Playing Dad: An Analysis of Video Game Fathers and their Daughters as Playable Characters

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I analyse the depiction of video game fathers and their daughters, who eventually become playable protagonists, in four popular, mainstream video game titles: *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* as well as the downloadable content add-ons *Left Behind* and *Burial at Sea* and their sequels *Dishonored 2* and *The Walking Dead: Season Two*. I argue that the construction of fatherhood in games reflects a postfeminist media landscape that prioritizes fatherhood as a main, thematic narrative hook in response to feminist criticism of video games. I further argue that despite the inclusion of daughters as secondary playable protagonists in video games, this emphasis on fatherhood negatively impacts the daughters in order to prioritize the perspectives of their fathers.

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> *If you picked up a video game at random, chances are the main character will be a gruff older man who's really good at killing things. But increasingly, chances are they'll be a gruff older man who's really good at killing things and is also a father.*
>
> — Sage Hyden, "The Witcher 3, The Last of Us, and the 'Daddening' of Video Games"

Introduction

Parenthood is stressful; kids are complicated. You want to be a good parent, to set positive examples for your children. When you upset them, you worry it will stick with them. It's hard to know if you're doing and saying the right things. Will they remember that? Are they getting enough to eat? Are they dressed well enough for the weather? Are they getting an education? Should they be allowed to use a gun? Is it safe to let them go into an abandoned building full of zombies all alone? Can you let them sacrifice themself for the greater good? Will they jumpstart the apocalypse? Would you die for them? Cut off a limb? Start a war?

Of course, these aren't everyday parenting concerns, but they are the kinds of things you find yourself wondering while playing games like *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013), *Dishonored* (Arkane Studios, 2012), *BioShock Infinite* (Irrational Games, 2013) and *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012). Over the last decade, video games featuring parenting have grown increasingly popular with fatherhood as the clear favorite amongst video game developers — notably, mothers are almost entirely absent from mainstream video games. In 2016, during a late night conversation about video games, Cassandra Feely and I noted that we spent a lot of time being dads in video games — as much time as we spent being fantasy warriors, space marines or assassins. We were far from the only ones to make this observation. In his 2010 article "The Daddening of Video Games," Stephen Totilo describes and names the phenomenon, stating that video game fatherhood "is becoming nearly as popular in video games as health bars and shotguns." In "Dawn of the Dad," Andrew Groen (2012) argues that dads are replacing the more traditional "faceless, furious badass" protagonist. Totilo highlights some of the earliest examples of paternity in games, including the *Silent Hill* games, the *BioShock* franchise and *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010). However, more recent additions include *The*

Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (CDProjekt Red, 2015), *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego, 2010) and *God of War* (Santa Monica Studio, 2018), alongside the games which are the focus of this thesis: *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*.

As the above list makes clear, fatherhood is a compelling narrative hook that features in numerous games from different genres, gameplay and art styles. Totilo (2010) attempts to explain some of this popularity through the games' emotional engagement with players, suggesting that "being a video game dad is an effective method for getting the player to feel something" and noting some of the intense emotions that games about fatherhood had elicited from him. He describes some of the experience of playing *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* (Climax Studios, 2009). After a car crash, the game begins with the player searching for their daughter in a dark and snowy city:

> And with a tap of your A button, you can call for your daughter. She won't hear you. She wouldn't show up, not so early in the game, hours before the story of what's really happening unfolds. But I would like to meet the player who didn't press the A button and then press it again, who didn't get into the role-play of being a dad, hoping against hope to hear his daughter call back to him.

Totilo makes a strong personal argument as to the emotional involvement that stories about fatherhood attempt to invoke. Games like *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* aim to engage with players' emotions specifically through stories about being a dad. Groen (2012) argues that the goal seems to be to "take video game storytelling beyond the average cookie-cutter action heroes in order to dig at deeper emotions and motivations."

In "Stay Close to Me," Mark Pajor (2014) discusses *Heavy Rain*, published in 2010, as one of the earliest noted examples of paternity as a core narrative theme in a video game. However, popular media about fatherhood is nothing new. In *Postfeminist Fatherhood*, Hannah Hamad (2013) details the evolution of fatherhood as a structuring, thematic hook in popular culture, ranging through many genres, from comedies to dramas, action and war films. Films about fatherhood saw an increase following the second wave of feminism (Bruzzi, 2005; Hamad, 2014), which Hamad argues is the result of Hollywood attempting to grapple with new, feminist ideas about fathers and

their role in the family. Stella Bruzzi's (2005) *Bringing Up Daddy* argues that contemporary paternity in film is often related to the "crisis of masculinity" that emerged from "the unresolved ambiguities of how men and fathers were being and might want to be defined" (p. 156). Similarly, I argue that the developers of games like *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are, like Hollywood, attempting to grapple with a changing industry and differing social and critical demands being directed at video games. In this thesis, I attempt to analyse what the presentation of fatherhood in video games reflects about popular culture, including masculinity, violence, and paternalism, as well as the sociopolitical elements that impact their presentation.

As Totilo (2010) points out, prior to the emergent "daddening" of games, "video game dads have not been us...they've been *your* dad." Rather than featuring as the main characters of games, they have been non-playable characters, used primarily for player motivation, "your dad who is dying and hopes you can pick up his sword and fight. Your dad who is evil and is hoping you won't pick up a sword and fight" (Totilo, 2010). Now, fathers are the player characters and fatherhood is their motivation. Groen (2012) argues that the popularity of fathers as protagonists is due to the video game industry itself maturing and that game developers may want protagonists that better reflect their experiences now that they themselves are fathers. For example, Neil Druckmann, director of *The Last of Us*, credits fatherhood with drastically "shifting his priorities" around the kinds of stories he wants to tell as a game developer (Alexander, 2021). However, the popularity of video games about fatherhood is being motivated by audiences too. Groen (2012) notes that video games are even using fatherhood to advertise games that have nothing to do with fatherhood at all. For example, the zombie horror game *Dead Island* (Techland, 2011), which features a father who is attacked by his zombified daughter before throwing her out of a window — despite the negative feelings it inspired in audiences, the ad campaign contributed heavily to the game's success (Groen, 2012). Ultimately, the "daddening" of games has produced a new kind of video game story, inspired by creators and audiences, with protagonists whose narratives not only center fatherhood, but incorporate it into the game's mechanics and the experience of playing.

Pajor (2014) envisions video games "as a heavily performative medium where the player performs the role of a character," which is where video games about fatherhood

begin to diverge from other kinds of media. Since video games are an interactive medium, players are not only observing stories about fatherhood, but also participating in the story by performing *as* fathers. However, this participation takes place within a system of rules that governs how audiences interact with the game (Bogost, 2007) and specifically how fatherhood is represented and performed in the game's world. Since video games often rely on violent mechanics governing player interactions, violence becomes incorporated into the performance of fatherhood. Fatherhood is simply being added on to pre-existing tropes of male action game heroes, like the "broad-shouldered, brick-fisted, angry-looking space marine" (Groen, 2012), resulting in characters that express their fatherhood through (sometimes exclusively) violent game mechanics.

Although Groen (2012) argues that video game fathers are a departure from the earlier model of a hyper-violent protagonist, Pajor (2014) argues that they have simply recycled violent mechanics so that video game fathers can prove their love for their children through heroic, protective acts. Not only does the performance of fatherhood rely on violence in video games, it valorizes it by framing fathers' violent actions as necessities — often, by the games' settings being violent and dangerous, so that the fathers are forced to fight and defend themselves and their children. In *Heavy Rain*, the protagonist and father, Ethan Mars, is forced to confront a serial killer to rescue his kidnapped son. *Red Dead Redemption* is set in the Wild West, in the midst of a gang war. *The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead* are both set in post-apocalyptic worlds with zombies or zombie-like enemies, while *Dishonored* and *BioShock Infinite* take place in worlds plagued by political turmoil and rebellions. Although violence is not inherent to any of these dangerous settings, it is one of the most common elements of *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* and thus, its presence communicates an inescapable relationship between fatherhood and violence. Consequently, throughout this thesis I attempt to grapple with the presence of violence, its importance in the narrative and mechanics of paternally-focused games, and the impact that it has on the fathers, daughters and their relationships with each other.

Thus far, this introduction has only discussed the "daddening" of games. However, *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are separated from other "daddified" games by the children that developers chose to

accompany the protagonist fathers. If dads have become the hegemonic ideal of male video game protagonists, then daughters are seemingly the ideal secondary protagonist. By including daughters as secondary protagonists, developers can create appealing sidekicks who help rather than hinder player progress. Video game daughters are part of the new wave of helpful sidekicks in games, who provide back up, supplies and advice, while staying out of the player's way (Yin-Poole, 2012). Instead of tedious missions to escort characters from one location to another, daughters like Ellie and Eizabeth are designed with artificial intelligence that allows them to participate in combat. Others, like Emily and Clementine, are useful for slipping into small spaces, or used to gauge their fathers' morality in reaction to player choices.

Aside from their usefulness as tools in gameplay, the daughters are also a major part of each game's emotional core. Through their character design, the daughters communicate a sense of helplessness and naiveté. Their young, waifish appearances inspire protectiveness in audiences, fuelling the players' desire to protect the daughters, particularly when they are repeatedly abducted, acting as damsels in distress for their fathers rescue. However, each daughter's age and size create a compelling contrast when paired with their heightened capacity for violence that further engages audiences. Players are asked to take responsibility for their daughters, to save them from kidnappers and to guide them through surviving in dangerous environments. As a player, I often felt protective of my fictional daughters. I replayed the ending of *Dishonored* multiple times, to ensure that Emily survived. During *BioShock Infinite*, I wanted to help Elizabeth to escape and find her way to Paris. In *The Last of Us*, I found myself sprinting through a snowstorm, trying to rescue Ellie before she could be killed by kidnappers. As Lee in *The Walking Dead*, I didn't hesitate to cut off my own arm, in order to rescue Clementine. Although most analysis of *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* talks about the prevalence of the fathers as the player protagonists, it is their relationship with their daughters that provides the emotional core to all four games.

Notably, the daughters are more than simple sidekicks and emotional hooks, since they eventually become playable protagonists, taking over for their fathers after they die or become incapacitated. As my research into the "daddening" of games progressed, I became invested in exploring why games that focus so strongly on fatherhood featured

daughters as their secondary protagonists, even allowing them to step into their fathers' place in the game. In my own player experience, I found the transition to playing as the daughters entertaining and often empowering, but it was sometimes difficult to separate the daughters from their fathers, as individuals with their own agency and personalities. Video games have a history of poor representation for female characters and traditionally developers have instead chosen to focus on heterosexual male subjectivities (Cassel & Jenkins, 1998; Stang, 2016). On the surface, including more female characters in games and even giving them prominent roles as playable protagonists seems like a positive, progressive action. However, the construction of the daughters and their relationship with their fathers ultimately reproduce a number of toxic tropes that detract from the daughters' development as characters. Consequently, asking if the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* count, particularly as playable protagonists, as progressive representation for women in games becomes a complicated question that I attempt to grapple with throughout this thesis. Overall, I argue that the design and development of the daughters as secondary protagonists focuses too much on their importance to their fathers and too little on their development as independent protagonists.

In this thesis, I analyse four video games that are often included as examples of the "daddening" of games, but also feature daughters as secondary protagonists who eventually take over for their fathers as the game's playable protagonist. I argue that the popularity of video game fathers and their daughters reflects a more sophisticated approach to game design that attempts to grapple with modern criticisms of the medium. However, despite some positive, progressive elements, *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* ultimately still contain numerous toxic tropes that are damaging to their depiction of both the fathers and daughters.

Methodology

For this thesis, I selected games from four Western, typically American developers that were accompanied by either a direct sequel to the original game or a story-expansion in the form of downloadable content (DLC). The games selected were: *BioShock Infinite* (Irrational Games, 2013) and its DLC (a two-part expansion) *Burial at*

Sea: Episode One (Irrational Games, 2013) and *Burial at Sea: Episode Two* (Irrational Games, 2014); *Dishonored* (Arkane Studios, 2012) and its direct sequel *Dishonored 2* (Arkane Studios, 2016); *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) and its DLC *Left Behind* (Naughty Dog, 2014); and *The Walking Dead: Season One* (Telltale Games, 2012) and *The Walking Dead: Season Two* (Telltale Games, 2014).

I chose to focus on these four game franchises based on the following criteria:

1. The games must have similar size and scope, with their overall gameplay falling between roughly 10-15 hours of playtime. This allowed me to play each game all the way through in its entirety, multiple times.
2. The games must have a story that not only includes fatherhood as a strong component, but uses it as a core, structuring thematic element. Fatherhood must be central to the narrative and to the players' experience.
3. The games must emphasize a father-daughter relationship as a central part of the narrative.
4. The games must all feature daughters who become playable characters in either the main game, or its sequel or DLC.

As discussed previously, there are many games that include fatherhood as a strong component, but many were rejected from this analysis typically because they did not adhere to the above criteria. For example, although *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red, 2015) is considered a "daddified" game by many, it is too long (accounting for about 100 hours of playtime) and, while it features a strong father-daughter relationship, it is overshadowed by large quantities of other story content due to the game's sprawling open world. In addition, several of these game franchises include other games or additional DLC that were rejected for similar reasons. *Dishonored* includes several DLC that were rejected from my analysis because they are focused on side characters and stories that are unrelated to the main father-daughter pairing of Corvo and Emily. *The Walking Dead* has several DLC additions that do not focus on Lee or Clementine. In addition, there are two sequels, both of which feature Clementine as a main playable character, that I chose not to look at in order to focus on *The Walking Dead: Season Two*, since it featured Clementine's first story as the playable protagonist without Lee present. I also did not include *The Last of Us Part II*, because it came out too

recently to feature in this thesis, despite continuing to address similar themes and topics to the original game.

In order to analyse *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead* I approach the games as texts, with an emphasis on their interactive nature. I also include in my analysis some paratextual elements including advertisements, critical reviews, packaging and art design, and interviews with game developers, since these elements all impact the audience's reading of the text. Since games involve active participation, players are an important part of the creation and experience of the game. Furthermore, I explore the relationship between narrative and mechanics, because the two elements work together to create the complex, interconnected systems that make up video games. A large part of this thesis discusses the impact of player performance on the way that a game is read and the messages that it conveys. However, video games also require player interaction, because they "encode certain values and ideas, which players decode and engage with as they play" (Fernández-Vara, 2019, p. 8). Consequently, the action of playing a game helps to create a game and its message, as well as reflecting the ideas and values of creators and audiences.

Chapter Previews

In the first chapter of this thesis, I focus on describing the development of both the fathers and daughters as playable protagonists, with individual discussions of their aesthetic and appearance, behaviour and mechanics and progression. First, I begin with a general overview of the commonalities between the fathers in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*. Second, I describe the design of the fathers' aesthetics and appearance and how they relate to the stereotypical grizzled male action heroes of video games. Third, I detail their behaviour and mechanics throughout the games, with a particular emphasis on how they interact with their daughters through those mechanics and the level of violence present in the game. Last, I discuss the relationship between the fathers and the game's progression: how do they move forward through the game? What are their markers for success? What impact do the fathers have on the game world? Subsequently, I apply a similar analysis to the daughters. First, I begin by examining their aesthetic and appearance, both in contrast to other female video game

characters and in contrast to their fathers. Second, I describe their behaviour and mechanics, both as non-player-controlled artificial intelligences, and as playable characters, including a discussion of their reliance on the same types and levels of violence as their fathers. Third, I detail the way that the daughters develop within their games' progression.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I focus on the fathers individually, in order to analyse the reasons for their popularity as playable protagonists, the broader social contexts that impact their design and implementation in games, and their critical relationship with different areas of game design, including violence, masculinity and success and failure. In this chapter, I attempt to answer questions about why the fathers are designed the way they are. Why do games focus on fatherhood? Why do games about fatherhood favour particular kinds of settings? How do video games allow or even require players to perform fatherhood? What role does violence play in the performance of fatherhood? And how is the successful performance of fatherhood measured?

In the third chapter, I turn to focus on the daughters, to examine their relatively recent origin as characters in popular culture and their recent popularity and how it impacts their inclusion in video games. My main goal with this chapter is to address the idea that the daughters are a complicated mixture of success and failure in terms of feminist game design. First, I detail the evolution of female action heroes throughout the history of film and television, beginning with female action heroes in the 1970s and 80s, including the "Final Girl" (often found in slasher films in the era), the rise of "girl power" media in the 1990s and more recent analysis of young girls and daughters as popular contemporary action heroes. Second, I discuss the contradictions between the daughters as "empowered" young female characters and their lack of agency in their games, where they serve as an emotional hook for the story largely through their victimization. Third, I explore how the daughters are, similar to their fathers, reliant on violence which they explicitly learn from their fathers, as they are taught to fight, shoot and survive in dangerous environments. Fourth, I discuss the ways that the daughters' behaviours, particularly as playable protagonists, reinforce the idea that fatherhood is the ideal form of masculinity in games. In the fifth section, I discuss the way that mothers in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead* are used as either tools or

antagonists, or erased entirely, which further centers fathers over all other characters. Last, I examine the way that the daughters are also similarly used as tools to support the fathers' stories, as they are used to measure the morality of the fathers' actions and ultimately to redeem the fathers' failures throughout the games.

Finally, in the conclusion to this thesis, I discuss some of the potential future areas of interest for research into this and related topics and I address some of the features that were not included in the thesis itself, which might provide additional insight. First, I discuss my further interest in the erasure of mothers from video games. Their absence from video games in general provides a rich space for analysis. Second, I highlight the way race is treated in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*, with characters of colour often being side-lined or killed off to prop up the fathers' and daughters' narratives. Finally, I briefly discuss sexuality, because although it is a minor element of the games, it does play a part in the daughters' development, particularly when applying a psychoanalytic approach to their analysis.

Chapter 1: Construction and design of video game fathers and their daughters

Introduction

In narrative-based video games, player characters are usually the audience's first introduction to the game's world, story and mechanics, as well as the avatars by which players experience and interact with the game. Many games feature adult, male protagonists who tend to adhere to stereotypical, and often toxic, examples of masculinity; as Ewan Kirkland describes it "the imagery, language, and implied readership of most popular video-game publications, reveals a masculinity that appears rooted in the traditional iconography of action, guns, and violence" (Kirkland, 2009, p. 165). Although the initial player protagonists in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are similar violent action-hero characters, they are differentiated from other male video game protagonists because they are also fathers. Importantly, their fatherhood is a core part of their personality, narrative and interactions with the game world and thus, functions as a structuring, thematic hook for their characters. In the following chapter, I discuss how and why fathers as player protagonists are designed and executed the way they are, specifically by examining their images, characteristics and what they convey to audiences. Since video games are an interactive medium, I will also discuss their mechanics, including what behaviours and interactions are available to players and how these mechanics are used to communicate fatherhood.

Mark Pajor (2014) highlights the predominance of "violent, hypermasculine wish-fulfilment fantasies in video games" and that the common cultural image of video games often includes war or crime games that allow for heightened levels of violence (p. 127). In general, video games tend to favour the perspectives and stories of white, heterosexual men (Cassel & Jenkins, 1998; Stang, 2017). Gladys L. Knight (2010) observes that the male action hero "operates best alone," favouring his independence and avoiding personal relationships and showing little emotion (p. xiv). By including father-daughter relationships into this formulaic construction of male action heroes, *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* complicate the construction of their playable protagonists. On the one hand, the design of video game fathers uses

narrative, aesthetics and mechanics to convey that the fathers still look and act like the traditional, hyper-masculine, violent power-fantasy characters that are common to games. However, their constructions must also communicate their fatherhood to audiences, typically by inviting players to participate in the mechanics of fatherhood.

Despite diverse settings, narratives, mechanics and developers, video game fathers look and act similarly in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. As a result, the games reconfigure the traditional traits of male protagonists to create a new kind of character archetype within video games, who builds upon those hyper-masculine, violent character traits by becoming a father. However, for *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, one of the main characteristics that ties the games together is the presence of a young, female companion character that is constructed as and treated like a daughter. Sometimes the girls are their actual daughters, in a biological sense, while others are simply adopted during the game. As a result, *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are centered around the relationship that forms between the fathers and their daughters. Additionally, the stories in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* tend to include similar themes and settings, like apocalyptic disasters, social decay and redemption (Parker & Aldred, 2018; Stang, 2017). As the game's franchises progress and release sequels and additional DLC, those daughter companions become playable protagonists in their own right and supersede their fathers' original role. In some cases, the daughters take over as the main playable protagonists of the first game's sequel and in others, they are the central characters of additional DLC. In each game, the daughters are designed and executed similarly to the fathers, in their aesthetic design, mechanics and behaviours, and their progression as character.

By pairing the fathers in these games with their young, female companions, the games both reproduce traditional kinds of gendered character relationships — like controlling and paternalistic behaviours from the fathers, putting the daughters in harm's way to inspire protectiveness, and the elimination of mothers. As a consequence, the daughters are often negatively impacted by this relationship with their fathers, despite their eventual role as the game's playable protagonist. In this chapter, I will begin by analysing the design of the fathers in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and

The Walking Dead, beginning with an overview of the construction of fatherhood in video games. Following that, I will provide a detailed description of the fathers' aesthetic appearances, with a discussion of how their designs communicate information about the games' worlds and fatherhood to audiences. Next, I will analyse the fathers' behaviours and mechanics in order to highlight how players interact with the game and how fatherhood factors into that interaction. Last, I will discuss the way that the games measure player progress and how that progress communicates the fathers' emotional development in particular. After discussing the construction of fathers in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*, I will move on to examining the construction of the daughters. First, I will provide an overview of the daughters, with a particular emphasis on the developer's intentions for their designs. Second, I will examine the daughters' aesthetics and the ways in which they are designed to appeal to players as sidekicks and companions, despite their eventual role as a playable protagonist. Third, I will discuss the daughters' behaviours and mechanics, which typically mimic the abilities of their fathers. Last, I will examine the progression of the daughters' character development throughout their games, with an emphasis on the impact that their games' settings and worlds have had on the daughters.

Constructing Fatherhood

Regardless of genre or playstyle, mainstream male video game protagonists tend to follow a similar design,[1] often depicted as gruff, stoic, masculine figures with a propensity for guns and violence — usually skilled in many different types of weaponry, with little effort (Groen, 2012; Kirkland, 2009; Provenzo, 1991). Gerald Voorhees (2016) argues that video game fathers are not only capable of violence, but excel at it. Most of these men are grizzled, muscled, intimidating and emotionally detached, often employed as soldiers, mercenaries, law enforcement, and other jobs to which their capacity for violence is well suited (Burrill, 2008). They are carbon copies, "never bending, always stoic, unrelentingly 'in character'" with little variety and a strict adherence to these examples of video games' hegemonic masculinity (Burrill, 2008, p. 21). In *BioShock Infinite*, Booker DeWitt is a hard-boiled private investigator, soldier and retired Pinkerton

[1] Joel Miller and Booker DeWitt even share a voice actor.

agent. *Dishonored's* Corvo Attano is a bodyguard, spy and assassin. In *The Last of Us,* Joel Miller is a smuggler with a dark and violent past from the early days of the game's apocalypse. *The Walking Dead*'s Lee Everett is a convicted murderer.

In *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary U.S. film*, Hannah Hamad describes characters who are similarly designed in film and television as "paternally-signified"; whether they are a father or not, their actions and behaviours are commonly associated with fatherhood, particularly "heroic fatherhood" (Hamad, 2014). Hamad (2014) argues that the popular depictions of heroic fatherhood in film emerged from media in the 1960s and 70s that encouraged a reconfiguration of masculinity whose "dominant iterations tend toward a model of fatherhood that is … emotionally articulate, domestically competent, skilled in managing the quotidian practicalities of parenthood" (p. 8). Bruzzi argues that fatherhood became a tool for personal development, the "vehicle for teaching a man to feel" (p. 157) In other words, fatherhood in film and television was changing to include more varied depictions of paternity that began to confront traditional hegemonic masculinity. While traditional action heroes rejected family ties (Knight, 2010), heroic fathers embrace involvement with their children as another facet of their masculinity. Hamad (2014) examines fatherhood as a new form of masculinity through a postfeminist lens, arguing that creators use feminist criticism to produce more complex, emotional and nuanced male characters with a stronger involvement in their children's lives specifically to appeal to modern audiences. Subsequently, Hamad (2014) also argues that creators then reject further feminist criticism in order to continue centering more stereotypical forms of masculinity, including paternalism, dominance and violence since those, too, appeal to audiences[2] (Hamad, 2014). Consequently, fatherhood in modern media can project an illusion of feminist progress, while failing to address common tropes of toxic masculinity.

