

A Place to Survive: *OMORI* Through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

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Abstract

This research delves into the narrative of the role-playing game *OMORI* (OMOCAT, 2020). We use Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as an analytical framework to investigate character portrayal and development. Our study employed descriptive and interpretive qualitative methods and used a three-phased approach to scrutinise *OMORI*'s narrative, expound and dissect character portrayals within their broader contexts, and note important character developments throughout the game. Our findings highlight the substantial influence of immediate and non-immediate external environments—family dynamics, societal norms, and cultural elements—on the development of the primary characters within *OMORI*'s narrative. More specifically, this paper emphasises the roles of culture, capitalism, and religion within the game. The study's significance lies in its presentation of interconnected relationships among the systems posited by Bronfenbrenner. We offer insights for further research studying games through their socio-historical contexts and scrutinising characters' backstories. This is particularly relevant where it has been theorised that youth in advanced capitalist societies might be swayed by cultural values that affect their well-being and life contentment (Butler, 2021).

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Ecological systems theory; role-playing game; narrative; character development; *OMORI*.

Content Note

This paper includes mentions of self-harm and suicide. Reader discretion is recommended.

Context and Concerns

Games often serve prosocial purposes. Video games today have evolved to depict inclusive narratives about autism and loss, as in *To the Moon* (Freebird Games, 2011) and its sequels. The Dark Souls series (FromSoftware Inc., 2011–2018), created by Hidetaka Miyazaki, questions the cliché of a difficult combat system that takes down countless foes for the sake of genocide, and there have also been video games like Toby Fox’s *Undertale* (2015) that go against the pattern of combat with in-game boss enemies, allowing the player to befriend them instead of killing them. All the aforementioned titles are role-playing games (RPGs), a genre where players assume fictional roles to advance a narrative in an imaginary environment with a specific degree of freedom (Lortz, 1979). Through its inherent plot-driven nature, the format of an RPG is flexible enough to fit contemporary situations and narratives. Therefore, RPGs can be narrative and social—but, fundamentally, they are also psychological experiences (Deterding & Zagal, 2018).

We can critically analyse the cultural impact of RPGs by examining their dissemination as a thematic genre and by exploring the depictions of the narrative and its characters as a form of literature. RPGs have not only influenced the creation of other texts but have also generated their own cultural products. The perspective of considering these texts as “gaming capital,” dynamic artefacts influenced by the players, industry, and popular media (Consalvo, 2007, as cited in Deterding & Zagal, 2018), aids in understanding how the dissemination of RPG tropes, particularly those related to players and gaming narratives, has contributed to a wider appreciation of RPGs as significant cultural artefacts.

Conceptualisations of the RPG as a literary device, a specific game genre, and a phenomenon shaping behaviours have collectively outlined perceptions of RPGs and RPG players within the broader cultural sphere (Deterding & Zagal, 2018).

The acknowledgement that neoliberalism, a constructivist modernising social model (Davies, 2014), operates as a form of governmentality that influences the conditions of actions, leads to the compelling proposition that the very act of decision-making in a game inherently normalises a neoliberal approach to decision-making in real-life situations (Baerg, 2009, as cited in Zhu, 2015). That is also to say that every gametic outcome in a single-player game is the result of the intricate entanglement between the player’s actions and the game’s programming, a dynamic tempered only by the existence of the culture of consumption, as well as engagement (Zhu, 2015). It is therefore not surprising to observe practitioners in psychiatry and social work using RPGs among adolescents and children with special needs. Practitioners report that the game environment serves as a valuable social and behavioural framework, facilitating their development of impulse control and social competency (Enfield, 2006; Rosselet & Stauffer, 2013).

