more precise reason behind using the chosen background colour. Sometimes the background colour already created certain expectations on what the underlying message could be, while this was not something studied additionally during the development phase.

In conclusion, the intended effect of this concept is for people to first become aware of the sexual scripts, to then eventually, sexually explore beyond them. The awareness component was successful in this validation, and all participants expressed further interest in sharing the concept and its essence with other people. When it comes to the Instagram profile, the validation also showed that participants got more interested in the community segment of the concept as well - what do other people say about this, how did they interpret it, is there a specific discussion happening in the comments section. Still, all participants also expressed they require additional scientific facts published with the illustrations because this gives necessary credibility to the concept. The mechanism was rated high as well and supported breaking the uncomfortableness of the topic, resulted in a funny moment when scrolling over the illustrations and made the whole interaction more fun.

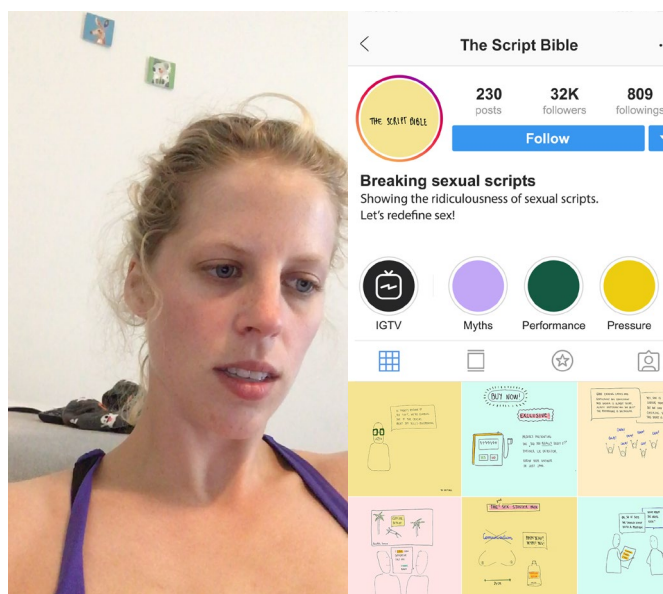


Image: Concept validation with a user

Validation with the created product qualities:

DIRECT

The product should be direct in conveying its message without pampering the user. It should go straight to the point.

- Validation shows the concept is direct in conveying its message and the chosen mechanism supports this.

HONEST

Through honesty and directness, the product should surprise and shock people at the same time.

- Shock appeared only once with one participant, others experienced positive emotions, even though they were quite surprised with the tone of the illustrations.

INVITING & FAST

The product should invite people to think longer about the conveyed message and inspire further discussion. However, it should not take any extra or additional time from them; the message should be conveyed quickly.

- The visual language was inviting; almost all illustrations were immediately understood. However, some required additional clarification which was supported with the followup text explaining the social script in the presented illustration. This also differs among participants and depends on if they have experienced the sexual script themselves.

FUNNY

The product should make people laugh.

- All participants were pleasantly surprised with the created humour and preferred the intended tone of the concept as well, which added to the humour as well.

FEELS PERSONAL

The product should feel like it is saying a specific personal story, as it understands every user. Each message should be based on something personal.

- Each participant found an illustration with which they fully resonate, and they could recognise the majority of presented sexual scripts. The visual language supported this product quality as well, because of the chosen style, which made the participants feel more connected with the topic.

EYE-CATCHY

The product should have an impact and create space for future change, through a visual language which sticks out.

- Visual language supported this product quality. However, some additional changes are suggested in how to make it stick out more.

NOT EDUCATIONAL

The product should not seem like an educational tool. It should have checked facts and correct answers, but not try to convey the message through an educational point of view.

- The concept was not validated as educational, more as a different way to approach the researched domain. The credibility of the concept achieved through the followup text did not impose specific attitudes or norms onto participants.

Consequently, the validation of the concept indicates that the chosen mechanism, intended effect and the first step of achieving this effect fit the statement and the project as well.



