

Exploring Interpersonal Touch in Computer Games

Cody Watts
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB, Canada
wattsc@cpsc.ucalgary.ca

Ehud Sharlin
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB, Canada
ehud@cpsc.ucalgary.ca

Peter Woytiuk
BioWare Corp.
200, 4445 Calgary Trail
Edmonton, AB, Canada
woytiuk@bioware.com

ABSTRACT

Acts of interpersonal touch are used by couples to communicate with their partner in a simple, lightweight and emotionally significant way. In this abstract, we briefly present our motivation and initial design approach for *Matchmaker* – a cooperative, romantically-themed game for tabletop computers which integrates acts of interpersonal into its game mechanics.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.5.2 [Information interfaces and presentation]: User Interfaces – Input devices and strategies, interaction styles.

K.8.0 [Personal Computing]: General – Games.

General Terms

Design.

Keywords

Computer games, interpersonal touch.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal touch – an act of physical contact shared between two people – is one of the most emotionally-significant ways that human beings communicate. Intimate behaviors like hand-holding, hugging and kissing are commonly used as a method of expressing affection between couples. However, findings by Crusco et al. & Fisher et al. suggests that even a fleeting touch from a stranger can improve one's overall mood [1, 2].

We believe that computer games can leverage the emotional connections created by interpersonal touch to create an emotionally-engaging gameplay experience for couples. To support this notion, we present our initial design approach for *Matchmaker*: a cooperative, two-player computer game which detects and reacts to acts of interpersonal touch (e.g. hand-holding) between its players.

2. MATCHMAKER

Using interpersonal touch as interaction technique presents a unique challenge, since players may feel conspicuous about touching their partner as they play. Our goal in designing *Matchmaker* was to create an environment in which players would feel confident to hold hands with their partner as they play. Since touch is so often used as an expression of love and romance, it seemed only fitting that *Matchmaker* be a romantically-themed game whose cutesy, heart-filled appearance would reflect the affectionate behavior of its hand-holding players.

In *Matchmaker*, players must work together to create matches between Peeps – the small love-starved people who inhabit the world of *Matchmaker*. By touching and dragging compatible Peeps together with their partner, players can create matches and increase their score. There's only one caveat: players must act quickly, because Peeps which remain single for too long will become depressed and lovelorn. When a Peep becomes lovelorn, it will start to cry and it cannot be matched with any other Peep. There's only one cure for a lovelorn Peep – players must join hands, and touch the affected Peep to rejuvenate it's faith in the Power of Love. A lovelorn Peep which has been cured in this way becomes ready to find love once again, and can now be matched up with other Peeps.

3. CONCLUSION

We have presented our initial design approach for *Matchmaker* – a cooperative, romantically themed game for tabletop computers designed to help us explore interpersonal touch interaction in games.

We hope to present our completed implementation of *Matchmaker*, along with an evaluation of the game and its use of interpersonal touch soon.

4. REFERENCES

- [1] Crusco, A., Wetzel, C. 1984. "The Midas Touch: The Effects of Interpersonal Touch on Restaurant Tipping" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 4, (512-517).
- [2] Fisher, J. D., Rytting, M., and Heslin, R. 1976. "Hands touching hands: Affective and evaluative effects of an interpersonal touch." *Sociometry* 39 (416-421).