

Research Topic:

**Designing for Connection: How Cooperative Game Design Enhances
Emotional Healing and Player Experience.**

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Abstract:

This report focuses on how cooperative game design can help in achieving emotional healing by looking at a game interaction between narrative structure, cooperative mechanic and visual atmosphere. Although the past studies have shown that digital games can invoke highly emotive feelings, minimal focus has been placed on how the interaction of particular design characteristics can be used to manage emotions and promote positive interpersonal interactions during collaborative gaming. Based on the given case study (It Takes Two, Hazelight Studios, 2021), the paper will discuss how the most efficient combination of compulsory collaboration, storytelling focused on restoring relationships, and affective aesthetics stimulate emotional control, empathy, and mutual responsibility among the players. This paper combines both theoretical approaches to reading games on the one hand, with close textual and design analysis, which presents emotional healing sessions of a cooperative game as originating not in one, but in a concerted arrangement of narrative, mechanics and visual language. The results are supposed to enhance the insight into emotional designing techniques in collaborative computer games and their possible worth to the future development of games.

Key Words:

Cooperative games – Emotional healing – Game narrative – Player interaction
– Visual atmosphere

Contents Page:

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Review	5
3. Narrative and Emotional Engagement.....	7
4. Cooperative Mechanics and Emotional Regulation.....	8
5. Visual Atmosphere and Affective Design.....	9
6. Conclusion	10
7. Bibliography	12

1. Introduction

In recent years, game designers have explored from aspects such as narrative structure, visual atmosphere, and collaboration mechanisms how these factors affect players' emotional responses and heal their emotions. This trend reflects that people nowadays have a clearer understanding that games are not merely entertainment tools, but also media for healing players' emotions and enhancing their relationships. However, although some cooperative games have achieved some success in terms of emotional experience and expression, and have shown a positive development trend, there are still some immature cooperative mechanisms or design arrangements that may cause frustration and emotional conflicts among players, thereby weakening the effect of emotional healing. Therefore, it is necessary to further explore how different design elements in cooperative games interact and enhance emotional healing, so as to provide new ideas for game designers from the perspective of game design. Based on this, this paper takes the perspective of game designers, combines relevant literature on games, psychological healing, and cooperative games, and through analyzing selected cases including "It Takes Two", examines how the cooperative mechanism, game narrative, and scene aesthetic design jointly affect the emotional healing of players. It further summarizes practical design ideas that can be applied to the design of future cooperative games, thereby inspiring new design ideas for game designers and providing a new perspective for the development of the game industry.

2. Literature Review

In a similar way, Bopp and others. In 2018, it was pointed out that feeling "happy" while playing games is really important. They said that games with strong emotions usually make players happier. Because of this, game designers are paying more attention to the feelings and connections between players, the characters, and between the players themselves. Bopp and others. In 2018, it was found that when players connect emotionally with characters through storytelling and how they are shown, they tend to care more and feel more involved. The elements that affect the performance of emotional healing not only depend on the content of the story distributed in the game, but is also connected with cooperation of the players. As Deppkin and Mandric (2017) noted, interaction with the players will influence how the players enjoy the game and feel in cooperative games. Nervous design of modes of working collaboratively may cause frustration and even disputes among individuals. Failure to work together as players equally may cause tension and may result in negative attitudes such as anger. These findings demonstrate that the plot and interaction of players can have a tremendous impact on the expression of emotions in teamwork games. Much of the research up to now has also examined the way games can be used to make the players feel more emotions and to become more involved with how they can accomplish this by exploring how emotions are designed by the game and how the players feel. Majority of these studies are thinking of the outcomes of emotional experiences and they very seldom discuss particular game design decisions and approaches towards real-life situations. In cooperative game design, not only the game itself but the interaction between players can influence the emotion of players. At this moment, there are not a number of studies, which examine game design as a whole in a closer look. They do not even analyze how the

components elements of story, images, and synergy engage in cooperative games, and how these elements influence the experiences of feelings and healing among the players.

Judging by the analysis above, this study will involve several of the cooperative games that are highly emotional and possess distinctive visual narrative. The primary case of the present study is *It Takes Two* (Hazelight Studios, 2021). This game is a collaborative game, but it has fused storytelling with cooperative games in an effective manner. The environment in the game is cozy and easy to live in and players are also encouraged to collaborate as a team. This design allows players to interact with one another and it serves as a good example of learning what emotions could be experienced in cooperative games. Other team games that are compared in this study are also analyzed. On the one hand, one of these games is *Spiritfarer* created in 2020 by Thunder Lotus Games. This research does not simply depend on one example because it focuses on the various instances. This approach helps us to realize better how we can get our emotions improved by various ways of the cooperative game designs. The similar comparison also reveals that the method of healing emotions can be various in various games.

This paper considers the uses of cooperative games that can be used to make people feel better. It analyzes the current literature and pays attention to the most significant elements of the game. The study is centered on interaction between the players and how the game design influences their interaction with each other in the game. The primary objective of it is to discover a design idea that can make people feel relaxed and bond. These research findings should reference the academic discussion and be helpful in future designing of cooperative games.

