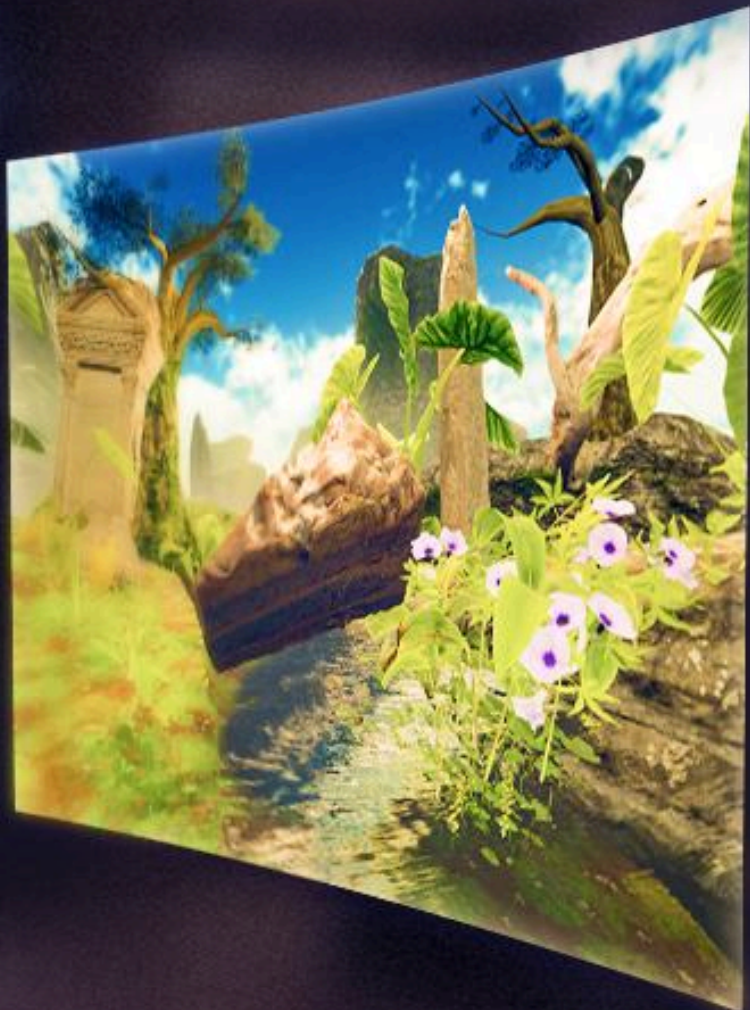


# EE SCAPE

VR application mitigating  
emotional eating



VR Application 3D

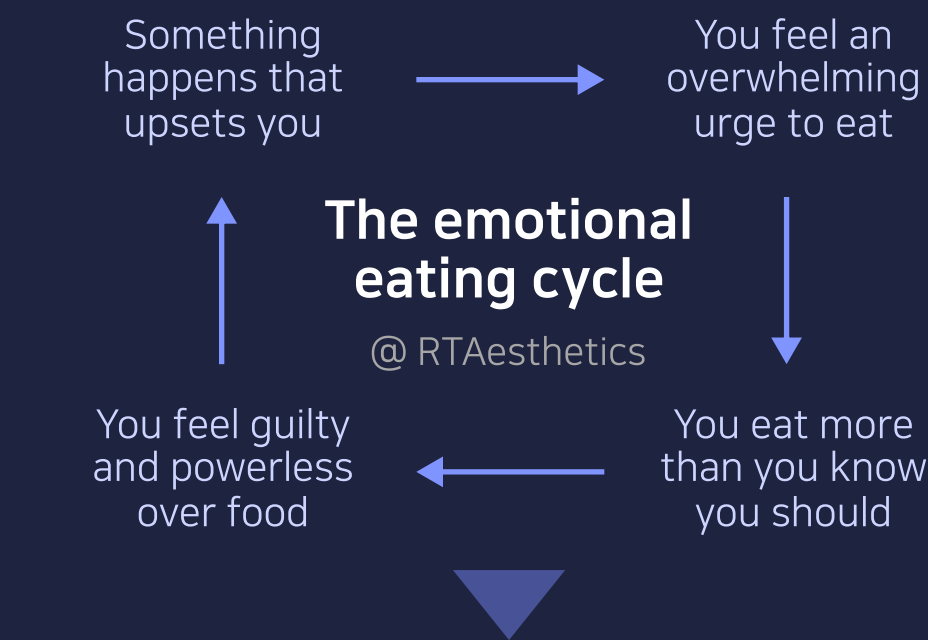
Period	2024.03 - 2024.06
Roles	Planning, Research, Interview, User test, UX/UI design, 3D design, VR development
Tools	Blender, Unreal Engine



# BACKGROUND

## Emotional Eating

**Emotional eating (EE)** is food consumption based on emotional factors such as stress or pleasure rather than physical hunger. Unlike normal appetite, this self-rewarding behavior is characterized by a desire for certain foods. Many emotional eaters are concerned about their weight gain and feel guilty. Perpetuating this vicious cycle of stress leads to further emotional eating and can become severe eating disorders.



