GAME NARRATIVE SUMMIT

Fade to Black? Writing and Designing Sex Scenes in Video Games

Michelle Clough
Freelance

GDC GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE® | FEB 27–MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1–3, 2017 #GDC17

UBM

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

such mobile

very dating sim

much VR startup

igda international game developers association

Romance and Sexuality Special Interest Group

Fewer Tifas
Male sexualiza

Michelle Clougl
Freelance

GDC

ord
es

SEX IN GAMES

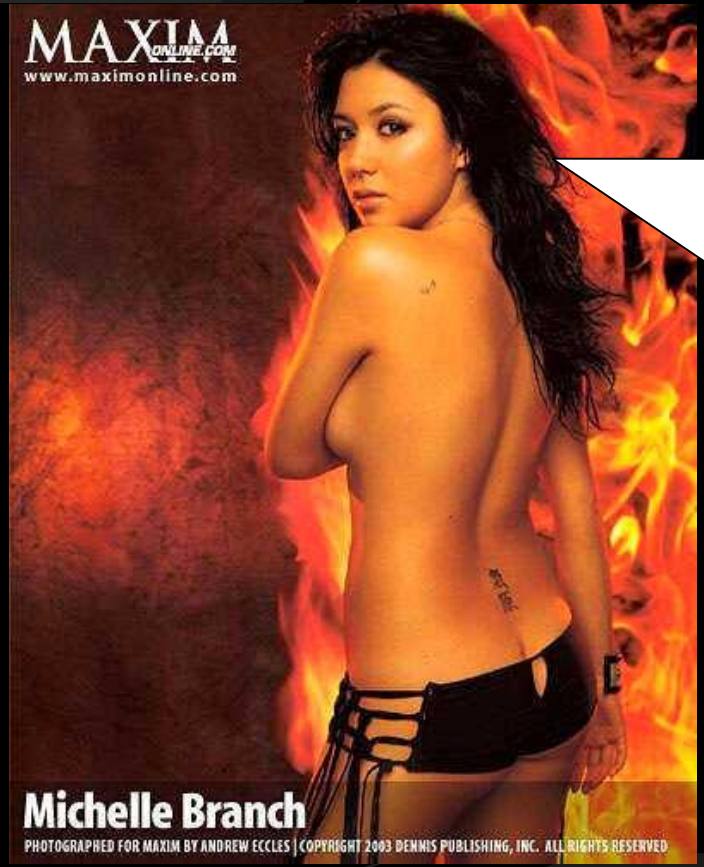
themepress
I'M

HilariousGifs.com

SHAME. SHAME. SHAME.

I want a game about bedding hot, sweaty men.

Meh, scratch that. How about hot, sweaty girls?



Hey, check out all these sexy, naked women…

XXX
20/50
UNCENSORED
IGN.COM

JOHNNY CAGE WINS
FATALITY

JOHNNY CAGE WINS
FATALITY

There is hope!

WOLFENSTEIN

WITCHER

LER IN A BIND

ASSIN'S CREED

*not picture
dating sims, queer games, etc.

Outline

1. Team groundwork
2. Crafting the context
3. Crafting the scene

Sex scenes and your team

Look, my instructions were very clear! *"He reaches for her boob!"*
… oh, shit, I thought you said, *"he reaches for the lube."*

I want
a sex scene.

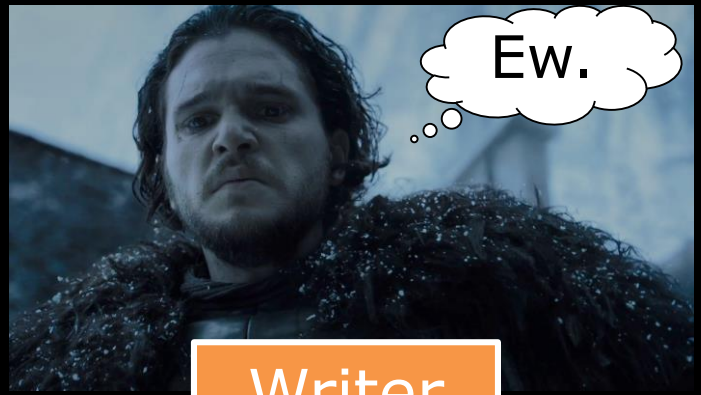
Creative Leads

#narrativedesigngoals

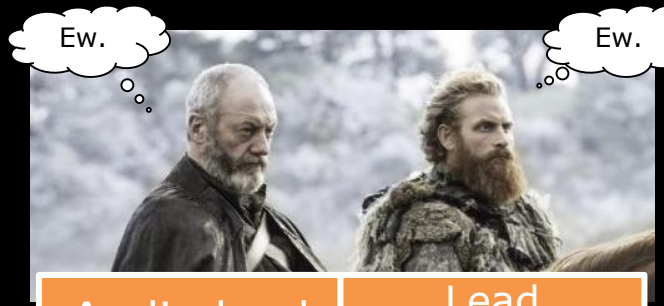
Creative Director

Horrible sex scene concept

Lead Design



Writer



Audio lead

Lead programmer

Art lead

Go! Go! Follow your commander!

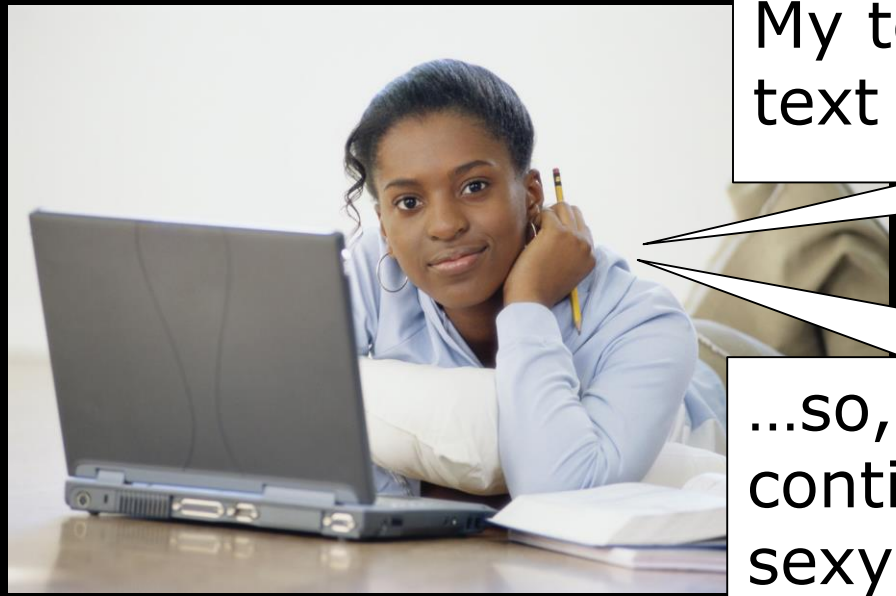
Sex, teamwork, and awkwardness

So, sounds like you're into bondage, then? That's hot.

