



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

Demo: <https://youtu.be/EgML2UNNXnA>

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.



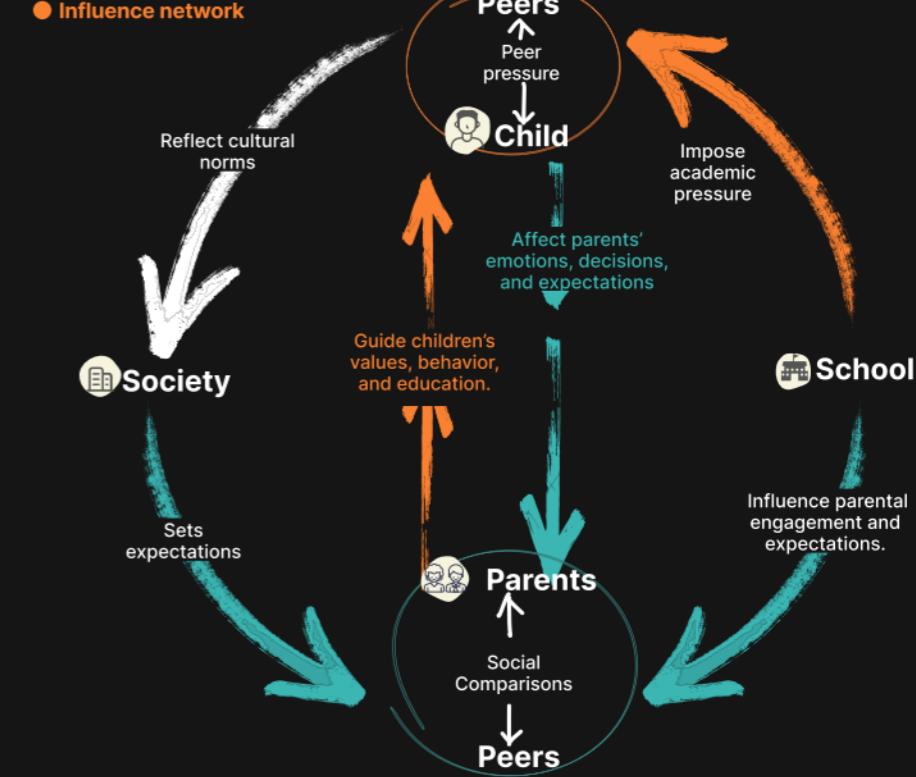
RESEARCH ON CHINESE FAMILIES

● 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

-Extracurricular overload

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

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

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

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.

83%

43%

78%

38%

80%

11%

22%

38%

30%

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.

● Parent-child insight

Ensure their children meet societal expectations

Recognition within their social circle

The return on their investment is disproportionate

Stereotypes about children and their children's friends

the lack of enough communication → Blurry boundaries

Verbal violence → Control → Monitor

Focus all their attention on their children, neglecting their own needs

Self-exploration → Cognitive abilities development → Influenced by societal pressures

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 session



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

Deep role immersion session



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?



STORYLINE

● 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.

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

Show 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.

Items

Tom's bedroom



Diary



Contact list



MM

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

Emma's bedroom



Skateboard



Laptop

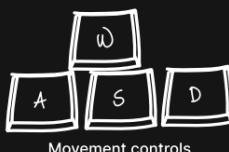
Control



Click



Interact with objects



Movement controls



Jump

Chapter 2



Find the skateboard.



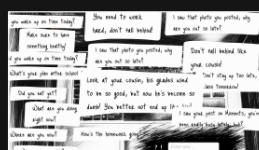
I'm taking a break.

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**.

