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Daddy Issues: Constructions of Fatherhood in The Last of Us and BioShock Infinite

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Abstract: This paper examines the dadification of digital games, the trend in which players are positioned as father (figures). Comparing the way fatherhood is imagined in *The Last of Us* and *BioShock Infinite* on both ludological and representational registers reveals contesting constructs of masculinity with different relations to feminist politics.

Pointing to the increasing prevalence of digital games in which the player is positioned in the role of a father/father figure, games journalist Stephen Totilo dubbed this phenomena 'the daddening of video games' (2011). As a digital game trope, Totilo argued, fatherhood both (re)presents a cultural construct of fatherhood and also uses it as a rhetorical device: fathers have 'unconditional love' for their children; fathers act on behalf of their children, whether to find or protect them; fathers care for 'someone who is helpless;' fathers signify the player's role as protector; fathers intensify the motivation to play; and fathers provide an emotional hook to deepen the players' investment in the game. Though Totilo productively identifies the trope, his discussion of fatherhood and its efficacy as a rhetorical device is unreflexive and unabashedly celebratory: the player as father figure represents the continuing social and aesthetic maturation of the medium. [1]

As if to counterbalance this excess of praise, several games critics have offered equally polarizing vilifications of the dadification of games. Writing for *Kill Screen*, Jess Joho (2013) points out that dadified games do not represent a break from conventional portrayals of the 'pistol-packing, middle-aged, chip-on-his-shoulder, badass-male protagonist.' Critic, activist and game developer Mattie Brice (2013) pushes this critique further, arguing that game dads not only remain 'selfish assholes' but also — much like bell hooks' (1992) concept-metaphor of 'eating the other' — that dadification is just another way of making 'other types of people serve their [white-male protagonist's] character growth.' Maddy Myers (2013) amplifies this criticism in an essay for *Paste* magazine, arguing that this practice not only re-centers the male, but also encourages

players to sympathize with men who take away their daughters' agency, normalizing this female powerlessness.

In this paper I build upon the insightful criticism emerging from this public discourse occurring in the enthusiast press as well as the scholarly discourses on masculinity in games studies. Specifically, I examine the constructions of masculinity circulating in and through the figures of fatherhood advanced in *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013) and *BioShock Infinite* (Irrational Games 2013), two of the most prominent and popular exemplars of the dadification of games. [2] In order to foreground how fatherhood contests/contends with gender and sexual boundaries I endeavor to outline a more rounded conception of fatherhood in digital games than the polarizations offered by critics situated in the enthusiast press.

Specifically, I argue that *The Last of Us* (hereafter *TLoU*) and *BioShock Infinite* (hereafter *BSi*) construct fatherhood and its relation to masculinity in ambivalent but ultimately troubling ways. Both games feature father figures who are not simply capable of extreme violence but excel at it, and whose filial relations — in both games figured as their daughters — is inflected with instrumentality and a degree of neglect. However, the practices of fatherhood in *TLoU* and *BSi* differ dramatically in regard to several dimensions that will be analyzed in depth: the amount of control the fathers exercise over their daughters, the degree to which fathers are expected to share consubstantiality with their daughters, and the extent to which the daughter figures are positioned as sexual objects. To wit, I agree with Joho, Brice, and Myers that the dadification of games re-centers men and valorizes violence as power, but I ultimately argue that *TLoU* advances a construct of fatherhood that is paternal but not patriarchal and is thus less bound up in the pathologies of hegemonic masculinity and less toxic to a feminist, social-justice framework.

In what follows I will examine certain aspects of *TLoU* and *BSi* side by side, but I begin with an overview of scholarship on masculinity in games. This is followed by a brief introduction to the games in question and their deployment of father-daughter relationships. I then look at the ludic nature of the relationship between the father and daughter figures and then examine how the father-daughter relationships are represented in the narrative and visual discourse of the games.

