

The Connections Lab: How To Touch And Feel Your Mate On The Distance

By: Anastasia Naum } February 22, 2017



Today more and more couples live far away from each other. It is easy to travel and to stay in touch. Lots of people even prefer this kind of relationship to the traditional one, but still, they need more facilities to communicate over distance. Technology is swiftly going much further than Skype, Google Hangouts or Facetime. Some day we will be able not only to speak and see each other but also touch. Wait, are we already?

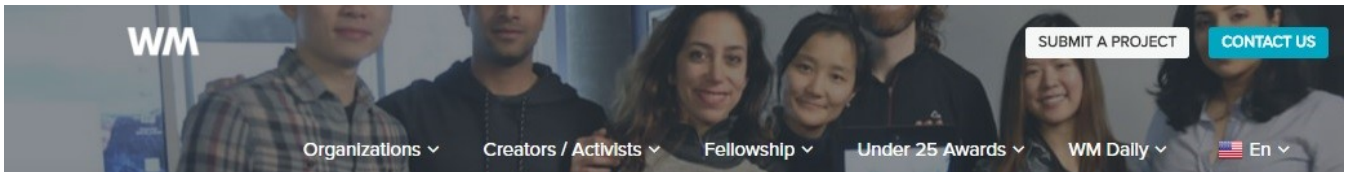
Not So Far

The Connections Lab, part of the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, was created in 2010 by Associate Professor Carman Neustaedter. The name of the Lab speaks for itself. The research group studies the design and use of technologies aimed at supporting the everyday activities of people. Many of their projects focus on connecting people through space and time to make them feel not so far from each other.

I Glove You, Honey

The lab has recently presented the technology that gives one an opportunity to feel another over distance. Technically, it's two vibrotactile gloves. Each «speaker» have one glove to send and to receive impulses. So the sensors in gloves imitate a feeling of a touch. What's interesting, the glove obviously can not move the partner's hand, but it can control a number of vibrations. Testing the technology, couples managed to high-five, to hold hands, to tickle.

Couples can adjust the amount of pressure used and the strength of the vibrotactile sensations by placing their hand either gently against their body or with added pressure. Just like in real life. It is also possible to wear a pair of gloves, one on each hand. This would allow both partners to share touches at the same time. Flex-N-Feel Gloves were invented by a master student of the Lab, Samarth Singhal. The work is still in progress.



TelePresence

But the touch is not enough. Being together means sharing. Sharing a coffee, a movie, a dog. A telepresence robot could help. It can express body language of the partner. They can get closer to the partner or leave the room. The Connections Lab continues to research what impact could this technology have on a long-distance couple relationship.

I Wish You Could Show Me Around

Over distance, we are also usually interested in our partner's environment. To stay close to each other we want to know what's the weather like, what things one put yesterday on a night table. The other Singhal's invention is a Be With Me mobile based video communication system. It allows you a 360-degree view of your partner's environment by simply rotating your phone.

The CLab

The Connections Lab (The Clab) is a group of young scientists, some of them haven't even reached their 30s. «They are all really passionate about what they are doing. I push them out of the comfort zones and get them to do things they may think not possible before. Then I come to the lab I see them learning and growing», – says Dr. Carman Neustaedter about his students. The Connections Lab study how the people use the technologies in the present and then design the future. One of their key cores is how technology can improve a domestic life and connections between different family groups. For deeper information, you can check Lab's recently published book. Among other interesting projects of the CLab is Shared Geocaching, which is a game two people can play over distance; Bicycle Navigation Through Tactile Feedback; Pet Video Chat, which is to interact with a Dog over distance and many others. No matter how far away we are from each other, we are getting closer and closer.

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