

Mobilu

A NARRATION FOR GIRLS.
TOLD ON MULTIPLE PHONE SCREENS.

PROJECT DESIGN:
KEYWORDS:
PROJECT BLOG:

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Mobile Animation, Dynamic Web Development, Participatory Media
<http://mobilu.wordpress.com/>

SUMMARY

**Hand drawn mobile animations targeted to girls, with the option to vote on the path the narration will take.
Displayed when four users join their mobile phone screens to one larger screen**

PROJECT STATEMENT

For my project I'm building a series of animated movies for mobile phones. Focusing on their personal problems and experiences, they are targeted towards teenage girls. Each of the clips contains a little story, build around the main character "Lu". The content evolves from the challenges this heroine is confronted with. She has a pet, family and friends and represents the age group the audience identifies with. The story will be told in several episodes. Each episode addresses a category of issues women at this age face. For example the categories: body image, love, self-knowledge and sexuality.

It is the process in which the videos are displayed that makes the experience of watching them special. The animation is shown on four mobile phone screens at once. It is split by the phones frames, but when the videos are synchronized, they merge into one larger image. Therefore, in order to see the full movie, four users have to meet at one spot. They become players, active in the narration.

Each player receives the application via MMS, opens it and now has a quarter of the full video image on the screen. When four girls each hold their mobile phones up simultaneously, they can watch the whole animation. They are free to watch it where ever they want or feel comfortable. It intentionally involves the challenge of bringing a group together to encourage dialog amongst the players.

At the end of each animation they will be offered to choose between two options of how the story they just saw will continue. Mostly at a key point of the story, when the heroine has to take an important decision. Right after voting for the next part they can continue to watch the elected animation on their phones.

Again, each of them has only one quarter of the animation on her phone. They have to find the right way to unite the phones in order to see the complete animation, which again gives the process a game character. The sound of each mobile phone speaker contributes to the sound scape of the animation. There are no voices in the sound, but instead some written text in the video. This keeps the application open to users with different backgrounds. In general the form of the animation resembles a cartoon or comic: using icons, speech ballons and other parts of comic grammar.

KEYWORDS

Mobile phone, Flash Lite, Cartoon, Animation, participatory storytelling

DESCRIPTION

Through several workshops I organized with kids, I had the chance to observe how insecure specially girls become when it comes to their body image and sexuality. They negotiate between all of the stereotypes and expectations they are exposed to the media, their friends, their family, while at the same time trying to be true to their own identity, feelings and desires. Education in this field often focuses on safety and birth control, while the emotional and ethical challenges of discovering sexuality are often not discussed.

I want to instigate conversations among girls on difficult topics. I want to make it easier for them to develop their voice and unique identity. In the ideal case, my project would help teenagers to discuss that they are not alone in their fears and decisions, and help them to take responsibility for themselves. I hope to not patronize them with my efforts, but open a secure space for talking honestly.

To achieve this goal, I decided to create a mobile phone application. As mentioned above, I see this format as a tool for encouraging communication. The application is easily accessible, self contained and running on every brand of phone. The Graphical Interface of the application leads the players smoothly through the whole experience. This involves finding the other player's phones via blue-tooth for synchronization. This also involves an election process, for choosing the content of the next story. It is coordinated by a server, when all phones are pinging it for permission to play.

Once the four player's phones are connected, they can start to watch one episode after the other on their joined mobile phones. To choose the path the narrative takes and to express a personal opinion by voting on one of two options, encourages even shy users to participate in an exchange.

The main character, "Lu", is the heroine of all episodes, she gains experiences girls can relate to. The users will decide, which decision she makes in the story. I hope that this way, the storytelling becomes more like a collective experience among friends, rather than educational material communicated via phone.

I believe that a mobile phone offers a private space girls have absolute ownership over. While computers are sometimes shared with other family members, most girls have their own mobile phones. Other devices, like the iPod or palm, would have been as capable of doing the job, but they are less common in lower income families and harder to build standardized applications for.

