

Exploring Everyday Creative Responses to Social Discrimination with the *Mimesis* System

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Introduction

We have created an interactive narrative system called *Mimesis*, which explores the social discrimination phenomena through gaming and social networking. *Mimesis* places players in control of a mimic octopus in its marine habitat that encounters subtle discrimination from other sea creatures. Relevant to computational creativity, *Mimesis* explores:

- 1) Collective creativity by constructing game characters algorithmically from collective musical preferences on a social networking site.
- 2) Everyday creativity by modeling the diverse creative ways people respond to covert acts of discrimination.

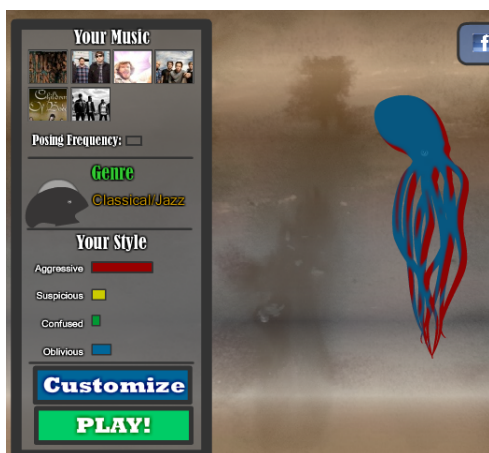


Figure 1: The player character is customized based on the player's musical preferences on Facebook.

Collective Creativity

Building on previous work [2], *Mimesis* requests access to information from the player's Facebook profile, using music preferences in the player's social network as a stand-in for qualities of individual and social identity. *Mimesis* generates corresponding moods for each musical artist. By associating the player character with artists' moods such as *oblivious*, *confused*, *suspicious*, or *aggressive*, players can impart these qualities onto the player character (see Figure 1). Within gameplay, moods are mapped to strategies of conversationally responding to microaggressions.

Everyday Creativity

The player character encounters other sea creatures who utter sentences like: "Where are you from?" and "You don't seem like the typical creature around here." This is

shown in Figure 2. While such questions may seem benign, they can also covertly imply the theme: "You are an alien in your own land" (such might be encountered by an Asian American in the United States). The player responds by using gestural input such as pinching out for an open/oblivious attitude or pinching in for a closed/aggressive attitude. Each encounter plays out according to a conversational narrative schema based on sociolinguistic studies of narratives of personal experience.



Figure 2: The screen shows the player's character (left) in a microinvalidation encounter with an NPC (right).

These encounters convey aspects of the experience of microaggressions, which are covert acts of discrimination. Researchers Sue et al. identify "microinvalidations" as communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the experiential reality of others. The "alien in your own land" theme is an example of microinvalidation. Microaggressions have been clinically found to have strong cumulative effects on health and happiness, restrict understandings between groups. [1]

We hope the system is an effective tool for increasing awareness of this subtle form of social discrimination.

References

[1] Sue, D., Capodilupo, C., Torina, G., Bucceri, J., Holder B., Nadal, K., Esquilin, M. Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life, *American Psychologist* 62 (2007).

[2] Harrell, D.F., Vargas, G., Perry, R. "Steps Toward the AIR Toolkit: An Approach to Modeling Social Identity Phenomena in Computational Media," *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Computational Creativity*, 2011.