Future of Sex & Intimacy 2052

AN EXPERIENTIAL FUTURES EXHIBIT

Presented at University of Houston
Spring Gathering Weekend – April 2022

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What We Did:

The future of sex and intimacy explores a world in which shame has been eradicated — specifically shame associated with sex, intimacy, and relationships. This experiential future transports participants to Clear River High School’s Social Emotional Xcellence (S.E.X) curriculum in the year 2052.

The team crafted an experiential scenario set at a Parent’s Open House evening at the school. Parents were invited to preview the completely re-designed high school sex education curriculum that was to be launched in the coming semester. The curriculum explored a variety of provocative topics including shameless pleasures, sexual identity, human-to-human and human-to-robot relationships, kinks and preferences, and consent.

Parents had the opportunity to explore and learn to model behaviors grounded in personal integrity and values as it relates to sex and intimacy in order to extend the classroom into the home, creating a fully integrated learning environment.

Future Artifacts Generated:

1. Syllabus
2. Consent Form
3. Principal’s Announcement
4. Weekly Exercises
5. Participant Personas
6. Classroom PSA Posters
The future of sex is a crucial topic to explore, not only because it is innate and natural for all living beings, but because it holds a unique complexity for humans, often shrouded in embarrassment, shame, and immorality. The taboo nature of sex in the Western world creates a barrier to open communication and exploration of our desires and fears, preventing us from achieving a deeper understanding of our own sexuality.

The purpose of our project was to leverage the power of experiential futures to explore the sources of shame, by experimenting and learning to embrace sexual mindfulness as a parallel to navigating emotional obstacles in change-making efforts.

This project is a provocation for reflection, to challenge deeply-rooted yet often unexamined beliefs and opinions, and a call for us all to lean into, rather than away from, the edges of our discomfort.

The Why

To invite participants into thoughtful engagement with sources of emotional discomfort as a means for questioning the rules and norms we take as given.
The team experimented with a number of design research methods and frameworks to explore the topic of Sex and Intimacy, including:

- Systematic Inventive Thinking
- Deliteralization / Deterritorialization
- Transition Design process
- Sci-Fi Prototyping
- Systems Prototyping
- Thoughtless Futures
- Gift from the Future
- Ethnographic Experiential Futures
- Embodiment and role playing
- Experiential Futures Ladder

As evidenced, this was an iterative process that unfolded over the course of a semester. Each method opened up and enriched the team's thinking around and understanding of the topic in generative ways, and ultimately contributed to the shaping of the final experience.

Three of the above mentioned methods and frameworks played key roles in the final design of the experience:

- Transition Design
- Ethnographic Experiential Futures
- Sci-Fi Prototyping
Transition Design

Mapping the landscape generated thought provoking questions as the starting point for deeper exploration and clarified motivations for each individual team member, and identifying the core themes of collective interest.
Part of the EXF process involved interviews that helped the team:
• Understand the impacts our relationship to sex has across life
• Understand the role of sex education and family in shame
• Draw out implications of a world without shame
• Identify curriculum content

Working through this process enabled a more vivid, realistic, and consistent world to be built.

If you de-dramatize it [sex], analyze the situation, strip down to facts, it’s much easier to manage. Remaining open-minded and conversational with your kids is the best way. I think the family unit is the most important. Let your kids know that “if you’re doing any kind of sexual activity, you can talk to me about it”

Dr. Tara, March 2022

“Our world is reinforcing anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Defining what is a healthy sexuality may depend on: Good self-esteem, confidence, knowing what you want and how you want to please your partner, communicating, what forces are we seeing to facilitate more human connection”

Laura Schlehuber, March 2022
Sci-Fi Prototyping

Generated the format of a HS sex ed class, which evolved from an imagining into what the future of the sex talk might be.
Experience Snapshot
### Flow of Experience

The experiential futures scorecard served as a guide to designing a successful experiential encounter with the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permission</th>
<th>Participants sign consent form to enter the experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediacy</td>
<td>Participants are engaged with the experience via candles, chocolates, and flowers. Followed by a second wave with partner engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>A parent teacher conference kicking off with a principal announcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keying on Change</td>
<td>After worldbuilding, participants were engaged with each other in curriculum to model for their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Participants are taken out of the experience to reflect on action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Critical Point

Agency and consent were of top of mind for the team throughout the design process, as both are essential aspects of sexual health and wellness. Creating a space of psychological and physical safety, and designing with a trauma-sensitive lens was a priority.

At every stage in the experience, participants were in choice about how they engaged with the experience. Beginning with consent forms, participants self-selected their persona, decided the extent to which they embodied their persona, and had multiple options of classroom exercises to choose from, ranging from modest, to playful, to quite provocative.
Permissioning

Participants signed a consent form prior to entering the classroom, designed as a slow initiation into the future context they were about to enter.
Future Artifact: Consent Form

Click here for access to consent form.
Immediacy and Medium

Participants had the option to enter as a generic “parent” participant or to select one of eleven different personas to embody, thereby immersing themselves more deeply into the world. They stepped into an actual UH campus classroom; a lucky coincidence that strengthened the “believability” of the experience.
Future Artifact: Personas

Click here for access to all personas.

About me

It is so crazy but I am THE picky person about cleaning things, etc. Despite of that, I have a fetish for feces during sex...(t is called coprophilia). Good thing is that many people has the same fetish, including my husband 😁. Watching feces come out really turns me on.

I am a former swimming athlete. I like to practice in lakes and oceans.