Some might think that a mobile phone screen would be too small to watch videos with rich or delicate content. Several mobile phone screens put together, can in fact form an image large enough to fit a 640 pix to 480 pix animation. I have talked to several girls in the age of the target group. They all had used their phones to watch videos already. My basic idea is to create the privacy and setting to tell universal, but intimate stories girls can identify with. I'm positive I chose the right medium for doing so. When I presented my project in front of R/GA CEO Bob Greenberg, he confirmed me in this assumption.

For keeping the files small and offering them to a large variety of phones, the animation's aesthetic is reduced to black/white, simplified and defined by ethically undefined characters. I hope to achieve a strong visual sense of continuity between the screens, even when they have different sizes. High contrast and simple shapes make it easier to follow an object across different screens.

I was thinking a lot about how to combine the positive aspects of online communication with the positive sides of real life communication. I came to the conclusion that online conversations on these specific issues are less satisfying if they don't affect or trigger real life encounters. I hope that my application will bring users together: interacting, breaking taboos sensitively, and having fun at the same time. I like to think that my application is a digital social networking tool for quality content in a physical space.

RESEARCH

Website:

<http://www.gURL.com/>

Books:

Girl Wide Web, Girls the internet and the Negotiation of Identity, Sharon R. Mazzarella, 2005

Bitchfest, by Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler, 2006

The Vagina Monologues by Eve Ensler, 2000

Sugar and Spice, sexuality and adolescent girls, by Sue Lees, 1993

The Psychology of Sexual Victimization, Michelle Antoinette Paludi, 1999

Backlash, Susan Faludi, 1991

Grassroots, A Field Guide for Feminist Activism, Jennifer Baumgartner and Amy Richards, 2005

Understanding Comics, The Invisible Art, Scott McCloud, 1993

Conference:

Left Forum organized by CUNY, March 2008, "The Pleasure Frontier: An Intergenerational Dialog on Sex in Feminism: An interrogation of sex and sexuality through various generations of feminisms

Reduced and private style:

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persepolis_\(graphic_novel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persepolis_(graphic_novel))

Support:

Jake Barton (Advisor)

Mobile Media Class (Shawn van Every)

Lower East Side Girls Club (internship, user testing)

Marianne Petit (Advisor)

Tools

Flash Lite, Mobile Processing, Php, MySQL, Final Cut Pro, Toon Boom,

Mobile Phones, Animation Software

AUDIENCE

My target group is girls who use their phones for connecting with their friends. Young female users who are curious about new features and open minded towards discussion. I'm interested in approaching second generation Americans, who might not own a home computer or have available options to find information in libraries and other public institutions. For them, I hope, that their mobile phone could become an interface to content they might otherwise be deprived from. The application is not intended to be used by teachers in class, but could be an additional way to approach after classes about women's issues. Since all software that I work with is readable with the free flash player 3, there is no software license necessary to start enjoy my project. I would have preferred to use Mobile Processing instead of FlashLite, since it is based on J2ME, but vector graphic video is still not implementable in Mobile Processing.



USER SCENARIO

A girl hears about the project and downloads the flash file. As she has done with several ringtones she sends the file to her phone via bluetooth. In an MMS, she sends her 3 best friends the same file. The four girls meet and hold their phones together, they start the application. Once they opened the application on their phone, a graphical user interface guides them through the experience of watching, voting and continuing with the next clip. There is no need to download the video separately, as it will all be contained in the application.

The first screen the users see after opening the application introduces them to Mobilu and let's them each choose to be one of 4 players. Then they learn how to position the phones in order to see all parts of the screen.

When they press the "next" button, their phones automatically ping a server for permission to play. After the first scene, the participants decide on the next thing that happens in the clip. The animation itself, contains of one long chunk of video. The control function jumps to different frames inside the video file, giving the illusion of several videos. Together the users have to take the decision, whether to watch one or the other part of the video. One choice is: "Is the heroine going home and asleep or is she meeting the guy she has a crush on?". If they vote for the latter, the video would jump directly to frame 230, instead of continuing to the next frame.

WORK DESCRIPTION

The interaction is coordinated through a flash lite application. Users download the application to their phones and navigate through the graphical user interface with a game character. It takes care of the communication among the user's phones. The animations are very reduced, black/white and compressed. Each clip is linked to the clips of option in order to provide the user's with the part they chose to see next.