Hamad's "heroic" fatherhood emerges from this postfeminist media zeitgeist, combined with a desire for the more traditionally male-dominated action films of the 1980s and 90s. For example, Hamad lists *Jurassic Park*, among many others, as an example of "heroic" fatherhood in action films. During *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993), Dr. Alan Grant becomes paternally-signified when he is forced to rescue and care for the

[2] Particularly the audiences of action and adventure genres.

grandchildren of the park's creator after they are all attacked by an escaped dinosaur. Despite commenting that he does not want children and showing that he has a general disdain for them, Dr. Grant lures the dinosaur away from the children, and then rescues them from a number of subsequent near-death scenarios. Throughout this experience, he tries to be comforting when the children are clearly traumatized and generally acts in a paternal role. Dr. Grant's developing relationship with the children is one of the film's major emotional hooks. Dr. Grant fulfils the role of the male action lead throughout the film, but also cares for and supports the children that he takes responsibility for. Similar stories can be found in action films like *Dante's Peak* (Donaldson, 1997) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), as well as more recent examples[3] like *Logan* (Mangold, 2017) and the Netflix show *Stranger Things* (Duffer & Duffer, 2016) and, for a non-western example, the Korean action horror film *Train to Busan* (Sang-ho, 2016). In essence, paternally-signified characters can mostly look and act like typical male action heroes, but their actions are positively recontextualized by their parental roles.

Much like the action hero fathers found in film and television, video game fathers' identities are constructed around video games' pre-existing tropes of hegemonic masculinity. Since fatherhood becomes central to their characters and a "structuring thematic, narrative hook" those same traits of hegemonic masculinity become features of fatherhood (Hamad, 2014, p. 16). In video games, these paternal traits are then communicated to players by a combination of aesthetic design, behaviour and mechanics, and their progression as characters through the game. As protagonists, the fathers' character design is one of the first things that players are introduced to within the game — often before playing the game, as players encounter advertisements, box art, and other marketing materials depicting the games' protagonists. Later, the protagonists' behaviours and mechanics introduce players to the world and its rules and what players can and cannot do within the game. Throughout each game, the protagonist characters also change and progress, both in terms of their mechanical abilities and their personal character development.

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[3] *The Last of Us* is slated for an eventual television adaptation, continuing this trend.

Aesthetic and Appearance

A character's design conveys information about their personality, actions, abilities and role in the story, as well as the world they inhabit and the game's mechanics. In most instances, a player with guns strapped to their back will shoot those guns during the game, while a character dressed in dark, flexible clothing will sneak around rooftops. For example, in *The Last of Us*, the game's third person camera perspective usually centers Joel's backpack, equipped with weapons that change based on the player's selections, as well as the general wear, tear and dirt of his post-apocalyptic lifestyle. Joel's backpack communicates the state of the game world as well as his role in it; not only is he capable of great violence, but he is also well equipped for it and skilled in a variety of weapons that are always at hand. Although they are not carried on his person, the contents of Booker's desk in *BioShock Infinite*, seen during the game's introductory chapter, also help to define his character. A still smoking cigarette in an ashtray, a loaded pistol, empty bottles of alcohol and a daily racing form help to paint Booker as a film noir-styled hero, with a number of addictions, who keeps his gun close. In *The Walking Dead*, Lee's aesthetics also reflect both the game world and his character, particularly towards the end of the first game. After being bitten, Lee grows sicker and more haggard as the infection spreads, with sallow skin and dark bags beneath his eyes, while he continues on his mission to rescue Clementine from a kidnapper, regardless of his deterioration.

Even in games that use a first person camera — where audiences generally cannot see the protagonist's face — a character's design is important and continues to communicate information about the world to players. Both *Dishonored* and *BioShock Infinite* use a first person camera, but players can easily see the protagonist's hands as they interact with the environment, by reloading guns, adjusting weapons and equipment, ingesting health potions or picking locks. In both games, the player protagonist's hands feature identifying marks that are also communicated through this first person camera. Booker has the letters "A.D." carved into the back of his hand, marking him as the game's "False Shepherd" as referenced in a prophecy found by players, and also providing a clue to his companion Elizabeth's secret identity. In *Dishonored,* Corvo and several other characters (including Emily and some of the game's villains) have the "Outsider's Mark" burned into the backs of their hands, imbuing them with the game's

supernatural powers and branding them as occultist heretics. These identifying marks not only contribute to each character's aesthetic design, but also communicate details about the world to players.

After Corvo escapes from prison near the start of *Dishonored*, players can find wanted posters featuring Corvo's face scattered throughout the city. As the game progresses through missions involving abduction and murder, posters appear featuring a mysterious "Masked Felon," which allow us to see Corvo's actual appearance as well as the intimidating mask that he uses during his revenge quest. Elements of each game's world communicate not only details of characters' physical appearance — without the wanted posters, players would not see Corvo's face in-game — but also help to build up the world around them showing, for example, Corvo's multiple identities, his wanted status and some the consequences of his actions.

The Walking Dead introduces Lee handcuffed in the back of a police car, being transported to jail after he was convicted of murdering his wife's lover, all prior to the start of the game's apocalyptic events. Dressed in a button down shirt and jeans, with no weapons or obvious signs of violence, Lee's design seems like that of an average person until a few minutes later, when the police car rolls off of the road, while trying to avoid hitting one of the game's first zombies. In the subsequent scene, Lee tries to avoid conflict and repeatedly checks on the seemingly unconscious officer, but eventually the game forces him to defend himself with the officer's shotgun when they are overrun. By the end of the introduction to the game, Lee is injured, bloody and roughed up and has shown that he knows how to and will use available weapons for self-defence. As a result, the game shows that despite that initial impression, Lee is capable of the same kind of violence as the other fathers discussed here and ultimately adheres to the same appearance-based tropes. Lee's appearance reflects both the state of the game world and his place in it.

Behaviour and Mechanics

While aesthetic design is meant to communicate information about the characters, narrative and game world to players, a character's behaviour and mechanics are how players are able to interact with the game world. In video games, characters' behaviours are created through a combination of developer-designed mechanics and actions

performed by the players. Although all of the games I discuss here feature different mixtures of gameplay, genre and style, all four paternal protagonists behave alike. Each game's developers relied predominantly on violent mechanics. As a result of their similarities to other traditionally masculine video game protagonists, they display roughly the same quantity and degree of violence. However, these video game fathers are also expected to perform *fatherhood* alongside (and in accordance with) typical levels of video game violence, which works to recontextualize both their violent actions and their masculinity. In chapter two, I discuss the complexities of conflating fatherhood and violence, but the goal here is to explicate *how* the fathers behave in their respective games.

Video game fathers borrow many traits from traditional, mainstream male video game heroes, but in the following section I will focus on their violent mechanics (even in cases of non-lethal gameplay) and their heroic protection of the daughters. *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* all prominently feature violent gameplay and participation in violence is mandatory to advance the plot or complete the game. *Dishonored* includes and even encourages non-lethal gameplay, but it remains both violent and entirely optional.

Despite variety in their styles and genres, *The Walking Dead, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Last Of Us* are all set in locations that require violent actions in order for the characters to survive. In chapter two, I will discuss in more detail the importance of disastrous or post-apocalyptic settings in each of these game worlds, but in the following section, it is important to note that each of the games takes place during a time of social, political or environmental upheaval. Both *Dishonored* and *BioShock Infinite* take place in cities that feature major political and social upheaval with a spreading plague and political coup in *Dishonored* and a worker rebellion in *BioShock Infinite*. Both *The Walking Dead* and *The Last Of Us* are set in post-apocalyptic worlds, beset by zombie or zombie-like enemies, "walkers" and "the infected" respectively. Violence is an inescapable feature of each game and, generally, the game's main mechanic, despite the presence of other available actions and affordances. Players will occasionally be asked to climb, solve puzzles or move objects in the world, but in the

end, *The Walking Dead, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Last Of Us* all rely on violence for the bulk of their gameplay.

As a result, one of the main ways that fatherhood is displayed as a mechanic in the games is through violence, most often used to protect their daughters. Each of the girls is kidnapped at least once in their respective games and their fathers are forced into violent situations in order to rescue them. Female companions have often been forced into the role of "damsels in distress" in games, and the trope persists although it has become slightly less common (Grimes, 2003; Provenzo, 1991). Often, it is the male protagonist's female love interest that is put into this role, while their victimization is used to develop their relationship to the player protagonist (Parker & Aldred, 2018). [4] However, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored, The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead* reimagine this trope around the daughter companions instead. Rescuing their daughters, particularly from abductions, becomes a core behaviour by which the dads indicate their heroic fatherhood and their emotional connection to their daughters.

In *Dishonored*, Corvo has a past as a soldier and is employed as the Empress Jessamine's "royal protector," often serving as a spy and assassin. Players' first opportunity for combat in the game comes during the empress's murder, where Corvo attempts to protect her and her daughter Emily. However, the attackers take Emily and Corvo is framed for Jessamine's murder, all of which result in the game's inciting action. Corvo uses violence throughout the rest of the game to rescue Emily, avenge Jessamine, and eventually install Emily to the throne. Emily's rescue is one of the first missions that players embark on, during which Corvo retrieves her from the Golden Cat brothel where she is being held hostage. Later, after his initial rescuers betray Corvo, they kidnap Emily again and Corvo rescues her once more during the game's final mission.

Throughout the game players have the ability to choose different paths leading to its conclusion, referred to as "high chaos" and "low chaos." A level's degree of chaos is determined by how often Corvo is spotted by guards or other enemies, how many people are killed, how many bodies are found, certain side quests and other small variables. As a result, a largely lethal and overtly violent playthrough produces higher chaos, while a

[4] Notably, the fathers in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* do not have love interests. Corvo occasionally references his past relationship with Jessamine, who is dead after *Dishonored*'s prologue.

predominantly stealthy and non-lethal approach produces lower chaos. Chaos is important to the game's outcome and therefore affects the way that Corvo's fatherhood is realized throughout, even down to the artwork that Emily produces — her drawings will take on darker subject matter the higher the game's chaos level, reflecting Corvo's actions — as well as impacting the game's ending (specifically, Emily's fate). There are three main possible endings to the game, each determined by the game's chaos level. In the "low chaos" ending, Emily's captor, Admiral Havelock, hands over the key to Emily's room, allowing Corvo to save her easily. During the epilogue, this ending results in a more positive and thoughtful Empress Emily, who ushers in a golden age of prosperity for the kingdom. In the "high chaos" endings, Emily is held by Admiral Havelock at the end of a catwalk, with a long drop into the ocean. If Corvo does not have the correct supernatural powers in his arsenal (such as one that allows him to temporarily stop time), Admiral Havelock will jump to his death, taking Emily with him. Neither survives.[5] However, if Corvo possesses the right powers, Emily can be grabbed and rescued before falling. In the high chaos ending where Emily survives, she grows to be a much harder and more ruthless ruler. *Dishonored* and its chaos levels create a system in which the degree of violence used by Corvo directly correlates to Emily's development. Even the mechanics (in the form of supernatural powers) that players select as they progress through the game can have an impact on Emily's life.

[5] Note that both of the high chaos endings, whether Emily lives or dies, are ignored in *Dishonored 2*'s story, which is based on the results of the low chaos ending. Ultimately, the player's actions in *Dishonored* have no actual impact on the events of *Dishonored 2*.

Figure 1. Example of Emily's art found during low chaos in *Dishonored*.

Figure 2. Example of Emily's art found during high chaos in *Dishonored*.

In contrast, Booker's and the player's actions in *BioShock Infinite* — due to the game's linear narrative — do not have the same role in Elizabeth's development. However, there is evidence that his past behaviours had a strong impact on her life in several ways. When Elizabeth was a baby, she was actually known as Anna and was Booker's biological daughter. After accruing a large gambling debt, Booker accepted a deal from Zachary Comstock, the founder of Colombia, to wipe away his debt in exchange for Anna.

Booker, regretting his decision, tries to take Anna back as she is being carried through a temporal portal and in the ensuing squabble as the portal closes, the tip of one of her fingers is severed. As a result, Anna is raised as Elizabeth by Comstock and his wife, who do not tell her of her origins and in fact present her as a miracle child. After her appearance in the city more temporal portals, called "tears," begin appearing and are connected to Elizabeth, at which point she is moved to Monument Island where she is imprisoned as a research subject and studied. Eventually, her powers are contained by a machine known as the Siphon, which traps her in one reality and limits her abilities. Her negative childhood experiences are the direct result of Booker's actions, twice over. First, when he sold her as an infant, leading to her life of imprisonment and experimentation. Second, because Comstock is also Booker, from an alternate reality. After participating in the events of the Wounded Knee Massacre, Booker felt remorse, underwent a baptism, adopted Christianity and changed his name to Zachary Comstock, all leading to his eventual purchasing of Anna from a different version of himself. *BioShock Infinite* and its many different timelines and realities are complicated, but it is clear that regardless of which reality, Booker's actions have had a lasting impact on Elizabeth many times over.

Throughout the game, Booker is repeatedly tasked with rescuing Elizabeth. Like Emily's kidnapping at the start of *Dishonored*, Booker's mission to retrieve Elizabeth is the game's inciting action that sparks the game's plot and leads him to the city of Colombia. Later, by the time she is taken again Booker has become attached to Elizabeth. Despite not yet knowing that she is really his daughter Anna, he is motivated to rescue her by a paternal affection and a desire to protect her. Each of these incidents refers back to his initial loss of Anna, all three events bleeding together through various timelines. At the start of the game, Booker is told by the Lutece twins "bring us the girl and wipe away the debt," which is a line that is repeated often throughout the game and ties together Elizabeth's multiple abductions in a way that makes it clear that they all relate to Booker's actions in different realities.

Joel, during the prologue of *The Last Of Us*, is portrayed as an average suburban dad in Texas. Although he owns a gun — kept unloaded, in a drawer — there is little other evidence around the house or in his interactions with Sara or Tommy that suggest that he has a violent past. By the events of the main game, he has been hardened by his

experiences and moves around the world armed and prepared for attacks and violence at every turn. As discussed before, his character design prominently displays Joel's available weaponry and each item that is visible on his backpack is usable as a weapon by the player. In order to progress through the game, players are required to fight their way through maps filled with opponents. Although stealth is an option in many scenarios, there are situations in which players are forced to confront and violently combat enemies. One feature of the game is that a mistake during a stealth attempt will result in all enemies in the area attacking the player, which forces stealth-sections to change to violent combat. Players, as Joel, are tasked with transporting Ellie to a safe zone outside of the city, through dangerous areas filled with infected and regular human enemies, necessitating that Joel commit violent acts in order to keep her safe while they travel.

Like Emily, Ellie is also taken twice. First, during the game's Winter chapter, Ellie encounters a group that recognizes her as one of their attackers during a previous chapter. There is a confrontation between Ellie and the group's leader, David, before she runs and they follow her back to her and Joel's hideout, at which point they grab her and take her back to their camp. Upon waking, Joel goes on a violent quest to retrieve her, killing his way through large groups of enemies. Although Joel is violent throughout the game, Ellie's abduction by David is a transformative moment, where Joel begins to acknowledge that he has developed paternal affection for Ellie. During the incident, Ellie runs away and ends up being hunted by David, culminating in a fight that results in her brutally killing him. Joel arrives shortly after to find her scared and upset at which point he hugs her and calls her "baby girl," a refrain previously reserved for his deceased daughter Sara. Later, Ellie is taken again by the rebel Fireflies upon her and Joel's arrival in Utah, where they reveal to Joel that their doctors will only be able to use Ellie to create a cure for the virus if they can access the infected parts of her brain, which will kill her. Joel proceeds to fight his way through the hospital and its resident Firefly soldiers to reach Ellie, killing her surgeon and the Fireflies' leader, Marlene, before he escapes the hospital with her. Afterwards, Joel returns with Ellie to a town in Wyoming that his brother Tommy has been working to secure, where he intends for them to live in peace. In both instances — Joel's torturing of David's men and his willingness to kill their allies amongst the Fireflies — the game presents these violent acts as justifiable in defence of

Ellie, whom he has come to see as an adoptive daughter. Players are encouraged to participate in, and root for, Joel's violence as it is used to express his fatherhood within the game's mechanical system. In contrast, *The Walking Dead* takes a different approach to showing Lee's fatherhood through violence, by complicating the definition of violence.

In *The Walking Dead*, Lee is a convicted murderer, having accidentally killed a man who was having an affair with his wife, but this incident is presented as an unusual, individual occurrence. No other elements of Lee's past indicate that he is a violent person, although his murder charge haunts him even during the game's apocalyptic events, as a reporter that they encounter recognizes him. However, when faced with a world infested by zombies, Lee is willing to use weapons to defend himself and Clementine. Violence against other living humans is relatively uncommon throughout *The Walking Dead*, unlike *The Last of Us* or *BioShock Infinite*, where players kill their way through swaths of human enemies, and much more common versus the game's "walkers". *The Walking Dead* can be critical of violence, asking if it is the best course of action and forcing players into difficult choices. At times, *The Walking Dead* also questions the nature of particular kinds of violence. In mainstream, popular video games, violence is common, usually presented through guns, explosions, fistfights and death — all violent mechanics that are rarely approached with a critical eye. Rather, they are an accepted and even expected part of many popular games. However, *The Walking Dead* often tries to explore concepts like the lasting impact of violence, as well as mercy killings, self-defence and self-sacrifice, and their relationships to violence. At one point in the game Lee, Clementine and their group are presented with a seemingly abandoned car in the wilderness, filled with food, water and other useful supplies that they have very little of at the time. After a short debate, the group will loot supplies from the car and players can either choose to steal along with the group, or to side with Clementine and leave the supplies alone. Despite their actions, even members that participate in the theft are critical of what they are doing, with Lilly pointing out that they do not know if the car's owners are alive or dead and that "if they come back, then we're just monsters who came out of the woods and ruined their lives."

Later in the game, Clementine is taken by a stranger[6] that she has been communicating with over her walkie-talkie, who is revealed to be the owner of the car that their group looted. As a result of the group's actions, and several days of starvation, the man's wife takes their daughter and leaves, resulting in their deaths. In response to this trauma, the man exacts a revenge plot against the group and kidnaps Clementine, because he believes that he can provide her with a better, safer life. Although the group's actions against the man might not be considered traditional video game violence, they have a direct negative impact on his life and result in the deaths of his remaining family members. However, the theft is ultimately justified within the story, because it allowed their group and thus Clementine to survive a little bit longer, due to the food and water that they stole. Notably, Lee is forced to fight the man in order to rescue Clementine. Despite the fact that their group wronged him, the game justifies Lee's actions because of his desire to protect Clementine, while disregarding the stranger's desire to also protect her. As a result, the game makes an argument that a particular *kind* of violence is necessary, in order to act like a father in the game. Although the stranger was motivated by paternal feelings towards Clementine, Lee was the "better" father, because of his capacity for protective violence and self-sacrifice on Clementine's behalf.

Progression

While the fathers' behaviours and mechanics are meant to show how fatherhood is expressed in games, typically through violent means, their progression shows how they change throughout the game and plays an important part in their development, both mechanically and emotionally. Mechanical progression often comes in the form of learning new skills or new information about the game world they inhabit, like Lee learning that infected bites are what transforms a person into a walker. Later, this gives players the option to amputate Lee's arm after he is bitten, in an attempt at saving him. Emotional development helps to drive the plot forward by impacting characters' thoughts, feelings and decisions as well as their emotional interactions with other characters. Each of the following examples also demonstrates that player engagement via conversations between the fathers and their daughters become important to the daughters'

[6] He is unnamed in the game.

processing of their traumatic experiences and to the progression and development of the video game father-daughter relationship.

Although none of the games here feature a traditional "levelling up" mechanic, the player characters gain new traits, abilities and weapons as they progress through the game. Subsequent chapters of *The Last of Us* and *BioShock Infinite* introduce new weapons to Joel and Booker's respective arsenals, while Corvo picks up new skills and tools by advancing through the plot of *Dishonored* and receiving rewards or finding items in the world. In *The Walking Dead*, Lee's development comes less as an expansion of the weapons available to him, and more as knowledge and experience of the world and other characters — knowledge which he is happy to share with Clementine, like keeping her hair short to avoid being grabbed or how to shoot a gun. Additional weapons and skills are an important part of the progression of a game, as it makes characters stronger and more able to deal with future confrontations. However, the emotional progression that the fathers undergo is also important to the processing of both the fathers' and daughters' experiences.

It is through their progression that players are able to perform the emotional aspects of fatherhood while interacting with the daughters. Postfeminist fathers in film eventually develop a fatherhood "that is (or becomes) emotionally articulate" and requires more engaged emotional reactions and affect (Hamad, 2014, p. 2). Narratives about family and parenthood have often been used to inspire strong emotional reactions in audiences and, in the case of video games, this type of engagement pulls players into a protective, emotional role through the player's actions (Groen, 2012). In games, this is expressed predominantly by the fathers' interactions with their daughters. At the start of their respective games, the fathers tend towards the same kind of emotional repression found in traditional male video game protagonists, rarely choosing to show or discuss their feelings, often as a result of traumatic experiences. For example, at the beginning of *The Last of Us*, Joel is shown to have a playful and affectionate relationship with his daughter Sara, before she is killed during the game's prologue. When they are introduced to the game, it is during a conversation where she gives Joel a birthday present and the two of them joke about it being broken. He lazily scolds her for still being up so late and then time ticks by as she falls asleep on the couch, before he carries her upstairs and tucks

her into bed. After the prologue ends with her death, the game immediately cuts to 20 years in the future, where Joel is shown to be surly, bitter and sarcastic, working as a smuggler in a rundown "quarantine zone" city, clearly changed by the loss of his daughter and subsequent traumatizing experiences.

However, as the games progress, the fathers become more open and engaged with their daughters, largely through conversational interactions. In *The Last of Us*, Joel initially has no interest in bonding with or caring about Ellie, beyond what is necessary to smuggle her safely out of the city. But players are prompted to start conversations between Joel and Ellie, usually when Ellie is inspired to comment on relics from the pre-apocalyptic world that Joel previously inhabited. Early in the game, these conversations are more about pre-apocalyptic popular culture, like advertisements featuring thin models (Ellie is confused about why people would not want to eat if food were common) or Joel's preferences (he misses coffee). Discussing a movie poster[7] they encounter, Ellie and Joel have a conversation, which he abruptly cuts short, that illustrates her curiosity about the world and his own emotional repression regarding his dead daughter, Sara:

Ellie: Bet he totally guts her by the end of the film.

Joel: What? No. No one gets gutted. It's a dumb teen movie.

Ellie: Well who dragged you to see it then?

Later, there are more emotional conversations between them. After Ellie's assault at the hands of a community of cannibals, Joel tries to adopt a more upbeat and supportive approach to Ellie and their conversations. As they are entering Salt Lake City during the game's final chapter, Joel struggles to get Ellie's attention as she repeatedly loses focus, ignores his inquiries and drops out of the conversation. Shortly after, they encounter feral giraffes and pet them, before Joel tries to talk to Ellie about their future and her decisions. Throughout this final section of the game, Joel tries to connect with Ellie on an emotional level and to bring her feelings and opinions into the conversation, far more than at any previous point in the game. His relationship with Ellie has clearly progressed during the game, to be more open and emotionally articulate.

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[7] The poster features a teen girl and a werewolf embracing and is reminiscent of the *Twilight* films, hence Ellie's belief that someone will be "gutted."

In the first season of *The Walking Dead*, a major component of the game's narrative progression is produced by Lee and Clementine's interactions. Unlike the other games discussed here, *The Walking Dead*'s multilinear narrative means that the player's behaviours predominantly involve engaging with Clementine and other players and their actions change the path of the game's story and change the kind of character Clementine ultimately becomes. Players choose how Lee interacts with Clementine, what he teaches her, how he talks to her and impacts her personality, indicated by the repeated notification that "Clementine will remember that…" — a refrain that impacts Clementine in later games, as she refers to her memories of Lee and the things that he taught her about survival.

