

♥ Broken Hearts ♥

Mr Alexander Bilz, Dr Lynsay Shepherd, Prof Graham Johnson

School of Design and Informatics, Division of Cyber Security, Abertay University, Dundee, UK

Email: [lynsay.shepherd, g.johnson}@abertay.ac.uk](mailto:{lynsay.shepherd, g.johnson}@abertay.ac.uk)

Overview

Romance fraud is a form of social engineering whereby a scammer leads victims to believe they are in a trusting romantic relationship before requesting financial aid. Victims are often left emotionally and financially devastated. Law enforcement and dating platforms frequently run campaigns about romance fraud, explaining how to spot potential scammers; this information is often text-based and is not particularly engaging. The Broken Hearts prototype is an interactive application which seeks to educate the general public about romance fraud, its consequences, and how victims can get support.

Problem Space

Using serious games (applied games) to educate the public about romance fraud.

Game Play

Broken Hearts is a platform-based game with some RPG (role-playing game) elements developed for web and mobile using Unity. The player is an archetypical romance fraud victim who must navigate different phases (levels) involved in the scam. The player collects "Letters" (tokens representing messages exchanged between the scammer and victim) and "Tactics" (objects explaining persuasive tactics used by scammers). Players must make decisions on monetary requests issued by the scammers throughout the game whilst avoiding "Obstacles" (real-world scenarios which may limit or delay communication with the scammer, e.g., having to work late). In the final level, the player (victim) interacts with NPCs (nonplayable characters) representative of friends/family and law enforcement to discuss their online partner (scammer).



Research Outcomes

- The environment helps players consider tactics used by scammers, and the obstacles emulate real-world pressure victims may face with romance fraud, e.g., timely communication with the scammer.
- NPCs provoke the player to consider how best to receive support if they think they are being scammed.

Significance & Impact

The prototype was designed to educate users on the dangers of romance fraud and to explore the emotional and financial damage victims face. Ultimately the game aims to enable users to engage in secure online interactions. Through further development, it is anticipated that practitioners (e.g., law enforcement) could adopt this type of game to educate the wider public about the dangers of romance fraud.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Scottish Funding Council and Abertay University Graduate School.