Direct



Honest



Inviting & Fast



Funny



Mechanism



Eye-catching



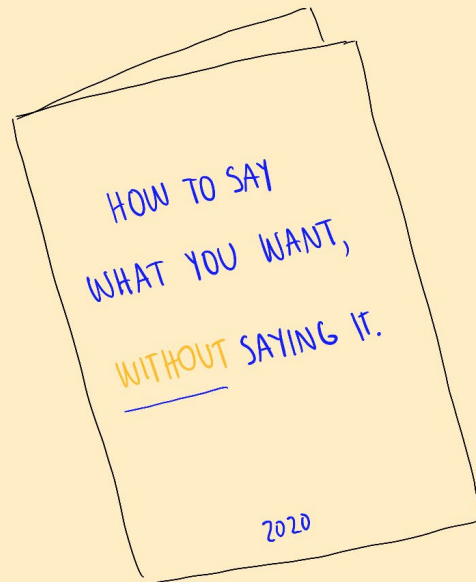
Feels Personal



Not Educational

In conclusion, while this concept only focuses on the first layer of defeating the sexual scripts - the awareness, the validation and reflection both indicate the chosen direction is a suitable one. Moreover, the created concept shows the chosen mechanism is also fitting for this approach and can result in more open discussion, breaking the uncomfortableness of the topic and spark further interest in the topic itself.

NEW BESTSELLER!



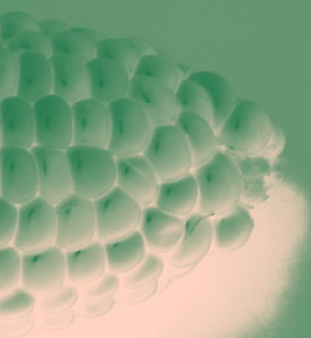
ALL UNWRITTEN RULES
FINALLY WRITTEN!

Illustration ridiculing a familiar sexual script - communication in sex is not natural.

One of the standard sexual scripts is the belief that if sex is perfect, we do not have to use the word. Is that true? How do we then show to our partners what we like, enjoy, need? Somehow non-verbal communication became the norm, and those who communicate openly during sex sometimes seem as weird. Well, what if then we could have all those unwritten non-verbal rules placed in one manual, to make it easy for everyone?