So is there a reason you keep pushing for Kratos to be naked?

How to get the team comfortable

The lonely freelancer…



My team lead is just a bunch of text on a computer screen.

…so, Mr. Bunch of Text, let's continue our discussion of the sexy dynamic between the heroine and her friend…

Foster fellowship

Lead the way

ABSOLUTELY NO:

- Kink-shaming
- Vanilla-shaming
- Slut-shaming
- Virgin-shaming
- Gender-shaming
- Asexual-shaming
- Queer-shaming
- Straight-shaming
- TMI-shaming
- Prude-shaming

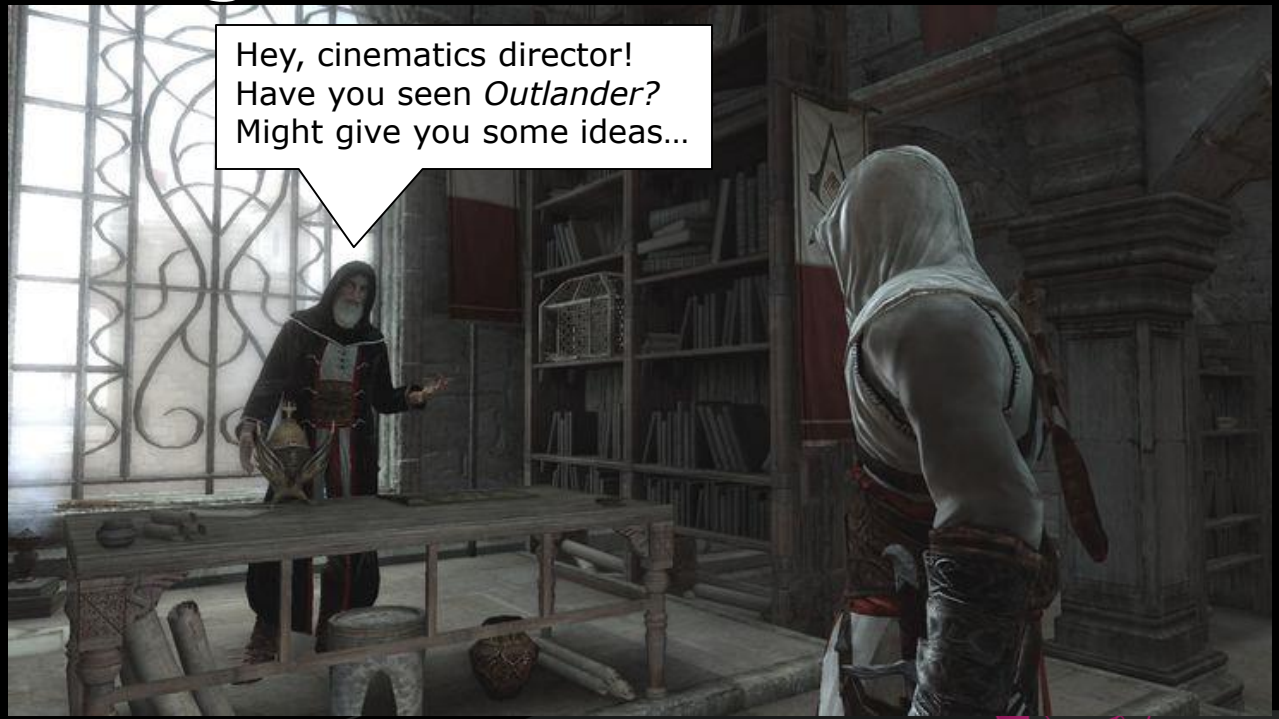
IN THIS DESIGN SCRUM!

Reject ideas, not desires

Hey, Mitch, your spanking mini-game doesn't match the serious, emotional tone of our game.

Also, **DUDE,** what the hell is wrong with you, pervert?