The animations themselves are partly hand-drawn and then scanned, partly generated with a wacom drawing board on the computer. The pieces are exported in different formats, depending on the users phone. While watching the clip, the pieces must be reassembled by holding the phone screens together in a certain order explained at the beginning of the clip. Each phone add sound patterns to the animation.

MUSIC

I create the music for the animations myself. All other sounds are downloaded from online audio file libraries. As you will notice all dialog in the video is written. There is no voice or speech in any episode. This enhances the identification process and helps to maintain secrecy, even in a crowd of people, as long as the four players stand close together.

CATEGORIES

The categories of issues that I address in the stories were motivated by the latest statistics of teenagers infected with sexually transmitted diseases. A new study found that one out of every four teen girls has a sexually transmitted disease. Obviously the number and quantity of young people having sex was highly underestimated. It's important to talk about the questions that come up and the decisions that are taken before and while having sex. Deciding when to engage or not engage in sexual relations in the first place is one of the most important decisions a teenager can make. The more early and valuable information they can get, the better.

FEMINISM

After First- and Second-wave feminists achieved the right to vote, to work and to have ownership over the female body, Third-wave of feminism highlights sexuality as a positive aspect of life.

*Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's "essentialist" definitions of femininity, which often assumed a universal female identity and over-emphasized experiences of upper middle class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to third wave ideology. There is a heightened emphasis on the discursive power and fundamental ambiguity inherent in gender terms and categories. [.....] Also considered part of the third wave is **sex-positivity, a celebration of sexuality as a positive aspect of life, with broader definitions of what sex means and what oppression and empowerment may mean in the context of sex.***

I quoted from Wikipaedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third-wave_feminism), March 2008

DISTRIBUTION

A website will inform the users about the project and offer a tutorial on how to download the application to a phone. It is a blog, on which I will post the newest episodes and give users the chance to find older ones. Once the flash file is on the desktop it has to be sent to the

phone via bluetooth. There is also the option to send the application from friend to friend via MMS or transfer the file from a social network site.

DRAWINGS

The book "Understanding Comics", by Scott McCloud, gave me a lot of inspiration on how to implement the concept of "Closure" without giving up my own visual interpretation of a situation.

These images show the main character and her room.



MAIN CHARACTER: "LU", 18



LU'S ROOM IN HER PARENT'S HOUSE

CONCLUSIONS

I created several stories that I have not yet turned into episodes. I hope that I can create a series of 10 episodes, which will get modified depending on my observations with users and general feedback.

My internship at the Lower East Side Girls Club helped me to keep my user group's perception and expectation in mind. For me, the most challenging part in the project was the visualization of sexual topics, without being pornographic, but neither hiding and censoring. In our society there is a lack of language and symbolism to talk about sex in a respectful, but as well precise and positive way. I hope my animations go the right direction towards creating this language.

STORYBOARD DRAFTS

On the following two pages you will find a draft from the very first storyboard. The following pages are stills from the actual animation. It is the story of Lu, dreaming about Jim whom she is in love with. She feels isolated from her family and unable to talk about her feelings with

her parents. Fortunately she has a very good friend she can talk to while they walk to school. In the morning they are having a class with an awkward teacher...he touches her shoulder in a way that makes her angry. After school she hangs out with Jim and some other kids. Lu invites Jim to her concert in the evening. She is the singer of a band and plays in a little bar. At night, Jim is in the audience. He loves her music and performance. They end up making out after the show. Together they go to Jim's place and have sex. Although they practice safe sex, the condom breaks and they both face the risk that Lu got pregnant. Her sister gives her information about where and how to receive the morning after pill. They drive to a pharmacy and buy the pills. Lu decides to go home, but she is scared to meet her parents after all that had happened during this night. When her mother wakes up and asks where she has been, Lu starts to cry. She starts telling her mom all that she had experienced. Her mom had been worried and angry, but is thankful to hear the truth and regain Lu's trust. She manages to calm Lu down and to let her know that she will be there for her problems, if Lu dares to share them with her.