## Eating Disorder



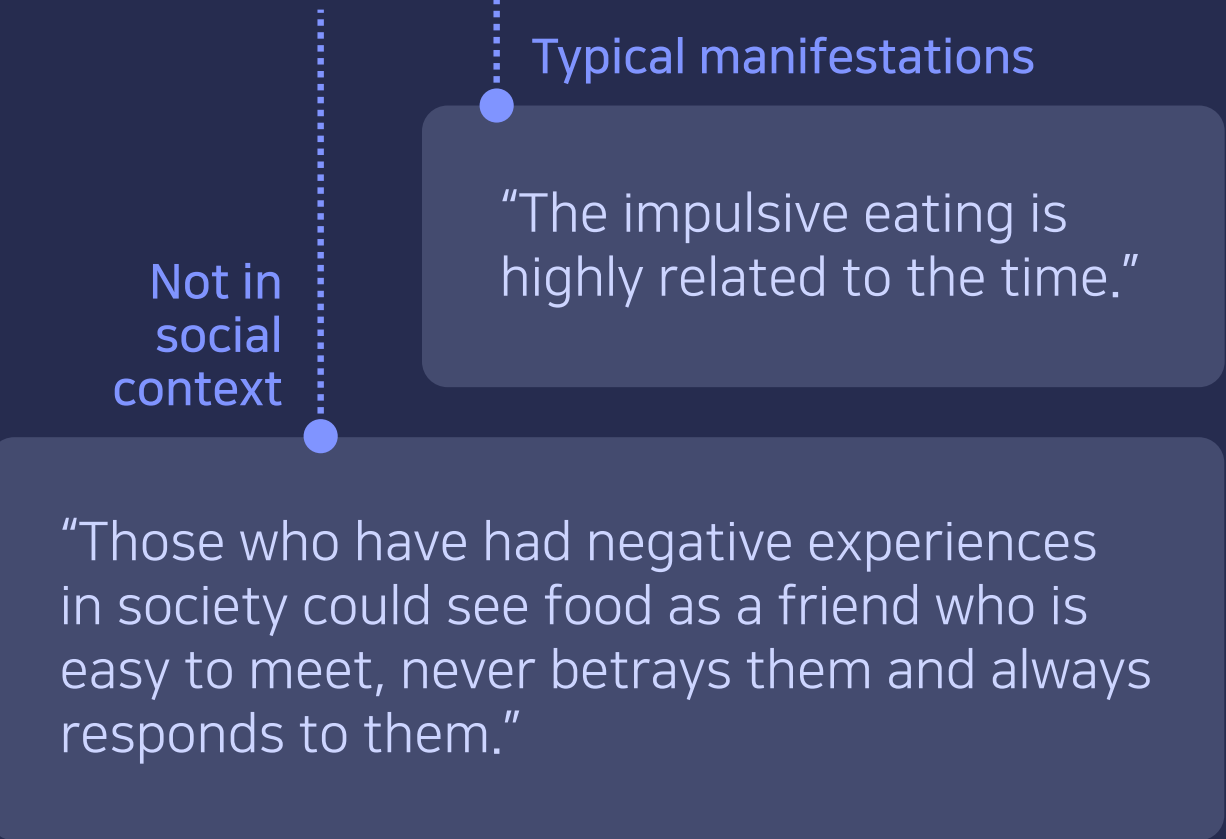
The number of eating disorder patients

@ Bigdata OpenPortal of Health Insurance Review & Assessment Service

# TARGET USER

From advice of eating disorder experts, we set research subjects to those who emotionally eat at night at home.

## Emotionally eat at night at home



Insights from eating disorder experts interviews.

Refer our subjects to :

## “Emotional Night Eaters”

# RESEARCH PROCESS



PREMILINARY STUDY

Eating Disorder Experts Interviews

- 1:1 interviews with two experts on eating disorders aimed to understand the **characteristics and problems of emotional eating** and **get advice to define research targets**.
- We asked **how we distinguish** emotional eaters from eating disorder patients, **how eating disorders are different** from other mental health concerns, and **what interventions** have been applied.



Photo of eating disorder expert interview

Emotional Eater Survey

- Emotional eater surveys aimed to identify the **context and pattern of emotional night eating**.
- We asked **how often and why** they craved food at night, **how they responded** to it, what **specific food** they craved, and how emotionally eating at night **affects** their feelings and thinking.
- A total of 31 responses were gathered from 21 females (age M = 25.5 years, SD = 7.5) and 10 males (age M = 24.2 years, SD = 4.3)

주로 몇 시쯤 야식에 대한 욕구를 느끼나요? \*

☐ 8시 ~9시 사이

☐ 9시 ~10시 사이

☐ 10시 ~ 11시 사이

☐ 12시 ~ 1시 사이

☐ 1시 이후

☐ 기타..

야식을 먹은 날 수면 및 다음 날 아침 식사에 어떠한 영향을 미치나요? \*

ex. 불면증 있음 / 소화 불량으로 잠에 잘 들지 못함 / 배가 안고려서 아침을 거름

질문할 텍스트

원소 얼마나 자주 야식에 대한 욕구를 느끼시나요? \*

☐ 주 1회

☐ 2주에 한 번

☐ 한 달에 한 번

☐ 주 2~3회

☐ 거의 매일

☐ 기타..

주로 어떤 상황에서 또는 왜 야식을 먹나요? \*

ex. 나에게 관심을 주고 싶을 때, 몰척할 때, 상사한테 해진 날, 학업 스트레스 보다가 등

야식에 대한 욕구를 조절하는 편인가요? \*

☐ 못 참고 항상 먹음 / 조절할 생각을 안 해봄

☐ 참고는 싶지만 마음처럼 잘 안됨

☐ 주로 참지만 가끔 굴복함

☐ 행안에서는 안 먹고 참음

야식에 대한 욕구를 참고 넘기기 위해서는 어떠한 노력을 하시나요? \*

참지 못할 경우 '노력' 안 할 또는 '참지 못할'을 적어주세요.

질문할 텍스트

야식에 대한 욕구를 조절하지 못할 때, 그 이유는 무엇인가요? (또는 관련된 특별한 상황) \*

질문할 텍스트

주로 어떤 음식을 야식으로 먹나요? \*

특정 음식의 이름과 어떻게 음식을 준비하는지(요리 또는 배달 등) 적어주세요.

질문할 텍스트

야식을 주로 누구와 먹나요? \*

☐ 혼자

☐ 친한 친구와

☐ 가족들과

☐ 여러 명의 친구들과

어디에서 야식을 먹나요? \*

☐ 식탁

☐ 공부 또는 일하는 책상

☐ 침대

☐ 방 바닥

☐ 기타..

나만의 야식 패턴이 있나요? (이 음식은 이런 날, 또는 이런 상황일 때 먹는다 등) \*

ex. 기분이 울적할 때는 마라탕을 먹는다. / 드라마를 보다가 화면에 나오는 음식을 먹는다.

질문할 텍스트

야식을 먹고 나면 보통 어떤 생각과 감정이 드나요? (중복 선택 가능) \*

☐ 맛있게 먹었으니 만족한다

☐ 또 못참고 먹어야한 자신에게 복증이 난다

☐ 설이 험하게 걱정된다

☐ 내일은 굶거나 거의 안 먹어야한다고 생각한다

☐ 가족 몰래 먹은 거라 들킨까봐 긴장된다

☐ 딱히 별 생각 없음

☐ 기타..