Figure 3. Clementine will remember her introduction to Lee in *The Walking Dead.*

Early in the game, Lee can sometimes struggle to communicate with Clementine as they get to know each other, with the game often presenting dialogue options that have negative repercussions. While falling asleep in a barn near the start of the game, Lee can say that the barn smells like "shit," which causes Clementine to scold him for swearing. Later, during a tense scene in a looted pharmacy, Clementine interrupts to tell Lee that she needs to use the bathroom, and the dialogue option "just go," causes Lee to snap at

her,[8] after which she is visibly upset. However, as their relationship progresses, dialogue options become overall more positive and present fewer opportunities for direct conflict between Lee and Clementine. Clementine's personality starts to shine during the game's later episodes as her trust in Lee grows, when she transforms from a girl who scolds him for swearing, to one who mischievously admits to putting bugs in a boy's pillow. Eventually, this emotional connection culminates during Lee's death scene where he tries to comfort Clementine and offers emotional support as she learns that he is dying. Depending on the player's choices, Clementine can either shoot Lee to prevent him from becoming a walker, or she can leave him to turn. Lee is emotionally supportive of either decision, offers encouragement to Clementine regardless, and continues to give her pieces of advice. As a result of their connection, developed throughout the game, Lee can communicate with Clementine and encourage her survival. In this instance, it is not only Lee who has progressed, but Clementine too, demonstrating mutual emotional development between the two of them and an overall healthier relationship.

In contrast, in *BioShock Infinite*, the player's only options to engage with Elizabeth emotionally are predetermined by the plot, rather than players' actions. Booker is not prompted to start conversations with Elizabeth and players cannot communicate with her directly. Regardless, Booker and Elizabeth's progression occurs without the same level of player input seen in *The Walking Dead*, *Dishonored* or *The Last of Us*, demonstrating that the progression of the father-daughter relationship in all four games is important to the development of the game's emotional and narrative core. Booker's affection for Elizabeth grows throughout the game as he tries to help her, offering support and advice and becoming less gruff and unengaged after different traumatic plot points. For example, when he and Elizabeth are faced with the task of retrieving Elizabeth's mother Lady Comstock's fingers to activate a fingerprint lock, Booker tries to stop Elizabeth from doing it herself. After suggesting that she think about what she is doing — to which he receives an angry response from Elizabeth — he demands that he be the one to do it, suggesting that the emotional toll will be harder on Elizabeth than himself. Later, after her murder of Daisy Fitzroy, Elizabeth is clearly traumatized and upset, but because

[8] There is little indication that this line will result in Lee snapping at Clementine, to the chagrin of many players.

of the emotional bond and trust that has formed between her and Booker, she turns to him for help and advice on how to deal with what she has done.

In *Dishonored*, Corvo is Emily's actual biological father, but evidence of this relationship is largely absent from their interactions in the first game — they are friendly and Emily obviously trusts Corvo, but the only direct reference to her being his father is that she has written "daddy" across one of her drawings of him. In the game, players first engage with Emily with a hug and a game of hide-and-seek in the palace courtyard, which serves both to show the baseline of their relationship and to begin teaching players about the game's stealth mechanics. After rescuing Emily from her captors early in the game, she and Corvo interact very little and not much relationship development is shown between them, creating a situation where Corvo is only paternally-signified by his repeated rescuing of Emily. Even during the game's epilogue, no concrete familial connection is shown. Consequently, Corvo and Emily's relationship changes the most during the space between the first and second game, from a friendly and fond relationship with little acknowledgement of Corvo being Emily's father in *Dishonored*, to a public, affectionate and strong bond between them in *Dishonored 2*. In the second game, Corvo is openly referred to as Emily's father and their relationship is part of the game's core conflict. After a confrontation with the game's main villain, Delilah Copperspoon, during Emily's coronation, players are asked to choose either Emily or Corvo as their main character, and rescuing the other character is a central motivation in the game's story. By holding one of the two hostage, Delilah forces the other to return to the city to rescue them. In subsequent parts of the game, the strong familial relationship between Corvo and Emily is conveyed through more subtle means, like a note found in the tower's hidden safehouse upon escaping. The end of a letter from Emily's lover, Wyman, reads:

> I don't want to go back to Morley, but I'm needed there. It'll be four months before we see each other again. I'll miss you. And yes, I'll bring you some white leaf tobacco for your hookah. Lord Corvo, if you're reading this letter as per your Royal Spymaster functions, know that I am joking and perfectly aware that the white leaf tobacco is forbidden in Gristol.

This note demonstrates that Corvo and Emily's familial relationship is now obvious to external characters and has become public knowledge. Other characters also make

reference to their father-daughter relationship throughout the game, including the spirit of Emily's mother, who is trapped in a clockwork mechanism used by the player. If playing as Corvo, Jessamine's spirit will point out that Emily "carries your lessons within her." Later, when Jessamine's spirit is replaced by Delilah's, she will use public knowledge of Corvo and Emily's familial relationship to taunt both of them, demonstrating that their relationship has progressed between the first and second game and become a core part of their identities.

In *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* the fathers' development of their relationships with their daughters is an important aspect of their progression through the games. Games traditionally rely on progression to build-up the players' characters with additional skills, weapons, levels and powers, but *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* also emphasize an additional kind of progression that focuses on the father-daughter relationships that are central to games' narrative and the players' experience as fathers. In the next section, I will discuss the way that the daughters are constructed in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* through their aesthetic design, behaviour and mechanics and progression, to explore the other side of the father-daughter dynamic found in these games.

Construction of the Daughters

As demonstrated in the previous section, the fathers in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are constructed following similar traits to other stereotypical male action heroes, with additions that indicate their role as fathers. Similarly, the daughters' designs follow tropes that are common to other female video game characters, with additions that are indicative of their role as "daughters."

Female video game characters are a source of contention, in both popular culture and academia, because they are often designed to titillate the average male player and/or relegated to passive roles as victims of violence (Abele & Gronbeck-Tedesco, 2016; Grimes 2003; Provenzo, 1991). In particular, female game characters are rarely protagonists, and are often represented as "damsels in distress," in need of rescuing by a game's male hero (Grimes, 2003; Provenzo, 1991). Furthermore, their victimization also

tends to be highly sexualized with torn clothing, nudity, gendered insults and/or violent sexual assault. It is also common for female game characters to serve as the love interest for a game's male protagonist. However, the daughters featured here are young girls, typically not sexualized by the narrative and featuring a different kind of physical and aesthetic design than adult women in games. When the daughters end up replacing their fathers as a game's playable protagonist and becoming action heroes in disastrous and post-apocalyptic worlds, many of these common tropes end up being reimagined. For video game daughters, this means straddling two different kinds of character design. On the one hand, the daughters are designed to be sidekicks and companions, dependent on the paternally-signified player character for their survival and meant to appeal to players on an emotional level to encourage protective feelings. On the other hand, they must also be able to adapt at later stages into becoming playable protagonists who are skilled at survival within the game worlds on their own merits and as adept at violence as their fathers.

There is little consensus on the role of the female action hero in feminist discourse (Abele & Gronbeck-Tedesco, 2016). Genz (2009) argues that the new female action hero is no longer passive and immobile, "she fights, she shoots, she kills, solves crimes and rescues herself and others from dangerous situations" (p.152). However, some theorists argue that the way these female characters look and behave simply transfers traits of toxic masculinity and violence to women, instead of men, while not otherwise addressing or interrogating those issues (Schubart, 2007). Other researchers suggest that female action heroes, particularly adolescent ones, are empowered to critique the sexualisation of women and girls in film and modern anxieties about the nuclear family (Lupold, 2014). In *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored, The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead* the daughters are constructed from a combination of positive and negative traits that create complex characters who are difficult to categorize — simultaneously creative and interesting takes on female action heroes, that still maintain some of the more toxic tropes typically associated with female characters, particularly in video games. In the following section, I will address the aesthetic design of the daughters in *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored, The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead*, and how their individual appearances change to reflect the impact of their respective game worlds. Following that, I will look at their mechanical

design and behaviours, particularly as they relate to game developers' desire to create "helpful" sidekick characters. Finally, I will discuss their progression as characters and how it is displayed through changes to their appearance and to the actions that they are able to perform in-game.

Aesthetic and Appearance

In *The Walking Dead*, *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite* and *Dishonored* all of the girls were purposefully designed, on some level, to appeal to players as sidekicks and companion characters. Each of these daughters are aesthetically designed in much the same way that popular animated characters are, to elicit an emotional response from audiences (Khazan, 2013).[9] Elizabeth, Emily, Ellie and Clementine all have large eyes and petite frames that are meant to indicate youth and innocence. In contrast with the dangerous environments of their respective games, this inspires protectiveness in players. Lupold (2014) argues that the "wholesome faces of young girls are stealing the spotlight away from the more mature bodies of women warriors" in film, and that this is meant to monopolize on the shock of seeing young girls as violent action heroes (p. 6). However, in an interview Ron Rosenberg, executive director of the recent *Tomb Raider* reboot, explains that their new design for the series' protagonist, Lara Croft, was meant to inspire protectiveness, by making her younger, less hardened and less sexualized than her previous incarnations (Schreier, 2012). Even as she is presented as the protagonist, her youthful character design is not meant for players to project on to, rather players are meant to feel that they are going on an adventure alongside her and "trying to protect her" (Schreier, 2012, para. 4). Schubart (2007), in her discussion of the "daughter" as an archetype in action films, points out that the daughter is different from other archetypes, because of the "striking disjunction between her actions and appearance" (p. 196). She is often "slight, flat chested, and with an air of adolescence" and she "does not *look* like the type you would expect" to handle weapons or kill people in cold blood (Schubart, 2007, p. 196). Elizabeth, at about nineteen, is the oldest and most mature of the daughters in

[9] Animated characters with proportionally large eyes and small round features are, in terms of character design, more likely to evoke feelings of protectiveness and to make characters appear younger (Khazan, 2013).

these games and is still designed to be waifish and delicate, with exaggeratedly large eyes.

However, particularly by their time as playable protagonists, the girls have all proven themselves to be physically strong and capable despite their stature. Although some researchers, like Grimes (2003) argue that traditionally, "without the musculature and size necessary to realistically perform the actions they are shown accomplishing," female action heroes lack authenticity, the daughters here are all believably capable of self-defence. During her imprisonment in *Dishonored*, Emily routinely attempts to escape and makes her captor's lives difficult. In *The Walking Dead*, Clementine repeatedly helps out in dangerous situations and shoots walkers to defend herself and the group. Ellie will jump into fights with her knife in *The Last of Us* to protect herself, Joel or other companions. In *BioShock Infinite,* Elizabeth is both physically capable — in that she will occasionally wield weapons, like when she murders Daisy Fitzroy — and supernaturally capable, as she is shown in prophecies destroying the entire floating city of Colombia with her powers. Later in this chapter, I will go into more detail about how each of the daughters learns and adapts new abilities from their fathers and later refines them as they progress.

Similar to video game fathers, the daughters also display the signs of dirt, decay, fatigue and violence that mark both types of characters as originating from dangerous game worlds. Each of the girls' appearances also shows a steady decline in their state of dress and cleanliness as the games progress. In contrast with their fathers, it is far less common for the daughters, prior to their becoming playable protagonists, to openly display weapons or tools the same way that their fathers do. For example, during the majority of *The Last of Us*, Ellie carries a backpack like Joel's with some small details that are indicative of her personality, but unlike Joel, she does not openly carry guns or weapons — in part, this is because her access to weapons is limited and sporadic, only being supplied to her with Joel's approval in the early sections of the game. However, after Joel is incapacitated at the end of the game's Fall chapter, Ellie becomes the game's temporary playable protagonist, at which point her appearance transforms the most dramatically as she is shown dressed in an army green coat, with a bow slung over her shoulder. During this section of the game, she also openly carries a handgun and hunting

rifle. In the subsequent chapter, as soon as Ellie is no longer the game's playable protagonist, she returns to her more normal appearance, without visible weaponry. Her appearance also changes during the DLC *Left Behind*, as the timeline swaps between the period before Ellie met Joel, and the one where Ellie is working to save Joel's life after his injury. In the earlier parts of the game, she has no visible weaponry, while in the later part, she is armed similarly to her time as the playable protagonist in the main game, providing further evidence of the impact that the game world and her time with Joel have had on her.

Unlike their fathers, the daughters initially seem fundamentally unsuited to the violent game worlds that they inhabit. However, over time their physical integration into the design of the world is part of their development as characters. Some of the daughters' softer, more youthful design elements change to reflect the impact of the game's world on the daughters' physical selves. After being bitten by a dog in *The Walking Dead: Season Two*, Clementine is forced to stitch up her own wound, which leaves a lasting visible scar on her forearm. By the second game, she is also older and harder, more jaded by the experiences she has had between the two games. In *The Last of Us*, Ellie is initially introduced as a young, relatively non-threatening girl, in need of help and protection as she is escorted out of the city. Outside of the city Ellie, Joel and Tess encounter guards that scan them for infection, at which point Ellie lashes out and attacks them. After the encounter, Joel and Tess discover that Ellie has an infected bite mark on her arm, which instantly transforms her into a potentially deadly threat, until she reveals that the bite is old and she is actually immune. In both *BioShock Infinite: Burial at Sea* and *Dishonored 2*, the daughters have grown since the end of their previous games, and they are both adults in their early twenties by the time they become playable protagonists. Both Elizabeth and Emily show clear signs of aging, with more adult features, proportions and dress that reduce their more youthful appearance in earlier games.

In essence, the aesthetic design of the daughters in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* is composed of and complicated by multiple contrasting elements. While the daughters are initially designed to appear young, wide-eyed, waifish and naive, their appearances also change throughout the game to reflect the impact that the violent settings of their games have on them. Similarly, their designs are

meant to convey a certain amount of dependence on their fathers for protection, while also suggesting that they are capable of extreme violence once they become playable characters. In the next section, I will discuss the way that the daughters' mechanics operate, allowing them to function both as sidekicks dependent on their fathers and as eventual playable protagonists, typically by learning their own violent skills from their fathers.

Behaviour and Mechanics

As initially non-playable characters, the girls mostly have either an artificial intelligence controlling their actions (like Ellie and Elizabeth, who participate in gameplay) or their role is scripted (like Clem and Emily). As such, their roles in the games differ slightly, until they become playable characters in their own right. Companions can be cumbersome or difficult to work with in video games — often getting in the way, trapping players in rooms and forcing restarts, delaying progress, or being attacked by enemies and needing rescue. Ken Levine, director of *BioShock Infinite*, argues that "there [are] not a lot of great AI companions," in games and that they are generally not designed to be of assistance to players (Yin-Poole, 2012). As a result, characters like Elizabeth and Ellie were designed to be helpful companions, whose contribution to the game is positive overall. Elizabeth provides useful secondary strategies and supplies healing potions and ammunition; Ellie often throws bricks and bottles to distract enemies, jumps on enemies, shoots from a safe vantage point to provide cover and occasionally stabs an enemy to assist Joel. According to Ken Levine, "there are a lot of little machines running Elizabeth's behaviour that work very hard to keep her out of your way, to keep her as a partner and not a hindrance" (Yin-Poole, 2012). In contrast, Clem and Emily are largely removed from the position of sidekick, requiring no artificial intelligence or rescuing outside of the game's main plot. Both regularly provide scripted assistance, like Lee boosting Clementine through a window while searching for supplies (an opening which is only big enough for her) or Emily revealing to Corvo that she knows a secret escape tunnel from the Golden Cat. Nonetheless, as the games progress each of the girls gains new knowledge, experiences, weapons and skills, all of which become evident when they later become playable characters.

Violence is an important part of the daughters' mechanical behaviours, both as sidekicks and protagonists. Like their fathers, the girls have a variety of weapons and abilities available to them as well as a range of combat options, often including stealth and non-lethal options, and each possesses differing levels of agency within the story. For example, Elizabeth can create "tears" in space and time that affect the game environment by bringing through weapons and tools for combat scenarios. However, she does not create these tears without the player's input and thus, has no real control over her powers within the context of the *BioShock Infinite*. Later, during the game's DLC *Burial at Sea*, Elizabeth becomes the main playable character and gains control over the tears. However, she is also limited to predominantly non-lethal attacks. For example, using the air-grabber she is unable to kill enemies, in stark contrast to Booker's use of the same tool, which featured intensely violent and gore-filled takedown animations. In contrast to Elizabeth, Ellie, controlled by the game's programming, will engage in combat when attacked and generally fight back without input or control from the player.[10] In *Dishonored 2*, Emily has the ability to accept or reject the same supernatural powers that were once presented to her father and either choice dramatically impacts gameplay. In the first game, Corvo receives his powers from the game's supernatural entity, the Outsider, who often grants supernatural gifts to worshipers or individuals that he finds interesting. In *Dishonored 2*, players (as either Corvo or Emily) have the opportunity to accept or reject the Outsider's offer. Without powers, the game tends to be much more difficult and harder to navigate. Corvo will receive a similar set of powers to those from the first game, while Emily gets an entirely new and different set.

When they become playable characters, the daughters have essentially the same mechanics as their fathers, with minor changes that reflect differences in their abilities — such as Elizabeth's skills in *Burial at Sea* skewing more towards stealthy gameplay than direct conflict. Overall, the girls are dependent on the same violent actions as their fathers, both to protect themselves and others in their care. On the one hand, this is partly because it is easier to recycle the same mechanics as the fathers from a game design perspective, but narratively, this is because they still inhabit the same disastrous and post-

[10] Combat is triggered by the player engaging with or being identified by enemies, but otherwise the player does not control Ellie's movements or reactions.

apocalyptic worlds; like their fathers, violence is necessary for the daughters' survival. It is further compounded because, as the daughters become playable protagonists, they usually lose access to their fathers (and fathers' abilities). In *The Last of Us*, Ellie becomes playable after Joel is injured, which forces her to defend and care for him, as well as herself. During her period as a playable character, in both *The Last of Us* and its DLC *Left Behind*, Ellie attempts to obtain antibiotics to treat Joel's injury. She is forced to defend herself and Joel from both human and infected enemies using the same level of violence as Joel did earlier in the game, with only minor differences between her ability and his. At the start of *Dishonored 2*, if players choose Emily as their protagonist, Corvo is left as a stone statue in the throne room until Emily has the ability to save him (or not, depending on player choice) at the end of the game. In *Burial at Sea*, Booker dies before Elizabeth takes over as the protagonist and in *The Walking Dead*, Lee dies at the end of the first game, leaving Clementine as the playable protagonist of the game's second season. Each of the daughters not only uses similar powers and a similar level of violence as their fathers, but also shows that they are learning from and inheriting their fathers' abilities, which will be explored in the next section alongside other examples of their character progression.

Consequently, the daughters' behaviours and mechanics differ little from their fathers, requiring the same level of skill and violence, typically having access to the same kinds of weapons and tools, and involving roughly the same kind of gameplay. It can be argued that the reason for this general repetition of mechanics between the fathers and daughters is due to the developers reusing, but mildly altering, their skills due to the game's combat system already being in place. Alternatively, on a narrative level the adoption of the same mechanics as their fathers suggests that the daughters are learning and developing their own abilities based on their exposure to the fathers. In chapter three, I discuss in more detail the way that *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* all indicate that the daughters have learned how to be violent survivors from their fathers. However, in the next section, I will discuss how the daughter's learning is expressed through their progression in the games and their adaptation to the violent and dangerous settings that they inhabit.

Progression

By the time the daughters have become playable protagonists in their games, they have learned a good amount from their fathers and their appearances have better adapted to their game worlds. Unlike their fathers, the daughters begin their character progression before they are playable characters and continue to develop during their own stories. As they accompany their fathers during the early games, the daughters all observe and absorb information and skills through their interactions. Later, they continue to develop this knowledge as part of the player's progression through the game, learning new skills, picking up new weapons and exploring new locations. In the context of the game's mechanics, it is more straightforward for players to continue using similar sets of abilities rather than learning an entire new set of rules, and simpler to adapt the original gameplay, animations, dialogue and other elements than it is to completely redesign the game. However, the choice to recycle these mechanics also communicates the idea that the daughters learn from and follow in their fathers' footsteps by adopting many similar traits. Additionally, in contrast to the paternal characters, whose appearance is meant to communicate their specific role in the game world, the daughters' physical appearance changes throughout the game to indicate the more important impact of the game world on *the daughters*.

Some transformations, like that of Elizabeth in *BioShock Infinite*, are quick and explicit, while others take place gradually over one or more games in the franchise. After being kidnapped and once more rescued by Booker, and her subsequent murder of the rebel leader Daisy Fitzroy, Elizabeth changes dresses, largely to indicate that she has experienced a personal, emotional change in character. In a new dress, no longer ripped to expose her underclothes and no longer covered in blood, Elizabeth asks Booker: "How do you wash away the things that you've done?" She outwardly displays that she has been traumatized by the experience. Later, in *Burial at Sea*, Elizabeth's dress deteriorates as she explores the city of Rapture while it collapses into deadly chaos. As she fights through encounters with enemies, she steadily becomes dirtier and more bedraggled to reflect the impact that the story and environment are having on her. Elizabeth shows that she has learned from her father during *Burial at Sea* when she demonstrates knowledge of weapons abilities that she was never allowed during *BioShock Infinite*. During

BioShock Infinite, Elizabeth's participation is largely non-violent, leaving most of the killing to Booker. Her main contribution is through supernatural powers, by creating tears, and her violent murder of Daisy Fitzroy. But in *Burial at Sea*, after Booker is killed, Elizabeth takes up the same weapons that he used and proves her competence with them as she assumes similar styles of combat and exploration to Booker's. As the game progresses, she even adopts the same supernatural aides that Booker used earlier in *Burial at Sea* and during *BioShock Infinite* — "plasmids" that allow for temporary elementally-charged powers used in combat and puzzle solving.

In *The Walking Dead*, Clementine learns from Lee that she should keep her hair short to avoid being grabbed by humans or walkers. In later seasons of the game, Clementine not only keeps her hair short, but also comments multiple times on her hair in conversations and mentions where she learned it. Through Lee, the player's actions create lasting changes to Clementine's character. From Lee, she can also learn to avoid cities and to shoot a gun. Numerous parts of Clementine's personality and actions stem from things she learned from Lee, with perhaps the most important example coming at the end of *The Walking Dead Season Two*, when Clementine is presented with a choice much like Lee's at the start of the first game. After their group is scattered, Clementine adopts an orphaned baby, A.J., belonging to one of their members who died and the two remain together through the rest of the games in the series. Given all that Clementine has learned from Lee, she is ultimately quite successful in caring for A.J. and the two survive together for many years.

Dishonored 2 starts with a tutorial section that is framed as a training session for Emily, run by Corvo that indicates he has been training her for years with the same movement and combat skills that he possesses. During the tutorial section, Emily is tested in her stealthiness, stamina and combat abilities by Corvo's obstacle course. Compared to the young girl of the first *Dishonored* game, she is quick, smooth, talented and refined, showing abilities that are a match for her father's and which clearly mimic his own fighting styles. Later, she has the opportunity to obtain supernatural powers like her father's, with slight differences that allow for more varied gameplay, but are otherwise relatively analogous between the two characters. In *Dishonored 2,* Emily's personal style has also evolved to be much more like her father's, with similar tailoring, cut and colour,

to reflect the personal changes she has experienced between games. According to game designer Sébastien Mitton, Emily's outfit was designed for a "confident young Empress at 25 years old… [who is] also a thrill-seeker at night who runs through alleys and over rooftops" (Monnet, 2016). In essence, her outfit was designed to reflect her growth from the young girl of the first game, to an empress and assassin in the second as well as being designed to draw parallels between her and Corvo.