Image: Charles Deluvio, Unsplash



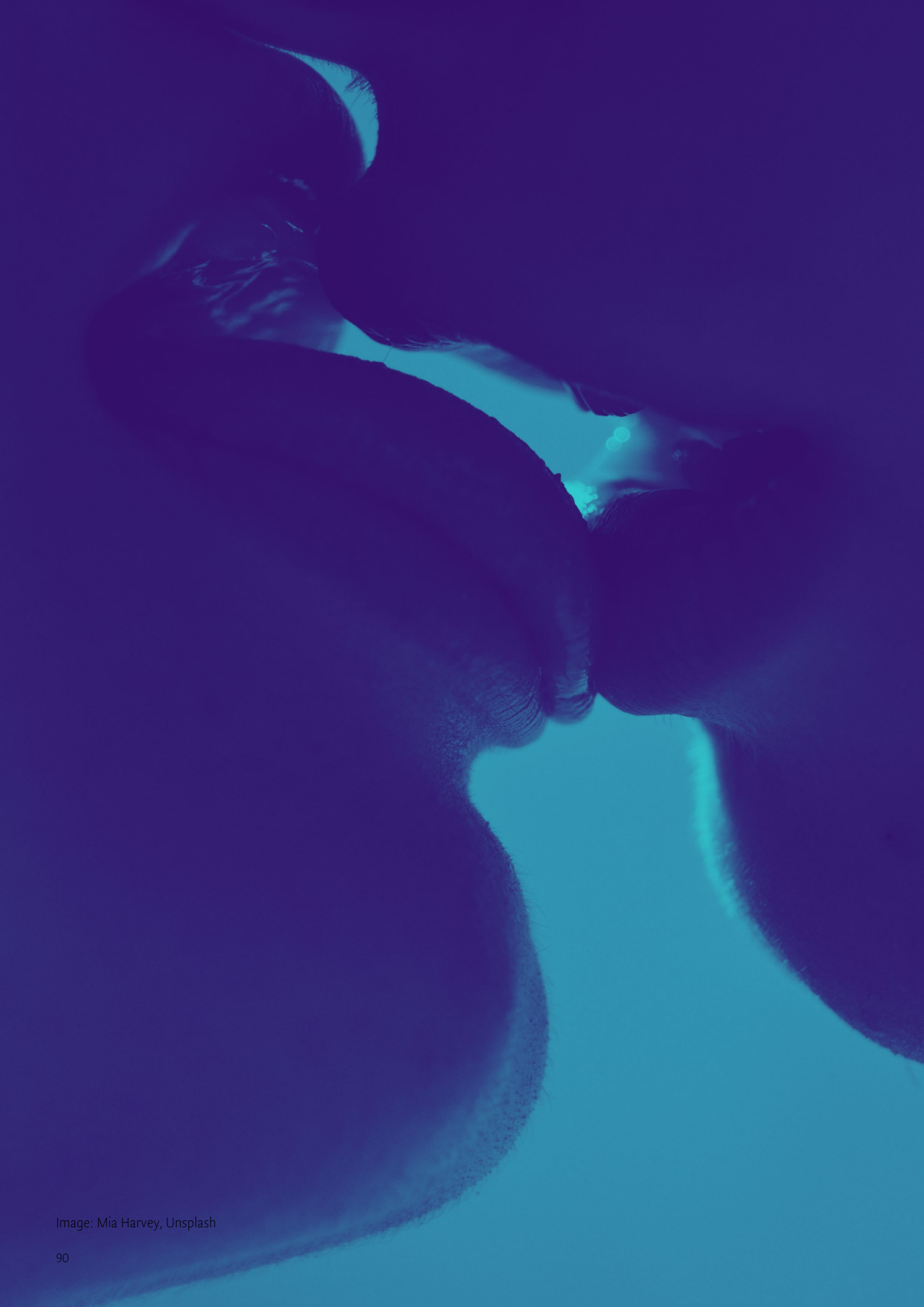


Image: Mía Harvey, Unsplash

4 - THE REFLECTION

This Chapter focuses on the final concept reflection - can this concept break sexual scripts? Most importantly, it provides a reflection on the overall approach as well. In addition, some future recommendations are also proposed.

- 4.1. The desired outcome - can this concept break sexual scripts?
- 4.2. Future recommendations

4.1. Concept Reflection

THE DESIRED OUTCOME - CAN THIS CONCEPT BREAK SEXUAL SCRIPTS?

The intended long term goal of this research is for people to be freer in their sexual exploration. However, the question is, how can we define what freedom means to each individual?

In this project, freer sexual exploration states for more open, playful and curious exploration, which sets free of sexual scripts in its unique ways. The full freedom of sexual scripts in people's sex lives is unlikely to happen in the future world, considering the analysis in Chapter 1 which explains how ingrained social scripts and specific sexual depictions of sex are in people's behaviours. So the goal of this project is not to burn all sexual scripts now, but rather become aware of those and use them as a learning point in order to create a better future world. Nevertheless, choosing the correct mechanism to achieve the intended goal is crucial because behaviour change which this project aims at is for people to become aware of limiting sexual scripts and potentially let go of those while finding the courage to explore in different ways. This is, without argue, a challenging task and an awareness campaign or project can only predict so much. However, humour can be used as a mirror to society - a moment to let our guards down and reflect on the behaviours we are encouraging, and to, later on, be able to improve those.

Still, it is an essential philosophical reflection which design often dismisses, and that is the given of thinking we as designers, have the power to decide what behaviour has to change and in general, to govern how the world should be. Such an opinion may be a contradiction of this whole project as well, considering the fact I was a future designer as well stating the current world requires specific change, throughout this report. However, I believe that as an active participant in the society and as someone who has researched this domain for the last six months, have the responsibility to suggest such changes, while providing additional backing for them. I feel accountable for making these suggestions public and calling for an open discussion, without stating there is only one truth or only one-way sexual scripts

should be tackled. If research has shown something is regularly missing in the current world, that is self-reflection. So while I try to provide the guidelines for the future world, I am also, hopefully, creating a space where trial and error is embraced because without making mistakes and learning from them, I see no real change in the future of this domain.

Consequently, the way I define freer sexual exploration is merely based on what the worldview I have created has shown me. ViP has guided me to these conclusions and gave me the freedom to form my perspective. Without arguing, other researchers in this domain might find something else essential for them or decide to define freer sexual exploration in different ways. Therefore, the intended effect of people to be freer in sexual exploration is based on the above-explained theoretical view of this topic. If such an effect will become alive - that is still yet to come, and we should actively work on achieving it, rather than creating strict rules now and never iterating on them again.

Another critical question is, what does script awareness bring to people?