야식을 먹고 느끼는 생각 및 감정에 대해 어떻게 대응하나요? (중복 선택 가능) \*

☐ 별다른 행동은 안 함

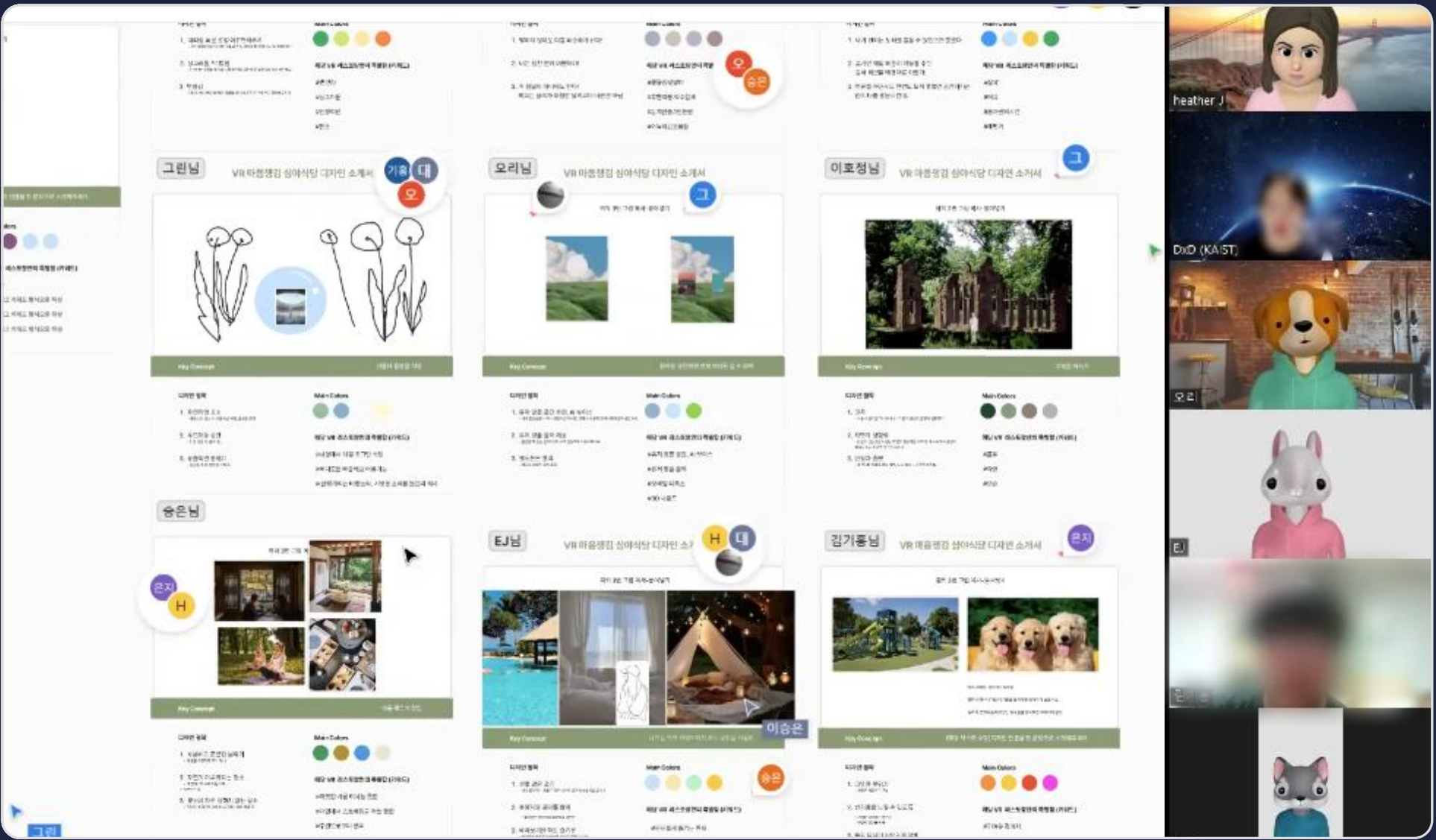
Screenshot of affinity diagram and thematic analysis



