

Playing for Change: The Potential of VR Feminist Games
in Promoting Gender Equality

by

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A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Digital Futures

OCADU CO, 130 Queens Quay East, March 28 to April 2, 2025

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2025

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Abstract

My research explores the integration of feminist theory and virtual reality (VR) game design to raise awareness of gender discrimination and misogyny. The central project of this thesis, *Her Day*, is a feminist VR game that immerses players in scenarios of gender-based discrimination. Drawing from personal experiences, the game reflects the systemic biases faced by women in traditional Chinese families and broader societal contexts. Guided by feminist theoretical frameworks, this study employs iterative design and value-conscious design methods, combining gameplay mechanics, such as emotion-driven choices, with VR's unique features to encourage players to reflect critically on societal biases. This research explores the potential of feminist VR games as a transformative tool for promoting gender equity and social change. Through digital technology, it examines how interactive VR experiences can challenge systemic biases and foster critical reflection, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable digital future.

Keywords: Feminism, Virtual Reality (VR), Feminist VR Game, Misogyny, Gender Discrimination, Gender Equality, Immersive Experiences, Game Design

Acknowledgment and Dedication

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my primary advisor Emma Westecott and secondary advisor Veronika Szkudlarek, for their invaluable insights, guidance, and support throughout this research. Their expertise and encouragement have been integral in shaping this project, and I deeply appreciate the time and effort they have dedicated to guiding me through this journey.

I sincerely thank the participants who participated in the questionnaires and game testing, providing valuable feedback. Their contributions and perspectives have been essential in refining this work.

Finally, I am deeply thankful to my family and friends for their encouragement, patience, and emotional support throughout this journey. And to my lovely girlfriend—I love you. I hope that one day we can have our legal rights in our hometown.

I dedicate this thesis to all the people who have or would face gender discrimination and misogyny. I also dedicate it to all feminists who are working in or planning to enter the field of game development and research. May this work contribute to the ongoing conversations and efforts toward gender equity and inclusion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Project Overview

I was born and raised in a regular traditional Chinese family, where societal and familial expectations for women were deeply ingrained in daily life. Like many women who grew up in similar cultural environments, my upbringing was shaped by various voices that tried to discipline and regulate me. I have been bound by those discriminatory and misogynistic words and still cannot fully break free. My background has given me a deep understanding of the systemic biases faced by women in current Chinese society, both within the family structure and in broader social contexts. These experiences have shaped my perspective on gender inequality—not only an academic concept, but also a reality that continues to influence my life.

My thesis, *Playing for Change: The Potential of VR Feminist Games in Promoting Gender Equality*, explores the intersection of feminist theory, virtual reality (VR) technology, and game design to foster empathy and raise awareness about gender discrimination. This research explores feminist VR games that challenge gender discrimination by addressing workplace bias, restrictive family expectations, and societal limitations on women. While there is no established canon of “feminist VR games,” this research explores how VR can be harnessed to promote feminist critique and awareness. Few studies explicitly define this category, making it necessary to acknowledge the evolving nature of feminist game design in

VR contexts. Rather than framing VR as an “empathy machine,” I argue that its immersive, embodied, and interactive nature makes it particularly effective in allowing players to confront gender discrimination firsthand. Unlike traditional media, VR engages players through bodily presence, perspective-taking, and active participation, which can lead to deeper critical reflection on systemic biases. However, scholars such as Lisa Nakamura (2020) have critiqued the notion of VR as an “empathy machine,” cautioning against the risk of performative empathy without deeper structural critique. Instead, this research positions VR as a medium that helps embodied interactions, which research by Slater and Sanchez-Vives (2016) has shown to be effective in fostering critical awareness rather than just passive emotional responses.

My project, *Her Day*, is a VR game where players play scenarios depicting gender-based discrimination. VR games provide a unique medium for exploring gender bias due to their interactivity and embodied engagement. Immersion, as one of VR’s key affordances, further strengthens this engagement by allowing players to experience discrimination firsthand. *Her Day* aims to enhance players’ immersion and increase their awareness of misogyny. The primary goal of this research is to highlight the potential of VR games as powerful tools for raising awareness about gender discrimination and addressing gender biases. By immersing players in lived experiences, it critically examines the systemic biases women face in both traditional Chinese families and broader societal contexts.

Research Question

This research is guided by the following central question: Why use VR to increase players' awareness and understanding of sexism and misogyny in feminist games? VR's affordances—such as perspective-taking, embodied interaction, and spatial storytelling—enable a more visceral exploration of sexism and misogyny than traditional media.

At first glance, choosing VR might seem like an obvious decision. VR's potential for immersive experiences stems from its unique affordances, as mentioned above. Unlike traditional media, VR allows users to actively engage with virtual environments, which enhances presence and interactivity (Slater and Sanchez-Vives, 2016; Bailenson, 2018). While VR holds great potential, it remains underutilized as a tool for social change, particularly in feminist game design. This is largely due to technological, economic, and cultural barriers. VR hardware remains expensive and inaccessible to many users, limiting its reach. Additionally, feminist game design principles have historically been developed within 2D and narrative-driven formats, leaving VR largely unexplored in this context. The gaming industry's male-dominated market further limits investment in feminist VR projects (Ruberg, 2020; Flanagan, 2009; Shaw, 2014). Furthermore, feminist VR games remain a significantly underrepresented gap in the existing gaming area. This gap exists because mainstream games often lack diverse and inclusive narratives that challenge traditional gender roles or address issues of gender inequality.

While VR technology has been explored for raising awareness of gender discrimination

and misogyny, there remains a lack of established frameworks explicitly defining its impact on feminist game design—Feminist game design, though not always explicitly defined as a distinct field, has been explored in works such as Flanagan’s *Critical Play* (2009) and Ruberg’s *Queer Games Avant-Garde* (2020), which examine how games can challenge traditional structures and narratives through feminist and queer perspectives. This research aims to bridge that gap by examining how VR’s unique affordances contribute to feminist critique and social activism. VR technology certainly plays a role in raising awareness about gender discrimination and misogyny, research by Peck et al. (2020) suggests that VR body-swapping experiences can influence players’ perceptions of gender bias by allowing them to embody different gender identities.

Diverse narratives and inclusive perspectives are often overshadowed by traditional male-dominated frameworks, such as the classic “Hero’s Journey” (Campbell 1949), where female characters are frequently marginalized. In these narratives, heroines often reconcile with patriarchal values, becoming nearly indistinguishable from male heroes after their gender identity is stripped away. While this issue is present across all narrative media, games uniquely engage with gender representation through interactive storytelling, systemic design, and player agency. Unlike passive media, games allow players to embody different identities and directly experience the constraints of patriarchal narratives. A framework that examines these aspects can reveal how game mechanics reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. I am not making a value judgment on these portrayals. Rather, they reflect two distinct approaches to

resistance: one that assimilates into patriarchal ideals by stripping gender identity, and another that actively challenges these norms while maintaining a distinct female perspective.

The first approach, as discussed by Shaw (2014) in *Gaming at the Edge*, emphasizes a gender-neutral perspective in game design, arguing that removing a character's gender does not fundamentally alter gameplay. This study identifies the first approach as the 'gender-neutral perspective,' which assumes that gender differences should be minimized in game design. Games adopting this principle do not undergo any fundamental changes in narrative or gameplay, regardless of the character's gender identity.

The second approach, as outlined by Ruberg (2020) in *The Queer Games Avant-Garde*, emphasizes identity politics in game design. It argues that gender identity plays a crucial role in shaping both narrative and mechanics, making its removal highly disruptive. This study identifies the second approach as the 'identity-based perspective,' which asserts that gender identity is fundamental to both narrative and game mechanics. Unlike gender-neutral approaches, games designed under this framework center on gendered experiences, making the removal of gender identity highly disruptive to player immersion and story coherence. When a game is designed with this principle, removing the gender identity of the protagonist often causes catastrophic disruptions to the narrative and game mechanics, significantly affecting players' understanding of the story's narrative.

The main goal of my research is to raise awareness of gender discrimination and explore how interactive media—such as VR games—can promote social change. Overall, I'm

iteratively designing and developing a VR game to showcase the expectations, negations, and limitations imposed on women by traditional Chinese families and society to analyze players' perceptions and reactions to gender issues during gameplay, as well as explore potential theoretical frameworks that may support my game making.

Working on this project allows me to combine my expertise in game design with my commitment to gender equity, creating a work that is both theoretically grounded and emotionally impactful. Through this project, I aim to deepen my theoretical knowledge and practical skills while gaining a more profound understanding of and analytical ability regarding gender issues.

As a woman, I cannot ignore the malicious words and actions directed at myself, my friends, and my family. As a game designer and feminist, I hope this work can promote players' understanding and spark meaningful conversations about gender and social justice. I hope that through the power of digital technology, it can help the wider culture and society shift towards equality and inclusion and contribute to creating a more equal social environment for the digital future.

Chapter 2: Literature and Contextual Review

Although VR has huge potential as a transformative medium, it remains a growing technology that has undergone distinct waves of evolution. Early VR systems in the 1960s and 70s were primarily experimental, followed by more mainstream applications in the 2010s with devices like the Oculus Rift and HTC Vive. Despite these advances, VR is still refining its accessibility, affordability, and user engagement, which may explain why feminist VR games remain notably scarce. The gap in feminist VR games highlights how VR's unique capabilities, such as immersion and interactivity, are still underutilized in addressing gender inequality and systemic biases.

Literature Review

1. Feminist Theoretical Foundations

Feminist theory forms the core framework of this research, providing a critical perspective on VR games challenging social norms and redefining gender narratives. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) introduces the concept of gender performativity, emphasizing that gender is not an inherent identity, but a series of repeated behaviors shaped by social frameworks. This idea challenges the more mainstream notion of gender as a fixed identity and highlights its constructed nature through repetition. Butler's scholarship has long provided a theoretical foundation for feminist and queer games that challenge binary identity constructs.

Beginning with *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), she introduced the idea that gender is performative and socially constructed, paving the way for game narratives that embrace fluid and non-conforming identities. In her 2024 work, *Who's Afraid of Gender?*, Butler expands on these ideas, critiquing the cultural and political weaponization of 'gender' and urging creators to resist reactionary narratives that hinder inclusivity. Then, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, mentioned in *Mapping the Margins* (1991), emphasizes the need to consider overlapping systems of oppression when understanding marginalized experiences. Crenshaw argues that the experiences of oppression are shaped by intersecting identities such as race, gender, and class, and that gender cannot be separated from these factors (race, class or other identities). This insight is important for ensuring feminist VR games do not perpetuate exclusion but instead address the diverse experiences of marginalized groups. Intersectionality not only enriches the depth of narrative but also challenges players to engage with the complexities of identity and privilege. Games that integrate intersectional perspectives force players to confront how overlapping social categories—such as gender, race, and class—shape individual experiences. *Night in the Woods* (2017) exemplifies this by portraying a protagonist struggling with mental health, financial instability, and gendered expectations, allowing players to experience the compounded effects of these intersecting factors. Similarly, *Tell Me Why* (2020) engages with the intersection of gender identity (transgender identity) and cultural heritage (Indigenous heritage), affecting character interactions and societal perceptions within the game.

Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) sees the cyborg as a metaphor for breaking down the boundaries between humans and machines, nature and technology. Haraway's vision inspires VR as a medium that transcends traditional limitations, reconfiguring embodied experiences and enabling players could have hybrid identities. Through this, VR games can embrace hybridity and complexity, reimagining narratives and mechanics to disrupt traditional power structures and offering players new ways to engage with agency and self-determination within narratives.

Together, these feminist theories provide a powerful framework for VR game design, structured around three key components: (1) Theoretical foundations—drawing from Butler's concept of gender performativity, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and Flanagan's critical play theory; (2) Design principles—centering on challenging gender norms, immersive storytelling, and player agency; and (3) VR mechanics—leveraging embodied interactions, environmental storytelling, and branching narrative structures to engage players in gendered experiences. They invite game designers to rethink the role of games in deconstructing societal norms, fostering empathy, and advocating for equity. As VR technology continues to evolve, these theoretical insights will remain crucial in shaping its potential as a transformative tool for feminist expression and activism.

Chinese feminist theorists and new media artists have contributed perspectives on gender and digital culture. Dai Jinhua's critique of media representation highlights how gender roles in China are shaped by both state ideology and market forces, an intersection that also

manifests in gaming narratives. Wang Zheng's historical research into feminist activism in China offers insights into how resistance against gender norms can be expressed through interactive media. Moreover, artists such as Cao Fei and Shu Lea Cheang have experimented with digital storytelling and virtual identities, demonstrating how new media can serve as a site for gender critique. These perspectives provide a supplement to game studies.

2. Feminism in Gaming Culture

The evolution of feminist thought has significantly influenced how games represent gender, structure mechanics, and shape player agency. However, the presence of feminist themes in game narratives does not necessarily equate to structural change in gaming culture. To fully understand feminism in games, it is necessary to examine both representational shifts and the systemic barriers that persist within the industry and player communities.

The history of gaming culture is deeply intertwined with gender dynamics, often reflecting and reinforcing societal norms. Gender dynamics are informed by sociocultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Historically, gaming spaces have been dominated by men, marginalizing women players and creators. Bryce and Rutter in *Killing Like a Girl* (2002) analysis of gaming culture reveals how early games perpetuated gender stereotypes, portraying women as secondary characters or figures in need of rescue. Similarly, Jenson and de Castell in *Tipping Points* (2013) document the exclusion of women from gaming spaces and the persistence of these gender stereotypes. However, even within

these exclusionary environments, opportunities for resistance and reimagination have emerged.

Feminist interventions in gaming have challenged these norms through representation and design. Angela Washko's dating simulation game, *The Game: The Game* (2016), explores the intersection of gaming culture and gender politics. Players take on a femme-presenting role and immerse themselves in the world of "pick-up artists" (PUAs), challenging the ideological landscape of hyper-masculine communities. The Game directly highlights harmful behaviors and attitudes that treat women as objects, critiquing the normalization of misogyny and the commodification of relationships in these spaces.

Gone Home (2013) is a key example of how games can tell a deeply personal story centered on a female perspective. Its exploration of identity, family dynamics, and societal expectations redefines what a game can be, moving beyond traditional action and conflict to create a narrative-driven experience that emphasizes emotion and immersion. The game has been praised for its sensitive treatment of LGBTQ+ themes, though debates about its classification as a "game" highlight the ongoing tensions within gaming culture. Studies such as *Riot Grrrl Gaming* (2019) by Tulloch, Rowan, Hoad, and Young, further explore the feminist aesthetics of *Gone Home*, framing it as a critique of traditional game narratives while pointing out its lack of intersectionality. These insights provide the foundation for designing games that are narrative-driven for feminist critique.

Articles such as *Gendering Identity Talk* (2022) by Buyukozturk and *Sexism in Online*

Video Games (2014) by Fox, Jesse, and Tang delve deeper into the persistence of gender norms in gaming communities. Buyukozturk's analysis of how gamers construct gender identities highlights the reinforcement of hierarchies in games, while Fox, Jesse, and Tang's exploration of masculine norms highlights their role in perpetuating sexism. These studies offer practical guidance for addressing gender inequalities in gaming culture, informing game design that challenges dominant gender norms and creates more inclusive player experiences.

Grassroots initiatives like Dames Making Games (founded in 2012, Toronto) and Pixelles (founded in 2013, Montreal) emphasize the importance of communities in driving systemic change. Dames Making Games supports women, non-binary, and marginalized gender creators by offering mentorship, workshops, and game jams that lower the barriers to entry in the industry. Pixelles provides game incubator programs, financial support, and networking opportunities, ensuring that underrepresented developers gain visibility and access to resources. These spaces provide support for marginalized creators and promote innovation and inclusivity in game development. Their success demonstrates that transforming gaming culture requires both institutional reform and grassroots advocacy.

On the practical side, experimental art games like *PsXXYborg* (Epstein and Leitch, 2013) integrate feminist theory into game design, blending experimental design with activism. These illustrate how feminist practices can expand the possibilities of what games can achieve. By integrating feminist theory into the creative process, these projects reimagine the role of games as tools for reflection and change.

Feminism in gaming culture is not just about rewriting narratives; it's also about reclaiming spaces. It's about challenging deeply ingrained norms, amplifying marginalized voices, and redefining games as a medium for exploring identity and promoting equity. The work of feminist creators and communities continues to influence the industry, proving that games are not only a form of entertainment but also powerful cultural tools for resistance and transformation.

3. VR as a Medium for Feminist Games

While feminist interventions in gaming have historically focused on representation, community-building, and industry reform, Virtual Reality (VR) introduces a new layer of engagement by immersing players in embodied experiences of gendered oppression. This shift raises critical questions: Does VR enhance feminist storytelling, or does it risk reinforcing performative “empathy” without structural critique? Addressing these concerns requires an analysis of how VR affects player agency, narrative immersion, and interactive resistance mechanics.

It is important to clarify that the goal of this study is not to define a single standard for “feminist games”, but rather to focus on how VR influences the ways feminist games are expressed. When discussing what constitutes a feminist game, a rigorous and cautious approach is necessary. We must acknowledge that “feminist games” is not a universally recognized category, and there is currently no single, widely accepted definition. Different

scholars and designers interpret feminism in games in various ways, exploring the concept from diverse perspectives. In *Feminism in Play* (2018), the authors examine how feminism intersects with game design, industry structures, and player communities, arguing that feminist games do not conform to a singular definition. Instead, they represent a broad and evolving field of study, encompassing a range of approaches, including feminist representation in narratives, alternative mechanics that challenge mainstream game structures, and industry interventions that promote inclusivity.