An argument for being aware of sexual scripts is in power such awareness gives to people. It is vital to become aware of the dominant sexual scripts in the current world because, in this way, people can understand what makes them (and maybe only them) feel good or bad, what brings them joy and whatnot, regardless of what the society says it should. Because if people understand what sexual scripts exactly have an influence on their sex lives and when do these influences happen, they can try to take advantage of it, understand the behavioural pattern and choose for themselves what to follow and what not.

Still, being aware of something is not enough to foster behaviour change or call-to-action. Awareness is a valuable tool, but there have to be actionable and achievable calls to action which will guide people to engage in activities they have not done before or to know how to proceed after gaining awareness.

Moreover, this requires much courage. People get validation from knowing their social group accepts them or shares the same values and attitudes. Knowing they belong brings comfort and safety (Hari, 2018). Such understanding of human principles gives us a perception of the perfect ratio most people enjoy - to be somewhere between unique and similar to others. In the domain of sexual exploration, if the social group an individual belongs to, is more closed to stepping out of sexual scripts, or discusses sexual exploration superficially, the ambition to behave differently will likely not happen.

Sexual human behaviour is, therefore, mostly influenced by other social scripts present in the world, as mentioned during this research. It is, nevertheless, tough for people to admit their behaviour is influenced by something out of their scope of cognition. Simply - it makes people feel like they are sheep, blindly following some rules. In truth, we could say we all are, but that is more or less already established (Hari, 2018). Because of social scripts, people understand human interactions better; it provides them with some rules and guidelines, a feeling of control over their actions. However, societal scripts can also result in behaviour which might not resonate with us, but for some reason, we are still behaving in such a way. Perhaps because that behaviour has become a habit or maybe there are social rituals we are a part of which provoke such behaviour. In the context of this domain, sexual scripts can, at the same time, support people in freer sexual exploration, but they can also make it uneasy. So it is imperative to state that different people enjoy different things - and this is why sexual script awareness is important.

In addition, can people avoid sexual scripts? Probably not - and stating that the rule is not to follow a rule is a paradox itself. This was one of the significant challenges of this research as well, on how to encourage freer sexual exploration among people, foster behavioural change steps, without explicitly telling people what to do. Such an approach is a common pitfall for most campaigns and products in this domain, where the focus is on the generic promise of how better or different sex will be after burning the scripts.

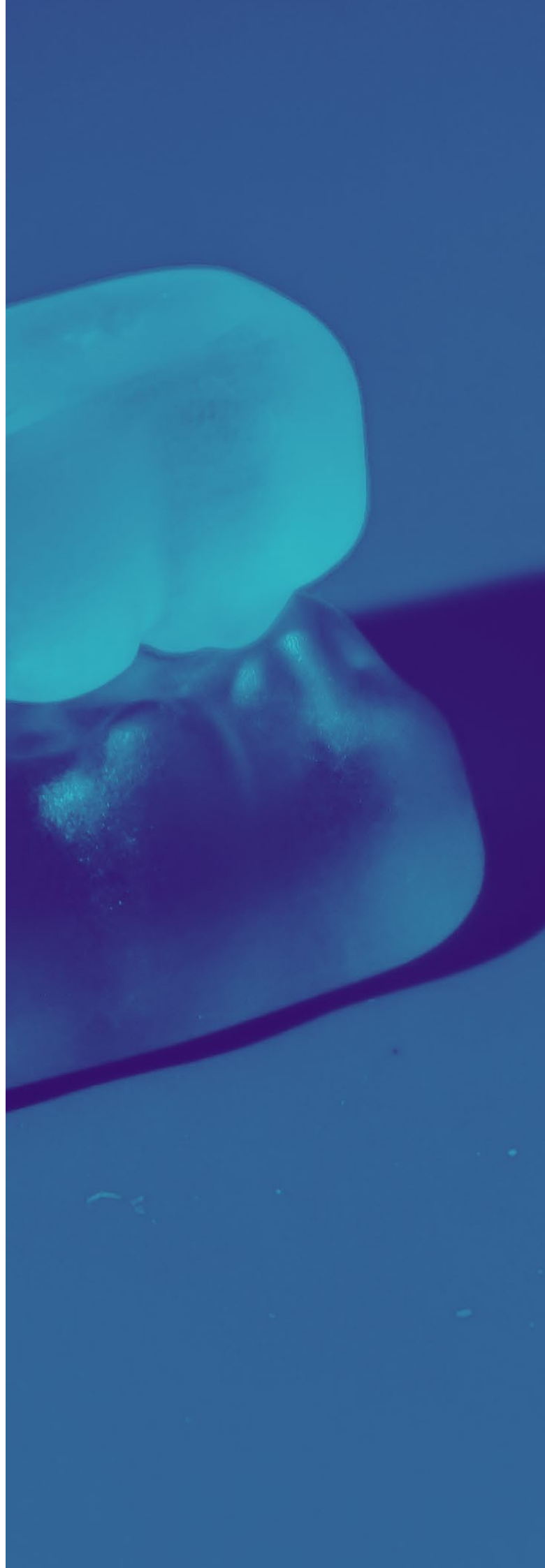
Again, the normativity of progressive ideas and most importantly, a bit of a desperate human need to strive for perfection. Just like any other human behaviour and interaction, sexual exploration should not aim to be perfect.