I lived years with so much shame of my fetish and guilty of being me. It was very hard to conceive “happiness” and normalizing this situation. I want my kids to understand that boundaries are very necessary: You MUST respect the other person’s will and physical integrity 100% of the times. Once you have consent, it is ok to express “weird” fetishes. I am glad this school is #shamefree for over 5 years! You go kids!
Future Artifact: Classroom Setting

Click here for access short clip of teacher in action.
Sensory & Semiotic Vectors

The “Parents” were welcomed in with options of warm tea, chocolate, and flowers to generate a sense of safety and comfort. They also had time to explore the classroom posters, which further hinted at the state of this future.

Click here for access to short clip of experience in play.
Click here for access to all classroom posters.
Internal Consistency

Once everyone was seated, the principal delivered their announcement to set the context of 2052 and more specifically, the purpose of the gathering.

Click here for access to announcement recording.

Future Artifact: Classroom Announcement
Keying on Change

Judy’s presence as a fixture of the classroom was perhaps the most conspicuous manifestation of change, which drove participant immersion in the 2052 atmosphere and set the tone for the discussion topics and exercises.

In this future, Judy was a school AI assistant. As a non-human staff, she could serve the role of an admin secretary but also the role of a hands-on sex-educator.
Future Artifact: Syllabus + Weekly Exercises

Click here for access to full syllabus, weekly lessons, and script.
After the activities, participants shared their feedback, suggestions and impressions on the experience and personal takeaways.
Feedback
“We were transported”

“Pushing the limits in a comfortably uncomfortable way”

“The personas enhanced the experience”

“The personas enhanced the experience”

“The awkwardness is the point: effective experiential immersion”

“It was well prepared and improve interaction consistent.”

“The use of the personas make it engaging and a possibility to hear other perspectives”

“Preparation through senses was joyful (flowers + chocolate)”

“Relaxed delivery/presentation.”

“The focus on reflection of shame as a positive is psychologically healthy.”

“It was engaging. Shame was a good topic. Sex talk should be normalized”

Participant Feedback

Spring Gathering – In Person Experience – April 2022

What did you enjoy about the experience? What insight or learning are you taking away?
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“I enjoyed the experiential space to explore a topic that is sensitive to communicate present or future.”

“Great job transporting us!”

“A learning point with this experience was the chance to see a nuance the future of sex ed will be.”

“It was experiential. Different.”

“An insight: Openness to uncomfortable discussions without shame. Clever presentation”

“Atmosphere created in the room was calming which helped people talk about an uncomfortable topic. Personas was a great idea.”

“Eliminating Shame was an interesting concept of something to contemplate further! Great Job!”

“Presentation of a (very) different perspective. Need to pay more attention to this topic in the real word to help, in real schools.”

“I was able to be in experience. Fidelity with details, incorporation”

“It was fun to go through and experience together as “parents” rather than more individually based”
Participant Feedback
APF Conference – Virtual Experience – July 2022

What did you enjoy about the experience? What insight or learning are you taking away?

“Don’t let this discussion die. It is imperative to spread this discussion and talk about sex. It was a very good experience.”

“Talking about sex is uncomfortable but the way the experience was posed was very open minding.”

“What do you intend to do with the project? I hope you can keep doing workshops to spread this discussion. Maybe to real stakeholders?”
More exploration about what would have been shamed for the personas.

Making it longer and more engaging with other would be great – The time was too short

More time to explore the great posters in the room!
This one was interesting because there was an immediacy, and a sort of settling into the experience, followed by a secondary wave of discovery when it came to engaging with a partner. This was well designed in that the flow of information was regulated.

Perfect harmony of medium and message.

Perhaps the strongest sign systems was the representation of the sex doll, which was NOT the central focus. The mundaness of it was perfect in terms of evoking change and difference from the present.

Further to the previous point, the worldbuilding was really well done. The curriculum, the background of the school, etc. Both mundane while also being very different from the present.

Implications were clear but also, interestingly, very subjective. Feedback from some folks was almost a shoulder shrug, while others were deeply concerned and resistant to the changes in this world and its implications. This speaks to a certain richness in details and even the gamification aspects of this piece.
Discussion & Future Impact
Team Discussion and Reflection

David Geye, Elizabeth Herfel, Hauson Le, Ingrid Furtado and Mushfiqa Jamaluddin

This experiential futures workshop was generative and provoked new thoughts regarding to sex and intimacy for both the team and participants. The iterative process of exploring the topic space, experimenting with multiple methods and frameworks in an open-ended process, and arriving at the final form through a combination of rigorous research and trusting our creative intuitions pushed each of us to the edges of our comfort zone at various points in the semester. We are walking away having collectively gained a deeper appreciation for the need for more experiential approaches in futures and having grown our own capacities as futurists.

Many participants mentioned that this experience can be applicable to current stakeholders in helping them to formulate, re-organize and anticipate emerging changes regarding sex and intimacy within our society. We agree that this experience could be a powerful experience to bring to real school stakeholders and policy makers and has the potential to translate very clearly into action in the near future.

**Future Modifications:** From a content perspective, the main areas of feedback from participants were the desire for more time to explore the classroom and future artifacts, and to engage more deeply with the exercises. The concept of consent was perceived as too-complex of a topic to discuss when it came to robots and AI, which may warrant more time and space to dive into adequately. Meanwhile, virginity was viewed as an obsolete topic for 2052.

**Limitations:** Constraints for this project included working virtually to create the experience, not having the opportunity to test out the physical space before the exhibit and limited time within which to host the experience.
Beyond Spring Gathering

The team was invited to present this project at APF’s Exploring Next in June 2022.

The team adapted the experience for a virtual setting and a global audience. The conversation around sexual shame was expanded through participation of a diverse, global audience, with attendees dialing in from Turkey, the Philippines and Australia.

We hope to continue evolving this experience and engaging more people in this important conversation.