



Hug Over a Distance



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You use email to request a meeting with a remote client and instant messengers to check availability of a colleague overseas for a briefing. But what do you use to express that you are thinking about your remote loved one?

Hug Over a Distance!

An intimate interface for remote couples:
http://www.floydmueller.com/hug_over_a_distance

The Research



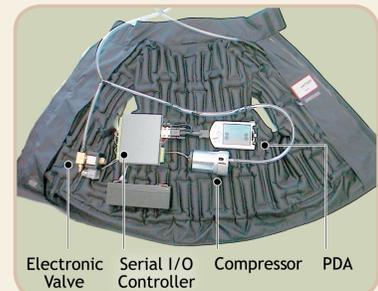
Based on the results of our ethnographic study with couples, we developed Hug Over a Distance to test the feasibility of technology for intimate couples. Hug Over a Distance is an air-inflatable vest that can be remotely triggered to create a sensation resembling a hug. Unfortunately, the couples did not consider the vest to be useful in their daily lives; however, the prototype provoked and stimulated design ideas from the couples during participative design workshops. We found an unexpected benefit: the prototype enhanced the couples' understanding of our methods, so we believe that prototypes can serve as tools to make participatory design volunteers aware of their importance in our academic research.

The Scenario

You are separated from your partner due to a work assignment in a city far away from home, and you miss her. You miss giving her a hug and holding hands. Therefore, you pick up your mobile phone to call her, but hesitate, because she is at work and a call might disturb her. Besides, you do not really have anything important to say and decide therefore not to call.

Instead, you decide to send her a Hug Over a Distance. You take the koala and rub its belly, which in turn sends out a hug signal, visualized by a little animation (the koala is currently a placeholder for a corresponding vest). Your partner is wearing a stylish vest, which nobody around her can identify as a piece of wearable computing. However, the vest contains a wireless receiver, which receives the hug signal. Inside the vest are small air compartments which inflate quickly all around her body torso, giving a sensation similar to a real hug. The hug is discretely received, because others cannot "see" the hug.

She knows that you are thinking about her because she received a tactile emotional message from you, meaning "I am thinking about you." You both feel closer although you are still apart.



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