

Tapu Conversations

Using Tivaevae to facilitate safe
conversations around sexual health and
wellbeing for Cook Island youth

Kyani Utia

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

07 May 2024

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07 May 2024

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Meitaki maata

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based research project looked at designing a culturally responsive and engaging resource for Cook Island adolescents. Eurocentric frameworks are currently dominating health and research concerning the development of Pacific peoples, where there is a lack of understanding of the cultural sensitivities of topics such as sex.

In addressing the culturally sensitive topic of sexual health and wellbeing, this practice-based research project explored communication design approaches to prompting safe, engaging, and culturally responsive conversations around sex with Cook Island youth. There was an opportunity to understand better where Pasifika¹ (specifically Cook Island) youth get their sexual health and wellbeing information and develop a designed resource incorporating this.

¹Pasifika - The term 'Pasifika' is widely used within Aotearoa, New Zealand and encapsulates the range of migrants of the Pacific region (Enari & Haua, 2021).

This research project adopted an Action Research and Tivaevae model approach. Pasifika sexual health and wellbeing researchers, Pasifika communication designers and Cook Island youth were included in this research to bring insight into first-hand experiences around specific challenges surrounding the issue. In conjunction, this research was also highly self-reflected and incorporated a wide range of experiences and interpretations to redefine taboos within sexual health and wellbeing and how conversations are navigated. This creative and reflective exploration informed a culturally responsive and engaging conversational 'game.' Embedded with Tivaevae, the game is an engaging way to safely talk about situations relating to sexual health and wellbeing and provides a visual representation of the conversations.

Creative and culturally driven methods were integral to the research around facilitating safe conversations that understand Pasifika and its values. The final design outcome suggests the incorporation of Tivaevae and Cook Island communication design has the potential to create a safe space for these difficult conversations among Cook Island youth.

POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER

I see immense potential in bringing Pasifika culture and practice into academic spaces and have seen its impact throughout my tertiary study. My Cook Island and Samoan heritage has always shown me the importance of sharing stories as a community – and the interesting and beautiful ways of telling them, whether it be orally, visually, or physically.

Both my parents were first-generation born and raised in Aotearoa. Their parents had come straight from the islands, and I grew up hearing stories about their struggles to balance traditional norms in the home with the ever-changing socio-norms of society around us. This has been passed down to my generation. I struggle to navigate the cultural ways that I live at home within the world around me, which is predominantly Western. This relates especially to the topic of sexual health and wellbeing. Conversations around ‘sex’ have always been taboo in my family – talking about sex casually was something you just didn’t do.

During my undergraduate studies, I worked on design projects that highlighted the importance of cultural stories within complex topics. In the final year of my undergraduate studies, I worked on a project surrounding cultural identity and the challenges that Māori and Pasifika youth continue to face. This project not only established my passion for working with a community but also the significant impact that design can have on complex wellbeing issues. Through this experience, I saw first-hand the impact that design and stories have on people and their lives, and this only made my passion for community-led work grow. Following this, my practice began to focus hugely on Cook Island artistic practices such as Tivaevae and what this entails. From witnessing my grandmother and her sisters stitch Tivaevae from scratch as a young girl to creating my own designs and building my skills and technique to design my own Tivaevae, it has become my cultural expression.

CONTEXUAL REVIEW



Sexual health and living in a sexualised society.

A sexualised society

Society is saturated with sexualised content through social media, the internet, and images everywhere (ref). This content is prevalent within society today; however, the impact that this has on individuals is significant (Bale, 2010). The term sexualised culture is used to describe this and establishes the dramatic shift of culture to a more sexually visible society, such as close-to-naked bodies (Attwood, 2007). Health practitioners have noticed the negative tension between adolescents' sexual health and the sexualised culture within society. Brown et al. (2006) talk about the impact of social media as a key influence on young people's sexuality and sexual behaviours (Brown et al., 2006). Papadopoulos (2010) states that exposure to this type of media encourages distorted views of sexuality among males and females and the objectification of women by young males. Consequently, this leads to false views of sex and unrealistic and unhealthy expectations of sex roles (Papadopoulos, 2010).

Defining sexual health and wellbeing

In looking at the sexualised culture that is seen within society today, it is important to consider the definitions of sexual health and wellbeing, as defining the terms provides context to the research. The definition of the term sexual health and wellbeing is evolving with the ever-changing nature of society. This evolution is influenced by social and political impacts and historical events. These include events such as the ongoing abortion and reproductive rights movements, the sexual revolution, the evolution of gay rights movements, and the drastic impact of HIV/AIDS on society all around the world (Edwards & Coleman, 2004). Edward and Coleman (2004) break down the importance of the following three parts when sexual health is considered.

"1. a capacity to enjoy and control sexual and reproductive behaviour by a social and personal ethic;

2. freedom from fear, shame, guilt, false beliefs, and other psychological factors inhibiting sexual response and impairing sexual relationship

3. freedom from organic disorders, diseases, and deficiencies that interfere with sexual and reproductive functions."
(Edward and Coleman, 2004, pg. 191).

Sexual health and well-being encompass not only the absence of disease and illness but also the positive aspects of sexuality (Mitchell et al., 2021). Lottes (2000) outlines that there is a difference between sexual health and sexual wellbeing, and these definitions continue to evolve. Sexual health is broad and complex and is often linked to the biological side of sex, such as safe sex and family planning (Lottes, n.d.). Sexual wellbeing means being able to have informed, pleasurable, and secure sexual experiences, which are founded on self-confidence, a positive attitude towards human sexuality, and mutual respect in relationships. The term sexual health and wellbeing encompasses these aspects, as they are difficult to look at in isolation (Lottes, 2000). This definition is a contrast from what is mentioned previously, surrounding the negative impacts of unhealthy sexual culture. It highlights the consequence of what society looks like without positive sexual health and wellbeing. This literature has shown the overwhelming presence of sexualised content on social media and the internet has affected individuals, causing a conflict between adolescent sexual health and the prevailing sexualised culture, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of sexual health and well-being in today's changing society.

Pasifika as a research focus

While this research project focused on Cook Island youth specifically, it was important to scope Pasifika communities due to their similarities. Current health and wellbeing interventions for Pasifika and Māori youth show a lack of understanding of cultural differences, and therefore there is a growing need for appropriate targeted approaches (Rojas & Gretton, 2007). There is a gap in how culturally responsive approaches are used in research that concerns Pasifika in New Zealand and how these impact the Pasifika people's engagement in health and wellbeing settings. Pasifika context

The term 'Pasifika' is widely used within New Zealand and encapsulates the range of migrants from the Pacific region (Enari & Haua, 2021). Pasifika make up eight per cent of the population in New Zealand. Although Pasifika is defined as migrants, more than 60 per cent are born in Aotearoa, New Zealand, with Cook Islanders, Niueans, and Tokelauans sharing dual citizenship (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d). By 2028, one in five of the population of Aotearoa, New Zealand, is expected to be Pasifika youth. This highlights the need for more focus on this group (Pasifika Proud, 2016). Ioane et al. (n.d) state that "the current and future health and wellbeing of Pasifika children and youth in Aotearoa, NZ, will have an impact on the overall wellbeing of society." Pasifika youth are overrepresented in violent crime statistics compared to other ethnic groups. This overrepresentation is also present in sexual offences and other related charges (Ioane, 2016). Lambie (2007) highlights that current health and wellbeing programs for Pasifika youth are Eurocentric and are often derived from the United States, which fails to consider the indigenous and contextual scope of New Zealand and its cultural aspects (Borduin et al., 1990).

Understanding Pasifika values

Ioane (2017, pg. 1) explains that "the Pasifika community in Aotearoa and abroad pride themselves on their relationships to their family, village and community." This is a crucial consideration when working with Pasifika communities, especially when health and wellbeing are involved, as there is more than just the clinical and practical sides of healthcare (Ioane, 2017). Pasifika communities are highly diverse; however, they share many similarities. One key link between the communities is their concept of relationships (Reynolds, 2016). Mo'a (2015) highlights that the Pasifika worldview is community and collective-focused, driven by the relationships formed between each of these aspects: community, family, and village, as well as the spiritual world (Mo'a, n.d.). The key values are reciprocity, respect, humility, and love. These values act as a foundation for the theoretical construct known commonly as Vā. Wendt (1999) identifies the term Vā as the betweenness of space - not the empty space - but rather the relation of space. This means the relationships between the different things, individuals, or entities within the space (Wendt, 1999). This construct is derived from spiritual underpinnings and is the foundation of Pasifika relationships, especially within families (Tuagalu, 2008). Aspects of the concept of Vā ensure boundaries and protocols are adhered to. This relates to my research as it looks at the vā that is created in Pasifika communities.

Sexual health and taboo within the Pasifika context

Defining Taboo

The definition of the term taboo from a Western perspective continues to be an umbrella term that can be described as the restriction and avoidance of action, communication, or language and may be informed by the cultural and religious contexts that it is surrounded by (Krajewski, & Schröder, 2008). In other words, social norms and values are dependent on a particular community and how they might function (Keller et al., 2021a). Examples of topics that are commonly known for being taboo are religion, politics, sex, and death. What makes these topics taboo is not the concepts themselves but, more so, the impact they may have on a particular community (Schroder, 1999). Keller et al. (2021) also state that “taboo is also intensely connected with shame, which is at the basis of the strong connection between taboos and the fields of sex, death and religion” (Keller et al., 2021b, p. 11).

“Taboo’ was one of the first Polynesian words to be assimilated into the English language” (Gilmore et al., 2013, p. 4). Khairullina et al. (2020) states that the word taboo is derived from the word Tapu and is used heavily across Polynesia (Khairullina et al., 2020), Melanesia and New Zealand (Gilmore et al., 2013). The term ‘taboo’, or more so what it stands for, can also be found across multiple places, expanding to China, North America, Egypt, and India.

These places identified this term as sacred prohibitions (Khairullina et al., 2020). Calder (1996) describes how colonial European perspectives of the term that was once Tapu had shifted significantly to Taboo. Western understandings of the term have not always aligned with its original meaning and have drawn from Christianity and other colonial influences (Calder, 1996). Tapu and its indigenous definition signifies the spiritual prohibitions or boundaries that act as protection from many contexts (Mikaere, n.d.). It is shown in the literature that the Western perspective of this term fails to acknowledge the ‘sacred’ aspect of this term and, over time, has developed a rather negative connotation within society today (Gilmore et al., 2013). The history and comparison of the terms taboo and tapu establish the influence of Western and colonial perspectives on indigenous understandings. This research project used the term tapu by its Pasifika definition and explores how this concept is navigated today in terms of sexual health and wellbeing when Pasifika youth are considered.

Sexual health and wellbeing in a Pasifika context

Sexual health and wellbeing are sensitive and sacred topics of conversation within most Pasifika homes in New Zealand. There is a divide between what is learnt within the home setting and what Pasifika are exposed to outside the home (Cammock et al., 2022). Public health information in Aotearoa, New Zealand, is dominated by Western perspectives and often fails to acknowledge the cultural knowledge and belief systems of Pasifika (Garland-Levett, 2017). Sexual health is seen as a Tapu² topic for Pasifika, which means there is often a lack of conversation about this in the home environment between family members. Naz (2014) states that “this is particularly the case for intergenerational discourse between parents and children” (2014, p. 679). A commonality between most Pasifika homes around sexual health for youth is the expectation of abstinence from sex before marriage. When this topic is raised within the home, it suggests that youth are having premarital sex (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2016a). This is immensely frowned upon due to cultural and religious beliefs that may differ between each household, as the act of sex is connected with bringing life into the world (Cammock et al., 2022). Cammock et al. explain that “women expressed that these assumptions would have negative repercussions, such as getting ‘kicked out’ of the house or the imposition on freedom” (Cammock et al., 2022, pg. 9).

² Tapu within the Cook Island language and culture means sacred (Te Ava & Page, 2020a)

The negative impact that this has had on youth has resulted in many young Pasifika feeling abandoned, rejected, or fearful of losing parents or family. Another key insight from this study was the fact that participating in sexual activities “highlighted a disconnect between women’s desire to engage with their family members in family planning communication and fears of not living up to parent’s expectations concerning sexual behaviour” (Cammock et al., 2022, pg. 10). To some extent, these views and perspectives surrounding sex are also influenced by Christianity (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016). Sundaram & Sauntson (2016) highlight that there is also a pressing need for more diverse sex education than what is currently heavily informed by Christianity (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016).

Cook Island Tivaevae as an artistic practice

Tivaevae (also spelt as Tivaivai) (Figure 1) are brightly coloured, stylistically handstitched Cook Island quilts or appliques. Cook Island women (and some men) (Horan, 2012) have made Tivaevae for centuries, and it has become a unique and distinct part of the Cook Island identity. They are presented at various ceremonial events such as milestone birthdays, funerals, and weddings. A significant part of Tivaevae is that they are passed down through generations and are traditionally not bought or sold (Herda, 2011). It is commonly known that Tivaevae was introduced by Christian missionaries in the 1800s (Horan, 2012); however, Cook Island women have made it their own, as it is seen today (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019). Before the missionaries, the Tivaevae consisted of patterns on bark cloth and indigenous fibres (Horan, 2012), and overtime were traditionally passed down through generations. However, the art and practice of making Tivaevae is slowly being lost today (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019).

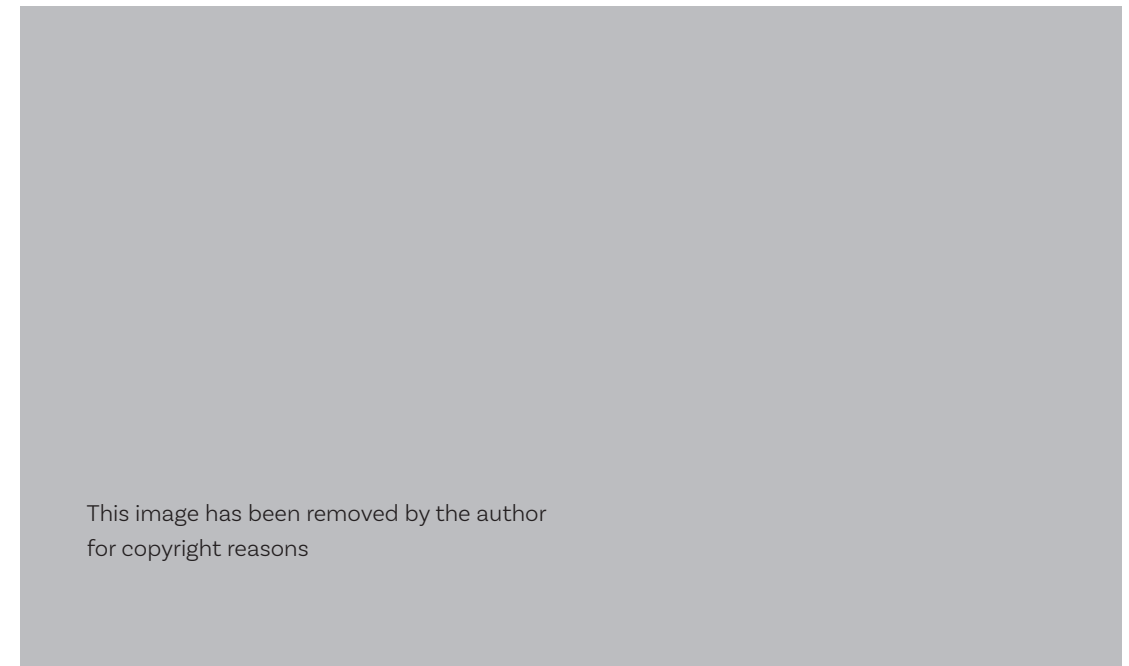


Figure 1. Two women holding Tivaevae (Tataura style). (n.d.). Tivaevae Collectables. Retrieved from <https://tivaevaecollectables.com/history>

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Figure 2. Teura, V. (1997). Tivaevae manu (applique quilt) [Embroidery and sewing on cloth]. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, New Zealand. Retrieved from <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/274048>

Figure 3. Right. O'Neill, A. (1994). Tivaevae (For A Bottled Ocean) [Towling, thread, dowl]. Starkwhite, Auckland, New Zealand. Retrieved from <https://ocula.com/art-galleries/starkwhite/artworks/ani-o-neill/tivaevae-for-a-bottled-ocean/>

There are four types of Tivaevae: Tivaevae Tataura (applique and embroidery), Tivaevae Taorei (piecework/patchwork), Tivaevae Manu (one whole piece is sewn on) (Figure 2), and Tivaevae Tuitui Tataura (joined embroidered squares of fabric) (Figure 3) (Te Ava & Page, 2020). The making of Tivaevae takes immense skill and technique that is usually learnt through guidance from parents, grandparents, or aunts (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019). The Tivaevae within the parameters of this research project looked at exploring the traditional practice and process of making Tivaevae. This also looked at how it represented the implementation of cultural knowledge and values into complex issues that are currently dominated by Western ideals and worldviews. The concept of how Tivaevae builds relationships with youth (intergenerational relationships such as mother and daughter) is used to inform how the research focuses on Cook Island youth.

Pasifika adolescence and sexual health and wellbeing

Pasifika youth in Aotearoa, New Zealand, experience poor sexual health outcomes (Cammock, Pousini, et al., 2023). Pasifika youth are impacted by a heightened exposure to social media, violence, abuse and pornography today (Clark et al., 2013). Adolescence is described as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. This not only refers to biological growth but also when significant shifts occur in their social roles within society, both of which are ever-changing (Sawyer et al., 2018). In other words, adolescence can be described as the time in youths' lives when they are seeking to achieve independence. Christie and Viner (2005) liken it to the tension between independence and dependence (whether this be concerning their parents, caregivers, peers, or the community). The specific time at which young people experience adolescence is dependent on the different social and cultural environments that they may be surrounded by (Christie & Viner, 2005a).

A significant notion to consider is how young people begin to redefine themselves and their relation to others. During this period, young people will generally feel that other adults, parental figures, or youth their age may not authentically understand how young people feel or experience things (Christie & Viner, 2005a). With this, some of the challenges that young people face during adolescence include navigating sexuality, experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and sex, taking responsibility for themselves and others, education, developing relationships, and renegotiating rules at home. Due to adolescents being more susceptible to content, the concern for them being exposed to unhealthy behaviours around sexuality, drugs, alcohol, and sex is more significant (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2016). Therefore, there is an opportunity to address this issue at what is a critical developmental time for youth.

An opportunity for design to support better engagement with youth around complex health and wellbeing issues.

Design in healthcare

Design, such as communication, product and architecture, are common domains found within healthcare (Tseklevs & Cooper, 2017). Chamberlain et.al (2015) emphasise that there has been a growth in the use of design and design-focused research for health or health issues (Chamberlain et al., 2015). Most healthcare systems and services focus significantly on the illness as opposed to the optimising of health, and how this is apparent with more vulnerable groups (White, 2015). On the other hand, design within healthcare is an ever-evolving practice that has grown interested in its potential to address some of these challenges within how health services and information are delivered (Chamberlain et al., 2015). Buchanan (1992) states that there is a need for the use of creativity to address complex issues (Buchanan, 1992). There is a need to ensure that care (and how it is communicated) is adapted to meet the various requirements of an aging population within a health system facing growing demands (Chamberlain & Partridge, 2017).

Pasifika youth and healthcare approaches

Young people's skills, capabilities, understanding, and maturity are often overlooked and negatively defined in research regarding healthcare that concerns them (Carter, 2009). It is difficult to navigate and accurately represent the complexities and challenges that young people face. Therefore, there is a growing need to include youth directly in the decisions and research process concerning their own healthcare (Hutton, 2005). Likewise, Western frameworks often dominate the healthcare space, but there is an opportunity for more tailored Pacific-centred approaches to address the unique challenges and health issues that affect Pasifika people (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2016b).

“Current understandings of Pacific youth sexual and reproductive experiences are limited and efforts to deliver culturally appropriate sexuality education are made difficult by lack of resources and cultural sensitivities and taboos.”
(Cammock, Pousini, et al., 2023, p. 1).

This establishes an opportunity for change in how difficult conversations are approached when Pasifika youth are concerned. With the divide in cultural understandings, effective outcomes around sexual health and well-being for Pasifika in Aotearoa, New Zealand, are limited. Furthermore, there is potential for a shift in how conversations are approached. Chamberlain and Craig (2013) state that design artefacts can prompt conversation. This allows users to freely apply their creativity and strategy to understanding ideas (Chamberlain & Craig, 2013). Marshall et al. (2014) establish how physical objects can help to verbalise difficult conversations by prompting memories, everyday experiences, and feelings, where a shared understanding and a sense of relating to one another are also created (Marshall et al., 2014).

Te Ava & Page (2018) carried out a study around how the Tivaevae practice is used within education settings when working with Cook Island youth. Their study found that the Tivaevae within the research surrounding education settings represented the concept of a community coming together to help each other and grow (Te Ava & Page, 2020b). Due to the difficulties around having tricky conversations around sexual health and wellbeing, there is an opportunity to potentially use Tivaevae as the cultural approach to engage youth in meaningful conversations about how we might address these issues around sexual health and wellbeing taboos.



THE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Poor sexual health and wellbeing outcomes for Pasifika youth are due to social and cultural barriers (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2016a). Communication surrounding sexual health and wellbeing is made difficult due to traditional and Christian values and morals, family responsibility and cultural taboos (Cammock, Lovell, et al., 2023). There is an ever-pressing need for a better understanding of cultural taboos and how this impacts Pasifika youth in Aotearoa, New Zealand. An audit into the current landscape of information suggests limited resources and academic literature are available, that are specific to Cook Islanders and provide meaningful, relatable and useful information around navigating the taboos of sexual health and wellbeing from the perspective of a young person.

There is a strength to cultural values and norms that are heavily centred around the idea of respecting relationships and talking about certain taboo topics would mean a breach of this respect. However, this raised the question as to what extent youth may go to maintain the silence and consequently, what this means for them as they go on to navigate issues in the future (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2018). There is an opportunity to, therefore, explore how design might be used to navigate difficult and sensitive conversations for Cook Island youth in ways that acknowledge their different cultural barriers and understandings. Using communication design as a vehicle to help communicate messages that resonate with Cook Island youth, there was also an opportunity to explore what a modern take on Cook Island communication design might look like.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How might design be used to support safe and culturally responsive conversations around sexual health and wellbeing for Cook Island adolescents?

RESEARCH PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Engage with experts (a sexual health and wellbeing expert who has worked with Pasifika youth and designers of health and social impact-related projects) to identify important considerations when designing a Pasifika-youth-focused resource surrounding sexual health and wellbeing taboo.
- Explore insights from Cook Island youth and their experiences with sexual health and wellbeing taboos to design a resource intended for Pasifika youth-focused services or programmes.
- Examine how the cultural practice of Tivaevae can be used as a parameter to facilitate safe conversations around sexual health and wellbeing.
- Explore and develop Cook Island communication design and visual identity that can connect with Cook Island youth.

METHODOLOGY



RESEARCH JOURNEY ROADMAP

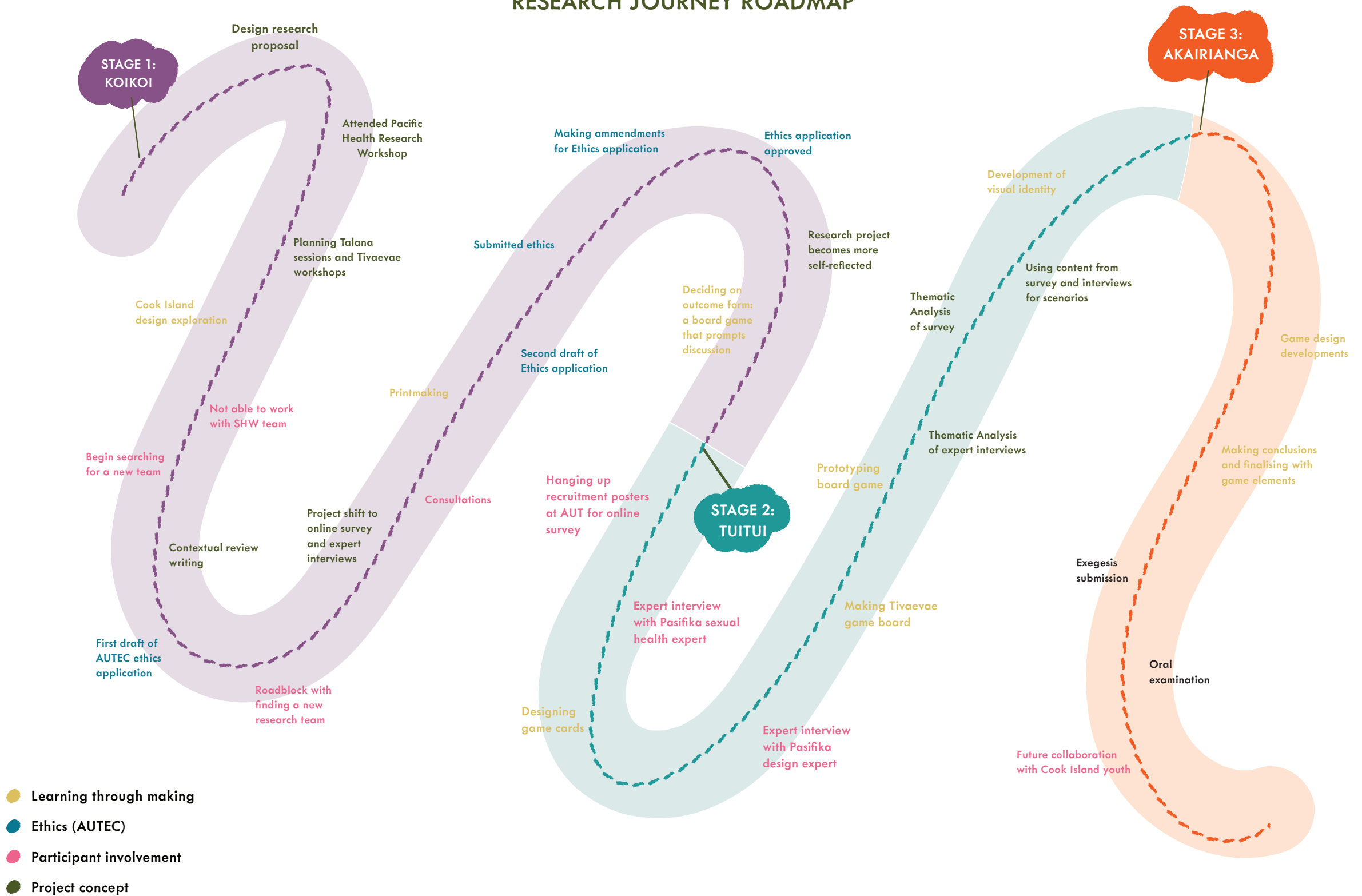


Figure 4. Research Journey Map - underpinned with Tivaevae model and AR

Action research

This research project used an Action Research (AR) methodology, focussed on acting through participation, involvement, and partnership that works towards a positive outcome or solution (Streck, 2023). AR continues to have multiple definitions that are due to its broad nature. This methodology looks at the use of self-reflective inquiry within a social and community context to improve, firstly, social or educational practices and the understanding of these practices (Altrichter et al., 2002). AR (more specifically within this research project) places the community at its forefront, whereby the community themselves may provide knowledge on solutions that they are familiar with (Flynn et al., 1994). Altrichter et al. (2002) highlight that AR is not the enquiry on people but rather the research with people (Altrichter et al., 2002). With the community and culturally-oriented nature of this research project, my role as a researcher with AR involved establishing relationships with both sexual health and wellbeing experts, Cook Island youth, and my own experiences to create a designed outcome. The 'action' of this research looked at the implementation of these insights to create a resource that targets the gap in culturally responsive knowledge around taboo conversations around sexual health and wellbeing.

