

02 Bound by Love

Game design | Role-playing games | Family relationship research

Project brief:

The game lets players experience the oppressive parent-child relationship in a Chinese family, which encourages mutual respect and trust for true communication between parents and children.

2024.5 - 2024.7

Individual project

INSPIRATION

● A true story of an incoming freshman

I came across a story from network about JiaJia, who posted that her mom stole her university admission letter because her mom wanted her to become a local teacher. This sparked a heated discussion online about **extreme control from parents**.



"My mom has strong controlling tendencies; she has interfered in every aspect of my life."

● My similar experience

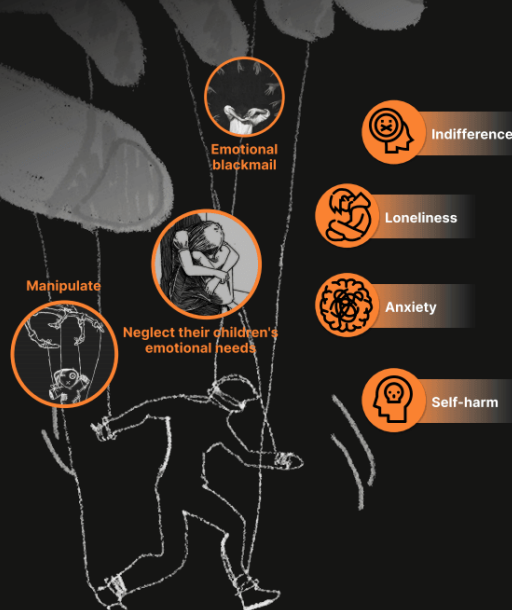
For me, though my mom doesn't control me in such an extreme way, she still put a lot of subtle pressure on me. Before entering university, I felt **exhausted under her extreme care**. Even though I got into one of China's top universities, it seems like I still have endless heavy goals.



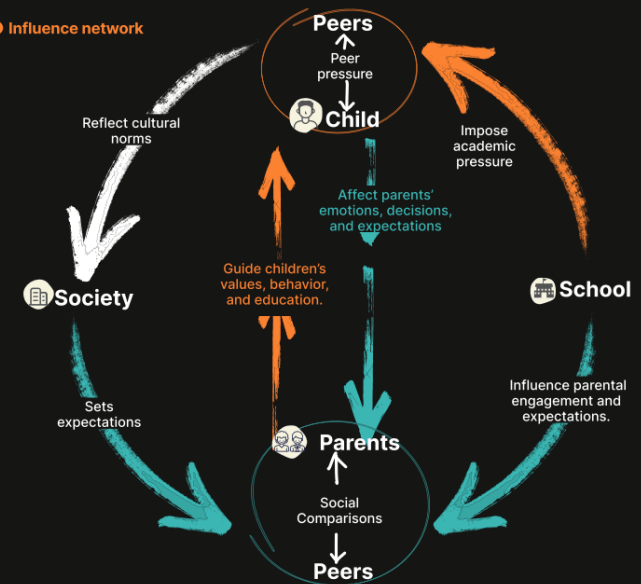
RESEARCH ON CHINESE FAMILIES

● How parental control shapes relationships and its impact

In many traditional Chinese families, there seems to be a strong emphasis on parental control and authority. Parents often take an overly involved or controlling role in their children's lives.



● Influence network



External pressures on families put **parents** in the **spotlights**. In an oppressive parent-child relationship, parents, who should help manage stress, end up being the main source of it. I want to understand how both parents and children view this relationship and its reasons.

● Parent-child user research

Education and success

83% of respondents agree that a person's level of education is an important factor for success.

Extracurricular overload

78% of parents in Beijing choose to enroll their children in extracurricular tutoring classes.

Limited equality

43% of mothers hope to establish an equal interactive relationship with their children.

Education-first mindset

38% of parents agree with the statement "In order for my child to have a happy future, I believe education should be prioritized while they are young."