In *The Last of Us*, Ellie begins the game as a companion who hides and does not engage with enemies, usually tucked close to Joel or Tess behind cover, but as the game progresses she becomes bolder, defending her companions by throwing bricks or bottles to distract enemies. In later stages, she becomes an active support by leaping onto the enemy's backs to stab them or providing covering fire from a distance while Joel eliminates enemies up close. However, the clearest example of Ellie's mechanical progression can be seen during her DLC, *Left Behind* which alternates between two timelines: Ellie before she was bitten, exploring an abandoned mall with her friend Riley and Ellie exploring a different abandoned mall in search of first aid for Joel after he is incapacitated during the Fall chapter of the game. In the *before* sections, she and Riley largely avoid combat, except when they play a game of water pistol tag against each other. In the present timeline, Ellie exhibits a multitude of skills against enemies, including different kinds of movement, weapons, tools, and improvised explosives — none of which she was acquainted with in the earlier timeline. Perhaps the most obvious example is the game's "listening" ability, which characters use to triangulate the location of enemies based on their noise and movement. In *Left Behind*'s flashback scenes with Ellie and Riley, Ellie does not have this ability, but in the game's current sections, after her exposure to Joel and his use of the listening ability, Ellie is able to employ this skill to keep track of enemies. There are also numerous scenes in which Ellie is explicitly taught a skill by Joel. After their escape from an infested hotel in Pittsburgh, Ellie and Joel find themselves outnumbered by enemies. Despite his earlier insistence that Ellie not be allowed a gun, Joel sees the necessity if they are going to make it through the blockade ahead and gives her a hunting rifle, with a quick tutorial on its use. Later, during the Winter chapter, when players are controlling Ellie, she continues to use a hunting rifle that she steals from David, with competence, to defend herself and David from an

onslaught of infected enemies. Ellie's aesthetic change is also gradual, matching the game's linear narrative extended over a full year. Her outfits change with the seasons — from a t-shirt during the summer chapter, to a lighter jacket in fall, to a heavier coat in winter.

Conclusion

In an interview with VentureBeat, Neil Druckmann points out that their ultimate goal with the creation of *The Last of Us* was to "create a story with dual protagonists" and "to build an entire game around this concept of meeting a character really early on and forming a bond that would evolve and shift as you see all the facets that a deep relationship between two people can have" (Takahashi, 2013). As demonstrated in this chapter, the developers of *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* all designed these games to emphasize the father-daughter relationships that exist at their cores. Emerging from the complex system of a video game, all of the elements present here — from aesthetic design to mechanics to narrative — help to produce a collection of stories that are ultimately about the relationships between video game fathers and their daughters. By examining these different design elements as applied to both the fathers and daughters, it becomes clear that they were not designed as separate characters, but rather to work as a system.

In their aesthetic design, behaviours and mechanics and progression, video game fathers present a very specific image of fatherhood, tied together with a complex combination of hegemonic masculinity and postfeminist interpretations of paternal characters. Ultimately, the design of the fathers does little to challenge the deeply ingrained pattern of hypermasculine, violent male protagonists. However, by centering dual protagonists who build off of each other to create stronger, more fully rounded narratives, they present the potential for subversive and interesting changes that can be seen in the design and development of the daughters. Video game fatherhood becomes a more complex iteration of traditional masculinity that exhibits a stronger emotional affect and centers the importance of their relationships with their daughters. However, this relationship also shows the clear impact of paternalism, dependency and victimization that continues to affect the daughters, despite their more complex and emotionally

intelligent fathers. As a result, there are elements of the fathers' designs that are more positive and feminist approaches to the traditionally toxic character tropes commonly associated with video games' male protagonists. Alternatively, there are also numerous design concepts that are applied to the daughters in negative ways that are not negated by their eventual roles as playable protagonists.

Chapter 2: Video game fatherhood

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the emergence of fatherhood as a core thematic element of *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, including the performance of fatherhood as a component of often violent game play, which is often the result of repeated themes and settings that are shared between the games. In the previous chapter, I provided a detailed description of the way that video game fathers are designed and implemented. I will focus on providing context for the emergence of "daddified" games in a postfeminist media landscape. Fatherhood as a core component of video game design has emerged through a combination of socio-political issues and feminist criticism, both of which resulted in the reimagining of stereotypical male video game protagonists. However, this reimagining of the male hero as a father originates in film and television (Bruzzi, 2005; Hamad, 2014).

First, I will discuss Hannah Hamad's (2014) concept of "postfeminist fatherhood," which she provides to describe the ways in which modern U.S. cinema prioritizes stories about paternity, which I extend to use in my exploration of fatherhood in video games. Throughout this chapter, I argue that the way fatherhood is depicted in video games formed, in part, as a response to feminist criticism of video games. As a consequence of the pluralisation of masculinity, fatherhood became a central topic of film and television following the second World War and has continued to dominate, particularly in the action and adventure genres of film (Bruzzi, 2005; Hamad, 2014).

Second, I will focus on Mark Pajor (2014) who describes the emergence of fatherhood's popularity in video games using the term "paternal masculinity," which highlights the ways that masculinity in video games has become tied together with the performance of fatherhood. Since video games often rely on violent mechanics for their performance of masculinity (Burrill, 2008), then fatherhood as an aspect of masculinity also becomes tied to violent mechanics. As a result, violent video games make (often inadvertent) arguments about what fatherhood looks like within the context of video games.

Third, I will discuss the role that violence plays in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* and how it relates to masculinity and fatherhood, and our conceptions of both in popular culture. In particular, I will discuss the major shift in U.S. cinema that occurred after September 11th (9/11) terrorist attacks, as films began to focus heavily on natural disasters, dystopian plots and post-apocalyptic environments (Faludi, 2007; Hamad, 2014). As a subset of this discussion, I will discuss why video games also took an interest in these dangerous, apocalyptic themes, which I argue allow video games to more easily justify the use of violent paternal masculinity, as it becomes a necessity to protect the fathers and their daughters from harm.

Fourth, I will examine the performativity of fatherhood, in the sense that it has become a kind of procedural interaction in games. Rather than games simply featuring a story *about* fatherhood, their interactive nature means that players are an active participant in the production of fatherhood within the game. That is, fatherhood becomes an action that players can perform. Since video games rely so heavily on violence, as discussed throughout this thesis, the performance of fatherhood becomes inexorably linked to the performance of violence in games. If violence is necessary for the fathers to protect their daughters in dangerous environments, then fatherhood itself becomes dependent on violence in order for video game fathers to express love for their daughters.

Finally, in order to examine how performative fatherhood shapes the narratives of *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* I will discuss the importance of fathers' successes and failures and the role that they play in these games. Video game mechanics are often structured around the ideas of success and failure, and often used to motivate players (Juul, 2013). However, in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* success and failure also factor into the games' narratives, motivating not only the players, but the fathers themselves. Specifically, failure in these games becomes indicative of failed fatherhood and typically the only way to perform fatherhood successfully in video games is through the performance of violence that is deemed "correct" within the context of a specific game. Success and failure are often integral to games, but for *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite,*

Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* what is normally a mechanical feature becomes essential to the narrative experience of the game.

Postfeminist Fatherhood

Paternally-signified characters are ubiquitous in film and television, having become a virtual staple of U.S. cinema in recent years (Hamad, 2014). Citing examples ranging from romantic comedies like *Sleepless in Seattle* (Ephron, 1993) to action films like *Commando* (Lester, 1985), Hamad highlights the pattern of paternal narratives emerging in film throughout the end of the 20th century. Although narratives about fatherhood have been common throughout cinematic history, Hamad argues that fatherhood's current prevalence places it as the dominant paradigm of masculinity in mainstream U.S. cinema. Recently, male action heroes are less likely to be suave, womanizing bachelors, and more likely to be single fathers, who must balance their heroic world-saving actions with the day-to-day realities of parenting. Although these paternally-signified protagonists vary somewhat, depending on factors like genre or narrative, they are all positioned as the heroes of their respective stories (Hamad, 2014). Since their fatherhood is not a background trait, but rather a defining feature of their characters and inextricably linked to their heroic actions within the story, fathers become emblematic of an ideal form of masculinity, which creates a paradigm that Hamad calls "postfeminist fatherhood" (p.2). Postfeminist fatherhood emerged as a common cinematic theme in the later part of the 20th century and continues to be popular today. Consequently, I argue that the dominant paradigm of postfeminist fatherhood has also appeared in many contemporary, narrative-based video games that, like cinema, prioritize heroic fathers as their main protagonists.

Postfeminist fatherhood has several important elements. First, Hamad argues that postfeminist fatherhood emerged, in part, from second wave feminism advocating for more active parental roles for fathers. That is, second wave feminists commonly wanted men to be more involved fathers, active in their children's lives particularly on an emotional level (Bruzzi, 2005). Protagonists whose masculine identities were primarily defined by their roles as fathers were expected to display a new "sensitive masculinity," that emphasized a "strong/sensitive dualism" (Hamad, 2014, p. 15). Postfeminist

fatherhood began to focus more on "melancholic fathers and their emotional trajectories, as they transcend grief and/or cement bonds with their children" and on their roles as single (often widowed) fathers (Hamad, 2014, p. 24). Since the fathers were now responsible for their children's emotional well-being — previously considered a maternal responsibility — mothers instead became a hindrance to fathers bonding with their children. Consequently, this allowed postfeminist fatherhood to appropriate or marginalize motherhood, frequently erasing mothers from the narrative entirely (Hamad, 2014). In chapter three, I will discuss in detail the way that mothers, and other maternally-signified characters are erased from the narratives of video games in general, as well as *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*.

Many film scholars argue that fatherhood, in action films in particular, is a reactionary construction of a masculine identity that evokes some of those common ideals of second wave feminism, like more involved participation in fatherhood, while still allowing for the rejection of further feminist criticism (Bruzzi, 2005; Hamad, 2014). As McRobbie (2007) explains in *Interrogating Postfeminism*, "elements of contemporary popular culture are perniciously effective in regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism" (p. 27). In *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* the fathers are more emotionally engaged with their daughters and do take on the responsibility of their care, often after profoundly traumatizing experiences — like the death of Joel's daughter Sara, Empress Jessamine's assassination and Corvo's imprisonment, Clementine saving Lee from a walker attack or Booker's post-war traumas. As a result, they are representative of more emotionally engaged fathers. However, the games are also violent, with each of the daughters regularly threatened or attacked so that their role in the narrative often emphasizes their victimization. Furthermore, mothers are erased from the games almost entirely and, when they are present, they are most often antagonists. In order to prioritize video game fatherhood in the narrative, mothers and daughters are marginalized. Or, according to Hamad, postfeminist fatherhood "offers little challenge to the status quo, while tacitly accounting for itself in disingenuously feminist terms" (2014, p.11). In essence, postfeminist fatherhood appears on a surface level to have taken feminist criticism into

account, through more complex male characters who have embraced fatherhood, while still featuring many other commonly criticized elements, like excessive violence, the victimization of women and the symbolic annihilation of mothers.

One of the main ways that this status quo is maintained is through the concept of "heroic fatherhood," described in the previous chapter's *Jurassic Park* example. Not only are fathers now heroic characters, as with Dr. Grant in *Jurassic Park*, but their heroism is indicated by their performance of fatherhood (Hamad, 2014). Fathers must do more than simply save the day, they must also engage with the emotional needs of their children, providing comfort and support after the traumatizing experiences that required the fathers' heroic actions in the first place. However, these new film fathers still exhibit many different tropes indicative of toxic masculinity, which are excused or justified by their heroic actions. Fathers in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are all similarly configured, with the games highlighting their emotional connection with their daughters, often in the face of great trauma and loss, alongside violent gameplay mechanics and environments. Therefore, video game fathers end up being represented both in terms of their more "sensitive" emotional engagement with their children and their ability to enact drastic violence on behalf of their children (often with both being framed as positive traits).

Fatherhood in contemporary popular culture is not an ideologically neutral trait. Rather, it demonstrates ideas in popular culture about what fathers and fatherhood look like, how fathers should act and what role they are expected to play in the family. As argued by film and television, contemporary fatherhood is often dependent on "heroic" violence alongside their new-found emotional connections with their children (Hamad, 2014). In the next section, I broaden this discussion to include video game fatherhood, which I argue manifests similarly to the postfeminist fatherhood found in film and television.

Paternal Masculinity

In the Winter chapter of *The Last of Us*, Joel awakens from his injury in the previous section of the game to find Ellie missing and stumbles out into the start of a blizzard to search for her, where he encounters men from the group that took her as they

in turn search the area for him. At the end of the section, Joel takes two of them hostage for a session of cold and emotionless torture to learn where they have taken her. He sinks a knife into one man's knee before choking him, then beats the other man with a piece of pipe, even after they confess everything they know. Throughout the "Pittsburgh" section of the game, this degree of violence is enacted on hapless "tourists" by the gang that controls the city. Joel and Ellie witness people tortured and gunned down in the streets with their corpses stripped of their belongings and tossed into discarded piles. In one scene, Joel even admits that he participated in similar hunting groups, attacking and robbing innocent people. Later, we discover that the group that has taken Ellie adopted cannibalism during a hard winter and have meat lockers full of human bodies (a fate that awaits Joel and Ellie if they are captured). Violence like this is common in games — and pervasive throughout *The Last of Us* — when enacted by video game fathers, this violence is reimagined as an acceptable necessity, so long as it is for the sake of protecting their children. As seen in this example, although Joel regularly performs a similar (or even the same) degree of violence against other characters in the game, his actions are valorized by the game, because they are performed in order to keep Ellie safe.

Pajor (2014) terms this kind of protective video game fatherhood "paternal masculinity," basing the concept off of the idea of "heroic protection discourse" — a term coined to describe masculine identities that are steeped in violence and aggression in order to protect others. Like Hamad's "heroic father," paternal masculinity is an identity built upon the father's ability to protect his children. Pajor's (2014) use of "paternal" in paternal masculinity refers specifically to the idea of *paternalism* and the way that colonizing powers frame themselves as protectors and defenders of colonized groups, while in reality they are the ones who benefit from the relationship. In essence, Pajor (2014) argues that heroic fatherhood is not an altruistic action, but rather exists to make those performing fatherhood feel better about themselves and their place in society.

Paternal masculinity also allows video game fathers to conflate violence with protection and other heroic actions, so that violent masculinity — the kind commonly associated with the "traditional iconography" of video games (Kirkland, 2009, p. 165) — can be used to "prove" paternal love (Pajor, 2014). In the above example from *The Last of Us*, Joel's actions as he kills and tortures his way through enemies are justified by the

game, because he is attempting to find and rescue Ellie. In previous chapters of the game, Joel had not yet acknowledged that he cares about Ellie like he cared for his daughter Sarah. Thus, this section of the game not only reinforces the defensibility of Joel's violent actions, it also connects them to his love for Ellie. Furthermore, each time Ellie is victimized by the narrative and Joel rescues her, his negative emotions about failing to save Sara are addressed and thus, he benefits as a character from this resolution. Ultimately, *The Last of Us* uses Ellie's suffering to help Joel learn to be a better father, with his character growth coming at Ellie's expense. As Bruzzi (2005) describes it, developing fatherhood is used as a "vehicle for teaching a man how to feel" (p. 157). Paternal masculinity attempts to frame video game fathers' violent actions as protective and therefore positive, while the fathers benefit by having themselves presented as crucial to their daughters' survival. Combined with Hamad's concept of "heroic fatherhood," paternal masculinity demonstrates that violence, heroism and fatherhood are all entangled in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*.

Importantly, violence is vital to the successful performance of paternal masculinity in video games. Pajor (2014) argues that "by placing violence in the context of protection, narratives serve to conceptualize violence as productive rather than destructive" (p. 128). When video game fathers kill waves of enemies to rescue their daughters, they are triumphant within the game's narrative. They have successfully "proven" their love for their daughters. Rather than focusing on the destruction their actions cause, the games present these actions as successes that allow the player to progress through the story. Later in this chapter, I will discuss in detail the way that video game fathers' actions often fall into a success/failure dichotomy that prioritizes violence as a marker of success. However, for now the focus is on the importance of violence in defining paternal masculinity.

Accordingly, Pajor (2014) argues that violent paternal masculinity gives men "a way to define themselves as crucial to society" (p. 129). Pajor relates this idea to "masculinity in crisis," a concept that emerged to describe the modern disenfranchisement of men (Bruzzi, 2005; Robinson, 2000). Some scholars argue that masculinity has experienced a "crisis" as it relates to feminism and shifting socioeconomic circumstances, which have subverted the previously central role that

masculinity played in society (Robinson, 2000; Swenson, 2014). Bruzzi (2005) argues that it was this emphasis on crisis in the 1990s that helped to propel the popularity of the caring and emotionally articulate father as a masculine ideal, by trying to renegotiate the role of fathers in the family. Pajor (2014) elaborates that, in the context of paternal masculinity, this "crisis" occurs "when men feel the need to prove their identity through violence, but are aware of the moral questionability of that paternal behavior" at which point, "their sense of self is placed in peril" (p. 130). In *Die Tryin'* (2008), Burrill argues that "to a certain extent, masculinity is constantly unstable and in need of 'proving'" (p. 21), which Pajor (2014) argues takes place through the performance of violent paternal masculinity. As I will discuss further in the next section, "masculinity in crisis" also factors into the prevalence of apocalyptic and disastrous settings that allow male protagonists to "reflect and respond to socioeconomic threats to masculinity" (Swenson, 2014, p. 62). Likewise, the violent mechanics that back video game fatherhood support the idea that fathers must react to threats against their children with violence that reinforces their necessity to society. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter Clementine, Ellie, Elizabeth and Emily are all abducted and subsequently rescued. Each time the fathers save their daughters from near death or kidnappings, their position as protector is reaffirmed and they benefit from the daughters' victimization, as it positions the fathers as necessary to their survival. In essence, paternal masculinity's main goal is not protection, but the positive and affirming feelings that arise *for the fathers* from the act of protection. Hence, paternal masculinity attempts to frame itself as a positive force regardless of the oppressive impact that it might have on those under its protection, like the daughters in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* (Pajor, 2014). Paternal masculinity is expressed through violence that is recontextualized as necessary, productive and protective, which allows video game fathers to defend their sense of self, and to define themselves as a positive force, while disregarding any negative impact their actions may have on others.

Paternal masculinity is evident in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* through the fathers' performance of violence in protection of their daughters, which is a core mechanical and narrative feature of each game. Each father's initial motivation centers around the transportation of the daughter from one location to

another and thus they require the father's protection (particularly because the worlds they traverse are so dangerous). Joel's mission in *The Last of Us* is to transport Ellie to the Fireflies' researchers, so that they can use her immunity to develop a vaccine against the game's deadly cordyceps virus. Similarly, in *The Walking Dead* Lee takes on the responsibility of travelling across Georgia with Clementine to reunite her with her parents. *BioShock Infinite* begins with Booker being asked to retrieve Elizabeth and hand her over to his employers to pay off a debt. In *Dishonored*, Corvo seeks to rescue Emily from her kidnappers and install her to the country's throne. On both a mechanical and narrative level, the fathers' respective missions are motivated by protection. In order to deliver their daughters safely to their final destinations, the fathers must commit morally questionable actions but, by making these missions central to the games, protection of the daughters becomes essential to defining the fathers' violent actions as positive and defensible.

Violence

In the first chapter, I briefly discussed the role that violence plays in the construction of paternally-signified characters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. In this section, I will elaborate on violence in these games and further explain the relationship that it has to postfeminist fatherhood and paternal masculinity. In particular, I will discuss the impact that the September 11th (9/11) terrorist attacks in the U.S. had on masculinity in cinema and the prevalence of disastrous and post-apocalyptic environments in games that help to justify the games' use of violent paternal masculinity.

Violent game mechanics are common across many different genres and play styles, often considered an accepted part of game design by developers. *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* all prominently feature violent mechanics that are largely unavoidable. In the previous chapter, I described many of the available mechanics in each game, but in this section, I would like to emphasize that regardless of the surface level mechanics, each game features an inescapable level of violence. Even in *Dishonored*, the only game here that features dedicated "non-lethal" gameplay, the player is still capable of choking people into unconsciousness. Also, if the

player had already knocked them out and they were killed (by falling in deep water, for example) the death does not count against the player's lethality, despite the player being directly responsible for their death. Furthermore, *Dishonored*'s non-lethal options for completing major missions are often extremely violent, even if that violence is not directly committed by the player. For example, the mission "Lady Boyle's Last Party" asks the player to eliminate (either through assassination or non-lethally) the correct Lady Boyle (out of the three similarly dressed and masked sisters). For the non-lethal elimination, the player must incapacitate the correct Lady Boyle and deliver her to her stalker, Lord Brisby. Although this ending is non-lethal, it is not non-violent and has unsettling implications about Lady Boyle's fate and the suggestion of future violence. In a later mission, Corvo can hand the Pendleton brothers over to a gang that will cut out their tongues and force them into hard labour. Each of these options count as "low chaos" and, despite being extremely violent, are used to accomplish *Dishonored*'s "good" ending.

Although each game also includes other mechanics like puzzle solving, terrain traversal, exploration, and conversations or dialogue, violent mechanics remain necessary to completing the game. In *The Walking Dead*, Lee is sometimes capable of diffusing fights before they can break out into violence or occasionally finding ways around dangerous herds of walkers. However, the game features numerous instances of scripted violence, with no alternatives. In fact, violence is a common part of the game's binary choice sequences, in which the player is regularly asked to choose who to kill or save in a particular confrontation. Even in scenes that are otherwise calm and non-violent, violence itself still dominates the situation. Lee asks to trim Clementine's hair after an incident where an opponent grabbed it. He points out that, given their current circumstances, it is far safer for her to have short hair that cannot be grabbed. It is a peaceful scene set in a moving train car, with autumnal trees passing in the background and a quiet, friendly conversation between Clementine and Lee. He asserts the need to cut her hair short for safety and, although she pouts and complains that she will "look like a boy," she acquiesces and allows the trim. However, the contents of the conversation heavily feature discussions of violence, both the actual violence committed by the man who tried to grab Clementine and theoretical future violence by walkers and other assailants. Eventually,

this conversation turns to Clementine questioning Lee about his murder charge. On the surface, this is a positive, uplifting scene that exhibits Lee's active, emotional engagement with Clementine and cements the familial relationship that has emerged between them. It is also a scene with great emotional importance and impact for Clementine, as she repeatedly references it during future games. However, the scene is still ultimately steeped in violence.

In contrast, *BioShock Infinite* is a linear story with a very fixed narrative that still emphasizes the necessity and ubiquity of violence. As a first person shooter, the game's propensity for big action set pieces, weapons and shooting are a given. However, the game's narrative elements support the necessity of violence too. For example, at the game's end, after Booker has realized that the game's discord was caused by his own actions — or at least those of an alternate universe version of himself — he allows himself to be killed by multiple different Elizabeths. During the baptism that initially led to him becoming the game's main villain, Zachary Comstock, Elizabeths from several different timelines drown him in order to stop the cycle (in a violent scene that is somewhat unnerving from a first person perspective). Essentially, the game makes the argument that killing its player protagonist is the only way to reset the timelines so that the villain does not rise to power again. However, the violent actions of Booker and the Elizabeths ultimately have little impact, and the future addition of the downloadable content *Burial at Sea* simply reinforces that violence is an inescapable part of the story, as the city in which it is set almost immediately descends into violent chaos.

Although some violence can be avoided in *The Last of Us* by playing stealthily, violence as a whole is unavoidable in the game, as it is a core component of the experience of fatherhood in the game. Inevitably, at the end of each major section of the game, there are scripted sequences where the player triggers major enemies, falls into a trap, or gets locked in a room and there are no opportunities to avoid these fights or to circumvent the violence that is necessary to ensure Joel and Ellie's survival. Similarly to *BioShock Infinite*, *The Last of Us* depicts a world in which violence is entirely unavoidable. Furthermore, the game makes the level of violence feel natural and suited to the world and its characters. Early in the game, while trying to find a car battery in an abandoned school, Joel, Ellie and their temporary companion Bill are locked in the

gymnasium with one of the game's big boss enemies. Playing through this section is a frantic experience with limited supplies, nowhere to run or hide and an enemy with ranged attacks that explode to cloud the player's vision and the ability to kill the player instantly if it catches them. As a result, most players' immediate reaction is to fight back with the weapons at hand, and to try to get Joel, Ellie and Bill out alive. Not only does *The Last of Us* take place in a game world filled with violence and danger, it makes the setting and the players' actions feel natural and offers no real criticism of the game's continual violence.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, violence is a key mechanical and narrative feature of *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* that is justified in myriad different ways. Paternal masculinity supports the use of violence to demonstrate a fathers' love in video games, while also allowing for the fathers' personal growth at their daughters' expense. Violence is built into the experience and performance of video game fatherhood. Another way that *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* account for their overabundance of violence is by setting each game in a disastrous, dystopian or post-apocalyptic world. Since players become immersed in these dangerous environments, violent reactions become a natural and accepted part of the game's mechanics and narrative. By situating each game in a violent setting, the fathers' violence on behalf of their daughters is further justified as a necessity. In the next section, I argue that the popularity of these settings for explorations of paternal masculinity is a result of major cultural shifts that relate to "masculinity in crisis" and the 9/11 terror attacks.

