

## Big Daddies and Broken Men: Father-Daughter Relationships in Video Games

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### Abstract

This article discusses the recent trend of father-centred video game narratives and analyses the father-daughter relationships portrayed in four critically acclaimed and commercially successful games which exemplify this trend: *BioShock 2* (2010), *The Walking Dead* (2012), *BioShock Infinite* (2013), and *The Last of Us* (2013). The author critiques these games for granting the father-figures agency over their daughter-figures and constructing them as moral barometers, helpful gameplay tools, and means for paternal redemption. *The Walking Dead* is discussed as the only positive portrayal of a father-daughter bond among this selection of games.

### Author Keywords

Video games; fatherhood; masculinity; feminism; agency; morality

In her studies of postfeminist ideology within the Hollywood film industry, Hannah Hamad (2013) observes that “paternalized protagonists have become an increasingly and often overwhelmingly omnipresent feature of popular film in the early twenty-first century” (p. 99). Hamad theorizes that fatherhood has become “a defining component of ideal masculinity,” and so it is perhaps unsurprising that this trend has influenced the video game industry as well (p. 99). The past decade has seen a dramatic increase in the number of critically acclaimed and commercially successful video games which position players as father-figures and prioritize paternal narratives. Games journalist Stephen Totilo (2010) has celebrated this phenomenon – what he calls the “daddening” of video games – as a maturation of the industry. He claims that the centralization of father-figures is “an effective method for getting the player to feel something” (para. 13). While this trend could be viewed as a more “mature” approach by the standards of the game industry, it could also be a result of what developers perceive as the shifting desires of an aging male gamer demographic, perhaps newly interested in tales of heroic fatherhood. According to the Entertainment Software Association’s 2015 report, the average game player is thirty-five years old, and The International Game Developers Association (2015) reports that the developers themselves fit into this same age demographic and are overwhelmingly male. Jesper Juul (2012) has noted that developers often make games that would appeal to their own demographic, so if developers are now fathers making games for players who they assume to also be fathers, this may help to explain the recent increase in paternal protagonists.

Regardless of the reason behind this trend, some game critics and scholars have critiqued what they label as the “dadification” of video games as simply another means for developers to valorize violent male agency (Brice, 2013; Joho, 2014; Voorhees, 2016). Indeed, these “dadified” protagonists are often tasked with protecting a daughter-figure, and so this shift appears to be a rehashing of the familiar trope of a heroic man rescuing a damsel-in-distress. Although this trope is certainly popular for video game narratives, it is also deeply harmful. The lack of diverse representation of women in video games has been a heated topic of discussion for years and many scholars have noted that developers overwhelmingly privilege heterosexual male subjectivities (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Kennedy, 2002; Miller & Summers, 2007; Dunlop, 2007; Jenson & de Castell, 2008; Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory, 2009; Hayes & Gee, 2010). Not only are most mainstream Western video games dominated by male protagonists, they also often present these protagonists as hyper-masculine (Kirkland, 2009) and violent (Burrill, 2008), while granting them agency at the expense of the female characters they are meant to protect. By centralizing the father-figure as active and the daughter-figure as passive, these games are clearly catering to what developers assume is a male audience, and what Laura Mulvey (1975) has famously termed the “male gaze.” These daughter-figures seem to exist for the pleasure of the assumed male player, so he can act out a fantasy of heroic fatherhood. While there is nothing wrong with heroic fatherhood *per se*, as Yvonne Tasker (2008) notes in her analysis of father-centred Hollywood films, “[t]he centring of the male subject is typically achieved at the cost of women, with mothers marginalised or even absent” (p.176). Although she is discussing film, Tasker’s points ring true for video games and other media as well. This marginalization, or even vilification, of mothers is a convenient way to allow for the centralization and valorization of fathers doing “whatever it takes” to save their children. This trope has become so common that some game journalists have demanded to know where the mothers are in video games (Smith, 2014; Campbell, 2016).

