

VIIV
BENEATH THE SURFACE

DIRECTOR
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BENEATH THE SURFACE

AGENCY
HAVAS

x

PRODUCTION TEAM
THE SWEETSHOP

x

DIRECTOR
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A TREATMENT BY

NICOLAS

JACK

DAVIES

TOGETHER WITH THE SWEETSHOP



01 **INTRO**

02 **UNSPOKEN
TRUTHS**

03 **A BETTER WAY**

04 **LIVED
EXPERIENCE**

05 **CHARACTERS**

06 **THE FILM**
BENEATH THE SURFACE

07 **CASTING**

08 **THE TEXT**

09 **LOOK & FEEL**

10 **STYLING**

11 **LOCATION &
SPACES**

12 **THE EDIT**

13 **SOUND &
MUSIC**

14 **THANK YOU**

[CLICK TO JUMP TO CHAPTER](#)

INTRO

INTRO — 01.0

It goes without saying that it's inherently human to repress our true feelings. I'm a master of a monotone "Yeah, fine" no matter whether I'm actually feeling top of my game or completely overwhelmed by life ha.

But I can only imagine how that affects our responses to a long-term medical condition.

The insight behind this campaign is witty and relatable, and just goes to show that you really can't judge a book by its cover.

Most doctors will recognise 'Sure, it's fine' as code for 'it could be a little better', but they're not always empowered to give better. This film draws attention to the common affliction of self-denial and encourages Doctors to consider alternative treatments.

UNSPOKEN

TRUTHS

IF THE WRITING'S NOT ON THE WALL, IT'S ALL OVER OUR FACES.

TRUTHS — 02.0

The thoughts we hear from our characters aren't being deliberately withheld. It's just what they've needed to tell themselves to cope.

This film gives us access to the truth, the subconscious feelings that people haven't even been able to admit to themselves until now.

Establishing that there are underlying truths is key to landing this idea. There are two stages to this.

FIRST

WE HAVE OUR
FOURTH-WALL
BREAKS.

TRUTHS — 02.1

I've watched a lot of high end dramas which use this device. All the most successful still have a very clear yet subtle distinction between their world and 'our world'. Let's take inspiration from them here.

Our first character is in her own world, seemingly absorbed in her coffee as she thinks. It's only towards the end of the phrase that she glances towards camera, holding her gaze as if to say, 'yes, I see you.' When we pick up in our next scene, the man is already looking at us, before answering the door to his dad.

This locks our audience into the technique. These aren't theatrical asides. Each character is very much in their world - we just happen to be there as their little secret.

SECOND

WE HAVE THE TEXT.

TRUTHS ——— 02.2

Each scene requires slightly different timing and impact.

For example, in our opening scene, we are hinting at the fact that not all is as it initially seems with the text and the characters true inner thoughts.

It's a quick, almost fleeting beat, designed to pique curiosity. Her look to camera suggests she has something more to say, but before she can, we move on.

Once we've built the concept, the rest follows suit, and the audience knows what to expect.

This allows us to then build the intensity, leading up to our final moment in the Doctor's office, where we land on a tight close-up of the woman.

Her expression finally seems to mirror her true feelings, making the pay-off all the more relieving.

COULD BE BETTER? THERE HAS TO BE A BETTER OPTION OUT THERE.

BETTER — 03.0

The role of HIV in people's lives has changed dramatically over the last fifty years. The diagnosis doesn't carry the weight it used to, so I want to say first and foremost - this is not meant to be dark and bleak.

The irritation people feel about their pills is just that - irritation. It's another thing on the list in already full lives, another reminder they have to put on their phones, another object on their bedside table.

Our man hiding pills from his dad doesn't behave with intense shame or fear. He just reckons the conversation would be more weight than it's worth.

Our Doctor audience will be all too familiar with the reservations our characters have, even if most patients act otherwise. This isn't a film revealing unknown hardships. It's celebrating a new freedom of choice.

BETTER ——— 03.1

Our tone lies largely in the looks the characters give us, and how much they correspond or contrast to the text. I love the quirks of expression, and everyone can relate to that sense of ‘nonplussed with a hint of frustration’.