Masculinity, Fatherhood and Games

Game studies and allied fields examining the socio-cultural dimensions of games and gaming have produced some insightful research on the nexus of masculinity and digital games, but not as much as should be expected. This may be due, in part, to the tendency to accept as given that male game characters are depicted in a hypermasculine manner as muscular, violent and virile (Kirkland 2009, 165), or to the general consensus that games are structured to reward masculine activities such as violence, warfare and domination (Alloway and Gilbert 1998; Schut 2007). This tendency to valorize physical power, violence, domination and aggression are still integral to the hegemonic form of masculinity in digital games, which Kline, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2003) call 'militarized masculinity,' and it certainly deserves critique.

But, as a blanket condemnation, the notion of militarized masculinity erases the historical specificity of the forms of masculinity associated with and emerging from digital games and the specific contexts in which these masculinities are represented or enacted. Centering this pathological form of masculinity erases alternate, competing, and complicit figures of manhood. In short, it obviates the most fundamental lesson from Connell's (1995) seminal work on hegemonic masculinity, a term which refers to the notion of manliness paradigmatic of a social formation but nevertheless acknowledges a range of distinct masculinities, sometimes competing and at other times cooperating, that occupy culturally specific raced, classed and sexualized coordinates (43-4).

It is with some relief, then, that we can discern a body of work — with a substantial footprint in this very journal — that has refused to mistake the hegemony of militarized masculinity in digital games for a totality.

The interplay of technological mastery, physical domination, and juvenile playfulness is central to Burrill's (2008) book-length study of masculinity in game cultures. A parallel set of constructs appears in Schut's (2006) analysis of fantasy role-playing games, in which 'respectable manliness' characterized by intelligence and chivalric honor comes into conflict with a violent, working-class 'rough masculinity' and the lustful embrace of play that exemplifies 'eternal boyhood.' However, perhaps as a result of the increasingly toxic state of game culture (Consalvo 2012) — which has always policed and marginalized women and people of color (Gray 2014) but has more recently birthed #GamerGate, a hate movement that has terrorized prominent women in game development and criticism (Todd 2015) — the notion of boyhood that Burrill and Schut identify is largely absent from more recent analyses.

Indeed, the forms of technological masculinity and militarized masculinity characteristic of games and game cultures have been discursively figured as under assault, and the boyish construct of masculinity may be a casualty of this war of position. As Nakamura (2012) explains, while technologically based 'geek masculinity' is a relatively novel form of patriarchal power, 'the more gaming capital becomes identified with white masculinity, the more bitter the battle over its distribution, possession, and circulation will become.' Vanderhoef (2013) identifies similar anxieties around more traditional notions of masculinity in game culture rooted in gaming's infantilization within popular culture at large.

In this context, it should be no surprise that the highly lucrative and competitive area of e-sports, in which gameplay is stripped of its frivolity and professionalized, is one of the most prominent manifestations of game culture. In a series of ethnographic studies of professional gamers (and amateurs who enact the professional style) Nick Taylor (2011; 2012) identifies a hypermasculine but commonplace set of discourses and bodily practices enacted by players of first-person shooter games. These performances of militarized masculinity, he argues, do rhetorical work to legitimate the activity's claim to the status of 'sport.' TL Taylor's (2013) ethnographic research adds another layer of complexity to the study of masculinity and e-sports by positing that e-sports is a site where geek masculinity and hegemonic, athletic masculinity both circulate. While TL Taylor argues that these forms of masculinity are in constant tension, in fact, in the context of e-sports they are amalgamated into a neoliberal masculinity that draws characteristics from both to maximize competitive effectivity (Voorhees 2014).

This resonates with Johnson's (2011) findings in his textual analyses of survival-horror games, where scrutinizing the distinction between geek/technological masculinity and militarized masculinity in *Dead Space* and *Resident Evil 5* reveals a tendency to privilege militarized masculinity above technomasculinity. But returning to the *Dead Space* series after the release of two sequels, Johnson (2015) finds that technomasculinity is given greater prominence and value. No longer construed as duplicitous or dangerous, technomasculinity is incorporated into a construction of manhood alongside militarized masculinity. As Johnson argues, the negotiation of techomasculinity and militarized masculinity is an intelligible, albeit disappointing and counter-productive response to the shifting of gender identities associated with the growth of the service sector and decline of unionized labor attendant to neoliberalism (28).