VR has great potential as a transformative medium for feminist games. Unlike traditional media, which primarily relies on visual and narrative representation, VR's immersive nature stems from its first-person embodiment, sensorimotor feedback, and interactive agency. These features enable players to physically inhabit a virtual body, fostering deeper empathy and emotional engagement. One way this occurs is through body-gender transfer mechanisms, which allow players to see themselves as a different gendered avatar in real-time, often achieved through virtual mirrors, full-body motion tracking, and haptic feedback. Research such as *Effect of Body-Gender Transfer in Virtual Reality on the Perception of Sexual Harassment* (2021) by Wu, Chen, and Fitts demonstrates that when male players experience VR harassment scenarios as female avatars, their perception of sexual harassment shifts, increasing awareness of gendered power imbalances. Similarly, *Examining the Effects of Gender Transfer in Virtual Reality on Implicit Gender Bias* (2022) found that prolonged exposure to an opposite-gender avatar in VR reduced implicit gender biases, illustrating how

embodied perspective-taking can lead to long-term attitude changes. By directly challenging players' ingrained gender perceptions through embodied experiences, VR presents a unique opportunity for feminist game design. Unlike text-based narratives or traditional role-playing mechanics, VR's sensorimotor realism (the ability to map physical actions onto a virtual body) enables players to internalize new perspectives beyond passive observation. While limitations such as sample size and long-term retention effects remain, these findings highlight how feminist VR games can use body-gender transfer as a tool for fostering gender awareness and empathy.

However, this potential does not come without challenges. Lisa Nakamura's article *Feeling Good About Feeling Bad* (2020) critiques the concept of VR as an "empathy machine," warning of the dangers of "toxic empathy." She argues that users may mistake fleeting emotional responses for meaningful understanding, leading to superficial engagement. This serves as a reminder that feminist VR games must go beyond surface-level experiences. Instead, they should aim to provoke critical reflection and inspire ongoing conversations about systemic inequalities. To address these concerns, games must go beyond surface-level experiences. Instead, they should incorporate multi-perspective storytelling and consequential choices, allowing players to switch between characters from different gender identities and social backgrounds, and witness how systemic inequalities shape individual experiences. Additionally, reflective mechanics—such as post-game debriefing and open-ended discussions—can ensure that players engage critically with gender issues beyond the virtual

space.

What makes VR distinctive is its ability to create embodied experiences through first-person perspective, motion tracking, and haptic feedback. These technologies allow players to physically engage with the game world, reinforcing a sense of presence and agency. Unlike traditional media, VR engages the player's body and senses, making them active participants in the narrative. Research by Slater and Sanchez-Vives (2016) highlights how VR's embodied cognition enhances presence, while Banakou et al. (2016) demonstrate that body-swapping mechanics in VR can shift gender perception, reinforcing the impact of immersive storytelling. Various VR projects have also demonstrated how immersive technologies can amplify marginalized voices. For instance, Flanagan's *Critical Play* (2009) explores how alternative game design strategies can challenge dominant narratives, a principle that applies to feminist VR experiences as well. This physicality provides feminist creators with a powerful tool to reimagine storytelling. Feminist approaches in VR transform game making by incorporating multi-perspective narratives, decentralized storytelling, and embodied interactions. These design strategies challenge linear, male-centered storytelling by allowing players to explore alternative perspectives and directly engage with social issues through their virtual bodies. By integrating these elements, VR not only enhances representation but also enables players to actively participate in the reconfiguration of embodied experiences, fostering new ways of storytelling and agency in digital spaces.

Additionally, VR's evolving ecosystem offers a fertile space for diverse creators to thrive.

Unlike the established gaming industry, where marginalized voices often remain sidelined, VR remains an emerging field with the landscape still being shaped. This openness enables feminist creators to experiment with bold, groundbreaking narratives that reimagine power structures and invite players to engage with equity in transformative ways.

As VR continues to develop, its role in feminist games will become increasingly significant. By leveraging VR's immersive and interactive qualities, feminist games can transcend passive representation, creating powerful experiences that inspire empathy, challenge biases, confront discrimination, and drive meaningful change. In this way, VR becomes more than just a gaming medium—it becomes a tool for activism and transformation.

Contextual Review

1. VR in Games

While feminist game studies debate what constitutes a feminist game, it is equally important to examine how these theoretical discussions translate into game design, industry structures, and player experiences. By analyzing VR's role in this discourse, we can explore not only how feminist ideas shape games but also how VR technology uniquely amplifies or challenges feminist interventions in gaming.

VR has transformed gaming by providing an immersive, interactive experience. Jerald (2015) explains that VR's ability to create spatial presence and sensorimotor engagement distinguishes it from traditional gaming. Additionally, Slater and Sanchez-Vives (2016) demonstrate how VR enhances immersion through embodied cognition, influencing player perception and interaction. Early applications of VR in gaming focused on creating environments that were more engaging and realistic compared to traditional 2D games and early flight or military simulators. Unlike conventional screen-based games, VR allowed players to experience 3D spaces with greater interactivity, reinforcing its potential as an immersive technology (Jerald, 2015).

One of the earliest known immersive, multisensory technologies was Sensorama, developed by Morton Heilig in 1962 (Robinett, 1994). This mechanical system incorporated a stereoscopic 3D display, fans, a scent emitter, a stereo sound system, and a motion chair to

create a simulated motorcycle ride through New York. Users could experience environmental elements such as wind and city sounds, while chemical compounds were used to simulate the scent of gasoline or food from street vendors (Howard Rheingold, 1991). Though groundbreaking, Sensorama was a non-interactive system, meaning it could not respond dynamically to user input. In 1968, Ivan Sutherland and Bob Sproull developed the Sword of Damocles, the first head-mounted display (HMD) driven by computer-generated imagery (CGI) (Sutherland, 1968). This system provided basic 3D wireframe graphics but was constrained by its bulky hardware, requiring a ceiling-mounted support structure—hence the name “Sword of Damocles.” Despite its limitations, this project laid the groundwork for modern head-tracking VR systems, marking a critical step toward real-time computer-generated virtual environments.

The movie *Tron* (1982) introduced the concept of a “virtual reality” world, sparking public interest in immersive gaming experiences. In 1987, Jaron Lanier founded VPL Research, the first company to develop and sell VR equipment such as the Data Glove and EyePhone. These devices, though expensive, showcased VR’s gaming potential by demonstrating how immersive environments, real-time interaction, and embodied experiences could redefine player engagement and agency. Unlike traditional games, VR allowed players to physically move within virtual spaces, enhancing spatial awareness and realism. *Dactyl Nightmare* (1991) became the first commercial VR game, introducing real-time 3D multiplayer gameplay in an arcade setting. Players navigated a 3D arena, dodging enemy fire

and avoiding attacks from a flying pterodactyl. The game used the Virtuality 1000CS headset, one of the first consumer VR HMDs, and a 6DoF tracking system to map head and hand movements into the game world. Companies like Sega and Nintendo also explored VR with devices such as the Sega VR (1993) and Nintendo Virtual Boy (1995). However, these efforts failed due to a combination of technological, economic, and market-related factors. Sega VR never officially launched due to tracking latency and low-resolution displays, while Nintendo Virtual Boy suffered from poor ergonomics, monochrome visuals causing eye strain, and a lack of compelling content, resulting in weak consumer adoption. Additionally, VR hardware at the time was costly and lacked mainstream appeal, limiting its adoption beyond niche markets.

During the 2000s, advances in computer graphics and sensor technology improved VR systems. However, high costs and suboptimal user experiences limited VR's adoption in gaming. Efforts like the VRArcade system (2007) integrated better HMDs and motion tracking systems, but their market impact remained limited. With advancements in hardware, particularly with the introduction of affordable consumer devices like Oculus Rift (2016) and HTC Vive (2016), VR became accessible to mainstream gamers. The launch of Oculus Rift's developer version in 2012 marked a new era for VR gaming. The Kickstarter campaign raised \$2.5 million, showcasing widespread interest in consumer VR. Oculus Rift featured high-resolution displays and low-latency design, solving many issues from earlier VR attempts and attracting industry attention.

In 2016, several consumer-grade VR devices entered the market, such as Oculus Rift, HTC Vive, and PlayStation VR, making VR accessible to mainstream gamers and driving its popularity in the gaming industry. According to Statista, the global VR market size was approximately \$3.89 billion in 2016, growing to about \$6.71 billion by 2020. In China, the VR market reached 112.6 billion RMB in 2023, a 22.8% increase from 2022. With the introduction of affordable standalone devices like the Meta Quest series, the VR user base continues to grow. Newzoo predicts that by 2024, the global active installation base of VR devices will reach 46 million units, with VR gaming revenue expected to increase to \$3.2 billion.

VR's immersive nature allows players to interact with game environments in ways traditional formats cannot replicate. Studies like *Enhancing Our Lives with Immersive Virtual Reality* (2016) by Slater and Sanchez-Vives have shown that VR significantly enhances user engagement, spatial awareness, and emotional response. This immersive quality has made VR a powerful medium for storytelling, particularly for games that aim to evoke empathy and challenge social norms.

2. Feminism in Games

In the early days of gaming, female characters were often depicted in secondary roles or as passive figures, such as the “damsel in distress.” Games like *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), where Princess Peach needed rescuing, epitomized these gendered stereotypes. Even when

women were protagonists, their appearances were often highly sexualized, serving a predominantly male audience. *Metroid* (1986) was an early exception, with Samus Aran as a strong, armored protagonist, though her reveal as a woman was used more as a twist than an empowering statement. However, the early 1990s saw the rise of feminist interventions in gaming and digital media, particularly through CD-ROM games, online guilds, and Net Art, feminist artists and collectives began subverting those narratives through digital media. VNS Matrix, an Australian feminist art collective, pioneered cyberfeminism in gaming with *All New Gen*, a radical CD-ROM game that challenged traditional power structures in digital culture. Artists like Olia Lialina pioneered interactive Net Art, creating early web-based works that reimaged gender narratives in digital spaces. She Lea Cheang's *Brandon* (1998), the first game acquired by the Guggenheim Museum, explored gender identity and queerness through a nonlinear, participatory narrative. These interventions laid the foundation for feminist game studies and activism, demonstrating that digital spaces—like games—could be sites of resistance and redefinition. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the emergence of more complex female characters. Games like *Tomb Raider* (1996) were praised for featuring strong female protagonists but critiqued for perpetuating objectified representations of women. Games like *Final Fantasy* series and *Silent Hill 3* (2003) introduced female protagonists with more emotional depth and agency, though female-led games remained relatively rare.

As feminist discourse gained traction, some developers began to integrate feminist ideas more consciously into their games. Rather than simply focusing on aesthetics, they started to

create characters and stories that engaged with themes of independence, resilience, and self-discovery. By the late 2000s, indie games had emerged as a platform for more diverse voices, giving space to developers interested in exploring identity, gender, and social justice through storytelling. For example, in 2010, Australian designer Alexander Ocas developed the browser-based game *Loved*, which used reflexive game mechanics to challenge players on themes of control and autonomy (Anthropy, 2012). Similarly, the critically acclaimed indie game *Celeste* (2018) tackled issues of self-acceptance and mental health, illustrating how independent games provide unique opportunities for introspection and identity exploration (Boellstorff, 2019). These examples highlight how independent games became a space for personal storytelling and social critique, expanding the scope of feminist discourse in gaming.

The 2010s saw the rise of feminist games that emphasized narrative depth and explored themes of identity, oppression, and agency. Titles like *Gone Home* (2013) and *Life is Strange* (2015) challenged traditional gaming tropes by focusing on personal stories and emotional depth. *Gone Home* (2013) by Fullbright is a landmark game that tells the story of a young woman exploring her family home and uncovering her sister's experiences of queer love and self-discovery. *Life is Strange* (2015) allows players to engage with themes such as friendship, trauma, and choice from a young woman's perspective, challenging the traditional male-dominated storylines and mechanics. These games demonstrated how feminist principles could redefine the medium, creating spaces for diverse voices and perspectives.

In 2012, media critic Anita Sarkeesian launched the *Tropes vs Women in Video Games*

video series through her platform Feminist Frequency. The series critically analyzed recurring sexist tropes in video games, sparking industry-wide discussions on gender representation. Sarkeesian's work and the broader movement for feminist critique in gaming exposed and challenged the lack of diversity in the gaming industry, though it also led to considerable backlash, including harassment campaigns like GamerGate (GG).

Recent feminist games have adopted an intersectional approach, addressing issues of race, class, and sexuality alongside gender. This evolution reflects a broader understanding of systemic oppression and its diverse impacts. For example, Tale of Tales' *The Path* (2009) is an example of a feminist reinterpretation of traditional storytelling in games. Inspired by the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood*, the game subverts traditional narrative structures by letting players control six sisters, each tasked with crossing the forest to reach their grandmother's house. The game explores themes such as puberty, trauma, and society's expectations of young women. It attempts to show players that "being eaten alive by a wolf is not the most horrific thing a girl can experience." And the game *Celeste* (2018) explored mental health and self-discovery, resonating with feminist audiences through its nuanced portrayal of identity.

3. VR and Marginalized Identities in Feminist Games

The roots of VR as a medium for exploring feminist and artistic themes can be traced back to several groundbreaking early projects, which, while not games, laid the foundation for how VR could be used to challenge norms and engage with deeper narratives. Catherine Richards'

Spectral Bodies (1991), the first Canadian virtual reality artwork, explored the relationship between simulation and subjectivity, questioning how identity and sensation are constructed in digital spaces. Brenda Laurel and Rachel Strickland's *Placeholder* (1992) took this further by creating an interactive VR environment where users could embody "Critters", emphasizing the fluidity of identity and challenging rigid notions of selfhood.

Similarly, Char Davies' works *Osmose* (1995) and *Ephemere* (1998) pushed the boundaries of VR as a sensory and meditative experience. These projects focused on themes of embodiment, perception, and the interconnectedness of nature and human existence, diverging from the action-oriented focus of many VR applications of the time. These works focus on immersion and introspection, and the goal is not to connect those immersed users with others, but to connect them with the depths of their own inner selves.

Although these early VR projects were not games in the conventional sense, they demonstrate the potential of virtual reality to serve as a space for questioning societal norms, exploring identity, and fostering empathy—those key principles are also fundamental to feminist game design. Their influence continues to resonate in contemporary feminist VR projects.

VR feminist games have evolved to include rich narratives and interactive storytelling. Like *Clouds Over Sidra* (2015), though not explicitly feminist, highlighted the unique struggles of marginalized identities. Similarly, Micha Cardenas' *A Breathtaking Journey* (2021) combined environmental and gender issues, emphasizing the intersectionality of

feminist concerns.

Breaking Boundaries (2018) places players in the lives of three of history's most influential women in science: Grace Hopper, Marie Curie, and Jane Goodall. The game allows players to experience moments from these figures' careers, emphasizing biographical details such as their work environments and personal belongings to deepen the understanding of their lives and achievements. By immersing players in the achievements and challenges faced by these women, the game celebrates their contributions while encouraging reflection on the historical and ongoing barriers to gender equality across various fields. This is particularly important because, throughout history, the achievements of women have often been overlooked and forgotten, leaving their stories untold. By bringing these narratives to the forefront, *Breaking Boundaries* ensures that these women's legacies are remembered and cherished.

Body of Mine (2024) takes a deeply personal approach, exploring themes of identity, gender, and self-discovery. The game allows players to take the body of another gender and experience transgender stories. Within the virtual environment, players are encouraged to question their own perceptions of identity and privilege. Through interviews and interactions with real individuals, the game offers a deeper understanding of gender fluidity and the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

Theoretical discussions of feminist game studies and VR provide a foundation for understanding how gender and power dynamics can be reimagined in interactive media.

However, the practical application of these ideas in *Her Day* goes beyond abstract critique—this game serves as a design experiment that explores how VR mechanics can embody feminist resistance. By incorporating emotion-driven gameplay, branching narratives, and embodied interactions, this project aims to move feminist VR games beyond passive representation and toward active critique.

Chapter 3: Approach

Next, I will introduce the main methods and design process of this research. The focus is on game design and iterative design. The main game design theories come from Clara Fernández-Vara's *Introduction to Game Analysis*, Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum's *Values at Play in Digital Games*, and Brenda Laurel's book *Computers as Theatre*.

Methodology

The design and development of *Her Day* follow a Research-through-Design (RtD) methodology, emphasizing iterative creation and reflection to explore how feminist values can be embedded into VR games. Research-through-Design is an approach where knowledge is generated through the act of designing, rather than being solely derived from external analysis (Jonas, 2007). As Jonas explains, RtD is guided by the logic of the design process itself, while also being supported or driven by research and inquiry. This methodology allows us to engage critically with feminist game design by continuously iterating on VR mechanics, storytelling, and player experience.

1. Game Analysis

The methodology for analyzing *Her Day* incorporates principles from Clara Fernández-Vara's *Introduction to Game Analysis*, emphasizing a structured approach that considers both

the context and formal aspects of the game. This method allows for a comprehensive examination of the game's design, narrative, and cultural relevance. Contextual analysis situates *Her Day* within the socio-cultural and technological landscape of VR feminist games. This involves examining the societal issues the game addresses, such as Sexism and Misogyny, and the technological affordances of VR that enable immersive narrative. Drawing from Fernández-Vara's insights, the analysis also includes paratexts, such as promotional materials and player feedback, to understand how external factors shape the game's reception. Formal analysis focuses on the game's internal structure, including mechanics, narrative integration, and player agency. Key elements such as the "Mood Value" and choice-driven interactions are evaluated to determine how they support the game's feminist values. This approach consists of three key principles:

1. Contextual Analysis: socio-cultural and technological landscape
2. Formal Analysis: Game mechanics, Narrative integration
3. Paratextual Analysis: The content and how it communicates the theme of the game, player feedback from playtesting sessions to assess engagement and critique.