Apocalypses, Dystopias and Natural Disasters

Popular culture, particularly in the U.S., saw a major shift towards media that emphasized apocalypses, dystopias and natural disasters after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001 (Faludi, 2007; Hamad, 2014). Other disasters further exacerbated this shift in the following years, such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the South East Asian tsunami in 2006, by keeping the looming threat of disaster present in the news cycle (Hamad, 2014). Kaplan (2016) argues that 9/11 had a traumatic effect on Western culture in general, which has been reflected in the popularity of stories of disaster and collapse in modern media. Media in the U.S. began to focus on "protective paternalism" (Hamad, 2014, p.

54) that returned to "formerly outmoded masculine traits of protectionism and violent vigilantism" (Godfrey & Hamad, 2011, p. 157). In addition, the period following 9/11 saw an increased backlash against feminism that fuelled the emergence of postfeminist storytelling in Western popular culture (Faludi, 2007; Hamad, 2014). As discussed by Pajor (2014), one of the major crises that masculinity faces is the desire to reconcile those outmoded traits of masculinity — like the desire to reinforce their sense of self with violence — and the moral questionability of their actions. As a result, games can address these contrasts by establishing settings that encourage violence, like disasters and apocalypses, and then putting the fathers and their daughters in life-threatening situations. Narratives like these, that centralize heroic, protective fatherhood by threatening the fathers and their daughters serve to recontextualize the fathers' violence as justifiable, because it is a protective, paternal force (Hamad, 2014). *The Walking Dead* provides a clear example of this in the aforementioned train car conversation between Lee and Clementine, during which the following conversation can occur:[11]

Lee: Killing is bad, no matter what.

Clementine: But you do it now to protect yourself — and to protect me.

Lee: It doesn't make it good.

Clementine: But you have to.

Lee: I do it because it's necessary. And because walkers aren't people.

Although Lee is confirming here that he believes that killing is bad, no matter what, he does not grapple with the morality of the situation. He states that the killing and violence are necessary for their survival and, furthermore, dismisses potential criticism by pointing out that "walkers aren't people" and, therefore, violence against them is acceptable. Notably, this conversation does not address the violence and killing that Lee and the group have committed against living people throughout the game. However, this example clearly demonstrates the necessity of *The Walking Dead*'s apocalyptic setting in justifying Lee's violent actions throughout the game. By emphasizing apocalypses, dystopias and disasters, narratives that feature paternal masculinity as a core component can create an environment in which violence is easily justified.

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[11] Out of four available dialogue options.

Another way that violence is justified in these and similar settings, is by encouraging "survivalist" narratives which, Swenson (2014) argues, emphasize the breakdown of society in order to create male protagonists that can "reflect and respond to socioeconomic threats to masculinity in post-9/11 America" (p. 62). Due to their disastrous and dangerous environments, violence becomes "socially sanctioned" in contemporary games (Ouellette & Thompson, 2017, p. 22). Not only do these narratives focus on the collapse of society, they center on the idea of survival through violence, which allows male protagonists to restore a specific and seemingly decentralized hegemonic masculinity from before the "crisis of masculinity" (Swenson, 2014). In his analysis of *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010) Pajor (2014) argues that the game skirts the question of the morality of paternal masculinity by presenting society as a hindrance to Ethan Mars rescuing his son. In games that feature disastrous, apocalyptic or dystopian settings, he argues that video fatherhood evades the same questions of morality by "dismantling society itself" (p. 135). In essence, survival narratives provide access to a more stable masculine identity that predates the feelings of disenfranchised masculinity that emerged after 9/11, where the moral questionability of their violent actions no longer matters, because those actions are necessary to their survival, and that of their daughters.

Evidence of this narrative shift can be seen in numerous games published over the last 20 years, but particularly in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, due to their emphasis on paternal masculinity, violence and dystopian or apocalyptic game worlds. Although these settings are popular in games, the ways in which they are utilized by *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* reflect both a reliance on violent gameplay mechanics (and the games' general need to justify their use) and a change in the landscape of popular culture. In the following paragraphs, I will describe the settings of each of these games and elaborate on the ways in which the setting is used to justify violence and paternal masculinity.

Both *The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead* take place in post-apocalyptic environments that feature zombie or zombie-like non-human (or perhaps ex-human) enemies that, notably, eliminate any possibility of peaceful coexistence. In contrast to human enemies, who could theoretically be reasoned with, monstrous enemies create a seemingly uncomplicated target for violence. Krzywinska (2008) calls zombies the "ideal

enemy" in video games and describes them as "strong, relentless, and already dead; they look spectacularly horrific; and they invite the player to blow them away without guilt or a second thought" (p. 153). Not only do the zombies as enemies allow for unquestioned violence by the player protagonists, they also create an environment where violence is the only option for dealing with them. In contrast, human enemies in *The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead* do present a theoretical alternative to violence for conflict resolution. That is, human enemies could theoretically be reasoned with, while zombies cannot. Nonetheless, human enemies are typically dealt with using the same violence that is used against the zombie enemies. Often, this is supported by the environment itself, by putting the games' protagonists against other humans in the game's post-apocalyptic setting in a constant competition for survival — food, safety, shelter and supplies are all scarce in these environments. As a result, the post-apocalyptic worlds in *The Last of Us* and *The Walking Dead* provide reasons for the player protagonists to kill both the zombified enemies by making them uncomplicated enemies, and human opponents, because they are in conflict with the player protagonists.

The Last of Us and *The Walking Dead* are also similar, due to both games' post-apocalyptic settings impacting their respective protagonists. At the start of *The Last of Us*, Joel is presented as an average, middle class white man, who is impacted by the game's apocalyptic events in the prologue — the death of his daughter and 20 years of struggling to survive — and becomes the much more violent, grizzled and cynical man that we see for the rest of the game. Likewise, in *The Walking Dead* Lee begins the game with a limited exposure to violence through the murder of his wife's lover, but he is transformed by the game's zombie apocalypse into someone who is better equipped to deal with the violence necessitated by the game world. Considered in the context of the "crisis of masculinity," these transformations by Joel and Lee are part of the reactive, survivalist narratives that demand a particular version of pre-crisis masculinity. Although they were relatively regular modern men before the apocalypse, its presence necessitates that they embrace the demands of violent paternal masculinity in order to ensure their survival and the survival of their daughters.

Similarly, *Dishonored* also features zombie-like enemies, although they are far less common than either walkers or the infected in *The Walking Dead* and *The Last of Us*.

In *Dishonored*, these opponents are "weepers," who are reflective of the social decay of the city due to a combination of plague and political corruption and their numbers within the game are determined by the game's chaos level. At a higher chaos level, with more social unrest, the weepers appear more frequently and are typically more aggressive towards the player. In *Dishonored 2*, after the resolution of the first game's "rat plague," these weepers are replaced with "nest keepers" — humans that have been infected by parasitic bloodflies that force them to protect their nests. Neither weepers nor nest keepers are dead, but both behave similarly to zombie enemies, in that they are relatively mindless, devoted to a particular goal and appear in a state of extreme decay. Compared to the walkers and the infected, the killing of weepers and nest keepers is at least somewhat morally complicated, because they are still living humans, but they are also ultimately doomed to death because of their respective infections.

In contrast with the weepers and nest keepers, the killing of human enemies in both *Dishonored* games is treated with more moral questionability, through a tool players receive called "the Heart," which acts as a sort of literal moral compass. By pointing this mechanically-modified, spirit-possessed heart at other characters that Corvo or Emily encounter during the game, players can learn their thoughts and secrets. For example, when using the heart on guards, the player can learn whether or not the guard regularly feeds stray dogs, abuses his family, or is secretly a serial killer. Ultimately, this tool adds interest to the game world and can help players solve puzzles or uncover secrets that aid their gameplay. However, it can also be used to justify killing other human characters by using those secrets to determine whether they should live or die. Writing for *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*, Nate Crowley (2021) states "I don't have the patience to stick to non-lethality all the time, and so my solution has been to let the Heart decide people's fates for me," a common refrain amongst players of *Dishonored* (para. 6). Although the Heart might provide a player with a reason to not kill one of the side characters they encounter, more often than not it seems that players use the Heart to justify their killing of characters that they think deserve it. One reviewer says, "I do like how it makes it much more tempting to forgo mercy and just dismember these awful people" (Webber, 2017, para. 6). In essence, the Heart gives players a kind of permission to murder the people they encounter on the streets, because the Heart assigns negative traits to them that make that murder

more easily justifiable. Or, as another reviewer says “I can see right into people’s souls; quite useful for a self-appointed judge of humankind” (Lane, 2019, para. 11). On the surface, this seems to add moral complications to players’ choices. However, while weepers and nest keepers make for uncomplicated enemies for the same reasons that zombies do, the Heart gives players a tool that they can use to justify Corvo’s and Emily’s violent actions throughout the game.

In contrast with the previously discussed games, *BioShock Infinite* begins in a seemingly utopian environment, as Booker enters the floating city of Columbia and is exposed to its bright, idyllic society. However, after about half an hour of gameplay, the illusion is shattered when a police officer sees the brand on the back of Booker’s hand and the city turns against him violently, declaring him the “False Shepherd” and an apocalyptic omen. It is this change that sparks the city’s descent into chaos and helps to justify Booker’s violent actions throughout the game. Rather than being a utopia, Columbia is a dangerous environment, full of monsters, soldiers, revolutionaries and religious zealots and, by tearing away the veneer of utopian civility, the game reveals this to the player and Booker. Similarly, *Burial at Sea* begins with Booker and Elizabeth exploring the underwater objectivist utopian city of Rapture, on New Years Eve, the night before the city fell to violent chaos caused by unregulated medical augmentations and political corruption. Like *BioShock Infinite*, *Burial at Sea* reveals Rapture’s underlying issues to Booker and the player. After each reveal, the player begins encountering enemies and violent combat encounters throughout the rest of the game. Together, these two introductions help to solidify the idea that the games’ violent encounters are justified by each city’s deterioration, by presenting the alternative utopian vision of each city before they collapse.

In summary, narrative-based video games that prominently feature fatherhood as a core thematic element rely on stories that emphasize societal collapse in order to justify the fathers’ violent actions throughout the game. By presenting their stories in worlds that are full of constant danger, narratives about paternal masculinity can create environments in which violence can be committed without question or moral considerations. Furthermore, by taking place in disastrous, dystopian or apocalyptic worlds that incorporate real-world cultural anxieties, like the fear of social collapse or “masculinity

in crisis," video games can give men a way to reaffirm their place in society through violent paternalism. Later, in chapter three, I will discuss in more detail the impact that these environments, paternal masculinity and violence in general have on the daughters in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead.*

Performing Fatherhood

Throughout this chapter, I have explored the popularity of video games that feature fatherhood as a core thematic element and how they emerged from popular culture that has been impacted by postfeminist storytelling. First, by examining postfeminist fatherhood and the way that it has come to be a dominant thematic element in popular culture. Next, I described paternal masculinity and how it functions in games, by positioning video game fathers' often violent actions as unimpeachably positive. Consequently, I also discussed the role that disastrous, dystopian and postapocalyptic settings play in normalizing violent paternal masculinity. In the following section, I will examine the emergence of fatherhood as not only a major thematic element of *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, but as a structural element of the games, producing a kind of procedural fatherhood. Procedurality, as defined by Janet Murray (1997), is the "defining ability to execute a series of rules" which, paired with participation from players, creates interactivity in games (p. 174). That is, video games are governed by rules that are used to model environments and game worlds, which affect the player's ability to interact with them (Bogost, 2007). Player performance is what makes video games unique and allows players to have direct input in the narrative and thus, for the player's active participation in fatherhood (Pajor, 2014). By nature of their interactivity, video games become a performative medium in which players are not simple observers, but an integral part of the game's functionality and engagement with the audience, and they create a world that is "dynamically altered by our participation" (Murray, 1997, p. 302).

Likewise, gender is also a performative cultural technology (Burrill, 2008). In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler originates the concept of gender as a performative act, arguing that gender is created through the repetition of actions with "socially established meanings" (Butler, 2007, p. 191). Burrill (2008) builds on this argument by suggesting

that “masculinity is a product of specific practices (some bodily, some social) that require an actor and audience (and some type of ‘script’)” (p. 21). As a result, masculinity can be seen as performative both in the real world, where its rules are encoded in social interactions, and in video games, where its rules are built into the game’s mechanics and story (which in turn reflect the rules of the real world). Similarly, by creating games in which fatherhood is a key thematic and narrative component, video games are forced to encode fatherhood as a procedural action and a core part of gameplay. Therefore, fatherhood is not only an action that players can perform, it is an action that players *must* perform in order to progress through the game.

Video game fatherhood becomes procedural through the performance of paternal masculinity, which as I have already demonstrated, is heavily dependent on a combination of paternalism and violence that take place within dangerous game worlds. Masculinity in games is often associated with violence and aggression; encourages male dominance (Provenzo, 1991); and features “strongly gender coded scenarios of war, conquest, and combat” (Kline, Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter, 2003, p. 247). As discussed previously, games that feature scenes of social disintegration, apocalypses and natural disasters further intensify the role that violence plays in the depiction of masculinity (Stang, 2018). Since *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* all prominently feature fatherhood as a core thematic trait, as well as violent masculinity, the games reinforce the idea that fatherhood, masculinity and violence are all inextricably linked.

Previously, I discussed the role that violent mechanics play in the construction of fatherhood in video games, with an emphasis on what those violent mechanics look like. In this section, I would like to examine the ways in which fatherhood becomes an action that players can perform, rather than simply a part of the narrative. On the one hand, fatherhood or a parent-child relationship, can be a major narrative component, which players navigate as they progress through the game. For example, in *Fallout 3* (Bethesda, 2008), the relationship between the game’s protagonist and their father is one of the game’s major narrative threads that helps to motivate the player’s progression through the game’s main quest. However, it is largely relegated to the background of the story, little more than a quest prompt for the player to follow, with no real relationship development

between the player character and their father. On the other hand, I argue that video game fatherhood, particularly in games like *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, is much more interactive and intrinsic to the game's mechanics and the player's experience. Players are invited to perform fatherhood as they would any other action in a game. Fatherhood is compressed into the same kind of performable actions as climbing, shooting, running and fighting. Consequently, in the next section I will also discuss the ways that *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* frame success and failure as important parts of the performance of fatherhood.

In his discussion of *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010), Pajor (2014) describes the ways in which the game combines both the day-to-day activities of fatherhood with the violent paternal masculinity that is essential to the game's mechanics and players' progression. In the early parts of the game, one of the main playable protagonists, Ethan Mars, goes about taking care of his sons in a domestic setting, playing with them in the yard, cooking for them and helping them with homework. Later, he even comforts his son Shaun over the death of his pet bird. However, after the game's inciting incident, during which Mars' son Jason is killed, the game shifts to include a version of fatherhood that embraces violent paternal masculinity when Mars' other son Shaun is kidnapped. Mars is tasked with completing a series of violent "trials" in order to protect and retrieve his son from the kidnapper. Consequently, *Heavy Rain* ostensibly shows that fatherhood consists of the normal "quotidian practicalities" (Hamad, 2014, p. 2) of parenting, as well as violent paternal masculinity, as necessitated by the dangers of the world.

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* display similar versions of fatherhood that also take into account the day-to-day needs of parenting. Despite the games' disastrous or post-apocalyptic environments, the daughters still have to be fed and sheltered. In *The Walking Dead*, Lee ensures that Clementine is clothed appropriately for the weather, attempts to find safe shelter and keeps her fed. In *The Last of Us*, Joel does the same for Ellie, as evidenced by her changing outfits as the seasons progress, their frequent references to scavenging for food and Ellie eventually learning how to hunt. After rescuing Emily in *Dishonored*, Corvo ensures that she has a governess and other tutors for her education, and keeps her in a safe location for most of

the game. Later, in *Dishonored 2*, we see that Corvo has also trained Emily in self-defence between games. When exploring in *BioShock Infinite*, Booker can also buy Elizabeth food and gifts and generally helps to educate her about the outside world that she previously had no access to. In the previous chapter, I also discussed the ways in which the fathers attempt to emotionally connect with their daughters, typically through conversations that allow them to engage with and address the daughters' traumatic experiences throughout the games. Or as Hamad (2014) describes it, the dominant model of fatherhood tends to become "emotionally articulate, domestically competent and skilled in managing the quotidian practicalities of parenthood" (p. 2). Each of these are minor, but realistic examples of real world, practical parenting and examples of the way that postfeminist fatherhood emerges in video game narratives.

However, *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* also emphasize violence, as previously discussed, and ensure that it is necessary for the successful performance of fatherhood. As seen in *Heavy Rain*, since Mars' only means of rescuing his son are through the performance of violence, the performance of violence *becomes* the performance of fatherhood. Burrill (2008) argues that the "power to enact violence" is fundamental to defining masculinity and men's relationships, which is often reflected by the portrayal of masculinity in games (p. 21). Consequently, I argue that violence in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* is essential to defining the relationships between fathers and their daughters, because it is their main mode of interaction and the only means that the fathers have of "proving" their love for their daughters.

Previously, I discussed the daughters' abductions throughout their respective games. Each time one of the fathers rescues their daughter, they are not only progressing the game's plot, they are also trying to be good fathers, proving their love by protecting their daughters. By killing enemies who threaten their daughters and themselves, the fathers are also successfully performing protective fatherhood. Previously, I described how the games' violent settings place both the fathers and daughters in environments that players can only navigate and progress through using violence. As a result, although there are other examples of fatherhood being performed in the games through their practical, day-to-day actions, the dominant form of fatherhood is that of violent paternal

masculinity. Many encounters can *only* be resolved through the performance of fatherhood and, specifically, violent paternal masculinity. In essence, the main way that fathers in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* perform fatherhood, is by "proving" their love through violent game mechanics. Players are not only using the interactions the game provides to navigate a story *about* fatherhood, they are actively performing fatherhood as a part of the game's structure.

In the next section, I will provide evidence that video games not only require the performance of fatherhood by players in order to progress through and complete *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, but also reinforce this idea through the way that they utilize "success" and "failure." I argue that success and failure are one of the clearest ways that *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* encode the performance of fatherhood on both a narrative and mechanical level.

Success and Failure

Success and failure are most often treated as binary opposites in video game design. Saving the princess is typically considered a success, while dying in combat is typically a failure that results in a "game over." Even multilinear games, with multiple branches and endings, usually only address a set number of potential outcomes. As a result, success and failure are mechanical components of game design, used to denote the player's level of accomplishment or their place in the game as they progress. However, success and failure can also be incorporated into video game narratives. In some instances, this is meant to give a narrative explanation of the players' success and failures. In other instances, it is used as motivation for player characters or drives a game's plot. *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* feature examples that combine both the mechanical and narrative approaches to success and failure. The fathers experience a combination of success and failure that is based on the players' actions and the successful performance of violence for their survival, as well as success and failure that drives the plot, their character development and their relationships with their daughters. Notably, each game's mechanics and stories are often permeated with redemption narratives that center around their successes and failures as

fathers. In chapter three, I will discuss the games' focus on narratives of paternal redemption, at the expense of their daughters' personal stories.

Success and failure in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are also important to the games' paternal masculinity and the performance of fatherhood. As mentioned previously, the fathers are expected to perform violence, with that violence given justification within the narrative by orienting it towards a particular goal — most often, protecting their daughters. Consequently, it is possible for the fathers to fail at that protection and, therefore, to fail at fatherhood, which is reinforced by the game requiring them to repeat those actions successfully, before they are allowed to progress or complete the game. Sometimes, this is shown through mechanical failures, such as Ellie dying in *The Last of Us*, because Joel does not reach her in time when they are attacked. Other times, it can have a more narrative focus, like Booker being unable to free Elizabeth in *BioShock Infinite*. Either way, success and failure are baked into the games' mechanics and specifically dependent on the fathers' successful performance of violence on behalf of their daughters. In the following paragraphs, I will describe the specific ways that *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* incorporate success and failure on both mechanical and narrative levels and how this translates to the performance of fatherhood.

On a mechanical level, Joel's success and failures are relatively straightforward, in the sense that players are forced to restart levels when Joel dies, or fails to rescue Ellie when she is grabbed by an opponent. Each of those components is also dependent on the use of violence. However, the parallels between Joel's dead daughter Sara and his actions taken to protect Ellie give a clear example of how *The Last of Us* presents successful fatherhood. At the start of *The Last of Us*, Joel's daughter Sara dies during the early days of the apocalypse, which becomes a defining feature of Joel's personality and a major influence on his actions throughout the game. Her death is also an example of Joel's failure to perform fatherhood according to the requirements of violent paternal masculinity. When Joel, Sara and Tommy are running from the new infected people on the streets, Joel gives Tommy his gun so that he can carry Sara, while Tommy shoots. Tommy gets separated from Joel and Sara while attempting to barricade a door, at which point Joel runs into a soldier who shoots at the two of them, killing Sara. As the soldier is

raising his gun to kill Joel too, Tommy appears and shoots the soldier instead. A similar situation is mirrored in the game's final scenes, during which Joel is fleeing the Firefly hospital with Ellie. In the parking garage below the hospital, Joel encounters Marlene who tries to stop him from taking Ellie, but he shoots her in order to escape. Early in the game, Joel fails Sara when he gives up his gun to Tommy, resulting in her death, while he refuses to do the same with Ellie, instead using the gun to kill Marlene so that she cannot follow them. In essence, the game is reinforcing the idea that violence is a necessity for the successful performance of fatherhood by showing a clear parallel between Joel's failure to use violence to protect Sara, and his eventual success in using violence to defend Ellie. Similar to *Heavy Rain*, in which "the idyllic, sunny life of the game's start ends with Jason's death, and all because you and Ethan failed at performing as a protective father," Joel and the player are catapulted out of Joel's comfortable suburban life by Sara's death, 20 years into a post-apocalyptic future, because of Joel's failed fatherhood (Pajor, 2014, p. 131).

Dishonored presents success and failure similarly to *The Last of Us*, by requiring the player's successful navigation of the game, as Corvo, in order to rescue Emily. Corvo's initial failure comes when he fails to protect Emily and Jessamine during the game's introduction. Specifically, that he was not capable of fighting off their opponent's surprise attack, with both his skills and weapons failing him. It is this failure that shapes much of his motivation throughout the game, including his desire to avenge Jessamine and to restore Emily to the throne. Later, if players choose to control Corvo in *Dishonored 2*, he is still motivated by his desire to rescue Emily and restore her to the throne once more. Although it is possible for Corvo to fail at this task in both games, that failure is typically presented as the game's "bad" ending. If Corvo fails in the first game, the empire crumbles; if he fails in *Dishonored 2*, he gains the moniker "Corvo the Black" and becomes a tyrannical ruler. In contrast, both the high and low chaos endings of *Dishonored* in which Emily survives present Corvo's actions as an overall positive success and *Dishonored 2* has a number of possible endings where Corvo succeeds. Like Joel in *The Last of Us*, Corvo's motivations and reasons for violence in both *Dishonored* and *Dishonored 2* revolve around his failed fatherhood, when he could not protect Emily.

In *The Walking Dead* Lee's success and failure look different, but reinforce the same essential theme: violence is necessary for successful fatherhood. While the fathers in *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Last of Us* all failed their living children in some way, Lee's initial failure, as he states in the game, was that he and his wife never got to have kids. Throughout the game, there are numerous situations that require Lee to be violent in order to protect Clementine, with the same general rule as the other games that Lee's death during combat will result in players having to restart. However, *The Walking Dead* twists this somewhat at the end of the game. After rescuing Clementine from her kidnapper, Lee collapses and begins to succumb to a walker bite he received earlier in the game, resulting in his eventual death. Notably, during his death scene, Lee continues to comfort and advise Clementine about her own survival. Players can have Lee choose to tell Clementine to leave the area, or ask her to shoot him so that he does not die a slow death. Unlike the rest of the game, at this moment, Lee's *death* becomes essential to Clementine's survival. *The Walking Dead* makes the statement that not only is violence a necessity; sometimes, successful fatherhood involves violent self-sacrifice. Like Ethan Mars' trials in *Heavy Rain*, Lee even has a moment where he is tasked with amputating his own arm after he is bitten, on the off chance that it will help him to rescue Clementine. Pajor (2014) points out that "it is important for Lee to save Clementine, not just for her to be safe by another person's actions" (p. 137), which is reinforced by the game's ending where, even though Lee died, he still succeeded in saving Clementine.