But in this regard *The Walking Dead* is not typical, and its peculiarity is likely imbricated in the racialized construction of Lee as a black man. As Bell, Taylor and Kampe (2014) note, Lee's performance of fatherhood is expressed through actions and traits conventionally gendered as feminine. It is an unfortunate but pertinent reminder that white masculinity typically demands that black male bodies be feminized in order to attain acceptance, much less esteem, in predominantly white cultural spaces (Oates 2007). The contesting constructions of masculinity in *TLoU* and *BSi,* however, are figured as and figures for white, middle-class masculinity.

Perhaps related to the disappearance of the discourse of digital boyhood — as if, like the professionalization of digital games, to assert the maturity of the medium — the past several years have seen the emergence of a more paternal form of masculinity. Kirkland's (2009) study of the *Silent Hill* series illustrates that it is not entirely novel for digital games to take on paternal masculinity but that the way it is treated has shifted greatly in the past decade. Though most of the games in the series position the player in the role of a man trying to rescue, protect or save women and children, Kirkland emphasizes that these male characters are narratively framed as suspect or unreliable narrators, and their ability to both move and act are constantly curtailed. Ultimately, Kirkland makes a compelling case for reading the series as a critical discourse that challenges the construct of heroic masculinity. Indeed, Bell, Taylor and Kampe (2014) argue that *The Walking Dead's* (Telltale Games 2012) protagonist, Lee, stages the production of 'masculine subjectivities rooted in care, responsibility, and negotiation rather than aggression and domination.' A far cry from the abject failure of fatherhood in the *Silent Hill* series, by fostering a 'mature paternal identity' characterized by "emotional openness, patience, compassion, and selflessness," *The Walking Dead* foregoes any attachment to militarized masculinity.

So how is paternal masculinity figured in games that cleave to the audience the industry has constructed as its core? To the violent, militarized, and white masculinity articulated to that presumed audience? While not the only games that position the player as a father figure, I look at *TLoU* and *BSi* as exemplars of the dadification of games. They are both hugely successful games released by respected developers that feature an older, male protagonist and a younger female companion that grow into a father-daughter relationship over the course of each respective game.

Contesting Fatherhood in *TLoU* and *BioShock*: *Infinite*

The father figures of *TLoU* and *BSi* are violent, physically powerful men. They do not exhibit boyish traits or technological mastery, but still they complicate militarized masculinity through the paternal element that inflects both the story and gameplay. In my analysis, *BioShock: Infinite* champions a conception of the father-daughter relationship that re-entrenches the most pathological and misogynist elements of patriarchal domination, while *TLoU* refigures the paternal role in ways that trouble the touchstones of traditional patriarchy.

To demonstrate this argument, this paper closely examines how fatherhood is figured in *TLoU* and *BSi* both procedurally and within the representational regime of the game.

A first-person shooting game with some role-playing game elements [3], *BSi* requires the player interact with the game via the character of Booker DeWitt, a mercenary on a mission to retrieve Elizabeth from her tower prison in the steampunk-inspired floating city of Columbia. Gameplay consists primarily of exploring the environments of Columbia to eliminate increasingly powerful enemies. The game's story is premised on the concept of a multiverse, where every decision creates another reality in which an alternative set of choices are offered. Over the course of the game, it is gradually revealed to the player that Booker has a troubled past that is intertwined with that of John Comstock, the founder of Columbia. In the concluding minutes of the game, the player learns that Comstock is the name that Booker took after being reborn (through baptism) in a different reality. While an unreliable narrator leads the player to believe that Booker's mission is his end of a deal to wipe away his debts, the game concludes by explaining that 18 years prior to the events of the game Booker sold his then-infant daughter, Elizabeth, to Comstock in order to clear his debts. In other words, at the end of the game, Booker learns that he is Elizabeth's father.