AR consists of practice, reflection, theory and action (Baldwin, 2012). The iterative creative process of AR follows the structure of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Figure 5) (Altrichter et al., 2002). I used this process as a way to maintain a continuous cycle of reflection and action. This involved a combination of intuitive and community-informed decision-making. Within the context of art and design and working with communities, this research approach allows for both knowledge collected from data and knowledge collected from creating to work simultaneously (Lin, 2019). I weaved this into my practice by drawing from the community, experts, and my own experiences, exploring these insights through practice and reflecting upon the learnings that practice establishes.

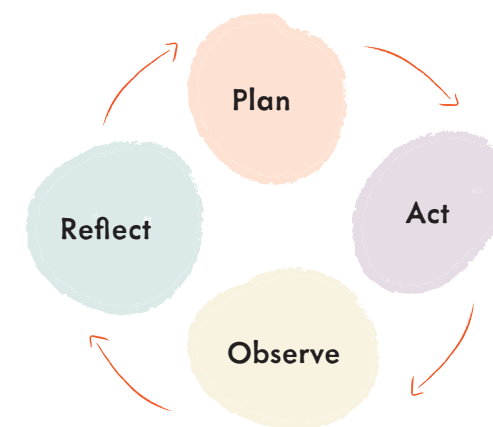


Figure 5. Action Research cycle. Adapted from Altrichter et al. (2002).

Tivaevae as a research framework

The Tivaevae model is the framework employed within this research project that embeds Cook Island cultural values. This model is used not only as a metaphor for its artistic practice but also as a guided approach to collaboration that forefronts Pasifika (Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges, 2019). In the Cook Island culture, the Tivaevae symbolises aroa (love) and tu akangateitei (respect) (Te Ava & Page, 2020). Using the Tivaevae as a research model focuses on the values of the people of Cook Island, as seen in the success of other indigenous methods (Wilson, 2001). The model is usually employed to implement the key components of Tivaevae, such as community, creativity, tradition, culture, and intergenerational relationships, into research (Te Ava & Page, 2020). The Tivaevae model is employed in research concerning Cook Islanders and Pasifika and guides research in culturally responsive ways (Te Ava & Page, 2020a).

Koikoi

As demonstrated in Te Ava & Page (2020), there are three stages of the framework that underpinned this research project. The first stage is Koikoi, which is the planning of the research and mirrors the process of the Tivaevae practice when the design of the Tivaevae is discussed and planned. This entails the making and gathering of patterns that will be needed for the stitching part of the process. The Koikoi process requires the gathering of knowledge, planning and the collating of materials with the intention of creating a story for the Tivaevae/research. This stage is significant as it allows Cook Islanders to develop their unique understanding of the world and its surrounding knowledge (Te Ava & Page, 2020). Te Ava & Page emphasise that “They [Cook Islanders], in effect, bring their own knowledge and investigate how the ‘patterns’ fit together and then are evaluated for success.” (Te Ava & Page, 2020a, p. 72). The key patterns or knowledge that were gathered within this research project were a literature review of definitions of sexual health and wellbeing within a Pasifika and Cook Island context and definitions of taboo, as well as an investigation of existing Cook Island design and art.

Tuitui

Stage two is Tuitui, which involves making connections from the previous stage to begin developing the research. This is the part of the Tivaevae process that consists of stitching the patterns onto the blank canvas. An essential element of the Tivaevae model involves establishing connections. When Cook Islanders gather during Tuitui to create Tivaevae, they develop relationships with one another. Within the research, this process is represented by the exploration and understanding of connections that begin piecing together to shape the research (Te Ava & Page, 2020). The key connections made within this research project were the insights from the expert interviews and survey surrounding the redefining of taboo and the exploration of Cook Island design aspects.

Akairianga

The last stage of the model is Akairianga, which is the research evaluation. This part of the Tivaevae-making process entails reflecting on the finalised Tivaevae and then preparing it to be gifted (Te Ava & Page, 2020). The evaluation that took place within this research was the redefining of taboo, the conversational game as a response to this notion and the reflections on how the outcome and research can be implemented in Cook Island communities in the future.

Overall, the use of Tivaevae within research is known to be widely accepted among Cook Island communities due to its validity. The alignment of this process with research acts as a culturally responsive approach that champions Cook Island values and understanding (Te Ava & Page, 2020). The Tivaevae tells a story through the stitching of pieces and designs (Te Ava et al., 2011). Further, this research project explored new and existing knowledge that acted as the pieces that came together to create a story surrounding sexual health and wellbeing challenges for Cook Island youth.

TIVAEVAE MODEL

STAGE 1: KOIKOI
PLAN THE DESIGN

STAGE 2: TUITUI
STITCHING TOGETHER

STAGE 3: AKAIRIANGA
EVALUATION AND GIFTING

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

MIND MAPPING

SKETCHING

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

ONLINE ANONYMOUS SURVEY

PROTOTYPING

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

JUL

AUG

SEPT

OCT

NOV

DEC

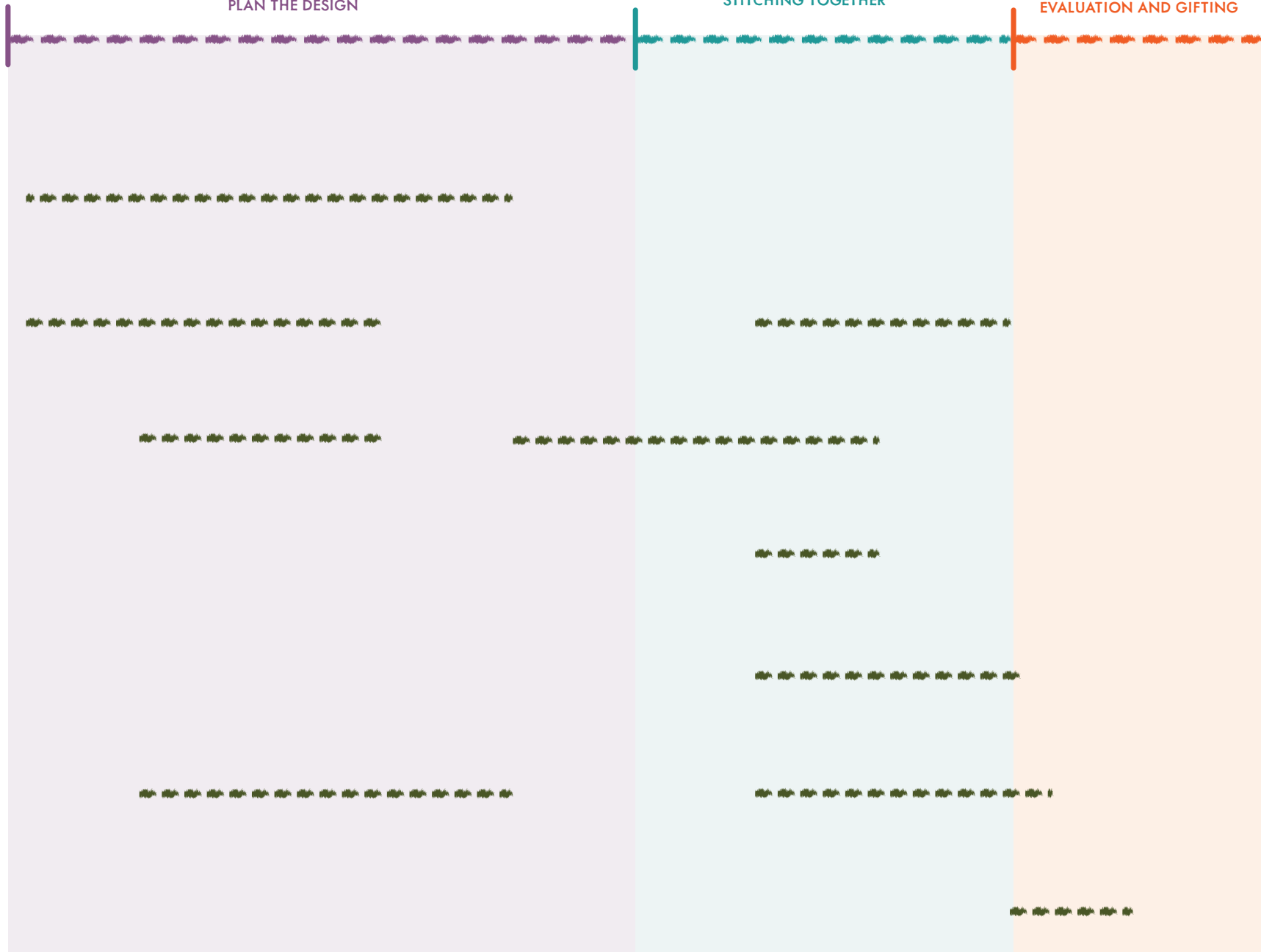
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Methods

Contextual Review

A contextual review was key to mapping the scope of existing research as well as the contexts that surround my research area (Gray and Malins, 2004). This method allowed for the use of existing knowledge and literature to identify gaps where knowledge is limited as well as research opportunities (Gray and Malins, 2004). Google Scholar and the AUT (Auckland University of Technology) Library were the main sources of literature in this research. The key topics were sexual health and wellbeing, Pasifika within a health context, Cook Island worldview and Tivaevae, youth engagement, design communication, and Pasifika design and ways of making. This method was a benefit to this research project as it brought attention to specific areas surrounding the broad topic of sexual health and culture.

The contextual knowledge required for this research project was first based on defining several terms, such as sexual health and taboo, within the Pasifika context. In addition, I investigated existing resources or approaches used specifically for the sexual health and wellbeing of Pasifika youth. My practice and expertise sat within communication design; therefore, it was important to scope areas such as sexual health and wellbeing and working with Pasifika youth which are unfamiliar knowledge. Although I know and have lived experiences surrounding Pasifika culture, it was also beneficial to my research project to scope the contextual knowledge where I was able to identify aspects that I was not aware of beforehand. This meant the content used within the research considered different perspectives and expertise to ensure a well-informed research project and design outcome. Consultations with sexual health and wellbeing experts and cultural advisors also played a part in contextualising the research and contributing to first-hand knowledge.

Expert interview

Expert interviews were used to better understand the scope of contextual knowledge by collaborating with people who have valuable experience and knowledge in areas that the researcher does not have as a designer and would be otherwise difficult to obtain through secondary research like a contextual review (Ku & Lupton, 2020). Experts were identified and contacted through information available in the public domain and through the supervisors' professional networks. A participant information sheet was sent out with the email to each expert (see Appendix 1) Two expert interviews were carried out, one with a Pasifika sexual health and wellbeing expert and a Pasifika communication designer with experience in sexual health campaigns. Each expert was interviewed and asked questions based on their role and the work they are involved with (see Appendix 2 for interview questions for the sexual health and wellbeing expert and Appendix 3 for communication design expert). The questions for the Pasifika sexual health and wellbeing expert were generally around their experiences with working with Pasifika surrounding sexual health and wellbeing and taboo, while the questions for the Pasifika communication designer were centred around their design process and considerations for Pasifika-focused campaigns from a cultural perspective. Interviews were conducted both in person and via Zoom call and were audio recorded with permission.

Interviewees were able to choose whether to answer a question/prompt or not. The identity of the participants was anonymous to the researcher and the researcher, their name, and what they communicated during the interview. The interviewees' privacy was protected throughout the research, and their names/identities were kept confidential in research documentation and writing. The interviewees had the option to opt out of the research at any time before or during the interview without any negative consequences. The participant was aware that if they withdrew from the study, their data would be destroyed unless it had already been analysed, in which case it was no longer possible to separate or remove it from the findings.

Online anonymous survey

A survey is a series of questions for individuals that are used to collect information about a particular topic. This method is commonly used within qualitative research data collection surrounding social and marketing research. Its value is in its ability to collect many responses to scope a wide range of information. When created appropriately, the survey can be a crucial method for collating statements about specific groups (Roopa & Rani, 2012). An online anonymous survey was used to help shape the content and format of the design resource to make it relevant and useful to the target audience. The objective was for the experiences and insights of Cook Island youth navigating the sensitivities of sexual health and wellbeing to be collected to inform the design outcome.

The survey was aimed at Cook Island youth aged between 17 – 21 years as this was the age group that represented the transition from high school to university (year 12 – third year of university). Posters were placed around all AUT campuses (around AUT Campus and Vā Pasifika on all campuses) as these were the locations that were identified by AUT staff where students of this age group are situated (away from university work). Due to anonymity, the participant information sheet was not sent out individually but appeared on the first page of the survey (see Appendix 4) The survey asked participants about their interpretation of the term taboo and how this has impacted how sexual health and wellbeing are navigated (see Appendix 5 for survey questions). The survey provided insight into the places youth feel most comfortable retrieving information about sexual health and wellbeing and how taboo and cultural customs have influenced this.

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is the visual representation of complex ideas or concepts and their connections with each other. There are very few rules when it comes to mind mapping, where points/ideas are associated with a main theme (Crowe & Sheppard, 2012). Crowe and Sheppard (2012) state that it is due to the lack of rules that allows for a more creative way to synthesise complex data visually (Crowe & Sheppard, 2012). Working with the plethora of information in multiple forms (written texts, visuals, drawings, images, conversations, etc.), I used mind mapping, a way to promptly layout keywords and themes visually that can then be expanded on. As a designer, this was an essential part of my design process and how I conceptualised the ideas in my research so that I could identify key concepts. Mind mapping was also the starting point for further developments and refining of design motifs and patterns.

Sketching

There has been an ever-growing appreciation for visual research when social aspects are involved in the research (Heath et al., 2018). Sketching was also employed to visualise my ideas (Ku & Lupton, 2020). As a designer, sketching and drawing was a crucial part of my iterative design process that allowed me to promptly sketch and scribble ideas of Cook Island patterns and design. My creative approach began with rough and vague sketches, then gradual development and the addition of details. Most sketches were loose outlines and shaded iterations of design motifs that were detailed enough to gauge the intent or concept of the drawings (Figure 6). This process also meant that designs could be made faster so that more time could be spent on refining and development.

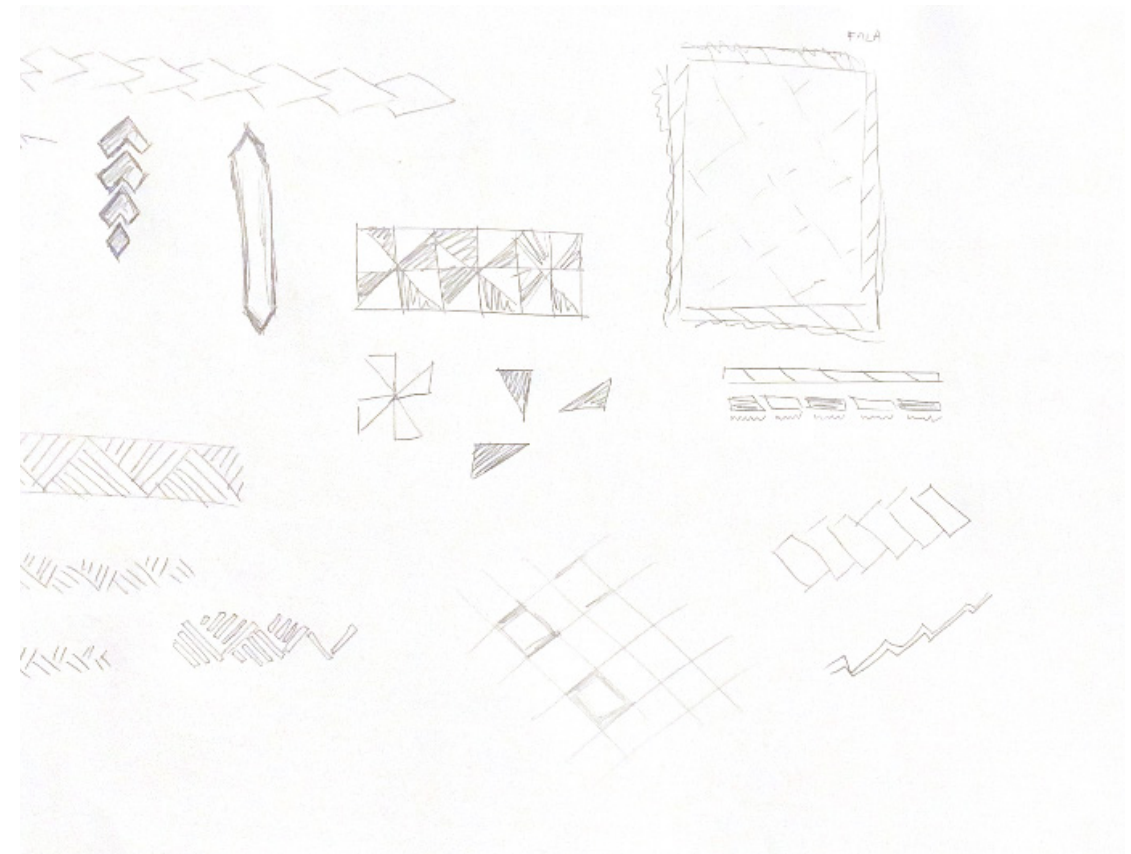


Figure 6. Sketching with pencil on paper of Cook Island and other Pasifika patterns.

Prototyping

A prototype is an early model or representation of a concept or final design before it goes into full production (Camburn et al., 2017). The benefit of prototyping is that it involves the making of fast mock-ups that can be tested or critiqued for what may or may not be working in terms of the design's intention (Coutts et al., 2019). There are multiple objectives to prototyping some of which are: refinement, communication, exploration and active learning (Camburn et al., 2017). Active learning and refinement were the two main objectives used within this research project when prototyping. Active learning looks at the gaining of knowledge through doing, and because of this, tacit knowledge is built (Telenko et al., 2016). Refinement refers to the small and gradual changes that contribute to the improvement of the design (Gordon & Bieman, 1995).



Figure 7. Laying out printed prototype developments of scenario cards for design critique session.

I used prototyping in my design practice to rapidly test a physical object, artefact, or design with the intended user or peers. I designed prototypes of the scenario cards (Figure 7) using both Adobe Illustrator (when working with illustrations and design assets) and Adobe InDesign (when formatting the cards). I designed with the intention of testing the designs and patterns I had already created with particular forms, and in this case, it was card deck form. This entailed considering more than the look and design of the cards but also how this would work as a whole card deck, printing, tangibility and physicality. I looked into the common dimensions of existing card decks. The initial stages of card prototyping consisted of using paper and then moving into more quality card stock as designs were developed. Prototypes were tested with peers during design critiques. The critique intended to gain insight into the practicality of the cards and what designs were more engaging.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method used widely to analyse qualitative data and usually, but is not limited to, identifying themes within this data (Terry et al., 2023). This method was a key part of this research project as it was a way to synthesise the plethora of data received throughout the research. The objective of this research project is to find solutions or gaps, through the community themselves, to then design better approaches. The data that was analysed was not limited to what was collected from expert interviews and online anonymous surveys but also feedback from design critique sessions with peers. Thematic Analysis was a systematic way to bring the information together to identify key information for the prototyping and reflection part of the research and design process.

DOCUMENTATION OF RESEARCH



STAGE 1

KOIKOI:

PLAN THE DESIGN

“The sisters sit together and plan what their next Tivaevae would look like. Drawing from the flowers and plants in their backyard they begin sketching out a design on some tracing paper. What colour? What shapes? What style? Who is this Tivaevae for?”

Scoping the Project: Pasifika research within health

My master’s project began with a meeting with a public health academic at AUT. Their work focused on sexual and reproductive health for Pasifika in Aotearoa and the sensitivities and taboos surrounding this area of health in Pasifika homes. The study found a need for more holistic approaches to understanding the perspectives of Pasifika in family planning³. This research interested me as it offered the chance to work with people with expertise surrounding sexual health and Pasifika communities. As a researcher and designer, this was an opportunity for me to make an impact and a possibility for implementation through organisations and the Pasifika community. There was also potential to join an existing project and experts to work alongside and could support participant recruitment later in the research (such as insights from the community, interviews, focus groups, etc.).

In May 2023, I attended a Pacific Health and Research Design workshop (Figure 8) that focused on how research within the health field is facilitated within Pasifika communities. The workshop briefly explored the health system and its current impact on Pasifika living in Aotearoa, New Zealand. It also highlighted the need for researchers and clinicians to better understand Pasifika communities’ perspectives so that the work that is done benefits these communities appropriately and authentically.

³ Family planning: the services individuals will access to achieve the desired number of children, if any, and the spacing between each child. This means the consideration of contraceptive methods (oral hormonal contraceptives or barrier methods) and infertility methods (World Health Organisation, 2022).

This workshop explored different Pasifika frameworks and methodologies that are often used in research concerning Pasifika communities, such as the Kakala model (Tongan), Fonofale model (Samoan), Tivaevae model (Cook Island) and the Talanoa methodology (Fijian, Samoan and Tongan). This workshop was relevant to my research as it demonstrated and looked deeper into the wide range of Pacific methodologies, frameworks, and models. on worldview and how particular paradigms (and in this case, pacific paradigms) inform practice, projects and/or research. The content of this workshop was relevant not only to my research project but also to my practice as a designer/researcher when communities and diverse groups are involved. The workshop gave insight into the Pasifika research that exists today and highlighted an opportunity for further research for Pasifika communities, especially surrounding health and wellbeing.

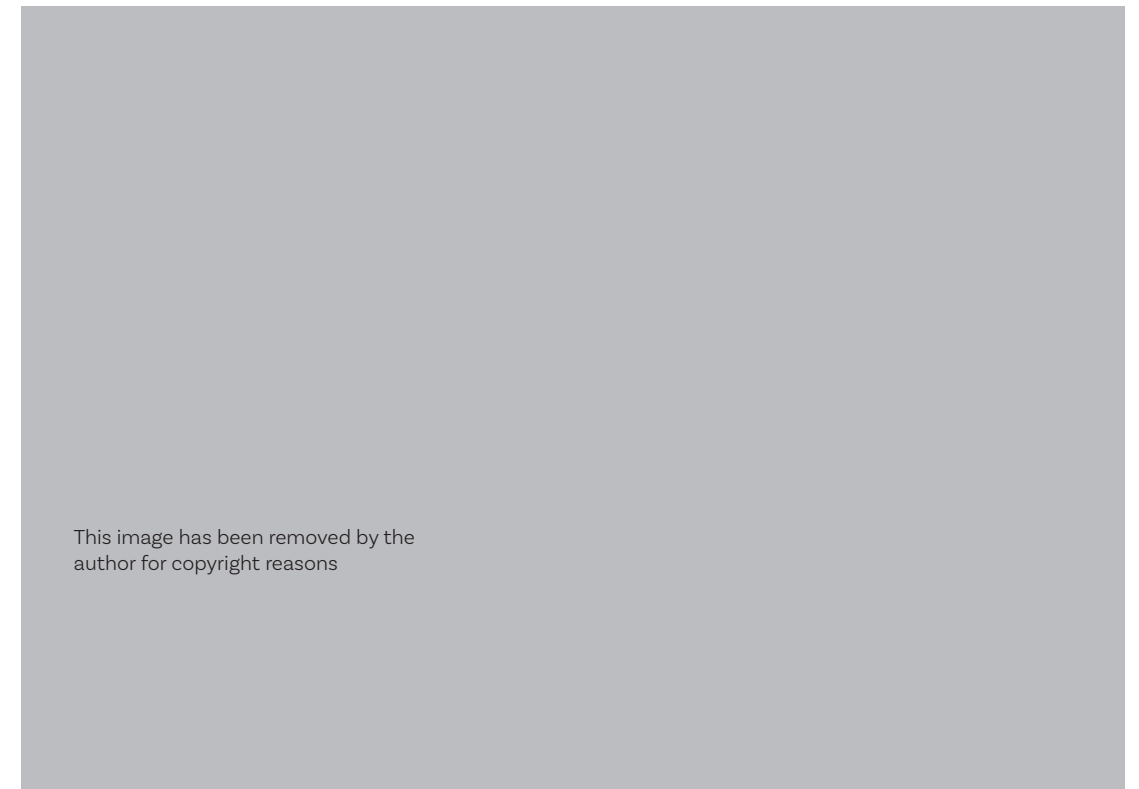


Figure 8. Pacific Health Research workshop

Conceptualising the research project

Following the Pasifika research workshop, I had another consultation with the Pacific health academic surrounding the conceptualising of my research project and what this could look like moving forward. Their existing project looks at working with Pasifika high school students on sexual health and wellbeing. Sexual health and wellbeing as a topic are taboo for Pasifika families in Aotearoa, and these are a result of cultural and occasionally religious beliefs (Cammock, Lovell, et al., 2023). We discussed the possibilities of the research and working with high school students for my research, with a focus on how my design practice can be used as an approach to improve the way youth might engage with the complex topic of sexual health.

When hearing about this research project, I was drawn to it instantly, firstly due to the complex concepts that it could explore, but also how it would be interesting to use my design practice alongside a cultural lens. At this stage of the process, I wanted to focus on Cook Island youth as well as Cook Island design, as this is not as prominent today as most other Pasifika cultures. I believe that this was an interesting research objective. While collating the knowledge from the contextual review, consultation and workshop, I formulated a research project concept that looked at working with Cook Island high school students around the complexities of sexual health and wellbeing whilst exploring Cook Island design and visual identity for the research. The next steps of my research project were to continue gathering contextual knowledge from journal articles and other scholarly work, with more focus on what I was looking for.

Initial plan for data collection and ethics application

I began planning out what my data collection might entail when working with Cook Island youth through the research team (Figure 9). The focus of this research was to better understand Cook Island youth's experiences around sexual health and well-being and how these insights might inform different approaches or resources. I divided the research data collection into two parts - Talanoa sessions and co-design workshops (to be informed by Tivaevae). The Talanoa sessions⁴ were to be used as a method for facilitating focus group discussions with young Cook Islanders about sexual health and wellbeing, where they can share their stories and experiences. The intention was to create an informal environment for discussions. These sessions were to act as the foundation for qualitative data collection throughout the research project and be a key touch point of engagement with my participants. I considered how I might be seen as an outsider, especially with a topic such as sexual health within a Pasifika context. Therefore, I looked at how I might demonstrate respect and reciprocity by sharing my own experiences.