Clear arrangements

30% of parents have clear arrangements and expectations for their children's daily life and studies.

Academic focus

80% of 8th-grade students say their parents care most about their academic performance.

Neglected interests

11% of students think their parents focus on their interests or talents.

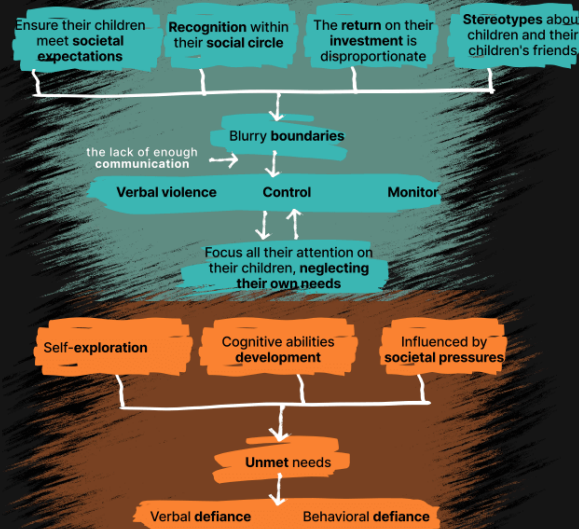
Communication

22% of eighth-grade students said "Parents almost never spend time talking with me."

Lack of support

38% of teenagers turn to their parents as their main source of support when facing troubles.

● Parent-child insight



In China, this tense parent-child relationship is very common. However, its effect are hardly be noticed. So, I created a game where people can experience this oppressive, Chinese-style family dynamic and to inspire them to build relationships with mutual respect and trust.

IDEATION

Why game?

Emotions expression ersion

The game uses task mechanics, scene changes, and other elements to express complex emotions.

Deep role immersion ersion

The game creates a strong connection between the user and the character, allowing for deep focus and engagement.

What they can get from the game?

Target players

Parents

For those looking to better understand the impact of their behavior on their teenage children and learn how to foster healthier interactions.

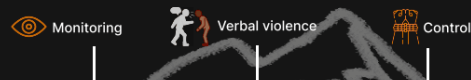
Teenagers

For those who may be facing challenges in their relationships with their parents, offering them a way to reflect on and understand their emotions and reactions.

STORYLINE

Play mode

Single-player: Players experience the game from the child's perspective



Game mechanics

Challenges should be designed to reflect the parent's different typical behaviors

Winning conditions

The player "wins" by asserting child rights

Ending

The child gains respect but loses it again

Core themes

Shows a trained parent-child relationship from different aspects

About "Control"



Symbol of control

Visualize control using a spider, a puppet, or anything with threads.



Other characters

Use other characters to represent the child's friends, making it easier to express the parents' social interference in the child's life.



Control behaviors

Through certain detailed objects or scenes, allow players to understand the daily controlling behaviors of parents.

About "Love"



Small spider

Touch players with adorable characters.



Parents' past

Through parents' excellent experiences, understand that they were once independent and positive.



Parents' care

Expressing parents' instinctive love through certain detailed objects.