OMORI (OMOCAT, 2020) interprets the RPG genre with a narrative steeped in psychological horror. It is reminiscent of *kishōtenketsu*, a Japanese four-act story structure that originated in China and consists of an introduction, development, twist, and conclusion. This is a commonly used blueprint for stories in video games and “a Nintendo favourite when it comes to designing stages, mechanics, and player goals for the *Super Mario* series” (Young & Slota, 2017, p. xii). *OMORI* follows the character Sunny as he gradually uncovers the truth behind his sister Mari’s suicide through photos related to the incident. Each collected picture recalls part of the truth that Sunny, the protagonist, had buried—the fact that he had accidentally pushed his elder sister Mari down the stairs after a fight about their upcoming music recital. Mari lost balance due to an injured knee, which caused her to fall onto Sunny’s splintered violin and break her neck.

This twist, concealed for most of the game, is at the heart of *OMORI*’s narrative and in-game story events, which we will reveal from this point onwards. Sunny, accompanied by his friend Basil, stages Mari’s suicide by hanging her from a tree. Both suffer from guilt after misleading their friends—Aubrey, Hero, and Kel—about the matter. Sunny isolates himself in his house for four years, while Basil becomes increasingly anxious and insecure.

Meanwhile, Sunny’s journey to find Basil within the world of Sunny’s dreams, known as Headspace, serves as an allegory for his subconscious act of distancing himself from the truth. Headspace appears in a colourful atmosphere meant to distract the player from the objective of finding Basil. Younis and Fedtke (2023), in their paper about the representations of trauma in *OMORI*’s environmental design, explain that the deeper the group traverses Headspace, the more Omori—Sunny’s Headspace counterpart—and the Headspace counterparts of Sunny’s friends forget about Basil and their initial objective of recovering him. Should all this be considered before and after Mari’s death, Aubrey, Hero, Kel, and Sunny become interesting subjects to investigate.

Aubrey undergoes a transformation after losing Mari, who had been like a sister figure to her: She dons pink-dyed hair, carries a bat in hand, and associates herself with the neighbourhood bullies. Kel, on the other hand, appears to be the most indifferent out of the whole friend group after Mari’s death. He is still energetic and social, empathetic towards Aubrey’s anger, and protective of Basil, who is bullied. Hero, Mari’s former romantic partner and Kel’s brother, has now become a well-adjusted college student, visiting home in Faraway Town for a short break. Prior to this, Hero was deeply affected by Mari’s death, only deciding to bounce back after almost a year to maintain his stability and remain resilient for those who rely on him. Meanwhile, Basil and Sunny are the most far gone. Sunny’s intense bout of isolation has impaired his social skills and memory, while Basil struggles to form connections with

other people due to his desire to be as stagnant as possible, fearing that any change will dismantle the truth he has carefully covered up.

As the player progresses in the game, Mari's staged suicide—the heart of Basil's and Sunny's traumas—becomes noticeably inaccessible. The memory is coded as traumatic not because of its inherent content, but because it is something unresolved and unavailable (Wolfreys, 2015). The same can be said for the rest of the group—Aubrey, Kel, and Hero—except that these three individuals exhibit attempts at moving on and coping. Aubrey honours Mari's desire to colour her hair, Kel continues to reconnect with Sunny despite the latter's disinterest, and Hero pursues a medical career to help people like Mari, who was presumed to have had mental health conditions.

Methodology

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that an individual's environment is not only composed of its immediate settings, but also the social and cultural contexts of relationships in those places—namely, at home, school, and work. This paper uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to study character development in *OMORI*'s narrative. Here, we stress the progressive and mutual accommodation between a growing human being and the changing qualities of their immediate settings. By relating the larger contexts of the game world to the characters, we intend to explain how the changes and interactions between the settings affect the involved characters. This starts with probing into how a person's development is influenced by the different environments they interact with (Rogoff, 2003).