Be the go-to for resources



Get diverse input

Creative

Technical

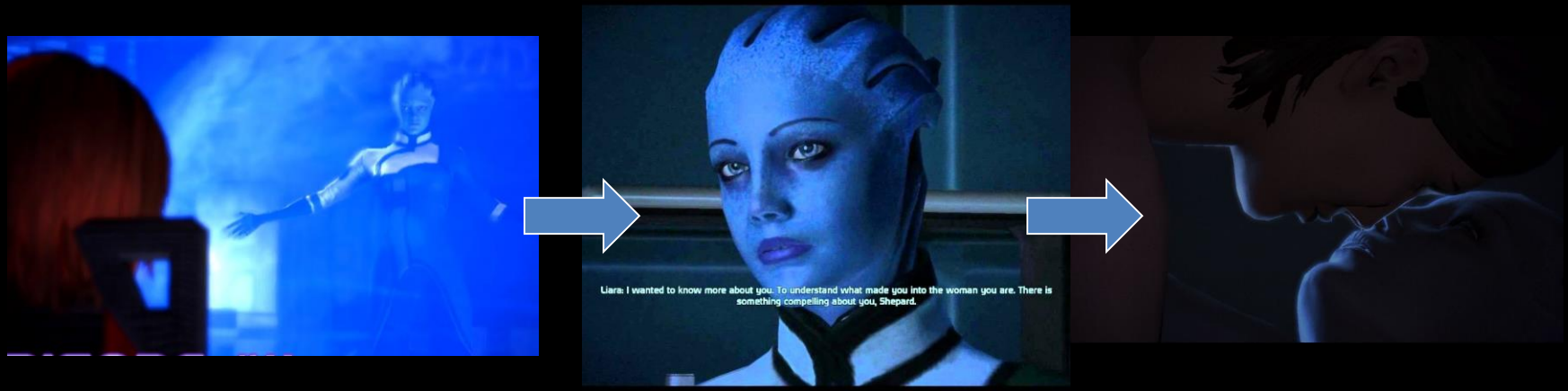
Business

Get diverse input

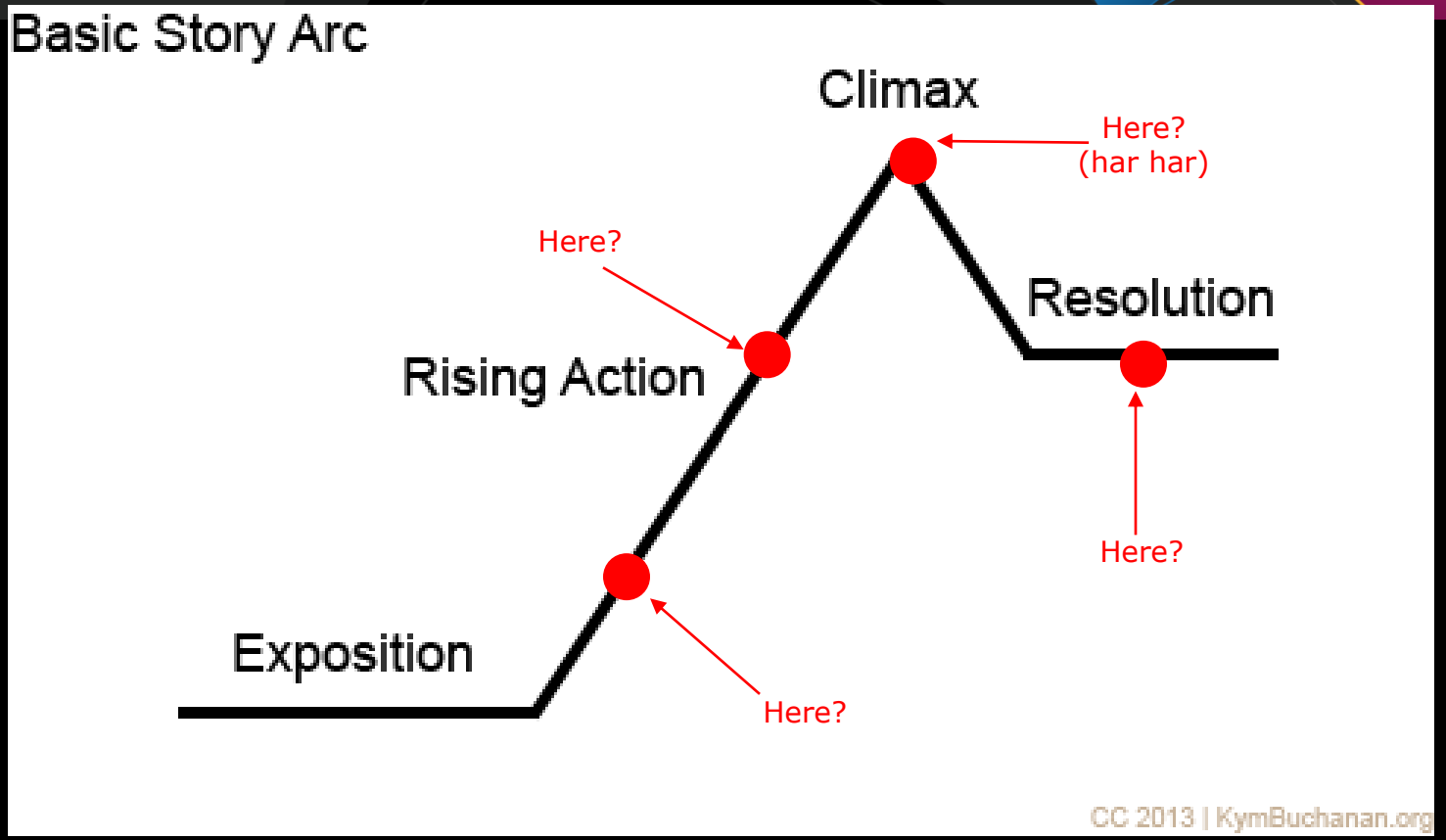
If all else fails…

- Discuss 1-on-1 or by private email
- Ask for media recommendations
- Anonymous feedback

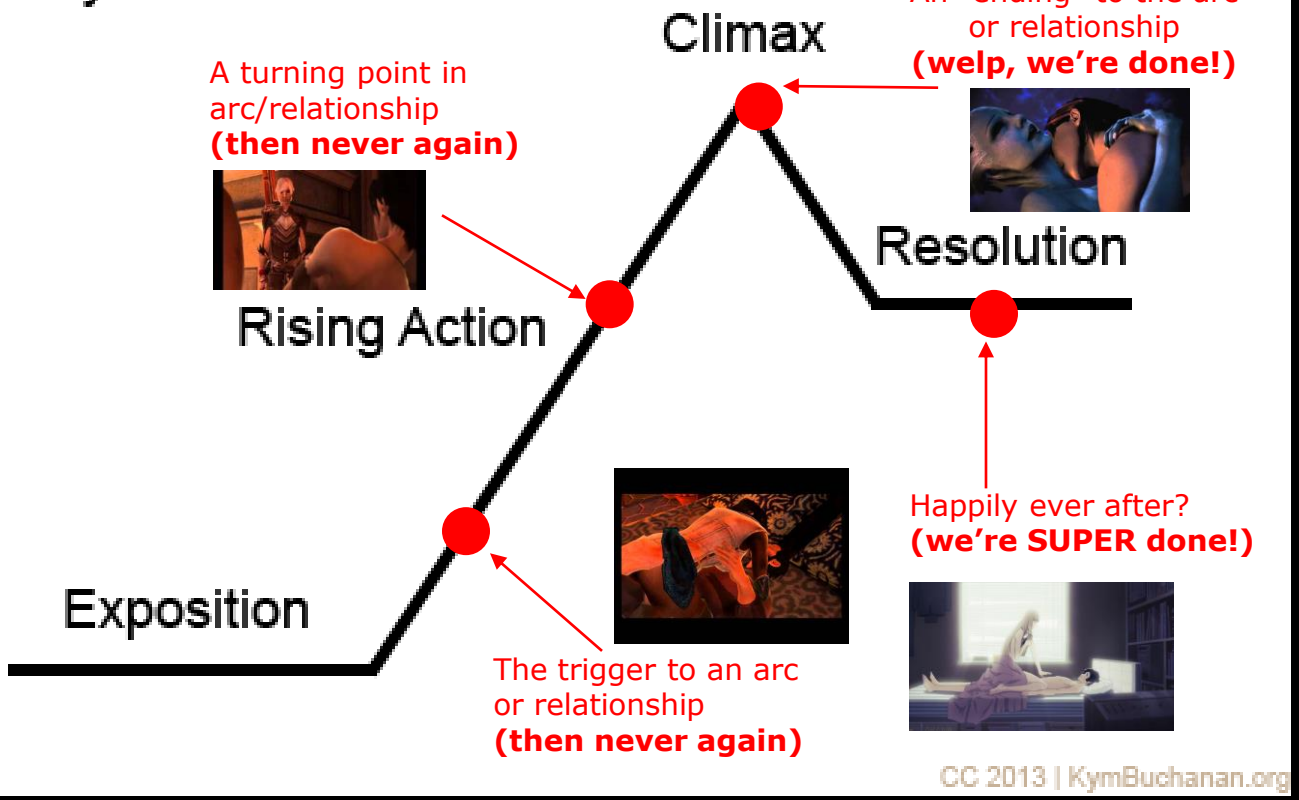
Writing and designing context



Because a good sex scene begins long before the clothes come off.


