ABSTRACT

The research argued that ‘Finding Paradise’, the third installment of adventure RPG video games developed and published by Freebird Games, embodied excellent storytelling techniques for illustrating loneliness and those who experienced it in society. The ‘Finding Paradise’ narrative used immersive technology to let players experience the subject at hand with their own senses. Video game design aimed for relevancy to contemporary society’s realities as well as compelling storytelling. Close reading was used to break down ‘Finding Paradise’ narratives into smaller aspects to strengthen and articulate a more connected relationship with the text; as a result, the researchers could draw interpretations within the text. By incorporating Herman’s fundamental narrative components into the ‘Finding Paradise’ narrative and examining how stories and narratives can be used as a teaching tool using the reader-response approach, it can be concluded that the subcomponents of the game’s narrative, specifically the representation of situatedness, event sequencing, worldmaking, and reality representation, provide a good example of developing a well-crafted and non-judgmental representation of loneliness as a mental illness and individuals who suffer from it that can also be used in EFL/ESL classroom.

Keywords: video games, loneliness, narrative, EFL/ESL
December 14th, 2017, fits into the category of a well-crafted representation of loneliness in the modern media. The video game was re-released amid the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine in June 2021 for Nintendo Switch. It is the third installment of the series of games made by the same game development company as the first and second installments, To the Moon and A Bird Story.

Finding Paradise is more of a narrative or story-driven game; most of the gameplay relies on finding the main character Colin Reed’s memories through puzzle solving. The player can learn the truth of his wish by analyzing information, experiencing his feelings, and discovering ways to go deeper into his memory.

Aside from being more participatory than books or movies, video games are one of the best ways to portray a given condition or illness through the perspective of those who are affected by it. Furthermore, research conducted in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic has discovered that commercial video games, under professional supervision, could be effective and stigma-free resources for the mitigation of mental health issues when traditional therapeutic treatments are unavailable (Kowal et al., 2021).

The Finding Paradise narrative can be used in ESL (English as a Second Language)/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) lessons to encourage students to produce discourse about mental health awareness in the target language by incorporating a reader-response approach. The Finding Paradise engaging and imaginative narrative allows learners to divert their attention from the more mechanical aspects of learning English (Davis, 1992). Learners' imaginative engagement could then be used to design instructional activities that require them to produce a discourse that involves the expression of learners' responses to the texts or narratives as they describe their imaginative engagement (Hirvela, 1996).

Considering the significance of loneliness representation in popular culture to raise awareness, this research would like to argue that Finding Paradise is a fit to explore loneliness better than any other media; hence, it later may raise awareness of this mental illness. Therefore, the researchers include close reading into the analysis, the researchers do the following: (1) Going through the Finding Paradise game’s narrative from beginning to end, including every option available to the player (play by choice mode); (2) Going through and identifying textual and semiotic clues in the elements of narrative (plot, characters, setting, theme, point of view, style, and conflict) that convey the emotions and reality of loneliness; (3) Analyzing those clues of the elements and dividing them into Herman’s four main narrative structures (representation of situatedness, event sequencing, world-making/world disruption, and reality representation), those parts are later subdivided into smaller subcomponents; (4) Analyzing the subcomponents of the narrative and how the subcomponents of the narrative represent loneliness; and finally (5) Concluding the narratives of Finding Paradise that have every subcomponent that positively and perfectly represents loneliness, symptoms of loneliness, and people who suffer from loneliness, and that they could be used as learning material to raise awareness of the mental illness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Video games, perfecting multimodality with a high level of immersion and agency, are more appealing media (Kowal et al., 2021; Michailidis, Balaguer-Ballester, & He, 2018). During immersion, one’s consciousness is temporarily expanded into parts of the unconscious, similar to hypnosis, but with the ability to remain conscious, as in lucid dreaming states. Game immersion is highly personal, but there are some indicators from the game itself that might help make the game experience more immersive. The game flow, realistic graphics, and story or narrative are some of the most important indications (Writz, 2021).

