Would You Kindly Parent?

Parenting, Caretaking, and Love in Games

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

How do games express and represent parental love, affection, and caretaking through their goals, game mechanics, and other design elements? How is parental love both exalted and problematized? This chapter, discusses how these tensions regarding parental love play out in two different games ⬚AQ 1 (*That Dragon, Cancer* and *Life Is Strange 2*), building off a previous analysis conducted with *BioShock*.

    To do this, the chapter will provide a close "reading" of the game as a text, as well as analyze its gameplay. What is allowed or discouraged through playing these games? Ainsworth's attachment theory is used as a framework for evaluating these games. In brief, this theory explains

that parent and child form a bond based on how the parent responds to the child's needs. The child develops an attachment style (typically one of four different styles), which can be secure, ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized-insecure.

This chapter argues that the games, *That Dragon, Cancer* and *Life Is Strange 2*, enable players to build relationships with other characters and/or practice affection and caretaking in various ways, such as through routine support or by balancing constraints and freedom with other characters in their care. These games express the tensions of parenting in their storyline, themes, and the player's activities. Moreover, the game itself also acts as a type of authority figure, who parents the player through a system of rules and boundaries, which can be enforced or transgressed. Thus, this paper also seeks to answer: how does a game (or game designer) seem to also build a "parental" type of relationship with the player, and in turn, how can the player respond?

This chapter, will not clinically evaluate the players' attachment to games, or the types of attachments in the game, but rather will use this framework to think more broadly about authority, bond-making, caretaking, and affection. How do designers and players themselves build "attachments" or affective engagement through games? Do some games foster a "secure and trusting attachment" for the game player, through clearly defined goals, feedback, and responsiveness to the player? Or, are some games fostering a more insecure bond and feeling of helplessness? How might these differences relate to the player's connection to the game, as well as to the game's story, themes, and game play? More broadly, how might answers to these questions show how designers can better support or parent their players through the game experience?

OVERVIEW: ATTACHMENT THEORY

To further unpack the affectional relationship among parent/caretaker figures and children in games, this chapter will use attachment theory as a framework for interpreting games (Ainsworth 1982; Ainsworth & Bowlby 1991; Bowlby 1969). It will discuss how love and caretaking gets operationalized between parent and child through the game's play. Moreover, it will explore how games themselves may mediate a parenting and affectional relationship between design and player.

For one, parenting does not just happen to a person or a child, but it emerges through a developing relationship between them over time. Likewise, games, game design, and game play are not just thrust upon the

player, but they unfold as a relationship among the game developers, the game, and the players (Schrier 2018).

Attachment theory relates to the bonding that is formed between the parent or caregiver and a child, which can result in different types of secure (or insecure) attachment. This theory explains that the caregiver tries to meet the needs of their child, and the child teaches the caregiver what their needs are (Seifer & Schiller 1995). In turn, the parent teaches the child to trust them and understand that they will try to respond to their needs and take care of them.

According to Seifer and Schiller (1995, 146–174), there are five different elements that relate to the formation of this attachment:

1. The attachment behavior, or the 'specific behaviors related to increasing infants' proximity and contact with a caregiver,'
2. Exploration, or the 'specific behaviors that decrease proximity to the attachment figure, but promote infants' interaction with the environment,'
3. Attachment system, or the 'theoretical organization and control of proximity and exploration behavior,'
4. Attachment strategy, or the 'organizational structure of behaviors observed in context from which a strategy for maintaining attachment relationships is inferred'
5. The bonds that form, 'between infants and their caregivers attachment.'

Caregivers and infants cultivate a relationship with each other that (hopefully) involves the caregiver as a "secure base" where an infant can find protection as well as have permission to leave briefly to explore and return. The infant relies on the caregiver for nourishment, care, safety, and protection, as they are still dependent on others for survival (Seifer & Schiller 1995). Ainsworth used the "strange situation" to investigate different types of attachment. In this procedure, she looked at the nature of the attachment to that home base, with the assumption that the infant is attached to the primary caregiver (she used mothers in her initial procedures) (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall 1978; Ainsworth & Bell 1970). Her question was whether the "secure base" was a place that the infant could explore, while returning for safety and comfort, or whether they were less trusting that the caregiver would respond and be available to them (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall 1978; Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton 1971; Ainsworth & Wittig 1969; Vaughn & Waters 1990). In the strange

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situation studies, the infant is in a room and the mother leaves temporarily. While away, another person (a stranger) comes in. The mother returns and comforts the child (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall 1978; Ainsworth & Bell 1970).