TLoU blends elements of adventure, role-playing and shooting games. For the majority of the game, the player takes the role of Joel, a smuggler of questionable repute whose daughter, Sarah, was killed in the opening sequence of the game set on the first day of the zombie apocalypse. Gameplay is characterized by exploration, movement puzzles (requiring players to figure out how to reach seemingly unreachable areas), and using stealth to avoid and weapons to eliminate increasingly difficult zombies, bandits, and cannibals. The story's conceit is that Joel must smuggle fourteen year-old Ellie to a research facility half-way across a zombie infested, post-apocalyptic America in hopes of finding a cure. Along the way, they eventually settle into a comfortable, familial relationship.

Ludic Figurations of Fatherhood

The first register upon which *TLoU* and *BioShock: Infinite* make claims about the character of the relationship between fathers and daughters is procedural, a term that describes how the execution of rules produces specific behaviors (Bogost 2007, 4). Bogost (2008) goes on to argue that procedurality is a form of expression and representation. He argues that games 'make claims about *how things work*' by 'assembling rules together to describe the function of systems' (original emphasis, 125). This means looking at, first, how the rules of the game structure the relationships between the father and daughter figures to the extent that they exist as objects within the games as systems and, second, how these rules determining the possible interactions between them are representative of the paternal/filial relationship. On this register, both games communicate a real ambivalence about the father-daughter relationship.

One important facet of the relationship between the father and daughter figures in both games is that neither Ellie nor Elizabeth is a psychic or physical burden to the player. In contrast to the archetypical escort mission in which the player must guide and safeguard a character, neither Ellie nor Elizabeth can be harmed by enemies in the game (Tocci 2008, 197). In fact, excepting certain narratively designated moments, the daughter characters are completely ignored by enemies. In this way, the daughter figure is not hypo-ludic, she does not take away from or otherwise restrict the player's ability to act within the game system, like the object of a typical escort mission (Conway 2010). However, this also means that the daughter is not a factor to be considered as the player strategizes and plays. That is, she is discounted and effectively erased from the player's thinking and therefore not a subject of the player's attention or care.

On the contrary, both Ellie and Elizabeth attend to and provide care for their fathers. They are hyper-ludic (Conway 2010) in that they enable the player to more potently and effectively interact with the game. Significantly, they enable the player/father in meaningfully different ways. As a companion, Ellie is not controlled by the player; she acts autonomously and her actions cannot be determined in advance. She will occasionally give Joel items when not in combat, such as health packs and bullets and during a fight Ellie will also help Joel by shooting enemies and sometimes stabbing them if Joel is on the losing end of a grapple. Elizabeth also gives the player money and items and during a fight Elizabeth will also help Booker by using her unique ability to open tears, or portals, to alternative realities. By transporting weapons caches, automated sentry turrets, and/or cover from these other realities, she enables Booker to more effectively combat enemies. Notably, unlike Ellie, Elizabeth does not act on her own, she acts in service of the father and by his command. Elizabeth only opens tears when the player, as Booker, commands her to do so.

Undoubtedly, *TLoU* and *BSi* substantially improve upon prior representations of young women in games. Here, they are not a helpless burden but a helpful advantage on the battlefield. Still, neither father, neither Joel nor Booker, is required to actively consider the needs of the daughter, or to aide or care for her. As procedural representations of the paternal role, both games forward father figures that perpetuate hegemonic, militarized masculinity; the father is removed from the obligation to care, and his capacity to do violence is centered. However, *TLoU* suggests a more progressive relationship with daughter figures, one that does not necessitate the kind of control typical of *BSi* but rather acceptance of the other's agency.

Representational Figurations of Fatherhood

The second register upon which *TLoU* and *BioShock: Infinite* make claims about the character of the paternal role is representational. There are four representational aspects relevant to understanding how the father-daughter relationships in *TLoU* and *BSi* construct fatherhood: the sequences of narrative events, the positioning of the player in relation to diegesis, the positioning of the player in relation to other characters, and the visual imagery.

Both games feature a sequence of events characterized by the theme of redemption. Joel and Booker have each, in their own way, led selfish lives and done irredeemable things. In this context, as Brice points out, their daughters are devices that enable them

to do good and to salvage their humanity. However, this redemption plays out very differently in *BSi* and *TLoU*.

