
Session 2: Solo Playthrough | 45 to 60 minutes

Descriptive Notes

- Game was played from start to finish, took 60 minutes
- Game takes place from September to August (approx. one year of employment)
- Arrows point to where I should go
- Start each day with an email
 - Go to the computer (highlighted with an arrow)
 - See an inbox – choose which emails you want to read
 - Email with directions from Amy, the owner of funeral home is flagged
- First email:
 - Read Amy's email first as it was flagged
 - Clicked on auto-reply ("Sure thing! I'll get right to it!")
- Once auto-reply was clicked, the inbox disappears, and the client's body appears. Didn't get a chance to read the other emails unless I go back to the computer
- Subsequent emails/clients:
 - Read Amy's email first as it was flagged
 - Read other emails (Jennifer, Matthew, newsletter)
 - Returned to Amy's email then clicked on auto-reply
- Challenge 1: Closed casket preparation for elderly woman ("Mrs. Garcia")
 - Death was noted as sudden (heart attack) by client, no embalming
 - Is the first challenge the game tutorial? Appears to introduce what to do
 - Followed on-screen instructions to drag a sponge across the body to clean
- Challenge 1.1: Memorial service
 - See casket highlighted
 - Decide to interact with grieving families first
 - Realise interaction is one-sided, more like listening to or checking in on their thoughts/conversations
 - Pay respect to client casket last
- Characters discovered, based on initial emails and first challenge:
 - Primary: Charlie, new mortician graduate
 - Secondary (Nonplayable)
 - Amy, manager
 - Jennifer, friend
 - Matthew, colleague
 - Tertiary (Nonplayable)
 - Clients
 - Grieving families

- Interactions
 - No spoken dialogue, all interactions with primary NPCs take place over email
 - Story is revealed through reading emails each day
 - Discovered 'Easter egg' content
 - Browser tabs next to inbox reveal hidden content
 - Minesweeper look-alike game
 - Websites for different funeral homes
 - Subscribed e-newsletters, emails from Jennifer reveal industry trends, dating life
 - Interactions with clients and grieving families are one-sided – more like eavesdropping on conversations
 - Interactions are click-and-point, drag-and-drop, using the mouse only
 - Stiff movements at time – awkward to drag mouse over limbs and torso, along the lines
 - Is this intentional, to show how hard it is to massage rigor mortis?
 - Or just a flaw in game design?
- Art and Music
 - Isometric illustration/projection of rooms
 - Soothing, meditative music – will be looking into soundtrack after
- Challenges: 4-6 clients
 - No timer on gameplay, I don't feel rushed to complete the task or challenges presented
 - Each challenge follows same pattern:
 - Prepare body for either embalming/open casket, closed casket, cremation
 - To complete: Follow on-screen medical instructions, client requests or safety instructions (i.e., keeping jewelry together, removal of pacemaker before cremation)
 - Attend memorial service
 - To complete: Approach the urn or casket and bow.
 - Optional: Listen in on grieving families' conversations
- Conflict: change in management
 - Owner has to sell business, funeral home is now under new management
 - Transition from small, mom-and-pop funeral home ("Rose and Daughters") to a corporate funeral home ("Hillside Heritage").
- Game ending
 - Leave Hillside to start own business ("Magnolia Forest Funeral Home & Natural Burial Forest")

Affective Notes

During play, I felt:

Mindful

- Regardless of client request, body should be cleaned as a sign of respect
- The ritual of preparing the body is done for the family, as much as it is for the client
- Grief is complicated, as evident from varying conversations or thoughts the NPCs share
 - For example: Mrs. Garcia's daughter upset from sudden loss of mother, young children bored with ceremony, friends find gathering awkward
- Nuances of deaths and Western cultural taboos
 - For example: Tommy, client who committed suicide asked for closed casket but family refuses. NPCs attending memorial service uncomfortable with open casket choice
- Loneliness surrounding death
 - For example: Memorial service for unnamed client is empty, no next of kin or friends

Bored

- Challenges felt repetitive
- Interactions with NPCs are not truly interactive – no choice, no turn-taking or response

Surprised (by how hands-on a mortician is with a body)

- During the first embalming challenge, you learn:
 - Eyes and mouth are hollow, will sag with rigor mortis
 - Body must be massaged embalming liquid to penetrate
 - Tools of the trade are medical instruments, for example:
 - cannula (helps push preserving chemicals into blood)
 - trocar (drains intestinal liquid)
- During the first cremation challenge, you learn:
 - Body does not disintegrate completely into ashes, but is reduced into bone fragments
 - Bone fragments must be then further broken down

Frustrated/Feeling Helpless

- New management has stricter rules, workplace feels more corporate
 - Not allowing clients to bring in outside food
 - Formal dress code
- Hillside manager Chad is disrespectful, lacks client-friendly demeanor that Amy had
 - Does not acknowledge your preferred name ("Charlie"). Insists on referring to you as Charlotte in email communications
 - Reprimands you for not upselling a premium burial package to a grieving family
 - Dismisses your suggestion or ideas for sustainable, eco-friendly burial options

Analytic Notes

What problems did it present me with? What options did it give me (to address those problems)?