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Based on the responses to the strange situation, Ainsworth et al. (1978) named four main types or patterns of attachment that get developed and observed:

1. *Secure attachment*. These infants have a secure attachment relationship with their primary caregiver. They may cry when they are away from their caregiver, but they are comforted when the mother returns, rather than angry, uncomfortable, or withdrawn. Ainsworth found that 65%–75% of the middle class one-year-olds tested with secure attachment.

2. *Insecure-avoidant attachment*. These infants may or may not cry when they are away from their parent, but upon return, they are not as confident that their caregiver will give them comfort and respond to them. They may not even notice the mother has returned and may play or ignore her, or begin to approach but then turn away.

3. *Insecure-resistant (or anxious) attachment*. These infants are also not as confident that their caregiver will comfort them, but they cry a lot during separation and may continue to cry or struggle when held after the caregiver returns. They may also be angry and not return to playing as they had before.

4. *Insecure-disorganized*. In this classification, the infants do not behave predictably. They don't follow a set pattern and seem to act under a different type of motivational system. They found that though this was less than 5% of the infants that they studied, it appeared that they made up 50%–75% of the high-risk infants who end up having social and emotional struggles later on.

It is important to note, again, that the formation of the relationship between caregiver and child, and the attachment style that gets developed is a dynamic and complex interaction that relies on many factors beyond just responding to needs, such as temperament of the child, medical needs, social context and community, and parental sensitivity to cues (Seifer & Schiller 1995). Just as the formation of the bond

is a complex interaction, so is the system of "letting go" of each other, and enabling increasing independence between caregiver and infant. Over time, the two units start to allow greater and greater exploration of the world apart from the other. No caregiver-child relationship is the same, and types and timing of interactions that are encouraged adapt and evolve depending on their complex understanding of each other and their world.

While these patterns have been primarily focused on parent-infant attachment, these patterns can continue with other relationships throughout one's life. According to the theory, one's relationship with their primary caretaker develops a mental model of attachment which then influences all future relationships (Hazan & Shaver 1987).

Moreover, this model of attachment has been critiqued for being centered on white, middle class, North American modes of parenting and care, rather than being universally relatable. It also focuses on the mother as being the primary caregiver, though in many situations a primary caregiver is not the mother. And, it does not necessarily take into account different developmental challenges (such as kids with special needs, like autism and/or prematurity). For instance, Keller (2018) critiques the universality of attachment theory, arguing that it ignores non-Western style parenting and the cultural diversity of caregiving systems. However, emotional expression and stranger interactions vary in different cultures. Children and peers may be the primary caregivers in some communities. The concept of children needing to be "responded to" in terms of their needs, rather than directed or guided to meet the needs of others, is a value and view in middle class, Western communities but may not be in rural or non-Western communities, for example (Keller 2018).

PREVIOUS CASE STUDY ON *BioShock* AND PARENTING

A previous paper argued that the *BioShock* series "reflects familial tensions and questions, allowing us to play through some of the most crucial challenges confronting contemporary parents," and serves as a type of model or thought experiment for different parenting styles and attachment types (Schrier 2018). This paper extends the author's previous work and consider games and parental attachment more deeply by looking at two additional games.