The continued lack of female player-characters, the marginalization of mother-figures, and the diffusion of the tired damsel-in-distress formula is unquestionably tied to broader issues of sexism and exclusionary practices within the game industry (Consalvo, 2008; Prescott & Bogg, 2011) and within broader video game culture (Consalvo, 2012; Shaw, 2010 & 2011). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that a tiny minority of game designers and programmers in the video game industry are women (Burrows, 2013). According to many female game developers, the industry is a toxic environment for women: game developer Marleigh Norton, for example, claimed that “[i]f you are a woman in the industry, there are all these little signals that you are not part of the club, that this is not your tribe” (cited in Burrows, 2013). These volatile issues were brought to media attention during 2014’s #Gamergate controversy, in which feminist game developers and critics were victims of harassment campaigns carried out by self-declared gamers (Johnston, 2014; Hern, 2014; Chess & Shaw, 2015). These toxic practices exist as barriers which deter women from entering video game design and demonstrate that there is a belief in “gamer” culture that women do not belong in the industry, that games should not be made for women, and that women do not seriously play games (or play serious games).

In order to contribute to this ongoing conversation, in this article I will examine the father-daughter relationships presented in a selection of critically acclaimed and commercially successful games which exemplify this “dadification” trend: 2K Games’ *BioShock 2* (2010), Telltale Games’ *The Walking Dead* (2012), Irrational Games’ *BioShock Infinite* (2013), and Naughty Dog’s *The Last of Us* (2013). These games all re-imagine the damsel-in-distress trope into a familial melodrama,

while still following the familiar video game narrative structure in which the player is invited to identify with a male who uses violence to fight monstrous beings to save a victimized female. In all three series, a broken man or failed father takes on the role of saviour/protector of a young female who becomes his daughter-figure. I will begin by discussing *BioShock 2* and how the player-as-father completely dictates the daughter-figure's own sense of morality, thereby forcing her to function as a moral barometer for the player's choices. I will follow this with a discussion of *The Walking Dead*, which is, as I argue, a more nuanced and positive portrayal of a father-daughter bond, in which the daughter-figure functions as a moral compass rather than a barometer. These two games both centralize player choice, though in *BioShock 2* the father-figure's choices determine the daughter-figure's fate, whereas in *The Walking Dead* the daughter-figure's behaviour potentially influences the father-figure's actions. I will then examine *BioShock Infinite* and critique its extremely unhealthy father-daughter relationship and the way it presents the daughter-figure as a useful gameplay tool. Finally, I will discuss *The Last of Us*, which presents another example of a toxic father-daughter relationship in which the daughter-figure is denied any agency over her own fate. These final two games both present a similar narrative set-up in which the daughter-figure functions as a means for the father-figure's paternal redemption.

### **Daughters as Moral Barometers and Moral Compasses: *BioShock 2* and *The Walking Dead***

In all four games, the daughter-figure is profoundly shaped by the actions of the player-character. In *BioShock Infinite* and *The Last of Us*, those actions occur during pre-scripted narrative events, while in *BioShock 2* and *The Walking Dead*, many of those actions are driven by player choices. Stories of daughters being moulded by their fathers are by no means new, and it is certainly a psychoanalytical and cultural understanding that the father is a vital figure for the daughter's development. Post-war Freudian psychoanalysts assumed that the father's role was to grant sexual approval to his daughter, so fathers were encouraged to involve themselves in their daughters' sexual development (Devlin, 2005). Similarly, after second wave feminism's call for more involved and responsible male parenting, the paradigm of "new fatherhood" emerged. According to fatherhood historian Joseph Pleck:

This new father differs from older images of involved fatherhood in several key respects: he is present at the birth, he is involved with his children as infants, not just when they are older; he participates in the actual day-to-day work of child care, and not just play; he is involved with his daughters as much as his sons.

Cited in Hamad, p. 10 (2014)

The centrality of father-daughter narratives in popular culture and the continued Hollywood trope of father as involved (sexual) protector, suggests that these ideas about fatherhood still resonate in society.