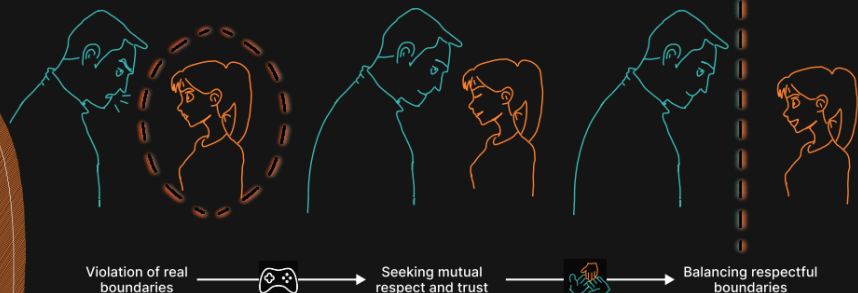
● I hope

Parents

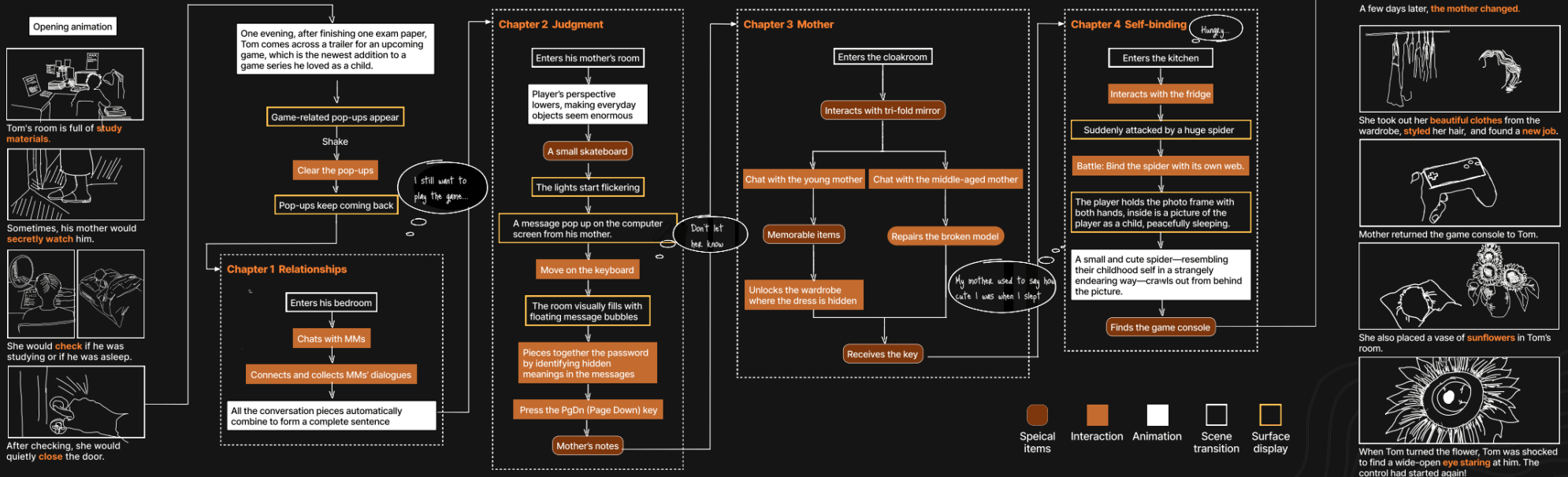
Let parents experience the impact of their own actions from the child's perspective, encourage them to try to understand their children and also care about their needs.

Teenagers

Through playing this game, children can understand that their parents' love is unquestionable and intuitive, and that the suffocating control comes from misguided beliefs or approaches.

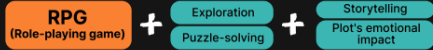


GAME FLOW



GAME WORLDBUILDING

Game Type



Background

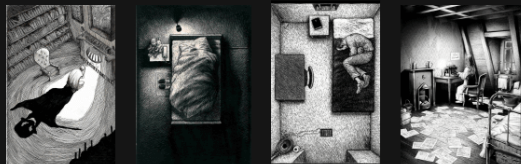
In China, almost all high school seniors must take the Gaokao (National Higher Education Entrance Examination), an **important exam** that give chances to enter top universities.

Parents also pay a lot of attention to the exam and some even go so far as to closely **monitor** and **control** their children's daily lives to help them succeed.