It’s certainly not the end of the world, but we can tell that they’re gritting their teeth about something (as revealed by our text), even if they initially give us a bit more of a smile.

Nobody’s wishing it had never happened at all. We’re just thinking that, ‘come on – there has to be a better option out there’.

DRAWING ON LIVED EXPERIENCE

EXPERIENCE — 04.0

Whenever I'm directing something with a subject matter like this, I like to talk to the people who will relate to it most. With the Starbucks spot I did a few years ago I talked to groups of young transgender people about their actual experiences, and found it so utterly valuable when it came to creating a more authentic and impactful film.

With this spot, we're unlikely to work with actors who are HIV positive themselves (unless they want to), so it's even more important that we cast people who are just as invested in understanding what they're playing.

I will ensure I get time with our cast before the shoot to really discuss findings from control groups, giving us the best chance of representing the reality of living with HIV.

We're elevating this film to a position where we're not only drawing attention to a product - we're also demonstrating real understanding and accurate compassion for those affected.

CHARACTERS

CHARACTERS — 05.0

Before we get into the script, I want to give some names to these faces. Let's meet our people living with HIV, and give them a little more story.

LOLA ——— 05.1

Lola is Type A and extremely outgoing, normally found rushing A to B to C. Like everything else in her life, she takes her HIV medication in her stride, but there are definitely hectic mornings where she only realises on the bus to work that she's forgotten to take her pills.

LOLA

PLHIV1 (LATE 20-EARLY 30)

DYLAN

PLHIV2 (MID/LATE 20)

DYLAN ——— 05.2

Dylan has definitely come out of his shell a lot since moving out of home. He has a great chosen family, and he's not on particularly bad terms with his blood relatives - they've just never been big talkers. He knows his Dad would be worried if he knew he was living with HIV, and would just prefer to save awkwardly reassuring him for another time.

DAVID & JOE ——— 05.3

David's friends would call him a bit of a late bloomer, but it's never held him back. He met 'kindred spirit' Joe on a single's cruise last year, and the honeymoon stage seems to be going on and on and on, marked frequently by trips abroad. Taking his medication with him is fine most of the time, but it's just a little less discreet than his bedroom drawer.

DAVID & JOE

PLHIV3 (EARLY 40, MID 40)

THE FILM

BENEATH THE SURFACE

SCRIPT ——— 06.0

The opening three scenarios are accompanied by a subtle but energetic soundtrack, to help with pace and transitioning between scenes.

Dynamic. Attention-grabbing. Nothing earnest or melodramatic from the outset.

Instead we deal in honesty and bold storytelling devices - music/ sound is a key factor to this.

SCRIPT ——— 06.1

We open on a woman, Lola (trendy professional) nursing a cup of coffee in a cafe.

She's taking a break from the work she's been doing on her laptop, which sits on the table beside her.

She's caught in an internal moment - her thoughts have drifted from the bustling surroundings of the cafe.

That thing that's always in the back of her mind is bubbling to the surface. The camera moves towards her, We hear..

VO - "When it comes to HIV treatment.."

As the line comes to an end, a wry shrug, and she flicks her eyes up at the camera / us knowingly. There's a glint in her eye yet also a vulnerability... she's letting us in, she's got something to say... but we cut...



SCRIPT ——— 06.2

Our attention piqued. We cut straight to a man, Dylan, looking down, his eyes similarly positioned on screen to Lola - a confident cut.

He takes a breath, then his eyes connect to us down the lens.. We hear his thoughts complete the second half of the woman's sentence..

VO - "...we don't have much choice"

There's a fed-up yet empowered tone to his thoughts - a kind of FML/ eye-roll feeling. He holds his look to us, his eyes flash down, deep breath.

He holds his look to us as his eyes flash down.

We cut to his loose POV to see his front door. He's standing in his hallway. The doorbell rings, he opens it-

SCRIPT ——— 06.3

We use the sound of the door ring as a transition point to the next scene, where we cut to a suitcase being unzipped and flopping open.