Similarly, *BioShock Infinite* also frames Booker's death as a success within the game's context. Booker's initial failure is that he traded away his daughter Anna (who is also Elizabeth) in order to pay off gambling debts and, although he immediately regretted it and tried to stop the transaction, he ultimately failed and harmed her further by causing her to lose a fingertip. Similar to Joel in *The Last of Us*, Booker also fails to use violence appropriately to defend Anna. Additionally, since Booker is also technically Comstock, he is responsible for Comstock's failures as well. In fact, Booker is responsible for many types of failed fatherhood across different timelines within the game — in one universe, instead of losing a finger, the closing portal decapitates Anna. In the game's final scenes, Booker submits himself to being drowned by several different Elizabeths, so that he can never become Comstock and, therefore, never fail Elizabeth in the first place. Like the

fathers in *The Last of Us*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, Booker must perform violent actions in order to protect Elizabeth, traverse the game, and reach its end. However, much like Lee in *The Walking Dead*, Booker's death is ultimately the only way that he can succeed at protecting Elizabeth, because his self-sacrifice is the only way that he can retroactively protect her from his own failed fatherhood.

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* all explore success and failure as core components of their respective narratives. In each instance, violence remains a necessity to the successful performance of fatherhood, particularly in the mechanical sense. However, each game also emphasizes the role that failed violence plays in their performance of fatherhood, by repeatedly showing that the only successful form of fatherhood involves violence — from Joel killing to protect Ellie, to Booker's death being used to protect Elizabeth. Failed fatherhood is often the main motivator for each of the fathers and is used as further justification for their violent actions, while successful fatherhood is only achievable through the violent protection of their daughters.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I detailed the ways that paternally-signified protagonists are constructed in games, through their appearance and aesthetic, behaviours and mechanics, and their progression through the games. In this chapter, I have provided a more detailed analysis of the construction of fathers as video game protagonists, with a specific focus on how their fatherhood is constructed within a postfeminist media landscape and how that construction appears in games as paternal masculinity. By focusing on their successes and failures as fathers, I was able to highlight the ways that paternal masculinity, violence and procedural fatherhood come together in games to shape their narrative and mechanical interactions.

Both fatherhood and masculinity are complex and varied, composed of complex interactions between society, gender and culture. However, their typical representation in video games adheres to similar themes, with little variation and thus simplifies their potential within narratives. Rather than allowing for more in depth explorations of fatherhood and its cultural importance, video game fatherhood becomes a one-

dimensional kind of story that repeats cycles of violence, social collapse, and paternalism to the detriment of more expansive narratives. As video game fatherhood has developed, influenced by the postfeminist and post-9/11 Western cultural milieu, a specific kind of paternal masculinity seems to have cemented itself in popular culture. It is not only evident in video games, but in film, television and comic books too. However, video games could provide an interesting sandbox in which to explore more complex and nuanced versions of fatherhood and paternal masculinity.

In the next chapter, I will provide a more detailed examination of the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, with a particular focus on their roles as playable protagonists. I will explore the development of the daughters as protagonists and the clear impact that their fathers have had on that development. By centralizing fathers and paternal masculinity, the games have failed the daughter characters in a number of ways. Daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* exist in the same physical game environments as the fathers, which forces their similar reliance on violence, but they also exist in the same thread of popular culture. As a result, the way that the daughters are represented, developed and explored as characters differs from the fathers in notable ways.

Chapter 3: Daughters as secondary playable protagonists

> *You're in my shoes now, raising a kid. Think you got a handle on it? It can't be easy, wanting to give him a childhood, but knowing what it takes to survive now.*
>
> — Lee Everett, *The Walking Dead: The Final Season*

Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on the daughters as secondary protagonists in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead.* As this thesis has demonstrated, the "daddening" of games is a well documented trend in video games, with roots in other forms of popular entertainment. Most of the research that has been done on the "daddening" of games focuses solely on the popularity of paternally-signified characters in video games. Little research or discussion surrounds the simultaneous popularity of daughters as secondary protagonists of these games. Although young girls are not the *sole* secondary protagonists of games with a paternal focus, they do predominate over both young boys or sons, as well as other adult companions (male or female). This chapter will explore why daughters specifically are such popular secondary protagonists and the particular role that they play in their respective games both narratively and mechanically. In the first chapter of this thesis, I described the design of the daughters as video game characters, including their appearance, behaviour and mechanics, and progression. In this chapter, I will focus on their prevalence as secondary game protagonists, their roles within their respective games and the broader impact of popular culture on their development. As a consequence of the design of the settings, mechanics and the fathers themselves in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, the daughters are allotted too many different roles, where they are required to act as sidekicks, playable protagonists, damsels in distress and moral barometers — even acting as the fathers themselves through their performances of paternal masculinity. Consequently, although the daughters appear to be positive, progressive heroines, it comes at the expense of their character development, independence and agency.

First, I will begin by outlining the origins of the daughters as popular characters in games by drawing from the history and development of female action heroes throughout film, television and video games. Beginning with the emergence of female action heroes generally in film in the 1970s, I trace a path through the subsequent popularity of "Final Girls" in the 1970s and 80s, "girl power" or "empowerment" media in the 1990s, Rikke Schubart's (2007) more recent concept of the "Daughter Archetype" and Eva Lupold's analysis of young girls as the heroines of contemporary action films. Although young girls are often the stars of their respective media, they are still often affected by media tropes that cause the girls to be dependent on men for safety, guidance, and validation and eventually rescue, when they inevitably become a damsel-in-distress. As evidenced in previous chapters of this thesis, the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are frequently dependent on their fathers for their survival and put into situations where they require rescuing by heroic men.

Second, I will discuss the role that violence plays for the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead.* In the previous chapter, I highlighted the violence performed by the fathers as a result of the games' settings and the mechanical requirement that they *perform* as fathers by protecting their daughters from the games' assorted dangers. Since the mechanics and settings do not notably change once the daughters become playable protagonists, they are also dependent on violent mechanics for their own survival and other vulnerable individuals in their care. It can be argued that the daughters' similar mechanics to their fathers are the result of developers seeking to simplify their designs by reusing mechanics. However, the way that the daughters learn violence from their fathers is reminiscent of similar father-daughter character dynamics found in film.

Third, I will explore the way that the daughters' continued reliance on violent game mechanics causes them to reproduce paternal masculinity that mimics their fathers and emphasizes that video game fathers, and their particular performance of masculinity, are presented as the ideal protagonist. In *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* each daughter ends up caring for and protecting a dependent individual, whether it be their incapacitated father or another child like themselves. As a result, the daughters use violence similarly to their fathers, to defend themselves from

harm and as a form of heroic protection. Although the daughters are independent characters, and not fathers themselves, the games reinforce the idea that the ideal protagonist must still enact paternal masculinity in order to be successful within the game.

Fourth, I will discuss the absence of mothers and other adult female role models in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead.* By eliminating the mothers and maternally-signified characters from the games, the fathers are repositioned as both the best and *only* paternal role models for the daughters. As a consequence, the daughters have only the fathers to rely on for paternal support and little to no outside influence from other women — a trope that is common amongst the young female heroes of action films. In addition, when mothers are present, they are either antagonists, mechanical tools or narrative catalysts.

Finally, I will discuss the fathers' reliance on their daughters for moral guidance and their ultimate redemption within the narrative. Despite being the secondary protagonists of *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite*, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, the daughters are often reduced to tools that are used to gauge the morality of their fathers' actions (and by extension, the player's) throughout the games. Furthermore, because redemption plays such a strong role in the games' narratives, the daughters become the primary source for their fathers' redemption, which typically comes in the form of successful fatherhood. As a consequence, the daughters' personal identities and characters are often built around their fathers' actions, rather than their own independent development.

Origins of the Video Game Daughter

A number of different elements have influenced the popularity and prevalence of young girls as violent action heroes and protagonists in video games. In this section, I will discuss the increased popularity of female action heroes across several decades of film, beginning with 1970s action films, the popularity of the "Final Girl" in 1980s slasher films and the rise of "girl power" heroes in the 1990s. Specific emphasis will be placed on Rikke Schubart's (2007) discussion of the "Daughter Archetype" and Eva Lupold's (2014) analysis of contemporary action films that star young, rebellious girls

capable of great violence. As female characters have grown in popularity in video games and received more prominent places, including as main protagonists, the depictions of women and girls in action films have impacted their development.

In the 1970s, female action heroes first began to appear in films that had been previously considered “male” films, typically portraying adult women who were similar to their male counterparts (Schubart, 2007). The increasing number of female action heroes showed that “the world of action and violence was no longer a man’s world” (Schubart, 2007, p. 20) and women now inhabited the same roles as male characters, including gunslingers, elite soldiers and secret agents. Postfeminist critics welcomed female action heroes as “progressive and a sign of equality," while others viewed their emergence as a “backlash against feminism” (Schubart, 2007, p. 20). Some critics argue that these new female action heroes represented a blurring of the line between genders, allowing women to branch out of limiting, passive and out-dated film roles into the broader world previously only available to men (Kennedy, 2002; Schubart, 2007). Other feminist critics argued that female action heroes were fundamentally unchanged from male characters, instead relying on many of the same violent, negative traits of traditional male action heroes. For example, Ellen Ripley of the *Alien* franchise was originally written as a man, but changed because of the assumption that audiences would be more engaged if the film featured a woman in peril (Knight, 2010). Similarly, during the redevelopment of Lara Croft for the recent Tomb Raider series reboot, the developers argued that players will want to protect her more and that “you start to root for her in a way that you might not root for a male character" (Schreier, 2012, para. 6). These criticisms are applicable to the daughters featured in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. Although they are part of a clear increase in the number of female video game protagonists — in genres typically dominated by both male characters and male developers — they also reproduce many of the same issues that critics traditionally have with their male counterparts. Like their fathers, the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are violent and perform similar kinds of paternal masculinity. Similar to their predecessors in 1970s action films, the daughters inhabit a traditionally masculine role as their visibility and

prevalence increases in video games. However, like the women of 1970s action films the daughters are also still negatively affected by the same toxic masculinity as their fathers.

Carol J. Clover's concept of "Final Girl" — a popular type of character originating in slasher films of the 1970s and 80s — also factors into the popularity of violent adolescent heroines. Clover's original theory describes a very particular kind of sole survivor, but the concept has evolved over the years to include a variety of final surviving women, including characters like *Alien*'s Ellen Ripley (Schubart, 2007). Elements of the "Final Girl" are evident in the design of the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. In "Her Body, Himself" Clover (1987) describes the gender ambiguity of "Final Girls" who are neither fully masculine, nor fully feminine, with boyish names and physical builds. Similarly, the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* tend to fit this description, since they are often tomboys or eschew more traditionally feminine things. Schubart (2007) builds on this to argue that Clover's "Final Girl" does not exist to portray strong girls or women who have survived traumatizing scenarios, rather they are meant as a "gender-neutral platform where the male viewer could experience a masochistic position" (p. 37). Schubart (2007) describes the "Final Girl" as a "sensitive body through which a male viewer [identifies] with pain, fear, and vulnerability" (p. 37). That is, in video games (typically male) players can project themselves onto the daughters as they are regularly kidnapped and attacked in order to experience a cathartic kind of masochism, but the daughters are not designed to represent empowered women who have survived against the odds.

Although today's violent young heroines are not explicitly "Final Girls," echoes of the trope can be seen in their visual character design as well as the narrative struggles that they face throughout *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead.* As discussed previously, the daughters' visual designs are meant to evoke feelings of protectiveness due to their waif-like and androgynously young appearances. As a rule, the daughters are unfeminine and unsexual — even when being sexualized, as Elizabeth's costume allows in *BioShock Infinite*, she still shows no hints of her *own* sexuality throughout the games. Ellie, who is one of the oldest of the daughters, even remarks negatively about more traditionally feminine things she encounters from before

the apocalypse. In Wyoming, after being found in an abandoned farmhouse by Joel, where she is reading an old book Ellie asks: “Is this really all they had to worry about? Boys. Movies. Deciding which shirt goes with which skirt? It’s bizarre.” Efforts are made throughout *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* to distance the daughters from adult women and traditionally feminine interests and activities. Furthermore, the daughters go through similar traumatic events to those that Final Girls often experience. During the Winter chapter of *The Last of Us*, Ellie is captured, brutalized and imprisoned by David, the leader of a group of cannibal survivors. Her eventual confrontation with David involves Ellie running and hiding, as she is not strong enough to overpower him on her own. Similarly, in *The Walking Dead*, Clementine often ends up the sole survivor of confrontations, where she is often forced to kill to defend herself against both humans and walkers.

Following their adult counterparts, young girls as action protagonists rose to prominence in the 1990s with films like *Léon: The Professional* (Besson, 1994) and *La Femme Nikita* (Besson, 1990), and television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon, 1997) (Lupold, 2014). Prior to this emergence, young girls were rare as the protagonists of action films, which favoured adult women instead — resulting in characters that tended to be much like their male counterparts, but with a different gender. Generally, these are young women who fulfil fantasies that equate sexuality and violence (Lupold, 2014). Notably, *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* seem to have swapped much of the sexualisation of female characters for additional violence. Similarly, in the 2013 Tomb Raider reboot, while the developers actively sought to reduce Lara Croft’s over sexualized proportions, they also created a wide variety of dramatic, violent deaths for her. Schubart (2007) points out that many of these young girls fall into a common television archetype of young women who are trained as assassins, often under the guidance of an older man and encouraged to use their sexuality against their targets. In *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, Schubart (2007) describes these young girls as belonging to the “daughter archetype” of action movies. Furthermore, both Lupold (2014) and Schubart (2007) highlight the tendency for these girls to be presented as “lolitas” or young girls who are taught to weaponize their sexuality to be successful assassins.

However, the young action heroines of the twenty-first century pull away from some of these tropes and archetypes with films like *The Hunger Games*, *Kick-Ass* and *True Grit*, because their stories focus less on their sexualisation (Lupold, 2014). Rather, they "demonstrate a maturity beyond their years, taking up arms against societal forces instead of simply using their sexuality to charm men" (Lupold, 2014, p. 11). Young action heroines in contemporary action films are more likely to be vigilantes or rebels, than underage *femme fatales*. Despite their reduced sexualisation the daughters remain extremely violent, which Lupold (2014) argues is meant to titillate audiences by contrasting their youth with typically more adult violence. Even more contemporary examples like *Logan* (2017) and *Stranger Things* (2016) illustrate this transition, featuring young female protagonists who are capable of extreme, often supernatural violence. Both girls in *Logan* and *Stranger Things* are also rebels, fighting against corrupt systems. Similarly, the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and The Walking Dead* are all young, violent and often rebelling against tyrants or corrupt systems. In *The Last of Us*, Ellie runs from the government control of quarantine zones and, in the DLC *Left Behind*, she runs from a military boarding school. Elizabeth in *BioShock Infinite* and Emily in *Dishonored* are both caught up in political conflicts, in which they end up fighting against corrupt leaders. In the second season of *The Walking Dead*, Clementine also rebels against the leader of a compound who is abducting other survivors and enslaving them as a workforce.

Violent young heroines in video games have also developed concurrently with similar characters in film and television. Video games have often been criticized for their treatment of women — who tend to be sexualized, passive, victimized and/or dependent, when they are present at all (Provenzo, 1999). Consequently, many young action heroines have emerged or changed in response to this criticism. For example, the developers of the Tomb Raider series reboot sought to desexualize Lara Croft, to appeal to audiences by being "less voluptuous" without the "ridiculous proportions and skimpy clothing," so that she feels more human (Schreier, 2012, para. 7). Schubart (2007) describes modern action film stars as the "active, aggressive and independent" children of feminism (p. 19). Similar to their film counterparts, and in response to feminist criticism, video game protagonists are becoming less passive and more likely to be the main protagonists of

their games, rather than being victimized, killed or imprisoned in towers awaiting rescue. However, despite the growing number of female game characters who are active protagonists, there is still a connection to more out-dated, passive roles and, in games like *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* the daughters are evidence of the current, conflicted approach to developing female characters.

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* all feature young female protagonists that adhere to many of the same character traits and tropes as the aforementioned action film protagonists. All four daughter protagonists are violent within their respective stories after becoming playable protagonists. Like their fathers, this violence is influenced by the settings of their games — disastrous and apocalyptic settings that require violence for survival — as well as their role in an interactive medium. As discussed previously, it is easier from a game development standpoint to reuse mechanics between characters. However, their role as a secondary playable protagonist also forces them to inhabit two different positions in their games. On the one hand, they have been designed as helpful sidekicks who are meant to engage audiences emotionally by inspiring feelings of protectiveness in players, through their roles as young, dependent girls — they are passive and lack agency during their time as secondary protagonists. On the other hand, they must also fulfil the same role in the story that their fathers previously did, meaning that they must employ violence for their own and others' survival while taking a main part in the narrative. Later in this chapter, I will discuss this contradictory approach to the design of the daughters that requires them to fill too many disparate roles in their respective games.

"Girl Power," Damsels and Agency

As mentioned previously, media about young girls often relies on a sense of "girl power" in order to market television and movies in a positive and uplifting way. Ostensibly, "girl power" exists to empower young girls by putting them front and center in the narrative and focusing on stories that contribute to feelings of empowerment. I argue that at least part of the popularity of the daughters as playable protagonists in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* stems from similar ideas. First, the adult men (many now fathers) who are producing games want to produce

media that appeals to themselves. In “The Daddening of Games,” Totilo (2010) asks, “where is all this dad stuff coming from? Is it the aging of gamers and the game developers who make games?” (para. 10). As Stang (2017) points out, many game developers and players fall into a similar adult demographic and may now find themselves more interested in stories about heroic fatherhood. Second, game developers (and other media creators) have sought to create media that is more inclusive of female characters that do not fall into the traditional and stereotypical roles of damsels in distress, princesses in towers and dead wives. Rather, they have attempted to present female characters that are “active, aggressive and independent” (Schubert, 2007, p. 19).

However, this approach has produced mixed results in terms of the representation of young girls in video games, who are instead being pushed into roles that strip them of their agency, force them to become damsels in distress despite their increased capacity for violence and self-defence and ultimately expected to further their fathers’ stories, even while they are acting as the main character of the game. Instead of being independent characters, the daughters' lives and journeys exist only in relation to their fathers. Despite being central characters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, the daughters are all relegated to secondary positions in the narrative, typically so that their fathers can rescue them — allowing them to demonstrate their successful performance of paternal masculinity. I argue that the daughters are meant to be strong, empowering characters created in contrast with previous incarnations of female characters by drawing from more recent female characters in film and television, who more noticeably embody the ideas of “girl power.” However, the execution of this ultimately fails because the daughters are still expected to fit into both the damsel-in-distress and sidekick moulds.

Evidence for this can be seen in the marketing for *BioShock Infinite*. In the game’s television commercial, Elizabeth stands atop a horse, with her hands tied and a noose around her neck, while a man preaches to a gaggle of onlookers awaiting her execution. Booker takes aim with a sniper rifle, but is attacked by one of the game’s main enemies (a “handyman”), causing him to leap to the platform below to free Elizabeth instead. Once there, he uses a plasmid power to float Elizabeth safely down from the horse before he is attacked from behind. Elizabeth shouts to warn him and tosses him

another weapon. In a short advertisement, the marketing makes Elizabeth's main roles in the narrative clear: she is a "helpful" sidekick, ready to warn or provide assistance, and she is a damsel to be rescued by the player and Booker. Notably, the game's narrative revolves around Elizabeth. She is easily the most powerful character in the game, prophesied to start an apocalyptic disaster in Columbia and her rescue is the game's inciting action. Regardless, the game's marketing presents her as a tool to assist the player, rather than as the game's central character.

Other characters, like Ellie in *The Last of Us*, are presented as much stronger and more central to the story — Ellie, like Elizabeth, is the character around which the narrative revolves. Ellie can fight, defend herself, banter with Joel and has an admirable sassy attitude given the game's apocalyptic circumstances all of which present her as strong, snappy, smart and resourceful. Unfortunately, the game ultimately strips her of her agency, by allowing Joel to control the narrative and her eventual fate. Outwardly, she does not appear to be any of the things that female videogame characters are often stuck with. She is not weak or passive, she stands up for herself and she perseveres against terrible odds. However, she is repeatedly abducted, rescued by Joel and eventually denied her last wish, to be allowed to contribute to the chance for a cure.

In contrast, both Emily and Clementine begin as younger girls, with even less agency in their respective games but later develop into more rounded and impactful characters, with their own agency and power within the narrative. Arguably, *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* present a more progressive approach to the development of female characters. Although they begin their stories young, frequently abducted by enemies, and with very little control over their lives, they are both given room to grow as characters. In *Dishonored,* Emily is largely a pawn who exists to challenge Corvo, by needing to be rescued after she is kidnapped, or to be moved around by the characters that are actually in power throughout the game. However, by *Dishonored 2*, Emily has clearly taken charge in her role as the future empress and is no longer being manipulated and controlled. However, her ultimate ending in the game is heavily impacted by either her own or Corvo's actions, depending on which character the player chooses to control. *Dishonored* had only three possible endings, either low chaos or high chaos and, if high

chaos, one where Emily lives and another where she dies.[12] In *Dishonored 2*, there are significantly more configurations to the game's outcome, with Emily victorious on the throne, or dead and the same possibility for Corvo. Although Emily has less agency if the player chooses Corvo as the main character, there is more balance to this set up than the others. During the period between the first game's publication and the second, developers had the opportunity to make Emily a more empowered character, largely because she is given more flexibility and choices through the game's multilinear narrative.

Like *Dishonored*, *The Walking Dead* involves Lee's decisions impacting Clementine both in the first game and the sequels. However, after he dies and Clementine becomes the main playable character, she ends up with significantly more agency than the other characters discussed here and, as a result, falls less into the "damsel" category. Despite the impact that the player's choices have on her development in *The Walking Dead*, she is ultimately in control of all of her decisions going forward. Lee's advice and teaching are important to her survival and she usually keeps them in mind, or is reminded of them by the game, but in the end, she has flexibility (within the game's limited narrative choices) and is not required to adhere to the things Lee has told her.

During their discussion of *The Last of Us*, some reviewers have argued that the female characters in the game, like Ellie, are "props who serve only to propel the male story forward" (Joyce, 2014, p. 4). Similarly, Stang (2017) argues that focusing on video game fatherhood grants the fathers agency "at the expense of the female characters they are meant to protect" (p. 163). Others argue that the daughters are more likely to be complex characters with freedom and agency, which is shared with a more robust cast of complicated female characters than exhibited in previous games (Albor, 2013). I argue that there is a mixture of both in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. Characters like Ellie and Elizabeth are certainly more active and involved in their stories, than similar sidekick-style characters from other games and they do get time as playable protagonists. However, the emphasis by game developers on creating them as "helpful" sidekick characters ultimately detracts from their ability to become fully realized protagonists. As a consequence of the idea that games must contain *more* female characters, the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and

[12] Notably, a non-canonical ending, since she is alive in *Dishonored 2*.

The Walking Dead are all forced into too many different roles that ultimately harm their development and reduce their complexity. When the daughters must be the helpful sidekick, the damsel-in-distress, exploration tools, weapons and the driving force behind the story, they end up spread too thin across the narrative.

Daughters' Education and Dependence on Violence

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the fathers in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are heavily dependent on violence as the main mechanic in their respective games. Violence is both how players interact with the game world and how the fathers perform paternal masculinity, predominantly by using violence to protect their daughters. As the daughters become the main playable protagonists of their games, they end up inhabiting the same role as their fathers. Little changes between the games with the settings, mechanics and story remaining mostly the same even when the daughters take the spotlight. Consequently, once they become the playable protagonists, they inherit the same types and degrees of violence as their fathers, become caretakers to dependent individuals and must use violence to protect themselves and their dependents in dangerous settings. As Schubart (2007) points out, a major part of the "daughter archetype" that she describes in action films involves the daughter characters learning violence from their male mentors. In this section, I argue that the daughters depend on their fathers for an education in violence that allows them to become the playable protagonists of their games.