Basic Story Arc
Climax
Here?
(har har)
Here?
Resolution
Rising Action
Here?
Exposition
Here?
CC 2013 | KymBuchanan.org

Basic Story Arc

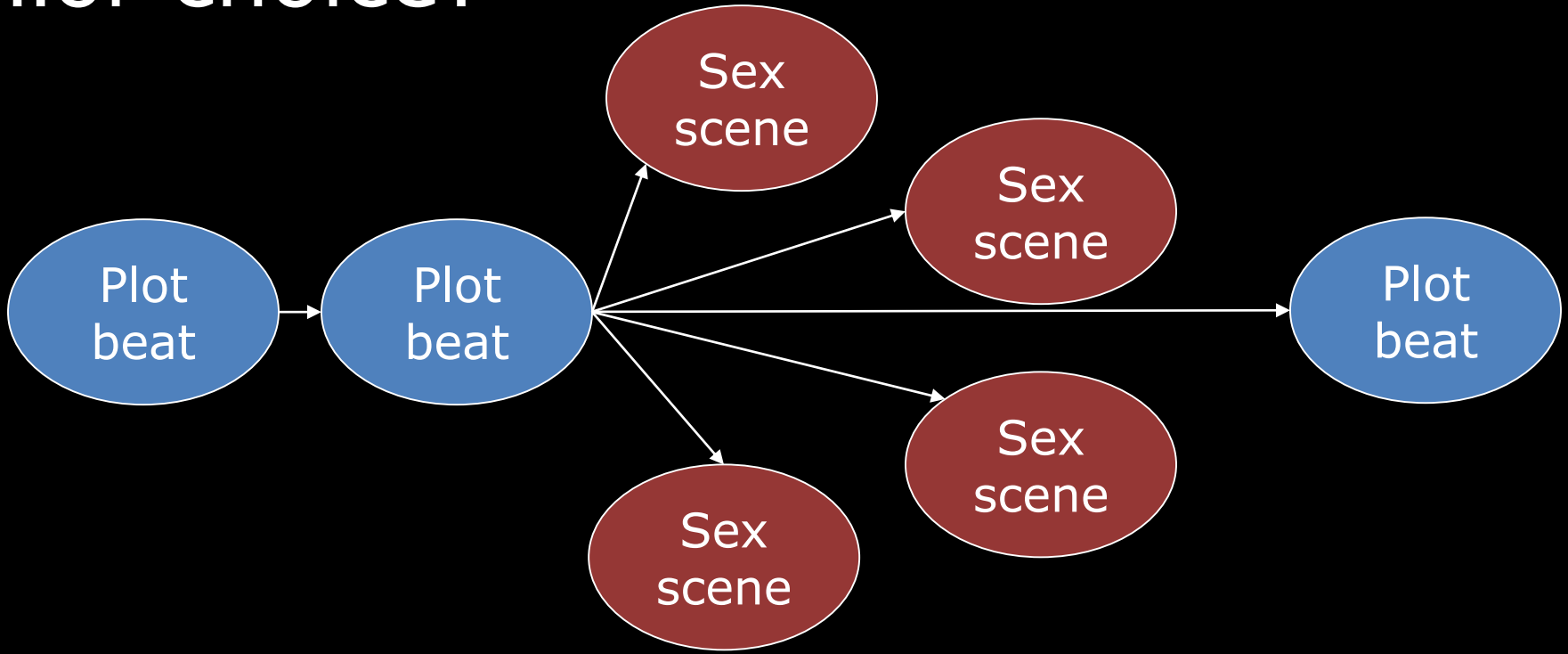


Sexual context and design

- Romance?
  - Branching, relationship counter
- Situational?
  - Corresponding major action sequence, a “crisis” before/after
- Casual?
  - Terms of character interactions or quest triggers
- Paid for?
  - In-game resource sink
- Etc. etc.

Linear…

...or choice?


Plot beat
Plot beat
Sex scene
Sex scene
Sex scene
Sex scene
Plot beat

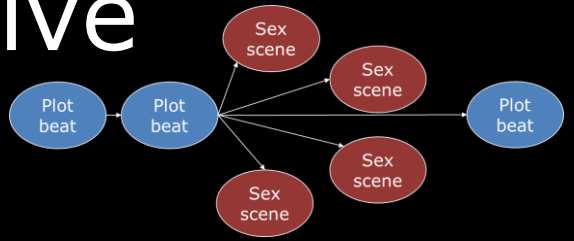
Sex in Linear Narrative

- More movie-like
- Can “establish” more
  - Character attitudes, relationships
- More writer control
- Less broad appeal to audience

Examples: Wolfenstein, Assassin’s Creed

Sex in Non-Linear Narrative

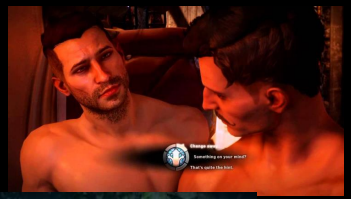
- Branching, sandbox, etc
- More game-like
  - Player agency and choice
- More diversity of preference
- More asset/writing intensive



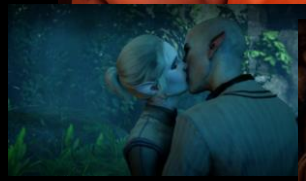
Examples: Witcher, BioWare games, visual novels

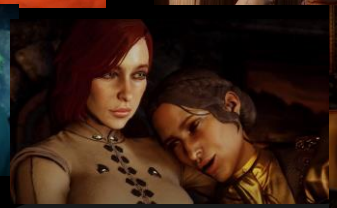
Choice of partner

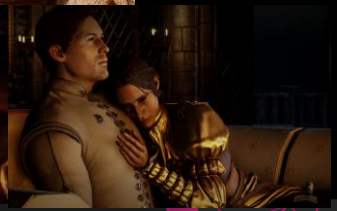
Hooray for sex!



And hooray for no sex!







Choice of approach

Choice of "yay or nay"

- Should have choice to accept/reject sex…
- But avoid bottlenecking the story arc
- Make other intimacies an option

The big question: Why?