⁴Talanoa discussions – used commonly among Tongan, Fijian, Samoan and Niuean cultures – is a Pacific way of communicating and used often as a framework for facilitating open and fluid discussion about a range of topics. The essential values that drive Talanoa are respect and reciprocity (Cammock et al., 2021)

MASTERS PROJECT TALANOVA/WORKSHOPS OUTLINE (DRAFT)

Discuss, share, stories	Design, prototype, feedback		
TALANOVA SESSION	CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP	CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP	
Session One	Session Two	Session Three	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro to the project • Icebreakers/get to know • Outline of what will be covered • "Shifting Perspectives" or scenario discussions • Talanoa discussion • Reflection/closing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreakers • Outline of what will be covered • Share session with Tivaevae making • Mapping ideas (design/approaches/toolkits) • Reflection/closing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreakers • Outline of what will be covered • Prototype discussion (feedback from what I've made) • Prototype session (making/developments) • Reflection/closing 	
<p>PLAN DESIGN What do we want to see?</p> <p>This session will follow a more fluid discussion approach where students can share their experiences around sexual health and wellbeing and how this is being taught currently. What is it like for a Cook Island adolescence transition from high school to university.</p>	<p>STITCHING TOGETHER Making connection/designing</p>	<p>STITCHING TOGETHER Implementation</p>	<p>GIFTING Implementation</p> <p><small>*The gifting part of the process looks at how the final outcome can be implemented back into the community (AUT?)</small></p>

 Tivaevae Model

Figure 9. Diagram of initial plan for Talanoa sessions and Co-design workshops with students with the implementation of Tivaevae model

Searching for organisations to work with

While I was initially hoping to join an existing research team and use my design practice to support their work, as we explored the potential further, it became evident that this was not likely to be easily feasible due to factors such as timing and resourcing. Despite this, I saw great potential in partnering or collaborating with existing organisations or groups who were working in the sexual health area with Pasifika communities. The benefits of this would be that organisations and existing projects could support my recruitment process where I could have access to a wider range of professionals and individuals directly from the communities that I would like to work with. My next steps were to begin looking elsewhere to help with recruitment, where I spent weeks contacting many professionals and organisations working in the Pasifika sexual health and wellbeing space. This was a new process for me, and as someone new to research and reaching out to professionals and organisations, that often led to dead ends was disheartening at times. However, it helped to shape and refine my project further, making it more thorough for others to better understand. I used email for most of the contact with organisations and professionals, which was retrieved from both the public domain and by referral from other lecturers and professionals within the AUT.

The direction of my research did not align well with the research team's work due to time restraints and other limitations.

I contacted two health organisations outside of the university in search of whether they had existing projects that might provide an opportunity for me to support or work alongside however, after two emails, there was still no reply. In addition to these, I talked with more lecturers and Pasifika staff within the university as potential collaborators who would provide a context for my research and offered knowledge about Pasifika students; however, these also led to more dead ends due to my research not aligning with their schedules.

As a research student reaching out, I offered my expertise as a designer as well and framed it as a possibility to bring form to complex issues and topics within sexual health for Pasifika communities. I outlined that I was open to manoeuvring the nature of my project to fit well with any existing work the organisations may have.

Reflecting on this, this process was stressful and frustrating and impacted how I could go about my research and its concept. I learned about my position as a student and the challenges that this brings when reaching out to organisations. This only highlighted further the opportunity for learning and research to be guided into unexpected places. The process of being unable to work with an established research team highlighted the reality of working with people surrounding research and the uncertainty that this brings. All things considered, this meant that I had more control over what my research may look like, as it was not determined by an existing project of an organisation that held its own structure or agenda. This notion was key when moving forward and allowed for a more self-reflected project.

Content analysis of existing sexual health and wellbeing resources

In contextualising existing resources (that relate to communication design), I formulated an audit of sexual health and well-being resources that exist today in Aotearoa and the services that they provide. I used this to scope out how these organisations communicate their information (design/layout and look and feel) or the content itself. It was also important to investigate the context of Pasifika youth within this topic and how this is portrayed, or rather not portrayed, within the health and wellbeing space.

The aim was to continue to refine and develop the 'concept' of my project. To help me navigate this, it was important to audit the current sexual health and wellbeing resources to contextualise information, knowledge, and/or resources that are readily available in Aotearoa today. Another focus for this content analysis (Figure 10 and Figure 11) was to look at what examples are working or not in terms of communication design and how they may relate or be culturally responsive to young Pasifika. One focus for this content analysis is looking at what examples are working or not working in terms of communication design and how it may relate or be culturally responsive to young Pasifika.

	CONTENT	DESIGN	CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE?
<p>Family Planning (Website)</p> <p>(Figure 12)</p>	<p>Information is quite straight-forward and all in one place. However all the information in one place could get quite overwhelming</p>	<p>Look and feel is quite clinical. Blocks of colour help to make it more friendly as opposed to using a hospital blue colour on white. Straight to the point and simple design –effective in making content easy to follow.</p>	<p>The overall vibe of the website is not particularly culturally focussed (as it will have to adhere to everyone)</p>
<p>Community and Public Health (Website)</p> <p>(Figure 13)</p>	<p>This is the first website that pops ups on Google when you search up ‘sexual health and wellbeing’. The website is very content heavy with it all on the first page. Could come off as overwhelming for youth.</p>	<p>Very text heavy. Look and feel is somewhat welcoming and does have thought to the design (not just plain white). However text is the focus.</p>	<p>The overall vibe of the website is not particularly culturally focussed (as it will have to adhere to everyone).</p>
<p>Tapu Va (Website)</p> <p>(Figure 14)</p>	<p>The content is very welcoming and family. It uses language that (as a Pasifika) I understand and can connect with.</p>	<p>Intentional design that incorporates cultural elements. Unsure with the specificity of the particular culture. Look and feel is interesting to look at and very welcoming. Fun and engaging.</p>	<p>The obvious use of cultural patterns hints to culturally focused design and content. No initial hint to a deeper meaning to what the design represents or shows from a cultural sense and how it relates to sexual health and wellbeing</p>
<p>Te Whatu Ora - Sexual and reproductive health (Website)</p> <p>(Figure 15)</p>	<p>Very fact-based content and quite medical. Contains links to further resources which can be very useful and a good way to have information in one place. However, this could be overwhelming for some as it is very text heavy.</p>	<p>Design is very clear and easy to follow. Also has a heavily medical look and feel. This could be a pro in terms of the website feeling professional that can be trusted. A con could be that the medical style could be perceived as less human. Laid out clearly however is very text heavy.</p>	<p>First glance does not hint to any cultural considerations. However the content does contain links to information that could be specific to you. Resource does not hint to be culturally specific.</p>

Figure 10. Content analysis audit table with reflections

**Sexwise (Website/
programme)**

(Figure 16)

CONTENT

Sexwise is a programme for youth, parents, teachers and educators, therefore the content is taught or shown through a community programme.

DESIGN

Design is clear and simple. Links to further resources – a good platform for placing information is one place.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE?

No initial hint to any culturally-responsive approaches. Resource's intention to cater to everyone. This is a pro as it means that all people from youth to adults can access information however this does not address the gap for tailored information that understands Pasifika.

**Peer sexuality support
programme (PSSP)
(Social media)**

(Figure 17)

Information found through social media (Instagram). Could be a good way to reach youth, that they can access frequently and easily. Very clear and easy to follow.

Look and feel is engaging and welcoming. Overall design and look and feel isn't cohesive.

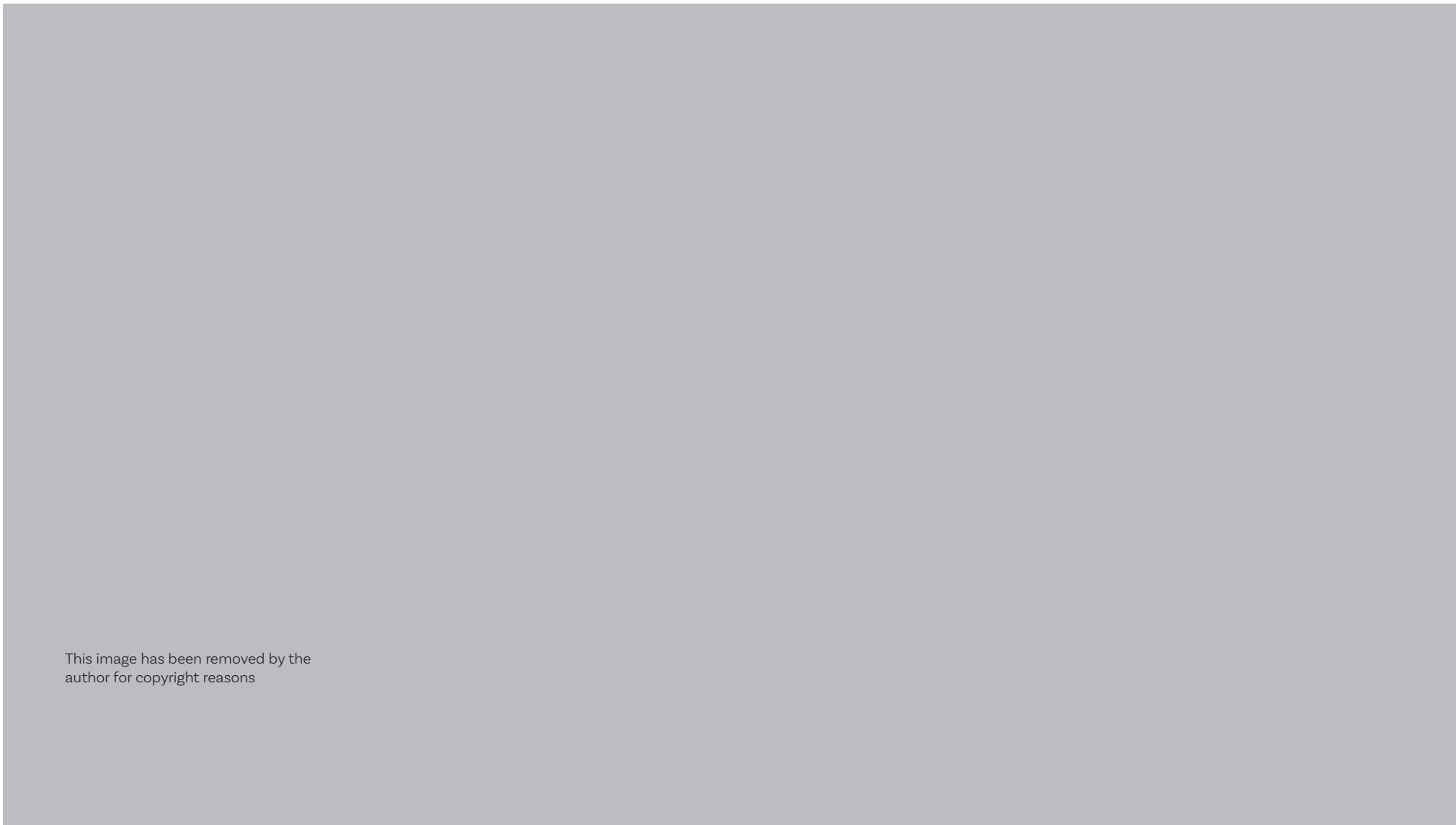
Due to the resources aiming to be accessed by all youth, there was no hint to a particular culture.

Figure 11. Content analysis audit table with reflections (Continued)



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Figure 12. Family planning website screenshot. Retrieved from https://sexualwellbeing.org.nz/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw_-GxBhC1ARIsADGgDju-hSbjzONqdHcCm4RKu_qo4UUBH_bxt9fdyO6sPOejcuuR42wAIFsaAryXEALw_wcB



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Figure 13. Community & Public Health website screenshot. Retrieved from <https://www.cph.co.nz/your-health/sexual-health/>

Figure 14. Tapu Va Instagram screenshot. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/tapuva.nz/>

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Figure 15. Te Whatu Ora - Sexual and reproductive health website screenshot. Retrieved from <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/health-services-and-programmes/sexual-and-reproductive-health/>

Figure 16. Sexwise website screenshot. Retrieved from <https://sexwise.nz/resources/for-parents-and-supporters/>

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Figure 17. PSSP Instagram page screenshot. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/psspprogramme/>

Summarising the audit

Overall, the sexual health and wellbeing resources I found that were publicly available were sterile and clinical, making the aesthetic of the design and layout less comforting and warm. In my opinion, the text-heavy content made some of the websites overwhelming to follow. Another aspect of these examples was that the online resources (websites) made the content less engaging and difficult to interact with. This notion raised the question of how this may work when Pasifika was considered. Understanding the accessibility of online resources was important. However, moving forward in my research meant considering the possibility of a resource that encapsulated the engaging, human, and hands-on aspects.

Reframing the project - the 'cost of silence'

There is a plethora of issues around sexual health and wellbeing to focus on, and therefore, it was challenging to find an angle that would drive my research and design outcome. I began with the concept of taboo and what that meant for Pasifika living in Aotearoa. In most Pasifika families, talking about sexual health is considered taboo and not something that young people would bring up with their parents due to fear, embarrassment, shame, or disappointment from parents and other family members (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2016).

This then raised the question of the consequences of staying silent. I considered that if youth were fearful about bringing sexual health up with their parents, then *where were they getting this information from*. This then formed the research opportunity of how I might use design to create a space that was safe and comfortable for Cook Island youth so that they could talk about their experiences without fear of judgment.

The Cost of Silence

What it means for Pasifika youth

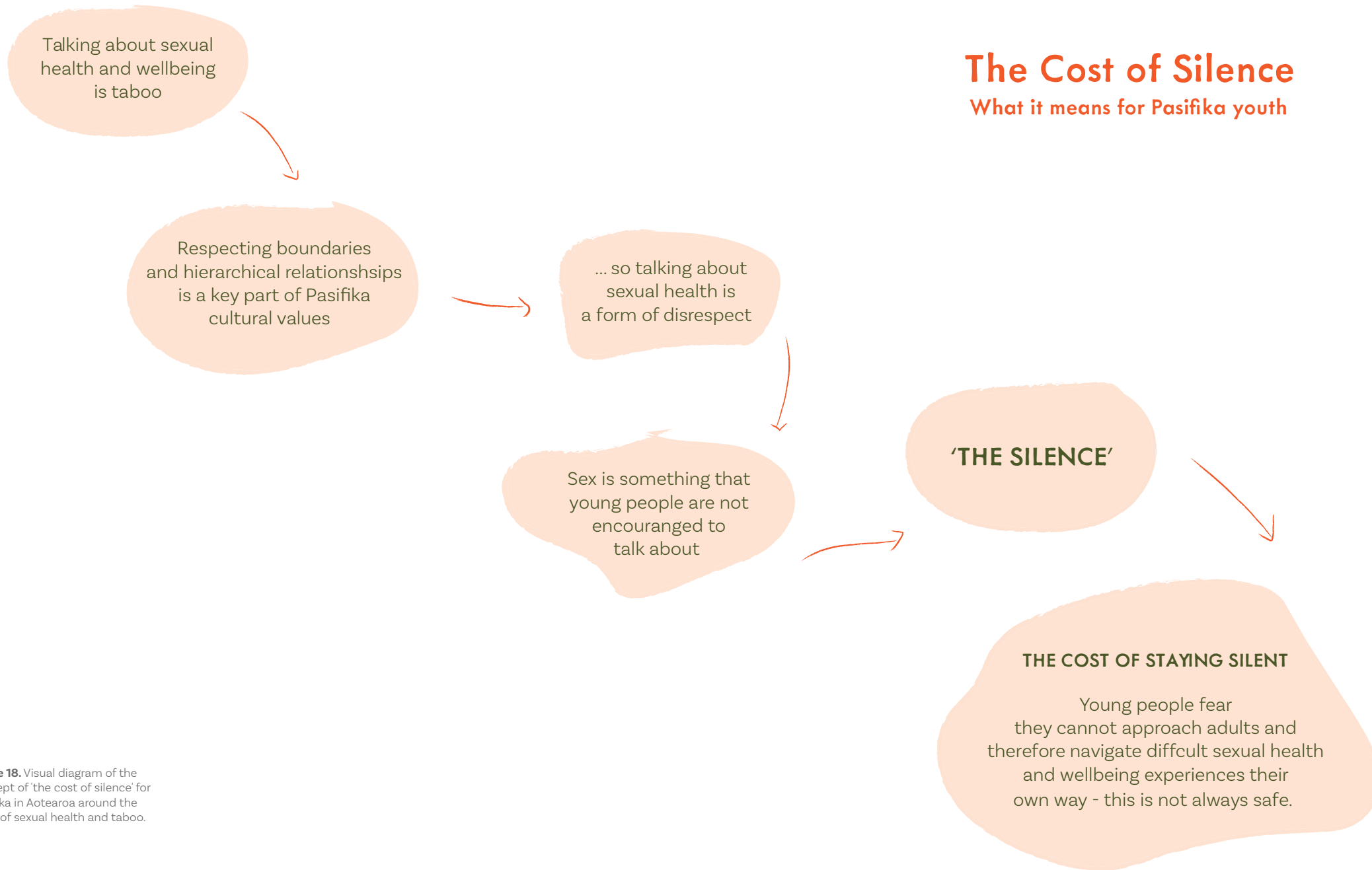


Figure 18. Visual diagram of the concept of 'the cost of silence' for Pasifika in Aotearoa around the issue of sexual health and taboo.

This angle also presented an opportunity to focus on transitioning from high school to university. With a new sense of independence away from home into adulthood, new spaces such as university can present difficulties and complexities for Pasifika youth navigating sexual health and well-being. Common experiences among Pasifika during this transition into independence with less parental guidance when attending university and what youth do outside of university (few teachers regulating, late nights, alcohol and drugs, partying and meeting new people who may not have the same background).

Looking forward, this shaped my research focus and looked at how safe spaces can be created for taboo topics such as sexual health to maintain a cultural lens and its considerations. My next steps in the research were to look deeper into what this may look like, using the 'cost of silence' concept to guide the research moving forward.

Key learnings from consultations

Sexual health student nurses

In exploring different aspects of sexual health within the Pasifika context, I met with two sexual health and wellbeing nurses from the AUT Medical Centre. The focus of this consultation was to understand their practice and their first-hand experiences working with Pasifika students. It was established that there was a great need for more Pasifika-centred health approaches when Pasifika youth were considered. Both nurses outlined some of the challenges they faced as non-Pasifika clinicians and not being well equipped with the knowledge to authentically and appropriately help youth due to cultural disconnects. As professionals, they found that some systems and processes do not work for everyone. This consultation informed the next steps of my research and highlighted the importance of hearing insights from health workers or professionals working with Pasifika youth with sexual health needs or concerns.

Pacific advisor

I sat down with someone from AUT Pacific who had a creative background. This consultation was fluid and open and explored the different cultural aspects that can be considered in my research. We discussed different cultural practices such as dance, Tatau⁵ and cultural artefacts. Through the discussions, it was established that drawing from different practices of culture (as opposed to only looking at artistic practices) can each contribute to the development of cultural design. This meant looking into the specific elements of these practices and how these can be brought together. For example, looking at the movements of dance and how this relates to our bodies and how bodies can be presented. There were links between this notion and sexual health with how the incorporation of dance as a cultural element was brought to a very complex and often Westernised perspective of health. Following this consultation, the discussion informed how I developed a visual identity for Cook Island design – by drawing from various cultural practices and artefacts.

⁵Tatau (within the Sāmoan culture) is the traditional cultural practice of tattooing (Samau, 2016)

Reframing the research participant group

When considering the collaboration with an existing research team, participants (who at the time were secondary school Pasifika students) might have been more easily accessible, and I would have had the support of trusted experts and researchers. However, throughout this research and engaging with an ethical approval process for this research, I better understood the complexities of trying to work with school-aged students (due to feasibility and ethical restrictions) and how recruitment worked. It became clear to me that the transition from school to university and child to adult was a significant area to focus on. This was also an area that I identified with and understood well. This also allowed me to focus my research more tightly on what was appropriate in the context of a master's project.

Tivaevae as a representation of fostering safe conversations

Using mindmapping I brainstormed several aspects of Tivaevae's artistic practice highlight how it may be used as a cultural approach to understanding a complex issue. The making of a single Tivaevae takes immense skill, technique, and time. Traditionally created by Vaine-tini⁶, Tivaevae would usually require a group of makers seated around material sketching out designs, planning colours and shapes to be used, and selecting the types of stitches needed (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019).

⁶ Vaine-tini – the group of Cook Island women who come together to make Tivaevae (Teura'atua-Rupeni, 2020).

Within this research project, I have not only drawn from academic literature, but also from my personal experiences and stories with Tivaevae I have grown up. This tacit knowledge⁷ and learning was a significant advantage for my research in conjunction with existing knowledge about Tivaevae in academic literature. From witnessing my grandmother and her sisters make Tivaevae, the artistic practice has always represented the community that is formed to create something beautiful. Growing up, my mother told stories of watching her mother and her sisters converse, laugh, and share experiences as they stitched and sewed. The art of making something as a community whilst conversing and connecting has represented the cultural way of fostering safe conversations and sharing of experiences. The Tivaevae acts as the physical space that is created to then form conversations, as though it is what brings people together with a sense of safety and understanding. This Tivaevae concept was used within the research project as the parameter for the research approach and the practice.

⁷ Tacit knowledge is the skills and insights gained through experience, which can be hard to express verbally (Oragui, 2024)

Ethics application drafts

Following the consultations and not being able to work with a research team on an existing project, my project and the data collection approach shifted from Talanoa sessions and co-design workshops to expert interviews and an online anonymous survey. This shift was necessary and appropriate given the time restraints and participants' accessibility. Ethics approval was granted in December 2023 (see Appendix 6).



Learning through making: Exploring what Cook Island design looks like

Creating digital illustrations

In the next phase of the research, I experimented with different ways and approaches to incorporate cultural elements and ways of making to see what might be integrated into my design solution. This was important as it allowed for a more holistic approach to cultural design. I drew from other forms of artistic practice found in the Cook Island culture (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019). My intention for these experiments was to begin to practice hands-on ways of making, and as a result, this gave the design an organic and more human look and feel.

One of the first experiments I did was an exploration of Cook Island shapes and colours. Drawing from Tivaevae patterns and colours, I collated a range of motifs (Figure 19) that I had illustrated. This experiment established the wide range of colours used within Cook Island Tivaevae. Working in a digital space (Adobe Illustrator), I experimented with iterations of shape and colour combinations, drawing from Tivaevae flower patterns.



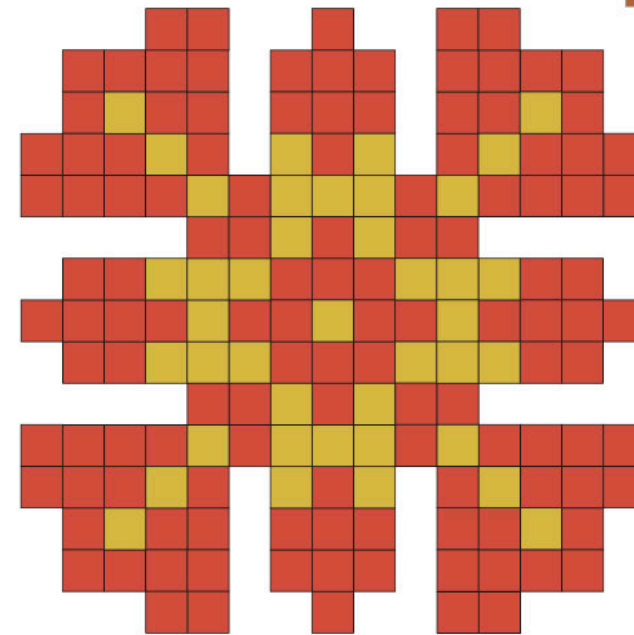
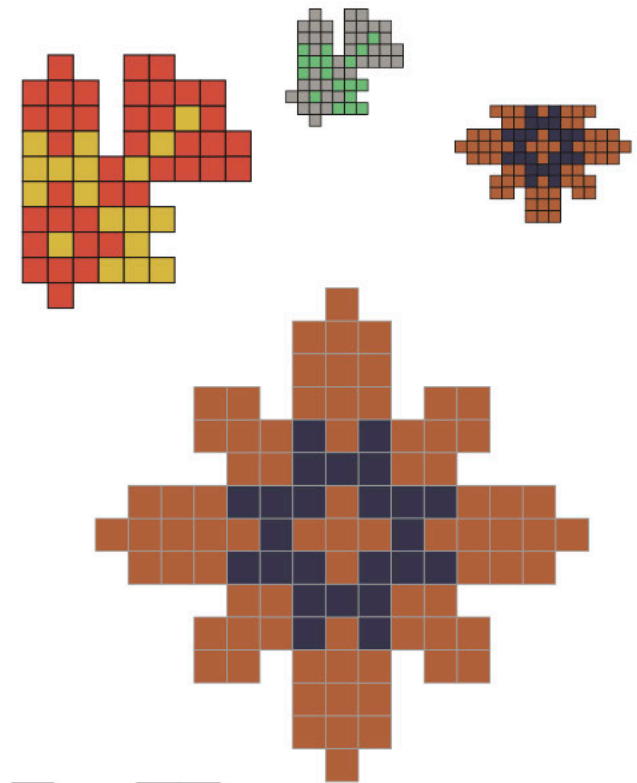


Figure 19. Using Adobe Illustrator to create coloured Tivaevae shape assets

Through this experiment, I was able to focus on the little details in Cook Island shapes and colours and found a common theme between the designs, which reflected a collation and curation of multiple individual pieces to create a whole image. I saw this as not only a concept of the visual identity but also the research angle as a whole. In other words, how the concept of bringing pieces together to make a whole can represent the cultural aspect of the research. This experiment also highlighted the need to explore a more analogue and hands-on approach to making (working outside the digital space).

Sewing on paper

For my next experiment, I wanted to explore a more tactile, physical approach to capturing Cook Island design and was inspired by the work of Alison Leauanae. Leauanae bought hand-stitched thread onto card and paper to create beautiful motifs and patterns that show,

“an interesting narrative about journeys that have a shared history but with unique perspectives...a powerful image of what it is to be kindred” (Kindred | Overview, 2023).

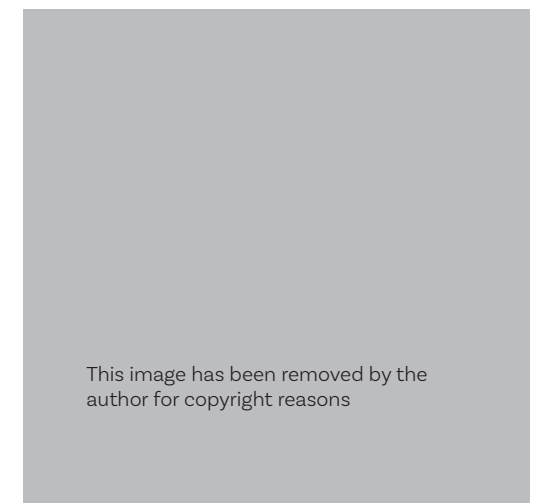
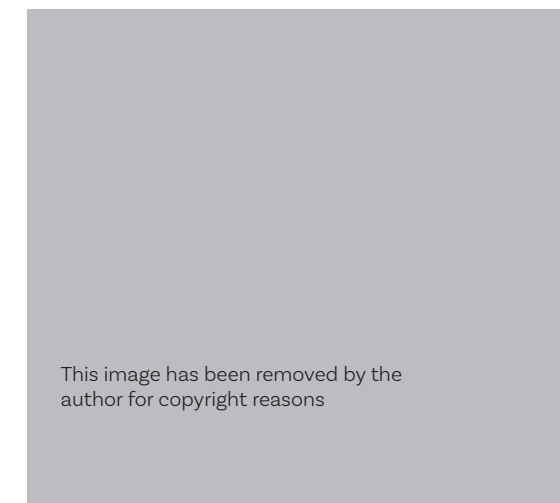


Figure 20. (Left and Right) Lalaga IX, 2022. Cotton hand-stitched & woven on paper by Alison Leauanae. Retrieved from <https://bergmangallery.com/exhibitions/53-kindred-linda-va-aelua-alison-leauanae/overview/>

Drawing from Leauanae's work, I used thread on a thick textured card to illustrate a pattern (Figure 21). I began by sketching out a design on tracing paper and taped it to the textured card. I then stitched the cotton thread onto the card using a sewing needle. Once the design was sewed in, I tore away the baking paper to reveal the design.