Schubart (2007) argues that girls who fit into the action film "daughter archetype" are dependent on men for many things, including an education, part of which is "to fight like a man" (p. 97). Stuller (2010) points out that "a consistent theme in stories about the female super, or action, hero is that she is reared or mentored by a man rather than a woman" (p. 289) Stang (2017) adds that, "even when the daughter-figure is strong, capable and independent, it is often the father who has primarily shaped her development" (p. 165) Girls of the daughter archetype never learn anything from other women (Schubart, 2007, p. 91) and as a consequence, lack female influence, role models and support — even in areas that would traditionally be relegated to women. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the consistent lack of mothers and female role models throughout

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* and the impact that this has on the daughters.

Furthermore, this is part of what reduces the daughters' agency as individual characters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. Rather than being able to find their own approaches to problems, learning alternative ways of dealing with opponents, or exploring the world in their own way, the daughters are forced to mimic their fathers, by repeating the same violent actions and reproducing similar paternal masculinity. As Stuller (2010) points out when discussing the father-daughter relationship in *Alias* (2001-2006), the father will "assume that he knows what's best for her," while ignoring that his daughter is a highly trained adult woman. In addition, he will attempt to "justify morally questionable steps to ensure her safety" (Stuller, 2010, p. 305). Similarly, the fathers in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* use their game's dangerous settings to justify engaging in intense violence to protect their daughters from harm — often despite the daughters proving themselves capably violent. Each of the daughters is regularly denied the ability to participate in the story or to defend herself with a weapon.[13] After Ellie picks up a gun and shoots an assailant that is drowning Joel in *The Last of Us*, he scolds her and takes the gun away — only to later grant her a hunting rifle, so that she can cover his attack. In *The Walking Dead*, Lee teaches Clementine to shoot, but she does not receive a gun until the game's final scenes. Although Elizabeth participates in combat through her "tears" and tossing helpful items to Booker, and is ultimately more powerful than Booker, she largely stays out of the way and never requests weapons for self-defence. *Dishonored* never approaches the idea of Emily learning to defend herself, despite her father being the Royal Protector and more than capable of teaching her and despite the fact that in *Dishonored 2* she has clearly received an education in martial arts from Corvo.

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and The Walking Dead all provide evidence of a violent education within each game's mechanics. In the first chapter, I

[13] I argue that there are often in-game justifications for this. Denying young girls access to handguns is a logical choice, regardless of the apocalyptic nature of the game. However, it begs the question: would young boys be denied the same access to weapons and protection, using the same justifications?

discussed several examples of the ways that the daughters inherit knowledge and skills from their fathers during their progression as game characters. The daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* all receive an education almost exclusively in survival skills from their fathers and those skills are predominantly violent. Schubart (2007) argues that the "daughter archetype" in action films typically relies on the daughters receiving an education from their fathers, particularly learning "to fight like a man" (p. 81). Similarly, the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* also receive an education in fighting and violence. However, Schubart (2007) also argues that the daughters receive an education in the proper performance of femininity from their fathers, which is inaccurate to these games. Very little emphasis is put on the performance of femininity in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. Combining the abundance of violence and the daughters' lack of a feminine education from their fathers, it becomes clear that the games are focused on a particular (violent) performance of masculinity, even after the daughters become playable protagonists.

Consequently, because of the emphasis on the fathers' performance of violent masculinity, the daughters are rarely given any choice about which skills and abilities they learn. In *Dishonored 2*, players learn that in the intervening years since the first game, Corvo has taught Emily how to defend herself. Later, Emily has the opportunity to accept supernatural powers from the Outsider, but can also reject them and the extra navigational and combat abilities that they provide. However, she cannot reject the skills that Corvo has taught her, including archery, sword fighting and stealth. Emily can reject powers granted by a god, but not her father's education in martial arts.

In the other games, the daughters are typically forced to rely on what they have learned from their fathers for their own survival, at times that require quick thinking. In *The Walking Dead*, Clementine must regularly defend herself from both human and undead enemies, as well as continually keeping her hair short as per Lee's instructions. Clementine's actions and the player's choices are both impacted by Lee's instruction, well after he is gone. After Joel is injured in *The Last of Us*, Ellie takes over the bulk of his responsibilities, keeping them both safe, hunting and finding supplies. During her time as the playable protagonist, we see her using a hunting rifle and bow, as well as

making explosives, which implies that Joel has been teaching her as they travel, since she seemingly did not possess these skills previously. The only major differences between Ellie and Joel's playstyle are that Joel has more weapons available and Ellie's pocketknife is reusable, while Joel's shivs are not.[14] Finally, when Elizabeth takes over as the playable protagonist during part two of *Burial at Sea*, she possesses many of the same abilities as Booker (and some of her own), as well as having access to similar weapons, although her playstyle is ultimately more stealth-based. At one point, the game draws attention to Elizabeth's different approach, when the hallucination of Booker that she is hearing tells her to sneak up behind an enemy to incapacitate them. During the exchange, she points out that Booker "wouldn't do it that way," to which the hallucination responds "just because your father did something one way doesn't mean you have to." However, there is very little difference between Elizabeth and Booker's playstyle and the game offers Elizabeth no concrete opportunities to approach things differently, no matter what the dialogue might state. Although the games occasionally try to present the daughters as having different approaches, or different tools and skills, there is ultimately little to no difference between the daughters' abilities and their fathers. Furthermore, the games present the similarities between the fathers and daughters as the fathers purposefully educating their daughters.

In the next section, I will discuss the ways in which the daughters use this learned violence to reproduce their fathers' paternal masculinity within their own time as playable protagonists and how this supports the argument that *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* all present fatherhood as the only successful approach to being a video game protagonist. In particular, the way the daughters take over for their fathers to fill the same role in the game by caring for someone who becomes dependent on them for safety in dangerous environments.

Reinforcing Paternal Masculinity

At the end of the second season of *The Walking Dead*, Clementine becomes the caretaker for an orphaned baby named A.J., whose mother dies during their escape from the hardware store where they have been held captive. In the game's final moments, the

[14] Consequently, Ellie is actually slightly stronger during melee combat, because she can use her blade more than once, while Joel's break.

multilinear story can lead to a number of different conclusions (7 in total) based on whom Clementine kills or saves and where they decide to go, or ultimately to stay. No matter what the player chooses, Clementine ends up becoming A.J.'s sole caretaker and remains so throughout the remaining games in the franchise. Despite a multitude of options, Clementine is essentially forced to adopt A.J[15] and finds herself in a very similar situation to Lee, when he took responsibility for Clementine's safety — including the ability and willingness to commit necessary violence and to make difficult choices. As a result, Clementine takes on the role of the video game father. In the previous section, I highlighted the fact that there is little difference between the actions and abilities of the fathers and their daughters. Accordingly, this section will look at further similarities between the fathers' performance of paternal masculinity, as defined in chapter two, and the daughters' actions as playable protagonists, which mimic their fathers.

In essence, the daughters are not different enough from their fathers to be seen as truly independent characters. Stang (2019) argues that Clementine's experience in *The Walking Dead* can be read as a "momified" game, but I disagree. In the previous chapter, I laid out the clear ways in which paternal masculinity manifests in video games, through both mechanics and narrative, and how it becomes a core thematic element of *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead.* When the daughters take over as playable protagonists, they take on both the mechanical and narrative roles of their fathers — they become the protectors, defenders and providers. Consequently, many of their actions throughout the games continue to recreate and react to the same conditions as their fathers and therefore cause the daughters to ultimately perform paternal masculinity. As I discussed earlier, little changes between the fathers and daughters with regards to their skills and behaviours in each game. Since the daughters are continuing to use the same skills that their fathers did, in order to perform paternal masculinity by protecting their daughters, they are reproducing a similar justification for their actions. Although Clementine adopting A.J. is the most direct evidence of the daughters taking up the mechanics of paternal masculinity, each of the daughters also takes on the care of a dependent individual in their respective games, whether that is another, younger child or

[15] Although, importantly, she loves A.J. and takes on his care willingingly. She is left little choice by the narrative.

an injured adult. The daughters' performance of paternal masculinity extends out to include many vulnerable parties, including the girls' fathers at various times. I argue that this is because the daughters are tasked by the games with taking over for their fathers *and* their mothers, in much the same way that the fathers are asked to fill in for the mothers as their daughters' emotional support system, as discussed in chapter two. In the next section, I will go into more detail about the absence of maternal characters throughout *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. For now, it should be noted that there is little to no maternal presence in any of the aforementioned games, resulting in a lack of maternal support or role models for the daughters. As a consequence, the daughters have no model on which to build a concept of "motherhood" and are further forced to construct themselves in relation to fatherhood, as it is seen in their respective games. Fatherhood and the performance of paternal masculinity is not only inescapable to the player, as discussed in chapter two, but to the daughters as well.

For example, in part two of *Burial at Sea*, Elizabeth attempts to find and care for a lost "Little Sister"[16] named Sally in the underwater city of Rapture. In theory, this could have been a story about Elizabeth's experience with parenting (similar to Clementine's story in *The Walking Dead*) or her own redemption, based on her actions during *BioShock Infinite*. However, her story is ultimately dominated by Booker's presence, even after his death at the end of part one. Elizabeth's internal monologue prominently features a hallucination of Booker and it is eventually revealed that her reason for visiting Rapture at all involved revenge for another Elizabeth, from a different timeline, who died as a baby because of Booker's negligence. Elizabeth employs a similar level of violence to Booker while trying to protect Sally during the second part of *Burial at Sea*, finally becoming a sacrifice at the end of the game once she knows that Sally and the other little sisters will be safe. Recall that Booker sacrificed himself at the end of *BioShock Infinite*, when he allowed the Elizabeths to drown him to break the cycle of violence. Elizabeth relies on violence to keep herself and Sally safe, including her own self sacrifice to ensure Sally's survival.

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[16] Not Elizabeth's actual little sister, but a particular kind of genetically altered and brainwashed child, used in earlier BioShock games as the player's source of a chemical called ADAM.

In contrast to Elizabeth and Clementine, both Ellie and Emily become responsible for the lives of dependent adults instead of children. *The Last of Us* and *Dishonored* both offer a role reversal during which the fathers become dependent on their daughters. In *Dishonored 2*, while Emily is the playable protagonist, Corvo becomes dependent on her for survival, after he is cursed by Delilah and turned to stone. Emily can also take responsibility for the lives of several other characters, depending on player choices. For example, she can choose to save Dr. Hypatia, which results in the doctor joining Emily's crew as she recovers. Joel's dependence on Ellie is shown in both *The Last of Us* and the *Left Behind* DLC. After he is injured at the University of Eastern Colorado, he falls unconscious and Ellie is left to keep him alive and to find antibiotics to treat his injuries. In both series, the daughters are forced to rely on intense violence to rescue or protect their fathers from further harm.

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* ultimately focus on the father-daughter relationships at their core. Following in the fathers' footsteps, the daughters perform the same kind of paternal masculinity, rather than being allowed to adapt to the situation or adopt a different approach. Even in situations where the daughters are allowed to take a stealthier approach in gameplay, they are typically recycling the same kinds of mechanics as their fathers and still rely on violence for their survival. As a result, the games not only emphasize fatherhood as the ideal kind of parent *and* protagonist — whether that protagonist is a father or their daughter — but they do so by erasing mothers from the narrative almost entirely. In the following section, I will discuss the influence that mothers have on *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, since they are largely absent from the story and the mothers have little to no impact on the daughters' development or the games' overall narratives.

Absent Mothers

Compared to fathers in video games, mothers are overall conspicuously absent. In *God of War* (SIE Santa Monica Studio, 2018), Kratos' wife asks her son and husband to inter her in her final resting place, for which they must travel the world, sparking their journey and the game's narrative. Players of *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008), are asked to select their character's stats and appearance moments before their mother's death during childbirth. In the *Uncharted* series, Nathan Drake's mother dies well before

the events of any of the games — even when the series explores Drake's childhood in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* (Naughty Dog, 2016), the story only regresses to a time after his mother's death, where she is physically absent, but shown as a major inspiration for her son's treasure hunting. Many more examples proliferate throughout video games, in which mothers are absent, not only as protagonists, but often as characters all together. When they are present, their roles are often passive or antagonistic. Åström (2015) discusses the "way mothers are routinely removed from narratives" in popular culture, which she calls the symbolic annihilation of mothers (p. 4). Gaye Tuchman's (2000) original use of the term was not only regarding the removal of women from mass media, but also their portrayal as victims and consumers. Åström (2015) uses the term to highlight the systematic removal of maternal characters from popular culture media. Repetitive use of this trope suggests, "that the best mother in literature is a dead one" (Francus, 2017, para. 2). *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* continue to embrace this trope by featuring mothers who are dead and absent, tools for gameplay, or antagonists.

However, none of this is exclusive to video games. Popular cultural media has a long, historical relationship with the symbolic erasure of mothers. Dever (1998) points out that, while the paternal ideal is rooted in hegemonic masculinity, the maternal ideal comes from "almost complete maternal absence," and has done so throughout centuries of oral and written media and literature (p. xi). Mothers are missing from cartoons and children's films — with Disney being a particularly habitual culprit (Boxer, 2014; Smith, 2018); Victorian literature (Dever, 1998; Thaden, 1997); the works of Shakespeare (Francus, 2017; Hamlet, 2017); and fairy tales (Åström, 2017; Schanoes, 2014; Warner, 1994). In all of these stories the mothers tend to end up "either dead, unimportant, ineffective, or destructive" (Thaden, 1997, p. 4). Specifically, they are killed or forced into passive roles or, if they are allowed to be active or granted agency within the narrative, they often become an antagonistic force. In addition, the driving force behind their antagonistic nature (in keeping with the fairy tale tradition) is often supernatural or monstrous (Warner, 1994).

Unlike fathers, whose popular culture depictions have gone through several variations during the 20th and 21st centuries, mothers in contemporary media continue to

be articulated in similar terms to their historical counterparts — a pattern that remains largely unchanged in postfeminist media. Maternal characters are still meant to embody traits that do not differ significantly from those expected of them in Victorian literature, such as "modesty, chastity, piety, charity, duty, compassion, self-control, and virtue" (Francus, 2017, p. 26). Children's media in particular presents images of mothers that are self-sacrificing, and domesticity "serves as cultural shorthand for Western standards of female behaviour regardless of age, class, region, ability, or character" (Francus, 2017, p. 26). As discussed previously, postfeminist fatherhood narratives emphasize the ideal of the kind, caring, attentive and good-natured mother by erasing her from the narrative before she can undergo a monstrous transformation into an antagonistic force (Warner, 1994). Francus (2017) suggests that this is because mothers threaten their children, and the postfeminist patriarchal imperatives with the spectre of maternal power. Hamad (2014) suggests that this is also, in part, due to the circuitous nature of postfeminism, whereby it is both a continuation and rejection of earlier feminist thought. Consequently, the idealized portrayals of women's domesticity set mothers in contrast to the postfeminist fathers, because video game fathers are presented as better equipped to handle the violence necessary for survival in the games' disaster scenarios. Eliminating mothers from postfeminist media allows for narratives that center fatherhood as the source of emotional connection, often depicting bereft and widowed single fathers (Hamad, 2014). In *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, there are no living mothers. As Schubart (2007) points out "the female hero… has no mother" (p. 81).

Dead mothers in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* can fill two specific roles within the narrative: catalyst and antagonist. First, mothers act as a catalyst, precipitating the events that kick start the game's plot, usually through their death or disappearance from the story, creating a "mystery for her child to solve" — a common element of maternal deaths in Victorian literature (Dever, 1998, p. xi). For example, the death of Empress Jessamine at the beginning of *Dishonored* is the inciting incident that drives the narrative for the rest of the game — it leads to Corvo Attano being framed for her murder, the kidnapping of her daughter, and the empire's descent into chaos and disorder. Although Empress Jessamine's death takes place on-

screen, other mothers' off-screen deaths still spur the narrative action of their respective games. In *The Last of Us*, Ellie's mother is almost entirely absent from the game, but her death is still part of what drives Ellie's partnership with Joel, escape from the city, and personal narrative journey. Clementine's parents are missing at the start of *The Walking Dead*, causing her to pair up with Lee during the game's first chapter.

A child's agency and autonomy are enabled by absent mothers, whose absences "make it possible for children to develop and grow" (Francus, 2017, p. 31). Antagonistic mothers exist in direct contrast to this idea, as they are imposed as impediments blocking the child's progression through their own developmental narrative. In addition, the antagonistic behaviour of mothers ties back to the idea that mothers should be virtuous role models for their children, by negating any of the typical maternal traits that are socially expected of mothers. Or, if those traits are present, they are shown to be smothering or antagonistic towards the child's development and freedom of movement in the world. In many cases, the mothers that return as antagonistic characters are also dead, which adds an additional layer of monstrosity to their presentation. In *BioShock Infinite*, Elizabeth's adoptive mother dies during the events of the game and returns as a spectral being that Booker and Elizabeth must defeat to advance in the game. In *The Walking Dead*, Clementine's parents are turned into the "walkers" that are the main threat to the game's characters throughout. *Dishonored's* Jessamine returns too, in the form of a talking, mechanical heart that, while not antagonistic herself, is used by antagonists and reveals antagonistic behaviours to the game's player character.

In addition to these dead and antagonist mothers, other female characters in all four games that might otherwise be considered maternally-signified characters fall victim to the same fates. Many of these women, upon presenting as a female role model for the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, are killed or repositioned as antagonistic forces against the father and daughter's story progression. In *The Walking Dead*, each time a female character is put in a position to offer affection or mentorship to Clementine, she is killed or removed from the story, including Lilly, who is asked to leave the group during a conflict, Christa, who is pregnant and killed at the start of the second series and Rebecca, who gives birth to A.J. shortly after their escape from the hardware store. Elizabeth in *BioShock Infinite* lacks

female mentors of any kind, after her adoptive mother is killed. Emily's estranged aunt in *Dishonored* 2 is the game's main antagonist. In *The Last of Us*, Ellie is presented with female role models through Tess, another smuggler and Joel's friend, and Marlene, who first introduces her to the fireflies. Tess dies while trying to extract Ellie from the city and Marlene is killed by Joel at the end of the game. Consequently, not only are there no mothers in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and The Walking Dead*, but the games lack any kind of adult, female mentorship or companionship for the daughters. In essence, the games make the argument that, while adoptive paternity is acceptable, adoptive maternity is only valuable in progressing the narrative, before it should be eliminated.

By erasing the mothers' and maternally-signified characters' active participation, the "widowed single father emerges as the paradigmatic hero" by stepping in to fill their absences (Hamad, 2014, p. 24). Erasing mothers and maternally-signified characters from the narrative results in a total lack of same-sex role models for the daughters. Consequently, this results in gameplay that reinforces the idea that fathers and fatherhood are better suited to the game worlds and their accompanying disaster scenarios. In chapter two, I discussed the role that success and failure play in the fathers' stories. As a consequence of the treatment of mothers in these games, fathers are not only presented as the ideal parent to protect the daughters from danger, but as the only viable alternative. According to *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, mothers *cannot* succeed at properly protecting their children, because they cannot successfully perform the violence necessary to ensure their own survival or their children's. When mothers do display similar levels of violence to the fathers, it is only as antagonists, but they are never strong enough to win against the heroic father. As a result, *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*'s mechanics reproduce and codify virtual worlds in which mothers are devalued to the point of erasure and in which the mechanical and narrative elements of the games normalize and reinforce this idea across multiple games and their sequels. In the next section, I will discuss the ways in which the games further prioritize fathers by using the daughters as tools to evaluate the fathers' failures and moral choices.

Moral Gauges and Redemptive Paternity

Finally, I will discuss the use of the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* as tools to address the morality of their fathers' actions and their personal need for redemption. First, the fathers' personal stories contain strong themes of redemption through their successful performance of fatherhood, as defined by the context of the game. In the previous chapter, I discussed the importance of success and failure in the fathers' performance of paternal masculinity. In this section, I will address the role that the daughters play in their fathers' redemption, with their survival existing as a concrete example of their fathers' success. However, the fathers' redemption often comes at the expense of the daughters, whose identities are built around their fathers' successes and failures, rather than their own. As Stang (2017) points out, the "cheerful female characters" are positioned as "vehicles for the paternal redemption of the embittered male protagonists" (p. 169). Second, through their reactions to events within the games, the daughters provide moral judgement of their fathers' actions. In the previous chapter, I discussed the way that protective paternal masculinity is used to justify violent actions by the fathers, so long as those actions are being taken to protect themselves and their daughters. In this section, I will examine the way that the games further rely on the daughters to provide a metric for whether an action taken by their fathers' is morally problematic or not. *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* are both multilinear games, where the daughters have been designed to react to their fathers' choices within the game world, allowing them to act as moral guides that can inform the fathers' future actions (and by extension, the player's). In *BioShock Infinite* and *The Last of Us*, the daughters provide narrative approval or disapproval of their fathers' actions, which reflects the fathers' character development throughout the story. In essence, the daughters' character development is either strongly influenced by or dependent on their fathers' actions, which reduces their independence and agency as characters. As Stang (2017) describes it, "each young woman's personality, behaviour, and future are all determined almost entirely by their father-figures" (p. 169). Consequently, the daughters within *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* act as tools to gauge the fathers' morality and successes as fathers, and to ultimately provide them redemption after their earlier failures.

In the first chapter, I describe Corvo's failure at the start of *Dishonored*, during which he fails to protect Jessamine and Emily from attackers, resulting in Jessamine's death and Emily's abduction. As a result, a significant part of his motivation throughout the game is to rescue Emily and restore her to the throne, thereby redeeming himself. Corvo has two opportunities to redeem himself by rescuing Emily. First, after she is kidnapped and held in the Golden Cat. Second, when she is taken to the top of the tower by Admiral Havelock at the end of the game. In the first case, Corvo must rescue Emily to progress the game. In the second, Emily can die during the confrontation if Corvo fails, resulting in the empire dissolving into chaos without Emily as the legitimate ruler. As a result, the game itself revolves around Corvo's redemption by successfully rescuing Emily and restoring her to the throne. For the most part, Emily serves as a prop for Corvo's redemption narrative in *Dishonored*. Her survival is representative of his success at the end of the game and her death indicates not only a failure to rescue Emily, but a failure to redeem himself by doing so. However, Emily's reactions to Corvo's actions — specifically the "chaos" system of morality that *Dishonored* utilizes — adds an additional dimension to his successes and failures. Specifically, if Corvo spends his time in *Dishonored* murdering, torturing and sowing discord to achieve a "high chaos" ending, Emily reacts to his choices. Her art becomes darker, reflecting her troubled dreams, and even when Corvo does succeed in saving her at the end of the game, her rule as empress is marked by violence, decay and political turmoil. Emily's reactions are what Stang (2017) refers to as a "moral barometer," meaning that she mostly exists to react positively or negatively to the player's actions (p. 167). As a result, even though Emily rules Dunwall, it is Corvo whose actions shape Emily and her rule, because her choices and personality are shaped almost entirely by Corvo. Emily is a source of redemption for Corvo, by giving him the opportunity to atone for his earlier mistakes, and acts as a moral barometer, by reacting to the level of chaos that is created in the game.

Similarly, in *The Walking Dead* the player, acting as Lee in the game, also impacts Clementine's development through his choices, while her survival marks Lee's successful performance of fatherhood during the game. However, unlike Emily in *Dishonored*, Clementine is designed to act as a moral compass, rather than a barometer, because she still develops a personality outside of Lee's actions and is meant to provide

guidance, rather than a direct reflection of the player's choices (Stang, 2017). Since players are emotionally attached to Clementine, there is a tendency to gauge player choices based on her reactions, because players want to help her to be happy and well adjusted. In the previous chapter, I discussed Lee's failure of fatherhood, which differs from the other fathers in *Dishonored*, *The Last of Us* and *BioShock Infinite* in that Lee failed to become a father at all, rather than failing to protect a child he already had. Clementine allows Lee to fulfil his pre-apocalyptic wish of having children by adopting her and, as the game progresses, Lee's ultimate goal becomes protecting and keeping her alive. However, he also aims to teach her how to stay alive on her own. As Stang (2017) points out, "choices do not matter on a grand scale in *The Walking Dead* – Lee will never save the world from its fate" (p. 167).