The analysis of *Her Day* occurs at multiple stages of development through an iterative Research-through-Design (RtD) framework. This process includes:

1. Pre-Production: Reviewing existing feminist VR games to establish design benchmarks.

2. Development and Iteration: Implementing prototyping and playtesting cycles, where player interactions and choices are observed to assess narrative impact.

3. Post-Play Analysis: Gathering qualitative data from player feedback.

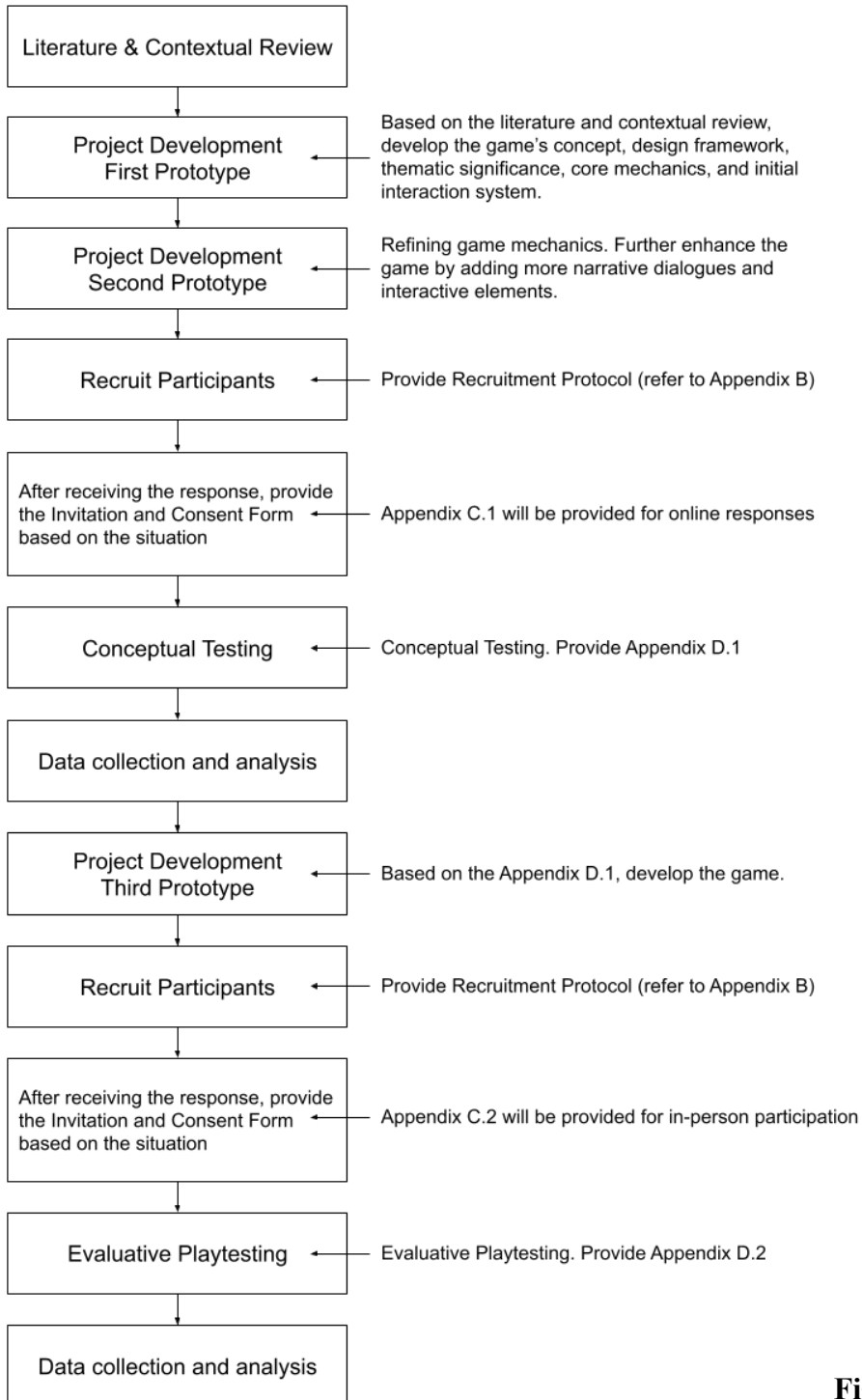


Figure 1. Project Flowchart

2. Value Conscious Design

The methodology for embedding values into *Her Day* is informed by Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum's *Values at Play in Digital Games*. This framework provides a structured approach to embedding ethical, political, and social values into the game design process through three key stages: Discovery, Implementation, and Verification. This project incorporates values-conscious design to align mechanics such as the "Mood Value" system, a dynamic in-game numerical metric that tracks and represents the player's emotional state when faced with scenarios of resistance or endurance. The Mood Value is displayed as part of the game's interface and fluctuates based on player choices. It is both a gameplay mechanic and a tool for provoking critical reflection on gender-based challenges. This approach ensures that players are prompted to engage with the sexism and misogyny in the game.

3. Iterative Design

In addition to analytical methods, the iterative design process is an important part of this approach. Each iteration improves key gameplay elements, such as interaction mechanics, the subtitle system, and the integration of VR immersive features to enhance empathy and engagement. This process includes functional testing to evaluate technical performance and conceptual gameplay testing. Playtesting sessions provided qualitative data on player engagement, emotional resonance, and the effectiveness of the feminist themes. The information gained from these sessions provides the reference for iterative refinements to the

game's narrative, mechanics, and visual design.

Research Methods

Through user testing, I will engage participants from diverse backgrounds to refine the emotional and narrative impact of the game. Feedback from players on how feminist values are represented will guide adjustments to gameplay and narrative.

Chapter 4: Game Development Process

Chapter Overview

Existing feminist game studies provide a rich foundation for analyzing how gendered experiences are represented, challenged, and reinforced in digital games. However, few studies specifically address the intersection of VR, feminist storytelling, and player agency. By situating *Her Day* within this evolving field, this research seeks to fill a critical gap, demonstrating how VR's immersive potential can be leveraged for feminist critique and social change.

In this section, I will describe the development process of *Her Day*. This includes prototyping, iterative improvements. For this project, there were two main prototypes, each of which went through multiple iterations.

Prototypes

1. First Prototype

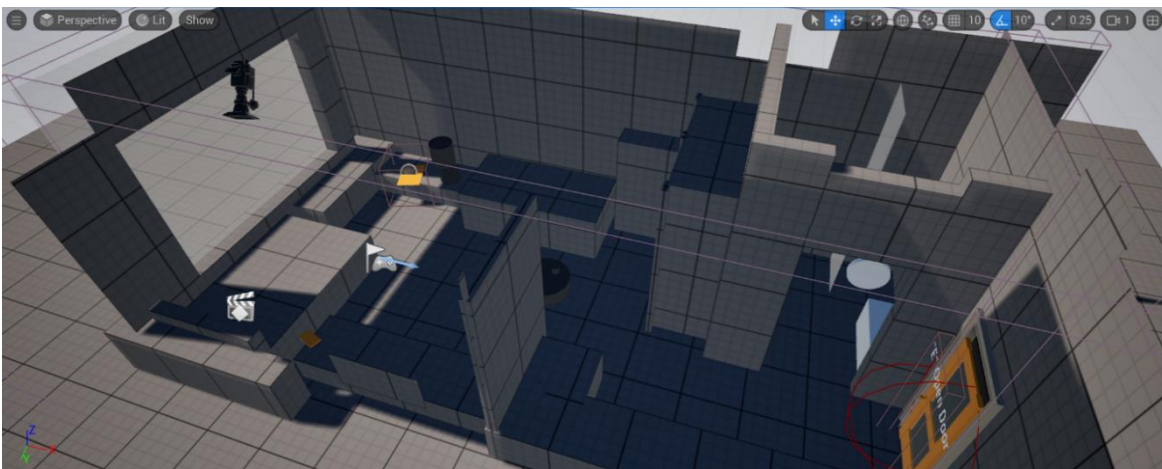


Figure 2. First Prototype

Requirements and Concept

The first prototype focused on building the foundation of *Her Day*. Through interaction and choices, the game encourages players to reflect on how to respond to unfair situations by chose “Submit” or “Resist.”

Core Gameplay Mechanic

I use anger as the core mechanic of my game. In the environment I grew up in, women are often not allowed to be angry. Many women, including myself, don’t know how to show or express their anger. My game

creates a safe space for women to be

angry about their situation and actively resist it. The core mechanic focuses on Mood and

Anger Values. These value systems determine the player’s choices and the final outcome of

the game. If players want to shift from “sadness” to “anger,” they must choose “resist.”

The game values are controlled by the player’s choices, with two main options:

Choosing “Submit” decreases the “Mood Value.”

Choosing “Resist” increases both the “Mood Value” and “Anger Value.”

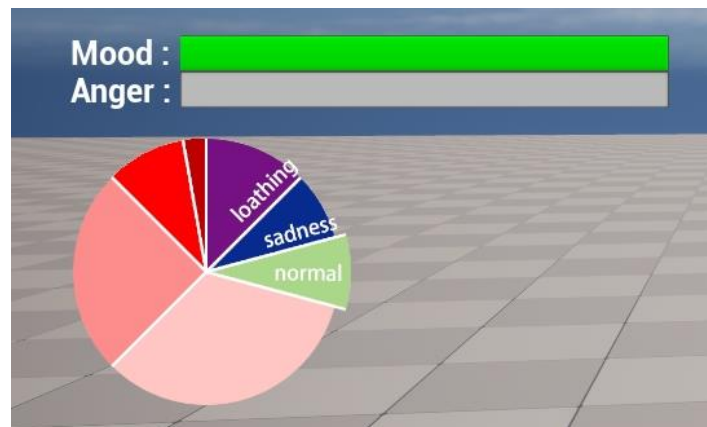


Figure 3. The “Mood Value Wheel” in Iteration 1

Gameflow Diagram

The first prototype sets a simple ending determination system. After entering the game, players are allowed to freely explore the environment. As they progress, they will encounter key decision-making scenarios—choosing either to “Submit” or “Resist.” These choices directly affect the “Mood Value” and “Anger Value”. After each choice, the game checks whether the values meet the conditions for an ending. If the Mood Value drops to zero, Ending 1 is triggered. If the Anger Value reaches “rage,” Ending 2 is triggered. If neither condition is met, players can continue their free exploration. The story is embedded within the process of environmental exploration.

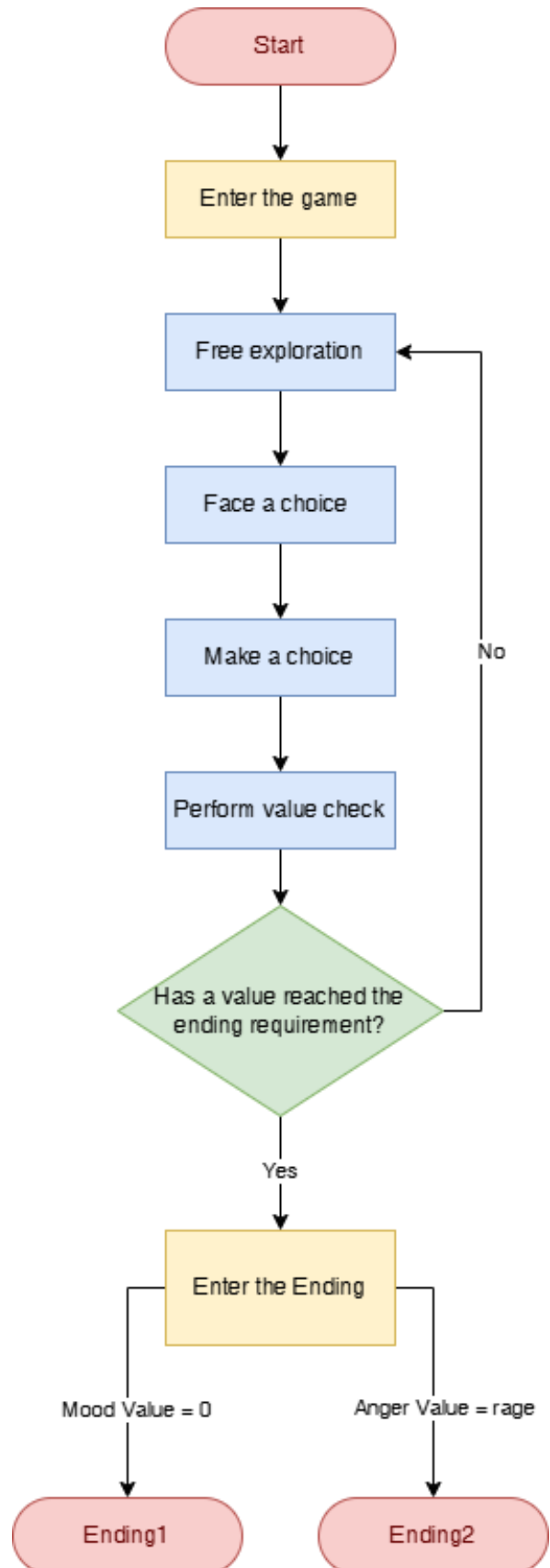


Figure 4. Gameflow Diagram Illustrating

Iteration 1: Add Secondary Gameplay Mechanics

The expression of emotions in a game cannot be limited to numerical values alone. This is not just about enhancing the player experience or making the game mechanics more detailed—while enhancing the player’s experience and providing detailed feedback through mechanics are important, the core goal of my game goes beyond this. It is to create a safe and empowering space where players can openly release their anger—a space that many, especially women, may not have in their real lives.

This is particularly important for those who have been taught that expressing anger is inappropriate or who have never learned how to channel this emotion constructively. Through the game, I hope to inspire these players to find the courage to acknowledge, embrace, and express their anger in the real world.

The first idea that came to mind was direct resistance: if someone hits us, we hit back. Based on this goal, I added a “counterattack” mechanic to the game.

Iteration 2: Incorporating Misogyny into Scenes - Script Development

At this stage, I draw from my own experiences to incorporate instances of misogyny encountered in daily life into the game’s narrative and environment. These include unsettling posters, advertisements, slogans, and interactions that reflect both subtle and overt forms of gender discrimination. The goal is to create moments that resonate with real-world experiences, immersing players in scenarios that provoke reflection and emotional

engagement.

For instance, players might encounter NPCs enforcing traditional gender roles, ignoring the protagonist, or using language that reflects deeply ingrained sexist attitudes. Examples include:

1. Elderly Family Members: Expressing control over a young, single woman's marriage choices, often disguised as concern.

2. Invasive Care: Masking violations of personal freedom under the guise of caring for the individual.

3. Appearance-Based Judgments: Linking a woman's clothing or grooming choices to her moral character or worthiness.

4. Patriarchal Expectations: Depicting traditional family values that demand women prioritize family over personal goals, conform to societal beauty standards, or defer to their partners in relationships.

5. Career Biases: Highlighting assumptions that women are incapable of excelling in certain professions, leading to gender imbalance in specific fields.

6. Targeted Advertising: Featuring slogans from beauty and cosmetic surgery ads that pressure women to conform to patriarchal ideals of attractiveness.

These elements are carefully and deliberately embedded into the game's environment and dialogue. For example, billboards display ads for cosmetic surgery and wedding dresses designed to create anxiety among women, while NPCs in family settings repeatedly emphasize

the importance of marriage and family to reinforce patriarchal norms.

Iteration3: Exploring Basic Input Controls and Environment Design

Teleportation and Smooth Locomotion are two of the most common movement input methods in VR games, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

Teleportation involves instantly moving to a chosen location by pointing and clicking, making it a popular choice for reducing motion sickness. Its simplicity and comfort are particularly beneficial for new players or games that focus on exploration and puzzle-solving. However, teleportation can disrupt immersion and the sense of continuity, as the instant jumps between locations feel less natural compared to real-world movement. It is also less suitable for games requiring a fluid and realistic traversal experience.

Smooth Locomotion allows players to move continuously through the virtual environment, usually controlled by a joystick or touchpad. This method offers a greater sense of immersion and realism, as it mirrors how movement is experienced in traditional first-person games. It is particularly well-suited for action, adventure, and open-world games where seamless navigation enhances the experience. However, smooth locomotion poses a higher risk of motion sickness, especially for players new to VR, and may require careful design adjustments like adjustable speeds or vignette effects to mitigate discomfort.

The scene design in my game is carefully crafted to balance storytelling and gameplay functionality, with the protagonist's home serving as the central environment. The space is

filled with objects that play dual roles: some enhance the narrative, while others support core gameplay mechanics.

Narrative-driven props include items like sticky notes, cards, posters, and books. These objects provide subtle storytelling cues, allowing players to uncover details about the protagonist's life, relationships, and the societal pressures she faces. For example, a sticky note might carry a passive-aggressive reminder about traditional family expectations, while a book might symbolize resistance or self-discovery.

On the other hand, functional props are designed to reinforce gameplay mechanics and player interaction. Objects like pillows, mugs, and a punching bag serve as tools for expressing the protagonist's emotions, particularly anger and frustration. Players might hit a punching bag to release anger or use a mug as part of a reflective moment within the game. These objects not only make the environment interactive but also tie directly into the game's core themes of emotional expression and resistance.

Reflection on Outcomes

Balancing between allowing players to explore the environment actively and presenting them with passively directed narrative content has proven to be a significant challenge. On the one hand, giving players the freedom to explore encourages agency and immersion, allowing them to uncover the narrative at their own pace and fostering a deeper connection with the game world. On the other hand, passively directed narrative content ensures that critical

narrative elements are conveyed effectively and not missed, which is essential for maintaining the game's emotional impact and thematic coherence.