- Passive observer/silent protagonist
- Lack of interaction or choice to deal with conflict

Representations

- **Gender:** female lead, LGBTQ-positive representation, respect for pronouns
- **Class:** person experiencing homelessness was shown without supporting family or next of kin
- **Race:** only Western funeral customs depicted
- **Violence:** implied with cause of death – death by suicide, accident or illness

Reflecting on the readings, what does the game do or enact? What about learning?

- Role-play and perspective-taking
- Projective identity through avatar-based play
- Mindfulness
- Marshall McLuhan and games as cultural reflection (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2020; 2019)
 - Enact Western culture's practices and attitudes towards death

Does anything stand out as a 'defining' or 'unique' feature of the game?

Role of identity and how it's represented with:

- Respect
- Honesty
- Vulnerability

References

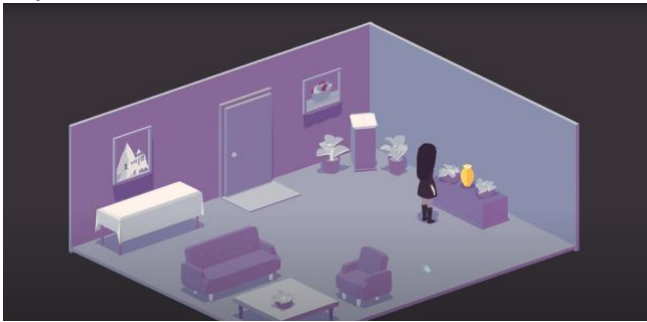
Egenfeldt-Nielsen, S., Smith, J. H., & Tosca, S. P. (2020;2019;). What is a Game? In *Understanding video games: The essential introduction* (4th ed.). Milton: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780429431791

Fieldnote Summary Session 2

Players who find story-driven games of self-discovery appealing will appreciate how the role of identity, even in death is represented through its mindful use of mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics.

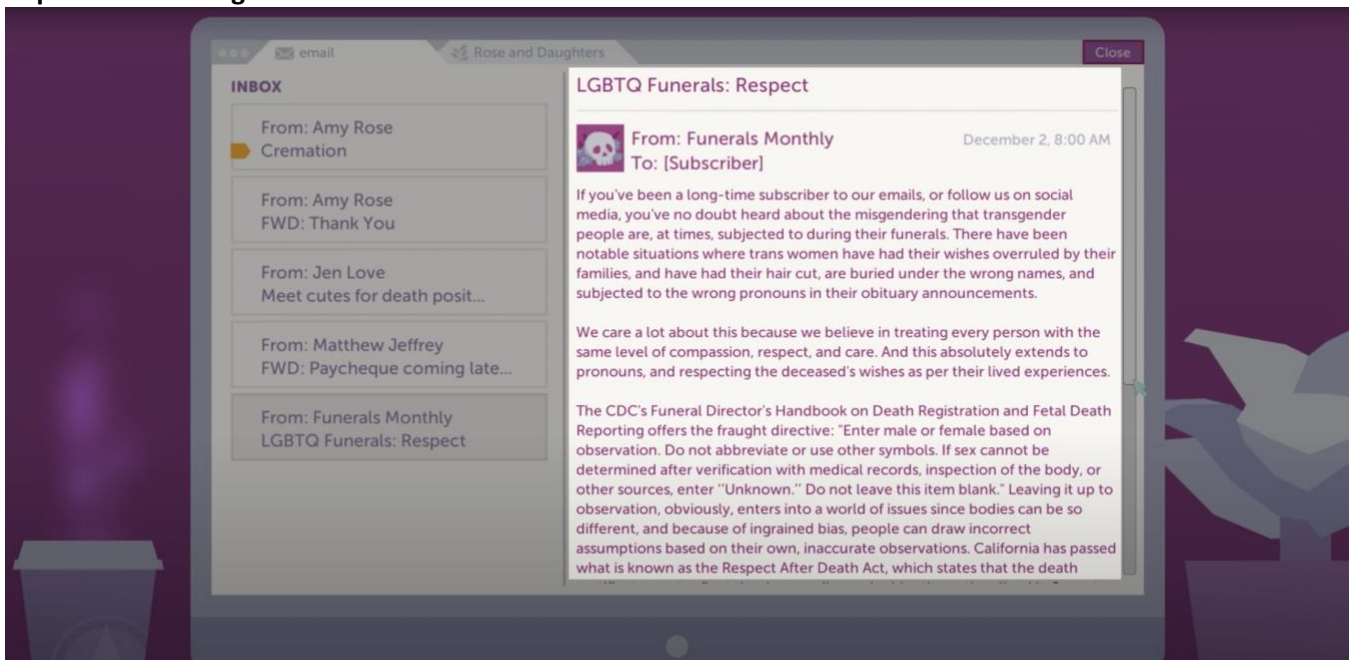
Images are on the next page.