Recognising that human development is shaped by the dynamic interactions between individuals and their changing environments, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory comprises a group of nested systems—a person's immediate settings, known as the microsystem; a person's interactions with their immediate settings, known as the mesosystem; indirect influences on the person, labelled as the exosystem; and cultural context, identified as the macrosystem (Ünal & Boz, 2020). Together, these describe the mutual adaptation between individuals and their environments, stressing the significance of cultural processes in shaping said development. Bronfenbrenner's theory can then be repurposed and reused to foster a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between the individual and their ecological niches, implying that human beings actively influence and are influenced by their surroundings. No setting remains stagnant and perpetually complete; changes in culture and communication among other social groups have been occurring since the beginning of time (Rogoff, 2003).

With this in mind, our analysis of *OMORI*'s narrative using the ecological systems theory aims to disassemble and reassemble its intricacies, real-life implications, and literary value. Particularly, we sought answers to the following questions:

- How are the main characters depicted in *OMORI*?
- How do the different ecological systems in *OMORI*'s narrative appear to influence the behaviour of the characters?
- What significant developments do the characters achieve by the end of the narrative?

Descriptive and interpretive methods of qualitative research design were used in analysing the narrative of *OMORI*. The descriptive method focuses primarily on providing a thorough description of the nature and state of the current situation, while the interpretive method centres on investigating significant meaning-making processes and demonstrating how they interact to produce observable outcomes (Elliott & Timulak, 2021).

Considering *OMORI*'s plot, we find specific characteristics that qualify this RPG as a piece of literature. Implicit in literary studies is the notion that literature focuses mostly on works made employing verbal language, encoded in books and other forms of printed media. Yet, given that literature "very much depends on contemporary manifestations of what is understood as such, and therefore defies any exhaustive definition" (Ensslin, 2007, p. 44), the term "literary" can pertain to emotions, meanings, and other related experiences evoked by words (Ensslin, 2007)—a commonality in RPGs, as gameplay relies on spoken or written language for substance. Additionally, Jara and Torner (2018) posit that a "70-hour computer RPG" can be considered as a text because, like other forms of media that utilise verbal language, it requires an expression of meaning through representation (Barthes, 1957). Thus, we can analyse RPGs such as *OMORI* like any other form of literature in the most traditional sense of the word; there is an implied poeticism expressed in RPGs like *OMORI* through several means of signification: dialogues between characters, found objects, and environmental design. We gathered data through a three-phased procedure, as shown below.

Phase 1: Identification of the Narrative

In this phase, the researchers explored the narrative of *OMORI* by playing it.

Phase 2: Description and Analysis

The extracted narrative was used to describe the depictions of the main characters and to analyse their behaviours and development in relation to the larger contexts or systems espoused in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory.

Phase 3: Identification of Significant Character Developments

Having analysed the influence of the larger contexts, the significant developments that the characters had achieved by the end of the narrative were identified.

Results and Discussion

The Narrative of *OMORI*

OMORI is a surrealist RPG that reimagines reality in a pastel-coloured game world with a set of friends and foes. As the player progresses, however, they become aware of the horrors that the world conceals, a forgotten truth for them to uncover. The RPG opens in White Space, a borderless black-and-white space where the titular main character is introduced. The player plays as Omori for a short while and interacts with objects in White Space until they hear a falling sound nearby, which comes from a Shiny Knife. Picking it up leads Omori into a neighbour's room where the main party—Aubrey, Hero, and Kel—await. Collectively, they proceed to a forest playground and meet two other important characters: Basil, another of Omori's friends, and Mari, Omori's elder sister (see Figure 1). After a bout of dialogue between the main party and the side characters, the main party go to Basil's house. Entering the house to sort their photos in Basil's photo album, the main group encounter an extra photo that terrifies Basil for an unknown reason. As he is about to confide in Mari about his uneasiness, the photo of a shattered violin flashes on the screen, prompting Omori to reappear in White Space. With no room leading to the Neighbour's Room, Omori decides to stab himself with the Shiny Knife to return to the real world.



