



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

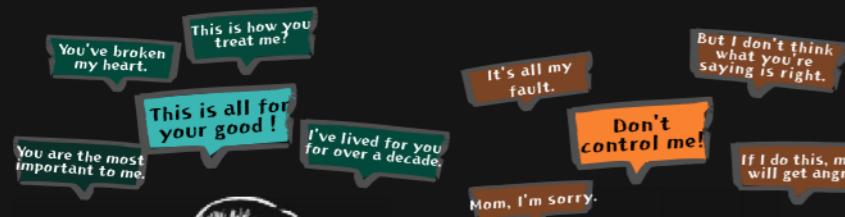
I came across a story from network about JiaJia, who posted that her mom stole her university admission letter because her mom wanted her to become a local teacher. This sparked a heated discussion online about extreme control from parents.



"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.



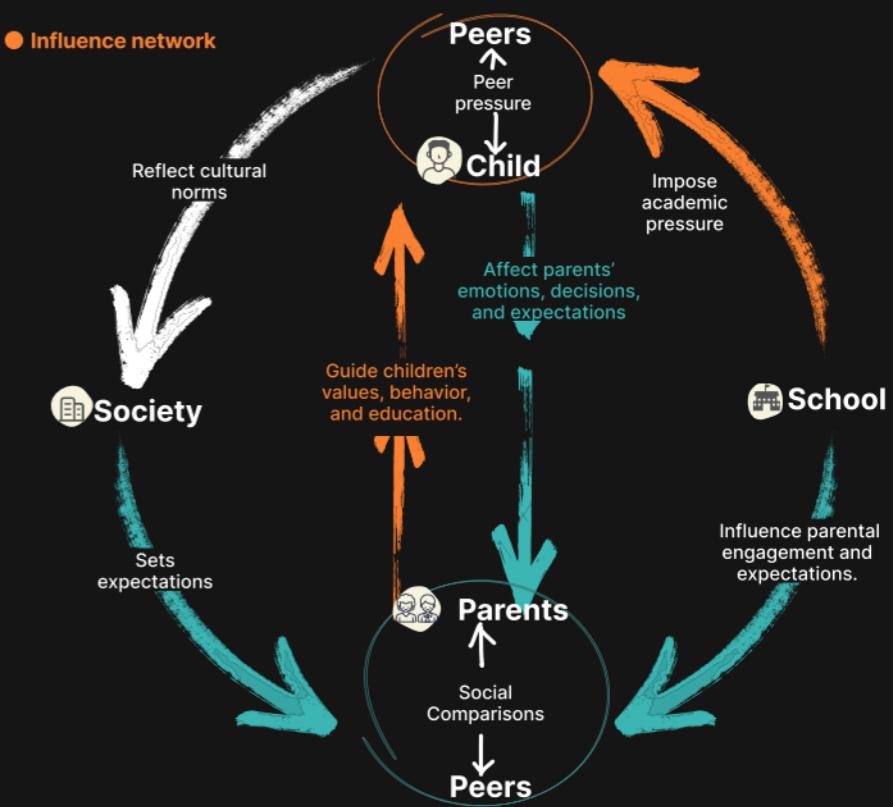
RESEARCH ON CHINESE FAMILIES

● 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.

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

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



Trophies



Books



Tickets



Gown

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

Kitchen



Spider mother and her baby

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

INTERFACE AND CONTROL

Control

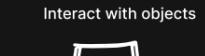
Click



Interact with objects



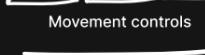
Laptop



Skateboard



Books



Tickets



Gown

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



Spider mother and her baby

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

UI design

Button



START

Start the game

X

Close

Skip

Skip the animation

X

Back

Tooltip



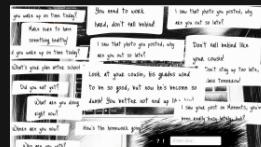
Wardrobe

Hover title of item

🔍

Info navigation

Chapter 2



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



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.