Representation of class

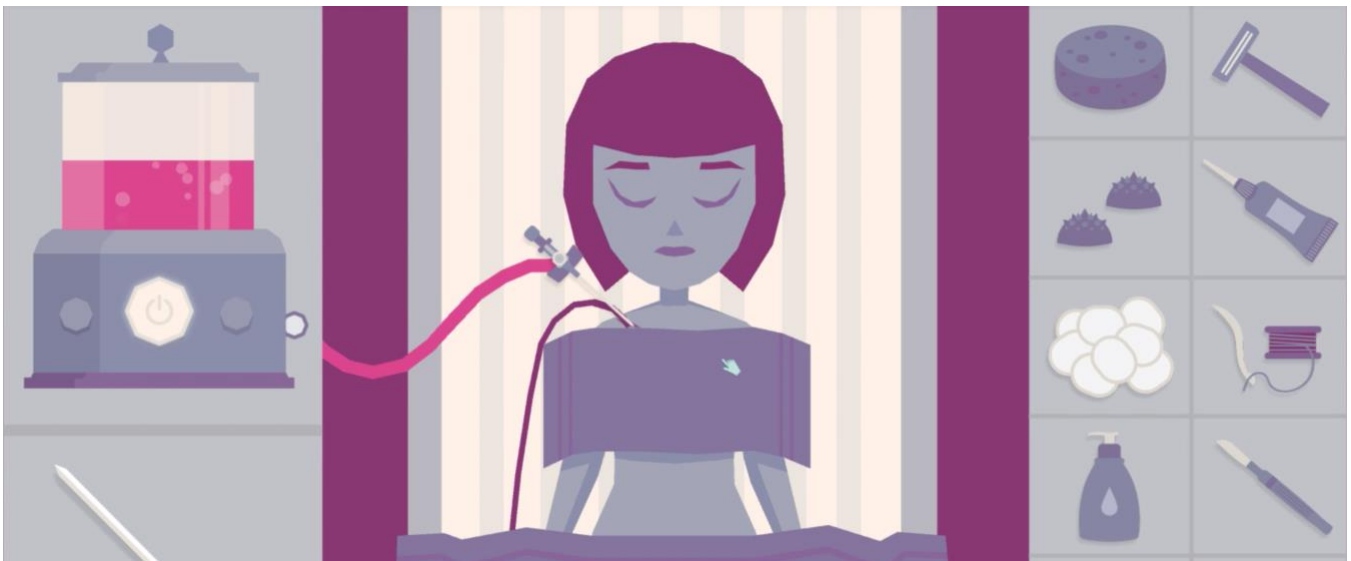


[Image: Acknowledging the gap in class by depicting the stark difference between memorial services. Service (R) is for a client who experienced homelessness vs. service (L) is for client with wealth]