Figure 1. Omori, to the right of the picnic basket, with (clockwise) Aubrey, Mari, Hero, Kel, and Basil. Screenshot by Jenelle Capati.

After Omori stabs himself, he wakes up in the middle of the night. The player is introduced to Sunny—Omori's real-world counterpart—who has locked himself in the house following his sister's suicide years before (see Figure 2). The game offers the player several choices that can alter the course of the narrative. Among them is the option to either respond to Kel, who knocks on the door to Sunny's house after discovering that Sunny will move away in three days, or to remain locked up in the house for the game's duration. *OMORI* has multiple possible routes and

endings, but in this paper, we are primarily interested in the events of the True Route, the route generated by the player's choice to reconnect Sunny with his friends. Choosing to respond to Kel triggers the True Route, whereas not doing so leads to the Omori Route¹ where Sunny continues isolating himself from the external world.

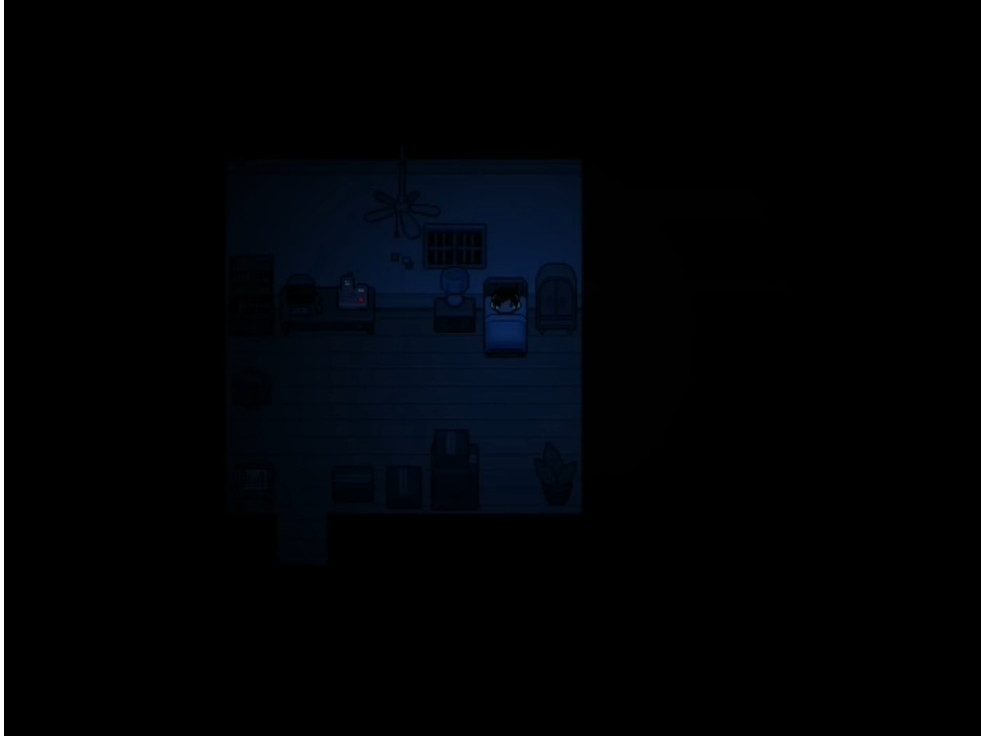


Figure 2. Omori, now Sunny, wakes up from his bed in the real world. Screenshot by Jenelle Capati.

We are interested in the True Route, for this is where Sunny reunites with his old friends and, in the process, learns that his conception of them in his dreams is no longer accurate. In contrast with the Omori Route, which focuses more on Sunny and thus requires a psychological method of analysis that is less involved with his relationships and environment, the True Route fully details each of the character's development and allows for a sociological character study.