In the original *BioShock*, players play as Jack Ryan, a genetically modified human being, who needs to explore an underwater, post-apocalyptic

world called Rapture. Schrier's previous paper, "*BioShock* as the Infinite Parent," argued parenting and parenting styles were thematically and ludically addressed through the game, and also that the game itself served as a model for how game design is like parenting. For instance, the paper discussed how the player in *BioShock* is first dropped into an unfamiliar scenario; it is a disorienting type of "birth" where they need to swim ashore and get grounded. The game scaffolds this interaction by giving instructions on what to pick up (e.g., the first weapon, a wrench), where to go, how to move, and what to press, while keeping the player bounded and safe from enemies while they practice and experiment with their new abilities. When the player first encounters an enemy (a splicer), the player is instructed on how to fight with a weapon or how to use the EVE (or "mana," for magic-like interactions, in the form of plasmid modifications) to defeat enemies. The game gives the gentle nudges and just-in-time information so that a player can reach each sub-goal, leading ultimately to the main goal. Throughout the game, the player learns how to cope with greater challenges. "The game designer must 'let go' of and 'trust' the player (and the game itself), and allow the player to explore the new world they have created" (Schrier 2018). By earning this trust, the player can continue to progress in the game (by completing missions or checkpoints) and the game rewards the player with more challenges, more freedom, and eventually, victory. The paper notes that throughout the series, the game "parents" the player in a number of ways, such as through:

1. ***Boundaries, constraints, and rules*** that govern and restrict play, for instance, being able to respawn in a vita-chamber or the subtle design of walls, paths, and the gardens that compel the player to continue to move forward in a particular way.

2. ***Giving feedback or consequences*** to the player when they make a choice or do something "right or wrong," such as by earning more EVE (replenishes their plasmids) or ADAM (helps them earn more plasmids) (rewards) or by lowering their meters (punishments), and

3. ***Dynamically changing and meaningful*** depending on the player's decisions and actions in the game, and gameplay emerges from those interactions. The game is a mini-world where players can exercise control over not just a series of challenges, but over an evolving world where their choices and actions matter and have game-ful and emotional resonance.

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While many games express these three features, *BioShock* also thematically explores parenting and in some ways, both upholds and subverts the notion of a "supportive and kind" parent, who is gently nudging the player along.

BioShock provides a litany of references to family in nomenclature and situation. It features game characters with familiar connections in their names and interactions—the Big Daddies (genetically enhanced human beings who are protectors of Little Sisters) or Little Sisters (genetically altered girls who collect ADAM) (see more at Stang 2018; Vanderhoef & Payne 2018). Many of the rules or instructions in *BioShock* are prefaced by the words, "Would you kindly," narrated by Atlas (a character who stands in for the game designer or "parental authority" of the game). However, the player later finds out that Atlas is Frank Fontaine, an enemy of the Ryan family, who orders Jack to kill his actual father. Moreover, the player gets acclimated to this type of overriding authority, where "Would you kindly" becomes such an embedded part of their environment that they may not even realize they are being parented and told what to do. This reflects the themes of *BioShock*, and the tension between thinking one has free will versus the realization that nothing is under our control.

One of the key questions in this chapter is the balance between freedom and constraints in *BioShock*—just as Jack Ryan did not realize he was being "compelled" to behave in a certain way, did the game also over-parent (intensively parent) the player while making them think they were free? Does the game help us better understand what it means to be a "good parent" both through its design and gameplay, as well as its themes, character, and story?

The exploration of parenting themes is supported by an analysis of two additional games that explore themes of parenting through the game's story, as well as its design: *That Dragon, Cancer* and *Life Is Strange 2*.

THAT DRAGON, CANCER

That Dragon, Cancer (Numinous 2016) is an indie game made by Ryan and Amy Green, two parents who were faced with the real cancer illness of their son, Joel. They started to make the game while he was in remission from cancer, but then while making the game, the cancer returned and he died. The game features scenes from their life, sometimes expressed from the perspective of the parents or the child.

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As in *BioShock*, the players begins birthed in a new world, and they are immediately oriented to its gameplay and emotional contours. For example, the player is taught some simple controls through interactions and instructions (e.g., feeding ducks, rocking on a toy rocking horse). The authentic voices of Joel's parents (recordings of Ryan and Amy Green actually talking to their son and family) are used to help teach and encourage the player in the game to feed ducks. We hear Ryan say, "Don't touch the birds" to Joel, and simultaneously the player is also told this, as they practice lifting Joel's arm and throwing the pieces of bread at the duck. Likewise, Amy says "Ready, set, go," while Joel sits on a rocking horse, and the game instructs the player what controls to press or tap to make Joel rock. The recordings of the Green family also provide the narrative exposition that sets up the real-world story of this family and game: that Joel got sick right after turning one year old and is developmentally delayed as a result. These voices, as well as the muted colors and simple character shapes, also immediately orients and inscribes the player emotionally into the authentic world of this family—their real struggles and concerns, as well as their joys and humor. Notably, Joel is faceless, possibly helping players to more easily inscribe their own child or imagined cared-for individual (McCloud 1993/2004; Noddings 1984).

