

Sex in the Time of Covid

The Sound

The Sound has set out to deeply understand **Sex & Intimacy** in the **time of Covid 19...**

....because this pandemic represents a real-time social experiment, and given The Sound's drive to uncover human motivation, this opportunity is ripe for exploration.



We talked to real people to understand how their sex lives have been impacted what shifts in behaviors and beliefs toward sex they have noticed during this time



We utilized a **quantitative exploration** (inclusive of both a data remine and a proprietary survey), and a **series of virtual conversations** to deeply understand people currently riding this sexual roller coaster



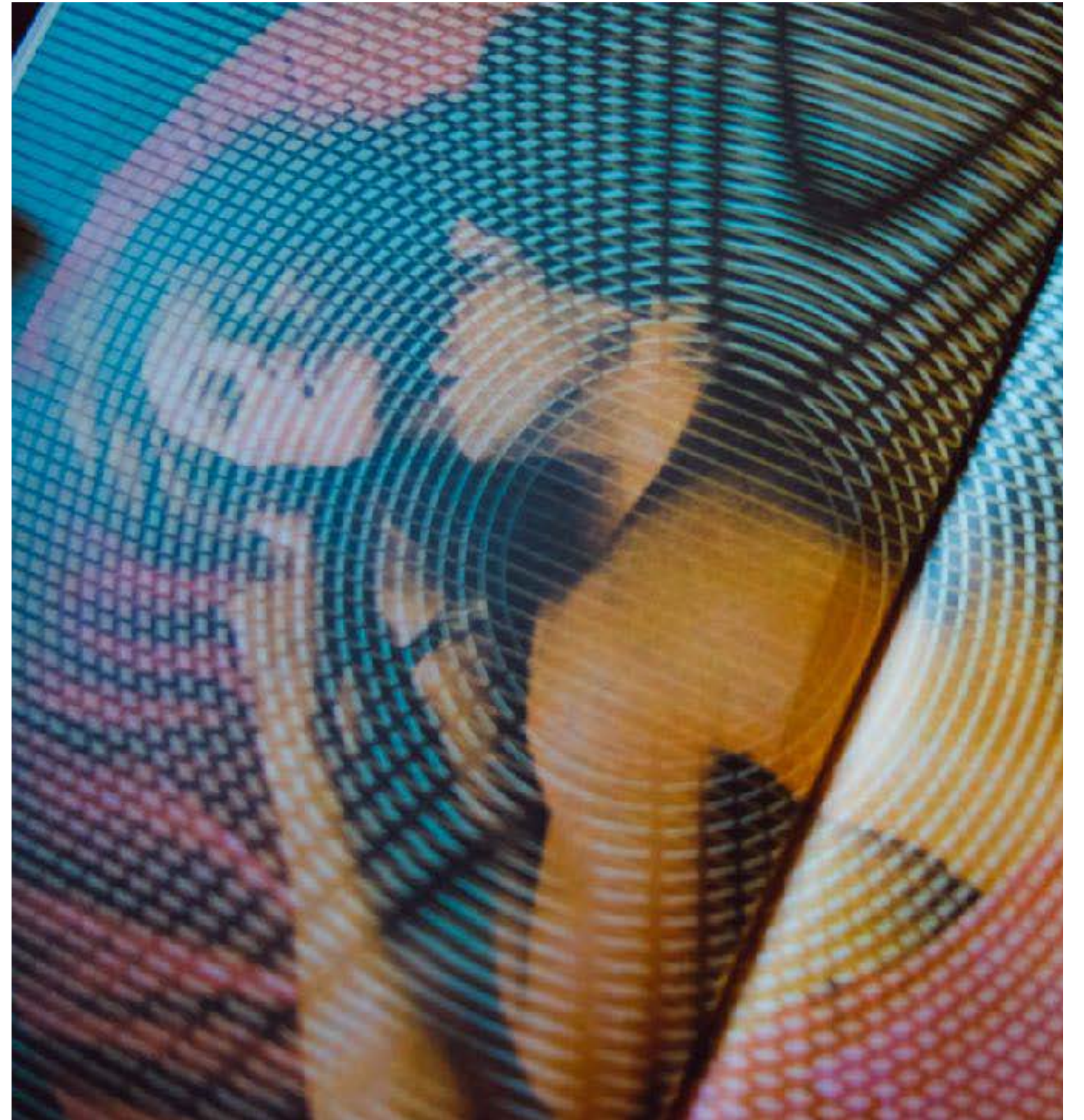
We've uncovered a richer understanding of this new sexual reality and reflected on how people's response to this new sexual reality impacts other parts of their lives...and industries as a whole