3. Narrative and Emotional Engagement

Storytelling plays a large role in team games in order to help build the emotional scene. The players can connect with the game and engage in interaction with other players through a good story. It has been proven that a closer connection between the gameplay and the story is associated with a more emotional experience in the game. The plot under discussion of It Takes Two lends to two characters that do not get along, and cannot communicate, and ends up gradually mending one another. These are the most essential aspects of the promotion of the game. The feelings within the narrative are not uplifted into the cutscene animation, but immediately incorporated into the teamwork activities and challenges. Players are required to collaborate in solving problems and foster growth of the plot together. Players experience the difference in emotions in the process they engage in the interaction rather than simply observing. Such a design makes individuals more subversive and prolongs their feelings. Players tend to be proud of their accomplishments when they complete tasks as a team. This emotion will cause our delight and help us feel better.

Time is also infused in this game. Initially, there will be the tension and antagonism between the characters. These issues will be reduced with time as the game continues. Constant collaboration leads to emotional maturity, transformation and eventual serenity. The process renders the story more true to life and realistic.

4. Cooperative Mechanics and Emotional Regulation

Moreover, the cooperation style of people also affects emotional healing in operation in addition to story telling. There is a great number of teamwork games where people cannot manage to accomplish tasks individually. The game also equips each game player with dissimilar skills and constrains him to act single-handedly. In such a mechanism, players require depending on one another to advance. On the one hand, cooperation is no longer a subject of choice, but an essential one. It is a good way of sharing responsibilities among players through this design. In the event that things are not going fine, the players tend to view it as a team issue rather than a situation of blame to someone as a way of eliminating stress and negative feelings in the game. It is these design decisions that assist in enhancing the mood of people. It has been shown that team-building games can ensure that individuals remain relaxed and socialize positively (Depping and Mandryk, 2017).

The manner in which players cooperate will also have an impact on the tempo of the game. A number of the operations involve the players operating simultaneously or in rotation. In the course of the game, the players should listen to their partners and wait until it is appropriate and modify their behavior based on the instance. This rhythm makes people communicate and get in touch with each other more easily. Thus, it makes collaboration not only absent of pressure, but it is beneficial. This rhythm-based interaction provides players with space for emotional regulation, and through the design of cooperative structure, interaction rhythm, and responsibility allocation, it not only enriches the gameplay but also promotes emotional relaxation and repair among players, thereby strengthening the design value of cooperative games in the emotional healing aspect.

5. Visual Atmosphere and Affective Design

The visual atmosphere and animation language have a direct emotional regulation function in the emotional healing of cooperative games. The stylization of the scenes, the color tone, the lighting design, the animation rhythm, and the character performance, etc., can enable players to have a visual first impression when they first encounter the game, guiding players' emotions before the story narration begins, thereby influencing their emotional understanding of the interactive situation (Isbister, 2016). Compared to the structural influence of narrative and mechanics, visual and animation design can more directly act on the players' perception level, shaping the emotional tone in an imperceptible way. From the perspective of 3D animation and scene design, the soft color combination, low-contrast lighting processing, and slow-paced animation movement help relieve players' tension in the game, providing a more stable emotional guiding effect, and bringing emotional security to players. In addition, the subtle body movements and expression changes in character animation can enhance the readability of emotions, making it easier for players to understand and empathize with the psychological state of the characters. Research shows that the degree of players' emotional attachment to the characters depends on continuous non-verbal cues (Bopp et al., 2018). In collaboration, the storyline presented at the animation level can bring positive emotional impacts to players, and can also eliminate the tension or opposition emotions caused by the pressure of cooperation, thereby helping players maintain emotional stability while maintaining the interactive challenge, and enhancing the emotional healing effect from the visual perspective.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the design of cooperative games requires a harmonious integration of narrative structure, cooperative mechanisms, and visual presentation, in order to enhance the emotional healing effect of the game and the gaming experience of players. At the narrative design level, the game starts from the story background and emotions of the characters, and sets up game clues through the development of the story and the restoration of relationships. Players actively participate in the story through actual operations, resonate with the characters and mutually heal. This process-oriented design approach enables players to continuously gain a sense of participation and emotional experience, thereby deepening their emotional investment and empathy, and ultimately achieving the effect of emotional healing. At the level of the cooperative mechanism, the design of mandatory cooperation and complementary abilities can guide players to communicate and collaborate, thereby reducing their sense of guilt for failure and setbacks. When challenges can be jointly faced and individual abilities cannot determine the final outcome, the emotions of mutual accusation and confrontation among players will decrease, and the emotions in the cooperative relationship can be more easily relieved, repaired, and healed. This game mechanism is designed to provide a stable interactive framework for emotional healing. Moreover, the visual atmosphere and animation language have a direct effect on regulating emotions and creating an atmosphere. The visual presentation of colors, scene atmosphere, and character animations enable players to maintain emotional stability during intense interactions and immerse themselves in the healing game world. Therefore, the emotional healing effect of cooperative games does not stem from a single design element, but is influenced by the collaborative effect of multiple design aspects. When

games work together to help players with their feelings and fix problems in relationships, people often feel more engaged in the game. This design also helps the game support emotional healing in a clearer and more meaningful way.

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