During development, I found that relying too heavily on exploration risked players overlooking key story elements, potentially diluting the narrative's intended message. Conversely, leaning too much on passive storytelling could disrupt immersion, making the experience feel linear and less engaging. Striking this balance required iterative adjustments, such as placing crucial narrative cues in highly interactive areas and ensuring environmental objects naturally guide the player toward important story beats.

This process highlighted the importance of designing the narrative and environment in harmony. One of the key challenges is figuring out how to use visual cues, object placement, and pacing to subtly guide players without making the VR world feel artificial or overly gamified. For example, in real life, objects don't have glowing edges to indicate they can be interacted with, but in a VR game, such design choices might be necessary to ensure players can navigate and engage with the environment effectively.

Striking this balance requires careful consideration of how to integrate these guiding elements naturally into the world. Instead of relying on obvious game-like indicators, objects can be placed in logical and intuitive locations, with lighting, sound, or context clues subtly drawing the player's attention. This approach ensures that the VR experience remains immersive and believable while still allowing players to understand what is important or interactive in the environment.

2. Second Prototype



Figure 5. Second Prototype

Iteration 1: Refining Game Mechanics

How to express “anger” as a form of resistance became a challenge during Prototype 1.

Initially, anger was represented as aggressive retaliation, allowing players to attack NPCs who made sexist or misogynistic comments in Prototype 1.

However, this approach did not suit very well with my core concept.

In Prototype 2, I changed the representation of anger to “punching the UI.” There were two reasons for this change. First, in Chinese social media culture, anti-feminists often mock feminists by calling them “boxers,” implying that showing powerful strength or engaging in actions like “punching” is degrading and humiliating for women. This notion is absurd and ridiculous. Second, I view the UI as a symbol of rules. Breaking the UI symbolizes breaking

free from restrictive and oppressive rules.

In VR, these basic interactions are enriched by physical engagement. This also shows the importance of using VR. Players use hand-tracking or controllers to pick up, throw, or manipulate objects, providing a tactile experience that strengthens their connection to the virtual world. In the non-VR version, players cannot use physical movements to complete the action of boxing the UI. Such body-controlled interactions can only be achieved in VR.

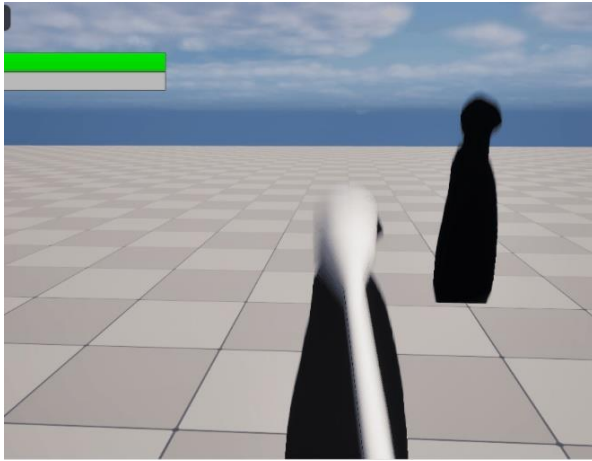


Figure 6. Game Mechanic in Prototype 1



Figure 7. Game Mechanic in Prototype 2

Iteration 2: Narrative Method Design

The narrative aims to translate feminist theories into concrete scenarios that players can experience and understand. Through iterations, I shifted the storytelling approach from UI-based narration in Iteration 1 to using visual elements and objects within the environment in Iteration 2. This change allows the story to unfold more naturally, immersing players in the game world through their exploration and interaction with the environment.

Giving players the freedom to explore enhances their sense of immersion, making the experience feel personal and engaging. This is one of the key advantages of using VR—it provides players with the ability to navigate and interact with the game space more freely than traditional formats allow. Objects in the environment, such as photographs, letters, or symbolic artifacts, become integral parts of the narrative, blending seamlessly into the overall story. This approach not only enriches the narrative but also deepens the player’s connection to the game’s themes and messages.

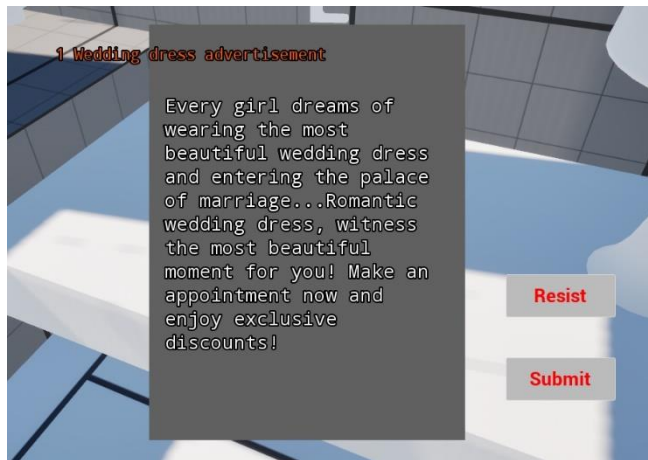


Figure 8. Narrative Method in Iteration 1

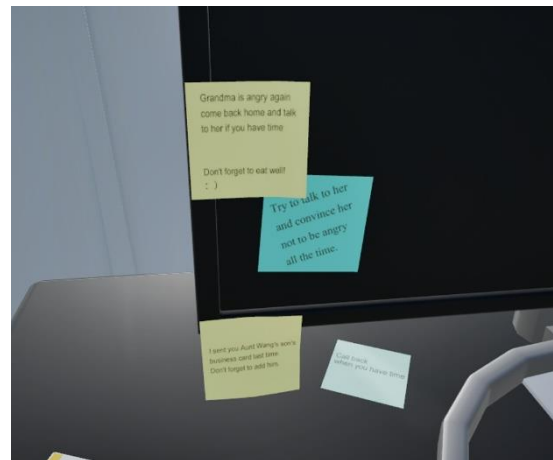


Figure 9. Narrative Method in Iteration 2

Iteration 3: Dialogue System

Initially, the subtitle system was implemented to make dialogue easy to read, with subtitles displayed at the bottom of the screen, much like traditional movies or games. However, in the VR environment, having subtitles move with the player's vision caused unintended issues such as motion sickness and visual fatigue, detracting from the overall experience.

To address these challenges, adjustments were made in Iteration 3. The system now uses pop-up dialogue boxes that appear in fixed positions within the virtual space. This ensures that the dialogue is presented clearly, either directly within the player's line of sight or near key interactive scenes. Additionally, the placement of these pop-up boxes dynamically adjusts based on the player's location in the environment. This design minimizes the need for frequent head movements, making the interaction smoother and more comfortable for the player.



Figure 10. Dialogue System in Iteration 2



Figure 11. Dialogue System in Iteration 3

These improvements not only enhance the usability of the dialogue system but also contribute to a more seamless and immersive VR experience, allowing players to focus on the story and gameplay without unnecessary distractions or discomfort.

Iteration 4: Interaction Mode

In Iteration 4, players can directly interact with objects in the environment, enhancing physical engagement with the virtual world and creating a more immersive experience. For example, players can pick up items such as papers or books to read detailed information embedded within the environment. These interactions are designed to make the game world feel tangible and responsive.

A specific addition includes the ability for players to grab a pillow with their left hand and hit it with their right hand. I also introduced a visual effect where feathers scatter when the pillow is struck. This type of interaction is easy to implement in VR, taking full advantage of hand-tracking and motion controls, but it would be much harder to achieve with traditional keyboard, mouse, or controller inputs.

These interactions focus on intuitive mechanics, allowing players to explore the environment freely, interact with objects meaningfully, and make impactful choices. Players are encouraged to navigate the game world at their own pace, examine objects closely, and engage in decision-driven dialogues that connect directly to the game's core mechanics and narrative. This approach not only deepens immersion but also strengthens the player's emotional and physical connection to the virtual world.

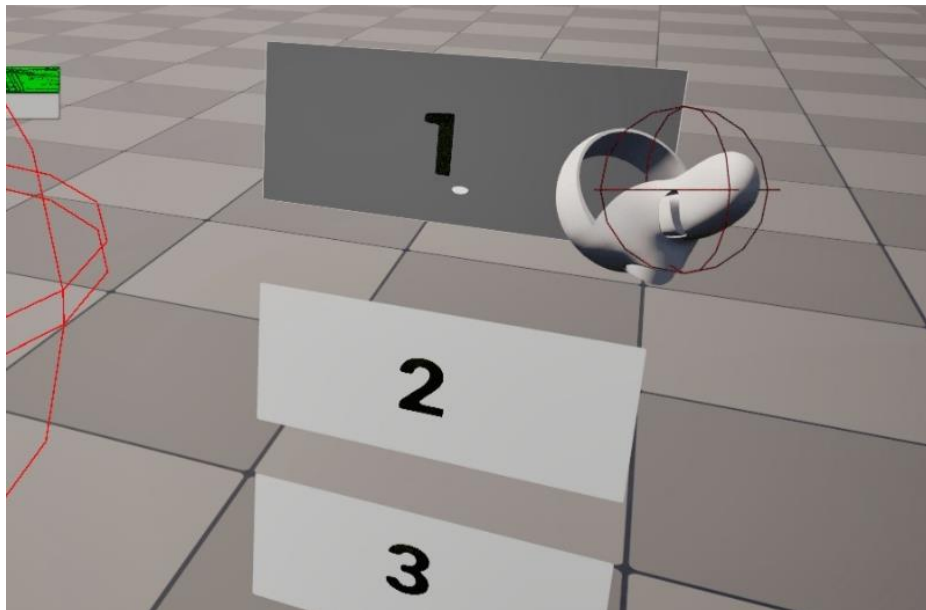


Figure 12. Interaction Mode used in Iteration 3

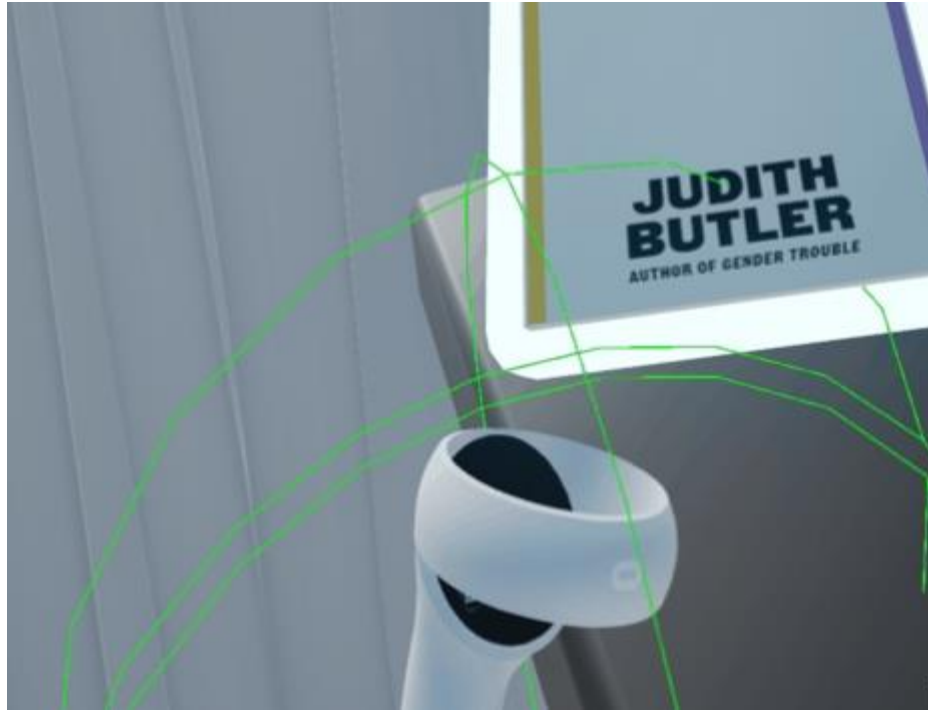


Figure 13. Interaction Mode used in Iteration 4



Figure 14. Environment Building in Iteration 3



Figure 15. Environment Building in Iteration 4

In addition, the prototype iteration also includes updates to the map environment.

Addressing Technical Challenges

Traditional subtitles that follow the player's gaze can cause motion sickness in a VR environment, leading to discomfort and distraction for some players. On the other hand, a lack of real-time subtitles can create barriers for players with hearing impairments. If subtitles are not consistently within their field of view, they may miss critical dialogue or narrative elements, reducing their overall engagement with the story. Striking the right balance between accessibility and immersion in subtitle design remains a key challenge.

Another significant challenge is maintaining a balance between player freedom to explore and preserving immersion within the VR environment. Allowing players to explore freely is essential for creating an engaging and interactive experience, as it encourages curiosity and agency. However, this freedom can lead to players missing key story clues or becoming disoriented in the virtual space. Conversely, providing too much guidance or overly restricting exploration risks breaking immersion, reducing the sense of autonomy that makes VR experiences so compelling.

Addressing these challenges requires innovative design solutions.

Data collection and analysis Between Prototype 2 and Prototype 3

After the development of Prototype 2 was completed, I collected D1 questionnaire data to better understand the players' real reactions to different scenarios of gender discrimination. The goal was to adjust the game design accordingly to make it more closely with the real experiences of different players. In this questionnaire, all the data providers were female and had never used VR devices. Their feedback mainly focused on three aspects: their responses to different situations, the extent to which they resonated with certain scenarios, and the coping strategies they might adopt in real life.

Organization and Analysis of Feedback Data

In the family dinner situation, when relatives discussed traditional gender roles and expressed the belief that women's primary responsibility is to care for the family and children, all respondents disagreed and tended to express their opposition clearly in reality. This consistent response suggests that in familiar and relatively safe environments, respondents are more willing to face such topics and try to positively challenge gender stereotypes. However, in another situation where they encountered sexist remarks from strangers on the street, respondents were more likely to remain silent or avoid confrontation rather than directly conflict the stranger. This completely different response—where respondents are more willing to express their opposition in private settings (such as within the family) but tend to avoid confrontation with strangers in public—suggests that if I want players to experience more

“discomfort”, I should reduce family scenarios and increase public scenarios, and the same goes the other way around.

Another feedback came from the situation of gender discrimination in the workplace. When the respondents were asked how they would react upon hearing an acquaintance comment in public that “women are not as capable in leadership roles,” their responses tended to be negative. One respondent chose to remain silent, while others mentioned that although they felt uncomfortable with such remarks, they would choose to maintain a neutral response rather than direct confrontation. In another situation, when respondents were asked how they would react if they were “in a job interview, and the interviewer makes a subtle remark about your appearance, which feels inappropriate”, all of them selected the option “I don’t know, I don’t care, it doesn’t matter.” In the open-ended answers to personal experiences, one respondent mentioned, “The issue raised in the supervisor’s report was that all the leaders were female.” and another believed that, “women have higher interview scores because the interviewers are all men.” From the results, when faced with a unequal power relationship, most respondents believed that direct confrontation could have negative consequences, leading them to be more likely to self-preserve rather than directly challenge the bias.

Beyond these situations, respondents also provided their real-life information about sexism or misogyny they had experienced in their lives. One participant mentioned:

This is very common when playing games. The male players I meet would say things like ‘Just follow me, play as Yao (a support character), and I’ll carry you.’ In reality, many

of them are worse than me at the game. The same applies to job fairs when I graduate—recruiters prefer male candidates, even though we are majoring in language studies at a normal university, where there are more outstanding female students. However, they still choose male applicants with lower qualifications.

Another reply said:

As soon as the game started, because the mid-laner picked a female character, the teammates said, “We’re going to lose again because there’s a girl on the team.”

When asked how they responded to experiences of gender discrimination or misogyny, one participant expressed that her approach was to “curse back.”

Game Adjustments Based on D1 Data

The data collected from D1 deepened my understanding of the gender discrimination scenarios in the game and made me realize that players’ real-life coping strategies are more complex than I originally thought. In the original game design, “Submit” was presented as a button. However, the survey results revealed that in reality, many people do not engage in any active response but instead choose “silence” as their way of dealing with such situations. Therefore, in Prototype 3, I replaced the “Submit” button option with a “silent behavior without any action” response, reflecting real-life reactions more accurately.

One of the most significant changes in Prototype 3 will focus on NPC dialogue and their feedback. Based on the reaction from the questionnaire, I reduced the amount of dialogue in the family setting. I placed more dialogue on scenarios in public transportation (subway) and the workplace, where players face more misogynistic situations. These adjustments were made

to better align with the areas where respondents frequently experienced gender discrimination but didn't respond positively to it. Additionally, I added new NPC feedback to the game's ending map. If the player achieves the resistance ending, and chooses to resist the NPCs again, those NPCs will respond with contemptuous or disapproving sounds. This feature is designed to increase the realistic challenges of resisting gender bias, showing that countering discrimination is not always an easy victory but rather a struggle that often faces pushbacks and resistance.

