

## **New media technologies for love, affection, and intimacy:**

Developing interactive prototypes to study how intimacy, love, and affection can be mediated with 'touch' technologies

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In this paper, we present preliminary results of two ongoing design research projects studying how new media technologies can support and maintain love, affection, and intimacy. We're specifically interested in 'touch' and the properties that physical contact connote in different cultural contexts, and how 'touch' can be used as a method for communicating feelings and emotions that are hard to express verbally.

In the first example, we present 'keep in touch', an interactive fabric that supports intimacy for couples in long distance relationships, and allows couples to communicate with each other using touch, body language, and hand gestures. The fabric displays a real time video image of the partner which is blurred. When the blurry image on the fabric is touched by the remote partner, their image slowly comes into focus. We presented our work to couples who frequently experience being away from each other to evaluate this visual-touch metaphor and conclude with an outline of future work, improvements, and research.

In our second example, we describe 'stay in touch', a fabric touch screen that divides a room in half. Participants stand on either side of the fabric and must touch each other through the fabric to interface with the content. In our first experiment, touching and sustaining a touch on different areas of the fabric will cause different images of a body to slowly fade in, and they fade out when the touch is broken. Early results indicate that physical contact between strangers can be encouraged and mediated with our prototype. We conclude by suggesting cultural contexts where our prototype can be used to study how touch can be mediated with technology.

Our work on technologies for love and affection underscores a key area of research absent in current human-computer interaction discourse and we hope to use our prototypes to enter the debate on how, and if, technology could be created for love, intimacy, and affection.



**Keep in Touch:** *When the blurry body of the other person is touched, their image comes into focus*



**Stay in Touch:** *Two people have to touch each other through the fabric to interface with the content*