In *TLoU*, this reversal occurs when Joel is gravely wounded. Turning the tables on the escort mission, Ellie kills several bandits and leads an injured Joel out of a building. The story jumps forward several weeks and the player assumes control of Ellie as she hunts for food and then endures the company of dangerous cannibals to barter for lifesaving medicine. Soon after, when the cannibals are hunting her and Joel, Ellie leads them away from an incapacitated Joel. She fights the cannibals (with the same capability and effectiveness as Joel) saving Joel's life a second time before the player eventually regains control of him.

In *BSi* the player is never given the opportunity to play as Elizabeth. Rather, the story concludes with Booker' failure to defeat the game's final boss, the mechanical songbird, prompting Elizabeth to intervene by opening a tear to an alternative world where Columbia is an underwater city. For the next ten minutes, Elizabeth leads Booker through the city and then a series of tears, explaining the metaphysics of the *BSi* multiverse as they stroll through several different worlds. Eventually, with his reluctant permission, Elizabeth drowns Booker in a baptismal pool in order to prevent him from ever choosing, in any possible reality, to be reborn as John Comstock and thus circumventing the chain of events that brought Columbia into existence.

These two role-reversals reinforce the messages about fathering communicated on the procedural level. It implies a deep apprehension toward powerful, capable daughter figures. When Elizabeth takes control, it ends with her killing Booker. In short, ceding power to the other, even one's daughter, is death. And while it is certainly not unproblematic that Ellie's display of strength, capability, and loyalty is undertaken in the service of her father, this game as a fable of fatherhood suggests that fathers should have confidence in the actions of their daughter figures. When Joel is incapacitated, Ellie saves his life. Ellie's strength helps Joel to recover, to heal and to become whole again. In losing power to Ellie, there is nothing to fear and everything to gain.

The method that *TLoU* and *BSi* introduce players to their respective diegetic worlds also impacts the constructions of fatherhood they produce. In *TLoU*, Ellie is the character who, regardless of the gender or age of players, is psychically consubstantial with players. Joel knows just how deranged the world is outside the initial safety of the Quarantine Zone, but it is as new to players as it is to Ellie. Joel explains things to Ellie that it would not make sense to explain to someone else as experienced as he is, and

Ellie asks the questions we cannot ask of Joel. In *BSi*, the player is Booker from start to finish. Further, it is the protagonist, Booker, who shares the player's perspective as an outsider while Elizabeth has been raised in Columbia. Thus, the world of Columbia is as new and strange and marvelous to Booker as it is to the player, making Booker the locus of both embodied and psychic perspective.

This positioning of players in relation to the psychic experience of various characters is one element that helps structure the possibilities for identification. *BSi*'s fixed point of focalization, in which the player both embodies Booker and comes to know the world through his eyes, encourages players to identify with an essential, immutable figure of the father. According to *BSi*, the father is whole, coherent, and essentially unchanging; the boundary between father and daughter is fixed and impermeable. There is neither opportunity nor impetus to see the world from her perspective. But it is not so simple in *TLoU*. The player inhabits, simultaneously, the embodied identity of the father and the psychic position of the daughter. Running around in Joel's body while also experiencing the emotions – the terror, excitement, and awe — that Ellie feels, facilitates the play of identification and difference. Thus, the figure of fatherhood developed in *TLoU* is subject to openness, permeability, and fluidity. Ellie's feeling and perceptions, her psychic state, impact the player's performance as Joel.