3. Third Prototype



Figure 16. Third Prototype

Iteration 1: Further improve the Game Mechanics

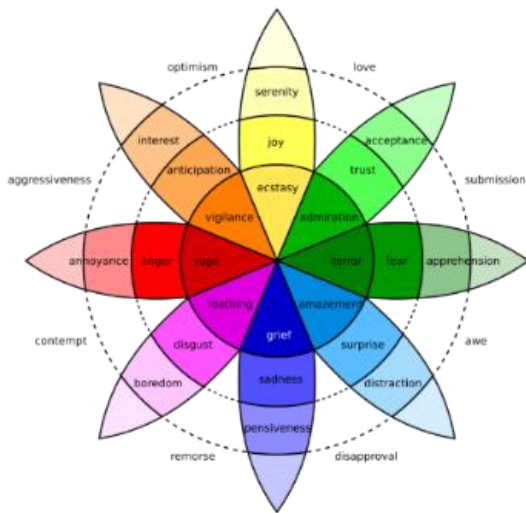


Figure 17. Plutchik's wheel of emotions

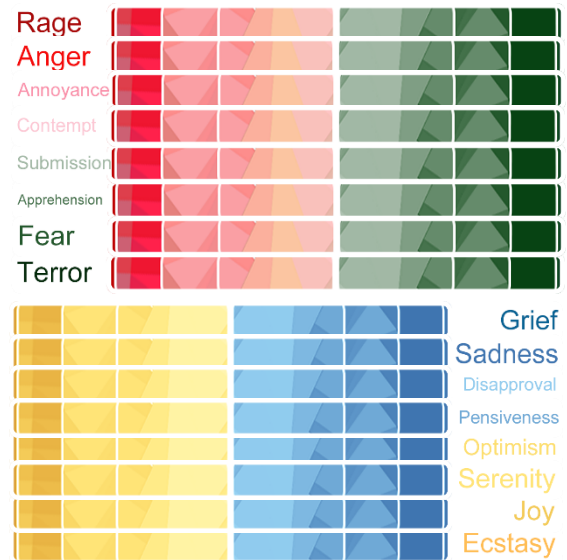


Figure 18. Emotions bar

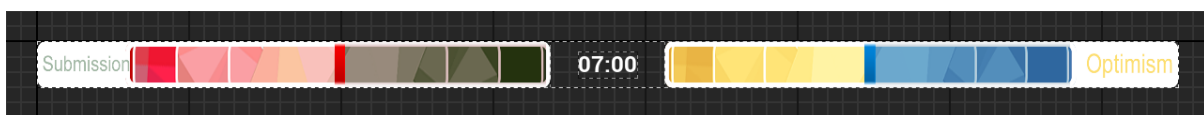


Figure 19. Emotions Value Input

The previous circular UI made it less clear how Anger Value and Mood Value were represented, which could cause confusion for players.

Finally, I chose the rage-terror (red-green) horizontal axis as the Anger Value and the ecstasy-grief (yellow-blue) vertical axis as the Mood Value, making emotional changes more intuitive. Anger and fear are often seen as oppositional forces in emotional responses—rage represents an aggressive, outward reaction, while terror represents an intense, inward fear-based response. Placing this axis horizontally reflects how people shift between aggression and fear, two primary emotions tied to self-defense and conflict. Mood is often associated with emotional highs and lows—joy and ecstasy represent emotional peaks, while sadness and grief represent deep emotional lows. This makes the Mood Value feel more natural and intuitive, clearly indicating whether the player’s emotions are generally positive or negative.

By aligning these values along a structured horizontal-vertical system, players can better understand their emotional state. This adjustment ensures a more straightforward and user-friendly emotional feedback system in the game.

Iteration 2: Average Acceleration Check

Adding an average acceleration check in Unreal Engine (UE), ensuring that light touches no longer trigger an action. By obtaining the final position coordinates at the end of the motion, we can determine the acceleration components along the x, y, and z axes. The detailed steps are as follows:

Set the Initial Conditions:

Define the starting position of the motion as $P_o = (0,0,0)$

Record the initial velocity vector $V_o = (V_{ox}, V_{oy}, V_{oz})$

Mark the initial time as $t_o = 0$

Set the Final Conditions:

Define the final position A coordinates of the motion as $Pa = (x, y, z)$

Record the final velocity vector $V_f = (V_{fx}, V_{fy}, V_{fz})$

Mark the total time taken for the motion as tf

Calculate the Acceleration Components: $\bar{a} = \frac{\Delta v}{\Delta t}$

Breaking it down into three components:

$$a_x = \frac{V_{fx} - V_{ox}}{\Delta t}, \quad a_y = \frac{V_{fy} - V_{oy}}{\Delta t}, \quad a_z = \frac{V_{fz} - V_{oz}}{\Delta t}$$

Compute the Average Acceleration Magnitude:

The magnitude of the average acceleration vector can be obtained using:

$$|\mathbf{a}_{\text{avg}}| = \sqrt{a_x^2 + a_y^2 + a_z^2}$$

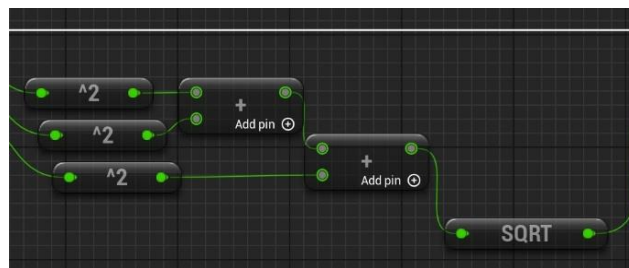


Figure 20. Blueprint screenshot of the speed check in UE5

Final Reflection on Third Prototype

The third prototype marks a significant step in refining both the game mechanics and narrative structure of *Her Day*, integrating player feedback, iterative design improvements, and enhanced interaction mechanics. One of the most impactful additions was the average acceleration check, which prevents accidental inputs by requiring a certain motion speed for actions to register. This adjustment not only increased the precision of player interactions but also reinforced the intended emotional weight behind resistance mechanics, ensuring that acts of defiance felt deliberate rather than passive.

Another major focus of this iteration was improving the clarity of emotional indicators, particularly through the Anger Value (rage-terror axis) and Mood Value (ecstasy-grief axis), which were adjusted based on the Plutchik wheel model. The previous circular UI led to confusion about how emotions were tracked, but the revised design makes emotional shifts more intuitive, allowing players to visually grasp their emotional state at a glance.

Overall, the third prototype successfully solidified key game mechanics.

Data collection and analysis After Prototype 3

After completing Prototype 3, I collected D2 data to further validate whether the adjustments made to the game had achieved the intended effects and to observe whether players' reactions had changed after the game experience. Compared with D1, the respondents in D2 filled out the questionnaire after playing the game, meaning their answers were not only

based on their personal real-life experiences, but also influenced by their in-game experiences.

This made several notable differences between D1 and D2 data, with the most significant change being how players responded to gender-discriminatory remarks from strangers.

Organization and Analysis of Feedback Data

In D1 data, when respondents were asked how they would react to a sexist remark from a stranger, none of them chose to respond positively. They all choose negative or neutral responses, such as avoiding conflict or showing indifference. However, in D2, most respondents chose to respond positively, trying to directly refute or express dissatisfaction. Similarly, when respondents were asked how they would react at a social gathering where someone made a gender-stereotyped “joke,” most of them chose to stop it immediately. When respondents were presented with a situation that “who claims that your chosen field of study or profession is more suited for men”, most players also chose to respond positively. Although there is an issue with the small sample size in the survey data, this contrast suggests that the game experience may have influenced players’ willingness to challenge sexist remarks, making them more inclined to take proactive action afterward. However, it is worth noting that in the response simulation in public places, most respondents still hesitated to take action, with many choosing “I want to stop them, but I wouldn’t actually do it.” Additionally, one respondent selected “It doesn’t matter to me.” The proportion of these responses was almost identical in both D1 and D2, suggesting that while the game encouraged players to consider

taking action, it may not have completely changed their actual behavior in public situations.

Additionally, similar to D1, respondents also shared their personal experiences or the instances they had heard about of gender discrimination and misogyny. Most respondents had witnessed or personally experienced gender discrimination. Some notable responses include:

The cafeteria staff automatically serve smaller portions to female students.

This is far too common—I've lost count of how many times I've seen it.

Yes, I've heard of many instances across various industries where gender discrimination exists. Men are often given priority or viewed as more competent—especially in fields like computer science, engineering, and architecture. As a result, women may face bias, fewer opportunities for career growth, and added pressure to prove their capabilities.

Some respondents identified with the fact that they faced some gender norms in their family:

When I was younger, I was often told by family members not to be so “tomboyish.” They believed girls should be ladylike, well-mannered, and avoid any behavior they considered “out of line.”

One recalled gender bias in education:

My high school homeroom teacher said that girls lack the explosive learning ability that boys have.

However, some respondents expressed the opposite view on this question. One participant stated: “There is no straightforward gender discrimination, but the older generation in my hometown tends to prefer boys.” Another person also chose a negative answer, but the respondent thought the reason is “probably because I stayed on campus. Most of the students

at the school are rational and objective.”

Although most respondents think that the game had influenced their responses to gender discrimination, as the feedback received about the reasons for change, most people think that the reason is “it’s a game”. However, in real life, when it came to more complex power dynamics, players remained cautious. For example, D2 respondents were more likely than D1 respondents to say they would respond positively in workplace situations, but when asked whether they would make the same choices in real life, some players hesitated. One respondent mentioned:

“I feel that I will choose to release in the game, and I am much more rational in life. I feel that I really want to learn to release, but maybe hitting people directly is not a particularly good operation.”

This response shows that respondents lack effective ways to resist or express their emotions in real life. It also demonstrates that the game provided players with a means of expressing themselves in a way that may not always be feasible in real-world situations.

Game Feedback Based on D2 Data

After Prototype 3, D2 respondents provided valuable feedback, not only on their in-game experiences but also on game design, situational authenticity, and VR itself. That feedback helped me understand both the strengths and limitations of the game, while also revealing areas for improvement. Some players felt that NPC reactions made the game feel more

realistic, helping them experience the real-world challenges of resistance:

I've had frustrating phone calls with my parents before—this feeling of being emotionally trapped is very real.

Yes, I've encountered more misogynistic men on the subway, so this part felt very realistic. The language used in the game is quite authentic.

Yes, the scenarios depicting sexism were realistic and relatable. For example, the phone call scene felt very real—something almost every East Asian child has likely experienced. Parents, under the guise of love, impose invisible pressures and expectations, shaping behaviors in ways that reinforce traditional gender roles. This subtle yet powerful portrayal makes the game deeply impactful.

However, some players felt that NPC responses lacked variation and depth:

I know it is an experimental work so some details must be skipped. But I do hope there are more topic-related interactions, like the player can trigger something by actions other than just walking close.

Regarding the authenticity of the game's situation, most D2 respondents found the game's dialogues and settings to be highly realistic, but some pointed out that although the emotions could resonate, some situations were too direct and might lack the complexity of reality: "The game is presented relatively directly, which may differ from the real-life experience, but the emotions are expressed directly, and I can relate to it very well." This can also explain why some players choose to respond positively in the game, but when asked whether they would make the same choice in real life, they still express uncertainty. This difference may suggest that the game needs to further provide more feasible resistance strategies in reality, so that players can make more appropriate responses in different situations.

In the feedback on the game experience, most respondents expressed that they felt VR Motion Sickness or uncomfortable while playing, with comments such as “The movement was too fast,” “I felt very dizzy and a bit nauseous,” and “I experienced dizziness, especially when turning.” However, most participants still rated the overall game experience as “good.” All players found the VR controls easy to learn, and most agreed that the game increased their awareness of gender discrimination and misogyny, while one person responded that it was “hard to say.” Regarding the question “Did you feel emotionally connected to the protagonist?”, most respondents said they felt some connection. Those who answered no explained that their personal experiences were different, as one respondent stated: “my personal experience was different, so for me, it feels more like I was helping this girl instead of that I was this girl.” Additionally, some participants also mentioned that they need more details to better understand the character.

The D2 questionnaire also included a question about whether VR is an effective medium for spreading awareness of social issues. Most respondents believed that VR could provide a more impactful experience, making it easier for players to empathize with the subject matter. However, some respondents raised concerns about the accessibility of VR, noting that hardware limitations might affect the reach of such games. One participant commented:

The range of uses and difficulty of use of VR equipment will limit some people from trying it. So I am neutral about this. But I believe it is a potentially effective medium.

Additionally, outside of the structured responses, some participants expressed confusion

about the emotional value bar displayed at the bottom of the screen. They felt that this feature was not clearly or intuitively presented and suggested that a more straightforward UI design would improve clarity.

Reflections and Next Steps Based on D2 Data

D2 data suggests that although the game enhances awareness, real-world power structures continue to influence players' decisions. This reminds me that in future iterations, more optional interaction methods could be introduced to allow players to explore a wider range of responses beyond simply fighting back or remaining silent. Future updates should not only provide opportunities for resistance but also help players understand how to resist effectively. For example, introducing a gradual influence system could allow NPCs' attitudes to gradually change based on players' continued interactions, making the world feel more dynamic and responsive.

One thing that caught my attention was that one respondent expressed guilt and shame in the responses to the questionnaire for “not helping people who experienced gender discrimination or misogyny”. This could reflect an internalized sense of social responsibility—they became aware that they might have been able to do something but did not take action. This sense of guilt and shame may come from several factors. For example, after experiencing the game, respondents may have become more deeply aware of the existence of gender discrimination and started to reflect on their own actions. When asked whether they had ever

helped someone in such situations, they might have suddenly realized that, rather than being active participants, they were often passive bystanders. This gap in self-perception could lead to introspection, and then triggering feelings of guilt and shame. Another reason may be that in many social and cultural contexts, concepts like “standing up for others” or “supporting marginalized groups” are seen as ideals of social responsibility. When respondents recognize their own inaction, they may feel that they have fallen short of social expectations, leading to guilt. However, this expectation is not necessarily imposed by the game itself—it may come from players’ own values or the influence of societal discourse. Regardless, this suggests that the game is prompting players to reflect on their social responsibility, prompting them to think: “If I were faced with a similar situation in the future, would I make a different choice?”.

However, it should be noted that I do not want this reflection to become a shackle for players. The feeling of guilt and shame was not an anticipated outcome of the feedback. If this feeling becomes too intense, it may lead to helplessness or anxiety rather than motivating players to take action. To address this, future game design or post-game guidance could shift the question from “Have you ever done something?” to “What can be done in the future?” For example, instead of asking “Have you helped them?”, the questionnaire could prompt players with: “In what ways do you think people can support them?” Another way is to let the game provide actionable steps that can be applied in real life, such as “liking or commenting on social media to support victims.” In addition, the game’s narrative design could also help ease players who might experience feelings of guilt and shame, such as: “Awareness and action are

a process—Not helping in the past does not mean that action cannot be taken in the future.”

Another approach could be setting up an NPC who has a similar process of reflection, allowing players to see that “Reflection” is a journey rather than an immediate moral obligation. Some respondents might think that “helping others” means taking large-scale actions, such as directly confronting discriminatory remarks or publicly challenging misogynists, which can create psychological pressure. To address this, in future game development, some texts could be appropriately mentioned to encourage players with messages like: “Even small acts of support can help combat bias.”

The second thing that caught my attention was that, based on the questionnaire responses, in the situation where a stranger makes an uncomfortable comment about someone’s appearance, no one chose a neutral response. This means that all respondents are aware of and affected by how others perceive and judge their appearance. In many cultures, physical appearance is considered a part of one’s personal value, especially for women—this is one manifestation of the commodification of women. This means that comments from strangers about appearance are often not just personal opinions or matters of individual aesthetics but rather a subtle form of social conditioning that reinforces societal expectations about appearance. For example, such remarks may carry implicit messages like “You shouldn’t dress like this” or “You look suitable/unsuitable for your certain gender role.” Therefore, respondents may perceive such comments not merely as neutral statements but as judgments on their self-image, identity, or value. This phenomenon actually reflects a broader reality: in

the real world, women and marginalized groups often experience social pressure in response to such remarks. As a result, in this situation, no respondents chose the “neutral response” option. However, this does not necessarily mean that “everyone is overly concerned with their appearance.” Rather, it is more likely a reflection of how appearance-related judgments are shaped by social and cultural norms, influencing the way people navigate everyday interactions.

Another point that I am very concerned about is that in the question “Have you personally experienced gender discrimination or misogyny?”, one respondent mentioned that in their hometown, elders generally prefer boys but did not consider this as “straightforward gender discrimination”. It is important to clarify that such an explicit preference for one gender is, of course, straightforward gender discrimination. If such bias persists in areas like family life, education, and employment for a long time, individuals may internalize it over time without consciously recognizing its impact. People become desensitized to these norms, and as a result, they stop questioning the rationality of what appears to be “normal.” Furthermore, when biases like this are perceived as “natural” or merely “personal preferences,” it becomes even more difficult to recognize them as socially constructed forms of discrimination. When a significant number of so-called “personal preferences” align in the same direction, they contribute to structural discrimination—even if the individual may not hold explicit subjective malicious intent. Thus, the respondent’s perspective is likely not a deliberate act of discrimination but rather the result of long-term social conditioning. However, discrimination

is never truly “invisible”—this precisely underscores the importance, necessity, and urgency of social critique and reflection guided by feminist theory. In future iterations, it might be beneficial to set an NPC who expresses a similar viewpoint, prompting players to reflect on and critically engage with this issue.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Player Experience and Reactions

Feedback on Sexism and Misogyny Scenarios

Most of the testers were female, with a few identifying as non-binary. Among the survey respondents, most opposed gender discrimination, but in real life, they tended to avoid conflict rather than confront it directly, especially in situations related to job applications, education, and social interactions. Female participants commonly experienced gender discrimination, but some expressed feeling “nothing can be done” when facing such issues and lacked effective ways to respond. However, the game experience significantly increased their awareness of gender discrimination, encouraging them to think more deeply about how to handle these situations in real life. Many participants felt that the game changed how they respond to discriminatory remarks—actions they took in the game to actively confront discrimination might have been met with passive avoidance in reality. They also believed that the main reason for this change was that it took place within a game.

Emotional and Identity Engagement

Testers reported that the realistic scenarios in the game—such as the subway and social gatherings—effectively strengthened their emotional connection to the issues, helping them better understand and relate to these challenges. In the survey, participants shared personal

experiences, such as “a workplace report that only mentioned female leaders,” “cafeteria staff automatically giving smaller portions to female students,” and “the belief that women should only focus on childbirth and childcare rather than working or being in the public eye.” One participant noted, “The striking mechanic in the game made me subconsciously feel that I shouldn’t remain silent when facing such situations in real life—I should respond effectively.” The results indicate that VR, as an immersive medium, has great potential in raising social awareness and encouraging players to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviors.