This idealized view of the father as involved, protective, and vital for his daughter's development has manifested in video games as the daughter-figure relying on and being moulded by the player-as-father-figure. The daughter-figure in *BioShock 2* is Eleanor Lamb, a former Little Sister

(genetically-altered little girls). The player-character, Subject Delta, is a Big Daddy: a monstrous, genetically-altered human being who has been physically and mentally conditioned to protect a Little Sister at all costs. Although the player's avatar is Delta, his daughter-figure – the young woman he had been created to protect – is the real protagonist of this game. Eleanor initiates the game's events by resurrecting Delta ten years after his death so that he can rescue her from her villainous mother, Sofia Lamb. As her Big Daddy, Delta is irresistibly drawn to Eleanor, and although Eleanor clearly loves her “father,” she is also using him as a tool for her escape. *BioShock 2* is a first-person shooter dominated by excessive violence: as he progresses through the underwater city of Rapture, the player-character must ruthlessly murder countless people in his quest to rescue Eleanor.

Throughout *BioShock 2*, the player must choose between “harvesting” (killing) or “adopting” (saving) Little Sisters, as well as choosing whether to spare or murder various antagonistic and treacherous characters. Although Delta dies in the end, his actions determine the ending cinematic and calibrate Eleanor's own moral compass as she literally absorbs his essence. If Delta adopts all the Little Sisters and spares the game's antagonists, Eleanor refers to her father as her conscience and saves her mother from drowning. If Delta harvests the Little Sisters and murders his enemies, Eleanor leaves her mother to drown and prepares to conquer the world, citing her father's survival instincts as her inspiration. Many game critics have praised *BioShock 2* for its portrayal of Eleanor as a strong, independent female character. As Michael Abbott (2010) writes, “Eleanor is nobody's damsel,” and as Seb Wuepper points out:

while technically Bioshock 2 is another story where daddy goes out to rescue his daughter, the kid in this case is far from helpless, her daddie [sic] being essentially just the vital part of her escape plan.

para. 6 (2013)

As strong and resourceful as Eleanor is, however, her personality and moral beliefs are completely dictated by the player's actions. Not only does she view her father as her saviour, she models herself entirely upon his behaviour. As Sofia observes of Eleanor while talking to Delta, “the girl lying on that bed is no longer my child, nor my life's work. She is a monster, shaped by you alone. Just as she has always wanted.”

In popular culture, even when the daughter-figure is strong, capable, and independent, it is often the father who has primarily shaped her development. Jennifer Stuller observes 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. Some of the strongest, most complex, and independent superwomen in modern mythology are raised by a single father, while their mother is almost always physically absent, and at least emotionally unavailable.

p. 105 (2010)

*BioShock 2* also presents a driven and capable young heroine who is desperately obsessed with her “father,” while her mother, rather than being physically absent, is presented as the villain of the game. Not only was Sofia planning to sacrifice her daughter to spread her cult-like collectivism throughout the city, she attempted to destroy the sanctity of the family by murdering the father and

keeping the daughter to herself. While physically present, Sofia is emotionally absent from her daughter: she coldly refers to herself as being, “above all, her intellectual progenitor,” who had minimal involvement in her birth, preferring to be “unhindered by nature’s crude bias.” Eleanor’s reliance on Delta is therefore understandable, though she is not simply a helpless damsel-in-distress: she has various supernatural abilities and, late in the game, dons armour and fights alongside her father. The player can summon her and send her away like a weapon, so the daughter unfortunately becomes a useful gameplay tool, a design choice which will be echoed in *BioShock Infinite*. Still, Eleanor demonstrates her capabilities by saving Delta numerous times, which is perhaps why the fact that Eleanor’s morality is completely dictated by her father’s action is so infuriating. Although she exercises agency to assist the player, she is given no input regarding her own behaviour – Eleanor is constructed as an unformed lump of clay waiting to be moulded in her father’s image.