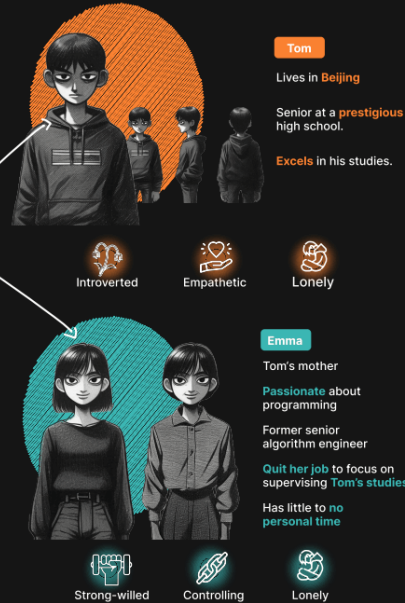


Visual style

Pencil drawing Dark atmosphere Psychological horror

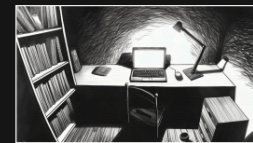


Character design



Scene setting

I designed several **scenes** and the **objects** within them to present the complex and dynamic parent-child relationship from different aspects, and listed the **dimensions** each scene would showcase.



Control

Monitor

Break the control



Compare

Notice

Break the control

Dedication

Understand



Dedication

Touched

Break the control

Items

Tom's bedroom



Demonstrating the mother's desire to monitor through recording and analyzing the child's social life, showing her need to know everything about the child.

Emma's bedroom



Demonstrate the mother's controlling nature and competitive mindset by limiting the player's skateboard usage time and bombarding them with messages from the mother.

Cloakroom



Use these items to present the image of an independent and accomplished woman.

Kitchen



Use the spider mother to represent mothers and the little spiders to move the players emotionally.

INTERFACE AND CONTROL

Control



Click



Interact with objects



Movement controls



Jump

UI design

Button



Start the game

Close

Skip

Skip the animation

Back

Tooltip



Hover title of item

Info navigation

GAME GALLERY

Opening animation

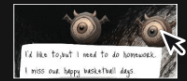


I introduced Tom's daily life through this opening animation, showing Emma's controlling role through her monitoring behavior, which Tom may be unaware of or too afraid to express anger about.

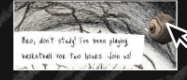
Chapter 1



Explore the bedroom and discover that Emma is secretly monitoring Tom's social life. The player must correctly **pair the MMs** in the specific conversation, distinguished by different colors, and place them into black boxes. This also symbolizes the child's **protest against social surveillance**.



• Mouse hovers over the MM.

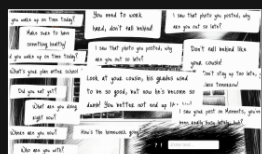


• Find the next sentence of the conversation to determine if this MM matches the MM from the first step.

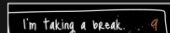


• This screen will appear once all matches are successfully paired

Chapter 2



• Find the skateboard.



• Interact with the number corresponding to the option on the keyboard



• Pay attention to the interaction timing. Mom doesn't allow Tom to play with the skateboard, so make sure not to get caught by her while pressing.

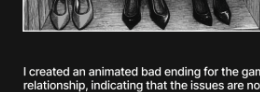
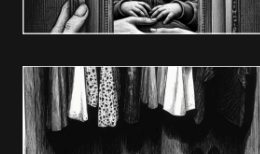
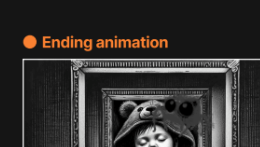
Complete an online chat with their mother within a limited time and find a four-digit password hidden in the **chat bubbles**, whose content reveals the Emma's tendency for **comparison and sense of superiority**.

Chapter 3



Explore the wardrobe to **uncover Emma's past**. By finding the young mother's dress and repairing the middle-aged mother's model, the player obtains a key to proceed to the next chapter.

Chapter 4



Ending animation



I created an animated bad ending for the game, where everything seems to be **getting better**, but ultimately it **returns to square one**. This represents the **repetition** of negative patterns in a parent-child relationship, indicating that the issues are not easily resolved and continue to recur despite efforts to break free.



Bind the large spider with spider webs to beat it, reminding people that a mother's love can also bind her.