Many games reduce the amount of scaffolding throughout the game as the player progresses, by not continuing to give hints or messaging once the player has mastered the game. However, *That Dragon, Cancer* continues to provide this type of supportive messaging throughout the entire game. Part of this may be because the game continually changes in the types of actions the player needs to take. For instance, in one scenario, a player needs to move a stethoscope on a dog, and in the next, they need to race around a hospital hallway in a red wagon. The goals and actions keep changing from scene to scene, but the player feels continually protected by the game designer. The designer seems to have affection and care for the player, making sure to continually lead them down a path to the end of the game. Although there is no "win" condition in the game (and in fact, the player experiences the loss of Joel no matter what they do or how they play), the "parenting" game designer stays on the journey with the player. This is not surprising given that the developers of this game were relatively new to game design, and may have been more protective of their players, similar to first-time parents and their newborn child. Moreover, like parenting, it's not about winning, losing, or achieving a particular goal, but

staying safe, recognized, and cared for, regardless of whether the journey that a person experiences has both highs and lows.

Players are not just being parented by the game; they are actually practicing parenting and caretaking activities through their game play. In many of the scenarios, the player acts as the parent or caretaker of Joel (by taking on the role of Amy or Ryan), such as rocking him as a baby in a hospital chair, giving him a beverage, or going to meetings with doctors. Throughout, we also hear the perspectives from the parents during these caretaking activities, such as through authentic voice mail messages or recordings made by the family. These elements often relate to those described by Seifer & Schiller (1995), such as behaviors that increase proximity and contact with the parent (holding and rocking the baby), and ones that decrease it, such as exploration or experimentation (racing in a wagon, playing with a toy). While taking on the role of the parent, we are constantly navigating between these two rhythms—proximity, care, and closeness, versus letting go, exploration, and distance—often within the same scenario. The player shows love in this game through the rhythms of caretaking: the continual ebb and flow of closeness and release.

Likewise, the pace and tone of the game also continually changes throughout, reflecting the varied pace of parenting, from the mundane routines of caretaking to the chaos of change. Like a parent, sometimes the player just needs to wait, listen, and attend, while other times the player needs to suddenly act and respond, reflecting the tedium of waiting and wanting time to pass, as well as the sudden rush and feeling that time is too quickly gone. This is particularly acutely felt, as we see with the Greens, when parenting a sick child with only a few weeks to live.

In *That Dragon, Cancer*, sometimes the player is forced to fail (Chen 2016) at what they are supposed to do in a scene, and this also serves a purpose gameplay-wise, thematically, and narratively. Some examples of instances of forced failure and lack of agency in the game: the player is step removed from the direct parenting, such as by watching the mother holding and singing to him (while the player looks through get well cards), or seeing the parents sit and listen at a meeting with doctors when they explain there are no more treatment options for Joel. The player cannot interact or do anything but listen to the interaction, which sometimes repeats, reflecting the hopelessness that the parents are feeling. Eventually the scene fills with water and the couple is swept away by the waves, and the player is not able to take any actions. In another scene, the player plays as Ryan and is trying to give a drink to a crying Joel, but there is

nothing the player (or Ryan) can do to ease his thirst or take away his pain. The player (like Joel) is helpless and cannot soothe the cries, which continue for a painfully long, and slow time, no matter what Ryan says or does. "I can't hold you, I can't make you feel better…okay buddy, I'll hold you," says Ryan, to his son, and we feel his despair, as well as his tension between wanting to help and loving his son, but being overwhelmed by a lack of agency over his son's experience. Often a lack of agency is deleterious for a game's design, but Farber and Schrier discuss how this scene shows a lack of agency, or control, for the player resonates because of the themes of parenting, grief, helplessness, and loss in the game (Farber & Schrier 2017; Schrier & Farber 2019). Despite trying to do everything we can (as a player, or in the role of a parent in the game) we still may not be able to console the child, respond to him, and form a secure attachment. This inability to soothe the child may reflect Ainsworth's insecure or disorganized attachment, where the child continues to cry, no matter what we do to show support.