While *The Walking Dead* similarly emphasizes player choice in determining the nature of a father-daughter relationship, I argue that it presents a healthier relationship grounded in mutual care and empathy. *The Walking Dead* is an episodic point-and-click style adventure game based on the comic book series of the same name. Events in the first season take place in Georgia shortly after a widespread zombie outbreak. The player adopts the role of Lee Everett, an African-American university professor whom the state recently convicted for murdering a senator. The game opens with Lee being transported to prison though he quickly gains freedom due to the chaos brought about by the zombies. Shortly after, Lee encounters a young girl named Clementine and joins up with her to protect her and find her parents. The relationship between Lee and Clementine is one of surrogate father-daughter and the game makes it clear that Lee’s primary motivation throughout the game is to protect Clementine at all costs. As Melissa Hutchison, the voice actor for Clementine, stated, “[t]he whole backbone of the story is the relationship between Lee and Clementine, and the choices Lee makes in order to protect Clementine” (Wallace, para. 13).

The protagonist of *The Walking Dead* is not presented as a hyper-masculine or violent man, and his relationship with Clementine is compassionate and caring. Many players experience real feelings of protectiveness and concern for Clementine, as well as guilt for making choices which frighten or upset her. Bell, Kampe, and Taylor (2015a & 2015b) conducted microethnographic studies to explore “real-life” emotions experienced by players in response to the consequences of their choices in *The Walking Dead*. The authors observed an enactment of mature paternal identity in the play of their participants as they began to focus on Clementine and “express emotional openness, patience, compassion, and selflessness” (2015b, p. 15). Although *The Walking Dead* is set in a violent world, the central focus of gameplay is not violent action but instead making difficult survival decisions, managing interpersonal relationships, and mediating conflicts. As Lee encounters other survivors and attempts to keep the group intact, the player is forced to make decisions about Lee’s behaviour, which in turn influence how others behave, who survives and who does not, and what kind of a role model he is for Clementine.

*The Walking Dead*’s unique selling point is that “the story is tailored by how you play” and the player is often reminded of this by being informed that “this action will have consequences.” While other characters will voice their opinions, the game offers little moral guidance and no reward for playing the game as selfish and antagonistic or as kind and heroic. The weight of the player’s choices is especially heavy when the game informs the player that “Clementine witnessed what

you did” and “Clementine will remember that.” Clementine functions as a motivating factor and emotional centerpiece, as well as a moral compass for the player, as she reacts negatively to anger and violence. Many of the morally-questionable decisions presented to the player must be made within a matter of seconds, and each major choice leads the player down specific branches of decision trees. The effects of in-game consequences on player choice are observable in the statistics given at the end of every episode of *The Walking Dead*. After completing each episode, players are shown the statistics of other players’ decisions at major moments in the game. In one memorable episode, Lee and his companions are captured by cannibals and the player has the option of killing one of them. 55% of players chose to kill him in cold blood, but as soon as Lee does so, the game reveals that Clementine was watching the entire time and was horrified by Lee’s actions. Shortly after, the player has the option to kill another one of the cannibals, and this time only 20% chose to kill him. This extreme shift is likely due to the players’ awareness that Clementine was watching and a disinclination to commit another act that would upset her.

Choices do not matter on a grand scale in *The Walking Dead* – Lee will never save the world from its fate – however, the player’s choices do influence how Clementine sees Lee, and, as an extension, how she sees the world. The father-daughter relationship presented in *The Walking Dead* is therefore more nuanced than that in *BioShock 2*: Lee’s influences on Clementine are subtle and build up over the course of months, and at eight years old, she is arguably more likely to be influenced by someone she looks up to and relies on. On the other hand, Delta’s actions can change sixteen-year-old Eleanor from kind and optimistic to ruthless and cruel in a matter of days. The progressive portrayal of Eleanor as a resourceful and determined young woman is therefore tempered by her lack of independent personality and sense of morality, whereas Clementine is never denied these elements. In fact, in a reversal of *BioShock 2*, the player-character is often influenced by Clementine’s actions and reactions – rather than functioning as a moral barometer existing simply to reflect the player’s choices, Clementine instead acts as a moral compass, reacting in a consistent way to Lee’s behaviour and encouraging the player to reflect on their actions.