It's no surprise that a healthy sex life can be linked to overall health and well-being*

In fact...

- People who engage in more sex have a better quality of life
- Relationships in which both partners experience orgasm during sex are happier
- Marriages that have more sex show higher marital quality, argue less and are more aligned overall

*Taylor-Jane Flynn, Alan J. Gow; Age and Ageing, Volume 44, Issue 5, September 2015, Pages 823–828



Despite this important sexual truth, it seems that most of us were taking sex for granted...

Few could have known what laid on the horizon for our society. **This meant** that many were lulled into their typical sexual routines

“Good” “scheduled” “average” and “routine” defined life in the bedroom – and the (in)frequency with which sex happened went largely unexamined

“I regret not having more sex before COVID and think this time will shift how I think about the role of sex in my life moving forward”

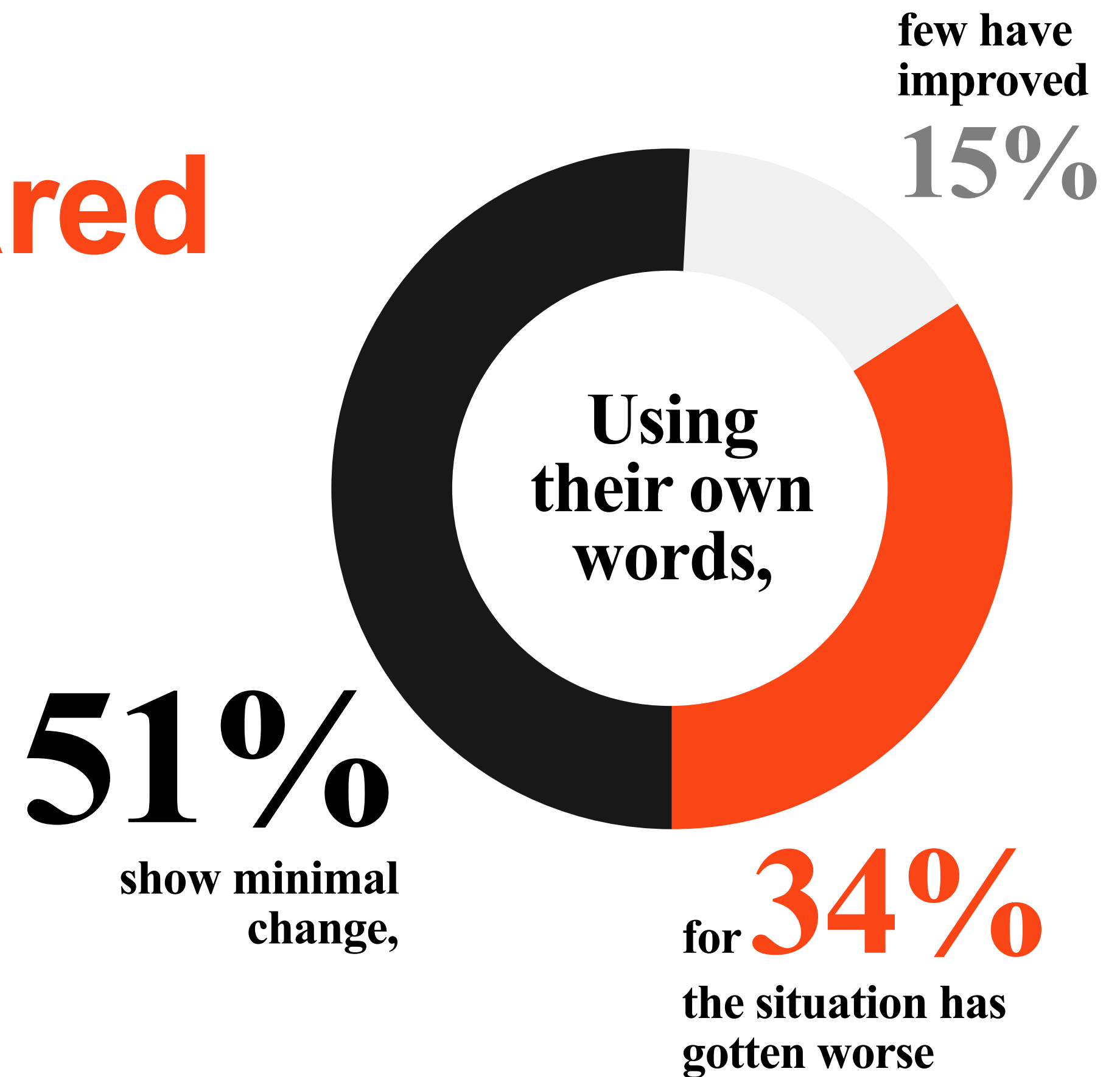


But that was all about to Change

Like every other part of our lives, sex and intimacy have been
impacted by our time spent in mandated self-isolation

Let's just say, it's tough compared to 6 months ago

A negative shift in tone for
1 in 3 people



Pretend your sex life is a movie.

How many stars does it get?