The technique of sewing thread to white card conveyed the concept of bringing a traditional aspect of the practice of Tivaevae (sewing) into a contemporary form, which opens new possibilities for the practice to be more accessible and versatile (as opposed to a Tivaevae quilt). This process established the notion of exploring different ways to bring the Tivaevae and what it represents to other forms. The Tivaevae represents the fostering of safe conversations, and therefore, my practice has been driven by the exploration of how I could bring elements of Tivaevae into my design practice. As a designer, my process has always been about learning through hands-on making, which is a huge part of my cultural heritage. The use of hand-stitching aligned with the human and organic aesthetic, making the overall piece tactile and engaging. This exploration also informed the next steps of my design research exploration in implementing hands-on techniques and aesthetics for my final design outcome.

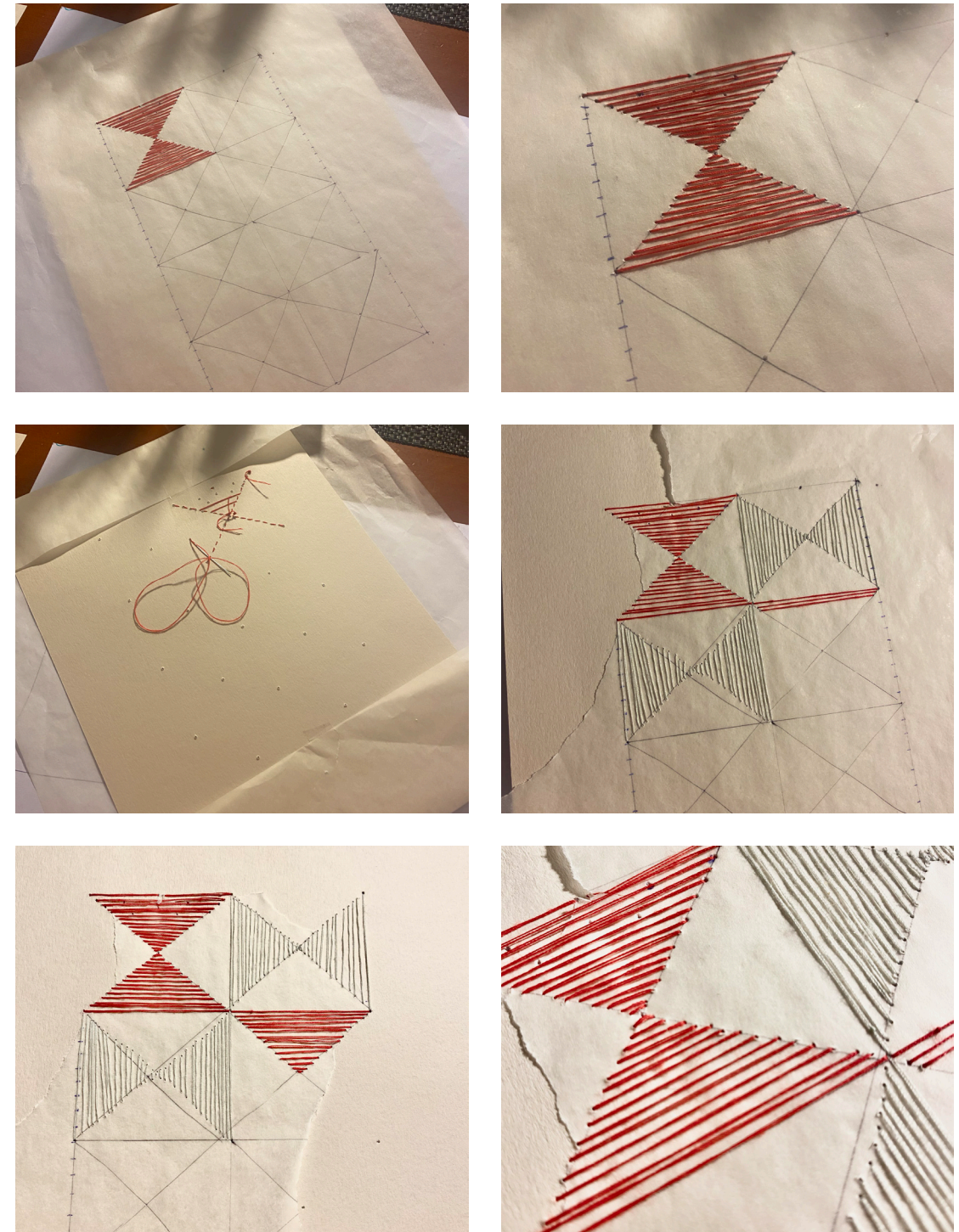


Figure 21. Series of images showing the process of using the sketched in design as a guide for sewing cotton thread into card.

Printmaking

In looking for more cultural makers, I came across a Cook Island, Tahitian, and Samoan artist Michel Tuffery. Drawing from his cultural heritage of ways of making, his art practice is broad and spans printmaking, sculpture, performance art, painting and design, new media, and animation. One style of making that I was particularly interested in was his printmaking using carving techniques (Figure 22). He is well known for his hand-carved lettering pieces (Devin, 2022).

Inspired by Tuffery's hand-carved printmaking, I experimented with carving out my own designs in this next exploration. I first sketched out the design roughly on printmaking rubber and then used carving tools to carve out the design (Figure 23). I learnt that the parts that are carved out are the parts that will not be revealed when printed on. I then used a sponge to put black water-based printing ink onto the printing block and then transferred that onto cotton material (material used for Tivaevae) (see Figure 24).

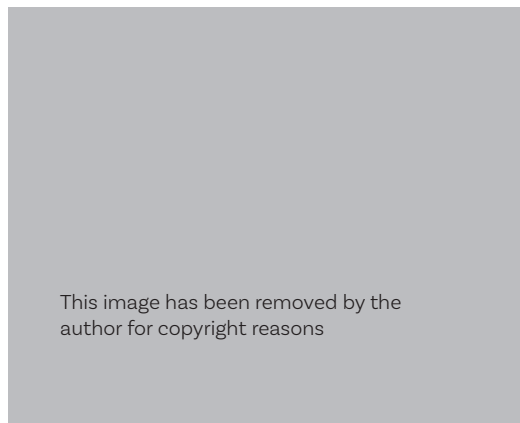
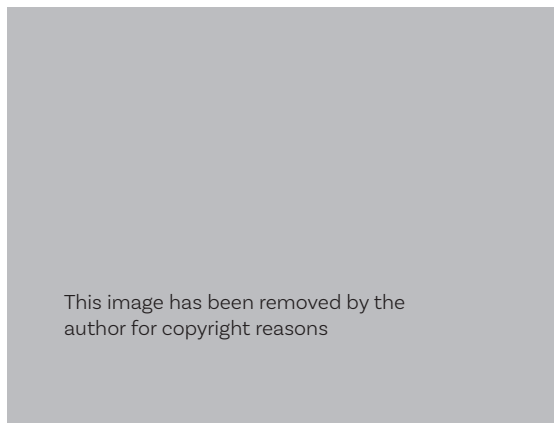


Figure 22. (Left and right). Series of images showing the process of Michel Tuffery carving lettering prints. Retrieved from <http://www.dominiquebaker.co.nz/blog/colab-workshop-with-flox-and-michel-tuffery>



Figure 23. Carving Tivaevae design on printmaking rubber



Figure 24. Printmaking explorations with black printing ink on different coloured cotton material

I also experimented with printmaking on card paper (Figure 25). This method of printmaking overall naturally shows a very organic look and feel where the style is unique. This showed, again, how I could bring an analogue and organic aesthetic to a plain form.



Figure 25. Using the printmaking rubber stamp on card paper

The printmaking experiments were an informative process as I had to draw from non-communication design methods of making or crafting. The focus of this process was to step outside the digital space and experiment with hands-on methods. This alone was a way of re-indigenising how I might design culturally within this research project. I found that drawing from traditional methods and using them to influence the contemporary contexts (space and area of work such as communication design) was a highly effective process for someone who wanted to design with a Pasifika/cultural lens. This experiment informed a possible style for the visual identity with its organic and somewhat messy aesthetic. One key idea for this project at this time was being able to bring the concept of Tivaevae to inform a more practical design outcome. Furthermore, bringing this to a printed form that can be held with two hands may be an effective way to design culturally.

Reflecting on key learnings from cultural making and Cook Island design

Colour

During the making experimentation stage of my design process, I focused on creating iterations and experimenting with different creative methods. Therefore, colour decisions were not at the forefront of these experiments. However, the use of colour (and the amount that is used) is a significant part of Cook Island's identity. One key part of this is using black in Cook Island design. To my knowledge, black is never used as it is perceived as a very 'negative' colour within the culture. For example, within Cook Island funerals, black is never worn, despite being commonly used in other cultures. For the remainder of my experiments (Figure 26), when colour is involved, it was important to consider this and the cultural significance and meaning of colours in my work. This was also a key consideration in my research and design decisions. These experiments also highlighted different ways in which I could consider the colour use within Tivaevae (figure) and what this can represent. Tivaevae are already colour-oriented and are what usually draw people in. I considered this when making decisions around colour moving forward within my design.



Figure 27. Tivaevae Manu. Retrieved from <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/789273>



Figure 26. Colour swatching from Tivaevae and experiments with colour variations.

Materiality

Another key focus of these experiments was the use of analogue and hands-on methods. This included the experiments made by hand and the different materials such as card, Tivaevae cotton, and printmaking materials. The tactile approach to these iterations counteracted existing Western approaches to the visual communication of information involving Pasifika.

As explored in my earlier audit, the current examples of Western design for sexual health and wellbeing information are very sterile and medical-focused (see Figure 28 and Figure 29).

Furthermore, my experiments allowed me to communicate a more organic and human approach visually. Using cotton material as opposed to card or paper allowed the design to focus more on touch and feel. The rough-looking ink prints on the material made it look more homemade, and I resonated with this significantly. I felt as though it was a first step to re-indigenising visual identity and making it Cook Island-specific. Reflecting on this, I saw the potential of this approach in terms of addressing the clinical, sterile current look and feel of information design around sexual health and wellbeing information.

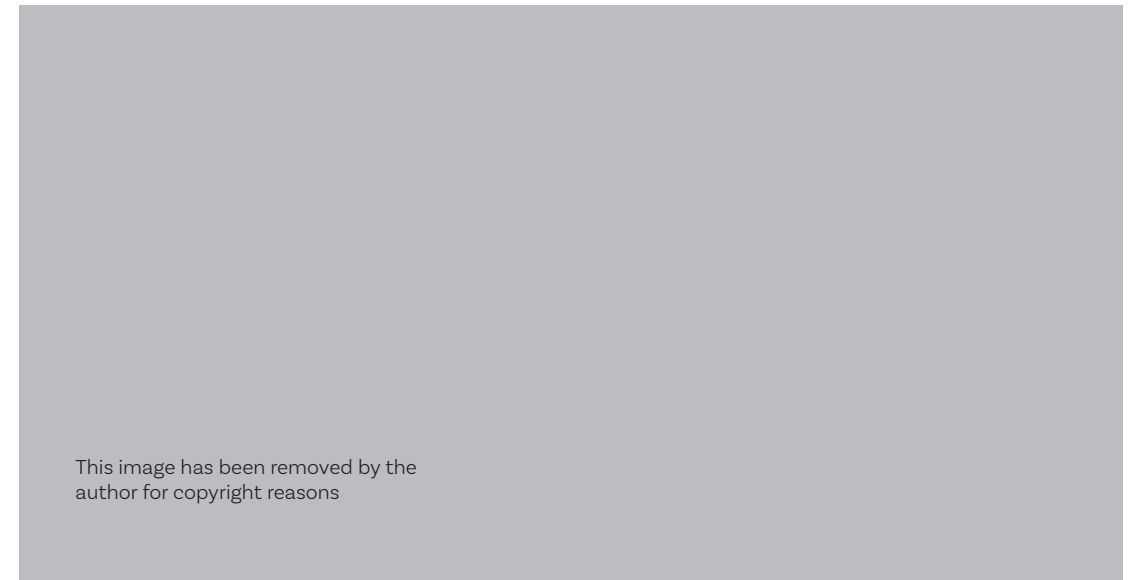


Figure 28. Community and Public health (sexual and reproductive health) website. Retrieved from <https://www.cph.co.nz/>



Figure 29. Auckland sexual health regional services website. Retrieved from <https://www.ashs.org.nz/>

Methods of making/process

Working in a non-digital space was an important part of my design process. This allowed me to draw from traditional Cook Island methods and bring them into a contemporary space in a way that does not dilute the crucial culturally appropriate elements. In other words, I stayed true to the methods of making whilst also creating and developing my own style of how these methods could be used to visually depict cultural elements. The artistic practice of making traditional Tivaevae is not only a method that I am most familiar with but also a part of the culture that I am drawn to and most knowledgeable about. Having the privilege of witnessing the making of a Tivaevae and hearing the stories from my grandmother and how she used to make it was a key part of this process. With this, my hunch at this time was whether the act of tactility and engagement could help make information and sharing around complex topics like sexual health and wellbeing more relatable for other Cook Island youth. This design process talks about how I might re-indigenise how communication design is approached.

Look and feel.

A key driver for this design process is the question, 'What does Cook Island design look like?' Like most indigenous cultures and communities, artistic practices and styling are significantly more developed and established than design (graphic and communication design). Pacific visual identity is continually likened to bright colours, floral designs, and Tatau (traditional tattoo) patterns. Lopesi (2017), explains that,

“These simplistic and homogenised depictions of Pacific culture flatten the different and distinct cultures across the thousands of islands that make up Oceania. And flatten the different lived experiences of Pacific people here in Aotearoa.” (Lopesi, 2022).

The development of Cook Island design intended to encompass the different community aspects of Cook Island and its unique ways of making and processes. Each Pacific nation contains its own identity and how it represents itself, and therefore, the exploration and investigation of Cook Island's design looked to authentically and creatively highlight the culture in its own distinct and unique way. This process established how I might approach the communication of complex information differently for Pasifika and, more specifically, Cook Island youth.

Developing and reimagining Cook Island communication design

Building on the concept of ‘the cost of silence,’ I wanted to explore the idea of prompts for discussion and what this may look like as an outcome. This exploration also looked at how I implemented the Cook Island design explorations (Tivaevae patterns and motifs, printmaking and sewing) into a practical form.

Looking at existing resources around sexual health for Pasifika, I came across Tapu Vā and used their questions on their public Instagram as the initial content for my design. Using these, I created a set of conversation starter cards that looked at questions such as ‘What was the sex talk like for you?’, ‘What is your hope for Pasifika sexual wellbeing?’, ‘What values promote positive sexual wellbeing for Pasifika?’ (Tapu Vā, 2022). These were designed simply to prompt conversations around these topics but also to experiment with different designs and how they work in a physical form. The colour and pattern choice at this stage was more iterative as opposed to specific decisions on what each colour or pattern represents. Throughout the research, I then began to build meaning behind the patterns and colours that I would use in my design outcome (see Figure 30).

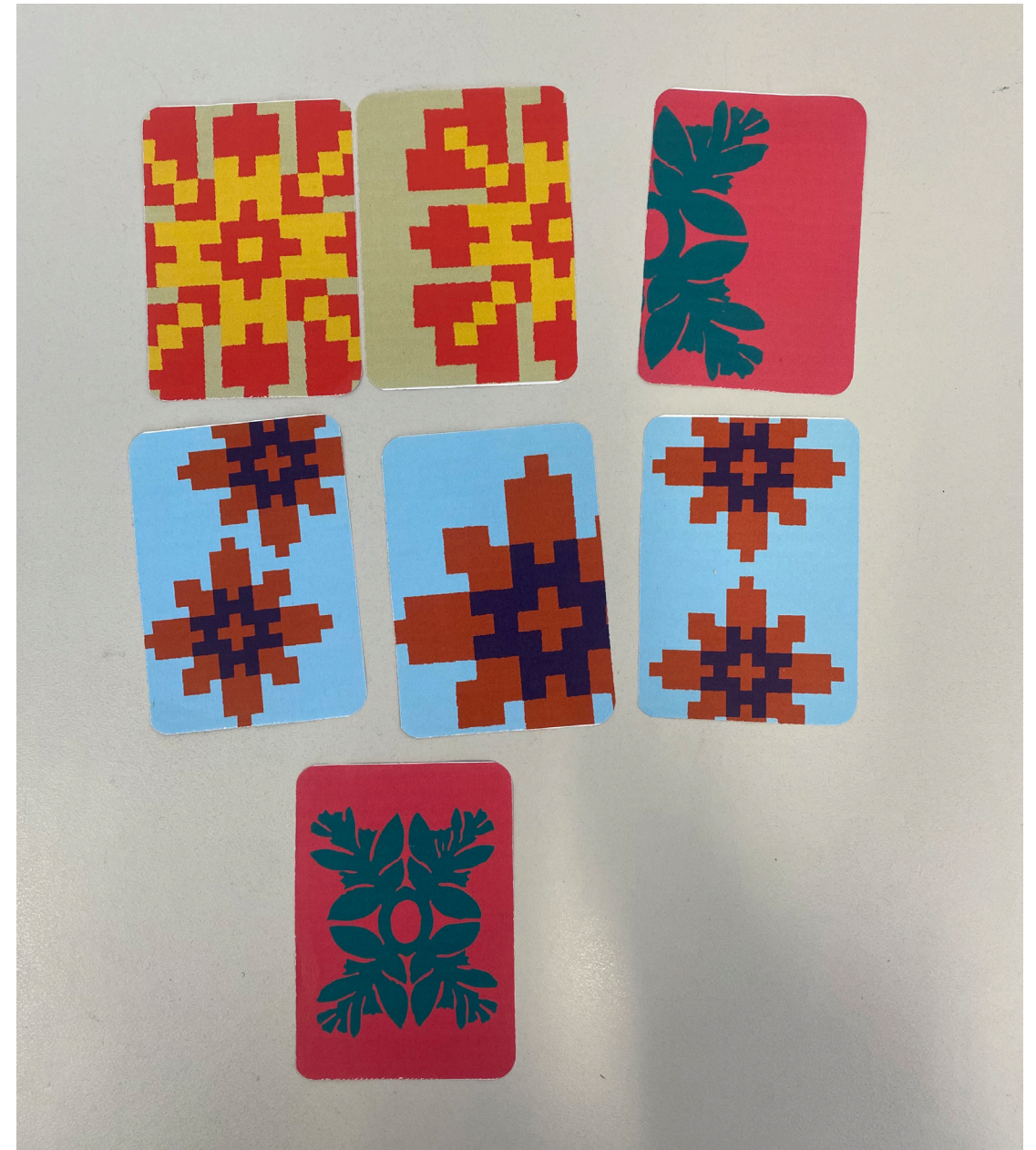


Figure 30. Using Tivaevae design exploration on conversation cards

Another aspect of 'the cost of silence' angle was the concept of how Pasifika struggle to navigate the significant differences between their home setting (parents/family cultural views you are brought up with) and the world that they are then exposed to in society. I also made a separate deck of cards (see figure 31) that looked at this concept and represented this with two cards: Inside (home) and outside (everywhere else). The card deck then included another set that showed different parts of sexual health and wellbeing, such as contraception, sex talk, pregnancy, etc. The game asks players to place the inside and outside cards on either side of the table (see figure 32). Using this placement as a scale or spectrum, the player would then be asked to place the other cards where they felt represented what or who they are most comfortable talking about regarding this. For example, when picking the 'contraception cards,' player might place it more towards the 'outside' card due to not feeling comfortable bringing that topic up within their household. The game aimed to have a visual representation of a conversation or thoughts on a topic as opposed to the question-and-answer approach I conceptualised in the first card deck.

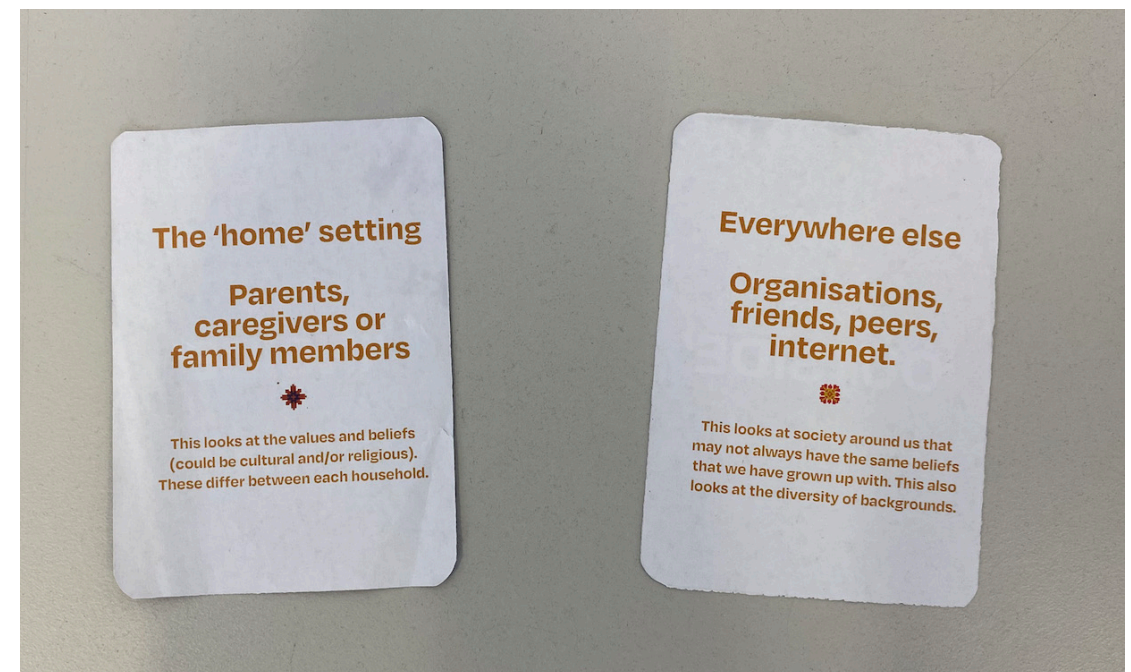
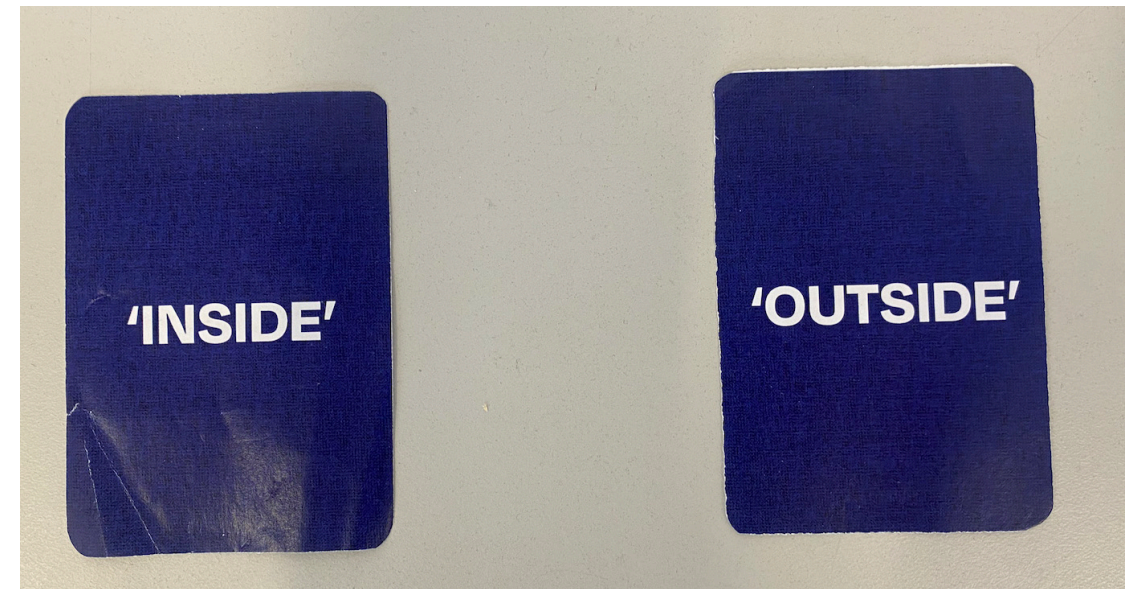


Figure 31. Both sides of the 'Inside' and 'Outside' cards.



Figure 32. Card placement within the 'Inside' and 'Outside' cards.

The process of testing my visual designs (look and feel) on a tangible and practical outcome helped to draw together the multiple layers of this research project and how these inform each other. For example, the experiment with the conversation cards involved the consideration of content (questions sourced from Tapu Vā), while the form and design of the cards used cultural elements from Tivaevae. In a design critique session with colleagues, I was able to practice facilitating the card game and better understand how it worked, as well as how important it was to explain the reason behind the designs. Bringing meaning was an important aspect of my practice as it ensured that the design was relevant and unique to this project specifically. Receiving feedback and critiques from others allowed for further development of my design and my approach to making, enabling me to identify gaps or opportunities for improvement that I may not have noticed beforehand. Moving forward in the research I used what I learnt from previous experiments to mindmap ideas around the design outcome.

CONVERSATIONS

"the cost of silence"

Where young people get their information from

prompt cards for discussion around sex → experiences?

consent? scenarios?
family experiences?
Pacific context

how can I re-create this as a designed outcome?

"Re-designing the Tivaevae"?

"laying out the Tivaevae"?

Tivaevae as a metaphor for safe/culturally-responsive conversations

Cook Island Design

Cook Island Artists/makers
inspo visual identity

Cook Island visual identity

STAGE 2.

TUITUI:

STITCHING THE TIVAEVAE

“Mama begins loosely stitching the Tivaevae pieces on the large piece of fabric by hand with her sisters. Grandkids are running around, the mamas are chatting away. The Tivaevae is coming together.”

Data collection analysis

Findings from expert interviews analysis

Expert interviews with one Pasifika sexual health and wellbeing expert (SHW expert) and a Pasifika communication design expert (CD expert) were carried out to scope knowledge surrounding considerations and design processes for sexual health and wellbeing projects and working with Pasifika. I facilitated interviews that covered their first-hand experiences with working on projects surrounding complex ideas within the Pasifika context. These takeaways and ideas served as a foundation for informing the design and research of this project that addresses the challenges and concerns related to sexual health and wellbeing among Pasifika youth. Key insights from the analysis around the impact of communication and the accessibility of information, cultural understandings and design research process are summarised below.

Impact of communication and information accessibility

Building trust and familiarity with Pasifika youth

The SHW expert highlighted their experience with working with youth through Talanoa and discussions, saying that youth find it easier to trust and engage with people such as researchers, peers or adults who have had similar experiences or backgrounds. This expert mentioned that youth often find it difficult to trust people and engage in conversations with strangers, especially surrounding topics like sexual health, which is very sensitive and personal.

“Reciprocity is key for creating a safe space for youth.” – SHW expert

It was encouraged that as a designer, I should aim to create familiarity and build trust through the design outcome and considerations. Creating safe spaces and fostering reciprocity is essential for engaging youth in conversations about sexual health. The expert advice given was to consider ways in which these aspects, such as trust and openness, can be shown and implemented throughout the design outcome.