### **Daughter-Figures as Means for Paternal Redemption: *BioShock Infinite* and *The Last of Us***

Unlike *The Walking Dead*’s Lee or *BioShock 2*’s Subject Delta, players of *BioShock Infinite* are invited to identify with a man of questionable moral integrity whose paternal actions they cannot control. The player-character, Booker, is charged with abducting a young woman named Elizabeth in order to pay off a debt. Elizabeth is the daughter of the game’s antagonist, Father Zachary Comstock, a racist religious zealot who, in a complicated turn of events, turns out to be a twisted version of Booker from an alternate reality. Booker also discovers that he is actually Elizabeth’s biological father: years ago he traded his infant daughter to Comstock to erase a gambling debt. Comstock raised the child as his own, renaming her Elizabeth, and keeping her in captivity while grooming her to be his heir. *BioShock Infinite* is the story of a failed father redeeming himself by saving and protecting his daughter. Although Booker initially abducts Elizabeth for his own benefit, throughout their adventure, he grows fond of the young woman and dedicates himself to helping her. By the end of the game, Booker has completely embraced his role as father and sacrifices himself to ensure a happy future for his daughter. Booker’s transition from self-oriented

to selfless is central to *BioShock Infinite*'s paternal redemption story: the final scene shows Booker, back in his own apartment nineteen years before the game's events, running to see if his infant daughter is safe in her cradle. The scene ends before Booker reaches the cradle, but the sound of a baby crying assures players that she will be there, and that through his sacrifice, Booker has earned a second chance at fatherhood.

Not only does Elizabeth provide the means for Booker's redemption, she also functions as a useful gameplay tool. Rather than being a burdensome side-kick that must be protected during battle, Elizabeth never takes damage and actually assists Booker by throwing him ammo, money, and supplies. The game openly reassures players that Elizabeth will not be a burden or an annoyance, informing them that "You don't need to protect Elizabeth in combat. She can take care of herself." Yet in their desperation to make Elizabeth useful and not annoying, the developers created what one player calls "a tool rather than a person" (Ella, 2013, para. 10). Some critics have lamented the fact that Elizabeth "quickly becomes a glorified ammo and health dispenser," which reduces her to "a very stiff, very robotic entity, great voiceacting [sic] or not" (Wuepper, 2013, para. 1). Although the father-daughter relationship between Booker and Elizabeth is central to the game's narrative, as Walker observes, the developers simply "took a collection of your own abilities and put them in an Elizabeth-shaped container" (para. 21). As a gameplay element, Elizabeth therefore resembles Eleanor in *BioShock 2* when she can be used as a weapon by the player.

In contrast to *BioShock 2*, in which the player has responsibility for how the daughter-figure grows as a person, *BioShock Infinite* offers no meaningful player input. Elizabeth does, however, undergo a major transformation. Elizabeth begins her adventure as a naïve and optimistic young woman who dreams of seeing Paris. She is initially horrified by Booker's violent actions, though she eventually learns to accept it – a necessary development since *BioShock Infinite* is a first-person shooter which centralizes violent gameplay. At one point Elizabeth even commits murder herself to save the life of another, and the trauma she experiences makes her colder and more sombre. This transition is also physical: Elizabeth cuts her hair short and changes her dress. At this point she asks Booker, "how do you wash away the things you've done?" to which he replies, "you don't, you just learn to live with it." Later in the game, Elizabeth is captured and tortured by Comstock. After this further trauma, she begins to willingly attack enemies herself, embracing the violence she originally abhorred. She also starts to emotionally distance herself from Booker, becoming more rude, aggressive, and disobedient towards him. Booker's transformation demonstrates Elizabeth's positive influence on him, while Booker's influence on Elizabeth is entirely negative, turning her into a cold, embittered, and vengeful murderer.