This paper argues earlier that the game sticks with the player, bringing them on the journey as a teacher and trainer, never fully letting go but watching from a distance. In this way, we feel the designer's affection and care for our ability to progress in the game. On the other hand, we are not always rewarded or given the responses we need in this relationship. While we sometimes know what to expect from these game designers (that they will support us through our journey and continue to teach us what to do in each scenario), we also learn that we may not be soothed or rewarded when meeting our goals or doing what was asked of us. The game seems to have a disorganized, chaotic response to our gameplay (constantly changing scenarios, tone, and rhythms, with no clear rewards, progression, or goals, and the scaffolding of actions without the real possibility of success). This underscores the anxious, insecure, and grief-stricken feeling we have while playing the game and while imagining ourselves in the shoes of these parents. The possibility of loss is always looming (whether the loss of Joel or the loss of the game). The complex and insecure attachment that is enacted reflects the themes of parenting in this game, and the real-world anxieties about parenting, love, and loss.

Life Is Strange 2

Life Is Strange 2 (Dontnod 2018–2019) is not as obviously about parenting—thematically and narratively—as *That Dragon, Cancer* or *BioShock*. The game begins in Seattle, Washington and follows a teenage boy, Sean

Diaz, and his younger brother, Daniel, reeling over the sudden death of their father, Esteban, who had been their sole caretaker. Sean and Daniel had already been managing being abandoned suddenly by their mother, who has been mysteriously away during the first three episodes of the game. As a result of being involved in a problematic interaction with the police, the two boys need to run away to safety, and Sean becomes a de facto caretaker or "parent" of his brother. At the writing of this chapter, only the first three episodes had been released, therefore, this chapter will only focus on what these three episodes reveal.

Like in the other two games, the players have the opportunity in the beginning to get oriented to the world of the game (the controls, themes, character backgrounds) before the real danger begins. Players need to interact with a friend, Lyla Park, and decide which objects to bring for a party that night (e.g., soda or beer, chips, condom), they need to negotiate choices with their family (such as to whom to give the last piece of candy) or whether to ask for or steal money. The game play consists of doing actions (such as picking up a can of soda, or moving to a room) as well as making dialogue and other types of situational choices, such as choosing whom to give the candy to (father, brother, or self), or deciding how to respond to a friend who wants to go to a party. The game's story unfolds through dialogues with other players, as well as through actions with objects or explorations of the spaces of the game.

After this brief orientation to the family's history, their relationships, and their context, the rest of the game centers on the two boys evading police and other dangers. In the first episode, the player controls Sean, who needs to teach and protect his brother in the woods. Although Daniel is not an infant, the player establishes an attachment relationship with Sean, as he becomes his primary caretaker. We explore the area, but we also need to parent him: we need to make sure Daniel is nearby, and that he eats the appropriate foods and stays safe. For instance, we need to test whether the berries we find are poisonous or not and deter or encourage him to eat them. We look for shelter and make a fire. Throughout these exchanges, we also need to continually negotiate whether to just focus on survival and protection, or whether to also encourage Daniel to be silly, imaginative, and have fun. For instance, do we encourage him to create an imaginative "barrier" (out of sticks and stones) for the shelter to protect them at night, and do we decide to teach him how to skip stones in the lake? How patient are we as we try to teach him? The game, for instance, first asks us whether we want to teach him at all about skipping

stones, and then we have to decide whether to keep encouraging him to try again, or to spend time doing other essential tasks (such as our main goal of building a fire). The game invites us to encourage (or not encourage) this behavior four times before Daniel is finally successful in skipping the stones (and the game gives us a reward for encouraging perseverance).