Communication with Pasifika youth

Both the SHW expert and the CD expert talked about the importance of understanding the community you are targeting. It was established considerations are needed for both what information is being communicated to youth.

“Always consider who this design speaks to.” – CD expert

The CD expert discussed that the design process within this complex topic could be about the filtering of what is appropriate for the target. The SHW expert supports this notion and states that,

“You have to be even more nuanced in the way that you communicate and engage with youth.” – SHW expert

The SHW expert also highlights the need to be mindful of gender differences in communication and to adapt communication strategies when engaging with youth. The SHW expert also discussed the significance of balancing humour and seriousness. As a designer, the CD expert established the value of learning from end users' needs and wants. These insights speak to the concept of adolescent susceptibility to content and, therefore, that there is significance in how information is communicated to youth.

Miscommunication with Pasifika youth

The SHW expert also highlighted the lack of proper communication and accurate information regarding sexual education and understanding. There is a large amount of miscommunication and misinformation around sexual education and understanding. The expert found throughout their work with Pasifika that young people are not always used to using language to explain everything. It was discussed that young people interpret language around sexual health and reproductive health very differently, and it is difficult to find the correct and effective language specific to youth.

“There's clinical language, the adult language, youth language, and then we have the Pacific youth language.” – SHW expert

Language plays a crucial role in discussing sexual health. The expert advice was that the nature of my design within the research needed to be mindful of using appropriate language that resonated with young people and respected cultural nuances. The SHW expert also established that design can play a small role in alleviating this issue by helping to provide transparent, health-focused conversations and resources that implement cultural understandings. This tied well with the tension between the current approaches to communicating with youth coming from a health perspective. This then highlighted the need for more tailored ways of working with youth that speak to them specifically. Moving forward, these insights informed the considerations for the outcome whereby the language of the youth is relevant and specific to them to create a sense of familiarity.

Pasifika youth's exposure to information

Throughout their experience surrounding sensitive cultural research projects, the SHW expert discussed that the internet provides a platform for accessing information without judgment or anonymity, especially for information surrounding sexual health and wellbeing. However, there are harmful effects to this exposure, and the concern is with how youth perceive sexual content and what they then do with that.

“Young people are online a lot” – SHW expert

On the other hand, the expert discusses that when done safely, good design can leverage online resources to provide accurate and reliable information to young people. In this way, the harmful effects of unfiltered exposure can be minimised. This informed the research as it highlighted what youth are asking for or are familiar with. This entailed considering future research on the implementation of online access that is done in a culturally responsive way.

Cultural understandings

The taboo around sexual health

In their experience surrounding taboos within the Pasifika context, the SHW expert discussed the taboo surrounding discussions about sexual health, particularly within Pacific communities. Among Pasifika youth, the term taboo is perceived as something you won't attempt to talk about or bring up in a discussion. The expert defines taboo (within the Pasifika context) as,

“when something is taboo, that means that you need to take your time with it. It's not bad, it's not something that you just jump into. You have to take more time and you have to show more respect. And I've often said taboo is about boundaries. Yeah, it's not about you can't do something. It's about knowing when it becomes unsafe, and that's where you put a boundary out.” – SHW expert

This was an interesting way of framing taboo, and it speaks to my contextual review of sexual health and wellbeing. It made me question the current definitions of taboo and how this has impacted Cook Island youth in navigating conversations. Moving forward, breaking this taboo and creating safe spaces for open conversations is crucial for promoting understanding and addressing misconceptions.

Cultural and religious factors that impact sexual health and wellbeing

It was emphasised by the SHW expert that cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards sexual health and wellbeing among Pasifika families. Sex and pregnancy are considered sacred within Pasifika cultures (that also stems loosely from Christian beliefs), whereby the act of sex is connected to the concept of bringing new life into the world. The dynamic between genders within the Pasifika context plays a significant part in conversations around sex, and this is important to understand in a cultural sense. This speaks to the initial hopes for the project around culturally responsive design, where it was encouraged that the design of this research project and its outcome should consider these factors and integrate them into designs to ensure they are culturally sensitive.

Design and research process considerations

Strengths in having a specific audience

The CD expert discussed specific considerations when it comes to Pasifika-driven design. Pasifika cultures, although they share many similarities, are also very different and unique.

The expert highlighted that it is important to focus on a specific nation or cultural group when designing for sexual health and wellbeing. Understanding the specific needs and values of the target audience can make the design process easier.

For example, focusing on Cook Island culture, as opposed to Pasifika communities as a whole, is a great way to consider values and design ideas specific and unique to that culture.

It was also discussed that researching the scope of other cultures is also a beneficial way for design to be well-informed as this allows you to look to existing material as inspiration to draw from to then create something new.

Research scope and time constraints

The CD expert discussed their experiences working with Pasifika communities on complex projects (such as sexual health and wellbeing) and highlighted the impact of time constraints on design projects and the research involved. Time constraints can impact the depth of research and the nature of the design process. The expert shared that designers should be aware of these limitations and adapt their approach accordingly as they are just as much a significant part of design and research processes.

Reflective design process

The CD expert highlighted that design can reflect personal experiences and cultural backgrounds. Culturally driven design can also be inspired by one's own understanding and knowledge about one's culture. Design projects that are culturally focused or aimed at cultural communities can be daunting due to the fear of creating something inappropriate to the culture or disrespectful. However, the expert discussed how drawing from one's own knowledge and understanding can contribute to culturally driven design solutions.

“Intuition and gut feeling play a huge part in the design process.”

– CD expert

The CD expert's experience with a community-focused project has taught them that the design you create can reflect you as a person. The expert highlighted that sexual health and well-being within the Pasifika context are complex.

Findings from anonymous online survey analysis

An anonymous online survey was carried out to scope the first-hand experiences of Cook Island youth. This approach was chosen because there was a gap in the literature about Cook Island youth specifically and their experiences about where youth are getting their information today. The survey provided insight into their experiences around navigating taboos and the cultural challenges that have affected how communication is carried out surrounding sexual health and wellbeing. 20 responses were received. Key insights from the analysis are summarised below.

Cultural and religious factors

A large amount of the survey sample highlighted that religious values and morals are an integral part of attitudes around sexual health and wellbeing and how this is approached within the home. It was established that Christianity is one of the main religions within Cook Island culture and, therefore, plays a huge part in difficulties around discussions. Conversations relating to sex are not often brought up due to religious beliefs within households. Cook Island youth state that they won't talk about these topics to avoid breaking certain customs, traditions or teaching. One respondent also shared a more saddening consequence that,

“Because of my religious attitudes around sex, youth have a lot of guilt, disappointment and disgust” – Cook Island respondent

A commonality among the responses was the fact that the only 'sex talk' youth received was that you are to not have sex until marriage. It was outlined by Cook Island youth that a large number of Pacific communities are heavily reliant on religious beliefs. Responses in the survey also mentioned that the integration of cultural and religious beliefs can have a massive effect on the understanding of sexual health and wellbeing. This suggests that considerations of cultural and religious factors are key to better understanding the challenges that youth face and how these are crucial to consider for the research moving forward.

Cook Island youth defining *taboo*

In the survey, Cook Island youth supported the notion that sexual health is a taboo and sensitive complex topic. One response highlighted the nature of taboo and sexual health within Cook Island families.

“We don’t ask questions, we just know it’s taboo, and so we stop conversations around it.” – Cook Island respondent

Responses mentioned that taboo makes conversations awkward and limits what they can do as a youth.

“I’d feel a lot safer if conversations around sexual health and wellbeing weren’t perceived as taboo” – Cook Island respondent

Another respondent discussed that taboo maintains the *Vā* (definition) between themselves and their family. It was also established within the survey that there is a need to change the way we understand the concept of taboo and what this means for Cook Island and other Pasifika youth.

Discomfort with discussions

The majority of the survey sample agreed that talking about sexual health and wellbeing-related topics is uncomfortable and that they would prefer talking about such topics with friends over their immediate family.

“Not being able to talk about this with parents meant I didn’t know much about things.” – Cook Island respondent

Many highlighted that talking about sex with parents felt ‘weird’, and they felt safer talking with friends and peers, especially those who may have different backgrounds and/or who are known not to judge. One respondent discussed the implications of being unable to talk about these topics with the people in your home.

Accessibility to sexual health and wellbeing information

It was established that the internet has made accessing information easier for Pasifika youth surrounding the complexity and sensitivity of sexual health because it provides a platform where young people can find information without any judgment or fear of being identified. This anonymity allows individuals to freely explore various topics and seek knowledge without feeling restricted. Additionally, one respondent mentioned that seeking advice or information from friends or the internet has become less taboo.

Harmful impacts

Several respondents within the survey highlighted that there is a harmful sex culture that is learnt from televisions and the internet (such as porn) as opposed to learning this from their family. One respondent mentioned that healthy conversations around sexual health and wellbeing are non-existent. There is also a damaging impact that harmful sex culture and lack of healthy conversations can have on youth. It was established that this can seriously damage youth's self-worth and confidence. A commonality between the respondents' experiences is fear of what parents may think or treat them if conversations around sex are brought up.

“There is a shameful portrayal and disappointment not only you but your family would receive from your family/community for partaking in sex before marriage.” – Cook Island respondent

Cook Island youth within the sample of the survey have highlighted a growing need for more healthy discussions around sexual health and wellbeing so that understanding can be built.

Potential successful considerations

Survey responses also discussed possible solutions or considerations to improve sexual health outcomes among Cook Island and Pasifika youth. One interesting response was the need to be more comfortable with using proper scientific terms relating to sex, such as the word 'vagina', as it is seen as very rude within the Cook Island culture.

“Traumatic events in life could be prevented or alleviated with more transparent and healthy conversations around these topics.”

- Cook Island respondent

One response also advocated for the fact that conversations are good to have with trusted peers as there is more comfort in having these talks with people who are as curious as you.

Developing and refining a Cook Island visual identity

Following the previous experiments, I began adding meaning to the designs and patterns that contributed to the visual identity. Moving away from Tivaevae patterns and designs, I drew from other Cook Island artefacts and patterns and extracted common motifs. I looked at designs on museum archives, Google Images, and personal art blogs for Cook Island design inspiration.

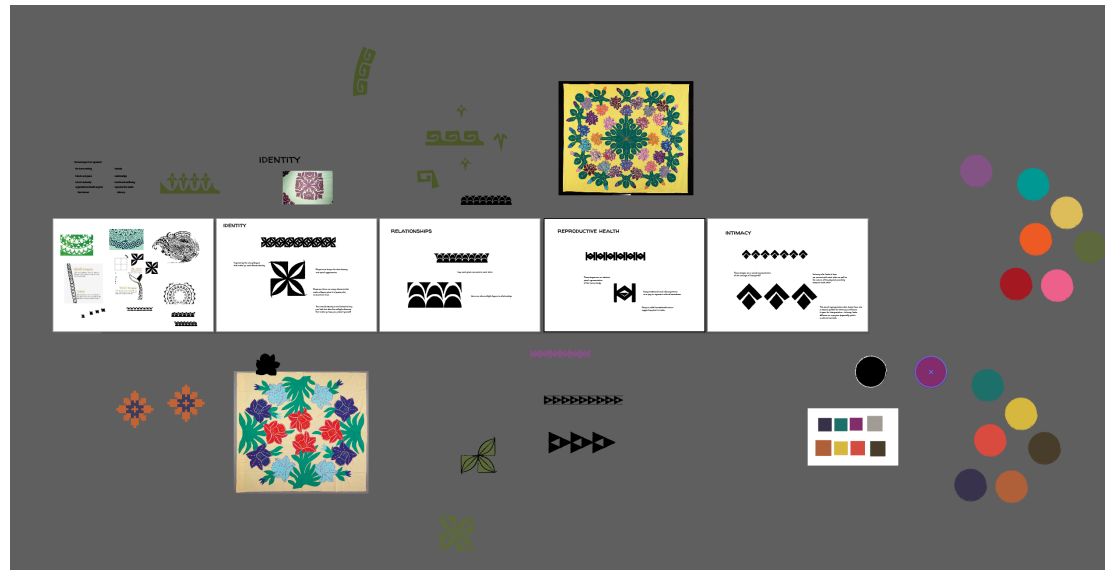


Figure 34. Adobe Illustrator workspace of motif developments

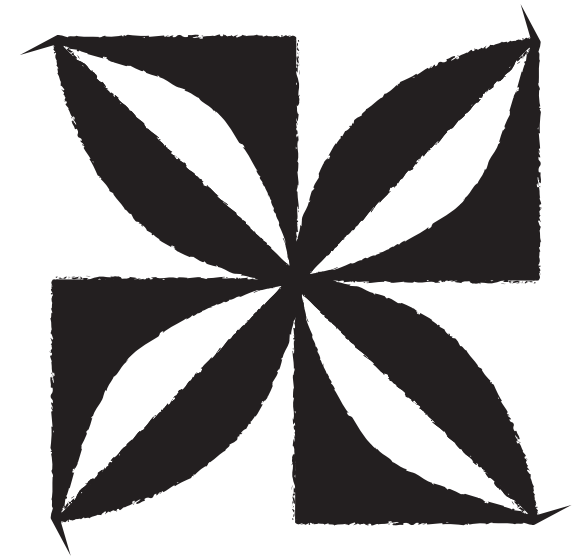
Working in a digital space (Adobe Illustrator), I then began breaking up shapes and forming new patterns and combinations. Through this process, I noticed commonalities in the designs I was creating—where elements were joined together, repeated, or layered (see Fig workspace). This process allowed the design I was creating to be more authentic and thoughtful. When developing the visual identity for the various topics surrounding sexual health and wellbeing, I drew from my contextual review to identify the different aspects that make up sexual health and wellbeing. These were identity, relationships, reproductive health, and intimacy. The focus for this exploration was creating a visual identity that is unique to both Cook Island culture and the research project. Drawing from the pattern explorations, I began working between content (the aspect of sexual health, such as identity) and the design and how these related to each other. The creation and development of the motifs were self-reflective and self-exploratory. This meant that ideation and decisions were heavily based on my own practice and reflections. The Cook Island design motif lexicon is showcased below.

Identity motif

This motif (Figure 35) is inspired by the common flower pattern (seen across multiple Pasifika cultures). However, I developed it further to be specific to 'identity'. Flowers are known for their beauty and visual appearance. However, many elements make a flower what it is, such as the environment, water, soil, etc. This is a representation of identity as one's sexual identity is not limited to how you look but also the multiple elements that make up how people may present themselves, such as upbringing, interests, values, etc.



Figure 35. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns



Relationships

This motif (Figure 36) is inspired by the Cook Island 'Tiktiki tangata' pattern that represents the unity of people and is symbolic of people holding hands. This motif represents relationships as it shows how each piece connects and also shows that there are multiple layers to relationships.



Figure 36. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns



Intimacy

Intimacy looks at how we connect and the physical proximity between two parts. This motif (Figure 37) represents this through the visualisation of being held. Taking a more abstract approach, this motif can be interpreted in various ways, as intimacy (especially within a cultural context) can represent something different to each person.



Figure 37. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns



Reproductive health

This motif represents reproductive health (Figure 38) through abstract shapes. With its solid foundation and structure, the shapes represent the body as the container that supports what is inside. This motif also uses traditional Cook Island patterns as a way to represent cultural sacredness.

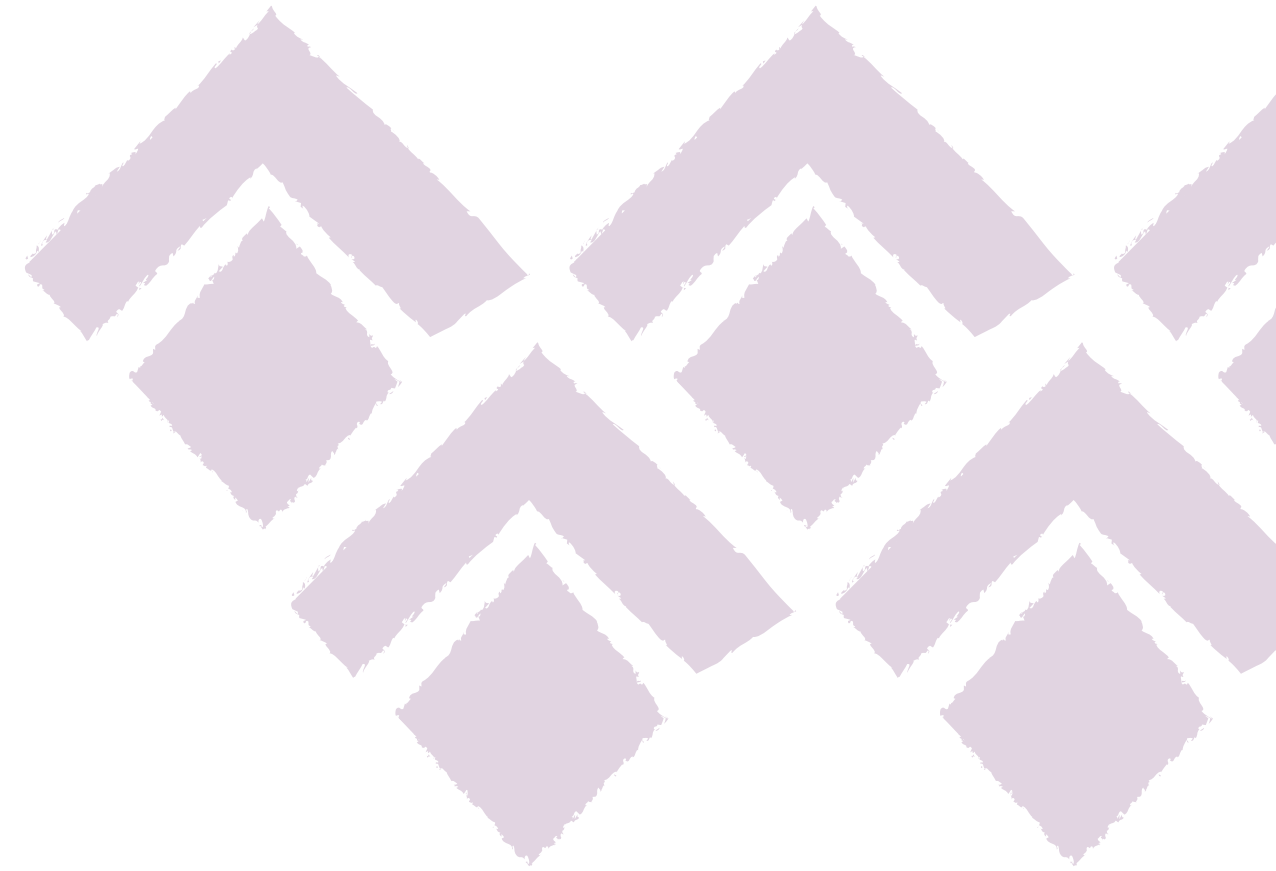


Figure 38. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns



Summary

The exploration of a Cook Island lexicon of motifs (that contribute to the visual identity) entailed careful considerations in conjunction with a fluid creative approach. This process allowed me to explore my own cultural identity and the meaning of patterns and formulate my interpretations. The lexicon was intended to be used as a set of assets that can be used across parts of the design outcome and touchpoints of the research that require communication design or illustrations. These touchpoints were the exegesis design and layout, scenario cards, instruction booklets or possibly further outreach of the research project following the exegesis submission.



Colour explorations and conclusions

The initial stages of colour exploration consisted of direct colour dropping from the Tivaevae illustrations that I have created. However, moving forward within my practice, I reflected on the development of the lexicon and the careful consideration that it entailed and wanted to emulate that within the colour usage. Feedback from various design critique sessions with design peers established the effectiveness of bright colours concerning the engagement of youth. Key takeaways from these sessions were the uniqueness of colour usage to Cook Island culture and its distinct identity. I wanted to emulate this also throughout the design outcome.

One key aspect of the research is maintaining a sense of tradition and sacredness. I saw this heavily within the Tivaevae practice and customs. Tivaevae are a valued artefact within the Cook Island culture and are, therefore, usually gifted on special occasions or stored away for another occasion. I saw connections between tradition and sacredness and the storage of Tivaevae. In the development of a colour scheme, I wanted to explore ways of implementing the concept of stored Tivaevae (Figure 40). I explored colour combinations (this time with meaning and intention) and drew from stored Tivaevae in my own home (Figure 39).



Figure 39. Stored Tivaevae and material

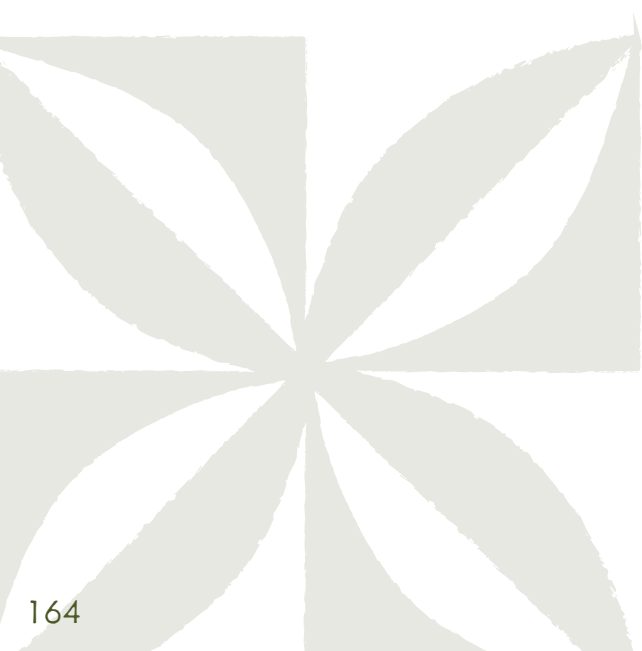


Figure 40. Colour exploration using the eye dropper tool on Adobe Illustrator

I looked at the stored Tivaevae and Tivaevae material within my own home that belonged to my grandmother. The box contained unfinished Tivaevae pieces and large pieces of fabric. In examining the material and Tivaevae, I noticed the colour faded and aged. I photographed this and brought it into the digital space (Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop) and used the eyedropper tool to extract the colours. I adjusted, added more, and refined the colours and compiled a set that I felt worked well together. This was based on incorporating a range of colours that were engaging and fun whilst not being too overpowering.

Data collection limitations and reframing the project

Ethics approval (AUTEK) was received in December of 2023, and therefore, data collection began in January 2024. This delay in data collection meant that I couldn't receive the number of insights from experts and Cook Island youth as I had anticipated. I worked around this by working with the data that was collected through the expert interviews and online survey, as well as shifting my approach to the research project from co-design to a self-reflected project. This meant my research was not solely dependent on participant input but rather on my reflections and the contextual knowledge that was continuously collected throughout the project. Although challenging, this shift allowed for my project to be more thorough and focused on how my research might act as a small nudge to future research around sexual health and wellbeing with a focus on Cook Island youth. Ideally, data collection in an earlier part of the project timeline would have meant the insights could inform more of the design and concepts. However, the nature of the research relied on my own learning through making and self-reflection which was just as effective and informative for the project and how it contributed to a design solution/outcome.



STAGE 3.

AKAIRIANGA:

EVALUATION AND THE GIFTING OF TIVAEVAE

“Mama prepares the finished Tivaevae to be gifted to her granddaughter for their 21st birthday”

Identifying strengths that were carried into the design outcome

By summarising the key insights from consultations, expert interviews, the online anonymous survey, and my design practice explorations, I made a list of recommendations that were subsequently incorporated into the next iteration of the solution.

Cook Island visual identity and communication design

- Cultural patterns drawn from a range of Cook Island practices and artefacts will be used to create a lexicon of patterns to be used across the outcome.
- Creating my own patterns (based on design practice) brings meaning to the designs and patterns.
- Tivaevae contain their own plethora use of colours that are usually drawn from nature and other organic matter.
- Consider the handmade organic aesthetic and how this is represented in the outcome. This style makes the designs more unique and human as opposed to current sexual health and wellbeing resources.

Design outcome

- The strength in hands-on/physical objects for prompting discussions
- Incorporating what the Tivaevae means in this project (acts as a safe and culturally responsive space for conversations). The conversations that are had are visually represented (creating your own Tivaevae).
- The use of scenarios allows for youth to talk about a topic whilst maintaining some anonymity or safety.
- Consider how multiple materials and forms can influence the design outcome, as opposed to only cards or sewing material.

Exploration and development of conversational game

Reflecting on the previous experiments within this research project, I found great effectiveness around the ‘conversation card deck’ that explored prompts for conversations around sex. I felt that this highlighted ways conversations around sexual health and wellbeing can be facilitated as it looked at where youth get their information around sexual health as opposed to asking youth to share personal or first-hand experiences around sexual health. The concern for this was that it would be difficult to manage safety, whereby some harmful experiences could be brought up. This informed my next exploration by experimenting with different forms of conversation starters.

I was inspired by the work of Talia Pua, who created the Continuum board game (Figure 41) to facilitate discussions around cultural heritage (Pua, 2019).

“In ‘Continuum’, players begin at the centre of the board and start each round by revealing two opposing statements about heritage. These statements form questions that guide players through a conversation about their personal connection with their heritage. At the end of the game, the players’ answers will be mapped out on the board.” (Pua, 2019).

Elements that I was inspired by from 'Continuum'.

- Responding to prompts through a physical movement.
- The board game feels like an artefact within itself.
- Uses tangibility to respond to complex conversations.
- There are no right or wrong answers – very reflective and open-ended.
- Conversations are visually represented

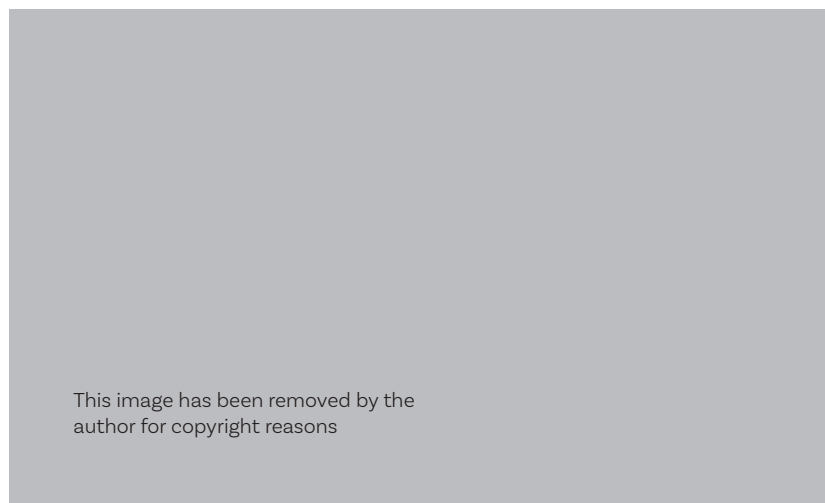


Figure 41. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns

Drawing loosely from Pua's (2019) board game concept and functionality, I explored how the Tivaevae is emulated in board game form to facilitate conversations. I used cotton material to wrap around cardboard to create a Tivaevae and then pastels to draw a simple pattern (Figure 42).

The research project looked at the differences between what we learn at home and the world around us and how these do not always replicate each other. Therefore, the focus of the game was to learn from the Cook Island youth where they feel comfortable talking about certain sexual health and wellbeing information. The game uses a set of cards to ask questions about sexual health and well-being and where youth may go to find information about certain aspects such as contraception, reproductive health, relationships, sexual identity, etc.