INTERFACE AND CONTROL

UI design

Button



Wardrobe

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

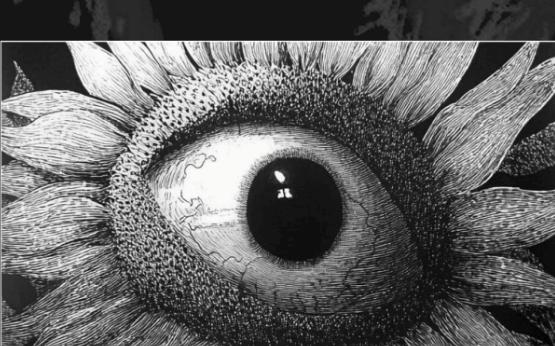
Chapter 3



Chapter 4



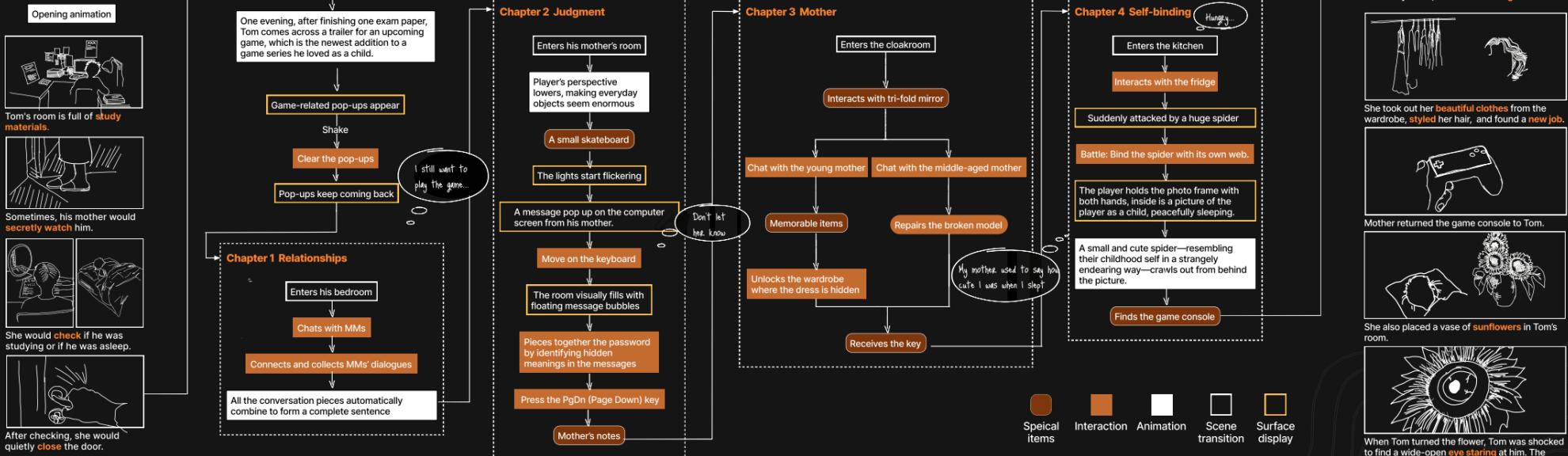
Ending animation



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.

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.

GAME FLOW



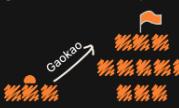
GAME WORLDBUILDING

Game Type

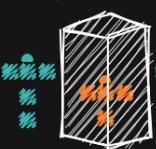
RPG (Role-playing game) + Exploration + Storytelling
(Plot's emotional impact)

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.



Character design



Tom
Lives in Beijing
Senior at a **prestigious** high school.
Excels in his studies.

Introverted Empathetic Lonely



Emma
Tom's mother
Passionate about programming
Former senior algorithm engineer
Quit her job to focus on supervising Tom's studies
Has little to no personal time
Strong-willed Controlling Lonely

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.



Tom's bedroom
The place where Tom sleeps and studies

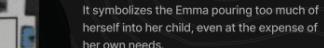
The giant eye dominates the room, evoking a sense of being watched or surveilled.



Cloakroom



Kitchen
The place where Emma goes to great lengths to prepare three meals a day for Tom



Emma's bedroom
The place where Emma sleeps and works

The blank computer screen suggests a lack of clarity or direction in her own goals or ambitions, possibly sacrificed to prioritize the family's needs.



Kitchen
The cold, detached atmosphere of this central space for family reflects a lack of emotional warmth or connection within the family dynamic.