DAVID (bubbly) sits beside it packing for a holiday, JOE in the background. He checks over his shoulder as if trying to keep a secret from him - a bit like Fleabag, almost like he's checking the coast is clear to break the fourth wall.

He turns back towards his suitcase and looks at us. We hear with a little resignation..

VO - "sure, I travel with my pills"

Then everything stops. The energy and kineticism built up in the edit pauses for a moment. With good reason - this is where we need to use our craft to bring to attention, in as clear a way as possible, that 'Sure, I travel with my pills' is an example of someone holding back.

We accentuate this moment dramatically by cutting to a wide of the scene to see 'Travel with my pills' boldly positioned in graphic font on screen around our hero. We accentuate this moment dramatically by cutting to a wide of the scene to see 'Travel with my pills' boldly positioned in graphic font on screen around our hero. Quickly,

I GET WORRIED WHEN I..

appears in the negative space above it.



I GET WORRIED
WHEN I

SCRIPT ——— 06.4

Ah, the truth. This moment, visually, takes us beneath the surface. From here the film becomes very clearly all about what our characters say versus what they really mean.

We cut back to him looking at us, this time his expression is different. A shrug. Then he chucks the pills in his suitcase, but they spill - an 'oh fuck' reaction followed by a genuine laugh. We hear a notification 'ping' alert off camera and on the sound we cut back to Lola.

Pace comes back to the edit. We see her phone and the alert.

Then Lola is seen in super close up flashing her eyes between us (down the lens) and her phone, with a restless energy as we hear...

VO - 'Erm, yeah, I take them everyday'

Her eyes hold on us for a beat. We cut wider, her eyes have followed us, still fixed down the lens. We see

I'M REMINDED I HAVE HIV WHEN I TAKE THEM EVERY DAY

Built around her in text. With a nuanced touch of performance, she looks around, as if acknowledging the bold message that has appeared around her. We cut in tight and she smiles sarcastically.

SCRIPT ——— 06.5

This catapults us back to Dylan, who has arrived behind his front door with his partner.

Hand on the door handle, about to open. But then, he turns to camera and we hear with a tone of confident denial..

VO - “No no, I don’t hide my pills”

Laughing it off with an ‘of course not’ smirk. Snap back to the action of the film. Open the door. “Oh hi, Dad”.

He quickly embraces his father and makes his way upstairs to stash his pills in the bedroom away from where Dad would see, leaving his partner and Dad awkwardly in the hallway

We cut wide to see a side profile shot of the staircase with

**I DON’T USUALLY HIDE MY PILLS UNTIL
SOMEONE COMES OVER**

emblazoned behind Dylan as he makes his way up.



SCRIPT ——— 06.6

We cut to a doctor's office to see Lola sitting on the opposite side of the doctor's table, looking directly at us, a little blankly. We hear...

VO - "And yeah... I'm happy with my treatment"

There's a powerful hint of resignation. We cut to her POV, to see the doctor busily checking their computer, not really making eye contact.

We cut back to a close-up of her face with

I'M NOT REALLY HAPPY WITH MY TREATMENT, WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

Written in bold all over it, filling the screen, like the Social Network poster. We cut back to the doctor as if this bold message has finally got their attention.

They pause what they're doing and engage with Lola as if to dig a little deeper into her concerns.

This feels like a climactic scene. Finally, someone might discover what's beneath the surface of our cast's experiences.



I'M *NOT REALLY*

HAPPY WITH

MY TREATMENT

SCRIPT ——— 06.7

We see the conversation play out from here in a wide of the office, with supers appearing over the top:

SUPER: DO PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV KNOW ALL OF THEIR TREATMENT OPTIONS?

SUPER: THEY COULD BENEFIT FROM LONG TERM TREATMENT. TALK TO THEM TODAY.

Then, with a dynamic flourish we quickly reprise a moment from each main character. There's more confidence and outward positivity to their actions.

The doorbell goes once more and Dylan hugs his Dad more joyously and this time doesn't run off. David is packing for another holiday but this time amusingly messing around with his partner whilst doing so.