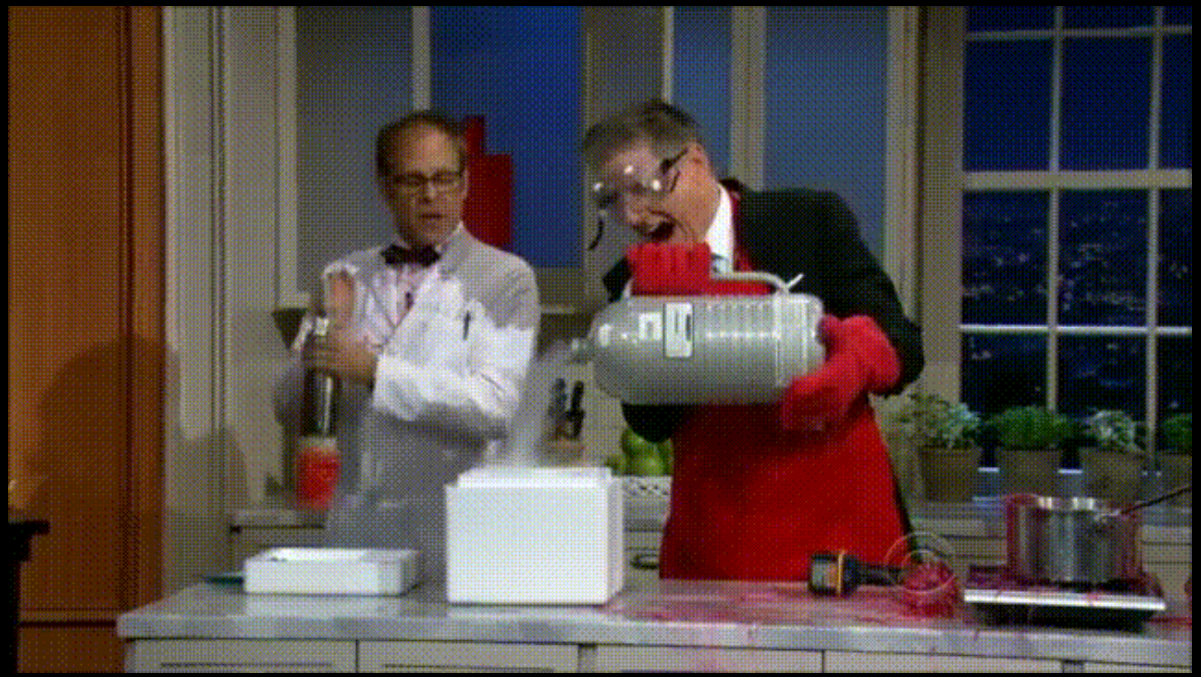
The big question: Why?

TAKE YOUR PICK:

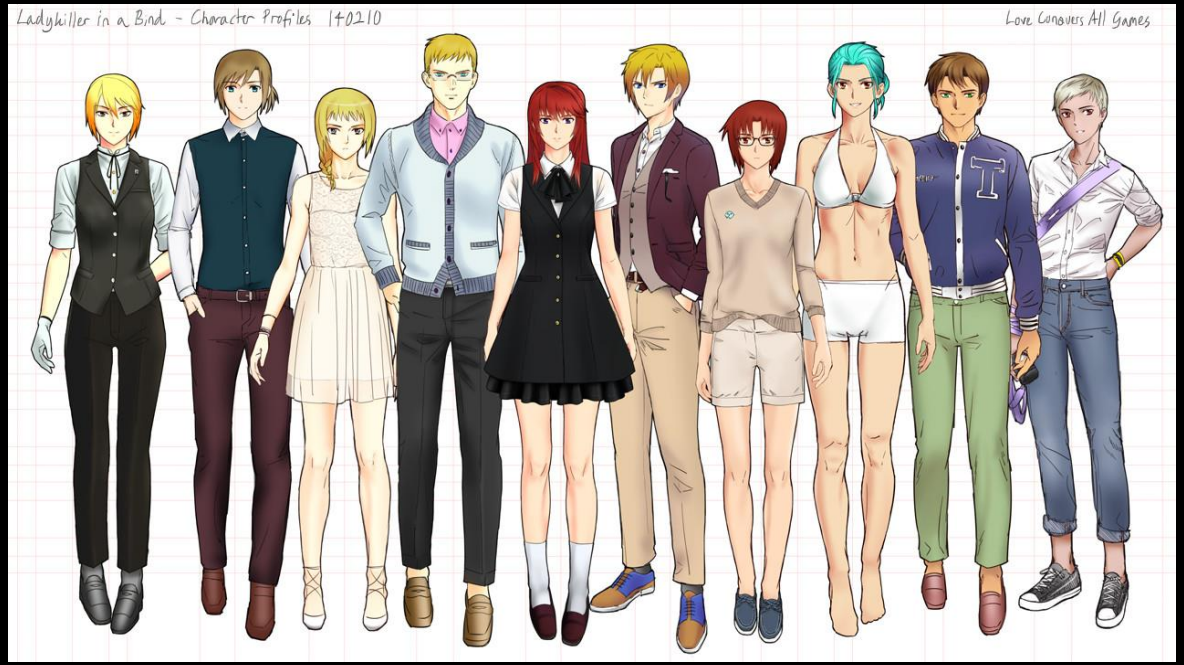
Because they're in love. Because they're attracted. Because they're bored. Because one of them wants to get back at someone. Because the world is ending. Because a relationship is ending. Because they've seen so much death. Because they want to feel alive. Because they want to have a child. Because HOT DAMN, that person's good-looking. Because they make poor life choices. Because they make AWESOME life choices. Because it's something to do. Because they lost a bet. Because they need comfort. Because ALIENS. Because the door to the Temple of Oogleflatz only opens with some truly banging sex on the altar. Because they read all these examples and got aroused. Because they got drunk. Because they're trying to manipulate the other person. Because they're under deep cover. Because they're James Bond. Because the other person is fantastic in the sack. Because WHY NOT. Because they're looking for connection. Because the love interest was in West Philadelphia born and raised, on a playground is where they spent most of their days.

Meh, I guess…
DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT'S BEEN SINCE A REAL MAN HAS COME INTO MY CHAMBERS?

More chemistry, please!



Know your characters



Anatomy of a scene: Wolfenstein

Questions:	William BJ Blazkowicz

Game design

Player

NPC

Now scram, I’ve got some hot meaningful sex to have, and you’re not invited.
This is my story, not yours. You must let me finish telling it.

Kindness coins

Compliments

Favours

Gifts

"Let's have sex/relationship."