However, through his choices, Lee's can save Clementine by providing her with the tools and advice that she needs to survive. Lee's choices do not define Clementine's development, rather they are meant to guide her towards survival. Clementine's reactions to Lee are also more complex, because they are based on her own personality, rather than acting only as a measure of the morality of Lee's choices. Furthermore, Clementine is not Lee's *only* source of moral judgement, as he is confronted by other characters over his choices and frequently faces consequences within the game, regardless of Clementine's reaction to the events. For example, during Lee's confrontation with the stranger that kidnaps Clementine at the end of *The Walking Dead*, the stranger will react to and criticize Lee's actions, based on choices that the player has made throughout the game, such as whether certain characters survived or stayed with the group. While Corvo's actions control Emily's development, Lee's choices simply cause Clementine to react to the situation and thus guide the players' choices. However, her personality and behaviours are impacted by Lee's choices to about the same degree as the stranger's. As a result, the relationship between Lee and Clementine is much healthier than the other father-daughter relationships discussed in this thesis, because Clementine maintains a sense of independent development. She has opinions about Lee's choices, but they do not control her.

In *The Last of Us*, Ellie serves as both the main source of moral guidance for Joel as well as his sole source of redemption. Joel's main failure in *The Last of Us* is the death

of his daughter Sara during the game's prologue, which haunts him for the following 20 years and initially has a negative impact on his relationship with Ellie. Ellie also provides some moral guidance to his actions that was previously missing, both because he wants to ensure her survival and because she provides a new perspective. For example, after their escape from Pittsburgh, Joel lashes out at their travelling companion Henry, because he and his little brother Sam had abandoned them shortly before. While he is pointing a gun at Henry, growling and threatening him, Ellie touches his shoulder and says his name to try to calm him down. Then, Henry rattles off his reasons for abandoning them and points out that Joel would have done the same thing in Henry's shoes, in order to protect Ellie. Finally, Ellie reminds Joel that Henry saved *her* life, at which point Joel relents and backs down. Although Henry and Ellie both make essentially the same arguments as to why Joel should not shoot Henry, Ellie is the only one that changes Joel's mind. Unlike *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, players do not have a direct impact on Joel's choices within the scripted narrative of the game. However, within the game Ellie still has an impact on Joel's actions and attempts to act as a kind of moral compass at times. Joel's reliance on Ellie as a source of moral judgement coincides with the core narrative of *The Last of Us* as well, since the game is ultimately about Joel's attempts at redemption by acting as a father to Ellie. However, because Joel's daughter Sara died, his redemption comes in the form of ensuring Ellie's survival regardless of the cost to himself, Ellie or society, which creates a toxic and unhealthy relationship between the two. At the end of the game, when Joel takes Ellie from the fireflies before they can perform surgery to attempt to create a vaccine, he successfully redeems himself in his own eyes, because he kept Ellie alive. However, he goes against Ellie's wishes in order to do so and potentially dooms society too, as no other immune individuals have been found besides Ellie, thus deepening her survivor's guilt. As Stang (2017) observes, "the redemption of the father is clearly framed as more important than the psychological health of the daughter" (p. 170). Regardless of the impact that it has on himself or those around him, Joel's redemption is more important than Ellie's psychological wellbeing or the health of society.

In *BioShock Infinite*, Booker's redemption comes as a result of Elizabeth's moral judgement of his actions and through his own self-sacrifice. Similar to *The Last of Us*, players have no real control over Booker's narrative choices or the outcome of the game

and cannot impact Elizabeth's development. However, Elizabeth still undergoes major changes, many of which have to do with Booker's actions and are in reaction to his morally questionable actions. Specifically, Booker's dark and violent actions have a negative impact on Elizabeth's development, eventually "turning her into a cold, embittered, and vengeful murderer" (Stang, 2017, p. 168). Like Emily in *Dishonored*, Elizabeth is impacted by Booker's morally reprehensible actions, resulting in a darker, broodier and more violent Elizabeth. However, unlike Corvo in *Dishonored*, the player does not control Booker's narrative actions and the game's outcome cannot be changed. Elizabeth's negative development is a set aspect of the game. Consequently, Booker's redemption involves his self-sacrifice to eliminate the timeline in which Elizabeth had the experiences that hardened her. Elizabeth's moral judgements are themselves motivation for Booker's redemption. Booker also requires redemption because of his original treatment of Elizabeth as a baby, at which point in time he traded her away to pay off a gambling debt. He immediately regrets his choice and tries to undo it, but his failure to protect and care for Elizabeth, as an infant, structures much of the plot of *BioShock Infinite*, although Booker does not know this for a large portion of the game. Booker's redemption is somewhat unique from the other fathers here, because it can only be accomplished through his death, rather than through Elizabeth's survival. In order to save the many different Elizabeths that he encounters at the end of the game, Booker must die (drowned by the Elizabeths) to eliminate the timeline in which he becomes Father Comstock and thus, prevents the violence that occurs during the game. Booker himself states that it is "the only way to undo" what he has done to Elizabeth. During his drowning, the camera pans away from the various Elizabeths that surround Booker and shows each of them fading away as Booker's death changes their realities. Elizabeth is both the motivation behind Booker's redemption and the tool by which it is accomplished.

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* all strongly feature stories of paternal redemption, which is the driving motivation behind many of the fathers' actions throughout the games and leads to a moving and emotional plot for players to engage with. However, the fathers' redemption often comes at the cost of the daughters' development and individuality, because the daughters are situated as tools in

their respective games, which exist to motivate the fathers and to provide moral judgement of their actions. While it is used as a narrative motivation for the fathers in all four games, it is also implemented as a gameplay tool in *Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, which further reinforces the idea that the fathers' redemption comes through the successful performance of fatherhood. In addition, the fathers' redemption typically takes precedence over their daughter's well-being and inordinately relies upon the daughters to gauge the success of their performance and redemption.

Conclusion

In my research for this thesis, it became apparent that the "daddening" of games was focused almost exclusively on the heterosexual male protagonists that inhabited the role of the father, with little attention paid to the other characters that supported them. Daughters, in particular, were largely erased from this discussion, despite their frequent simultaneous popularity alongside their fathers. Importantly, developers were designing specifically with daughters in mind, so their popularity and place as secondary protagonists is far from incidental. In this chapter, I have necessarily broadened the discussion of "daddified" games to include the daughters in this analysis of video game fatherhood. However, despite the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and The Walking Dead* being prominent characters, with their own time in the spotlight as playable protagonists, they are not given the same weight or importance as their fathers. Rather, they are tools to motivate the fathers and players and to guide their actions, to comment on the game world and to reinforce the importance of paternal masculinity. Although they come from an increased demand for female characters in video games, their implementation still relies on out-dated tropes and toxic depictions of women in games that ultimately detract from their individuality and importance as characters.

In this chapter, I first provided a thorough explanation of the origin of the daughters as playable characters, with their predecessors found in film and television as the heroes of action films, empowerment media and slasher flicks. I detailed the influences that earlier kinds of female characters had on the development of video game daughters and what previous research existed about similar character types. Second, I

explored the ideas of "girl power" (as found in empowerment media), agency and the daughters as "damsels in distress," finding that the games often present seemingly empowered heroines who are nonetheless often stripped of their agency and forced into the damsel role in order to support their fathers' stories. Third, I discussed the daughters' educations, received from their fathers, and their dependence on violence. While the developers could theoretically design the daughters to approach their game's worlds, mechanics, or puzzles differently from their fathers, they instead rely on the repetition of the fathers' violent gameplay. The daughters are given little opportunity to deviate from their fathers or the knowledge and skills that they gain from their fathers. Following this, I discussed the daughters' repetition of paternal masculinity after taking over as playable protagonists for their fathers. Through their performance of violent paternal masculinity, the daughters end up mimicking their fathers' behaviour. Combined with their overall dependence on violence, I argued that the daughters' performance of paternal masculinity further reinforces the idea that fatherhood is the only acceptable way to be a protagonist in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and The Walking Dead.* Subsequently, I supported this argument by examining the role that mothers play in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and The Walking Dead*, pointing out that the mothers are largely absent from these stories and have little impact on their daughters' lives or development. Consequently, the absence of mothers further reinforces the idea that fathers are the only acceptable parent, and mothers are fundamentally unsuited to parenthood or being a protagonist in video games. Finally, I argued that the daughters and their personal development as characters are ultimately disregarded in favour of supporting their fathers' narratives through two main methods. First, the daughters are used as moral gauges, so that their development is often dependent on the morality of their fathers' actions, rather than their own principles. Second, the daughters serve as tools for the fathers' redemption in their games, by providing a place for the fathers to work through their previous parenting failures, regardless of the impact that this has on their daughters.

Throughout this thesis, I have detailed why these design choices were made and how they were implemented for both the fathers and daughters. In this chapter, I hope to have illuminated not only why daughters are such prevalent secondary protagonists in

paternally-focused video games, but some of the conflicted and complicated aspects of their development and implementation in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. For example, although they are, on the surface, strong female characters who act and fight like their fathers, the daughters are still reduced to "damsels in distress," in need of rescuing and lacking their own agency. While their capacity for violence is often presented as a positive example of their place in the story, it only reinforces the idea that violence is a necessary part of their stories and that protective paternal masculinity is the ideal way to participate with the game worlds in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead.* As a consequence of these often complicated and contradictory approaches to the daughters' development as secondary protagonists, they inhabit a grey area with numerous positive and negative aspects.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I examined the popularity of fatherhood as a thematic element of video games, including its use as a mechanic and the simultaneous prevalence of daughters as the games' secondary protagonists, who eventually take over their fathers' roles. My initial goal was to explore the "daddening" of games, with a focus on their popularity as protagonists and why the performance of fatherhood compelled players. In our early discussions, both Cassandra Feely and I noted that we had become more invested in our roles as fathers than we had while playing as other similar characters, which caused us to question *what* about playing as a father had us hooked. Was it a wish-fulfilment fantasy about protecting others? Why did the daughters inspire so much emotional investment in us? As this thesis grew, I began to question further: why did developers focus on fathers, instead of mothers or parenting in general, in order to motivate and engage players? What did the prevalence of fathers as video game protagonists reflect about society and popular culture? I also became interested in the way that the daughters were implemented as secondary protagonists in games. Although they are not the sole companions to the fathers, they appear frequently enough to encourage additional questions about the depiction of young women in video games and the role they play both within the games themselves and in game development more broadly. What does the design of the daughters as secondary protagonists show about popular culture and game development? Why have video games become focused on father-daughter relationships over other kinds of parental relationships? In this thesis, I explored each of these questions and more as I examined the father-daughter relationships that exist at the core of *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*.

In the first chapter, I used game design concepts to analyse the aesthetic design of the player characters, their behaviour and mechanics, and the way that they progress through their respective games. I argued that the fathers and daughters have been designed with very specific aesthetics and mechanics in mind, which causes them to repeat similar tropes across games. Video games have a long history of gruff, violent hyper-masculine protagonists that laid the foundation for my analysis of the fathers, with their aesthetic designs demonstrating little deviation from the standard heterosexual white

male protagonist that games are known for — typically splattered with blood and carrying an arsenal of different weapons, often gruff and stoic and always capable of extreme violence. In contrast, the designs of the daughters depict a younger, more vulnerable protagonist, who is wide-eyed, naive and *also*, eventually, capable of the same kinds of extreme violence as their fathers. Throughout *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead* the fathers and daughters typically share mechanics and a playstyle with minor changes, but the important difference is that the fathers start their games with the knowledge of how to defend themselves with violence, while the daughters must learn these skills from their fathers throughout the game. As a result, the way that the fathers and daughters progress throughout their games are different, since the daughters must learn from their fathers before they are considered capable of eventually becoming the player protagonist. Despite the games having different genres, art styles, mechanics, settings and stories, the fundamental theme of fatherhood connects the games together and shows the similarities that do exist between the games. By highlighting these similarities, I was able to show that certain elements were repeated between games and, thus, have become closely associated with the depiction of the fathers and daughters in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*.

In the second chapter, I drew from research done by scholars of masculinity and fatherhood to shape my analysis of the fathers as player protagonists, with a particular focus on a postfeminist reading of the paternally-signified narratives in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*. Throughout this chapter, I analysed the relationship between fatherhood, masculinity and violence in video games, emphasizing their interactivity and the way it impacts this relationship. First, I provided evidence, using Hannah Hamad's arguments in *Postfeminist Fatherhood* (2014), that fatherhood has become a dominant paradigm of masculinity in film and television, featuring as a structuring, thematic hook in narratives that feature "paternally-signified" protagonists. Subsequently, I argued that this paradigm extends into video games, which have become similarly inundated with paternally-signified stories, so that fatherhood becomes a key part of the player's experience of the game.

Mark Pajor (2014) builds on this idea by arguing that fatherhood and masculinity have combined to create "paternal masculinity," which emphasizes violent gameplay as the performance of fatherhood. I demonstrated that *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead* are all extensively violent games that rely on that dangerous apocalyptic, dystopian or disastrous settings to justify the fathers' use of violence in order to protect themselves and their daughters. Fatherhood in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead* is designed so that when players are asked to *perform* fatherhood, they must do so predominantly through the games' violent mechanics. Consequently, the games create a system in which fatherhood can either fail or succeed if players perform violence "correctly," which is defined differently in each game. In summary, I argued that fatherhood in video games is *performed* by players as part of the games' interactive systems, typically through violent mechanics that are justified by the games' reliance on dangerous settings. Although there are elements of video game fatherhood that are not performed through violence, they rarely take the spotlight and are often extraneous to the games' examples of violent fatherhood. Occasionally, players are asked to perform fatherhood through emotional engagement with their daughters, that reflects a kinder and more nurturing kind of fatherhood, but games ultimately measure the fathers' success based on their violent actions, which are treated as necessary to ensure the daughters' survival and to complete the games.

My third chapter focused on the daughters as secondary protagonists in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*, referring predominantly to research done on the depiction of daughters and adolescent girls in film and television. Few of the discussions surrounding the popularity of fatherhood in games focus on the simultaneous popularity of daughters, despite not only their increased presence in games overall, but their inclusion as playable secondary protagonists in many games. In my discussion, I traced the creation of the adolescent action heroines through the history of film and television as the successors of adult female action heroes that emerged in the 1970s and were shaped by elements of "empowerment" media in the 1990s, as well as different elements from both horror and action films.

In the third chapter, I argued that much of the design of the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* comes across on a surface

level as positive, progressive, “feminist” character design. However, this is generally not correct. Instead, the daughters end up as damsels in distress for the fathers to rescue or tools to support the fathers in gameplay, and often lack their own agency within the stories, even after they become playable protagonists. I also acknowledged the importance of the fathers on the daughters’ development. The daughters receive a violent education from their fathers, which is what allows them to become playable protagonists and to defend themselves. This education is important, because it also impacts the daughters' adoption of paternal masculinity, allowing them to take over the performance of fatherhood from their fathers through the use of violence to protect individuals in their care. Although there should be the ability for the daughters to act independently from their fathers, they are instead created as carbon-copies of their fathers. I also highlighted the fact that the fathers are the only parental figures in their daughters’ lives; mothers, and any potentially maternal characters, are typically killed off or turned into antagonists. The daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and The Walking Dead* are further stripped of agency, and influences other than their fathers, because they are used to measure their fathers’ morality and they are the main tool by which their fathers achieve redemption. Put simply, I argued in the third chapter that the daughters are often presented as positive, progressive examples of female characters in video games typically because they look and act like their fathers. However, the way that the daughters are implemented in games, as narrative and gameplay tools, ultimately results in the daughters’ loss of agency and an inability to develop beyond the moulds created by their fathers’ performance of violent paternal masculinity.

Despite my criticism of *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*, I have to note that they are some of my favourites, to which I have a strong emotional attachment. Like Totilo’s (2010) experience with “daddified” games, I also found myself engaging with video game fatherhood on a deep emotional level. I found it difficult to avoid getting attached to Ellie, Emily, Clementine and Elizabeth while working my way through *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. It was often easier to justify intense video game violence because of a desire to protect my surrogate daughters. Essentially, I found from personal experience that fatherhood as a theme certainly *works* to motivate players and engage audiences.

Furthermore, playing as the daughters was fun and engaging, because they allow players to see the game from a different perspective and, in all honesty, I was motivated by the novelty of playing a teen heroine in a mainstream action game.

However, despite the daughters in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead* being prominent characters, with their own time in the spotlight as playable protagonists, they are not given the same weight or importance as their fathers. Rather, they are tools to motivate the fathers and players and to guide their actions, to comment on the game world and to reinforce the importance of paternal masculinity. Although they come from an increased demand for female characters in video games, their implementation still relies on out-dated tropes and toxic depictions of women in games that ultimately detract from their individuality and importance as characters. As a result of my analysis, I came away with the idea that fatherhood as a thematic and narrative aspect of video games has become repetitive and underdeveloped, resulting in stories that do little to challenge the status quo of the gruff, paternalistic male protagonist who expresses his love through violence.

Throughout this thesis, I have detailed why these design choices were made and how they were implemented for both the fathers and daughters. In this thesis I hope to have illuminated not only why daughters are such prevalent secondary protagonists in paternally-focused video games, but some of the conflicted and complicated aspects of their development and implementation in *The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored* and *The Walking Dead*. Despite the daughters demonstrating an increase in female protagonists in games, they still exist in worlds without mothers or female role models. Although they are important secondary protagonists within their games, their development, individuality and well-being are set aside in favour of focusing on their reaction to their fathers' actions and their fathers' eventual redemption. As a consequence of these often complicated and contradictory approaches to the daughters' development as secondary protagonists, they inhabit a grey area with numerous positive and negative aspects.

The Last of Us, BioShock Infinite, Dishonored and *The Walking Dead* are games that are ultimately *about* fatherhood. However, they approach this idea through a narrow definition of fatherhood that relies too much on the traditional conventions of violent

video game mechanics and a paternalistic, controlling approach to fatherhood. Given the nature of the games' settings and their reliance on violence, successful fatherhood is a limiting concept that is more likely to invoke brutality and death, than kindness or support. Accordingly, the design of the daughters reflects the games' focus on paternity and violence, rather than exploring other incarnations of fatherhood. Notably, there are examples of more interesting explorations of fatherhood in games, like *Octodad: Dadliest Catch* in which an octopus stuffed into a suit attempts to perform fatherhood with haphazard, but heart-warming results. *Dream Daddy* is another alternative approach to paternity in games, with the dating simulator allowing players to explore more identities than that of white heterosexual cisgender men. Neither game centralizes violence, while still focusing on fatherhood as a main narrative theme and encouraging healthier parent child-relationships. As Stang (2017) argues in "Big Daddies and Broken Men": "while paternal narratives are emotionally compelling, for the industry to truly demonstrate its 'maturation,' developers need to begin featuring healthier, more compassionate father-daughter bonds, more daughters as player-characters, and, perhaps most importantly, more maternal protagonists" (p. 171).

Future Directions

Since the concept of "fatherhood in video games" is quite broad, there were elements that I was not able to discuss in this thesis, as well as parts of this thesis that I would like to have explored in more detail. In my third chapter, I briefly discussed the role of mothers in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*. Notably, they are typically dead, antagonistic or sometimes used as tools to bolster the narrative or to spark conflict. I would be interested in exploring the symbolic annihilation of mothers in video games more thoroughly and to examine games in which the mothers play more significant roles, survive the game, or even serve as the player protagonist. As I noted in this thesis, fatherhood is often framed as a success or failure in video games, requiring that fathers perform violence in the correct way, at the correct time, in order to succeed at fatherhood. However, mothers are typically treated as having already failed, due to being ill-equipped to deal with the game's violence and dangerous settings

compared to the fathers. In essence, the games argue that all kinds of motherhood are automatic failures, while violent fatherhood is the only possible path to success.

Another aspect that I did not address in this thesis is race in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*. Non-white characters are present in these games, but they are often sacrificed to forward the narrative of white male protagonists. Furthermore, like the aforementioned mothers, characters of colour are often turned into antagonists or tools. Throughout this thesis, I observe that *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*, like many mainstream games[17], prioritize the perspectives of heterosexual white men, even despite the daughters as secondary protagonists. Since the games typically make the argument that fathers are the hegemonic ideal of a player protagonist, they often disregard or minimize characters that do not fit into that mould. As a black man, Lee is one of the few exceptions to this rule. In general, I would have liked to explore this issue in more depth, because the privileging of white heterosexual male perspectives further narrows the definition of video game fatherhood by excluding a variety of masculinities that could offer different and interesting perspectives on the construction of fatherhood.

In discussing the topic of race in "daddified" games, *The Walking Dead* stands out, since the game's main protagonists are all people of colour. First Lee and then Clementine, who is briefly replaced by a Latino man named Javier García in *The Walking Dead: A New Frontier*. Many of *The Walking Dead*'s secondary characters are people of colour, who inhabit a variety of different roles and often survive, even showing up in later games. *The Walking Dead* provides a much more interesting and diverse array of characters that all contribute to the game's narrative, rather than simply propping up the stories of white protagonists. Consequently, Lee's performance of fatherhood is also the least similar to the other fathers, as he relies less on violence and more on talking through disputes, and often attempts to support Clementine on a much deeper, more nurturing and emotional level (Bell, Kampe & Taylor, 2015). However, despite *The Walking Dead*'s more positive portrayal of non-white characters, the depiction of race remains a problem

[17] Including others cited as examples of "daddified" games, like *Red Dead Redemption*, *The Witcher 3, God of War* and *Heavy Rain*.

in *The Last of Us*, *Dishonored* and *BioShock Infinite* and presents an opportunity for further analysis of race in daddified games.

Sexuality is the final topic that I was unable to address in this thesis. In contrast to the vast majority of mainstream video game characters, the daughters in *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead* are predominantly queer or, at least, are open to being read as queer. Ellie in *The Last of Us* is a lesbian with a female love interest who plays a major role in *Left Behind*. In *Dishonored 2*, Emily's love interest was left purposefully gender-neutral by developers and only referred to with they/them pronouns. *The Walking Dead*'s final season presents Clementine with a choice between a male or female love interest. Elizabeth in *BioShock Infinite* is the only one of the four daughters who is not explicitly queer, largely because she has no love interest and her orientation is never addressed. I am curious about why this is such a notable part of the games that I examine in this thesis, particularly since literary analysis of father-daughter relationships so often turns to more Freudian psychoanalytic discussions about the fathers' involvement in shaping their daughters' sexual development (Devlin, 2005, as cited in Stang, 2017).

In my third chapter, I discuss Schubart's (2007) concept of the "daughter archetype," which includes the idea that the daughter relies on the ability to perform stereotypical masculinity and femininity — it is a part of their education, since their fathers are the characters that teach them how to perform these gender roles. One of the major ways that daughters in video games diverge from the action heroines that Schubart discusses is due to this trope being largely absent from *The Last of Us*, *BioShock Infinite, Dishonored*, and *The Walking Dead*. Little, if any, of the narrative in these games is devoted to the daughters' sexuality. In general they lack love interests, are overwhelmingly desexualized and do not rely on their sexuality to commit violence. I think that it would be interesting to spend more time with this concept and to explore the role of sexuality in these "daddified" games and why the developers have often chosen to make the daughters queer, when it goes against the typical characterization of daughter characters in existing media.

In the future, it is my hope that "daddified" games will embrace their ability to tell interactive stories, in order to explore a wider range of masculinities and conceptions of

fatherhood. I think that games that use fatherhood, or parenting more generally, as a core theme will increase in relevance to an aging population of gamers and game developers who now find themselves as parents. Current depictions of fatherhood in mainstream video games are being restricted by their overreliance on violence and out-dated tropes about masculinity that communicate troubling ideas about fatherhood and its place in video games, and popular culture more broadly. As Stang (2017) argues these games do not always have to be about "violent men who emotionally devastate their daughters" (p. 171). However, I also look forward to the future of "daughters" in video games as they move away from existing only in relation to their fathers and gain more agency as independent characters.

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