1-2 STARS

Describe their sex lives as

**“Non-existent, solo, masturbatory,
boring ‘jesus-would-be-proud’”**

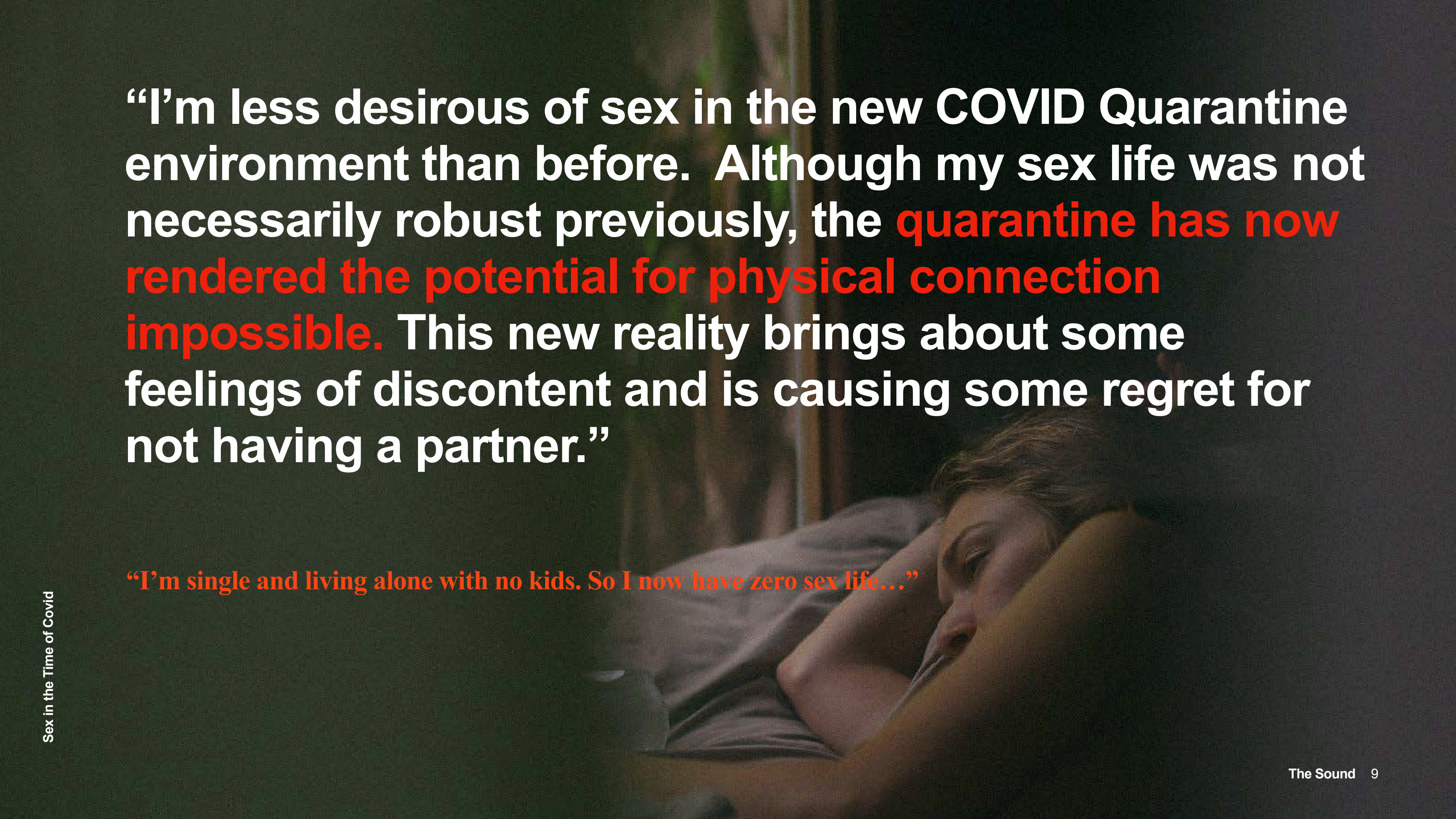
4-5 STARS

Describe their sex lives as

**consistent, active, fun, exciting, loving,
playful, romantic, connected**

"My partner is too stressed, and we argue more while quarantined because of all the sad and scary things going on around us, we are lazy in sweatpants all day every day - not an environment conducive to feeling sexy"

"I'm generally having a difficult time sensing any emotional connection with people behind a screen, to the point I've begun to turn my phone off during the work day and mostly only use it to listen to podcasts. I have zoom fatigue. my weekends are filled with "plans" and i can't begin to find interest in virtual sex. In the past, it was a means to an end, a precursor for foreplay."

A person is lying in a hospital bed, looking towards the camera. They have a nasal cannula in their nose. The background is dark and out of focus.

“I’m less desirous of sex in the new COVID Quarantine environment than before. Although my sex life was not necessarily robust previously, the **quarantine has now rendered the potential for physical connection impossible.** This new reality brings about some feelings of discontent and is causing some regret for not having a partner.”

“I’m single and living alone with no kids. So I now have zero sex life...”

We dug a bit deeper, and
uncovered 3 sexual mindsets
people are having in response
to Covid-19.



⁰¹ Waning
Desire









⁰² Desire...
But No Flesh



⁰³ Exploratory and
Experimental

Not surprisingly, relationship status and living situation impact your sexual mindset...

	Waning Desire	Desire... But No Flesh	Exploratory and Experimental
Single			
Live Separate from Partner			
Live with Partner			

But exploration + experimentation transcends both relationship status and living situation.

Whether living alone or with a partner, the lockdown has allowed people to slow down and EXPLORE

→ LIVING ALONE

For those **living alone**, a chance to experiment with new kinds of sex (virtual/ sexting or even different kind of porn)

I'm single and self-isolating, recently broke up with someone right before the pandemic started. We've had a sex a few times online in a spontaneous way (we were talking and it just started) which is something we had not done when we were together. These days I just have fun with different toys or just with myself. It's actually great and something I had not done much of before.