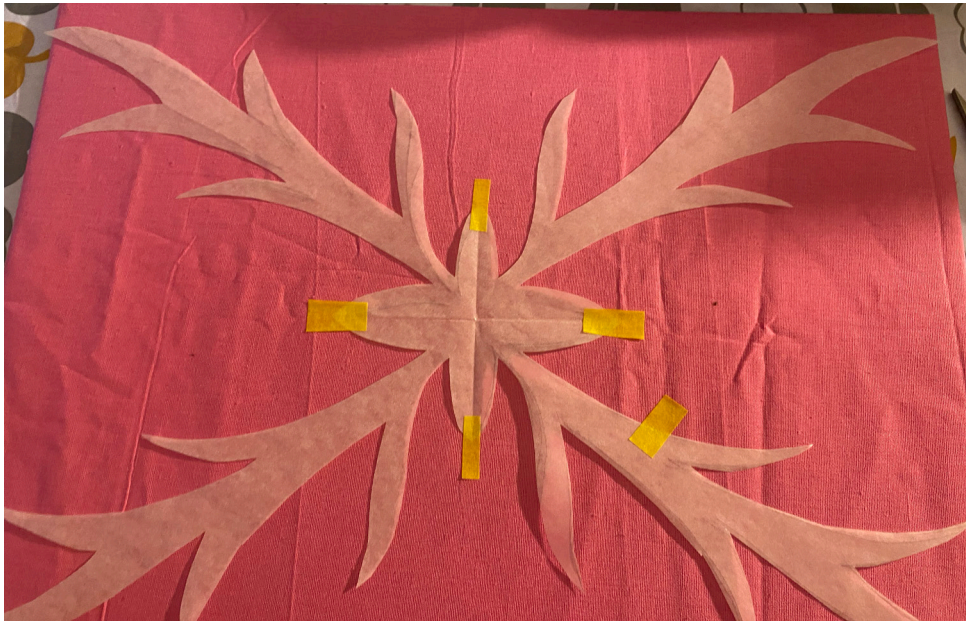


Figure 42. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns

I also drew from another Tivaevae style (Tivaevae Tuitui Tataura), which uses squares to make patterns (see fig). Using the same concept as the other iteration, layers place their pieces in the allocated square placements (Figure 43).

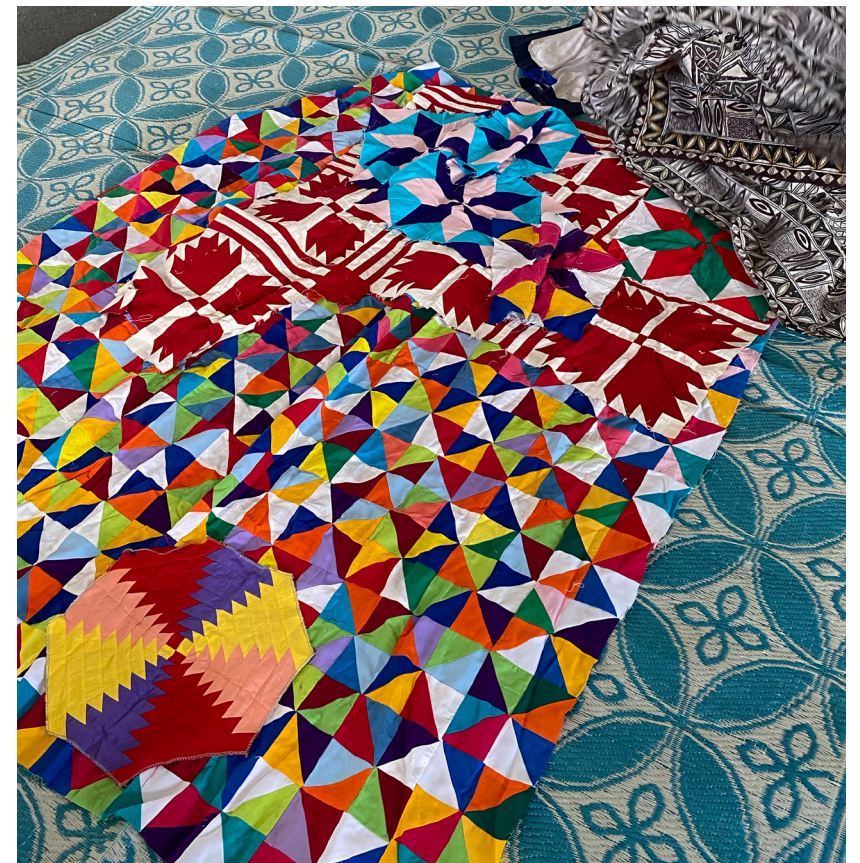


Figure 43. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns

Sketching: Development of Tivaevae board

Drawing from its concepts, I explored how Tivaevae represented the fostering of safe conversations through sketches.

The intention was to experiment with how Tivaevae, as a quilt, can be designed into game form. This informed the next steps of a board iteration that could then be prototyped into a game board form.

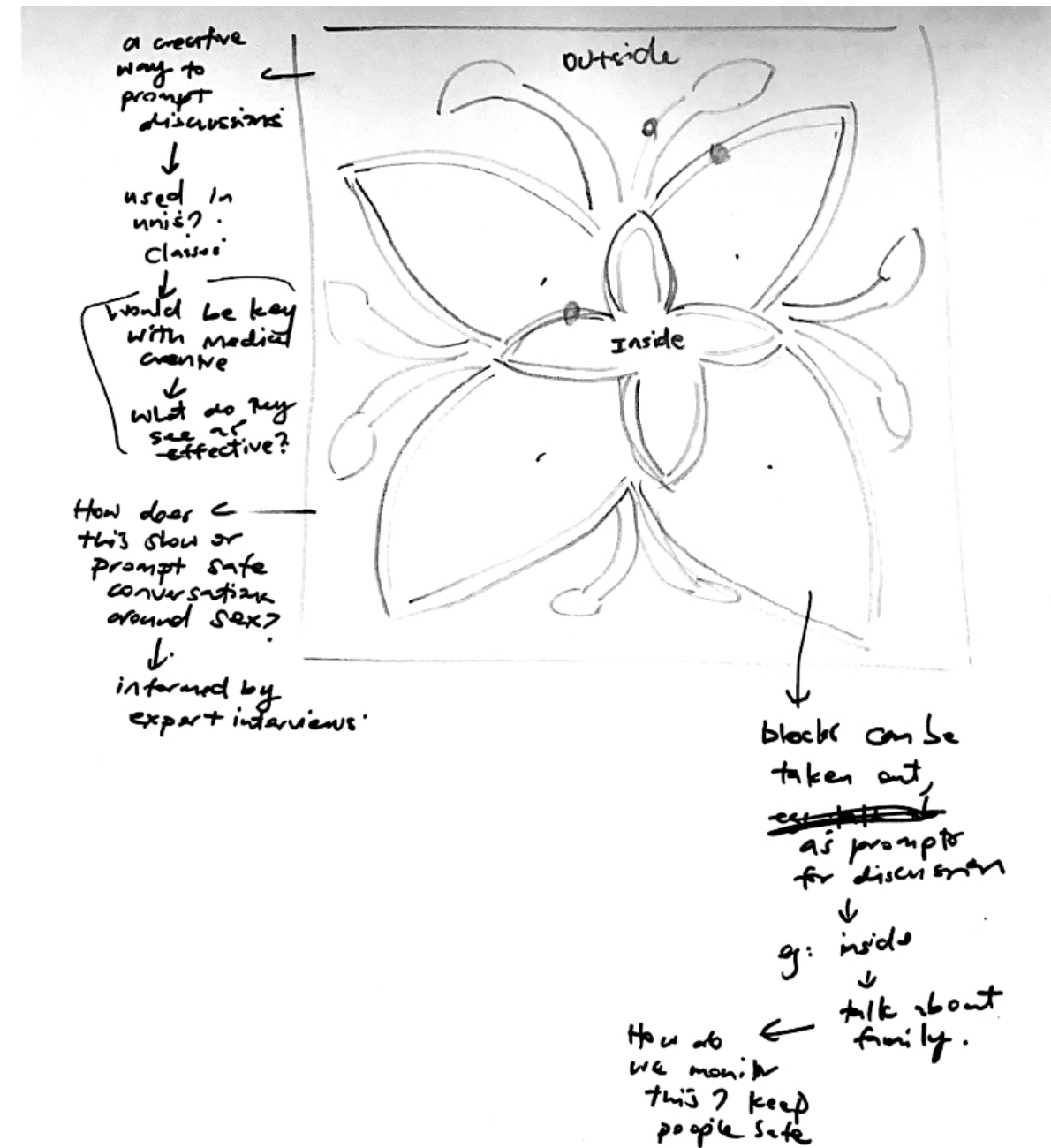


Figure 44. Annotations of Tivaevae sketch - an analysis of what different elements represent and are relevant to the research.

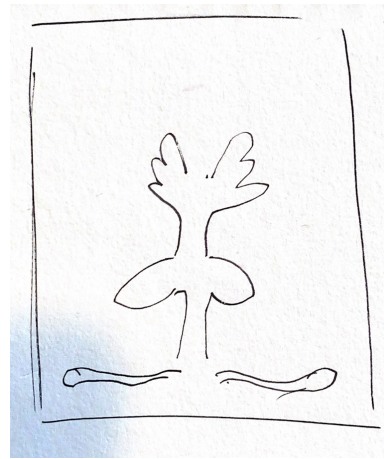
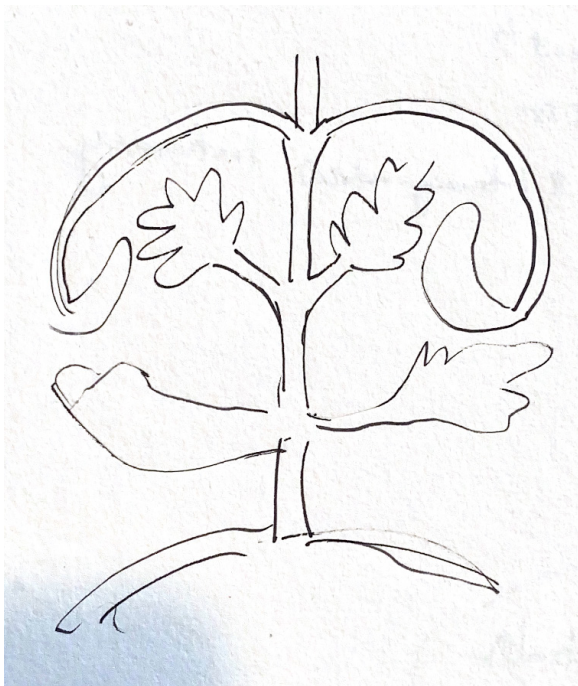


Figure 45. Rough sketches of Tivaevae designs.

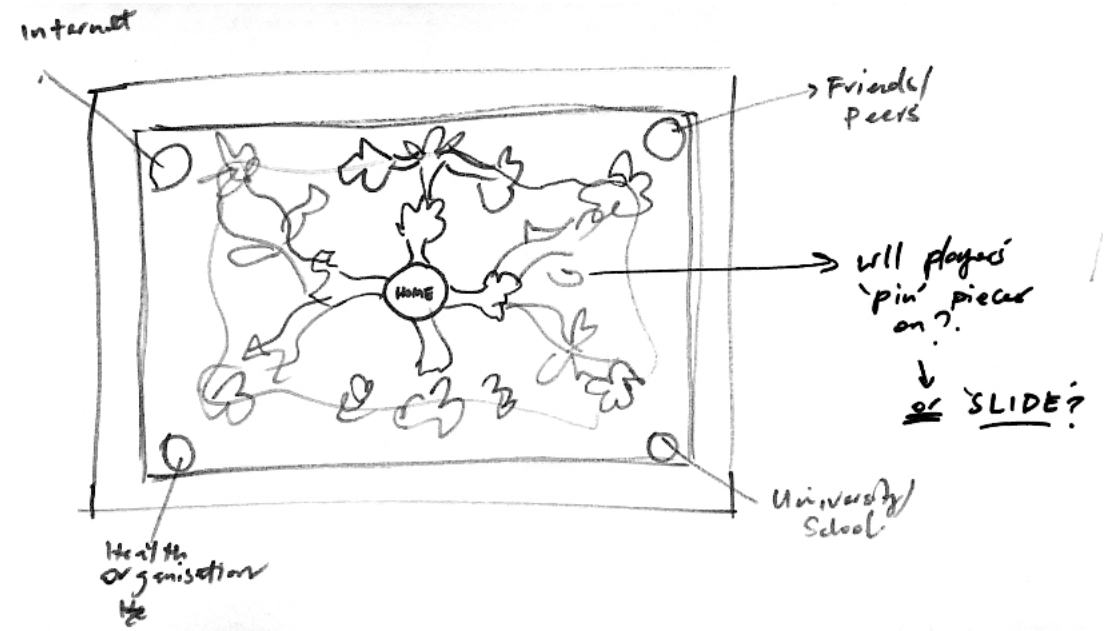
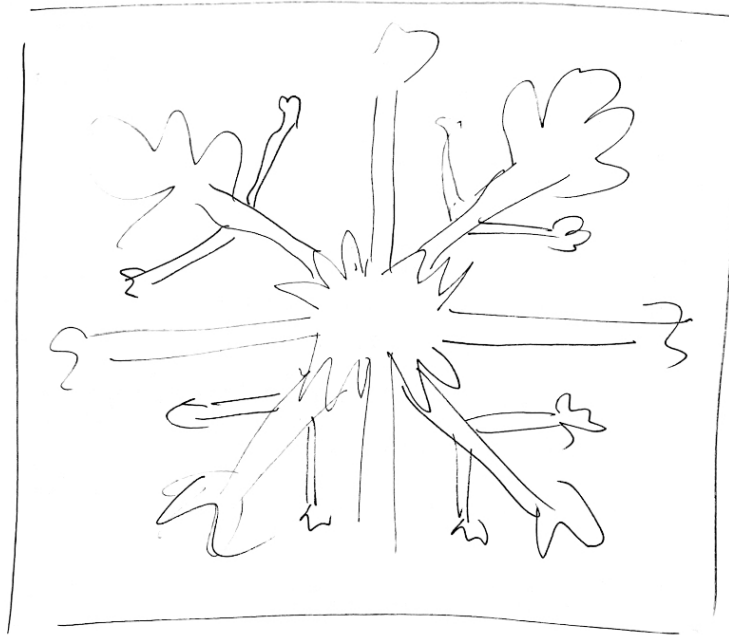


Figure 46. Developments of design into game form with annotations.

Figure 47. Developments of Tivaevae design into game form as a pentagon shape

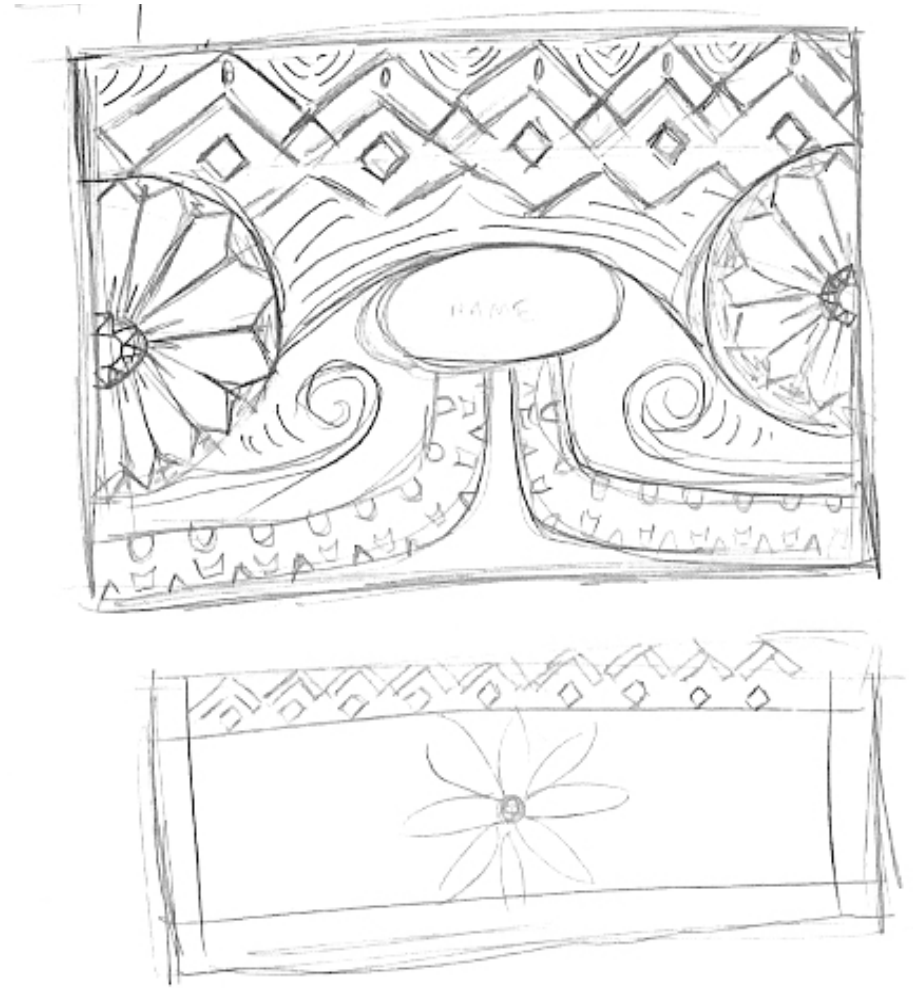
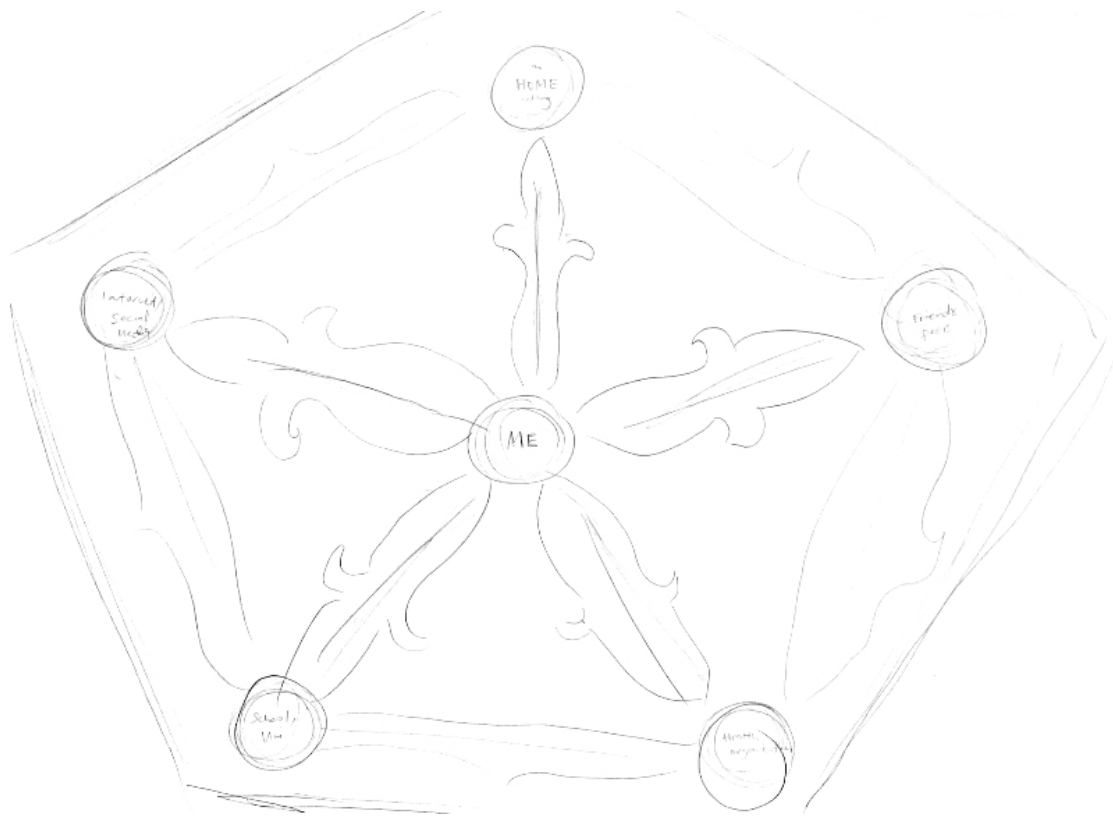


Figure 48. Developments of Tivaevae designs with Cook Island patterns to create a composition that incorporates teh different motifs

Game Concept

The concept of the game is that each end of the design on the board represents a different location or place where sexual health information can be found (school/university, friends, health organisations and services, and the internet). These locations are found on the outside of the game board (not shown in the image). The centre of the board is the 'home setting', which represents the cultural values or values that you are brought up with. Inspired by the artistic practice of Tivaevae, whereby individual pieces are sewn together to make a whole Tivaevae, the game looked at how you respond to the prompt by placing your piece somewhere on the Tivaevae board. When answering a question (such as contraception), players place their piece where they feel most comfortable going (Figure 49) between the 'home setting' and the other locations. The game is to be looked at as though it is a spectrum, with the home setting being one end and the other being the internet, for example. As the game is played, the conversations that are discussed are visually represented (Figure 50) on the board - each time the game is played, a new Tivaevae is created.

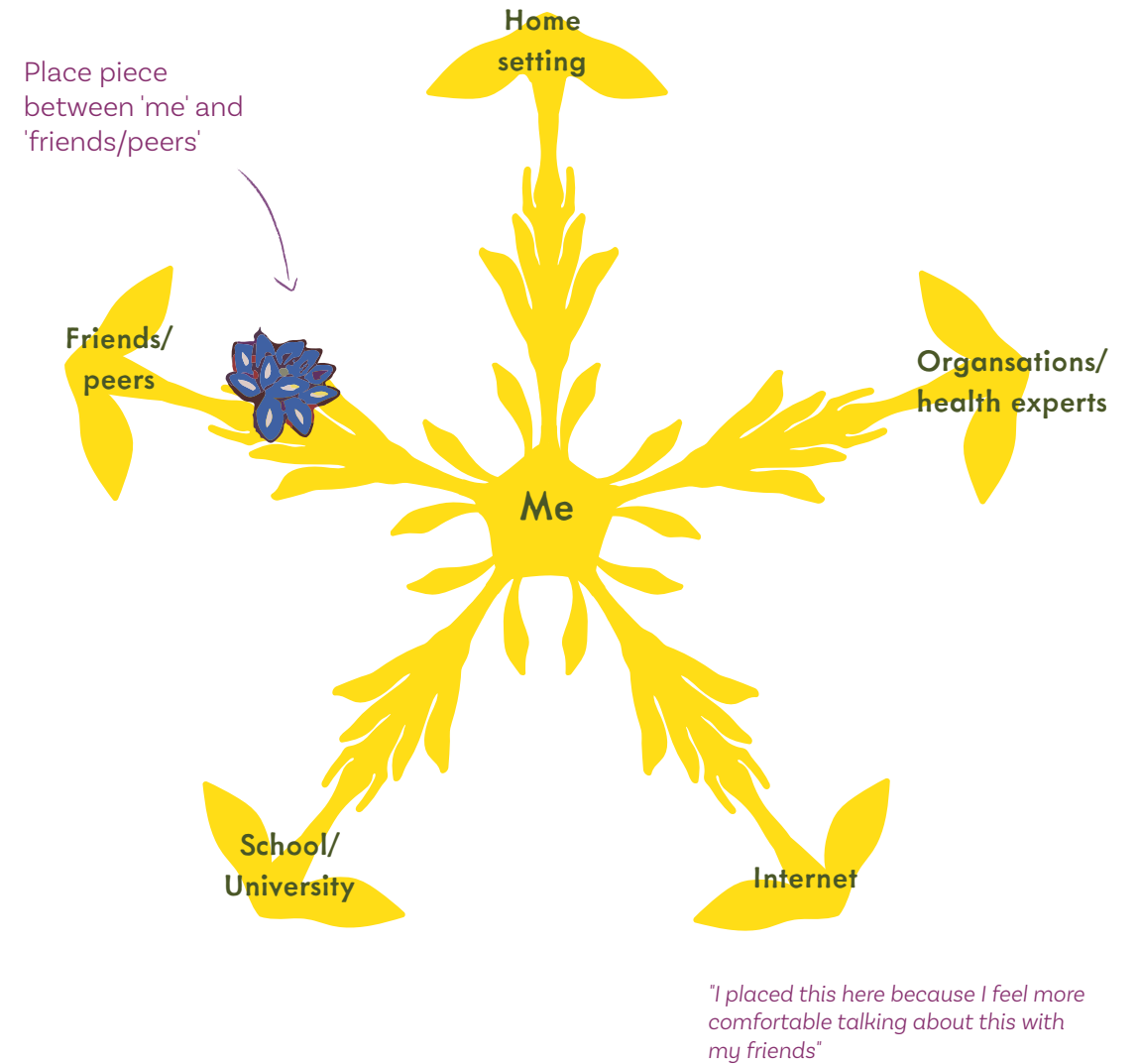


Figure 49. Visual representation of how the pieces are placed on the board in response to a prompt

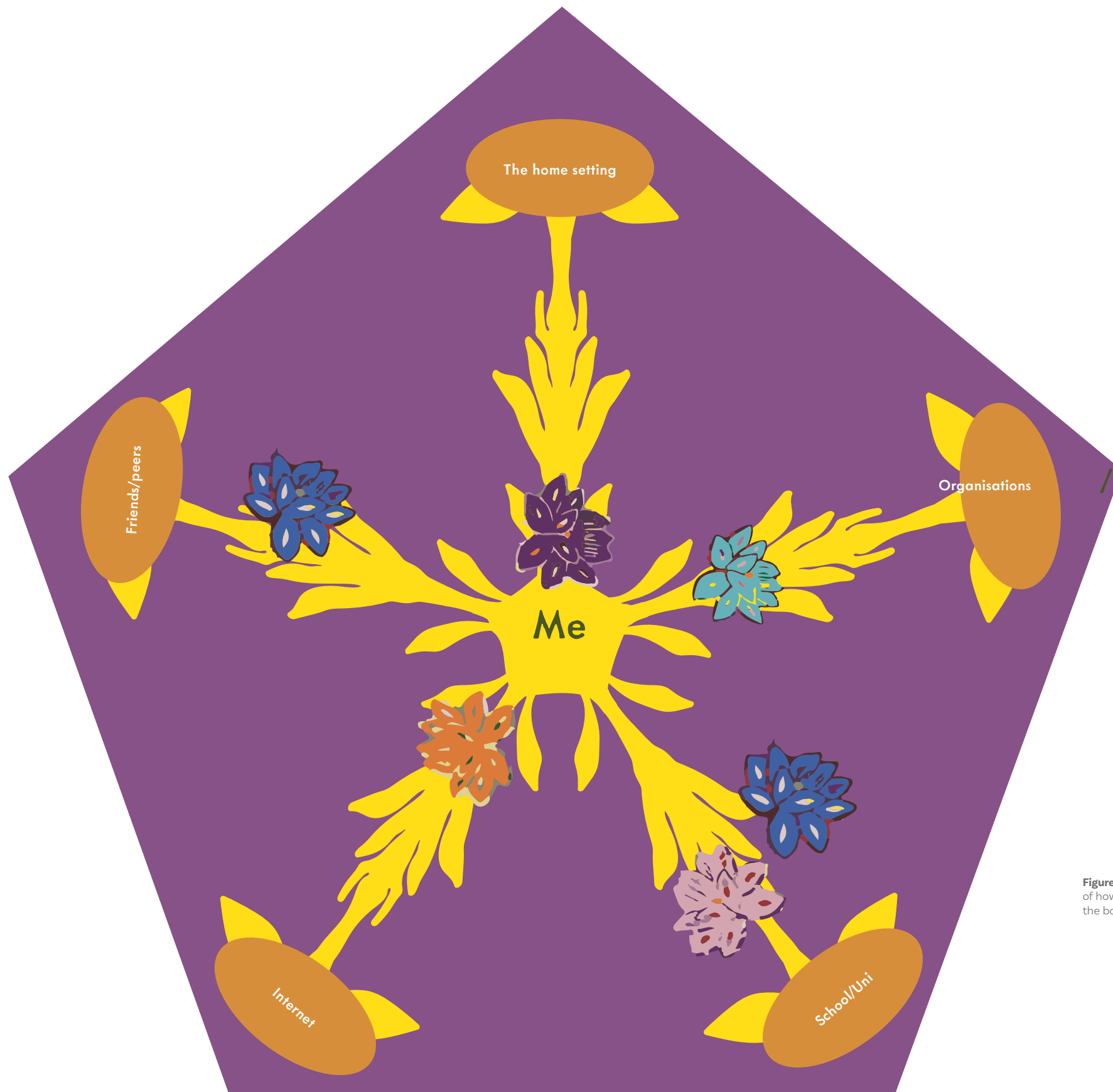


Figure 50. Visual representation of how the pieces are placed on the board throughout the game.