Significantly, this figuration of fatherhood is reproduced in the way that each game organizes the relationship between the player and playable characters. While Aarseth (2004) rejects the idea that playable characters are anything more than a vehicle for the player, I maintain that playable characters function both as a set of capacities and as affective attachments (Burns and Schott 2003). More apropos, the character's capabilities are another basis, in addition to physical markers of age, race, and/or gender, for the player's identification (Tronstad 2008). It is in this light that Ellie's ability to do everything that Joel can do is so significant. There is no gulf between the capacities of the father and the daughter and so passage from identification with one to the other is fluid. The player's ego identification, which Mulvey (1975) defines as the "fascination with and recognition of" one's own likeness (10) — and to this we can add likeness of capacity — is unimpeded even as the game switches between the two characters. Playing as Ellie for roughly a fifth of *TLoU* is a significant shift in perspective that, complimenting the player's experience of the novelty of the diagetic world discussed above, signals an ambivalence in the player's point of identification (and builds upon a prior impetus introduced in the prologue in which the player takes the role of Sarah, Joel's deceased biological daughter).

In contrast, there is no opportunity for this play of identification in *BSi* as the player never takes the role of Elizabeth, shares her perception, or her capacities. Booker is the only vehicle for the player in *BSi* and, perhaps more significantly, Booker is also the only vehicle for the player's gaze. This is characteristic of the visual focalization that Mulvey articulates as scopophilic identification (10), the counterpart of narcissistic identification. In the classic cinematic context, the spectator's narcissistic identification with a male character is enmeshed in a system of looks/looking that depicts women as sexually desirous to men, such that the entire symbolic apparatus of the film encourages the spectator to (scopophilically) identify not simply with a male character but with the hegemonic masculine position, generally.

Applying this scopophilic logic to *TLoU* is problematic both because of the time during which players experience the world as Ellie and the way that Ellie is depicted, visually and narratively. A fourteen year old girl, Ellie is a cute kid but not easily mistaken for woman. Relatively thin, she has few curves, small breasts and narrow hips. She is attired modestly, wearing a different outfit each season of the year but always full-length jeans and long-sleeved crew-neck shirt (or jacket). Throughout the great majority of the game, Ellie is running, climbing, hiding and fighting alongside Joel. Any desire to protect her is rooted more in a logic of paternal care than of sexual possession.

In the portion of the game played as Ellie, she is not only a capable, powerful subject but simultaneously is and is not an object of sexual desire. It is during this time that one of the game's villains, David, becomes obsessed with her and sends his henchmen to capture Ellie. Ellie is the object of David's erotic desire, but the game positions the player in disgust of this desire by making David a very difficult point of identification (for instance, David and his men are cannibals and his inhumanity is repeatedly communicated through both images and dialog). The temporary sexualization of Ellie, overwhelmingly represented as paternal charge and partner, is strongly coded as wrong.

Nineteen year-old Elizabeth, on the other hand, is positioned as an object of sexual desire. The narrative conceit is premised on a classic damsel in distress trope in which, typically, a young woman in peril is rescued by a hero resulting in their marriage or sexual consummation. Indeed, this traditional trope 'prepare[s] the ground for the insertion of the little girl into romantic heterosexuality' (Walkerdine, quoted in Wholwend 2009, 59). Elizabeth has spent her life imprisoned in a tower by the man she thinks is her father, John Comstock. The expectations created by this trope complement

the procedural representation of Elizabeth as an object whose aide is commanded, rather than a subject whose response is unexpected.

Though Booker's dialog never expresses lust for her, the manner in which the game's designers chose to portray Elizabeth betrays her function as an object of the male gaze. At the start of the game she is outfitted in a naval inspired high-waist, knee-length blue dress. A large blue collar and slim neckerchief draw attention to the open neck of her elbow-length white blouse. At rest, she stands with her weight on one leg, pushing the opposite hip out noticeably. However, Elizabeth soon changes into a second outfit, which she wears for the majority of the game and that erases any ambivalence concerning her appearance. This outfit consists of a blue, ankle-length A-line skirt, blue bolero jacket, and white corset trimmed with black, which highlights Elizabeth's slim waist and ample hips and breasts. As one blogger points out, the black trim of the corset (that she wears sans bodice) and the dark blue bolero jacket create a "boob window" drawing the eye to and framing Elizabeth's substantial cleavage (How Many Princesses, 2013). Given that *BSi* positions the player as Elizabeth's father, this is not simply crass objectification but also disturbingly incestuous. [4]