Likewise, later in the episode, we have to make choices about how to spend our minimal money on food and beverages at a gas station. Do we only spend money on what is necessary (e.g., bread, meat, drinks) to keep us surviving another day, or do we also spend on the candy that we know our brother wants? Throughout these exchanges, the game continually has us navigate the tension between wanting to meet our goals (the game goals of protecting our family, but also reaching new checkpoints in the game), while deciding whether to veer off the path and support our family's other social and emotional needs: to express joy, tell stories, or to feel trusted and empowered. Our choices in these navigations have consequences for the relationship that we build with our brother. Do we earn his trust by keeping him physically safe and emotionally cared for, as well as by enabling his imagination and encouraging his pursuits? These tensions serve to underscore the ways we show affection to and love for our brother in the game—we can take actions to keep him safe, and we can also actively encourage and teach him. The tensions also serve to enhance the anxieties of playing the game and being "a parent." As we navigate the park, for instance, we see signs of dangerous wildlife everywhere. There are teeth marks and poisonous berries, and "danger: wild animal" signs. The dark toned art style of the park, and ominous sounds and animal noises underscore these dangers. The park is empty of people except for the two boys. While we navigate the park, we are also trying to stay close to our brother. However, at one point, he seems to disappear and we have a momentary feeling of panic—further emphasized by Sean's pleas for Daniel in the game. Suddenly Daniel reappears as a surprise (he was hiding from us), further suggesting the dichotomy between parental authority and childhood freedom and leisure.

As a result, depending on the players choices and actions in *Life Is Strange 2*, relationships with characters in later scenes or episodes may be impacted. In-game consequences and feedback may suggest that your brother has a secure and trusting relationship with you, or perhaps, less secure, resistant, or even angry interactions with you. The game limits choices and interactions as it progresses, sometimes based on previous choices, which may lead to less and less secure bonds between the two

characters. For instance, in my game, in episode three, Sean and Daniel's relationship becomes particularly strained, and Daniel begins to spend more time with Finn, another character at a campsite they are staying near. It's possible that the game has constrained the choices such that no matter what the player does, this tension between Sean and Daniel emerges, as the game designers need to tell a particular story, and this strain progresses the story. Thus, while the first episode may enable the player to build a secure attachment with their brother, later episodes may enable other types of attachments due to circumstances and other factors, further suggesting the need to understand the dynamic system among all parties and their context, rather than just a one-to-one relationship when building attachment.

Furthermore, although we cannot clinically map the four different attachment types to the in-game relationships that form throughout the game—the types of actions and strategies that the player needs to make throughout the game are similar to those described earlier (attachment behaviors, exploration behaviors, the system surrounding these, and the bond that is formed) (Seifer & Schiller 1995). Throughout the entire game, we are continually enabling support and protection for our brother, whether to stay close and be careful, or to explore and expand one's imagination. We make the actions we believe will keep him safe, happy, secure, and protected, even though he may not like it. Though we are still a teenager in the game, we are thrust into a role that requires us to be the authority, the parent, and the moral decision maker. And in tandem, we, as the player, are also navigating this for ourselves. We are carefully following the rules and goals and being rewarded for this, and we are also deciding when and how to break rules or explore new situations, such as when to take time to draw in our notebook and observe our world, give money to a stranger who is playing an instrument, use a phone or computer when we are reminded not to do so, or steal an item to give to our brother for the holiday.

Thus, the game is also parenting us, as players, while we are also parenting another character. The game shows affection for us by guiding us through rules and goals, while also allowing us to experiment and explore, and even transgress those boundaries. The game teaches us what is "right and wrong" in this world, but then lets us go and allows us to be moral arbiters and decide how we will negotiate the system's morality (Schrier 2014, 2017; Sicart 2009). The game's system then serves up the consequences to our decisions in the form of punishments and rewards.

Likewise, the player, as Sean, can do the same for his brother, Daniel. As Sean, we show affection for our brother through the rhythm of keeping him close and letting him go, and sometimes allowing him to make his own moral decisions, and serving him feedback for those decisions.

Finally, the game also suggests the tension between being a parent (responsibility) and leisurely pursuits. Sean can no longer just be a carefree child—he needs to now be responsible as an authority figure and caretaker for someone else. The game also continually teases the player as to this responsibility—do we continue to follow its authority and rules and goals, or do we allow ourselves to be leisurely and carefree? The game, thus, also represents the tension between games and reality itself—the freedom and experimentation that a game allows, which reality does not always afford. The game is both a parental authority, teaching and training us, while also being itself an escape from those quotidian and routine responsibilities of parenting and life.