Kindness coins

Player takes action

X = X + 1

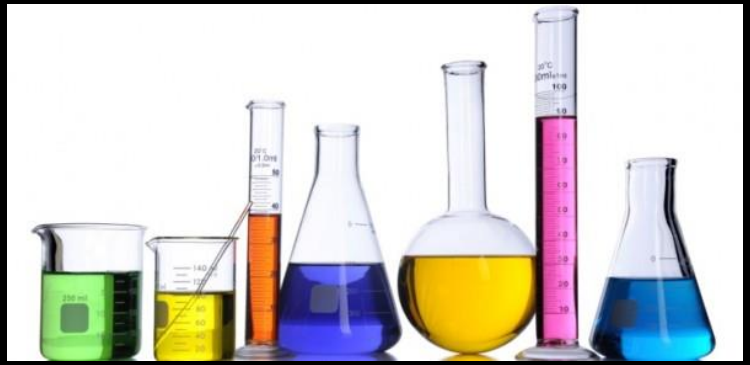
IF X >= 10

THEN display.(sexytimes)

Kindness coins

SEX

Chemistry casino



Chemistry casino

[display trait NPC finds sexy]

Examples: Eloquence, Wit, Forcefulness, Nice Smile, Butt

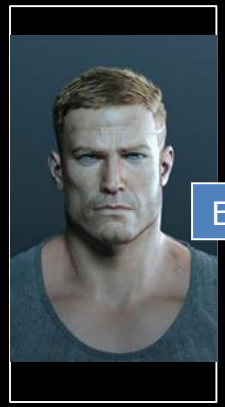
Is sexually attracted…

…maybe?

HATESEX IMMINENT

Sex in quest design

Event: Wolfenstein



Hero / PC

Encounters

Get coffee from dining car for you and Anya.
Avoid Nazis.

Task, Goal, Request
(often given by NPC)

PC completes quest

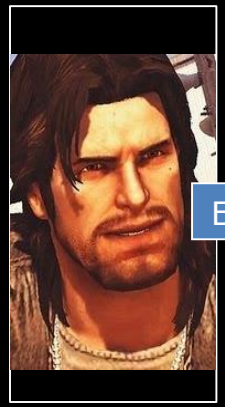
Quiet conversation leading to sex

Event

$EX
designed by freepik.com

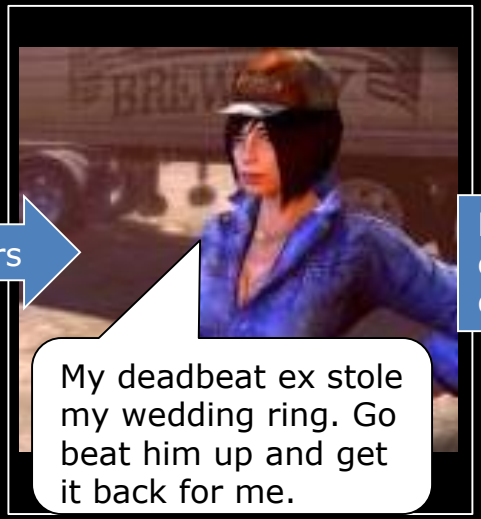
Stink of failure still on me.

Reward: Ride to Hell Retribution



Hero / PC

Encounters



Task, Goal, Request
(often given by NPC)

PC completes quest

"Now, let me show you what a mechanic can really do…"

Reward

Holy transactional sex, Batman!

More complex transactions

Lady Jaina Proudmoore
High Recognition
Your presence on the battlefield cannot be ignored. I would like to give you something extra for your efforts, mage.
Rewards
You will receive: 24 72
Arcane Trove
Thank-You Sex
50
Conquest Points
5
Lesser Charm of Good Fortune

Sex work

Sex work

Sex work

Welcome back! What can I get for you, honey?
1. The men.
2. The women.
3. Some of both.
4. Surprise me.
5. Er, never mind.

Now that you've learned how to approach the enemy, we need to find you a suitable weapon.

Writing the scene itself...

Cinematics team be like…

What are you doing?! Zoom in on his hand on the small of her back, dammit!

I wash my hand of this weirdness.

Apply narrative design to sex!

Technical and censorship limits

Game censorship

When tech failures attack…

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

Uh, we don't have nude character models.

INT BEDROOM – NIGHT

Now naked, Alex and Casey kiss passionately as they back towards the bed.

First draft

INT BEDROOM – NIGHT

Alex and Casey kiss passionately as they back towards the bed.

They fall on the bed. Clothing rustles. Fade to black.

Second draft

Be aware of consent issues

Ouch, that poor wall

Hell yeah, enthusiastic consent!

God, I want to kiss you right now.

Tell me where you want to be touched…

Let's take this nice and slow…

[pauses to make SEXY eye contact, gauge reaction]

Tackling problematic consent

Approach, aftercare, aftermath

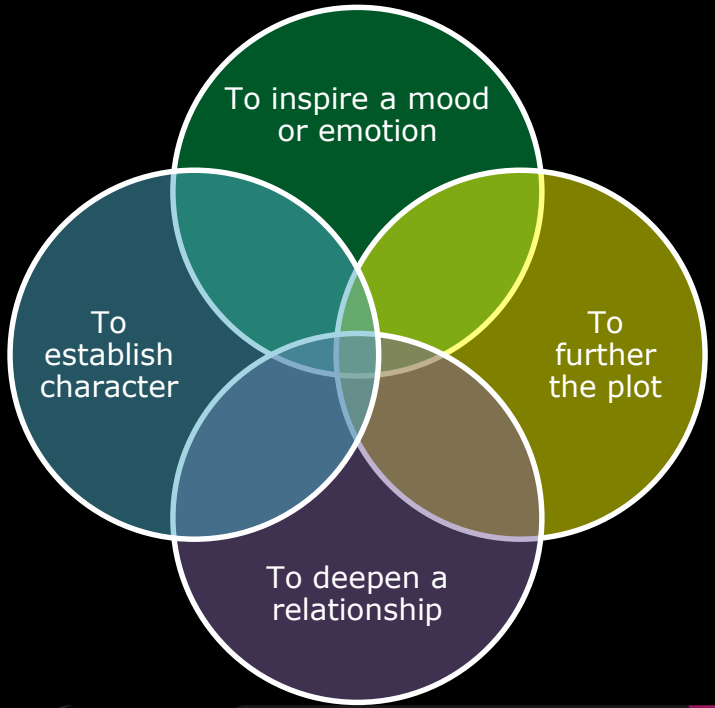
Approach, aftercare, aftermath

PS4Trophies
Subscribe

DEBUG DAY 1
THE BEAST ...you make me feel so safe... like all I have to do is make you happy, and everything will be fine...

People pick them?