Video game immersion enables the modification of the sensory, cognitive, and emotional products of an immersive gaming experience (Michailidis, Balaguer-Ballester, & He, 2018). Thus, experiencing video
RPG video games *Finding Paradise* features the same two main protagonists as its two predecessors, Dr. Neil Watts and Dr. Eva Rosalene from Sigmund Corp. However, the storyline and narrative are different, including their patient on his deathbed, Colin Reed. The story revolves around Colin exploring his memories to identify significant objects and collect energy from them in order to strengthen the memory and connect to a more distant one from his childhood to the present day (Valentine, 2017). During the thrilling scientific exploration, Eva and Neil discover that Colin, despite having a relatively happy and fulfilling adult life with his wife and a son, has suffered from loneliness during his childhood as a result of abandonment and peer rejection which later he inverts comfort in the shape of an imaginary companion named Faye. On his deathbed, the distant memory of Faye and his childhood causes him remorse and depression. His wish to reunite with Faye helps him deal with loneliness and discontent.

*Finding Paradise* is a narrative representation of loneliness and the consequences (Danneel et al., 2018). Loneliness can contribute to the immersion experience and convey the feeling of loneliness, resulting in a more isolated situation for the sufferers (Sundqvist & Hemberg, 2021).

The second subcomponent in the analysis is event sequencing. Whereas the focus on specific situations and events is the characteristic of narrative representations, the nature of how the world is going is also a concern in crafting the narrative. Furthermore, as particularity distinguishes a story from generic explanations, a narrative’s temporal profile distinguishes stories from many examples of description (Herman, 2009).

The plot of *Finding Paradise* shifts back and forth between Colin’s childhood and adolescence and his present. Although the player can easily identify the issues of temporality and particularity of events in the past and present using representation cues such as lighter and warmer color grading for the past and more frigid for the present, the back-and-forth event sequencing reminds about how loneliness, particularly loneliness experienced as a child, has no temporal consequences (Danneel et al., 2018). Loneliness can be restored in one’s older years. Figure 2 shows Colin’s childhood memory.

Next, it examines the worldmaking or world disruption subcomponent of *Finding Paradise*. Regardless of whether the representation cues and temporal sequences develop within a more or less fully

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**Figure 1 Finding Paradise Graphics**
(Source: Gao, 2017)
The reality of loneliness is rather complex. The conflicts in *Finding Paradise* describe situations and occurrences that depart from the realities and complexities within the case of loneliness. More than that, the narrative is a cognitive and communicative strategy for negotiating the gap between what was expected and what actually occurs in everyday life (Herman, 2009). Non-sufferers and ordinary people understand how thinking in the reality of loneliness that agency is never substituted, and aids supplied to help the individual recover do not overrule them (Yanguas, Pinazo-Henandis, & Tarazona-Santabalbina, 2018).

Conflicts in the narrative also assist the game player in attributing motives or aims to others, evaluating the foundations of their own behavior, and making predictions about future reactions to situations. In this context, the narrative provides a kind of discourse framework for developing reasons for why individuals do what they do or fail to do what they are expected to do.

The last subcomponent is ‘what it is like’ or how reality is represented in the narrative. The narrative is rooted in the lived, felt experience of human or human-like beings engaging with their surrounding environment on an ongoing basis (Herman, 2009). On the other hand, the less a text or conversation encodes the pressure of events on an experienced human consciousness, the less susceptible text or discourse is to narrative interpretation.

Many reviewers on fan sites praise *Finding Paradise* for exploring the themes of regrets, loneliness, and moving on, such as a review by Rebekah Valentine in 2017 on Fansided website, in which she fondly describes the characters as being ‘beautifully flawed and believably human’ (Valentine, 2017). Many other reviewers agree, as positive reviews flood Metacritic’s page on the game.