# PREMILINARY STUDY

## Participatory Design Workshop

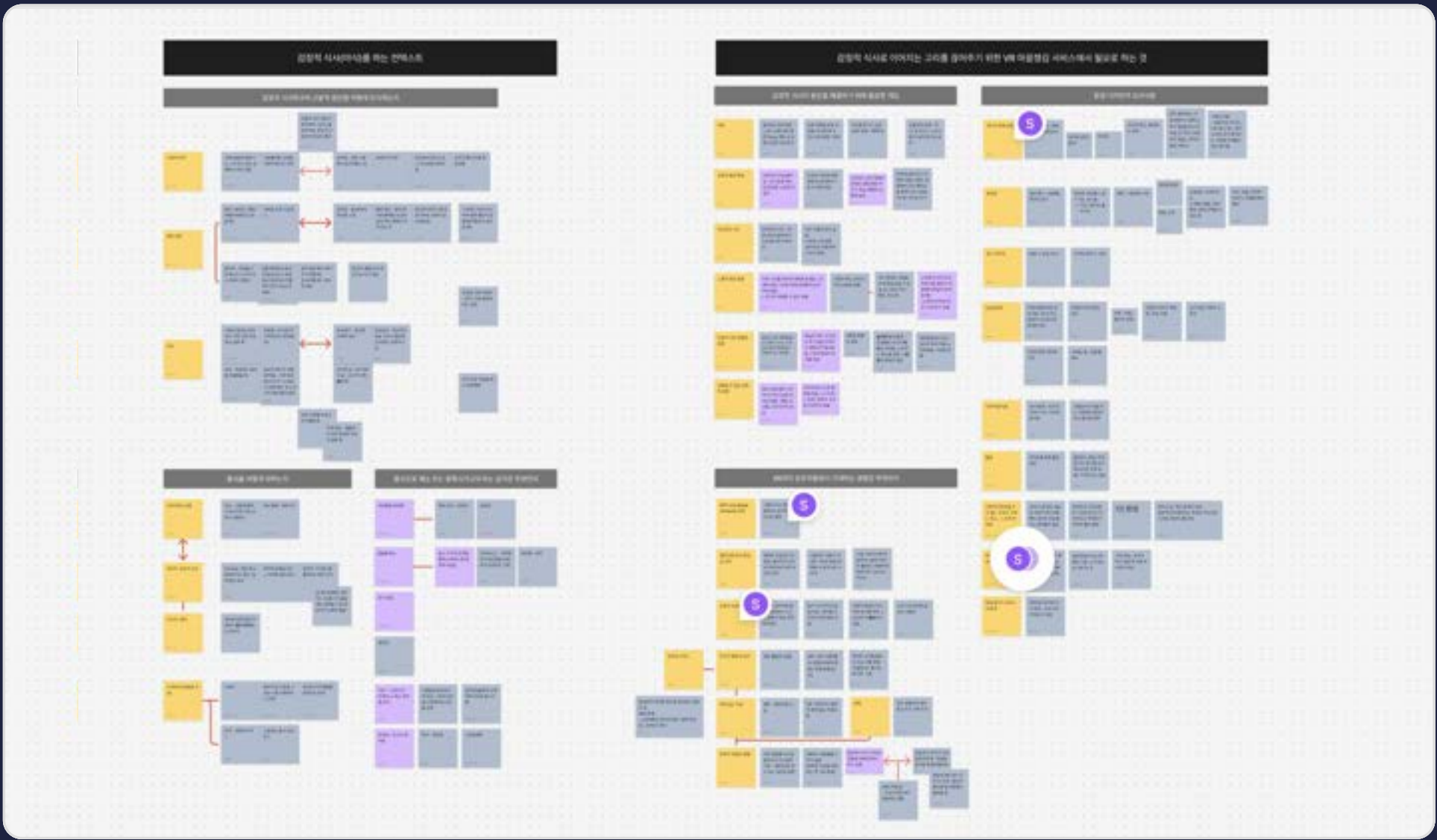
- Participatory design workshop with nine emotional night eaters, six females (age M = 25.3 years, SD = 3.7) and three males (age M = 22.7 years, SD = 4.0) aimed to **define user needs for a VR intervention**.
- Each participant shared their **emotional eating patterns** and designed a **virtual experience that helps overcome food cravings**.



Screenshot of participatory design workshop

## Data Analysis

- Three researchers analyzed all the data collected by preliminary studies and then **defined design considerations**.



Screenshot of affinity diagram and thematic analysis

# PREMILINARY STUDY

## Design Considerations

### Dealing with both mental problems and eating behavioral problems is important

All experts highlighted that interventions for emotional eating should address both the emotional problem and the eating behavior.

“In the case of eating behavior problems, underlying psychological and environmental issues should be addressed, along with the eating behavior itself.”  
Eating disorder expert

All design workshop participants sought a place that made them feel calm and consolation to alleviate the emotions causing late-night eating.

### Reducing emotional bonds on food is essential

Emotional eaters attach meanings to food. These emotional bonds to food make them repeat emotional eating.

“Emotional eaters tend to have emotional attachments to food.”  
Eating disorder expert

“Food is a comforting friend to me.” P9

“I seek out foods as a reward for my hard day.” P1

“Food is my escape where I can take a break from tasks for a while.” P6

### Intervention to immediately alleviate cravings is needed

Emotional eaters prefer instant or delivery foods that are ready to eat without cooking. The service should immediately intervene before their appetite leads to actual eating.

All emotional night eaters who answered our survey preferred quickly and easily prepared foods.

“Prevent binge eating by resisting the urge to craving for even five minutes.”  
Eating disorder expert

“Wearing a VR headset is very effective at blocking out the craving for food in real world.”  
Eating disorder expert



# VR INTERVENTION DESIGN

## Design Considerations

### Dealing with both mental problems and eating behavioral problems is important

All experts highlighted that interventions for emotional eating should address both the emotional problem and the eating behavior.

### Reducing emotional bonds on food is essential

Emotional eaters attach meanings to food. These emotional bonds to food make them repeat emotional eating.

### Intervention to immediately alleviate cravings is needed

Emotional eaters prefer instant or delivery foods that are ready to eat without cooking. The service should immediately intervene before their appetite leads to actual eating.



## Solution

### Use mindfulness meditation and peaceful audio-visual elements

Apply mindfulness meditation, which is used for mitigating eating disorders. Virtual landscapes with peaceful audio-visual elements can reduce user's negative emotions.

### Provide unusual experiences about the food

To help emotional eaters perceive it from a new perspective, we placed the food in unfamiliar contexts in a virtual environment.

### Provide immersive experiences to lead users to focus on other than craving

It provides a novel and immersive experience that is only possible in a virtual environment, allowing users to get out of focus on appetite.



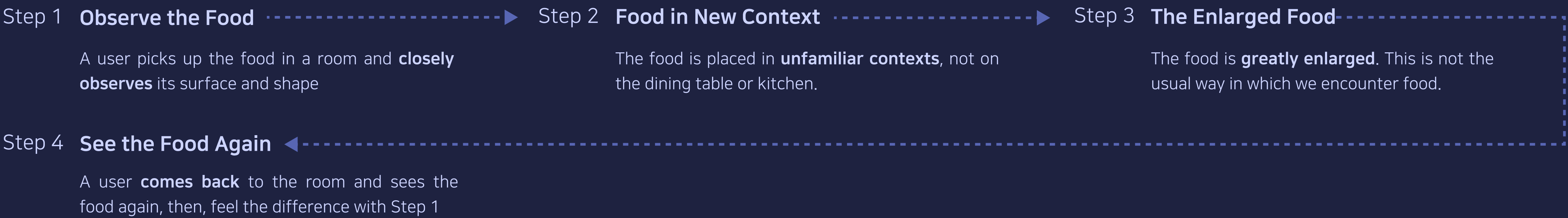
The **awareness** that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the **present moment**, **non-judgmentally**

Definition of Dr. Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)



EE-Scape Design

Through iterative discussion with a mindfulness meditation expert, we designed **four mindful steps** of the VR application, EE-Scape,





# VR INTERVENTION DESIGN

## Dépaysement

To change their fundamental perceptions of food, I applied Dépaysement as a new design strategy. This Surrealist art technique aims to render familiar objects unfamiliar by placing them in different environments or by combining unrelated elements into a single image. Among the various characteristics of dépaysement restructured by Jung-Yeol Lee, we adopted specific expression techniques of dépaysement applied to space since the spatial strategy is most closely related to our research on virtual environment design.