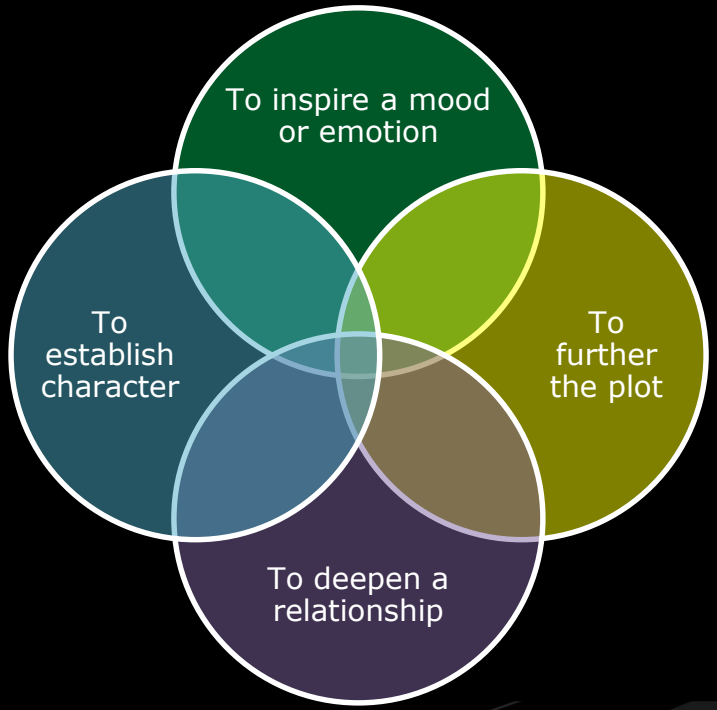
Narrative purpose



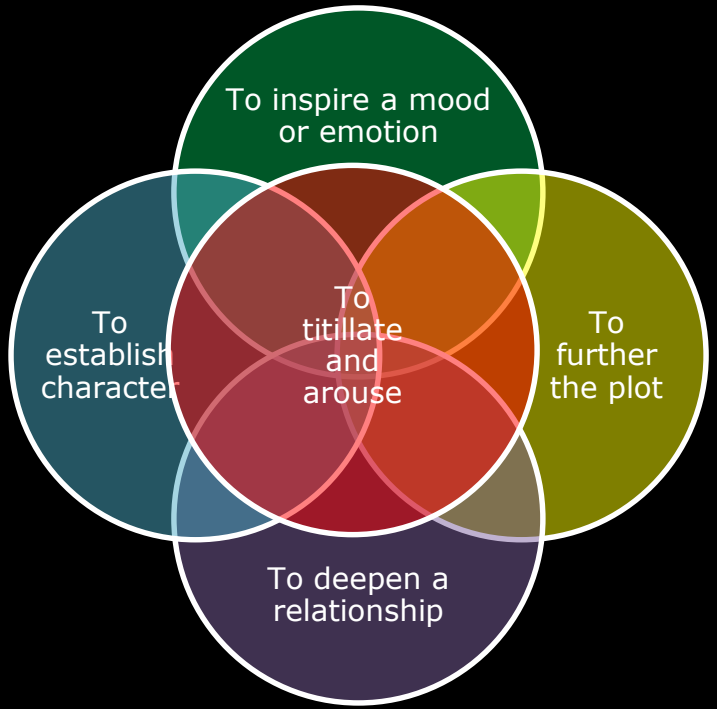
Titillation: the taboo purpose?

- Aim to arouse/excite player
- NOT a shameful intent – desire is valid
- NOT enough to craft a strong scene
  - Can lead to shoehorned scenes, objectified characters, sexist pandering, tonal shifts, etc.
- Avoid the "wrong kind" of shallow

Narrative VERSUS titillation...



...or narrative AND titillation



Sexy stuff for everyone!

YAY!

YAY!

Double standards in sex scenes

much nude

such sex

wow

Double standards in sex scenes

much pants

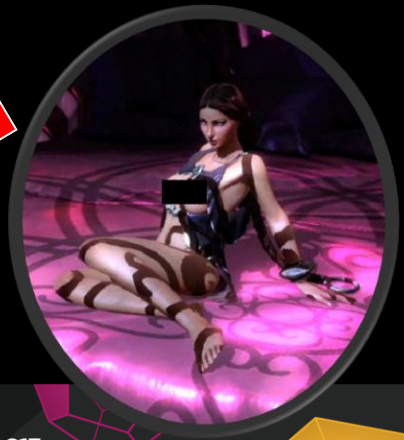
many distant

very no

Male Gaze

Identifies with / Doesn't desire

Lusts after / Desires



Male Gaze

- Assumes no other bodies attractive
- Assumes no other audiences are playing
- Assumes no other audiences like sex

Crash Pad Series.com
Unlocked
hurt me plenty
(pull back your hand to re-negotiate boundaries)
intensity: Heavy
clothes: Underwear
safeword: "Red Yellow Green"
FanFiction.Net
deviantART
Now a Major Motion Picture from New Line Cinema
The #1 New York Times Bestseller!
The Notebook
Nicholas Sparks
A Novel
BULLSHIT.
tumblr.
secretary
a film by steven shainberg
james spader
maggie gyllenhaal
"Terrific! Spader and Gyllenhaal are electric!"
-Peter Travers, Rolling Stone
"Sexy and highly stylized!"
-Chris Lee, Sony
"Mind-bogglingly sexy!"
-Glenn Kenny, Premiere
"Daring, funny and quirkily erotic!"
-Jami Bernard, New York Daily News
assume the position
Dawn Dump
WHAT IF YOUR FUTURE WAS THE PAST?
BASED ON THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER
OUTLANDER
SERIES PREMIERE
AUG 9 SAT 9P
starz
HBO
COMING OUT on top
START
LOAD
OPTIONS
GALLERY
CANDIDA ROYALLE
PRESENTS
A film by award-winning director: Petra Joy
FEMINIST PORN AWARD
"Unbelievably hot!!!"
"Petra Joy lives up to her name, creating JOYOUS, uninhibited erotica for women ...and men!"
FEMALE Fantasies
FROM A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE FOR THE ADULT CONNOISSEUR!
Femme Productions
Fifty Shades of Grey
TUSKS
THE ORC DATING SIM
Consensual Torture Simulator

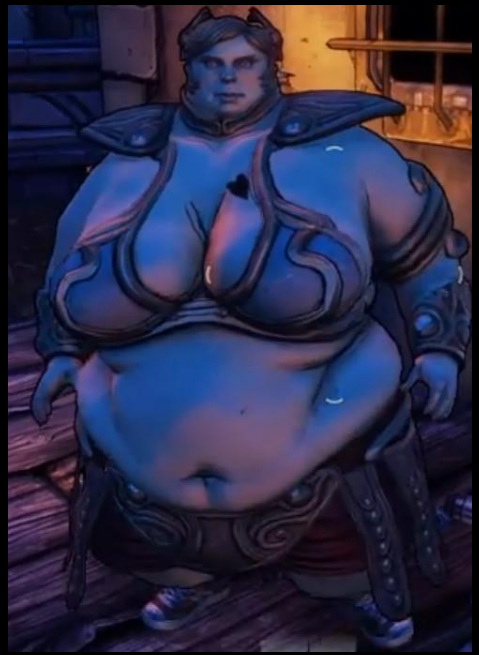
Diversity is not about avoiding sex so no one's offended.