The mentioned sexual scripts will almost always have influence, and that is fine. What the focus should be on is taking what we enjoy from these scripts, and rejecting what does not bring joy. In this way, sexual scripts will most likely have some importance or influence in people's lives, but will not be seen as dogmas that have to be followed. This approach provides freer space for sexual exploration, breaks the status quo of sex and supports people in finding out what they enjoy, and not what they believe they should enjoy.

In conclusion, Chapter 1, 2 and 3 all provide argumentation on how and why to tackle the chosen topic. The way I tackled this issue and how I have approached the researched domain is entirely subjective, as ViP guided me to do so. Still, after I have presented all the findings and conclusion - what now?

I believe that sexual scripts will exist in society, as long as the current society nurtures a way of life that encourages the creation of those same sexual scripts. To state that life without sociological or sexual scripts is better is absurd because there is currently no evidence for such a thing. That is, it can be predicted theoretically, but whether it will be so in reality, time will tell. Besides, is a life entirely without scripts the desired one? As ViP mentions, design tries to understand what is possible in the future, instead of trying to solve the problems of today. What this research shows is not only the negative consequences of the mentioned scripts in the current world but also the more massive impact such consequences might have on the future. However, research indicated an abundance of positive aspects of scripts, such as a simple understanding of how human behaviour operates. Scripts, the unwritten rules, vague mental structures, support people in understanding what is expected of them; they have a strong ability to guide people on how to live their lives. Therefore, scripts can be both supportive and limiting. What the focus should hence be, is to encourage people to reflect on the scripts they follow critically, after first providing them with necessary awareness of their existence.

Most importantly, different societies base their existence on different scripts because such scripts give them structure, efficiency in human behaviour and overall order, which they have decided is the norm. Therefore, life without those scripts seems a bit unrealistic now, because people have been nurturing them for centuries. Even if the desired future world becomes a reality, there will still be scripts. Ridiculing current world's sexual scripts might encourage people to go beyond them. However, in the end, those people will likely create their scripts - those who support them in their sexual wellbeing. So it is entirely up to an individual to decide what is worthy of following and not to aspire to live without scripts entirely - because such a lifestyle is again, just another script.



4.2. Future Recommendations

Future recommendations of this project provide some ideas on how to continue this research or launch this concept online after this thesis ends. This project was conducted with the additional support of Ink, so recommendations also cover some suggestions for them.

Firstly, Ink could use this concept as an awareness campaign for its future product in this domain. The suggestion after conducting this research would be to create the Instagram profile and test how the community reacts to it. Furthermore, this concept can also be used by Ink as a part of different workshops or lectures held by them, again in the context of this domain. Because their previous work also consists of a project designed to tackle sexual wellbeing, their expertise in that field is abundant, and the illustrations could support them in their aim.

Secondly, these illustrations align with my visual style and expression, as well. Hence, after this project finishes, I could create the Instagram profile and continue making these illustrations. After some time, I believe there would be some indication of what this concept can grow into.

Most importantly, the main future recommendation is to continue discussing this topic openly and refer to this research report, as well as to the created illustration in conveying the main message - the ridiculousness of sexual scripts. However, this desired effect requires additional research and continuous observation. Undoubtedly, throughout that process, some other opportunities or valuable insights might come up as well. This research project touched upon a few of those. However, the mentioned complexity of the domain indicates that even though there is an abundance of information available about sexual scripts, their long-term effect in society is still relatively unknown. Therefore, this research can also be served as an inspiration point for such future investigations.

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