Chapter 4



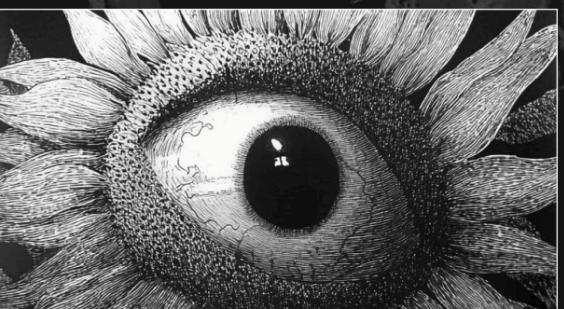
I introduced Tom's daily life through this opening animation, **showing Emma's controlling role** through her monitoring behavior, which Tom may be unaware of or too afraid to express anger about.



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

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.

Ending animation



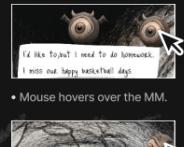
I created an animated bad ending for the game, where everything seems to be **getting better**, but ultimately it **returns to square one**. This represents the **repetition** of negative patterns in a parent-child relationship, indicating that the issues are not easily resolved and continue to recur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

GAME GALLERY

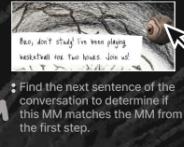
Opening animation



Chapter 1



Mouse hovers over the MM.

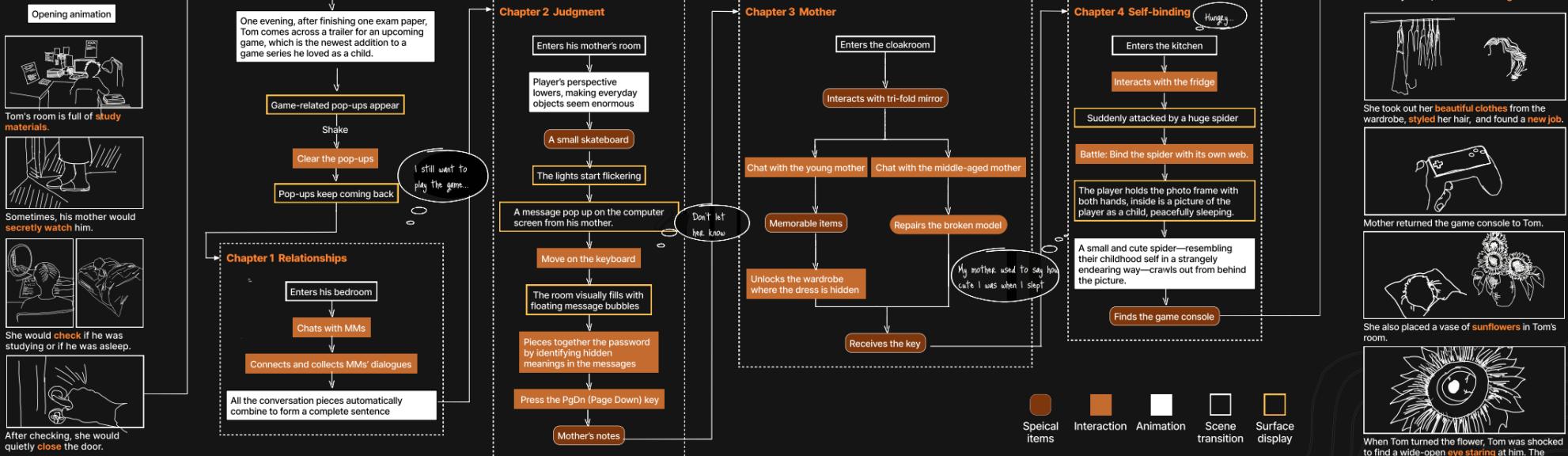


Find the next sentence of the conversation to determine if this MM matches the MM from the first step.



This screen will appear once all matches are successfully paired

GAME FLOW



GAME WORLDBUILDING

Game Type

RPG (Role-playing game) + Exploration + Storytelling
(Puzzle-solving) 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.

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

Visual style

Pencil drawing Dark atmosphere Psychological horror



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
The place piled with Tom's clothes mostly
It symbolizes the Emma pouring too much of herself into her child, even at the expense of her own needs.



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 her 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.



Dedication
Notice
Compare
Touched
Break the control