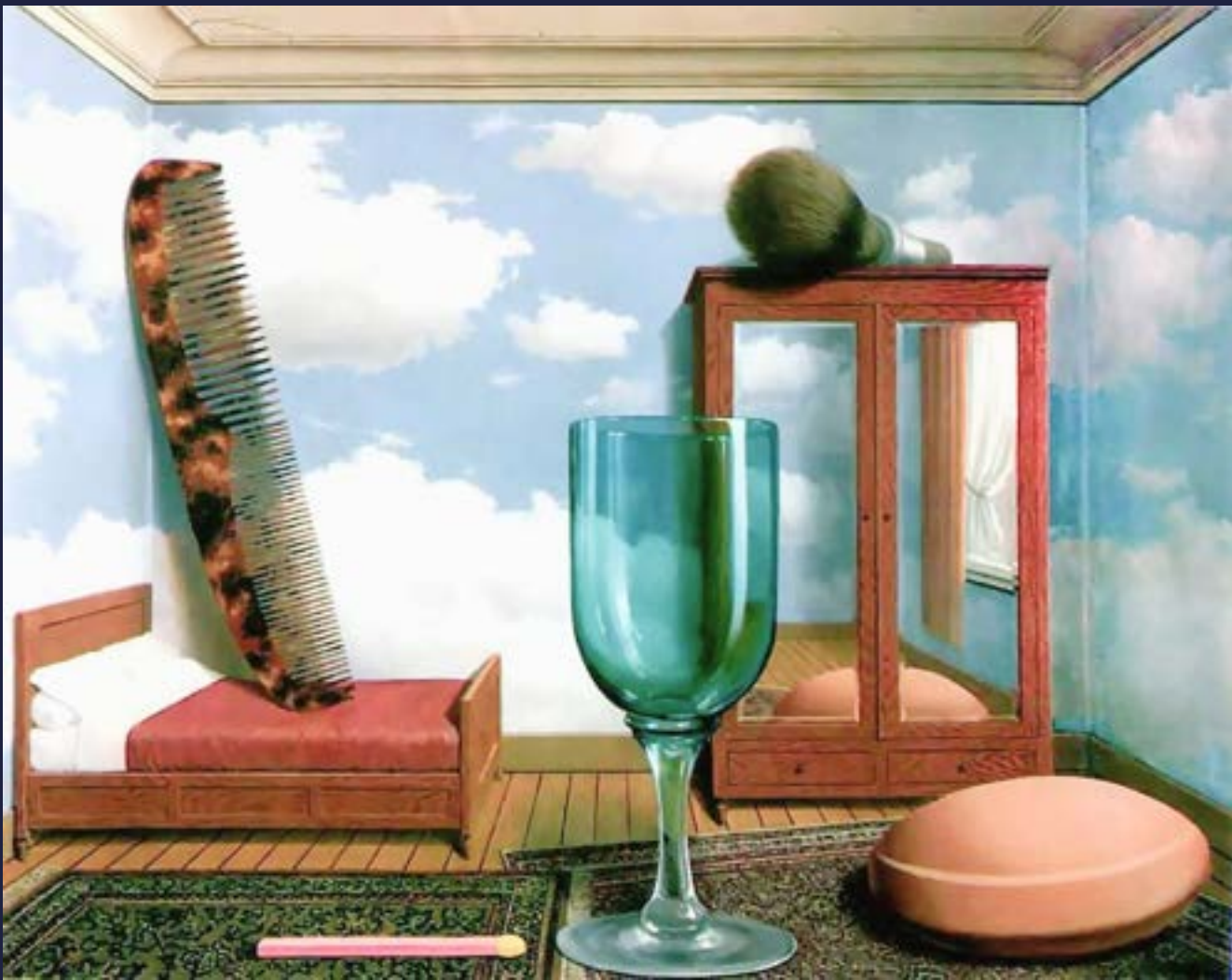
This approach was applied by separating images of food from their usual context, such as on a table or in a kitchen, and placing or enlarging them in unfamiliar VR (Virtual Reality) environments, such as natural landscapes.

@Paquet, M. (1994). Magritte. Benedikt Taschen  
@Suzi Gablic. (1985). Magritte. Thames & Hudson.  
@Lee, Jeong-Yeol. (2007), A Study on expression of interior design contemporary by application of dépaysement. Journal of the Korean Institute of Interior Design, 16(2), 79-86.

