
Cunt Touch This: A Conversation on Intimate Design and Embarrassment

Ben Kirman

Lincoln Social Computing (LiSC)
Research Centre
University of Lincoln
Lincoln LN6 7TS, UK
bkirman@lincoln.ac.uk

Sabine Harrer

University of Vienna
Department of English Studies
Spitalgasse 2-4/Campus Hof 8.3
1090 Vienna, Austria
sabine.harrer@univie.ac.at

Andrea Hasselager

Freelance Artist & Game Designer
andrea.hasselager@gmail.com

Conor Linehan

Lincoln Social Computing (LiSC)
Research Centre
University of Lincoln
Lincoln LN6 7TS, UK
clinehan@lincoln.ac.uk

Ida Toft

Concordia University
1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd W.
Montreal, Quebec,
Canada
i_tof@concordia.ca

Raimund Schumacher

Freelance Graphic Artist
sr@conspirat.com

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Abstract

This position paper presents a conversation between players and the designers of the unique mobile game experience *Cunt Touch This*¹.

Revisiting their personal experiences with playing the game, the player-authors read the game as a system that takes advantage of social embarrassment as a key element from which the pleasure of the game is derived. Contrasting this view, the designer-authors comment on the original intention, production context and purpose of *Cunt Touch This*. The goal of this confrontation is to explore embarrassment as a feeling oscillating between the emotional and the political dimensions of play. The unusual discussion format of the paper allows us to invite potentially challenging questions: When, where and why does embarrassment come about? What function does it have in play? Is it just part of the fun, or ideologically charged? Drawing together our differing perspectives as players and designers we contribute a candid reflection on the wider issues of embarrassment as it relates to design.

Author Keywords

Game design; embarrassment; pleasure

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

¹ <http://www.copenhagengamecollective.org/projects/cunttouchthis/>

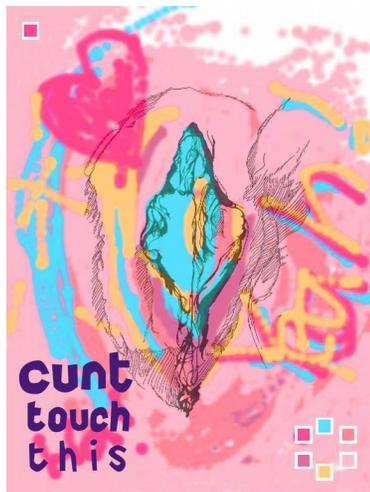
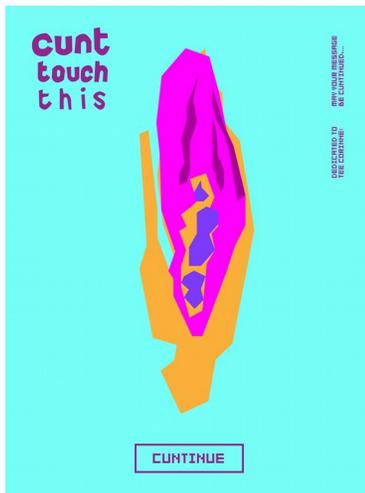


Figure 1: Game Visuals

Introduction

[Ben - player] It was late on a Monday night after a long day at a workshop, and we were in the only open bar in Nottingham. A colleague eagerly called me over to play a new game. Sabine handed me the tablet - the title screen showing a colourful abstract logo announcing “CUNT TOUCH THIS” - and with a small group of widely-grinning onlookers I started to play.

[Designers] *Cunt Touch This* is inspired by Tee A. Corinne’s *Cunt Coloring Book* from 1975 [1]. The game is a meditative drawing activity accompanied by audio feedback. Using fingers on a touchpad players can admire, care for and add their own artistic colouring to the detailed shapes of Corinne’s drawings. Pacing of strokes is important for the aesthetic look: slow strokes create thick colour lines while fast strokes add a coarse graffiti style. Randomly placed sensitive areas respond to the touch: Careful work around these gives more time to draw, while too much interaction will cause the image to pulsate in a slow motion cunt explosion before the image fades to white leaving the message “thank you, it was a pleasure”. The option “Cuntinue?” invites the players to encounter new levels. Sensitivity area and pleasure length on each vulva are unique just like each drawing shows the diversity of female bodies.