It's about asking what kinds of sex your different audiences might enjoy.

Diversity and sex

Diversity and sex

"Ooh, how ***exotic!***"



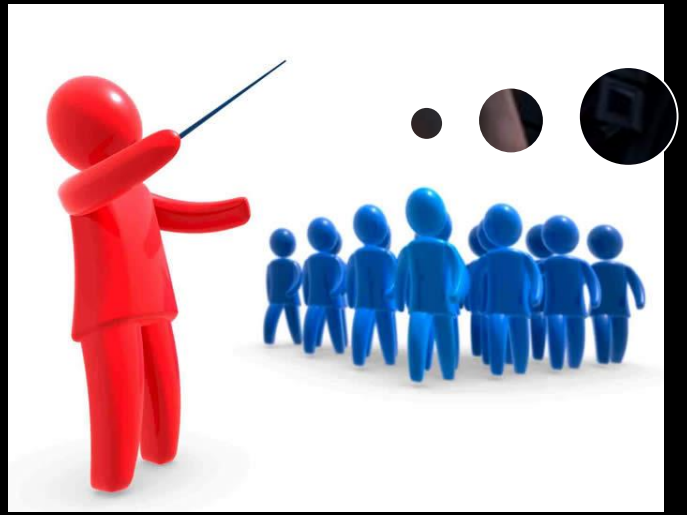
"Ha ha, fat people having sex is funny!"

Diversity in sex

Diversity OF sex

Diversity OF sex

Challenge your team



Characterization through sex

"**Characters come first**, no pun intended. […] **And this applies to sex scenes** in *Wild Hunt* as well."

- Karolina Stachyra, Senior Writer for *Witcher 3* (via Vice)

Characterization through sex

E.g. Sera in Dragon Age:

- Giggling constantly
- Always in motion
  - falling off bed etc
- Tells sacrilegious jokes
- Loves the obscene
- Imagines horrifying others
- Loves your rudely shaved pubic hair
  - Yes, that's a thing.

Did the character arc shift for you too?

Character **change** through sex

www.Bandicam.com

Write sensually – all senses

Sensuality in text games

CHOICE OF GAMES

Interactivity and player control

Yawn…

Sexy.

Tactile and sensual, but marketplace censored

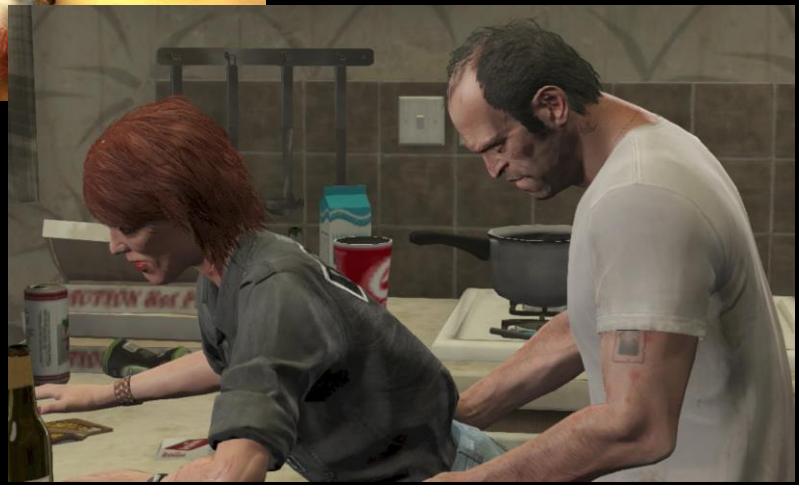
In infancy, no idea what we're doing yet

Meaningful interactivity

To conclude…

Sex here

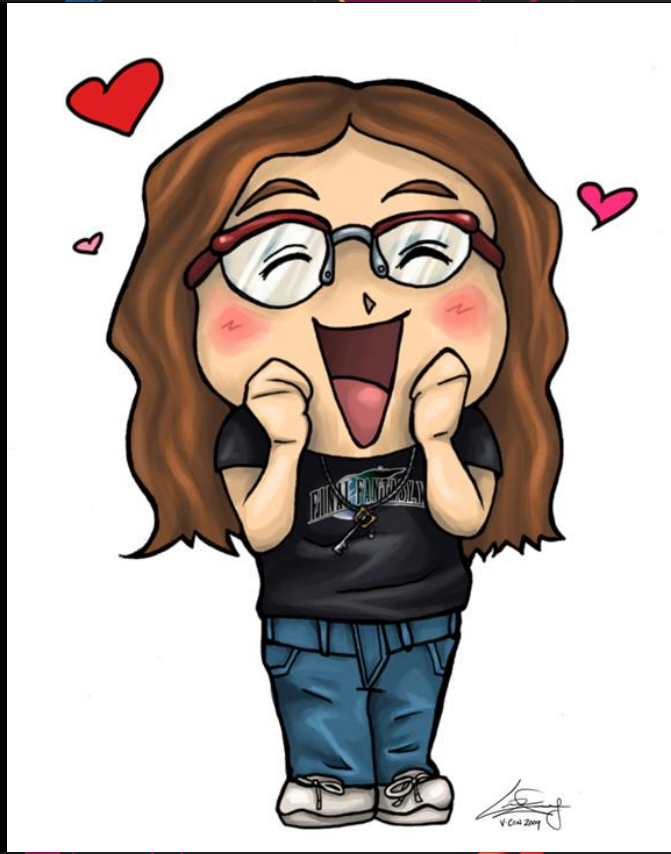
To conclude…



COPY FAX
HOURS

I WANT YOU
TO VALUE YOUR DESIRES
AS A SOURCE OF CREATIVITY

Thanks for listening!

- Email: michelle.clough@gmail.com
- Twitter: @michelle_clough
- Website: www.michelle-clough.com

Join the IGDA Romance and Sexuality SIG!
Meeting on Wed @ 2 in North Hall 111