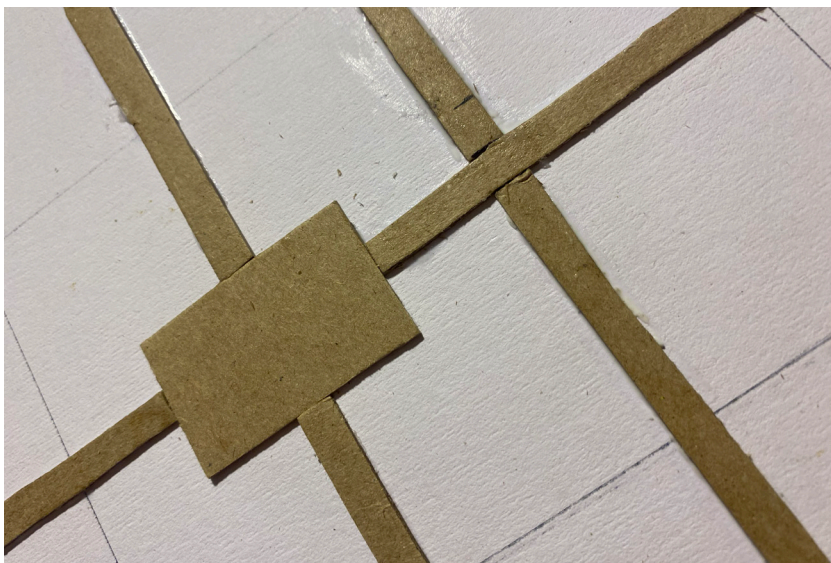
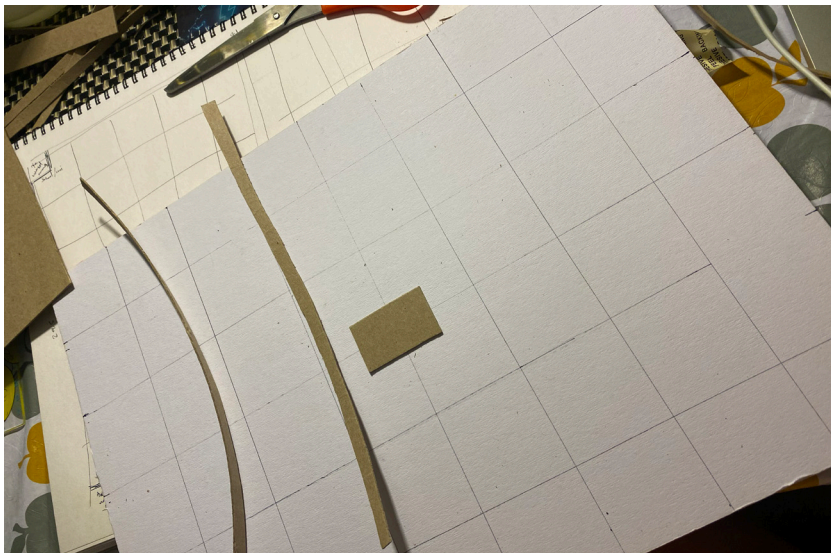


Figure 51. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns



Figure 52. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns

Through a design critique session with peers, I tested how both game iterations played (see fig). One key insight from this session was that the questions were too broad and generalised to answer using the board. As a group, we also found that using specific scenarios would be a great way to draw out more in the conversations. The scenarios could allow players to talk about what they might do if they were in the shoes of the personas mentioned in the scenarios as opposed to talking about their own experiences (unless they are comfortable doing so). This was a highly informative insight and helped to shape and refine the practicality and how the game plays. Feedback from the session also highlighted that the first game iteration was more successful and practical in responding to prompts and visually representing the answers to the questions. The placement of the pieces allowed for a more fluid way of displaying the responses that you could then talk to. The next steps of the explorations were about using the insights from the critique session as well as more design developments to further refine the gameplay and style of the game.



Figure 53. Cook Island reference images of artefacts and other patterns

Explorations of scenarios for board game

The design critique and self-reflection informed the next steps of the game exploration by looking into the development of scenarios as prompts for discussions. Discussions within the critique sessions showed scenarios as a great way to facilitate deeper, specific conversations where players can answer from their own experiences or with more generalised answers. In other words, the single topic prompts such as 'contraception' meant that players would answer based on their experiences or thoughts on the topics that may be too personal for some players. These prompts also were difficult to answer and articulate as they were too general. So, using specific scenarios meant players could step inside the shoes of a persona and their experiences and bring aspects of their own experiences to help respond.

Scenarios were derived from literature around common challenges that youth face surrounding sexual health and wellbeing. I drew from the experiences and created scenarios that centred around where youth would be comfortable talking about this to. During a design critique, I got feedback on the scenarios (Figure 54). The focus of feedback for this session was to refine the scenarios so that they can read well and work effectively with the game board.

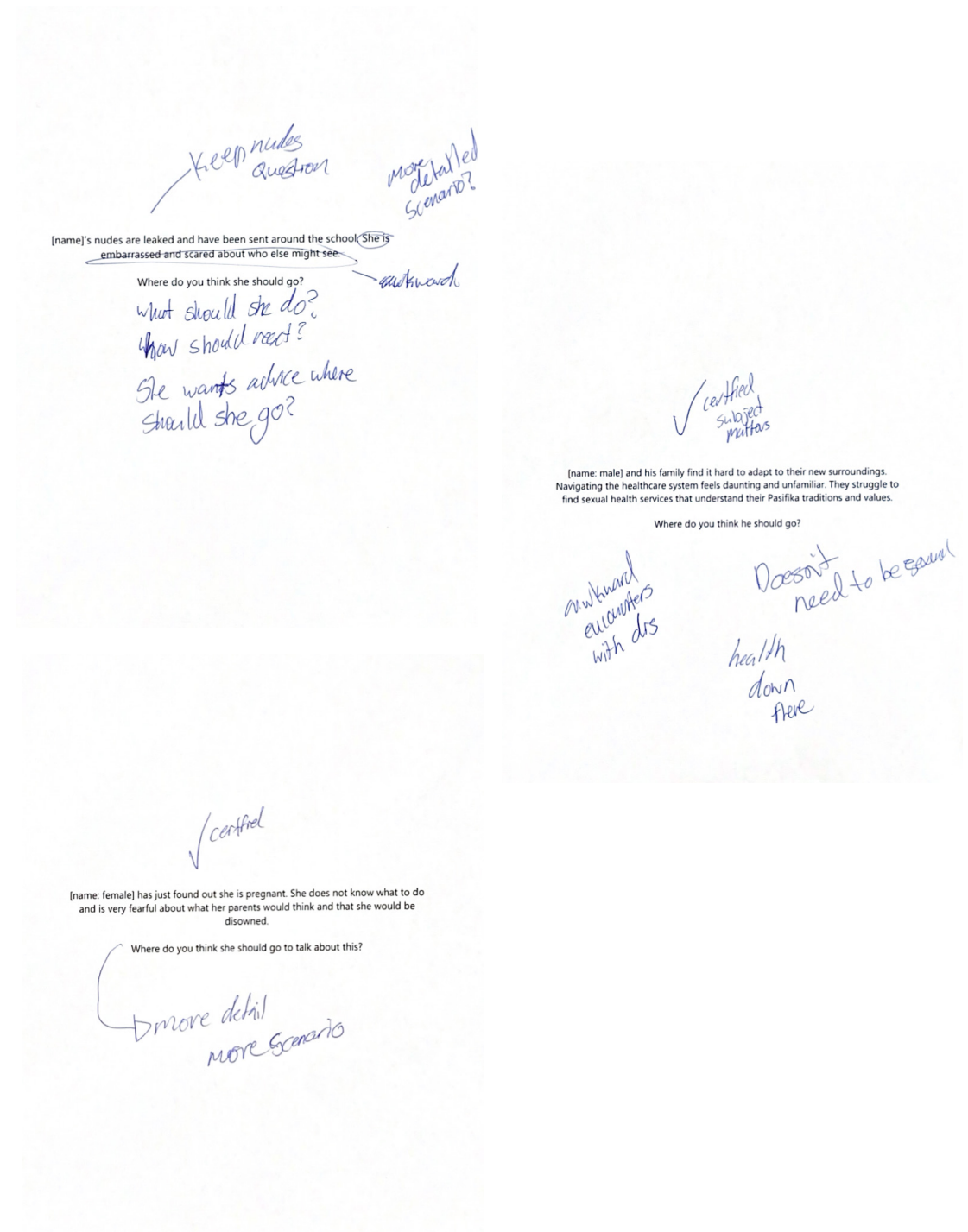


Figure 54. Annotations of feedback from peers for game scenarios

Conversational game elements

Tivaevae Board

The Tivaevae board is the central part of the conversational game. As shown in the explorations previously in this chapter, the Tivaevae board is the incorporation of the Tivaevae quilt in game form. The design draws from the Tivaevae Tataura style with a single base pattern. The board consists of the locations (internet, friends/peers, organisations/health experts, school/university, the home setting) with 'me' (the players) in the centre. The inclusion of 'me' into the game board represents the scale; from the player to the other locations are you comfortable with discussing certain topics or situations? This adjustment was a key insight received from peers whilst testing the gameplay of the scenarios with the board game. The colours were based on how well they contrasted with each other, as well as the developed colour scheme (mentioned previously). The locations are also displayed with wooden blocks so that they are seen clearly. These are also sewn in to incorporate the use of Tivaevae stitching. In conclusion, the Tivaevae comprises several design elements in conjunction with communication design aspects. Drawing on traditional ways of making and materials such as wood (Fijian Mahogany), Tivaevae material, and cotton thread. These elements aimed to create an engaging and beautifully crafted experience and space for youth when playing and participating in discussions.

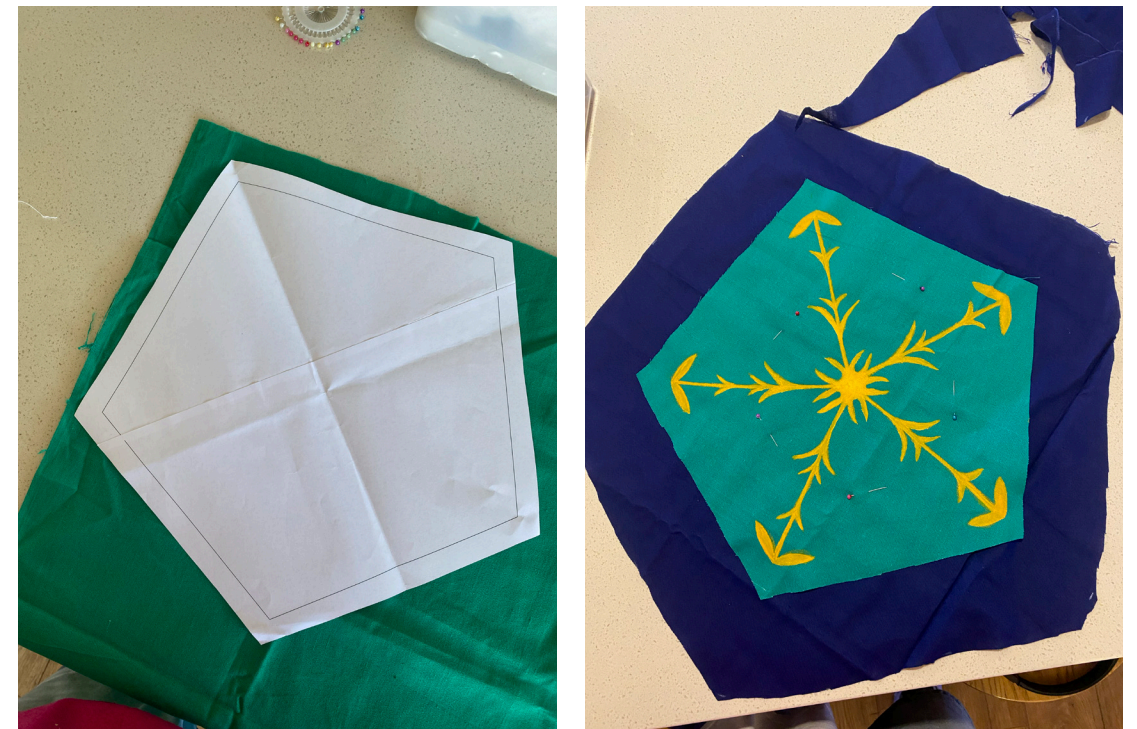


Figure 55. Developments of Tivaevae cotton board

Pieces

The pieces were crafted using wood and drew on the designs of Tivaevae pieces. The use of wood allowed for a professional feel that maintained an organic style. The pieces are used to visually represent your response to the prompt, whereby the placement and the number of pieces used per turn are fluid. They represent the individual designs that are sewn into the base (Tivaevae board) to create a finished Tivaevae quilt.

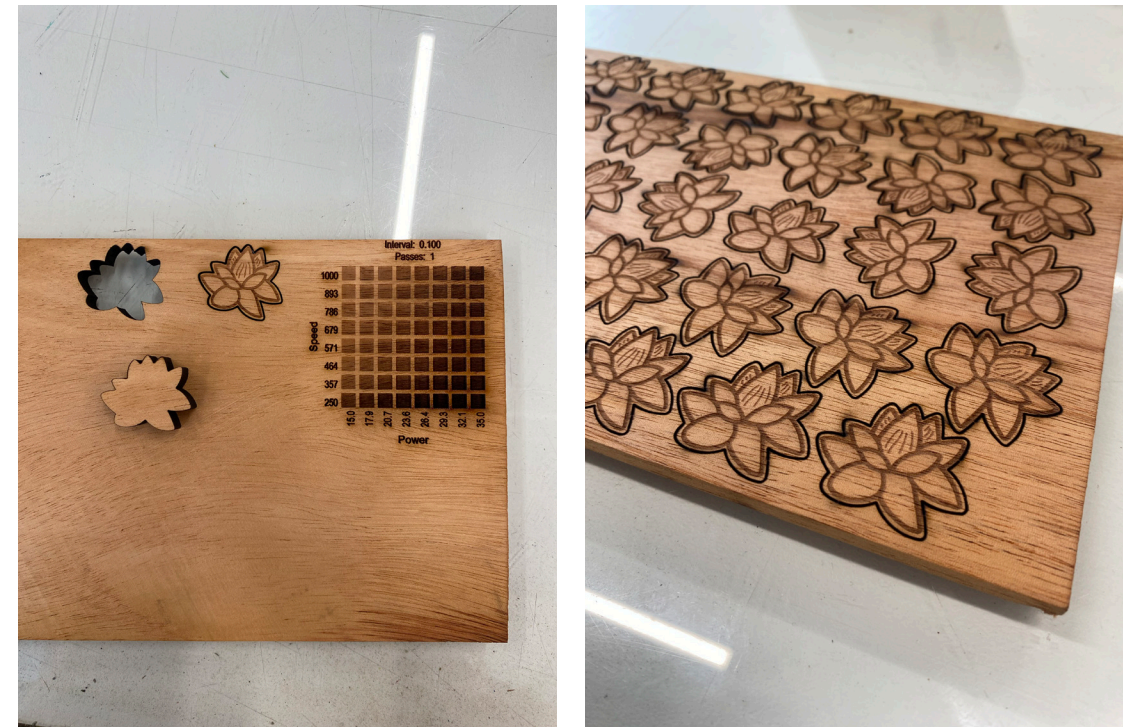


Figure 56. Developments of game pieces - lasercutting wood

Cards

The refined and final design of the scenario cards draws heavily from the exploration of Cook Island design and visual identity. The lexicon of patterns/motifs of Cook Island patterns (each as a representation of the different parts of sexual health and wellbeing) ensured that the overall design and look and feel of the cards were cohesive and meaningful. It was important for me as a designer that the treatment of the cards was also looked at as an artefact in themselves as these were also a significant part of the game that youth would continuously engage with. The designs used on each were chosen and developed thoughtfully so that they were coherent with the topics mentioned in the scenarios.



Figure 57. Developments of scenario cards

Final Design outcome – Conversational game

The designed outcome – a conversational game – is the physical and tangible response to the research covered in this project.

Due to the complexities and wide scope of the research topic that involves Pasifika youth, the design outcome is a small nudge to future research and working within Pasifika communities. This also hints at further collaboration with youth to improve the nature of the game and this could be used as a tool for further data collection (see discussion chapter). Further refinements and finishings occurred following the exegesis submission.

The next section showcases the final outcome.



AIM

This aims to engage Cook Island youth in safe and cultural conversations around sexual health and wellbeing. It is also a visual representation of the conversations - each time the game is played, a new Tivaevase is created.

NOTE: The overall aim of the game is about having fluid conversations with your peers as opposed to 'winning'.

YOU WILL NEED

- Game Tivaevase (Board)
- Flower Placement Pieces (Four different colours)
- Scenario Cards
- Follow-up Reflection Cards

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

2-4

GAME SET-UP

To begin the Tivaevase is laid out between the players. Ensure that the board is easily accessible to everyone. Place the scenario cards and reflection cards faced down in a pile close to the board.



There are four different coloured flower pieces: each player will receive their own coloured pieces. E.g. player one gets blue, player two gets orange etc. Once the board pieces and card decks are in place, the game is ready to begin.

THE LOCATIONS

AIM

THE HOME SETTING

This location represents each player's family setting or the setting you grew up with - e.g. parents, grandparents, siblings, extended family etc. This is the first location you were brought up with.

THE INTERNET

SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY

FRIENDS/PEERS

HEALTH EXPERTS

This location represents each player's social media, Google or other forms of online platforms. The information and knowledge you may receive from school or university such as health services that are available in education systems.

The friends or peers that you may talk to often - will usually be people around the same age group. This location represents experts in the sexual health and wellbeing field such as doctors, nurse or services/organisations such as Family Planning.

ROUNDS

There are three rounds. Once each player has had a turn responding to a scenario and reflecting, that is the end of a round.

For each round, one player will pick up a flower piece and read it aloud. This is a prompt for an open and fluid discussion as a group (5 mins).

Once the discussion is finished, the next round starts. After the three rounds are completed, the game is finished.



Scenario

Your friend tells you about some symptoms she is having, and she believes she is having an STD. However, she has no idea about how to begin with getting help and support.

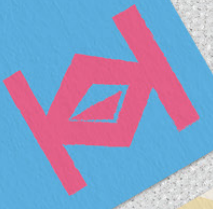
Where do you think she should go for help?

What are the symptoms of an STD? How can you tell if you have an STD? What are the risks of not getting help? What are the risks of getting help? What are the risks of not getting help? What are the risks of getting help?





DISCUSS....
What would you like to see improved within the sexual health and wellbeing system?



SCENARIO
Tamara feels *shame* about being sexually active. At home, it is expected that you are to *wait till marriage* before having sex. However, she would like someone to talk to about her experiences.

Where do you think she should go for support?

SCENARIO

thinking
first time. She
herself more but
where to start.

Where do you think she should go for help about this?

SCENARIO

Your friend tells you about symptoms she is having but she believes it may be about something she has no idea about. How do you think she should go about getting help?

Where do you think she should go for more information?

SCENARIO
Mel is nervous about going on the pill. She's nervous about what her partner might think.

Where do you think she should go for help?

SCENARIO

FOLLOW-UP

LET'S DISCUSS....

Is there a location - that is not on the board - that you would consider a better place to talk about different aspects of sexual health and wellbeing?

SCENARIO

SCENARIO

Leilani feels torn between her culture and her LGBTQ+ identity. She struggles to discuss sexual health with family members who may not understand or accept her orientation. This makes conversations very difficult.

Who do you think she should go to talk about this?

SCENARIO

Mel overhears her *non-Pasifika* classmates talking about their personal lives such as birth control and sexual activities. While, this makes her feel *uncomfortable*, she wishes she could talk *more openly* about her experiences like this.

Where do you think she should go to talk about this?

SCENARIO

SCENARIO

Joseph struggles to find *reliable* information about sexual health. With limited English in his home he feels isolated and unsure. Despite his curiosity and concerns, the *language barriers* create obstacles, leaving him uncertain about where to turn for guidance.

SCENARIO

FOLLOW-UP

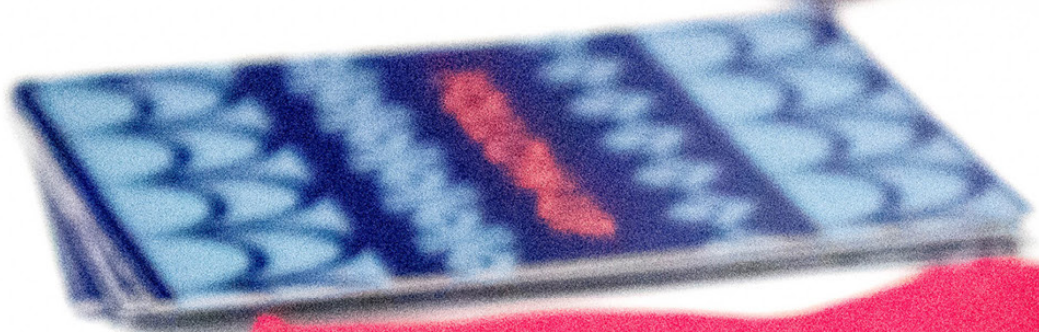
SCENARIO

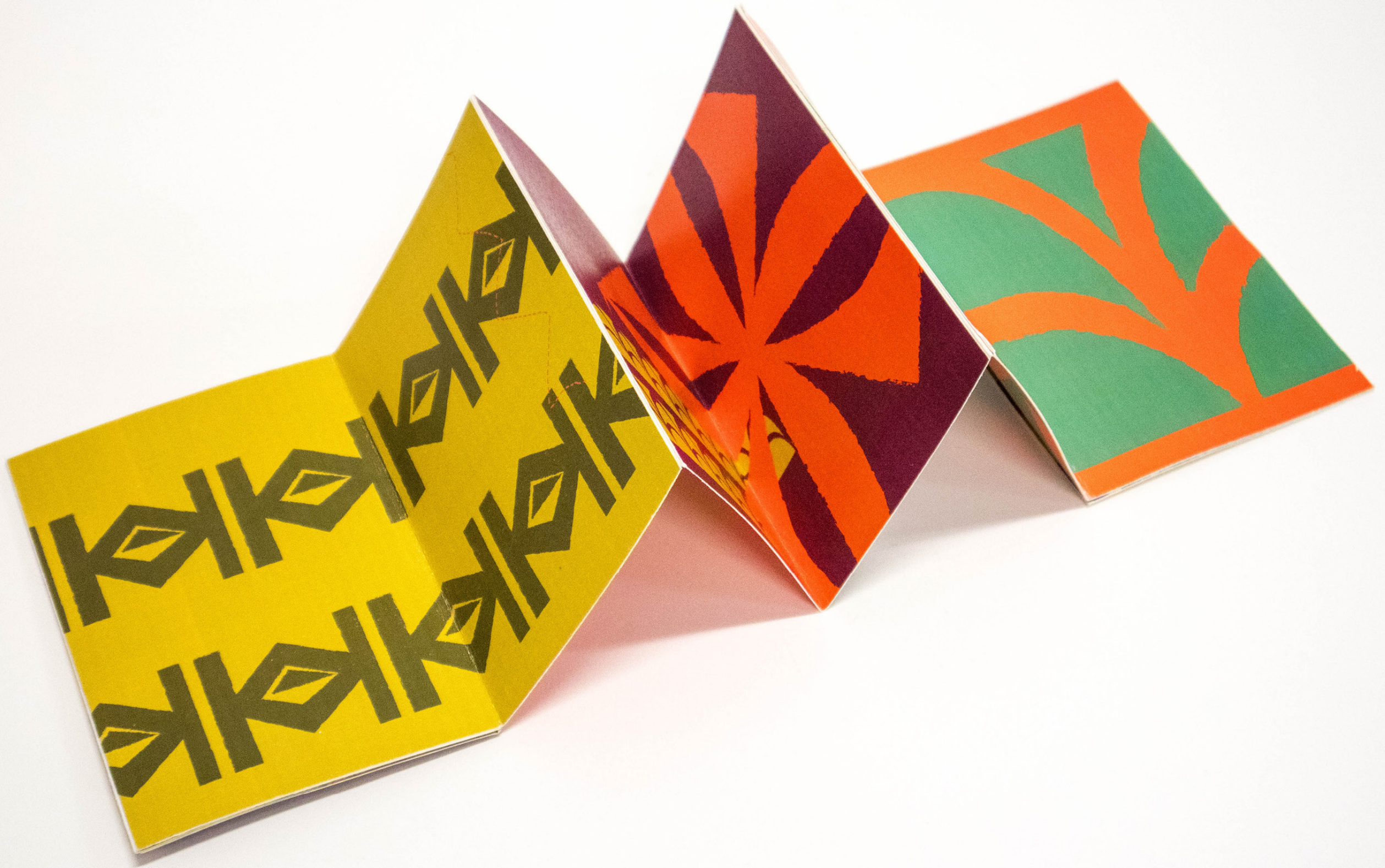
Joseph is sexually active but they have been using condoms for a while now.

What should she do?

Sofia is thinking about going on the pill. However, she's nervous about where to start and what her might parents think.

SCENARIO







SCENARIO
Tina is struggling with finding information about sexual health tailored to their LGBTQ+ identity. With limited resources and support networks, they feel isolated. They feel lonely with the lack of accessible guidance.
Where do you think they should go to seek help to talk about this?

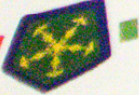
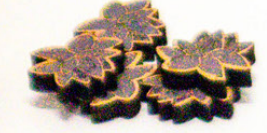
SCENARIO
Sofia is thinking about going on the pill. However, she's nervous about where to start and what her might parents think.
Where do you think she should go for help?

