Overheated

By Michael Gray

**Introduction**

On the surface, *Overheated* is a 2D Platformer about the player climbing their way out of a volcano. The player can jump, wall jump, and double jump to this end. On a deeper note, the game is a metaphor for dealing with stress and anxiety.

**Gameplay**

The basic actions of *Overheated* consists of simple platforming like running, jumping, wall jumping, double jumping, and going in and out of the game’s “Overheat Mode”. The player has to use these techniques to stay ahead of an ever-rising surface of lava. The core mechanic of the game is the Overheat Mode. When the player holds down the assigned button, they will enter overheat mode, allowing them to run and jump higher than they normally would. However, this has some adverse effects:

1. The heat Meter will rise. If it reaches to max, the player will die and have to restart the level.
2. The height that the player has to climb to will rise while Overheat Mode is in use.

The core decision of this game is deciding when and how to use overheat mode. It is ultimately needed in order to stay ahead of the rising lava, but using it too much will mean that the player will not make any meaningful progress. The goal of the game is to get the player to find that perfect balance between using Overheat Mode just enough to stay above the lava while also being limiting its use enough so that they can finish the game.

**Development Process**

Initially, *Overheated* was conceived under a different name, *Molehills out of Mountains*. The idea was to build a game that represented the

The idea for *Overheated* was to build a game to be a structural metaphor that makes the player feel like they are taking any stress they are feeling and making it work for them. To begin development, a schema of “using stress to your advantage” was defined:

1. Participants: The one who is stressed
2. Parts: Stress, how stress affects the perception of a task, how it can be a motivator.
3. Stages: Starting a task, feeling the presence of stress, managing stress levels, stages split into either controlling stress enough to stay motivated or being consumed by it and burning out.
4. Linear Sequence: Defined more or less in the order of the stages above.
5. Purpose: To manage stress and use it to motivate you without letting it consume you.

Stress as a concept needed to be understood through the lens of something more concrete that could be turned into gameplay. To this end, several metaphors for stress and how stress feels were considered:

1. Stress feels like you’re barely keeping your head above water.
2. Stress feels like you’re not making any progress.
3. Stress feels like overheating.

The three metaphors above statements acted as a guidepost. The third had the most profound effect, as it led to an understanding of stress as a concrete idea: *heat*. This idea that stress is heat affected how both of the other 2 metaphors expressed themselves in the game.

After some thought, it was decided that the game would be a 2D platformer where the goal was to climb upwards. This was decided due to the first metaphorical statement. The goal of the game would be to stay above some rising water level. The water was later turned into lava, to keep the “stress is heat” metaphor consistent.

The second metaphor led to the implementation of another important game mechanic: A finish line that rises higher. Stress often causes the person experiencing it to feel like whatever they are doing is not enough or will never be enough to finish whatever task they have to complete.

The final major implementation was the game’s Overheat Mode (OM). This was implemented to represent what it was like to actually control one’s stress. Using it too much will lead to a Game Over, much like how letting yourself become too stressed out can lead to burnout and giving up. OM is also the mechanic by which the finish line rises higher. Since OM is the primary analogue to stress, it makes sense that it is also the mechanic which causes the player to feel as if they are not making real progress.

**Links**

WebGL Build

<https://mikegray31.github.io/Game-Development-Portfolio/Overheated/>

Github

<https://github.com/MikeGray31/Overheated>

Google slides Presentation

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1e3bPt8y6aFuicneYZ8_-29ka_rN8Cv-MjxkXKYMBOyM/edit#slide=id.g30acaadbe26_0_0>