CONCLUSION

This chapter reprised a review of *BioShock* and investigated two new examples (*That Dragon, Cancer* and *Life Is Strange 2*) in relation to parenting and parental love and attachment. The chapter explored how parenting was expressed thematically and narratively, as well as through game play goals, mechanics (actions and activities), and the mood, tone, and environment of the game. The games showed the tensions that underscore parenting and how to take care of others: whether to reinforce boundaries or enable freedom, whether to keep family close or let them explore, and how to express care and protect another while also trying to protect oneself.

In *That Dragon, Cancer*, players feel the tension between wanting to help your child and being frustrated that you cannot help your child, as well as trying to meet goals and follow instructions, while being frustrated that you cannot ultimately meet the goals of the game. Furthermore, the game persists in prodding and parenting the player throughout the experience, almost hopelessly, since Joel succumbs to cancer in the game (as in real life) no matter what the player does.

In *Life Is Strange 2*, players navigate tensions between authority and freedom, boundaries and exploration, and responsibility and leisure. Players are continually torn between upholding rules or breaking them, or protecting others or encouraging experimentation.

In both games, the system continues to reinforce the overriding anxiety—whether the possibility of loss and grief, or the possibility of never

being able to fully escape one's responsibilities. Likewise, in both games, the game play reinforces these parenting themes and narratives. The game play serves to further enhance how the player (sometimes awkwardly) handles their role and responsibility as a game player, but also as a parent or caretaker in the game. In *That Dragon Cancer,* the player learns that parenting is always changing, chaotic, and lacking in control and predictability. Despite this, routines remain, and players need to keep trying to maintain stability in an unstable time. They are often helpless in the game to meet goals and keep their in-game child soothed, and likewise, they feel the helplessness of the parents represented in the game, who cannot cure their son of cancer.

Thus, while all different strategies for attachment and caretaking may be taken by the player—from the routine (e.g., feeding a child) to the fantastical (e.g., pretending to slay a dragon or build a fort)—the result may not be a secure attachment between parent and child, game and player. In fact, an insecure or disorganized attachment may further reveal the challenges and difficulties of parenting, and particularly, parenting under dire circumstances, as both games feature. The context and system of parenting, these games seem to suggest, matter just as much as what we can (or cannot) do within those systems. The game designer (and our real worlds) ultimately dictate what we can do. And, likewise, so much of parenting is ultimately beyond our control and reliant on a system we did not design. These games show us that even parents may have limited authority over the relationships they can build with their children, and how they can respond or connect to them.

Finally, what are the broader implications for how to design games and how to parent a player through its experience? It could be argued that all well-designed experiences place appropriate boundaries and need to teach its users how to interact with its system. However, these games suggest that designers can intensively parent their players (or overparent them), and provide too many boundaries, constraints, or prodding, possibly because they are afraid to release their designed experience to the players, and relinquish their control over it. Designers need to trust their players to learn and grow appropriately throughout their system. On the other hand, these games also suggest that the designers' constant scaffolding or overparenting of a player can further emphasize a game's themes of parenting, attachment, and loss, and in particular, parenting during dire circumstances, furthering the effectiveness of the game overall.

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Author Query Sheet

Chapter No.: 5

Query No.	Queries	Response
AQ 1	Please confirm if the edit "regarding parental love" is correct.	
AQ 2	Please check if the edit to the text "where an infant can find protection " is correct.	
AQ 3	Please provide details of Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton (1971) in the reference list.	
AQ 4	Please provide details of Ainsworth and Bell (1970) in the reference list.	
AQ 5	Please check if the word "game-ful" is correct.	
AQ 6	Please provide details of Numinous (2016) in the reference list.	
AQ 7	Please provide publisher location for "Mccloud (1993/2004)."	
AQ 8	Please provide publisher location for "Schrier (2018)."	
AQ 9	Please provide publisher location for "Stang (2018)."	
AQ 10	Please provide publisher location for "Vanderhoef and Payne (2018)."	