The figurations of the fatherhood constructed on the representational level in *TLoU* and *BSi* are radically different. Where the narrative of *TLoU* suggests that a father can rely on his daughter, confident putting not only a gun but also his life in her hands, *BSi* equates the daughter's power with the father's death. This is complemented by the shifting psychic and embodied perspectives in *TLoU* that suggest a relationship of consubstantiality between father and daughter, compared to *BSi*'s construction of the father as a coherent subject, the perspectival boundary between father and daughter fixed. Mirroring Ellie's procedural autonomy, *TLoU* acquaints players with a daughter who is an active, capable subject whose story, visual representation and location within the game's scopic regime is made possible by the father figure's paternal egalitarianism. To the extent that Elizabeth's character design reproduces her procedural status as object, *BSi* unproblematically takes the player across a taboo; by simultaneously positioning the player as the father and Elizabeth as an object of the player's sexual desire, *BSi*'s model of paternalism is incestuous.

Fatherhood and Feminism

Fatherhood is both a site of cultural and political struggle and a formation we must struggle to shape. And it is malleable, shifting in response to historical contingencies and the discursive interventions of activists, scholars, and cultural producers. As a key

site that makes intelligible sexual and gendered identity, fatherhood is a battleground that merits more strategic reflection and action. Indeed, redefining men as caretakers rather than providers is crucial to advancing public policy that better enables women to more fully participate in social, civic, and economic spheres (Silverstein 1996, 5). To this point, thoughtful action to refigure fatherhood has been absent from digital games, and popular culture more broadly.

BSi exemplifies the dangers of not carefully considering the consequentiality of cultural production. In response to discovering fan-made pornography featuring Elizabeth, director Ken Levine reveals that he has come to view Elizabeth as daughter figure: "Please stop it. You're killing me… It's like coming across a picture of your daughter" (quoted in Good 2013). Yet, despite this paternal affection, Levine signed off on a father figure who literally commands his daughter's every meaningful action, for whom surrendering control is death. He also oversaw the creation of a character that functions as a sexualized object for players positioned, by the game, as her father. While each of the various elements of the game — procedural, narrative, and visual — was meticulously planned and a good deal of consideration was surely given to how they would work together, it was clearly not thoughtful enough to notice the incestuous relation that emerges from the interplay of identification with Booker, narrative construction of Elizabeth as his daughter, and visual depiction of her as an object of sexual desire.

TLoU breaks from this uncritical approach with positive, if not entirely unproblematic, results. As creative director Neil Druckmann has explained in several interviews, his own recent fatherhood influenced his thinking about Ellie and Joel, and his desire to tell a simple story: "It's about the love of a father and a daughter" (quoted in Webb 2014). In this attempt to represent filial care the militarized masculinity common to digital games is somewhat tempered by redirecting the capacity for violence into a form of paternal masculinity. But more importantly, the model of fatherhood that emerges from the interplay of the procedural, narrative, and visual components of the game is one that is capable of growing to respect a daughter's agency, to not only protect but be protected, and to value how the other experiences the world differently.

Looking at the two most prominent and successful dadified games reveals that fatherhood, as a digital game trope, is far from settled. Both fathers in question, Joel and Booker, act in a similar fashion by doling out violence to anyone who would impede them. But their attitudes toward and relations with others, particularly their

daughters, are significantly different. As a figure of fatherhood, Booker enshrines the most pathological sexualized domination and violence underwriting patriarchal domination. Joel, at least, is a model of manhood we can work from, one that eventually opens up to the other. As the public discourse of feminist games critics have made plain, Joel is a fairly typical gruff, white-male game protagonist (Brice 2013; Myers 2013). And he expects his paternal authority to abide, ultimately robbing Ellie of the chance to make the most significant choice in the game (Joho 2013; Joyce 2014). It says something about the culture of mainstream digital games that Joel, as problematic as he is, is a father figure worth recovering. But in an activity still dominated by hypermasculine heroes and littered with sexualized heroines, if dadification can temper the militarization of games, then it is a step in the right direction we might appreciate without uncritically accepting.

