

ABORT 'N' GO. DESIGNING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHT TO AN AUTONOMOUS ABORTION.

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ABSTRACT

ABORT 'n GO is a design project within the crossing boundaries of critical design and industrial design. The aim of this project was to investigate and problematise the contemporary discourse on abortion in Sweden by using design as a discussion tool. (Sundbom, 2009) The design concept, a home abortion product, is based upon conducted in-depth interviews and a study by Anneli Kero. (2005) Keros study concludes that 67%, ie. the majority of women felt a relief after the abortion, but that they didn't feel free to express positive feelings. (Kero, 2005) The abortion discourse in Sweden is problematic since it's infected by double norms that may cause feelings of guilt and shame by women having an abortion. The abortion right is built upon conflicting standpoints; one is that women have right to have an abortion, without being questioned. Second is the notion that abortion is something that should be avoided, implying that you've done something wrong if you have had an abortion. (Socialstyrelsen, 2005, Bacchi, 1999)

With the home abortion design concept I wanted to explore and discuss the possibility of women having full autonomy over an abortion, ie. their own bodies. By combing insight from the interviews with the sketching process, a compliant and non threatening form was developed. The user interaction with the form carries haptic qualities, since the procedure position makes it difficult to rely on a visual interface. Since the purpose was to initiate a discussion on abortion, an interactive graffiti wall was included in the concept, encouraging visitors at the Konstfack Spring Exhibition to participate in the discussion. The comments from the wall were later included to the

design concept in a sound installation produced in collaboration with Niklas Sandberg for the Design Biennale in St Etienne.

(http://www.biennale2010.citedudesign.com/download/Pour_les_experts.pdf, p.4)

(<https://soundcloud.com/reclaim-the-tant/abort-n-go-produced-by>)



Figure 1: Abort 'n Go with VETO home abortion product.

DESCRIPTION

BACKGROUND

According to UN's declaration on human rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.." (Regeringskansliet, 2006) The written formulation born, is important for women's human rights. In Sweden the "free" abortion right has limitations, both by limiting the right with a time limit. Abortions are also controlled by the state. After week 18, the unborn fetus has prioritised rights over women. (SOF, 2004) The idea of the right of the fetus, is inherent in an abortion policy that implies that abortions should be minimised and carried out only in exceptional circumstances. (Bacchi, 1999) What consequences have the time limit restriction have on on women's citizenship? (Poposka, Beti, 2006) Does it affect the view on early abortions?

WE HAVE "FREE ABORTION"-WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Abortion is viewed upon as a right, that should be avoided, and only to be used as a last option. (Socialstyrelsen, 2005) (Bacchi,1999) This view that abortion is wrong, and should be avoided, has subsequent affects on how women experience an abortion. A woman in Kero's study asked: ".Am I inhuman to only have felt relief after the abortion?" I conducted two in-depth interviews, and several short interviews/discussions with women. One woman I interviewed felt that the staff wanted to punish her. She also told me that she felt questioned and stigmatised by the doctor about having an abortion This led to a situation where she didn't dare to tell that the doctor that it was her second abortion. A nurse I spoke to told me about a woman who were having her third abortion at the hospital. When the woman was sedated during the abortion procedure, the staff, glued a condom on her stomach, to punish her, in their view, unacceptable behaviour!



Figure 2: The double norms on abortion.

The women I interviewed expressed that they felt stigmatised by the doctor and other hospital staff. Women take well grounded decisions when having an abortion. (Kero, 2005) (Al  x, 2004) Still, abortion is seen as an anomaly, carried out by young, single, unemployed women, when de facto 40% of women having an abortion are over 30 years old, living in a relationship. Despite that, abortion is portrayed to be a emergency solution for certain "risk groups". (Kero, 2005)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The home abortion product was designed with the purpose of giving women full autonomy when having an abortion. The form is designed with a form direction that is not experienced as a threat. The interface is haptical, since the procedure position makes it difficult to use a visual interface. The interface form is inspired by the annual rings of a tree, which symbolises that it's an important decision in most women's lives. It was named Veto, to empower women's bodily rights. The technology is fictive and inspired by a feminist abortion method called menstrual extraction. It is originally a manual aspiration method that has been altered to a fictional high tech method to fit the design concept. It's an alternative to an aspiration abortion. There aren't enough resources in Sweden to provide early abortions for all women. (DN, 2007) This product would make it possible for women to be in charge of the whole procedure. Following the discussion on the wall, there was a great interest in discussing these issues. Some people greeted this product. "Cristine, I would have used it three times!" and "I wish this product existed now!". Statements that were critical on the design concept included: "It's not as easy as it seems, with all the white and designed. It makes me sad." There were also comments suggesting that "Not all women are happy with their abortions!" and someone

else replying with: "Not all women are happy with their children either." Abortion is still seen a controversial topic, especially when it's argued as an autonomous right, without intervention from the state or anyone else. Abortion is seen as a right with restrictions, which creates the double norms and

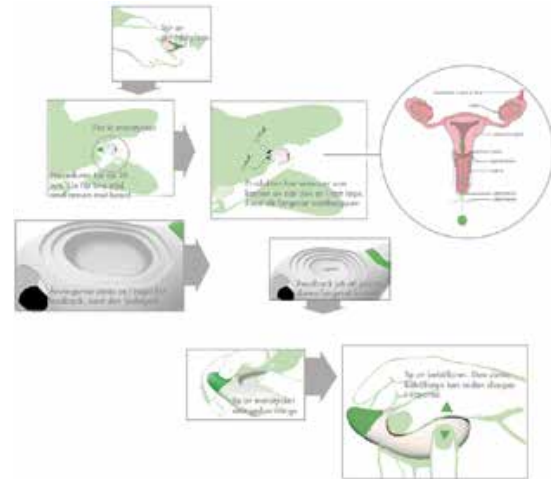


Figure 3: User-scenario.

the risk of putting guilt and shame on women. This was also debated on the wall, one person wrote: "Veto-what a great name! Women should have veto rights over their bodies. Women should have the right to have an abortion when, how and of what reason they choose."



Figure 4: VETO home abortion product in a side -view

The aim of the project was not just to design an alternative product solution, but also to problematise the double norms of the abortion discourse in Sweden. The strenght of using an artifact as a discussion tool is that it's tangible. The interactive graffiti wall initiated a discussion on the topic outside of the mass-medial context. With Abort n Go, the design process started from a standpoint, and subsequently resulted in a discussion.

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"1   Enligt 3   abortlagen (1974:595)... Enligt samma paragraf f r tillst nd till abort inte l mnas, om fostret kan antas vara livsdugligt utanf r livmodern", SOFS 2004:4, sid 4

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