

Equal Opportunity Affection Games, Critical Design in Stolen Kisses

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ABSTRACT

This brief paper outlines the design and development challenges of a critical design affection game. Affection games require players to flirt, kiss, hug or make love to meet their goals. The game described, named Stolen Kisses, allows players to kiss a wider variety of individuals. The game is played by placing your lips on a mobile device and balancing long kisses with short kisses across one of eight gender and racially diverse characters.

Author Keywords

Affection Games, Critical Design, Critical Gameplay, Kissing Games, Device Affection

ACM Classification Keywords

K.8.0. Personal Computing Games

INTRODUCTION

Affection games require players to flirt, hug, kiss, or make love to meet their goals. These games represent a marked contrast to the more well known genres of shooting, role playing, simulation, and puzzle games. Affection games have witnessed a marked increase in the last few years. There are simply more games that posit players as girls collecting the hearts of boys, couples sneaking kisses, fantasies about kissing famed celebrities and hugging giant stuffed animals to meet our needs [1]. This rise is most apparent in mobile games, where a variety of former Adobe Flash games have been re-released on Google Play and where the global and economic diversity of developers has increased.

Affection games and their increasing popularity provide a cultural perspective on intimacy, social norms and values. Likewise they provide hints of the developer's own biases, demonstrating through game design a collection of philosophies about affection and human-human relationships. While many of these games were formerly distributed via websites specifically targeting teenage girls, the movement to more gender neutral mobile distribution sites like Google Play and Apple iOS changes the market for such play. Affection games are now more readily apparent to wider demographic.

It is important to understand that affection games are not the dating simulations or soft porn adventures of the past, but succinct, pointed, purposeful casual games with one aim – get your goals met through affection. Whether players sneak a kiss without angering their boss [2] or incapacitate men with the flutter

of their eye lashes [3], these games say much about the state of human affection in a digitally mediated world. Like much play, these games are not innocuous and ineffective, they are a resonant practice that frames a distinct problem and an even more distinct solution. In short, they can be a kind of lesson in love or prescription for passion. For some they are nearly the harlequin novel of casual games.

The most common of these affection games are games for which the goal is to deliver a kiss or perform a high ranking kiss. Within this group, there is a newly emerging trend of literal kissing games. These games are designed to support players' physical kisses with their devices. Such games are designed to use the touch interface of contemporary digital devices not with fingers, but with lips. In such games players have been given license to love their devices in new and potentially awkward ways. Such designs represent a new reflection on player relationships to their digital experience. They add a dimension to human-computer interaction.

Beyond the obvious puns, there is a unique confluence of social values, expression and norms that conjures the expression of affection on inanimate devices. The arcade game's history is not far from kissing booths and love meters. It's also important to remember that while there are affection games with a sexual nature, many of these games' affections are more innocuous than what happens behind the curtains of red light districts. From this perspective, the notion of kissing your device has more in common with hugging a stuffed animal[4], than teledildonics[5]. As evidence, consider one of the more popular device kissing games takes kissing photos of cute children as its subject[6].

GAME DESIGN

Stolen Kisses is a simple game that embraces a kissing interface for Critical Design. Applying the practice of Critical Gameplay, which is derived from Dunne and Raby's Critical Design [7], the game encourages players to lavish their real kisses to a variety of virtual avatars. The novelty in the game is not as much in the interface as its subject. For novel kissing interfaces, please refer to Nam and DiSalvo's Kiss Controller [8].

Instead, as part of the critical design, Stolen Kisses critiques convention in these affection games. From previously published research it is clear that the vast majority of affection games are heteronormative and non-diverse [1]. These games generally don't depict and support homosexual affection (sexual or non-sexual) nor do the games depict interracial relationships. It's also standard for such games to depict only same race or creature type affections. In the typical affection games, Caucasians kiss only Caucasians and Asian kiss only Asians. In concert, kittens nestle only with kittens, and magical unicorns kiss only other magical unicorns.

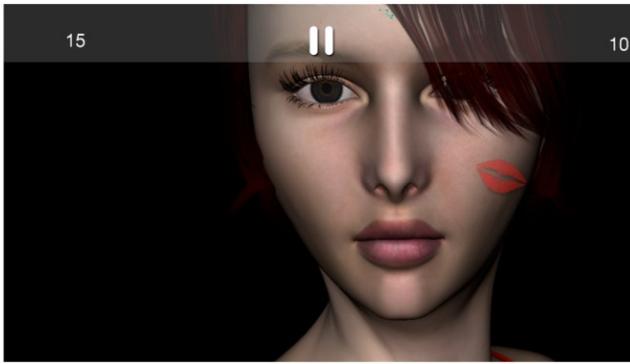


Figure 1. Screenshot of the Stolen Kisses Game

Stolen Kisses seeks to embrace a wider range of affection. The game allows players to choose one of eight characters to kiss. The characters are:

- Caucasian female
- Caucasian male
- African descent male
- African descent Female
- transgendered, Caucasian male
- transgendered, African descent male
- mixed race female
- gender and race ambiguous person

The players can select one person or they can select the dice symbol for a random selection. Once selected the player has one minute to kiss the character as much as they can. The kisses add points to their final score. Players can give lots of little kisses, or hold a kiss to accrue more points. However, if the player holds one kiss too long they lose all of their points. The highest points are achieved with giving longer kisses that land just right.

The game mechanics and experience are designed to be simple and casual. Players are encouraged to experiment.

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Both the Google Play store and Apple's iOS store have explicit restrictions about the types of content allowed in games. Although the game meets their explicit requires, Apple has restricted the sale of Stolen Kisses. As evidenced in figure 2, their claim is that kissing an Apple device will damage it:



Figure 2. Apple's developer resolution center, rejecting the Stolen Kisses Game on risk of physical damage from kissing.

Apple's claim that kissing the device will cause damage to it is troublesome. In response, the application's description was modified to encourage players to use virtual kisses and touch the device to kiss. Upon secondary review, Apple's remains concerned about the game's concept. In a world full of games where players must shoot, shake or swing their devices it's telling that a major distributor like Apple would prohibit such affections. To date, this censoring of affection has been the only technical challenge in designing, developing and distributing this simply affection game.

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