LIVING WITH THEIR PARTNER ←

There are a spectrum of experiences they're facing and for some, more time together means more sex (**1 in 3 (34%) people who live with their partner say they're having more sex now**)

- This sex tends to be more adventurous/spontaneous and experimental
- Things they've been wanting to try are now on the table (sex toys, role playing, using food) because they're not tired from the ROUTINE (getting ready, commuting etc)

My husband and I are probably having more sex at the moment but it's not like it's we're going like rabbits all the time ;) That said, we've started to explore things that we probably didn't previously. I find it's a lot easier to try new things when you've got more time at home. A lot of the toys we've bought have come out from under the bed more.

As a result of exploration, intimacy & connection is on the rise

→ LIVING ALONE

For some who are **living alone without in-person sex**, leaning into the intimacy required from video-chat dating to make the connection feel more substantive

In terms of dating, in some ways it's been good to open this conversation up in an extensive way before meeting someone - with one particular person, we have spoken a lot about what we both find enjoyable, things we hate, what we want from sex etc. All the conversations you should always have but often get too caught up in the moment to remember! This person can definitely talk the talk, but the fear now is can they walk the walk?

LIVING WITH THEIR PARTNER ←

Being with a partner they trust makes this an safe time and space to experiment and get kinky

If kids in the house, people are getting more creative with how and when they have sex, making it a more exciting connection

Some are truly living “for better or for worse” while spending more time than ever with their partners.

NO DIFFERENCE

For some, this has made no difference at all - their sex lives are consistent and the same pace/nature as before. Despite a change in routine, they're not finding themselves doing anything different

STRESSFUL/LOSS OF NOVELTY

But for many, being together 24/7 comes with its own issues:

More time together can mean more friction - this anger/irritation seeps into sex lives, dulling it down

Sex is no longer as exciting - something that used to be for special occasions/ weekends is no longer novel

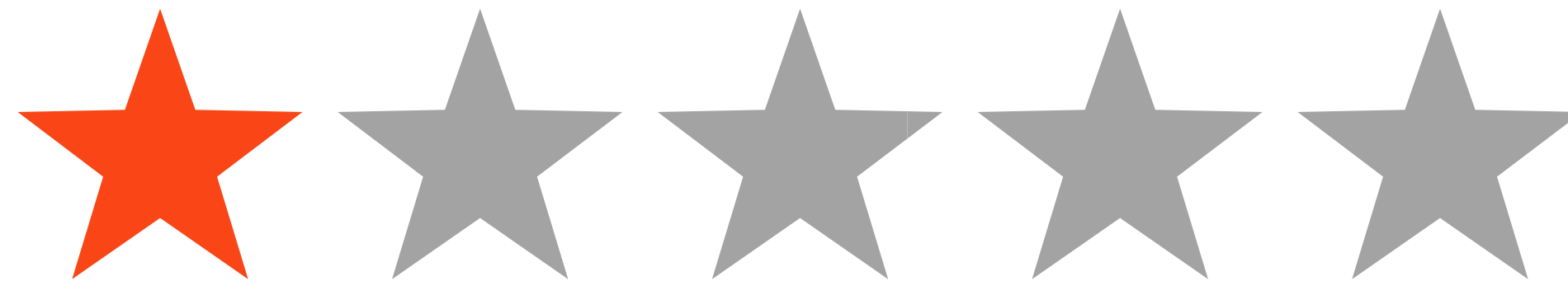
With work, kids, house chores, there is no energy left to do anything

Especially for polygamous/open/ multi partner relationships, not being able to meet others means eating into a big part of their sex lives

Others are quarantined alone and **getting frustrated**

Frustration/dissatisfaction

Whether dating or in a relationship, people are missing their “normal” sex lives and feel sad/frustrated in this change — lack of flesh leaves them less than satisfied



#1 PREDICTOR OF A LOW STAR RATING

Contacting an old flame or romance

#2 PREDICTOR OF A LOW STAR RATING

Masturbation

From a pandemic comes a sexual awakening

**Hope can be in short supply
during a pandemic 🦠**
**But, folks are holding onto the
promise of a sexier tomorrow...
they are inspired to speak up and
speak out for what they want 🗣️**

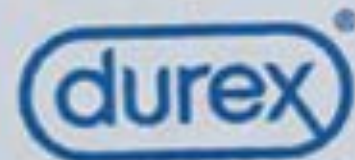


In fact, Covid has in many ways created **a “SEXUAL RESET”** for people...