SCENARIO
Tina is struggling with finding information about sexual health tailored to their LGBTQ+ identity. With limited resources and support networks, they feel isolated. They feel lonely with the lack of accessible guidance.
Where do you think they should go to seek help to talk about this?

SCENARIO
Tina is struggling with finding information about sexual health tailored to their LGBTQ+ identity. With limited resources and support networks, they feel isolated. They feel lonely with the lack of accessible guidance.
Where do you think they should go to seek help to talk about this?

FOLLOW-UP

GAME SET-UP
To begin, the Trainer is set out between the players. Ensure that the board is easily accessible to everyone. Place the scenario cards and reflection cards face down in a pile close to the board.





SCENARIO
she is what

SCENARIO

SCENARIO
Leilani feels torn between her culture and her LGBTQ+ identity. She struggles to discuss sexual health with family members who may not understand or accept her orientation. This makes these conversations very difficult to have.
Who do you think should she go to talk about this?

SCENARIO

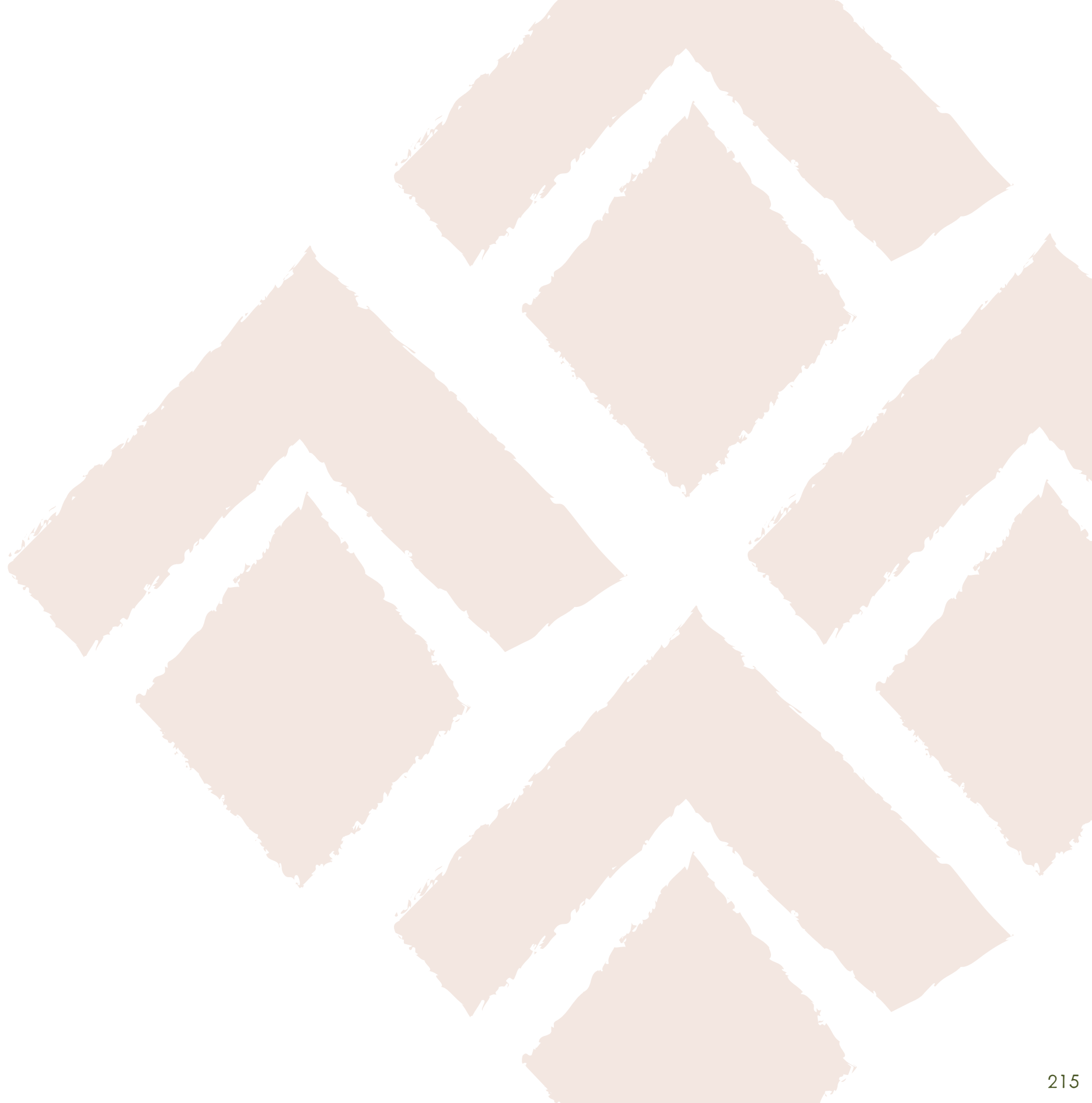
SCENARIO
Sofia is thinking about going on the pill. However, she's nervous about where to start and what her might parents think.
Where do you think she should go for help?

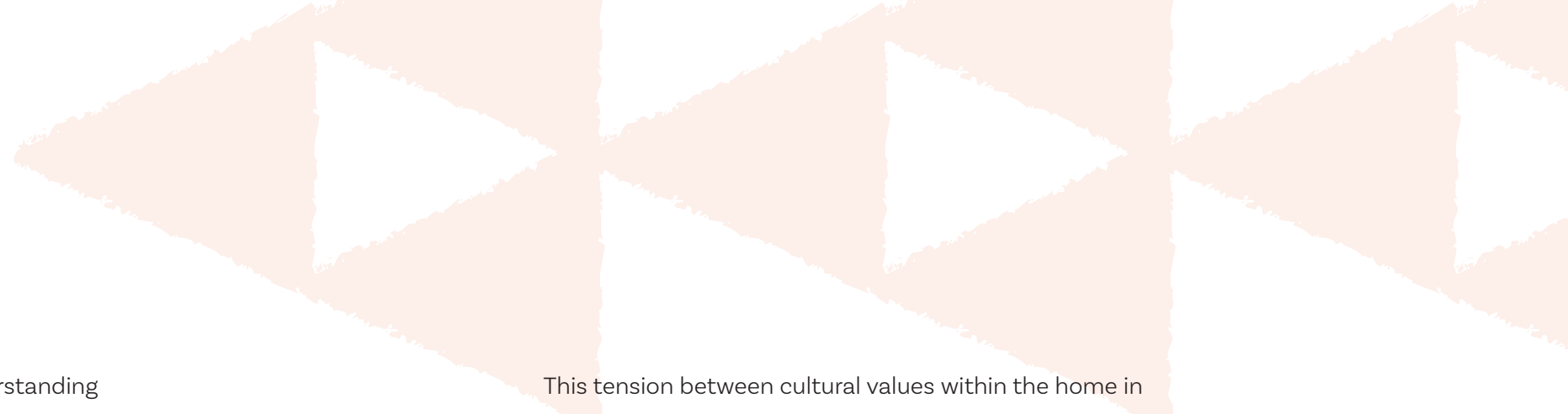
SCENARIO
Your friend tells you that she is currently dating someone and is thinking about having sex for the first time. She wants to educate herself more but doesn't know how to start.

FOLLOW UP
LET'S DISCUSS....
What sexual health and wellbeing issue/s do you feel needs more support within the Pasifika/ Cook Island space?

SCENARIO
Your friend tells you about so symptoms she is having, and believes it may be an STD. She has no idea about how to get help and where to go for more information.

DISCUSSION





There is an ever-pressing need for more cultural understanding surrounding Pasifika within the healthcare context, especially with Pasifika youth (Young et al., 2024). Good sexual health and wellbeing outcomes for Pasifika are a necessity. Yet, literature has shown that conversations around sexual health and sexuality among Pasifika are difficult and restricted because of cultural tapu and social stigma (Tupuola 2004).

Findings from this research project have highlighted the various definitions of taboo and what this means for Pasifika youth and their challenges navigating difficult conversations with family members. Previous research established concern with what information youth are exposed to surrounding sexual health and wellbeing, as the places youth are visiting are not always healthy or safe (such as pornography and harmful representations on social media) (Bale, 2010b). My research considered that conversations around sex and sexuality are not always encouraged within some Pasifika households in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2016a). These restrictions of conversations are usually due to cultural values around respect, whereby talking about sex is a breach of that (Veukiso-Ulugia, n.d). Indeed, the maintaining of boundaries and cultural morals is crucial for Pasifika youth and their cultural identity. However, because of these difficulties, the concern for Pasifika youth is where and how they retrieve information when it is not from their home.

This tension between cultural values within the home in comparison to societal norms created a rich research angle that responded to the challenges Pasifika youth face. The research explored how the lack of cultural understanding within healthcare or educational systems has made navigating the transition from child to adult and school to university difficult for youth. Several of the difficulties surrounding the maintaining of respect in communication are emotional – youth feel great guilt, disappointment, or fear in themselves (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2016a). Some of these difficulties were seen as feeling fearful or embarrassed of what their parents may think if sex is brought up, feeling immensely isolated when communication is non-existent, or the fear of bringing shame on both the youth and their family.

The research project drew heavily from the concept of ‘the cost of silence’ (as discussed by Veukiso-Ulugia (n.d.)) and what this means for the youth involved. As discussed in earlier chapters, the concern is with what happens when Pasifika youth are silent. Further, redefining the term taboo brought understanding to this and presented a gap this research sought to explore - taboo means that for a safe and cultural space to be created around conversations around sex, patience is to be upheld. Respect and respecting boundaries and relationships are a significant part of most Pasifika cultures (Ioane et al., n.d.-a), and therefore, talking about sex is a breach of that respect (Veukiso-Ulugia, 2018).

A key learning that this research project has presented is the importance of understanding the cultural definition of tapu. Through consultations, expert interviews, and youth insights, the potential for an evolving definition of tapu (within the context of sexual health around Pasifika youth) was observed. The Western perspective of taboo hints at a more negative connotation of the term relating to restrictions and prohibition (Krajewski, & Schröder, 2008). However, according to the Pasifika definition that drove the nature of this project, tapu does not mean the restriction of talking about these topics; rather, it takes time and patience. This was a key insight highlighted by the SHW expert. I found myself exploring a middle ground between the cultural values at home and healthcare or services and created a safe space for youth that forefronts this understanding.

This research project focused on Cook Island youth to narrow the Pasifika context, as I saw great potential in more Cook Island representation within healthcare and design spaces. The artistic practice of Tivaevae helped to support a Cook Island-specific approach to this research and provided a foundation to explore Cook Island design and visual identity. In identifying the challenges youth face in navigating conversations around sex, my design practice has shown traditional ways of making and how culturally responsive concepts could be brought into more contemporary forms of design. Through my design research practice, I considered the way older generations may have navigated these challenges would not be appropriate for today's youth. The redefining of the term taboo encapsulates this, and the use of Tivaevae helps bring the form to this new definition in a culturally responsive manner. My practice within communication design was employed to reinterpret traditional concepts and ideas (significant to the Cook Islands) in ways that were appropriate to the community the research is aimed at. Research has highlighted that Pasifika youth are grappling with multiple challenges around sex that their parents may not have confronted (Cammock, Lovell, et al., 2023). Therefore, using Tivaevae was a cultural, artistic practice that championed community and safety and acted as a way to handle ever-changing challenges, opportunities and ways of thinking.



Reccomendations for further research

There is a gap in culturally focused designed resources for Cook Island adolescents surrounding the difficulty of sexual health and wellbeing conversations. This is also the case for tools that focus specifically on learning where youth get their information from through conversations. This research suggests there is more that can be done to further develop the nature of the outcome and research into Cook Island's experiences around sexual health and wellbeing. Recommendations for future research building on my research to date are outlined as follows.

- Include more expert cultural guidance specific to Cook Island throughout the project: Due to time restraints and availability, this research project included very little cultural advisory. I believe the research and design outcome would have benefitted significantly from including cultural guidance from start to finish so that it is well-informed. The majority of the cultural considerations were derived from literature and tacit knowledge. The hope for this project is that it can be tested and developed with cultural advisors
- Consider how this project could be used for all Pasifika adolescents (regardless of university and school restrictions): The hope for this project is that it can reach more than school and university students and Cook Island youth. There is great potential for this working for Pasifika and Pasifika services as a whole.
- Implementing the Cook Island community will result in a more informed design outcome, informed by their insights. My initial plan was to work with Cook Island youth throughout the entirety of the project so that their insights informed the nature of the outcome and research. However, due to time restraints and ethical considerations, this was not possible. Looking forward, I see great potential in working with Cook Island youth to develop the game further.

The final design outcome

The contextualising of my research topic helped me to identify that conversations around sexual health and wellbeing within the Pasifika home are difficult due to cultural norms. Due to these challenges, the design outcome focused on creating a safe space for conversations that is culturally informed and engaging. As mentioned previously, this research project found a middle ground between the cultural norms at home and the societal norms that forefront Cook Island youth specifically. The outcome of this practice-led research project was a culturally responsive and engaging conversational game. This tool was intended to facilitate safe conversations surrounding sexual health and wellbeing for Cook Island adolescents.

Following Tivaevae as both an artistic practice and a research framework, this tool was informed by the common challenges faced by Cook Island and Pasifika youth around talking about their sexual health and wellbeing. Literature outlined a need for more culturally responsive approaches to working with Pasifika communities within the health setting. Through design, this outcome focused on the early stages of this issue and explored a better understanding of where youth are most comfortable receiving information about sexual health and wellbeing (for example, parents, grandparents, friends or the internet, etc). The findings of this research have contributed to new knowledge by exploring how culturally driven design might be used to better engage with Cook Island youth around a complex topic such as sexual health and wellbeing.

Limitations of the research

As outlined in the documentation of research chapter, one of the first challenges within the research was (despite an initial potential opportunity) not being able to work with a research team with specific expertise and experiences and working with Pasifika youth in the Sexual Health area. This meant more time than anticipated went into finding existing projects or organisations to work with and, importantly, to support my participant recruitment processes. Consequently, the process for ethical approval (AUTEK) also took longer than anticipated, with data collection beginning halfway into the research project. This meant the number of participants recruited was smaller than anticipated. The small sample size of insights collected from adolescents also made it difficult to draw generalised conclusions. However, the insights that were collected were notable and needed to be heard, and therefore suggest that further research in the future around this topic is needed. The target audience of the survey (Cook Island students between the ages of 17-21) was also a limitation that the recruitment location limited the scope of age ranges. However, there would be great value in hearing from more diverse age ranges who would have different experiences (such as a comparison between young and older).

My initial assumptions prior to my consultations, expert interviews and surveys were that the solution to the poor sexual health and wellbeing outcomes for Pasifika youth required a major shift in systems and education. It was not feasible or realistic to delve deeper into this within the master's timeline. However, this indicated that a more well-formed approach to the research might be warranted – looking into the difficulty in communication between Pasifika youth and their parents and the challenges with navigating this.

Future research opportunities

This project only set out to explore the community's involvement (experts and youth) in the pre-production stages of the design outcome. The implementation of a follow-up design workshop or feedback session with the intended users (Cook Island adolescents) may better shape or inform the design outcome. Subsequent research should be undertaken to explore the potential to improve the game and how it might be developed through greater community involvement for use in youth organisations and education institutions. Future research should involve the community throughout most of the design process, helping to inform key design decisions such as form, look and feel and functionality. Ideally, future research could also look at working with Pasifika youth as a whole around this topic, drawing from more diverse insights and experiences. Future research could also look at how the tool could be equitably accessed despite socio-economic backgrounds or location and consider how this tool could be accessible or used by Pasifika youth in different contexts (i.e. school settings, cultural groups, events).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet for expert interviews



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MĀKAU RAU

Participant Information Sheet

Expert interviews

Date Information Sheet Produced:
8 December 2023

Project Title
Sensitive conversations: Designing culturally responsive and engaging resources with Cook Island students around sexual health and wellbeing.

An Invitation
Kia ora, I'm Kyani Utia and I am a current master's student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). I would like to invite you to take part in an interview so I can learn more about your practice, the work you do, and any insights you might have about the development of a culturally responsive and engaging resource that will have the potential to help others navigate safe conversations around the taboo nature of sexual health and wellbeing.

What is the purpose of this research?
The aim of this research is to further understand Cook Island students' experiences around the sensitive and taboo topic of sexual health and wellbeing to design more culturally responsive and engaging resources. The overarching aim of this research is to improve better sexual health and wellbeing outcomes for young Cook Islanders living in Auckland, New Zealand. I hope to use the information from these interviews to inform the design of the research (an anonymous online survey and expert interviews and what the outcomes of the research could be.
Research will take place at either your place of work or online video call platform (Zoom or Microsoft Teams) at a time when you are available.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You have been identified through publicly available contact details on your organisation's website. You were identified as someone with expertise in either sexual health and wellbeing, communication design or cultural advisory. Your role is to provide further expertise on the sensitive issue to better understand the scope of contextual knowledge by collaborating with people who have valuable experience and knowledge in areas that the researcher does not as a designer.

7 May 2024 page 1 of 3 This version was edited in October 2022
Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12 December 2023, AUTEK Reference number 23/318

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you.

If you are still interested in participating in the interview after we have gone through the information sheet, then we will ask you to consent to participate in the study by completing a consent form.

What will happen in this research?

You will be asked to participate in a 45-60 min interview where I will ask questions about your expertise, relating to Pasifika/Cook Island students and how they navigate the sensitivity and taboo around sexual health and wellbeing.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You are unlikely to experience any significant discomfort during the interview process.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

You can choose to answer a question or prompt. If you choose not to give an answer, you will not be asked for a reason before continuing with the next question.

What are the benefits?

One immediate benefit of this research is for your expertise to be in areas that may not have been considered before, such as a designed outcome. Your expert knowledge will also benefit Cook Island students and improve their experiences with sexual health and wellbeing in the future.

This research will benefit the researcher by helping to achieve my master's qualification. In addition to this, learning and experience will be gained by working closely with stakeholders, facilitating interviews, and delivering a designed outcome developed and informed by the community and experts. As a Pasifika (Cook Island Samoan) researcher and designer, I will learn to design better for a specific community (Cook Island and Pasifika).

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy will be protected throughout the research, and your names/identities will be kept confidential in any research documentation or writing. Pseudonyms and/or the profession (e.g., communication designer A) will be used instead to discuss the insights or quotes communicated by you. You will be given the opportunity to choose their pseudonyms.

You will have the option to opt out of the research at any time before or during the interview without any negative consequences. The researcher will not ask for a reason. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed unless it has already been analysed, in which case it may no longer be possible to separate or remove it from the findings.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have at least two weeks to consider this invitation.

Will I receive a summary of the research findings?

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings, you can indicate so on the **consent form** and we will send you with a summary of the findings by email following the completion of the research. The intended final design outcome from this research will be made available as part of the Master of Design exhibition at the completion of this research and in the final Master's Exegesis available in Tūwhera – this website can be found on: <https://tuwhera.aut.ac.nz/research-repository>

You will also be able to access a summary of the research findings through the Good Health Design Postgraduate student's page: <https://www.goodhealthdesign.com/projects/taboo-conversations>

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Stephen Reay*, Email: stephen.reay@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Full name: Kyani Utia

Email: kyani.utia@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Full name: Stephen Reay

Email: stephenreay@aut.ac.nz

Appendix 2: Indicative Questions for Expert Interview with sexual health and wellbeing expert

Below is a list of indicative questions for sexual health and wellbeing experts.

Area of interest	Questions/prompts
Practice overview	1. Could you please tell me a bit about your practice and experience working with Pasifika adolescence?
Working with youth	2. Is there a particular story, experience, or insight (without revealing the identity of any individual) with Pasifika or Cook Island adolescence around sexual health and wellbeing that you feel was significant to you or perhaps you feel is important to tell.
Culturally understanding	Talking about sexual health and wellbeing can be a sensitive and taboo topic to talk about within Pasifika homes. 3. How would you describe or what is your understanding of taboo in the context of Pasifika youth around sexual health and wellbeing? How have you navigated this? 4. What do you consider most effective to best communicate information/knowledge youth need. 5. As someone who is not Pasifika, how would you describe your experience with navigating different cultural aspects when working with youth? 6. What do you find challenging or rewarding when it comes to working with Pasifika youth? What are any opportunities compared with other cultural groups
Communication materials	7. What resources or visual communication materials have you found that Pasifika youth engage with more or you find are more successful and helpful? Why?

Appendix 3: Indicative Questions for Expert Interview with communication design expert

Area of interest	Questions/prompts
Practice overview	1. Could you please tell me a bit about your practice with communication design within a health and wellbeing context? 2. What experience do you have designing a visual identity that is culturally driven and what did your design process look like?
Value of communication design	3. What characteristics made communication design most effective for this context (sexual health and wellbeing)? 4. How was designing with a Pasifika lens crucial to designing for this topic?
Experience	5. Can you offer in any advice for someone beginning to design for a sensitive topic (such as sexual health and wellbeing) with a Pasifika lens? What key things would you consider? 6. When working on culturally focused design projects, what are things that went well? What was most interesting? What did you learn?
Engaging youth	7. From your experience, what design elements resonate with Pasifika young adults/adolescence?
Extra	8. In your opinion is there anything else you could recommend that I consider when designing for this group?

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet for online survey

AUTTE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Participant Information Sheet

Online Anonymous Survey

Date Information Sheet Produced:
8 December 2023

Project Title
Sensitive conversations: Designing culturally responsive and engaging resources with Cook Island students around sexual health and wellbeing.

An Invitation
Kia ora, I am Kyani Utia, and I am a current master's student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). I would like to invite you to participate in an anonymous survey examining the taboo and sensitive nature of sexual health and wellbeing for Cook Island students. I am also interested in how your experiences and insights might inform designing more culturally responsive and engaging resources to support Cook Island youth around sexual health and wellbeing. Your participation is anonymous and voluntary.

What is the purpose of this research?
The aim of this research is to further understand Cook Island students' experiences around the sensitive and taboo topic of sexual health and wellbeing and designing more culturally responsive and engaging resources. The overarching aim of this research is to improve better sexual health and wellbeing outcomes for young Cook Islanders living in Auckland New Zealand. The information from this survey will be used to inform the design of resource prototypes to be more culturally responsive and engaging for Cook Island youth.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You have been identified to participate in this survey by scanning the QR code on the poster. You have self-identified as a current AUT student aged between 17 and 21 years old, who has recently finished secondary school and identifies as Cook Island. We are looking at your insights on how you navigate the sensitivities of sexual health and wellbeing to help inform a design outcome.

How do I agree to participate in this research?
By completing the survey, you are consenting to participate in this research. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time by simply closing the web browser before completing the survey. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. After completing the survey, it will not be possible for us to remove your data, because your responses are anonymous.

What will happen in this research?
In this survey you will be asked a set of questions about the taboo nature and sensitivities around sexual health and wellbeing as a young Cook Island student. This research looks specifically into the transition from

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high school to university and how you have navigated this time in your life. You will be asked to respond to 9-10 questions; however, it is your choice whether you wish to answer any question and you only need to share information that you are comfortable with.

What are the discomforts and risks?

I understand that this topic may be very sensitive and taboo for most people, however, it is unlikely that the questions in the survey may cause discomfort. We are not asking you to recount harmful experiences but rather create an anonymous, safe space for you to share what you choose to disclose and provide your insight into what might benefit others like you. **We will not ask you to provide information about yourself that might identify you, so participation will be completely anonymous.**

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

In the unlikely case of any discomfort during the survey process, the following support is available to you.

- AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health can offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly because of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:
 - drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9292.
 - let the receptionist know that you are a research participant and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on <https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health>

- Family planning provide a range of services including sexual and reproductive health information and clinical services. You can find out more information on: <https://www.familyplanning.org.nz/>
- Auckland University of Technology also provide spiritual support and resources. You can find out more information on: <https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/support-services/multifaith-and-spiritual-support>

What are the benefits?

One immediate benefit of this research is providing a safe platform for you to share your stories and insights around how you have navigated the sensitivities of sexual health and wellbeing. The findings and insights of this research project hope to benefit the wider community (potentially through a designed resource for Cook Island/Pasifika youth). All insights, feedback and discussions will contribute to better design to help support young Cook Island students around topics of sexual health and wellbeing.

This research will benefit the researcher by helping to achieve my master's qualification. In addition to this, learning and experience will be gained by working closely with stakeholders, facilitating interviews, and delivering a designed outcome developed and informed by the community and experts. As a Pasifika (Cook Island Samoan) researcher and designer, I will learn to design better for a specific community (Cook Island and Pasifika).

How will my privacy be protected?

This survey is anonymous and therefore all contact details or identifiable data will not be recorded.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

This survey should take no longer than 15 minutes of your time. There are no further costs associated with participating in this study.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

The survey will be available for one month

Will I receive a summary of the research findings?

Contact details will not be collected therefore summary of research findings cannot be sent to you. However, the intended final design outcome from this research will be made available as part of the Master of Design exhibition at the completion of this research and in the final Master's Exegesis available in Tuwhera – this website can be found on: <https://tuwhera.aut.ac.nz/research-repository>

You will also be able to access a summary of the research findings through the Good Health Design Postgraduate student's page. <https://www.goodhealthdesign.com/projects/taboo-conversations>

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Stephen Reay, Email: stephen.reay@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Full name: Kyani Utia

Email: kyani.utia@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

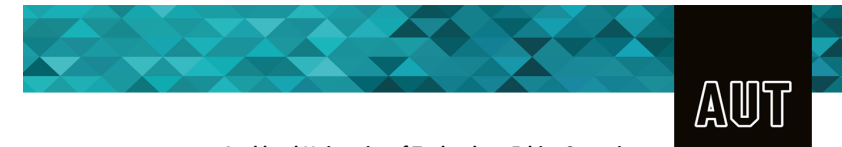
Full name: Stephen Reay

Email: stephen.reay@aut.ac.nz

Appendix 5: Questions for the Online Anonymous Survey (Qualtrics)

Sections	Questions
Section 1: Participant Profile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Age Are you? (Choose) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - male - female - gender diverse - prefer not to say
Section 2: Taboo and sexual health (Experiences, insights, and attitudes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Where do you often get your sexual health and wellbeing information from? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My parents/caregivers • Only my mum • Only my dad • Siblings • Other family members • My friends and peers • On the internet (please specify which platform) • Other (Please specify) Why is this so? What does taboo mean to you? How has taboo impacted you? What cultural beliefs inform your attitudes around sexual health and wellbeing? How have these impacted you and how you approach relationships and living well? What do you find it tricky when navigating conversations around sexual health and wellbeing? (For example, this could relate to cultural differences between your home setting and outside the home). What would make you feel more comfortable and safe to talk about sexual health and wellbeing?

Appendix 6: Ethics Approval Letter



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

12 December 2023

Stephen Reay
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Stephen

Re Ethics Application: **23/318 Sensitive conversations: Designing culturally responsive resources with Cook Island students around sexual health and wellbeing and identity.**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 12 December 2026.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

- Please provide for the file a clean copy of the Information Sheet (Interviews) as the submitted version has CK1-6 throughout the text.

Non-standard conditions do not need to be reviewed by AUTEC but must be completed before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

- The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC.
- All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
- Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
- A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
- A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
- Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: kyaniun29@gmail.com; cassandra.khoo@aut.ac.nz

Auckland University of Technology, D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316; E: ethics@aut.ac.nz; www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