The psychological reversal experienced by Booker and Elizabeth is paralleled in *The Last of Us*, yet another acclaimed post-apocalyptic father-daughter narrative. Released a few months after *BioShock Infinite*, *The Last of Us* invites players to identify with Joel, an embittered, taciturn man who is haunted by the loss of his daughter during a zombie outbreak twenty years earlier. Joel must escort a fourteen-year-old girl named Ellie, who is immune to the fungus which causes zombification, to a group of freedom fighters called the Fireflies. In a similar narrative set-up to *BioShock Infinite*, during their journey through post-apocalyptic America, Ellie and Joel develop a father-daughter bond which deeply impacts them both. Ellie, like Elizabeth, begins her journey as a cheerful and naïve young woman but grows haunted and withdrawn due to the trauma she experiences. Joel, like Booker, gradually embraces Ellie as a daughter-figure, growing warm and

affectionate towards her while she grows sombre and emotionally distant. Violence is central to gameplay in *The Last of Us*, and Ellie, like Elizabeth, is also conveniently immune to damage and assists the player in battle.

The father-daughter relationships in these two games, set against a backdrop of social breakdown and extreme violence, are practically identical. Many fans have noticed the similarities between these two games, as Keith Stuart writes for *The Guardian*:

Through a set of mysterious circumstances, a violent damaged man is forced to undertake the protection of a young girl with whom he eventually establishes a paternal bond. Much bloodshed ensues. Which game am I describing here: Naughty Dog's astonishingly well-realised 'zombie' horror adventure, *The Last of Us*, or Irrational's atmospheric science fiction shooter, *Bioshock Infinite*? The truth is, it could be either.

para. 1-2 (2013)

Both games position the young, cheerful female characters as vehicles for the paternal redemption of the embittered male protagonists. While Booker's redemption occurs with his sacrifice in order to secure his daughter's happiness, Joel's redemption occurs at the expense of Ellie's agency. Ellie believes that her immunity can lead to a cure for the fungus that has decimated humanity, and the Fireflies agree. When Joel discovers that Ellie would not survive the surgery that the Fireflies had planned for her, he abducts her from the hospital and flees with her, gunning down those in his way. Although Joel could not save his own daughter, in saving Ellie, Joel redeems his paternal masculinity. However, Joel made the decision to rescue Ellie against her will, as she had already decided to sacrifice herself to save humanity. When Ellie confronts Joel about his actions, Joel lies to her repeatedly in order to convince her that the Fireflies had failed in their efforts and had given up their search for a cure. In the ending scenes of the game, it is clear that Ellie does not believe Joel, and when she demands that he swears to her that his words are true, her sadness and resignation at his lie demonstrate how Joel's paternal "redemption" was one-sided and self-serving.

Joel and Booker are both deeply flawed characters, with tragic backgrounds coding them as failed fathers. Ellie and Elizabeth both exist not only as useful gameplay tools but also as means for the player-character to forgive himself and gain a second chance at fatherhood. In both games, the player is given no choice regarding either the relationship between the player-character and his daughter-figure or the game's ending. Writing about *BioShock Infinite* and *The Last of Us*, Maddy Myers has recognized how troubling this is:

We are meant to empathize with this father's feelings of regret and failure, because he *tried*. We are not meant to think too hard about the years that this daughter figure spent sequestered from other people, or the fact that this relationship is the only one she's ever had (so, gas-lighting her into believing it is a normal, loving relationship is terrifyingly easy, because she has no point of comparison), nor the fact that she has never been allowed to make a decision for herself and might want to know what it's like to do that.

para. 23, emphasis in original (2013)

These two games are remarkably similar in many ways, especially regarding the unhealthy, morally-questionable father-daughter relationships they portray. Both women are emotionally devastated by the end of the story, but the redemption of the father is clearly framed as more important than the psychological health of the daughter.

### **Conclusions: Big Daddies, Broken Men, Missing Mothers, and Empty Daughters**

*BioShock 2*, *The Walking Dead*, *BioShock Infinite*, and *The Last of Us* are four examples of the “Daddening” or “Dadification” of video games. In these games, fatherhood is a vital element of both the narrative and the player-character’s identity. In *BioShock 2*, Delta is a Big Daddy, a literal embodiment of protective fatherhood, who must rescue his daughter-figure and influence her development. In *The Walking Dead*, Lee becomes a surrogate father to Clementine and his decisions shape how she views him and the world around her. *BioShock Infinite* follows Booker as he redeems himself as a failed father by rescuing and bonding with a young woman who is revealed to be his long-lost daughter. In *The Last of Us*, Joel also finds his own self-serving version of paternal redemption while denying the agency of his daughter-figure. In the *BioShock* games and *The Last of Us*, the player-character is rewarded for his role as father-figure by living on inside his daughter, by getting another chance at fatherhood, and by finding a replacement for his own lost daughter.