Evaluating Game Mechanics

Balancing Narrative and Gameplay

One of the challenges in game design is finding a balance between narrative and interaction. Too much passive narrative, such as long conversations between NPCs, can make the game feel more like an educational tool rather than an interactive experience, reducing player immersion. To avoid this, I chose a fragmented and dynamic narrative rather than linear narrative.

Linear narrative is very effective in telling a complete story. It works like a traditional RPGs’ “main quest” structure, where players must complete quests in a set order to unlock the next quest of the story. This ensures a clear and structured progression, preventing players from missing key information. However, it can also limit player freedom, making them feel like they are following a script rather than actively discovering the story.

In contrast, fragmented narratives spread the story across the game world. Information is no longer presented in a fixed order but is instead collected and pieced together freely and actively by the player. This approach enhances the player's initiative, encouraging them to discover clues and construct stories themselves during exploration, which prevents the game from becoming a one-way information delivery tool.

Player Choice and Narrative Guidance

Overall, my game should focus on active exploration rather than passive acceptance, and it should show reality instead of directly educating players. Instead of directly “teaching” or “explaining” gender discrimination, the game should allow players to naturally experience these social issues through gameplay.

To achieve this, information delivery should rely on environmental narrative rather than NPC exposition. For example, instead of letting an NPC directly say, “They expect women to get married, have children, and give up their careers,” it would be more effective to let players find a magazine titled *The Perfect Woman's Guide to Family Life* in the room, filled with suggestions on how to be an “ideal wife.” Or, they might find a calendar at home, with a blind date circled in red pen, next to a note from the mother: “Don't forget to dress nicely.” This kind of design not only reflects how traditional beliefs reinforce women's marital roles but also allows players to grasp societal expectations through small details, rather than being directly told about them by an NPC. By letting the environment guide the player's

understanding, the game reduces the feeling of “being educated” and encourages players to discover and interpret these invisible norms actively.

Additionally, when players make choices, the game should not force them into the path of “resistance.” While the goal is to help players experience injustice and encourage them to challenge it, the game should not dictate that resistance is the only correct choice. No NPC in the game will directly tell the player, “Resistance is the only right way to change things!” Instead, the game allows players to decide how to respond to injustice through their own experiences. This design lets players face real-world pressures, weigh the consequences of different choices, and decide their own actions—not because the game tells them what they “should” do, but because they have thought through their decisions. I believe there is no single “correct” way to act; every choice has its own reasoning, and the player’s decision should come from their own thoughts rather than a fixed answer imposed by the game.

Beyond avoiding a preachy tone, allowing players to experience direct criticism from NPCs can deepen immersion. For example, instead of having an NPC simply say, “Women’s anger is often dismissed,” a more effective way would be to let the player experience it firsthand. If the player expresses anger, NPCs around them might not offer support but instead criticize them for being “too emotional.” The frustration and helplessness they feel in that moment mirror real-life experiences faced by women when their emotions are invalidated. When the player fights against these accusations, they are not just overcoming an in-game obstacle, they are challenging the real-world discriminations that silence women’s voices.

Reflections on Playtesting

Application of Feminist Theories in Gameplay

In character design for games, elements such as appearance, personality, behavior, and clothing are usually included. These elements need to align with the game's story setting, regardless of whether they have direct gameplay functions. For example, if a game is set during the "witch hunts," the gender of a "witch" should have clear narrative significance rather than being just an interchangeable label. However, some games blur this gender identity, such as *Salem 1692 (2015)*, which portrays "witches" as a broad oppressed group. This shifts the theme from "women resisting gender oppression" to a more general "people resisting the privileged class." This approach is often seen as a way to "elevate the theme," but in reality, gender issues are deeply tied to class struggles. With this in mind, I have high expectations for how *Assassin's Creed Codename HEXE* will handle its narrative. I hope it gives gender a meaningful role in the narrative rather than treating it as a minor, replaceable detail.

Gender issues cannot be separated from social and economic factors. The challenges women face in family and society are closely tied to labor division and perceptions of work value. In traditional patriarchal systems, when a family needs to outsource labor, women are often the ones expected to take on this work. However, the oppression of women as commodities in transactional systems is not solely driven by men—it is a deeper structural issue within society. In China, some feminists tend to see men as the "opposing enemy" in gender oppression. This mindset is partly influenced by the structure of Chinese families,

where a legally recognized family must consist of one man and one woman. As a result, people often attribute a victim's suffering to their partner rather than to deeper societal structures. This way of thinking follows the logic of "if the problem isn't caused by A, then it must be caused by B," ignoring the possible existence of a "C"—the social and cultural systems that actually sustain gender inequality. This leads to some extreme anti-assimilation views, such as "gender conflict is fundamental, and our rights can only be taken from the other side," even at the cost of exploiting them in return. However, this still operates within a binary gender framework, failing to truly dismantle gender opposition and leaving the root causes of gender discrimination unaddressed.

I do not believe gender is meaningless, especially in games where players cannot choose their character's gender. Beyond the objectification of female characters as marketable assets—although "attractiveness" and "sexuality" should not inherently be gendered—a character's gender usually carries meaning. For example, in my project, the game explores the theme of misogyny, which is built on gender perceptions. This means the protagonist being female is not just a design choice but a core part of the game's message. However, on the other hand, when a game allows for player customization, a gender-neutral approach can sometimes be more effective. In modern RPG character creation systems, more games are attempting to separate "body features" from "gender identity," letting players freely mix and match traits. However, most games still follow a binary gender framework, requiring players to first choose a "male" or "female" body template before adjusting details. While this is technically feasible,

it reinforces gender division in social perception, making players subconsciously view gender as a strict binary. A more inclusive approach would be starting with a gender-neutral base model, allowing players to freely adjust all body features instead of modifying a predefined “male” or “female” template. This would better support gender fluidity and reduce unnecessary gender opposition.

Game text should also be gender-neutral when gender is not a valid element. For example, in *Chinese Parents*, the game reinforces the stereotype that “mothers handle household cooking” through lines like: “Every time mom cooks, I insist on helping, but I only make things worse.” A more neutral phrasing, such as “When my family cooks,” would avoid this stereotype. Additionally, in the “Face-Off with a Distant Cousin” event, both the cousin and the player-controlled character are set as female, creating a stereotype that “women are competitive with each other.” These choices are not necessary for the narrative but unintentionally link certain personality traits with gender. To reduce such stereotypes, game text can be adjusted by de-gendering the expression, for example, changing “It’s the New Year, remember to visit home, your mom has prepared a New Year’s Eve dinner for you” to “your family has prepared a New Year’s Eve dinner for you”, or changing “a more feminine personality” to a more specific description word such as “gentle,” “fiery,” “intense,” “cowardly,” or “determined.” These adjustments reduce gender bias, making the game text more inclusive without affecting the narrative. When I design game texts, it is an important principle to avoid exposing players to meaningless gender stereotypes while playing. For

example, I would avoid phrases like “Why are you crying? Are you a girl?” unless the intent is to highlight gender discrimination in the game world.

The Impact of VR in Gameplay

Returning to the two approaches mentioned earlier: “emphasizing differences” and “emphasizing similarities.”

VR can, to some extent, reinforce the unification of gender issues—it allows players to overlook the physical appearance of the character, reducing the impact of gendered body features. Of course, traditional first-person games (FPGs) can also achieve this, but VR is different in that it does not simply let players “control” a character through a screen; instead, it allows them to truly “become” the character and enter the scene itself.

In a VR experience, the player’s perspective is no longer restricted by a mouse or joystick. Instead, they naturally move their viewpoint by turning their head, freely looking around, walking, looking down, or looking up. This intuitive interaction makes it possible for players to observe their surroundings more realistically. For example, in a traditional FPG, when a player looks down at a piece of paper on the ground, it is usually shown through a pre-set animation or a static camera adjustment. In VR, however, the player must actually lower their head or squat down, use their own hands to pick up the paper, and adjust the angle to read it. Similarly, VR allows players to move closer to objects, reach out to touch them, pick up items, and even use their hands’ real-time position, shape, angle, and speed to add new meaning to

interactions—something that traditional first-person games cannot fully replicate. This more intuitive way of exploring space reconfigures the player’s bodily experience in the virtual environment, making their interactions not just passive observations but actions that actively influence the game world. VR allows players to feel the direct feedback of their own movements, significantly enhancing immersion. The game is no longer just about “watching” but about “acting,” which enables players to temporarily set aside their original identity and real-world environment during gameplay, stepping into a new role. This experience allows players to enter social situations they may never have encountered before and encourages them to reflect deeply on their own past experiences in a new way. In this process, VR redefines the boundaries of social role perception, making players’ awareness of gender discrimination more real and direct, ultimately promoting the challenge and reconsideration of stereotypes.

Design Challenges and Unexpected Results

There are many challenges in the design process, such as “How can players engage in critical thinking while exploring the game?” and “How can the game balance the issue of different languages affecting how players receive information?”

One of the core goals of the game is to make players experience the oppression of gender discrimination. However, if the game is too long or contains too much information, players might lose interest in exploring further. They may feel that “it’s just a game” and avoid

actively thinking about the issues, ignoring the social problems the game aims to highlight.

But if the game is too short or lacks enough information, it will greatly reduce players' awareness of unfair treatment.

The second challenge is that language differences could affect how players understand key information in the game. If most of the information relies on dialogue and text, non-native speakers may struggle to understand it. Additionally, cultural and linguistic differences could lead to misunderstandings of the intended message.

Chapter 6: Future Work and Conclusion

Future Work

In future iterations, the game mechanics will improve by adding more forms of resistance. Rather than limiting resistance to direct and positive actions, future development will explore negative resistance and selective counterattacks. This will give players more choices and make the experience richer. Also, the representation of the Mood Value System will be enhanced through more dynamic visual elements, providing players with clearer feedback on their emotional responses and decisions.

The narrative structure will also be improved so that player choices have a more lasting impact on long-term story branches, rather than only influencing numerical values. Furthermore, more types of interactive objects will be added, allowing players to engage with the narrative more naturally.

Beyond gameplay improvements, there are plans to collaborate with feminist organizations, game researchers, and developers to explore the potential of VR in education, mental health, and social issues. More player testing will also be done, especially with people from different cultures backgrounds. This will help improve the game more inclusive and help its ideas and design connect with a wider audience. Improvements to reduce VR motion sickness will continue, and more efforts will be made to enhance accessibility features.

Expanding Public Engagement and Social Collaboration

Based on these future goals, it is necessary to consider how *Her Day* can extend its influence beyond individual gameplay experiences. I plan to bring *Her Day* into broader public and social conversations by deepening its role in gender education and advocacy. First, I intend to collaborate with art institutions, cultural organizations, schools, or feminist spaces to organize immersive exhibitions or public experience events focused on gender equality. These events could take place in galleries, community centers, or university spaces and would include demo stations of the game, emotional response walls, interactive feedback areas, and guided reading materials. These elements are designed to encourage participants to engage more deeply with the emotional and thematic content of the game. This approach transforms VR from a personal medium into a platform for social dialogue, fostering cross-community empathy and discussion.

Second, I plan to collaborate with organizations dedicated to gender equality and anti-gender-based violence. *Her Day* could serve as an educational and advocacy tool in their trainings, workshops, or public campaigns, supporting their outreach efforts and expanding their formats of engagement. I also intend to develop an open-access design guide based on *Her Day*, enabling educators and activists to adapt the game content within different cultural and social contexts. The aim is to help participants reflect on their own experiences, express emotions, and explore possible actions. These collaborations not only enhance the game's real-world impact but also help establish VR as a transformative tool in social practice.

To evaluate the effectiveness of these social initiatives, I will design a new questionnaire system that focuses on participants' attitudinal shifts, emotional responses, and cognitive changes before and after experiencing the game. These data will help evaluate how the game works in the real world and inform the continued improvements of both its design and research contributions.

Conclusion

Sexism in gaming, like in broader society, is deeply embedded within cultural, technological, and institutional structures. While gender inequality is a global issue, this research specifically examines its manifestations in VR and gaming, focusing on how feminist game design can disrupt existing power structures and create alternative narratives.

Historically, gaming narratives have often positioned women reactively—either as marginalized players or as subjects of male-dominated discourse. However, feminist interventions in gaming demonstrate a history of resistance, innovation, and transformation.

Reflection on Project Goals and Contributions

The development of *Her Day* was driven by a central question: Can VR serve as a meaningful tool for feminist game design? Through an iterative Research-through-Design (RtD) approach, this project sought to explore how VR's immersive affordances could be leveraged to create an interactive, embodied experience of gender discrimination. Unlike

traditional media, VR allows players to not only observe oppression but actively engage with it, fostering a deeper level of reflection and participation.

One of the most compelling findings from this project was how players responded to the lived experiences of sexism and misogyny within the game's narrative. All participants agreed that *Her Day* presented realistic and relatable depictions of everyday struggles, particularly those tied to familial expectations and workplace discrimination. This highlights the significance of grounding feminist game design in everyday realities rather than relying on abstract or exaggerated portrayals. The game's immersive nature enabled players to step into these roles, not as passive witnesses but as active agents navigating complex gendered dilemmas.

Beyond raising awareness, *Her Day* provided a space for decision-making and self-reflection. Its choice-driven mechanics required players to confront the emotional and social implications of both resistance and endurance. Faced with situations where they could either conform to or push back against misogynistic structures, players exhibited diverse reactions—some actively rejecting sexist expectations and asserting agency, while others hesitated, recognizing that real-world consequences often shape decision-making in ways games cannot fully replicate. These interactions reinforce the idea that feminist VR games should not dictate a singular “correct” response but instead expose the complexities of systemic oppression, allowing players to critically engage with them on their own terms.

However, the development process also revealed several challenges and limitations. The

small sample size of participants meant that while the findings were valuable, they could not fully capture the range of potential responses across a more diverse player demographic.

If traditional media relies on narratives to critique gender norms, VR provides something fundamentally different: a space to feel, to act, and to exist within these narratives in ways that provoke deeper engagement and transformation.

Final Thoughts on Feminist VR Games

The term “Feminist VR Game” is not a singular, rigid category, but rather a fluid and evolving space of exploration, resistance, and innovation. Unlike traditional genres or mechanical classifications, feminist VR games exist at the intersection of interactive storytelling, critical theory, and experiential design, each engaging with feminist principles in distinct ways. Some may focus on representation, ensuring that marginalized voices and narratives have a presence in virtual spaces. Others focus on embodiment, using VR’s immersive affordances to let players physically experience oppression, resilience, or systemic inequality. Still, others engage with agency and choice, examining how power structures can be reinforced or subverted through interactive decision-making.

At their core, feminist VR games do not provide solutions—they raise questions, provoke thought, and challenge players to engage with gendered realities in ways that traditional media cannot. By embedding social critique into mechanics, world-building, and player agency, these games create a form of activism that is participatory rather than didactic, reflective rather than

prescriptive. In doing so, they shift the role of the player from a passive observer to an active participant in systemic critique.

However, the development of feminist VR games comes with its own set of challenges. How do we design mechanics that encourage self-reflection without coercion? How can VR experiences remain impactful without relying on trauma as the primary design tool? How can feminist game design balance immersion with critical distance, allowing players to engage with oppression without becoming consumed by it? These are the questions that continue to shape the field, and as feminist VR evolves, the answers will be as diverse as the creators who push its boundaries.

As technology progresses, feminist VR has the potential to become a transformative force in game design and interactive storytelling. It offers a reimagining of power dynamics, a space to deconstruct patriarchal narratives, and an opportunity to craft speculative futures where gendered oppression is not just critiqued but actively dismantled. Whether through empathy-driven experiences, counter-narratives, or radically experimental mechanics, feminist VR games are carving out a space where gameplay itself becomes a political act, and where the medium's immersive potential is used not to escape reality, but to interrogate and reshape it.

While *Her Day* is one contribution to this ongoing discourse, it is only one step toward a much larger, evolving movement. The future of feminist VR is not predetermined—it is being written in real-time by the designers, theorists, and players who continue to challenge, expand, and reimagine what games can be.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Overview

You are invited to participate in a research project that explores the potential of virtual reality (VR) games in promoting gender equality and raising awareness of gender discrimination. The game being studied is called *Her Day*. It's an immersive VR experience that puts players in scenarios where they encounter gender-based discrimination. As a player, you will navigate through these situations and make choices that reflect either conformity or resistance to societal norms, ultimately shaping the narrative and the game's outcome.

Overview

Virtual reality provides a unique platform for immersive storytelling and offers players the opportunity to experience perspectives they may not encounter in their daily lives. My research aims to explore the potential of virtual reality (VR) games in promoting gender equality and raising awareness of sexism and misogyny. By developing and testing this VR game, I hope to gain insights into the effectiveness of VR in enhancing players' understanding of gender inequality and its impacts.

For this purpose, I am making the game *Her Day*, which is a feminist game that aims to explore the following question: How can game makers use VR to influence players' experiences and increase players' awareness and understanding of sexism and misogyny?

To help my making and evaluation of this project's results, I will conduct user testing sessions that focus on players' experiences, their emotional responses, and the choices they make in the game. The research will involve two rounds of user testing: a conceptual testing in Fall 2024, and a evaluative playtesting in Winter 2024.

Scope of Activities

For this study, I will be approaching one group of participants:

5-10 participants from the target audience of the game, which includes individuals interested in immersive VR experiences and narrative-driven games.