Perhaps the next few years will give rise to games in which mothers are featured as the protagonist, or to the mainstreaming of non-violent, compassionate and emotionally-open fathers like Lee from *The Walking Dead*. Until then, it is imperative that we continue to track how different figurations of fatherhood contest the most pathological, incestuous constructs of militarized masculinity.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

1. Sadly, this supposed maturation of the medium has not included recasting of women as mothers. Indeed, as Jess Joho (2015) points out, less than a handful of games position players as mother (figures), despite the large number of women, mothers includes, playing digital games.

2. Other titles the feature playable fathers and father figures as the protagonist include *HeavyRain* (Quantic Dream 2010), *BioShock 2* (2K Games 2010), *God of War III* (Sony Computer Entertainment Santa Monica 2010), *Nier* (Cavia 2010), *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar 2010), *The Walking Dead* (Telltale 2012), Dishonored (Arkane Studios 2012), *Octodad: Dadliest Catch* (Young Horses 2014), *The Castle Doctrine* (Rohrer 2014), *The*

Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt (CD Projekt Red 2015), as well as several titles in the *Silent Hill* (Konami 1999-2004) and *Splinter Cell* (Ubisoft 2002-2013) series.

3. For more about the first-person shooting and role-playing game genres see Voorhees, Call and Whitlock (2012a; 2012b).

4. While the internet hosts numerous compromising images of Elizabeth created by fans, there is no more powerful instantiation of this objectification and incestuous positioning than the *BSi* parody game, *BioCock Intimate*, from a developer using the alias Zone-Sama. The parody game does nothing more than make explicit the incestuous nature of the relationship between Booker and Elizabeth. But the developers of *BSi* also offer a more cannon instantiation in the downloadable content (DLC) *Burial at Sea*, in which an alternative reality Elizabeth and Booker explore the underwater city of Rapture and encounter a newsstand with pornographic magazines including one titled "Daughter."

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This article has been openly peer reviewed at **Ada Review** (http://adareview.fembotcollective.org/ada-issue-9-open-issue/daddy-issues-constructions-of-fatherhood-in-the-last-of-us-and-bioshock-infinite) .

Footnotes   (returns to text)

1. Sadly, this supposed maturation of the medium has not included recasting of women as mothers. Indeed, as Jess Joho (2015) points out, less than a handful of games position players as mother (figures), despite the large number of women, mothers includes, playing digital games.
2. Other titles the feature playable fathers and father figures as the protagonist include *HeavyRain* (Quantic Dream 2010), *BioShock 2* (2K Games 2010), *God of War III* (Sony Computer Entertainment Santa Monica 2010), *Nier* (Cavia 2010), *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar 2010), *The Walking Dead* (Telltale 2012), Dishonored (Arkane Studios 2012), *Octodad: Dadliest Catch* (Young Horses 2014), *The Castle Doctrine* (Rohrer 2014), *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red 2015), as well as several titles in the *Silent Hill* (Konami 1999-2004) and *Splinter Cell* (Ubisoft 2002-2013) series.
3. For more about the first-person shooting and role-playing game genres see Voorhees, Call and Whitlock (2012a; 2012b).
4. While the internet hosts numerous compromising images of Elizabeth created by fans, there is no more powerful instantiation of this objectification and incestuous positioning than the *BSi* parody game, *BioCock Intimate*, from a developer using the alias Zone-Sama. The

parody game does nothing more than make explicit the incestuous nature of the relationship between Booker and Elizabeth. But the developers of *BSi* also offer a more cannon instantiation in the downloadable content (DLC) *Burial at Sea*, in which an alternative reality Elizabeth and Booker explore the underwater city of Rapture and encounter a newsstand with pornographic magazines including one titled "Daughter."

DIGITAL GAMES   FATHERHOOD   GAME STUDIES   MASCULINITY   PEER REVIEWED

PROCEDURALITY   REPRESENTATION

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4 THOUGHTS ON "DADDY ISSUES: CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD IN THE LAST OF US AND BIOSHOCK INFINITE"

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