The father-daughter bond in *The Walking Dead* is notably different: Lee is not rewarded for his role as father-figure for Clementine, as he dies at the end of the game regardless of the choices made by the player. Rather, Lee’s actions prepare Clementine for a world without him, a violent world in which she must struggle alone. The second season of *The Walking Dead* stars Clementine as the player-character, and it is clear that Lee’s actions in the previous season – such as cutting her hair short, teaching her how to shoot a gun, and bandaging her wounds – have prepared her for survival. Although Lee can be more or less kind depending on player choices, these moments of caretaking are not optional. As observed by Bell, Kampe, and Taylor, this is a very different portrayal of fatherhood than in *BioShock Infinite* and *The Last of Us*:

In contrast to the violent, ruggedly individualistic and hegemonically masculine fathers offered by these games, TWD rewards a fatherhood rooted in non-violence, nurture, and self-sacrifice — gendered characteristics that are commonly categorized as feminine, yet are essential for a father to raise an emotionally and behaviorally healthy child.

p. 15 (2015b)

Clementine functions as a moral compass for player behaviour, but she is rarely treated as a damsel-in-distress or helpful gameplay tool. Although she is traumatized by her experiences, her trauma does not function as a means for Lee’s own personal redemption. Finally, even though the game’s unique selling point is player choice, Clementine retains her own independent personality and sense of morality.

The “Daddening” of video games has been articulated as a maturation of the video game industry, suggesting that players may have grown tired of narratives in which a heroic man rescues a helpless woman/love interest. Instead, these developers, perhaps shaped by their own experience as fathers, have centralized traumatized, violent, broken men who become father-figures to vulnerable young women or girls. *BioShock 2* and *The Walking Dead* both emphasize player choice in determining the nature of the father-daughter bond and centralize the father’s role in preparing his daughter to survive in a world without him. Rather than preparing Ellie to survive in the world on her own terms, Joel in *The Last of Us* teaches Ellie to survive as he has – through extreme violence and mistrust of others – which is perhaps why Ellie seems to question whether survival is even worth it at all. In *BioShock Infinite* and *The Last of Us*, Elizabeth’s and Ellie’s narrative role is to allow Booker and Joel to redeem and forgive themselves for their past failures, and their gameplay role is to assist the player in battle as a useful tool. Booker’s effect on Elizabeth’s life is entirely negative, and only with his death is she allowed to attain happiness. The final word is, of course, given to Booker and Joel: they get another chance at fatherhood and the players are therefore reassured of getting a “good” ending, even if they did not have any control over it. The ending of *BioShock Infinite* is particularly unpleasant because it negates Elizabeth’s entire existence by “resetting” everything back so that Booker can have his second chance – the narrative is entirely about him and his redemption.

All four of these video games remove, marginalize, or vilify mothers; cast violent men as heroes; and turn daughters into moral barometers, moral compasses, helpful tools, and means for paternal redemption. While Eleanor, Elizabeth, and Ellie are all interesting, complex, and dynamic characters with central narrative roles and at least some fighting abilities, they are problematically coded as both victims and helpful tools. Each young woman’s personality, behaviour, and future are all determined almost entirely by their father-figures, while their mothers are either villainous or dead. Video games are saturated with male protagonists haunted by their dark, violent pasts, but, perhaps following Hollywood’s trends, these broken men are now often father-figures. Although the majority of these father-centred games portray unhealthy, traumatizing father-daughter bonds, *The Walking Dead* demonstrates that these paternal protagonists do not always have to be violent men who emotionally devastate their daughters. As progressive as *The Walking Dead* is, this “dadification” of video games is simply another way in which male characters are given control over female characters. 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.

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