[Ben] When I later received an invite for the workshop on embarrassing interactions my immediate thought was of my experience playing, and watching others play, *Cunt Touch This* in that bar in Nottingham. I excitedly emailed the designers, to ask if they’d be interested in collaborating on a paper. The ensuing discussion was challenging, varied and illuminating reflection on intimacy and embarrassment as an aspect of interaction design that will be of value to anyone studying or designing in this space.

The Game

[Designers] The mission of the *Cunt Coloring Book* is to demystify female sexuality and drawing attention to its diversity in a fun, artistic way. Readers are not only invited to admire, but also to “make it their own” by colourising the detailed shapes Corinne displays. This pleasure-centric approach to the cunt has inspired the design of *Cunt Touch This*. Each level features one of Corinne’s artistically designed vulvas, which can be coloured, using a finger on the touchpad and the small, dynamic colour wheel on the bottom of the screen. There are randomly distributed sensitive areas which will respond to touch, and pacing one’s movements carefully is important, as the speed of the strokes determines whether the colour is applied. That way, the duration as well as the purpose of a painting session can be controlled by players: Whether they choose to rush towards climax or to spend more time with one of Corinne’s other available cunt drawings, is up to them. In any case, there are different vulva shapes waiting for players to explore, customise and playfully own.

We made *Cunt Touch This* at a small Danish game jam in spring 2014 in a team of 4. Andrea happened to have Corinne’s drawing book on her, and while we started admiring the beauty of her drawings in the way they playfully celebrate female sexuality, we started wondering how her work would look like in a game. Raimund enthusiastically joined the team as a graphical artist, and Ida started programming. When we introduced *Cunt Touch This* at the game jam’s final presentation, we found that it seemed to cause some fair amount of confusion among players. This is best reflected in the award that it eventually received: “least/best feministic [sic!] game”²

² <http://www.igda.dk/2014/05/08/bonfires-jamming-baking-and-more-happened-at-exile-spring-2014/>

The Player Experience

[Ben] I think the first feeling I had was that of cold panic. You are faced with this extremely detailed vulva. You are surrounded by friends and colleagues looking over your shoulders. I felt there was an expectation to perform. My first thought was to my surroundings – how do I “win” this without losing face? I consciously tried to desexualise it by earnestly colouring, but as soon as you start touching the screen the moaning sound effects reinforce the sexual aspect of the gameplay. I chickened out pretty quickly by trying to be funny and putting a smiley face on the vagina.

[Conor] It was definitely a memorable experience. When presented with the game you just see an outline picture and a drawing tool. The instructions were straightforward – colour in the picture. However, I was very suspicious that there had to be something more involved as spectators had raised eyebrows and were giving each other knowing looks. I guessed that the movements of my fingers on the touchscreen were probably being measured and that something would happen as a result. I also felt very keenly, whether it was true or not, that the spectators were watching those finger movements. I tried to convince myself that this was completely normal- the same as colouring in any other body part. But I also didn't really want to be seen as acting overtly sexually in front of colleagues at a public bar, so I was very aware of my movements. Given the social context of playing in public, the close topographical similarity between the colouring action and a sexual act, the wish not to react to the content of the colouring, and yet the desire to complete the game, this was a really interesting example of social game play experience built around social dynamics [3].

[Ben] I agree – as a spectator you get to observe as people struggle with the game. Especially the first moment of panic, where a new player tries to think of

what to do. The delicate encouragement of the person showing them the game (“try being more gentle”, “try a bit higher up”) I found to be the climax of the game.