Conceptual Testing (Fall 2024)

In the conceptual testing step, I'll invite 5-10 participants who represent the game's target audience (For details, refer to 3.2.). The goal is to test the core mechanics, including how players make choices and how those choices influence the game's narrative and the player's experience. Feedback will be collected through an online survey form, focusing on players' emotional engagement and understanding of the gender-related themes presented in the game. I will use player feedback to inform game design decisions. By analyzing participants'

reactions, choices, and the information and suggestions they provide during gameplay, I can identify areas for improvement to enhance the narrative, mechanics, and overall experience. This ensures that *Her Day* effectively addresses issues of gender discrimination and misogyny while resonating with a broader audience.

In this study, I will describe the story/background, and participants will be asked to respond based on their real-life experiences (see Appendix D). I will then use the collected feedback to modify the game narrative and player experience.

Evaluative Playtesting (Winter 2025)

After the game is complete, I will select 3-5 participants from the initial pool to engage in a more in-depth playtesting session. These participants will play the final version of the game, and the focus will be on evaluating whether the game successfully promotes reflection on gender discrimination. I'll ask participants to narrate their thoughts and reactions as they play the game live, and then I'll ask them questions about their experience in a casual, open-ended interview format.

Deployment

Conceptual Testing (Fall 2024)

For conceptual testing, participants will complete an online survey after playing the game. The survey will be hosted on a secure platform (Microsoft Forms on OCADU servers), and the process should take no longer than 30 minutes in total.

Evaluative Playtesting (Winter 2025)

For the evaluative playtesting, the sessions will be conducted synchronously, either in person or online, with both gameplay and follow-up interviews lasting a total of 90 minutes. Online playtesting will be through Teams or Discord calls.

About the Participants

Conceptual Testing (Fall 2024)

Conceptual testing will invite 5-10 players, with no specific game preferences. Participants will come from the broader OCAD U community as well as small gaming communities outside of Toronto.

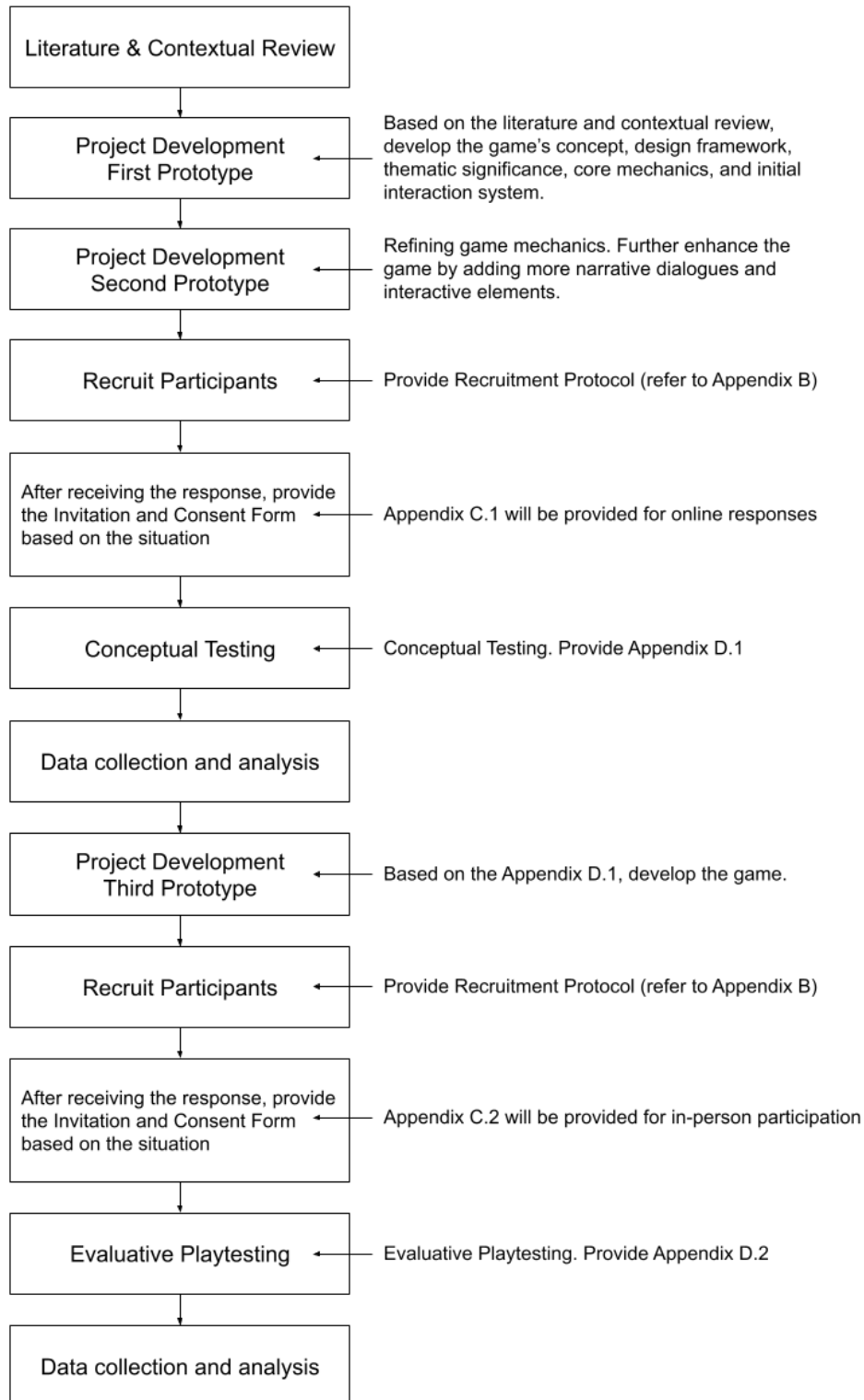
Evaluative Playtesting (Winter 2025)

A smaller subset of participants from the conceptual testing phase, particularly those who have had experiences similar to the game's themes, will be invited to participate in the evaluative playtesting.

About the Researcher

My name is Yixin Zhang, and I am a graduate student in the Digital Futures program at OCAD University. My research focuses on the intersection of game design, feminist theory, and virtual reality. Through this master's thesis project, I aim to explore how VR games can serve as powerful tools for social change, particularly in raising awareness of gender discrimination.

This game is both a personal and academic exploration of these themes, drawing from my experiences and research in game design. This game reflects my experiences as a woman who grew up in a traditional Chinese family.



Appendix B: Recruitment Protocol

The recruitment of participants will be carried out as follows:

1. The main sources for recruitment will be through word-of-mouth and online channels, including my own website and social media (Weibo, Twitter).
 - 1.1 The primary offline recruitment method will involve personal interactions with friends, classmates, and community members. The researcher will share information about the project during casual conversations in classes, workshops, or gaming events, encouraging interested individuals to participate.
 - 1.2 Example post text 1: “Hi everyone! I’m developing a VR game called *Her Day*, which aims to raise awareness about sexism and misogyny through immersive gameplay. If you’re interested in feminist themes or have experience with VR technology, please join the testing phase!

The testing session takes about 30 minutes, followed by a short survey. Your feedback will be invaluable in improving the game. All participant information will be kept confidential, and you can withdraw at any time. If you’re interested, please apply here [Link]. I look forward to sharing this experience with you!

If you need more information or have any questions about this study, you can contact me via email at xxx@ocadu.ca. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University, with clearance number [XXX]. If you have any comments or concerns, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at research@ocadu.ca.”
 - 1.3 Example post text 2: “The game *Her Day* is a VR experience designed to raise awareness about gender discrimination and misogyny. By immersing players in scenarios where they face gender-based challenges, the game encourages reflection on societal norms and biases. Participants will play the game and provide feedback, which will help improve its narrative and mechanics. The entire process will take approximately 30 minutes, including a post-game survey. Participation is voluntary, and all personal information will remain confidential. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis begins. Interested individuals can contact the researcher through this link [Link].”
2. The researcher will share information about the project in casual conversations during classes, workshops, or gaming events, encouraging interested individuals to participate. The link will direct interested individuals to a reservation form where they can submit their name and email address.

A sample of the reservation form is as follows:

Thank you for your interest in the *Her Day* project! Below is the registration form, which I will collect your contact information to provide you with further details about the study. You will receive a link to the online consent form and additional information via the email you provide, so please make sure the email is correct.

By providing your contact information, you agree to be contacted with more details about the study. If you decide not to participate later, your contact information will be deleted.

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Thank you!!

If you need more information or have any questions about this study, you can contact me via email at xxx@ocadu.ca. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University, with clearance number [XXX]. If you have any comments or concerns, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at research@ocadu.ca.

3. After the recruitment period ends, applicants will receive an email informing them about the research content, purpose, and game experience, and they will receive a link to the online consent form and additional information. Once the conceptual testing participants are confirmed, the list of submitted names and email addresses will be deleted.

4. A few weeks after the conceptual testing, I will invite 3-5 participants who have had similar experiences or are interested, as indicated in the survey form, to take part in the evaluative playtesting of the game. The follow-up invitations will be sent via formal email.

Appendix C.1: Invitation and Consent Form

Her Day: Conceptual Testing Survey

Key Contact

Yixin Zhang, Investigator
OCAD University
xxx@ocadu.ca

Testing Period

30 minutes - The survey will be available for conceptual testing from Tuesday, October 22, 2024, to Friday, December 6, 2024.

Total: 30 minutes

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research project that explores the potential of virtual reality (VR) games in promoting gender equality and raising awareness of misogyny. In this game, players will experience scenarios that reflect various forms of sexism and misogyny, allowing them to navigate through choices that influence the game's endings.

Research Goals

The objective of this research is to explore the use of virtual reality (VR) as an immersive tool to raise awareness of gender bias and misogyny. By analyzing player responses and feedback, the research aims to assess how VR can foster empathy and promote critical reflection on societal norms and gender roles. The ultimate goal is to contribute to feminist game design by demonstrating how digital media can be used to address and challenge gender inequality.

What's Involved

Conceptual Testing: Survey Form (about 30 minutes)

Participants will complete a 30-minute online survey after playing a prototype version of the VR game. This survey will collect feedback on gameplay mechanics, emotional engagement, and the depiction of gender-related issues. Your responses will be used to evaluate and modify the game flow and player experience in preparation for the final game.

The survey will ask you to provide your personal information, such as name, gender identity, email address, and your personal preferences in the game.

Participants may be invited to take part in the second phase of Evaluative Playtesting from December 2024 to February 2025.

Potential Risks and Benefits

Possible risks of participating include:

- Since the survey will be conducted digitally, extended screen usage may cause eye strain, headaches, or body pain. Participants will be encouraged to take both scheduled

and self-directed breaks as needed.

- Using online platforms like Microsoft Forms and sending emails are subject to the platform's policies, which may pose privacy and data exposure risks.
- The game will involve issues of sexism and misogyny. Since players are asked to empathize with characters and experience the story's context, they may feel discomfort. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you may withdraw from the study. If you need support, the following counseling or helplines can assist you:
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA): <https://cmha.ca/>
Mental Health Resources: <https://www.mhrc.ca/mh-resources>
MyGrief.ca: <https://mygrief.ca/>
Canadian Women's Foundation: <https://canadianwomen.org/>
- Use of VR equipment carries some risk in terms of motion sickness that can result from immersion in a VR headset. Take breaks regularly. If you feel uncomfortable during the game, please take a break; if you are prone to motion sickness, please remain seated while playing; if the symptoms persist, please stop playing immediately.

Considering these risks, participants are allowed to withdraw from the research before data analysis begins by February 10, 2025.

Possible benefits of participation include:

- Increased Awareness of Gender Issues: By participating in the study, players may gain a deeper understanding of gender bias and misogyny. The game provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on societal norms and biases that they might not have previously considered.
- Contribution to Social Change: Participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of a game aimed at addressing gender inequality, playing a role in the research that could help promote greater awareness and empathy in the broader community.
- Learn about Feminist Games: Participants interested in games or digital media may gain insights into feminist game design and how interactive storytelling can challenge traditional narratives and promote social justice.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Your responses (survey responses) will be published as part of a final document and submitted to OCAD University to be made available to the wider academic community. Your responses will remain confidential, and any identifying markers (name, e-mail address) will only be made available to the investigator while the project is ongoing for contact and transcription purposes. After the project ends, any identifying information will be deleted.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the option to decline to answer any questions and/or participate in any activity or component of the study.

You can also choose to withdraw from this study or withdraw your data at any time prior to **February 10, 2025**. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data you create will be removed and destroyed. Once data analysis begins on February 10, 2025, any data that has been submitted cannot be withdrawn.

Publication of Results

The data collected in this study will be used to explore the research outcomes of VR as an immersive tool to raise awareness of gender bias and misogyny as part of the *Her Day* project. Contact Information and Ethics Clearance

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the investigator, Yixin Zhang, via email at xxx@ocadu.ca. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University, with clearance number [XXX]. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office through research@ocadu.ca.

Consent Form

I confirm my voluntary participation in this study after reading this consent form. I have made this decision based on the information provided in the consent form (as stated above). I fully understand the details of the study and confirm that I have the capacity to give consent. I have had the opportunity to ask additional questions about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time prior to February 10, 2025.

I understand that my gameplay session will be recorded by Unreal Engine to capture in-game decisions. This recording will be used for analysis to understand better how players interact with the game.

I understand that anonymized segments of these recordings may be used in research presentations or publications. My identity will remain confidential, and no personal identifiers will be included.

I understand that these recordings will be securely stored and retained for research purposes until June 30, 2025, after which they will be permanently destroyed.

General Participation

- ☐ Yes, I consent to participate in the Conceptual Testing - Survey part of this study.
- ☐ No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your help in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C.2: Invitation and Consent Form

Her Day: Conceptual Testing Survey and Evaluative Playtesting

Key Contact

Yixin Zhang, Investigator
OCAD University
xxx@ocadu.ca

Testing Period

1. Conceptual Testing: 30 minutes - The survey will be available for conceptual testing from Tuesday, October 22, 2024, to Friday, December 6, 2024.
2. Evaluative Playtesting + Post-Game Interview: 1 hour - The playtesting period will be available from Thursday, January 9, 2024 to Monday, February 10, 2025.

Total: 1.5 Hours

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research project that explores the potential of virtual reality (VR) games in promoting gender equality and raising awareness of misogyny. In this game, players will experience scenarios that reflect various forms of sexism and misogyny, allowing them to navigate through choices that influence the game's endings.

Research Goals

The objective of this research is to explore the use of virtual reality (VR) as an immersive tool to raise awareness of gender bias and misogyny. By analyzing player responses and feedback, the research aims to assess how VR can foster empathy and promote critical reflection on societal norms and gender roles. The ultimate goal is to contribute to feminist game design by demonstrating how digital media can be used to address and challenge gender inequality.

What's Involved

This research consists of two stages:

Conceptual Testing: Survey Form (about 30 minutes)

Participants will complete a 30-minute online survey after playing a prototype version of the VR game. This survey will collect feedback on gameplay mechanics, emotional engagement, and the depiction of gender-related issues. Your responses will be used to evaluate and modify the game flow and player experience in preparation for the final game.

The survey will ask you to provide your personal information, such as name, gender identity, email address, and your personal preferences in the game.

Evaluative Playtesting: In-Person Playtesting + Post-Game Reflection (about 1 hour)

Select participants will be invited to participate in the evaluative game testing between December 2024 and February 2025. You will be invited to an in-person or online synchronous

test, where you will play the completed version of *Her Day*. During the game, as you experience the story and make key decisions that influence the game's outcome, participants will be encouraged to narrate their thoughts and choices in real time. Afterward, we will conduct a post-game interview to reflect on your gameplay experience.

During the test, your verbal narration of gameplay will be recorded, along with a screen recording. The post-game reflection will also include a recording of our discussion.

Potential Risks and Benefits

Possible risks of participating include:

- Since the survey will be conducted digitally, extended screen usage may cause eye strain, headaches, or body pain. Participants will be encouraged to take both scheduled and self-directed breaks as needed.
- Using online platforms like Microsoft Forms and sending emails are subject to the platform's policies, which may pose privacy and data exposure risks.
- The game will involve issues of sexism and misogyny. Since players are asked to empathize with characters and experience the story's context, they may feel discomfort. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you may withdraw from the study.

If you need support, the following counseling or helplines can assist you:

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA): <https://cmha.ca/>

Mental Health Resources: <https://www.mhrc.ca/mh-resources>

MyGrief.ca: <https://mygrief.ca/>

Canadian Women's Foundation: <https://canadianwomen.org/>

- Use of VR equipment carries some risk in terms of motion sickness that can result from immersion in a VR headset. Take breaks regularly. If you feel uncomfortable during the game, please take a break; if you are prone to motion sickness, please remain seated while playing; if the symptoms persist, please stop playing immediately.

Considering these risks, participants are allowed to withdraw from the test before data analysis begins by February 10, 2025.

Possible benefits of participation include:

- Increased Awareness of Gender Issues: By participating in the study, players may gain a deeper understanding of gender bias and misogyny. The game provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on societal norms and biases that they might not have previously considered.
- Contribution to Social Change: Participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of a game aimed at addressing gender inequality, playing a role in the research that could help promote greater awareness and empathy in the broader community.
- Learn about Feminist Games: Participants interested in games or digital media may gain insights into feminist game design and how interactive storytelling can challenge

traditional narratives and promote social justice.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Your responses (survey responses) will be published as part of a final document and submitted to OCAD University to be made available to the wider academic community. Your responses will remain confidential, and any identifying markers (name, e-mail address) will only be made available to the investigator while the project is ongoing for contact and transcription purposes. After the project ends, any identifying information will be deleted.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the option to decline to answer any questions and/or participate in any activity or component of the study.