## Space of Dépaysement

### Isolation

Contradictory details	Incongruity
Transition of space	Enlargement
Symbolic	



Rene Magritte, *Les Valeurs Personnelles*, 1952

### Heterogeneities

Incongruity	Metaphysical world
Illusion of gravity-less	Multiple perspective



Rene Magritte, *Golconda*, 1953

Specific expression techniques  
we applied to EE-Scape design



# VR INTERVENTION DESIGN

## EE-Scape Design

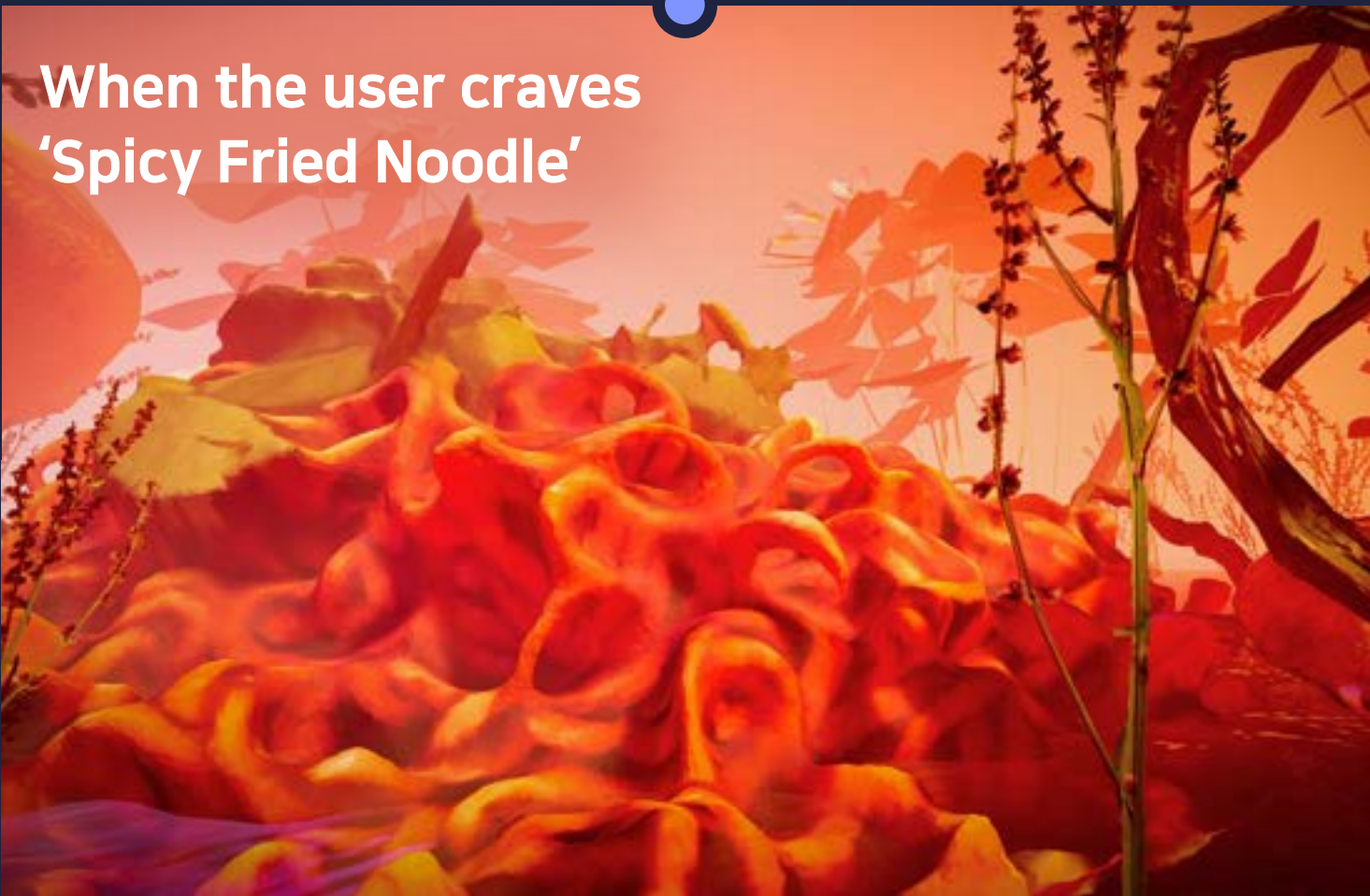
### Reflect the specific food that each user is craving at that time

Different people crave different foods in different situations. Based on this, the **VR experience of EE-scape changes according to the food the user craves** at that moment.

- The 3D food in EE-scape changes according to the user's choice.
- At the step of facing 'The Enlarged Food', the selected food is surrounded by virtual landscape, which is composed with visual elements that resemble the characteristics of each food, such as texture and color.



Screenshots of step 1, 'Observe the Food', of EE-Scape



Screenshots of step 3, 'The Enlarged Food', of EE-Scape



### Pre-survey

- We asked users to describe **how they feeling now** and **what food they want to eat**.  
Question 5 aimed to understand each
- user’s perspective on the food

- Q1.  
What kind of food are you craving right now?
- Q2.  
How much would you like to eat?  
(10-point Likert scale)
- Q3.  
Why do you want to eat this food?
- Q4.  
How do you feel now?  

☐ Depressed

☐ Lonely

☐ Joyful

☐ Fear

☐ Happy

☐ Annoyed

☐ Stressed

☐ Calm

☐ Bored

☐ Pleasure

☐ Anxious

☐ Sad

☐ Angry

☐ Tired

☐ Confused
- Q5.  
What words come to mind about this food and why?

### EE-scape experience

- Users followed **a step-by-step VR mindfulness meditation** taking a minimum of 5 minutes and a maximum of 10 minutes per person.



### Post-survey

- Post-survey had very similar questions to those on the pre-survey in order to **determine changes before and after VR prototype experience**.

- Q1.  
How much would you like to eat?  
(10-point Likert scale)
- Q2.  
How do you feel now?  

☐ Depressed

☐ Lonely

☐ Joyful

☐ Fear

☐ Happy

☐ Annoyed

☐ Stressed

☐ Calm

☐ Bored

☐ Pleasure

☐ Anxious

☐ Sad

☐ Angry

☐ Tired

☐ Confused
- Q3.  
What words come to mind about this food and why?

### Interview

Interview covered two main subjects:

1. **User reflections** on the experience of the VR prototype
2. **Potential and improvements** of our approach to regulate emotional eating

### Data Analysis

- Three researchers analyzed all the data collected by user test with thematic analysis.