The Designer Intent

[Ida] Like in Corinne's book, the game is a celebration of feminine individuality, power and creativity. It's a statement in a world where women's sexuality is being shamed and oppressed at the same time that women's body parts are photoshopped and modelled in odd and non-representative ways in a lot of our cultural media. The book shows a diversity of women's bodies - in a flat and non-prioritized structure, a diversity that is often censured from mainstream media.

[Sabine] Adapting a vulva shape for a game level is a quite efficient strategy to achieve that structure. Everyone playing games knows that different level territories look differently, so players will expect variety. At the same time, each vulva fills the whole screen, so players are invited to explore details. This kind of representation toys around with a long established tradition of genital drawing in games.

[Ida] Whenever there is a game that allows you to draw, the first thing that goes online is drawings of penises. Where is the mainstream pop-cultural equivalent - the casual vagina humour, I wonder? We're not talking simply about putting vaginas on display, but daring to enjoy them, celebrate them through the popular media available to us. Well, *Cunt Touch This* has exactly this to offer.

[Sabine] We had a lot of fun coming up with a silly kind of vagina humour that is linking back to Corinne's legacy. I admire the way she articulated the innocent activity of drawing to female sexuality, delivering a strong message: humour and pleasure go hand in hand, and sky is the limit to your imagination of how you wanna own that pleasure.

Discussion

[Ben] So the game isn't intended to be embarrassing?

[Andrea] It was not our intention to embarrass, but I can see how that emotion could be evoked in some players. The book was first published with the name 'Cunt Coloring Book' and was instantly wildly popular, then some people complained about the 'awful' name, they made a new edition called 'Labiaflowers', and then the book virtually died - I find this detail interesting.

[Sabine] I think embarrassment happens when players haven't internalised the idea that vulvas are potentially something to "play around with". One of the most fascinating comments we have received about the game so far came from a male designer of "sexual health" games, who argued that the game was "offensive" because it didn't address female sexuality from a serious health perspective.

[Ben] Perhaps he was "Too Legit to Clit"? (sorry)

[Ida] Being embarrassed is only one out of many reactions that we got for the game. Apparently, there are many play styles one can enjoy. Some players have spent a long time in the game, carefully listening to the music and playing around with colour schemes, and pointing out the beauty of the level shapes.

[Ben] On reflection I agree on this point. As something of a penis aficionado [2], colleagues frequently tweet me photos of scrawled knobs. I'd roll my eyes at "Cock Touch This", but embarrassingly my first reaction to the female equivalent was a cold sweat. That's a problem.

[Sabine] In that way this game makes tangible how far we stand in the cunt question. Are you ready to enjoy cunt humour as you can enjoy dick humor? And if not, what does your cold sweat mean, gender politics wise?

[Ben] Apart from that, *Cunt Touch This* is quite special when played with a facilitator - it feels very intimate.

We might view it as a game of sexual discovery? Like how "Spin the Bottle" and other kissing games provide "safe" spaces to explore sexuality? (e.g. [4])

[Sabine] Maybe a discovery of a pleasure angle on female sexuality, exploring what is usually left out of the picture.

[Andrea] And by showing many different looking vaginas in rapid succession we might also learn how to embrace them as normal.

[Ben] Ideally, should cunt colouring, both in app and book form, be an unremarkable/banal activity? Is the desired response to your game an apathetic shrug, rather than the embarrassment I found in it?

[Sabine] Well, different social bubbles come with different tastes and pleasures. I really like the bubble in which playing *Cunt Touch This* is neither embarrassing nor shrugged off. It's simply enjoyed as a social activity of artistic digital cunt colouring in good company (sorry). That's why we handed you the tablet in the first place.

Acknowledgements

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Author Biography

The authors are a collection of game designers, artists and scholars who share an interest in the potential of games to create uniquely personal and experimental experiences, including uncomfortable and/or embarrassing social experiences. In addition the authors appear to share a love for crude wordplay and MC Hammer.