While it certainly hasn't been sexual bliss for the masses, many are choosing to view this time as an opportunity - to look inward and examine their own needs and pleasure, to celebrate the increased access to their partners, and, most bravely, to find innovative and creative ways to maintain or experience intimacy during these times regardless of living situation

LET'S NOT GO BACK TO NORMAL

For too long normal just wasn't good enough.
Normal was making rubbish excuses
for not wearing a condom.
Normal was shaming women
for even carrying one.
Normal was one million needless STIs.
Every. Single. Day.
So, this is a call to arms, legs, bums
and private parts.
Let's not go back to normal.
The world has never been so ready for change.
So, let's all change it for the better.
For each other.
Sure, it's been pretty weird lately.
But, weirdly,
that's what makes 2020 really important.
So, when it's time to get back out on the streets
And jump back in the sheets.
Let's not go back to normal.
Let's have good sex.
Safe sex.
For everyone, forever.



Across the board, the biggest change for people's sexual lives moving forward is the increase in “discussing physical and sexual health with their sex partner(s)”

32% expect to do this more in the future

"Sex and intimacy overall has become especially comforting during this time. We've been more intimate and vulnerable with each other overall. It makes me feel safe and deeply connected to the person I love in a time when connection with the other people in my life is more difficult."

"I'm definitely more aware of how my partner is feeling, how he's coping with lockdown, and trying to communicate more, and part of that is through sex. Because I have more time to think about it I'm more likely to initiate sex, which I don't always do, and so we are having sex more often."

“Though I am alone now, I may be having a more open relationship to sex than ever before. I have time to explore my body without rushing or worrying, look up different resources, and be more forthright with people I am flirting with. Obviously I miss human touch so much and cannot wait to have real sex. I regret not having more sex before COVID and think this time will shift how I think about the role of sex in my life moving forward”

“I was feeling undesirable so i've checked in with myself and resumed self-care activities. I'm feeling like I'm in transition, and will likely get to a higher state after this.”

What does it mean for brands moving forward

This shifting relationship with sex points to a larger mindset reset that **brands will want to plan for.**

1. Greater openness to experimentation
2. Loosening of boundaries and norms in-home
3. Shift in the basis of relationship building
4. Greater willingness to trust
5. What is acceptable, potentially more entertaining and/or more effective in a virtual world vs. in-person





**What it means to
related industries
more specifically**

The desire to explore and experiment illuminates two categories that are going to see sustainable growth beyond the pandemic

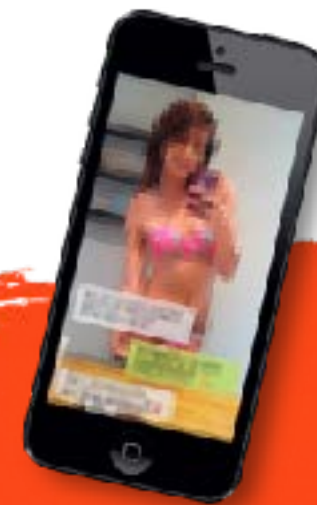


**Paid
PORN**



**SEX
TOYS**

One other behavior may be a positive shift in that people are more open... but, could be negative when it comes to teens



SEXTING



Paid PORN

While free porn use was fairly ubiquitous pre-COVID - and is unsurprisingly the ally that many sex-starved individuals are turning to as popular sites like Pornhub see massive spikes - it is paid porn that is more likely to see a sustained increase

Far fewer have ever engaged with paid porn (8%) vs. free porn (76%) - but those who rate their sex lives higher are almost twice as likely to pay for porn. Whether people are noticing a difference in quality or are becoming more 'woke' in terms of the ethical considerations around free porn, paid porn is showing signs of growth.

IMPLICATIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS:

This could signal growth opportunity on both sides of the paid spectrum - from premium, paid content creators with high production value tailored to specific tastes to amateur sites like OnlyFans, where anyone is just a few clicks away from becoming a paid star.

Sex Toys

Much of the sex toy industry has been geared to women for solitary use, with 72% of women claiming to use them solo and just 45% of men.

And while the pandemic may have put a hold on the ‘with others’ part for some people, experimentation with sex toys on your own may actually increase the overall industry, particularly when people can start using them with others!



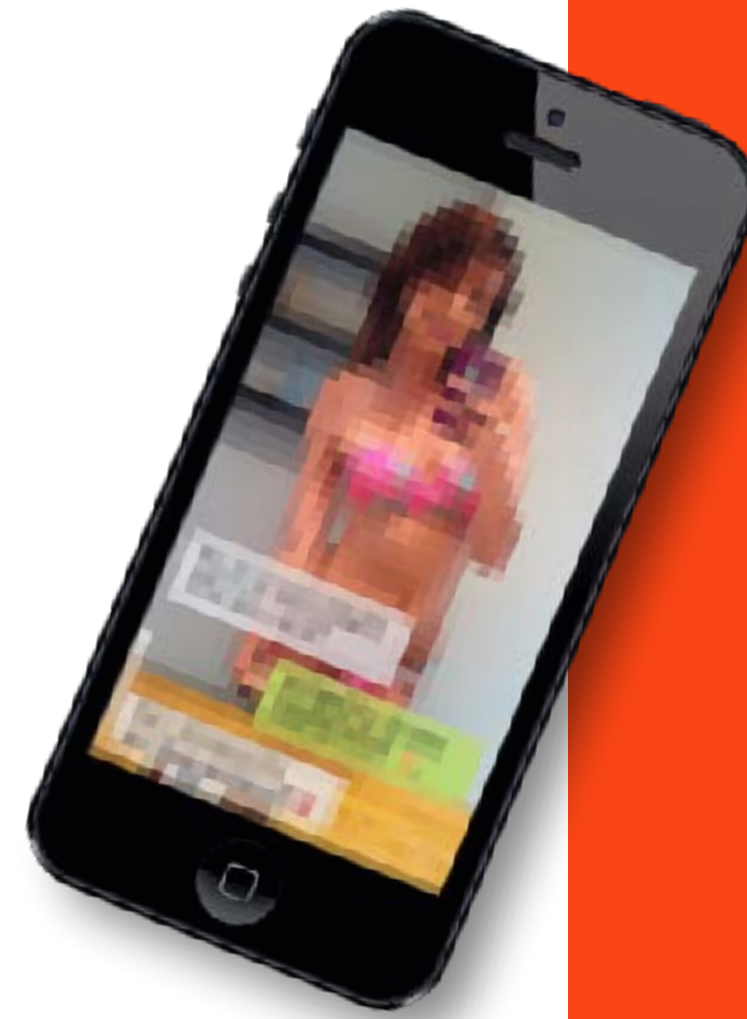
IMPLICATIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS:

While vibrators and other more solo-oriented toys aren't going anywhere, couple toys are likely to keep growing. And those that can innovate and expand to various tastes and orientations will likely win.

Sexting

Sexy texting and photo sharing is fairly common already, but is growing during shelter in place and expected to continue to grow post-pandemic.

30% of adults under 30 are sending more explicit photos/videos than they were 6 months ago. Women are a bit less likely to sext today but they show the greatest momentum for sending explicit images in the future.



IMPLICATIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS:

Just during the pandemic alone, dating apps/sites have popped up or are reorienting themselves to be used for people to connect with each other sexually and in a safe space...but multiple concerns persist. On the privacy side but also with the potential further normalization of this behavior among a younger and younger audience. While negative effects haven't been confirmed, it's still an area of debate.

THE
SOUND
Exploration. Strategy. Innovation.