And finally Lola is working away in her favourite coffee shop, gassing on the phone - she looks at us once more with an anxiety free, glint in her eye. And we hard cut out.

END TITLES: VIIV.





CASTING

CASTING — 07.0

HIV is pretty indiscriminate - people of all ethnicities, sexualities, ages, cultures and creeds are affected by it, so naturally we'll want to reflect this in our casting choices. That's a given.

We will cast people between 25 and 55 for our various roles, drawing from all walks of life and backgrounds with a completely open casting approach, to find the best possible performer for each role.

As we begin to narrow down our final cast, we'll make sure we have the full film in mind and the cast as a whole is representative of the groups detailed in the casting brief.

We'll be working with the same casting director I've worked with on a number of projects that required this inclusive and sensitive approach, including both the Starbucks ads I directed.

Let's talk more about personality. What I really look out for in any casting session is natural charisma. I don't necessarily mean bold and extraverted, but rather people who have a natural pull.

They have a cracking sense of humour, deep laughter lines, and an air of quiet consideration.

They feel real and relatable, like people we know and connect to in our everyday life.

I won't be looking for editorial faces, but authentic and characterful people who can communicate their feelings with the subtlest eyebrow raise, a slight twitch of a smile, a slight eye roll.

They should have a good feeling for light, down-to-earth comedy, and be able to embody the feeling of 'well this is a bit annoying' with ease.

THE TEXT ——— 08.0

I love the references you've given for the style of text here. Bold supers which say what they need to say simply and effectively. These messages need to SLAP, and in order to do so, they need to be legible in an instant.

For this reason, I think they should go right on top of the frame - occasionally interacting with one of the layers in the scene, like the 'Sex Education' titles do.

Drawing from the likes of David Fincher and Netflix shows like 'One Day', the text should be 2D, sans serif, with slight differences to 'truth revealing' words like italicisation and colour.

We will explore different fonts, formats, colours and sizing to reflect the emotion being withheld.

THE TEXT

Together, alongside the expert animators and designers at our post house, we can develop this after we've shot to create real emphasis and impact.

Using these references as stylistic inspiration will give the film a more contemporary cinematic feel.

If we were to incorporate some movement, or try and position the text exactly around our characters, we would need to make sure our cast were quite still, and this kind of restriction would stilt their performances.

So instead of trying to squeeze the two elements together, let's make each text moment graphic and stylish, confidently overpowering the image. These thoughts are crying out to be seen, so let's make sure they are!



EVERYTHING
TO [ADD TO CART](#) SELL
ANYTHING



SEX EDUCATION



I MAY
DESTROY
YOU



LOOK & FEEL

LOOK & FEEL — 09.0

I always feel like a hand-held camera is important when creating films with characters we believe in and can relate to.

Our camera will often reflect a human perspective, an intimate and observational approach for these unguarded and honest moments.

Our framing will be considered, and we will of course compose our shots with our text in mind. But we won't ever allow a sense that what we're watching has been "set up" to serve that text.

In keeping with this more authentic approach, we'll use natural light where available, subtly accentuating it where necessary.

As far as colour is concerned, I'd like to take this in a direction that is vibrant and saturated, standing out a little from the market.

Shows like 'I May Destroy You', 'Heartstopper' and 'Sex Education' do it very well. The world is still grounded in reality, but colour is injected throughout in costume and production design.

It's never garish, but rich and lively. 16mm lends itself beautifully to this approach and will create a visual feast.



STYLING

STYLING — 10.0

You know when you're watching a commercial and everyone seems to be in immaculately ironed, fresh off the rack fashion?

Our wardrobes say a lot about our character. I would like our cast to wear clothes that feel worn.

Jumpers with pilling fibers. Shoes that are scuffed and spattered. Jeans that have been through the wash one too many times.

Depending on who we cast, I would like to invite the actors to wear their own clothes if appropriate.

Not only would it give a more naturally worn look on camera, but it will make for a more comfortable performance. Nobody's wearing a second skin.

