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The first lawsuit on record claiming that video games were responsible for aggression in teenagers was filed in 1997 by Jack Thompson. This was not the first time people had questions about the effects of games on people's mental health with congressional hearings going back to 1993 when a game was banned by Congress for its explicit content. Since then video games have been given the stigma that they are bad for the mental health of players, especially children and teens. Many games address mental health in different ways, some do it subtly, while some like *Figment* make their entire game about it. *Figment* is an action-adventure game that was released in 2017 by Bedtime Digital Games. It follows the main character Dusty and his friend Piper through the “mind” in order to restore their hosts' confidence. *Figment* jumps into questions of fear and negative thoughts with its narrative and creates puzzles for the player using systems that are meant to link our own idea of what the mind would be like using ideas and sayings from everyday life to create an entirely new world for the player to explore. Video games shouldn't just be viewed as something that creates aggression and negativity, games like *Figment* can create healthy environments for players.

The overall idea of *Figment* is that the protagonist, Dusty, and his partner, Piper must traverse through the “mind” to restore their host's mind to its previously healthy state by fighting fears and solving puzzles while recovering lost memories. According to Henry Jenkins who uses Don Carsons' explanation, environmental storytelling is “...the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell.... Armed only with their own

knowledge of the world, and those visions collected from movies and books, the audience is ripe to be dropped into your adventure. The trick is to play on those memories and expectations to heighten the thrill of venturing into your created universe.” (Jenkins 2012) The game uses environmental storytelling to create a world that seems right to the player, despite the fact that what it's meant to be depicting is something that nobody has ever seen. Creating a world from what people think of the mind creates an environment that is meant to feel like you are literally stepping into this person's mind. From the design of most of the world it can also be assumed that the person whose mind you are traversing is younger in age as you make your way through colorful settings using pencils, instruments, and other objects you would expect to be a part of a child's life. As the story of the game progresses there are plenty of examples of the creators trying to build up this world from things people have common knowledge of including literal references to locations in the brain but also made up ideas like a “train of thought.” Besides just the overall look of the game world as the story progresses the mind begins to clear and there are less obstacles and shadowy areas. The enemies in the game affect the world as well leaving traces that are meant to create a darker atmosphere in what would otherwise be a colorful and happy place. The use of environmental storytelling creates a world that feels familiar to the player while also getting across what is happening in the game. The creators were able to make a space that allows the player to work through the mind removing fears and finding memories all while solving puzzles.

The game's systems also play a big part in creating the atmosphere the game is attempting to push. From solving puzzles using clocks, enigma machines, and finding a path for the train of thought to defeating fears to protect the mind, everything you do in the game

promotes a more positive environment. The game's combat is relatively simple (just swinging a sword), but this promotes a limit to the combat in the game as it is not the key system for progressing through the story. The combat does however play into the game's idea of fighting or overcoming your fears with the limited combat it does have. The main system employed in the game is solving a variety of puzzles. Each area of the mind that Dusty works his way through brings a new set of puzzles to complete to get to the next area or boss fight. Some of these puzzles include enigma machines, coding machines used during World War II by the Germans to send encrypted messages, these are meant to represent mysteries in the mind and are pushed and pulled similarly to when someone gets a question that they don't quite know how to answer. The game uses these obstacles to both represent something to the player and create an interesting challenge of trying to move them around a space into their correct position, not only to make a path for the protagonist, but also to fill in tracks for the train of thought, one of the few recurring items throughout the game that winds its way through one of the levels as you try to catch it while it goes out of control. There are plenty of areas and challenges in the game that clearly link to sayings and ideas that players would have already coming into the game. Overall the game designers were able to create an evocative space with their level design while also using commonly known ideas to create both the world and systems. Each of these tools lends itself to the creation of a positive environment for the player and not the dangerous and corrupting experience video games, especially those with some kind of combat, have been labeled.

While all games are not as lighthearted with their ideas and gameplay as *Figment*, the idea that moderate video game play is dangerous to younger people is something that should be dispelled. This is not to say that every game is acceptable for every age group and the content of

games should always be considered when allowing children to play them, because of a basic lack of understanding at that age of what is ok and what isn't. According to one article, "The inherent nature of videogames appears to promote and facilitate all aspects of Seligman's PERMA model" (Jones 2014). This model is used in the article to show that games can help people to not just live their lives but to live well and happily. The five letters stand for; positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Each of these can be seen in how people use and play games in a modern time. In a study involving 1304 high school students split into three groups, the group that reported low hours of games played a week had lower numbers of depressed feelings than the group that never played video games and the group of students who reported high numbers of hours played a week (Durkin and Barber, 2002)(Jones 2014). Engagement in a game is similar to immersion in that it is when a player feels connected to the game world because of the time spent or how the game was designed. Engagement in general has been linked to happiness and this applies to games as well. Relationships are one of the biggest things that modern games have been able to promote as "MMO gamers under the age of 18 have reported that the friendships they form online are comparable or better than their real-life friendships (Yee, 2006)" (Jones 2014). This shows that the relationships being made in online games can have a positive effect on someone who may or may not struggle in real life to make friends which allows people to have a better outlook. A sense of accomplishment can come from games as the player moves around a world and completes quests and tasks to better their character or the world in which they are playing. This sense of accomplishment can provide a boost to mental health as players feel competent due to beating something challenging or that took a long time. In general not all games should be given the stigma of being dangerous for

young people especially when pairing content selection with a limit on play time for children as games can be beneficial to players mental health and their social skills.

In conclusion, video games are not the evil that they are sometimes made out to be when played by appropriate audiences in moderation as they can be beneficial to players mental health as well and can lead to flourishing. *Figment* can be viewed as a game that uses both environmental storytelling and its systems to show a happy and positive environment for the player.

Works Cited

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