Kan Gao’s writing style has always been distinctive and unique, which is apparent in *Finding Paradise*. The distinctive writing is complemented by the game’s unique visual cues and immersive approach. The writing of the *Finding Paradise* narrative is also acclaimed for depicting an authentic outcome from one of the syndromes of loneliness in childhood that occurs when a child experiences negative friendship, that is, the creation of an imagined friend (Schwartz-Mette, Shankman, & Dueweke, 2020).

In their design, video games have come to depend not only on graphical complexity but also on the elements of fiction. Nowadays, video games represent a relatively new territory in studying the nature and impact of narrative (Batchelor et al., 2021; Ostenson, 2013). Ostenson (2013) has suggested that video games have a place in the English classroom. He has argued that video games, especially adventure video games, can help students learn problem-solving skills and teach them about social issues through the game’s narratives. As a medium of learning, video game narratives are participatory for understanding a specific subject or real-life problem from the first- or third-person point of view (Batchelor et al., 2021;
Ostenson, 2013). Students act as players, making decisions that drive the game’s plot. They can reach a meaningful conclusion about the game and experience the story from different perspectives at the end of the game.

The researchers propose adapting the reader-response method to implement video game narratives as a medium of learning. Reader-response theory that emerges in the field of literary criticism challenges the supremacy of authorial intention in a text and assigns readers to text interpretation (Hirvela, 1996). Rosenblatt in Hirvela (1996) has concluded that as active participants, readers create meaning while reading a text, resulting in an approximately equivalent role for the reader and the text.

Reader-response theory, as an instructional tool, has had a significant impact on both the teaching of literature and the teaching of composition within the L1 (First Language) context (Hirvela, 1996). Louise Rosenblatt later has contributed to the transactional theory of literature, which states that the text itself, particularly the literary text, is incomplete and requires the reader’s experience to be understood (Davis, 1992). Literature texts are an ‘evoked work’, meaning that they emerge from the reader’s experience of the original text as well as the meaning embedded within the text (Hirvela, 1996).

With its emphasis on viewing a real-life story from narrative reading, the reader-response approach as an instructional tool is better equipped to build upon a mental health discourse and loneliness in ESL/EFL classes. Because this approach is concerned with the student’s overall experience of the reader-text transaction, as in the Finding Paradise video game is the experience of understanding the narrative of loneliness and playing the immersive game, any discourse produced is viewed as a basis for achieving toward additional, connected discourse, in this case, mental health awareness. Discourse is thus produced and seen in the context of the full story of reading, and it serves as a starting point for further and related discourse production (Hirvela, 1996).

**CONCLUSIONS**

This research addresses the subject of loneliness and how little awareness there is in society. It aims to remedy the situation by employing the immersion experience from the RPG video game *Finding Paradise*. To summarize, *Finding Paradise* employs the basic elements of narrative to construct its gaming narrative around the theme of loneliness. In *Finding Paradise*, textual and semiotic cues, as well as characterization and settings, convey the emotions and reality of loneliness and represent those suffering from it. The back-and-forth flow of events between the past and present explains the realistic temporal narrative of loneliness, which is also supported by visual and semiotic cues. The worldmaking techniques also help the narrative to be credible and may assist the game player in attributing motives or goals to others, analyzing the foundations of their own conduct, and making predictions about future reactions to loneliness situations. Finally, the game’s human-like atmosphere, characters, and story encode the game as believable.

As a result, it is critical to initiate and continue the conversation of how new immersive media, such as video games, might depict and convey the human psyche in a more interesting way for people to absorb.

Due to the limited sample size employed and time allocated for this research, there may be discrepancies and/or differing viewpoints on the subject that are not accounted for. Future studies could look at the issue from a different angle, such as psychology, and with more data. Perhaps the perspectives used can provide a far larger perception of the media reviewed in the research and the subject matter under examination.

**REFERENCES**