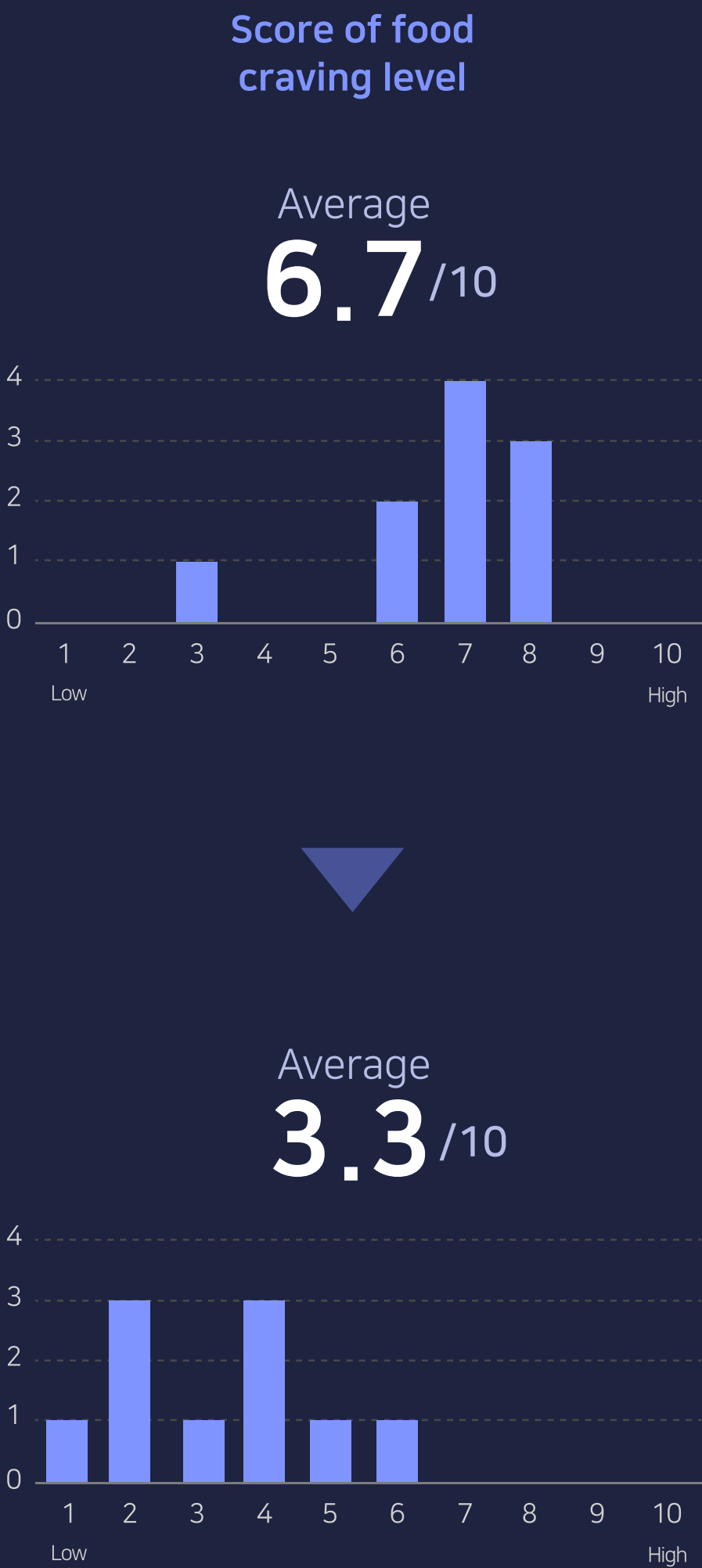


RESULTS

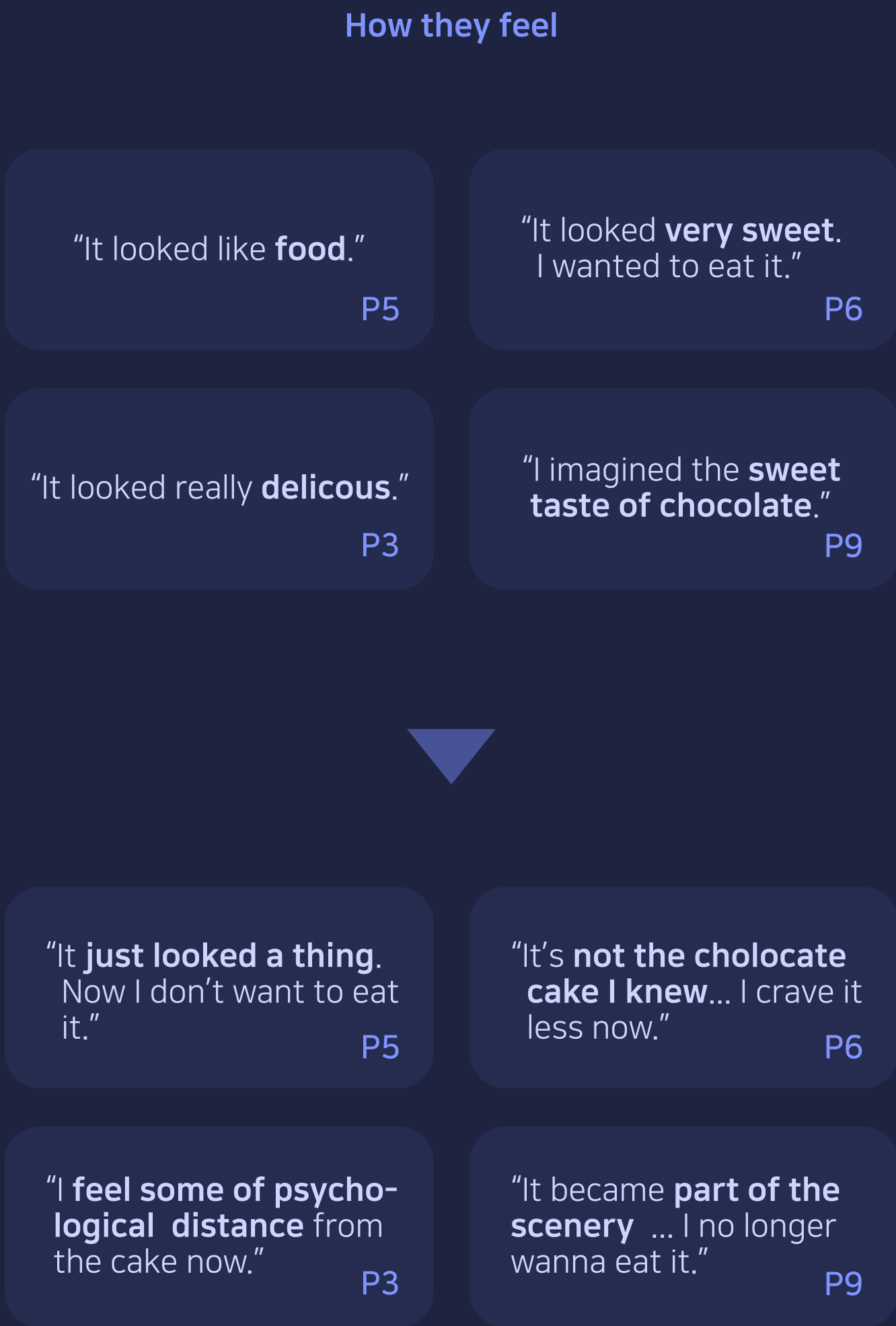
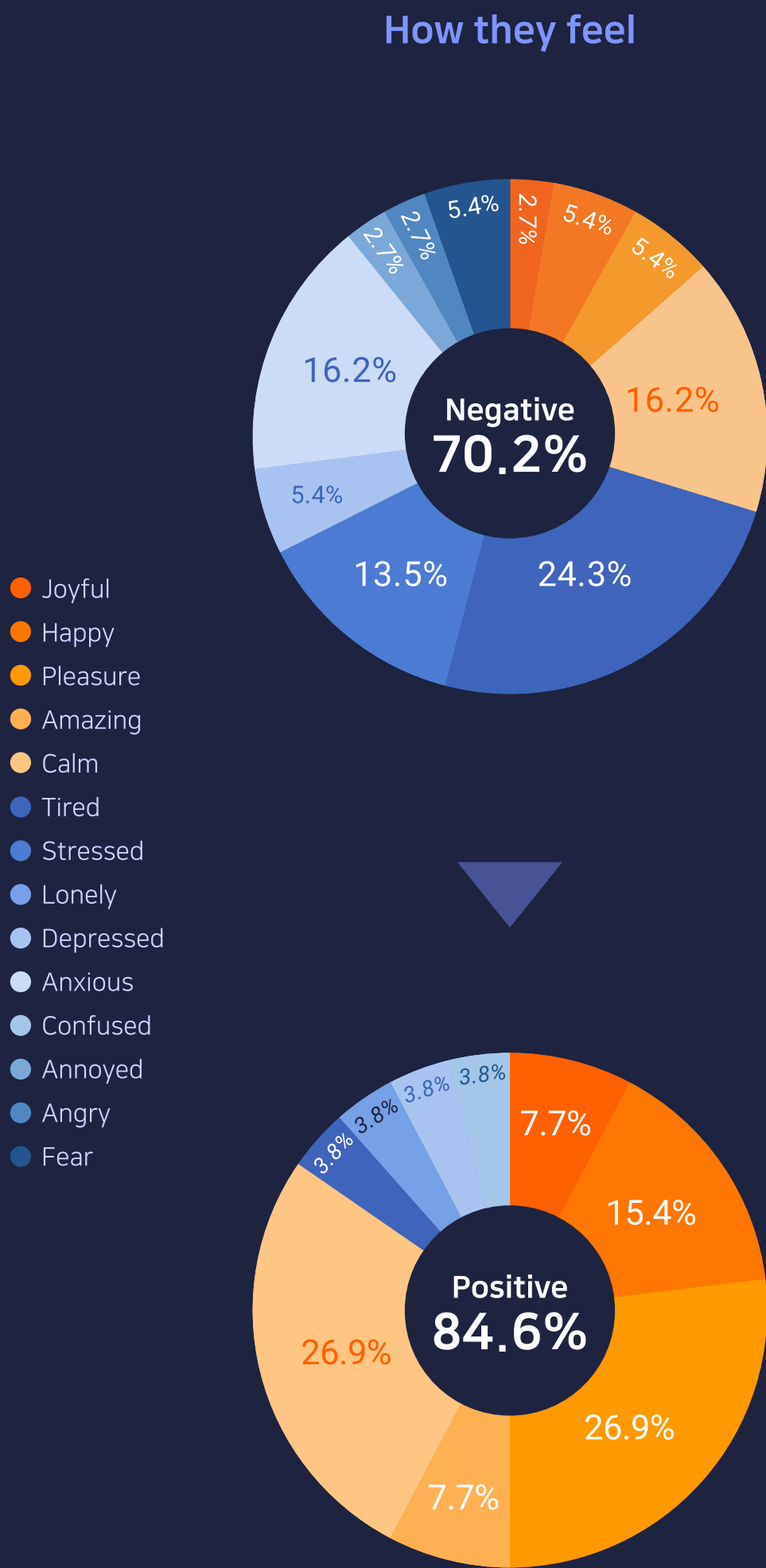
Before

EE-scape

After



Reduction of food cravings





# RESULTS

## Helpful features

From the interview data, we found three features of our VR mindfulness prototype that were helpful to users in reducing their cravings.

### ■ Effect of experiencing food from a new perspective

Participants indicated that EE-Scape reduced their cravings by **changing their perception of food**. In particular, seeing food from a new surrealistic perspective across step 2 and step 3, affected participants’ attitudes toward food.

### ■ Effect of focusing elsewhere rather than on a craving

Some participants emphasized that **beautiful and novel environments** of EE-Scape helped them to distract from a focus on cravings.

“I forgot about my appetite since I was more focused in new experiences of EE-Scape.” P2

“The virtual environment was so exciting that I could resist the urge to eat.” P4

### ■ Effect of solving emotional problems

The EE-scape helped participants to relieve their negative emotions that urged emotional eating so that they were less inclined to eat.

“My mind is so relaxed by experiencing EE-Scape that I don't have much appetite now.” P10

“I usually eat at night when I'm stressed, but now my stress is calmed, so I don't crave food.” P7

## Improvements

### Provide new contents

The content should be constantly renewed. In particular, elements such as the design of the virtual environment around the food or the background music should be different each time to help users overcome their emotional desire to eat by focusing on new experiences. We can use generative AI for continuous content development.

### Improve accessibility

The low accessibility of VR headsets makes it challenging to use the service sustainably. In addition, only users having VR devices, among many emotional eaters, can use the service. It is necessary to make the service available on more portable and accessible devices.

### Personalize the user experience

Content should be differentiated for each individual user's situation. For example, P6 and P9 felt calm in the universe, while P7 felt uncomfortable there. therefore, each user’s visual perference should considered. Also, users who frequently experience EE-scape can gradually become able to control their emotional eating, so the service should provide a variety of content to address underlying problems.