Representation of gender

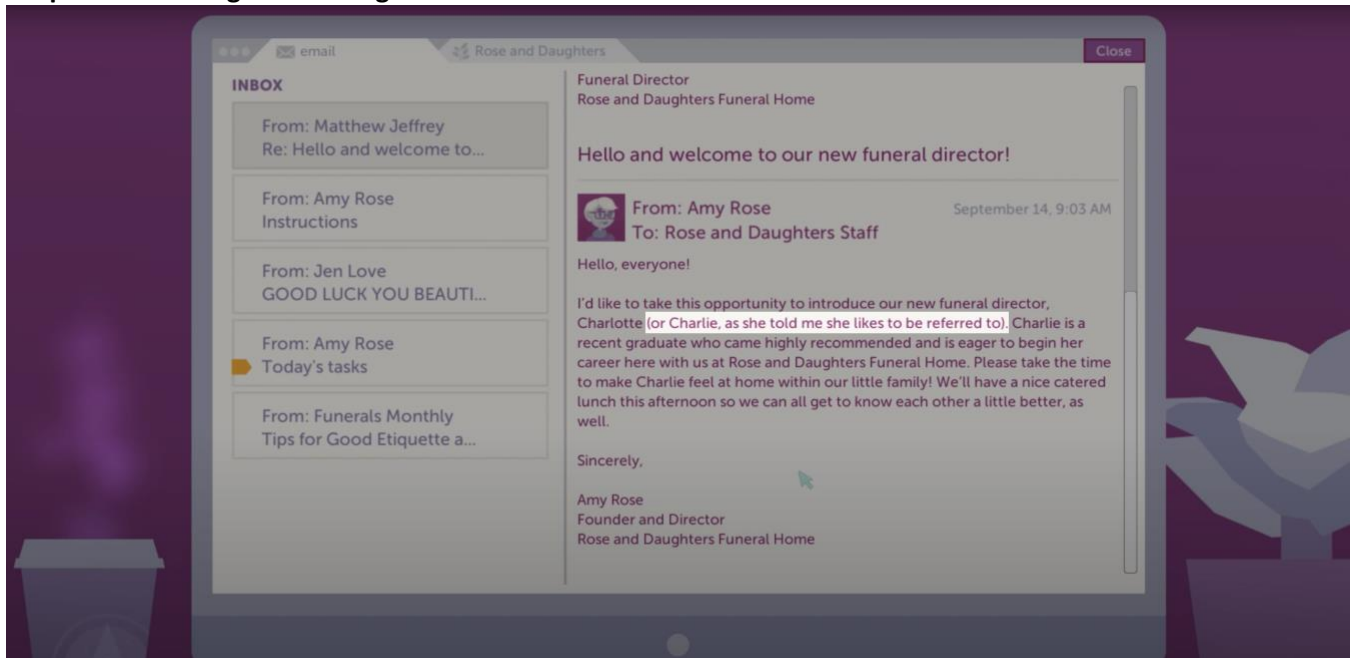


[Image: Newsletter content on LGBTQ funerals offering guidance on respecting deceased's pronouns]

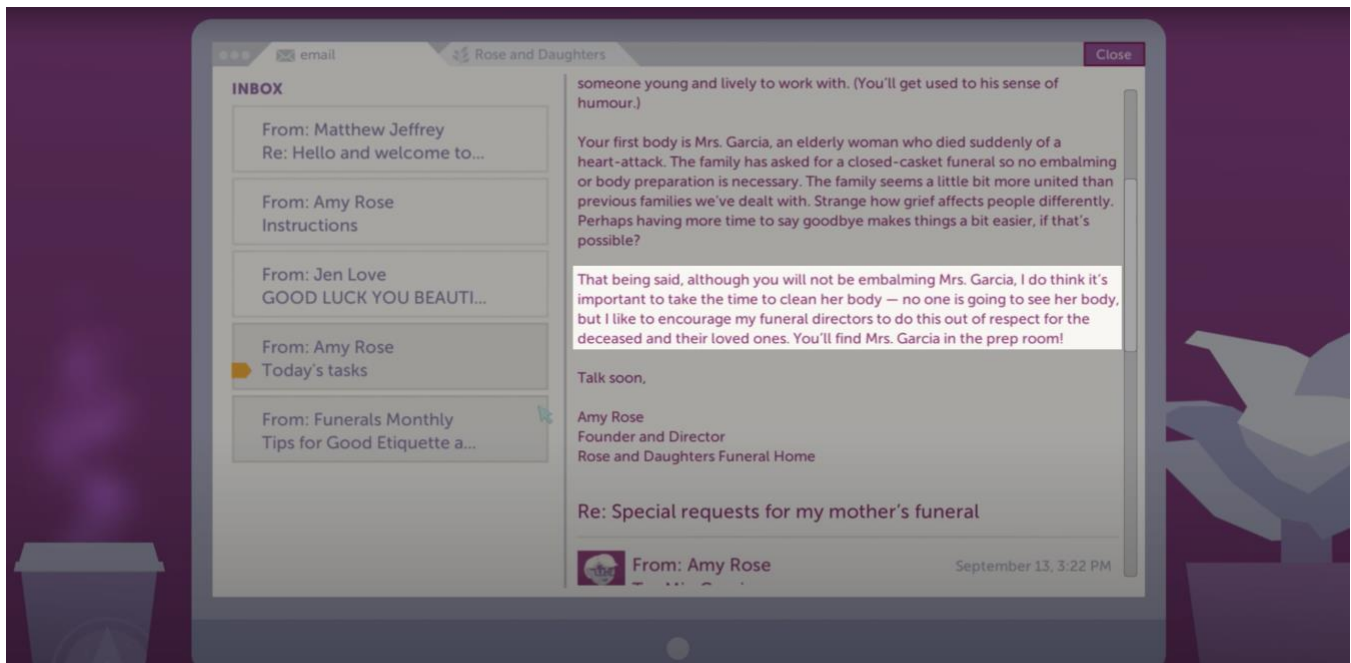


[Image: No gratuitous nudity, women are not sexualized – respect is given to the treatment of the body]

Respect as defining feature of game



[Image: Use of preferred name in Amy's introduction email]



[Image: Encouraging "respect for the deceased and their loved ones" by cleaning every client body]