You can also choose to withdraw from this study or withdraw your data at any time prior to **February 10, 2025**. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data you create will be removed and destroyed. Once data analysis begins on February 10, 2025, any data that has been submitted cannot be withdrawn.

Publication of Results

The data collected in this study will be used to explore the research outcomes of VR as an immersive tool to raise awareness of gender bias and misogyny as part of the *Her Day* project.

Contact Information and Ethics Clearance

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the investigator, Yixin Zhang, via email at xxx@ocadu.ca. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University, with clearance number [XXX]. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office through research@ocadu.ca.

Consent Form

I confirm my voluntary participation in this study after reading this consent form. I have made this decision based on the information provided in the consent form (as stated above). I fully understand the details of the study and confirm that I have the capacity to give consent. I have had the opportunity to ask additional questions about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time prior to February 10, 2025.

I understand that my gameplay session will be recorded by Unreal Engine to capture in-game decisions. This recording will be used for analysis to understand better how players interact with the game.

I understand that anonymized segments of these recordings may be used in research presentations or publications. My identity will remain confidential, and no personal identifiers will be included.

I understand that these recordings will be securely stored and retained for research purposes

until June 30, 2025, after which they will be permanently destroyed.

General Participation

- ☐ Yes, I consent to participate in the first stage (Conceptual Testing - Survey Form) of this study.
- ☐ Yes, I consent to participate in the second stage (Evaluative Playtesting + Post-Game Interview) of this study if selected.
- ☐ No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your help in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix D.1: Questionnaires

Appendix D.1 : Questionnaires

附录 D.1 : 问卷

Conceptual Testing - Online Survey (16 minutes)

概念测试 - 在线调查 (16 分钟)

Instructions

说明

For this survey, you will be placed in various scenarios from the VR game and asked to respond to different prompts. Your responses will help refine the gameplay experience by understanding how players react to situations involving gender-based discrimination. Please provide answers based on your real-life situation.

在本次调查中，您将被置于 VR 游戏中的各种情境，并被要求对不同的提示作出回应。您的回答将帮助优化游戏体验，让我们更好地理解玩家在涉及性别歧视的情境下的反应。请根据您的真实生活情况作答。

Content Warning

内容警告

Some scenarios involve themes of sexism, misogyny, and societal expectations placed on women. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, you are free to withdraw from the survey.

某些情境涉及性别歧视、厌女现象以及社会对女性的期望。如果您在过程中感到不适，可以随时退出调查。

Confidentiality & Anonymity

保密性与匿名性

Your personal information (name, email address) will be collected for contact and transcription purposes only. This information will be kept confidential and deleted after the project ends. Audio recordings from the post-game interview will also be anonymized in the final report.

您的个人信息（姓名、电子邮件地址）仅用于联系和转录目的。本项目结束后，这些信息将被删除。游戏后的访谈录音也将在最终报告中匿名化处理。

* 必答题

Section 1: Identity Information and Personal Background (30 seconds)

第一部分：身份信息与个人背景（30秒）

1. Participant Name 参与者姓名: (No real name required 不需要真名) *

2. Participant email address 参与者电子邮件地址: *

3. Date 日期: *

4. Gender Identity 性别: *

- ☐ Female 女性
- ☐ Male 男性
- ☐ Non-binary 非二元
- ☐ Prefer not to say 不愿回答
- ☐ 其他

5. Have you used VR technology before? 您之前用过VR吗? *

- ☐ Yes 是
- ☐ No 否

Section 2: Experience (15 minutes)

第二部分：个人经历（15 分钟）

Definition

定义

- **Positive response** - indicates resistance, expresses emotion or dissatisfaction
- 积极回应 - 表示反抗，表达情绪或不满
- **Negative response** - indicates avoidance, withdrawal, or submission
- 消极回应 - 表示回避、退缩或顺从
- **Neutral response** - I don't know, I don't care, it doesn't matter
- 中性回应 - “我不知道”、“无所谓”、“这不重要”

I will use the data to clarify the direction of my game and refine its design, ensuring that *Her Day* resonates with a broader audience. Please select the option that best matches your approach. 这些数据将帮助我明确游戏方向并优化设计，确保《Her Day》能够引起更广泛的共鸣。请选出最符合您情况的选项。

6. Situation #1

情境 1

At a family dinner, your relatives start discussing traditional gender roles and expectations for women, implying that a woman's primary responsibility is to care for the family and children.

They turn to you for your opinion:

在一次家庭聚餐上，您的亲戚们讨论了传统性别角色，认为女性的主要责任是照顾家庭和孩子。他们转向您，询问您的看法：*

- ☐ Agree 同意
- ☐ Disagree 反对
- ☐ I'm not sure 不确定

7. If you selected "Disagree" in the previous question, how would you respond to them:

如果您上一题选择了“反对”，请问您会怎样回应他们：

- ☐ Positive response 积极回应，表达反对
- ☐ Negative response 消极回应，不与争论
- ☐ Neutral response 中性回应，不确定

8. Situation #2

情境 2

You are at a job interview, and the interviewer makes a subtle remark about your appearance, which feels inappropriate. How do you respond?

您正在参加一场求职面试，面试官对您的外表做出了一句十分微妙的评价。您会如何回应？

*

- ☐ Positive Response 积极回应
- ☐ Negative Response 消极回应
- ☐ Neutral Response 中性回应

9. **Situation #3**

情境 3

You are walking in the street, and a stranger makes a sexist comment about your appearance. You feel uncomfortable and unsure whether to respond. What do you do?

您在街上行走时，陌生人对您的外表发表了让您感觉不适的带有歧视的评论。您会怎么做？

*

☐ Positive Response 积极回应

☐ Negative Response 消极回应

☐ Neutral Response 中性回应

10. **Situation #4**

情境 4

You are at a social gathering, and someone makes a "joke" that perpetuates gender stereotypes. You notice that others are laughing, but the joke bothers you. How do you react?

在一个社交聚会上，有人讲了一个带有性别刻板印象的“玩笑”。您发现周围人都在笑，但这个笑话让您感到不舒服。您会如何反应？ *

☐ Positive Response 积极回应，及时制止

☐ Negative Response 消极回应，装没听到

☐ Neutral Response 中性回应，没什么大不了我不在乎

11. **Situation #5**

情景 5

At a public event, one acquaintance makes a comment suggesting that women are not as capable in leadership roles. The comment is directed at you in front of others. How do you handle the situation? Knowing that the one has a higher status and background than you.

在一场公开活动上，一位熟人发表了“女性在领导岗位上的能力不如男性”的言论，并且是在众人面前直接对您说的。您会如何处理这种情况？已知对方身世地位都比你高。 *

☐ Positive Response 积极回应

☐ Negative Response 消极回应

☐ Neutral Response 中性回应

12. **Situation #6**

情境 6

You are talking to someone who claims that your chosen field of study or profession is more suited for men. They justify this by pointing out that most prominent figures in the field are male. How do you address this comment?

您正在与某人交谈，对方声称您的专业或职业更适合男性，并以该领域的知名人物大多为男性为理由。您会如何回应？ *

☐ Positive Response 积极回应

☐ Negative Response 消极回应

☐ Neutral Response 中性回应

13. **Situation #7**

情境 7

When you hear someone making misogynistic comments about women in public, would you stop them? Would you want to stop them?

当您听到有人在公共场合发表厌女言论时，您会制止他们吗？ *

- ☐ I want to and would do it. 我想要并且会去制止
- ☐ I want to but wouldn't do it. 我想要但不会去制止
- ☐ I don't want to and wouldn't do it. 我不想要也不会去制止
- ☐ It doesn't matter to me. 这对我来说无所谓
- ☐ 其他

14. **Situation #8**

情景 8

Have you ever heard of someone else experiencing gender discrimination or misogyny? If so, what was it like for them? Could you provide me with more information? Please write a brief response in the below.

您是否听说过其他人经历过性别歧视或厌女现象？如果有，他们的经历是怎样的？请简要说明。

*

15. **Situation #9**

情景 9

Have you personally experienced gender discrimination or misogyny? If so, what was it like for you? Could you provide me with more information? Please write a brief response in the below.

您本人是否经历过性别歧视或厌女现象？如果有，您的经历是怎样的？请简要说明。

*

16. **Situation #10**

情景10

Have you ever helped someone who personally experienced gender discrimination or misogyny? If yes, could you provide me with more information? Please write a brief response in the below.

您是否曾帮助过遭遇性别歧视或厌女现象的人？如果是，请简要说明。

*

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses are invaluable in helping us improve the game experience and gain deeper insights into gender-related issues. Your participation contributes to meaningful discussions and positive change. We sincerely appreciate your support and honesty.

感谢您抽出时间填写这份问卷。您的回答对我们优化游戏体验、深入理解性别相关问题具有重要价值。您的参与有助于推动有意义的讨论和积极的改变。我们由衷地感谢您的支持与坦诚！

此内容既不是由 Microsoft 创建也不由 Microsoft 背书。你提交的数据将发送给表单所有者。



Figure 21. Screenshot from the online table “Appendix D.1: Questionnaires 附录 D.1：问卷” created by the author on Microsoft Forms.

Appendix D.2: Questionnaires

Appendix D.2: Questionnaires & Gameplay Experience 附录 D.2：问卷与游戏体验

Conceptual Testing - Online Survey (35 minutes)
概念测试 - 在线调查 (35 分钟)

Instructions

说明

For this survey, you will be placed in various scenarios from the VR game and asked to respond to different prompts. Your responses will help refine the gameplay experience by understanding how players react to situations involving gender-based discrimination. Please provide answers based on your real-life situation.在本次调查中，您将被置于 VR 游戏中的各种情境，并被要求对不同的提示作出回应。您的回答将帮助优化游戏体验，让我们更好地理解玩家在涉及性别歧视的情境下的反应。请根据您的真实生活情况作答。

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* 必答题

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1. Participant Name 参与者姓名: (No real name required 不需要真名) *

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5. Have you used VR technology before? 您之前用过VR吗? *

- ☐ Yes 是
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Section 2: Experience (15 minutes)

第二部分：个人经历（15 分钟）

Definition

定义

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情境 3

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情境 6

You are talking to someone who claims that your chosen field of study or profession is more suited for men. They justify this by pointing out that most prominent figures in the field are male. How do you address this comment?

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13. **Situation #7**

情境 7

When you hear someone making misogynistic comments about women in public, would you stop them? Would you want to stop them?

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- ☐ It doesn't matter to me. 这对我来说无所谓
- ☐ 其他

14. **Situation #8**

情景 8

Have you ever heard of someone else experiencing gender discrimination or misogyny? If so, what was it like for them? Could you provide me with more information? Please write a brief response in the below.

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*

15. **Situation #9**

情景 9

Have you personally experienced gender discrimination or misogyny? If so, what was it like for you? Could you provide me with more information? Please write a brief response in the below.

您本人是否经历过性别歧视或厌女现象？如果有，您的经历是怎样的？请简要说明。

*

16. **Situation #10**

情景10

Have you ever helped someone who personally experienced gender discrimination or misogyny? If yes, could you provide me with more information? Please write a brief response in the below.

您是否曾帮助过遭遇性别歧视或厌女现象的人？如果是，请简要说明。

*

Section 3: Gameplay Experience (20 minutes)

第三部分：游戏体验（20 分钟）

By analyzing the feedback, I can better understand how the game is received and make targeted improvements to enhance the narrative, gameplay mechanics, and overall player experience, ensuring the final product is more engaging and impactful. 通过分析反馈，我可以更好地了解游戏的接受程度和进行有针对性的改进，以增强叙事、游戏机制和整体玩家体验，确保最终产品更具吸引力和影响力。我将使用原型上的反馈来指导我的游戏设计开发。请选择最适合您的方法的选项。

I'll use the feedback on the prototype to inform my game design development. Please select the option that best matches your approach. 我将利用对原型的反馈来指导我的游戏设计开发。请选择最符合您方式的选项。

17. Did you experience any technical issues during gameplay?

您在游戏过程中是否遇到任何技术问题？ *

- ☐ No 否
- ☐ Yes 是 (please specify below 请在下方具体说明):
- ☐ 其他

18. Did you experience any motion sickness or discomfort while playing the VR game?

您在玩 VR 游戏时是否感到晕眩或不适？ *

- ☐ No 否
- ☐ Yes 是 (please specify below 请在下方具体说明):
- ☐ 其他

19. How would you rate the overall VR gameplay experience?

您如何评价整体的 VR 游戏体验？ *

- ☐ Excellent 很好
- ☐ Good 好
- ☐ Average 中等
- ☐ Poor 不好
- ☐ Very poor 很不好

20. Did you find the controls of the VR game easy to use?

您觉得游戏的VR操作是否容易上手？ *

- ☐ Very easy 非常容易
- ☐ Easy 容易
- ☐ Neutral 中立
- ☐ Difficult 困难
- ☐ Very difficult 非常困难

21. Do you know what misogyny is?

您了解厌女症是什么吗? *

- ☐ Yes, I fully understand it 是, 我完全了解
- ☐ Yes, I have some understanding 是, 我有一些了解
- ☐ Maybe? 可能吧?
- ☐ No, I don't really understand 不, 我不太了解
- ☐ No, I have no understanding at all 不, 我完全不了解

22. Did the game affect your perspectives on sexism and misogyny?

这款游戏是否影响了您对性别歧视和厌女现象的看法? *

- ☐ Yes, significantly 是, 影响很大
- ☐ Yes, somewhat 是, 有些影响
- ☐ Maybe 不好说
- ☐ Not really 不太影响
- ☐ Not at all 完全没有影响

23. Do you feel that the game increased your awareness of sexism and misogyny?

您认为这款游戏是否增强了您对性别歧视和厌女现象的意识? *

- ☐ Yes, significantly 是, 很明显
- ☐ Yes, somewhat 是, 有些
- ☐ Maybe 不好说
- ☐ Not much 不太增强
- ☐ Not at all 完全没有增强

24. Did you feel emotionally connected to the protagonist?

你觉得自己和玩家操纵角色有情感上的联系吗? *

- ☐ Yes, very much 有, 非常
- ☐ Some 有一些
- ☐ Maybe 可能
- ☐ Not really 没太有
- ☐ Not at all 一点也没有

25. If not, please briefly describe the reasons.
如果没有，请简要说明原因

26. Do you think the game has a clear storyline?
您认为游戏有清楚的故事情节吗? *

- ☐ Yes 是
- ☐ Maybe 不好说
- ☐ No 没有
- ☐ There is a story but not clear 有故事线但不清晰

27. If yes, could you please briefly describe what works? 如果是，请简要描述起作用的地方。
If not, could you please briefly describe the reasons? 如果不是，请简要说明原因。 *

28. How effective was the story in portraying gender discrimination?
您认为游戏故事在呈现性别歧视方面的效果如何? *

- ☐ Very effective 非常有效
- ☐ Effective 有效
- ☐ Neutral 中立
- ☐ Ineffective 无效
- ☐ Very ineffective 非常无效
- ☐ Not sharp enough 不够尖锐
- ☐ Not enough examples 例子不够多

29. If yes, could you please briefly describe what works? 如果是，请简要描述起作用的地方。
If not, could you please briefly describe the reasons? 如果不是，请简要说明原因。 *

30. Were the scenarios depicting sexism realistic or relatable to you?
您觉得游戏中的性别歧视情境是否真实或有共鸣? *

- ☐ Very realistic 非常真实
- ☐ Somewhat realistic 具有一定真实性
- ☐ Neutral 中间
- ☐ Somewhat unrealistic 有些不真实
- ☐ Very unrealistic 完全不真实

31. If yes, could you please briefly describe what works? 如果是, 请简要描述起作用的地方。
If not, could you please briefly describe the reasons? 如果不是, 请简要说明原因。 *

32. Do you think VR is an effective medium for raising awareness about social issues like gender discrimination?
您认为 VR 是否是提高对社会问题 (如性别歧视) 意识的有效媒介? *

- ☐ Strongly agree 强烈同意
- ☐ Agree 同意
- ☐ Neutral 中立
- ☐ Disagree 不同意
- ☐ Strongly disagree 强烈不同意

33. If yes, could you please briefly describe what works? 如果是, 请简要描述起作用的地方。
If not, could you please briefly describe the reasons? 如果不是, 请简要说明原因。 (Not required 选答)

34. Has the game changed any of the ways you'd respond? (A different way of coping than in reality)
这个游戏有改变了你的一些应对方式吗? (与现实中不同的应对方式) *

- ☐ Yes, it changed a lot 是的
- ☐ Yes, it changed somewhat 一些
- ☐ Not sure if it did 不确定
- ☐ No, it hardly changed 很难更改
- ☐ No, it didn't change at all 完全没变

35. If yes, is the reason for the change because this is a game?
如果有，改变的原因是因为这是一个游戏吗？

☐ Yes 是的

☐ No 不是

36. If yes, could you please briefly describe what works? 如果是，请简要描述起作用的地方。
If not, could you please briefly describe the reasons? 如果不是，请简要说明原因。（Not required 选答）

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses are invaluable in helping us improve the game experience and gain deeper insights into gender-related issues. Your participation contributes to meaningful discussions and positive change. We sincerely appreciate your support and honesty.

感谢您抽出时间填写这份问卷。您的回答对我们优化游戏体验、深入理解性别相关问题具有重要价值。您的参与有助于推动有意义的讨论和积极的改变。我们由衷地感谢您的支持与坦诚！

此内容既不是由 Microsoft 创建也不由 Microsoft 背书。你提交的数据将发送给表单所有者。

 Microsoft Forms

Figure 21. Screenshot from the online table “Appendix D.2: Questionnaires & Gameplay Experience 附录 D.2：问卷与游戏体验” created by the author on Microsoft Forms.