LOCATIONS & SPACES

LOCATIONS & SPACES — 11.0

Each of the locations is a familiar and regular part of our characters' lives. An established part of their routine. This is the coffee shop our first character always visits before her appointments.

The second character has been living in the same house for nearly six years now. Each place is full of personality yet very normal.

Drawing from high end drama series, we'll dress each set so that it has a healthy life layer without feeling too forced or quirky.

There are boring bits of clutter on the table in the hallway, the coffee shop is local and not too fancy. Even the Doctor's office isn't too sterilised.

It's a local practice, with comfier chairs (no plastic, please) and hey, maybe even one or two personal effects belonging to the Doctor on their desk.

THE EDIT

EDIT ——— 12.0

We're not shooting to fit into a tightly controlled cut. Our edit should feel reactive, breathing and moving around the footage, rather than forcing us along. But this doesn't mean that there isn't momentum.

A front door sealing shut cuts to a zip closing on a suitcase. The movement of one person pulling away from their dad cuts to another person leaning back in their chair.

Our pace will still be punchy, but will undulate between bigger moments of movement and the quieter looks.

As this means our timing will be largely influenced by what we get on the day, I'll make sure that we get some takes which are more condensed than others with our cast, ensuring that we hit the key beats in our time frame.

In your previous script you had a moment with each character smiling after the call to action. I like the sentiment behind this, and I'd like to keep the feeling while tying it into the existing narrative.

So instead of separate smiling shots, we end on a more confident moment in each of the pre-existing scenes. Kende and Ola close the door firmly behind them, Dylan gives his Dad a warm hug.

SOUND & MUSIC

SOUND & MUSIC ——— 13.0

To really draw attention to the ‘true’ thoughts, I’d like to use some calculated silence. In each scene, we’ll have a bit of diegetic sound - coffee shop noises, radio chatter, etc.

But as we tune in with the characters’ real feelings, the background fades away, leaving us with just the text. Even though it’s unspoken, it’s still very much noticeable.

As we move continuously between noise and silence, the film echoes the disruption of our characters’ lives.

When it comes to music, I’d like to explore a reactive score, rather than a pre-written soundtrack.

Beats of music that push the narrative along and give each scene a bit more energy, but fade with the rest of our noise. I’d keep the instrumentation simple - perhaps just bass and piano.

THANK YOU

THANKS — 14.0

With any social or medical issue, the everyday pains are as wearing as major events, if not occasionally more so.

While HIV no longer has to be life-threatening, it's still life-changing. I feel like this campaign could make a lot of people's lives just that extra bit easier.

There are two key challenges to bringing this to life, requiring two very different but ultimately complimentary solutions.

The first is our moments of connection when our cast break the fourth wall, which requires nuance and subtlety.

The second is the text and the revelation of their hidden thoughts, which will need to be an immediate read for our audience without compromising our performances.



THANKS ——— 14.1

From a purely filmmaking perspective it is marrying the authenticity and the boldness of these two elements that is really exciting.

Through the use of our craft - the work with our cast before we step onto set, the clever use of music of sound, a tangible quality to the cinematography - we'll make sure we bring both elements together and create an impactful, memorable and human message.

Thank you for having me on board to pitch. My thoughts above are just the beginning, and I look forward to discussing it more with you.

Nick x



SWEETSHOP

OUR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSIVITY POLICY

Sweetshop Films is a progressive company committed to representing the voices of creatives from every walk of life, and facilitating the careers of the most talented individuals, regardless of background. To that end, at least 50% of our crew will be drawn from underrepresented groups*.

This is not a box ticking exercise. Our experiences demonstrate that a truly representative crew, meritocratically selected, gives us the best platform to make the most effective and creative work. We will continue to work to create pathways into production for new and inexperienced crew.

We hope that you will join us in effecting this change.

We're confident you will see the benefits of a diverse, cohesive, engaged and passionate crew in the work we create together.

LGBTQI+ community, those with disabilities, neurodevelopmental conditions, disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and gender non-binary individuals to be underrepresented.