In the True Route, Sunny returns to Headspace as Omori after his encounter with the real world and begins the quest to find Basil—the primary aim of the game after Basil's reaction to the extra photo. With his knowledge of the real world, he witnesses the gradual deterioration of Headspace and uncovers the truth behind his sister's supposed

¹ The Omori Route, also called the Hikikomori Route, becomes available when the player chooses not to accept any of Kel's invitations to spend time in the real world. Ignoring Kel knocking at the door leads Sunny to go back to bed. The subsequent segments in Faraway Town are substituted with scenes of Sunny completing tasks from the To-Do List to drive the storyline forward.

suicide: that it was a cover-up for an accident that plagued him and Basil, the only witness, with guilt and led him to avoid social contact.

Depictions of Characters in the Narrative of *OMORI*

Before Mari’s passing, the main characters in *OMORI* were tightly bonded as a friend group. Table 1 presents a description of each character within the story. Following Mari’s tragic death, noticeable changes occurred in their group dynamics, as each character coped with grief in their own unique way.

Name of Characters	Depiction Before Mari’s Death	Depiction After Mari’s Death
Sunny	Introverted, reserved, good listener, seeks guidance from Mari, struggles with self-confidence and self-worth, sees himself as weak and inadequate.	Withdrawn, consumed by guilt and grief, navigating emotions in reality and in the dream world, often emotionless.
Aubrey	Cheerful, expressive with emotions, always true to herself, calmed by Mari’s presence.	Devastated, struggling, feeling lost without Mari’s influence, harbouring intense hatred towards former friends for moving on too quickly.
Kel	Impulsive, childish, playful, competitive in games, protective of friends.	Maintaining a cheerful disposition while coming to terms with his grief.
Hero	Mature, responsible, emotionally supportive, mild-mannered, enthusiastic about domestic tasks, charismatic, humble about his achievements.	Initially grappling with extreme sadness, withdrawn from friends, family, school, and hobbies.

Table 1. Depictions of the main characters before and after Mari’s death

Influence of External Contexts on the Characters’ Development

In Faraway Town’s fictional setting, the growth and actions of the main characters are directly impacted by factors such as their family, friends, and the larger society they belong to. These elements mould their progress throughout the game. We analysed their influences on Sunny and his companions according to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) four levels—the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem—to understand their significance. We outlined the meaning and implications of each of these levels as follows:

Ecological System 1: Microsystem

The microsystem, for *OMORI*, would refer to the immediate environments where the main characters interact with other characters. A dyad, or pair, is the most basic unit of this level, which in turn can also relate to a slightly larger closed circle revolving around Aubrey, Hero, Kel, Basil, Mari, and Sunny. Interactions and interpersonal relationships within these circles, including their past and present dynamics, have a great impact on their characterization.

Ecological System 2: Mesosystem

The mesosystem involves the connections and interactions between the different settings and characters in the microsystem. How, for instance, school life can conflict with one's home life, work life, and so on. For instance, Sunny has two settings: Headspace and Faraway Town. Interactions between these two environments overlap when Omori's tribulations in Headspace translate into a gameplay mechanic that can be accessed in Faraway Town and that unlocks and helps Sunny's journey. Simply put, this level demonstrates how actions and events in one part of Sunny's life influence other aspects of his existence, whether fictitious or grounded.

Ecological System 3: Exosystem

The exosystem can be defined as the external factors that indirectly impact one's life. It encompasses societal norms and cultural values, but more specifically lies outside the scope of an individual and especially a child's control, and includes items like parents' work, income, childcare, and neighbourhood safety. A lack or abundance of these factors influence a child's development. Aubrey and Hero, for instance, have matured in different ways because their parents' personal environments indirectly impacted Aubrey and Hero's development.

Aubrey, who was deprived of proper childcare by her parents, becomes associated with a group of bullies due to the absence of secure support systems and financial security. Pre-time skip, where the major events of the game have not yet taken place, she is depicted as a sweet and bubbly character, surrounded by Sunny, Mari, Basil, Kel, and Hero as her support system. Hero, on the other hand, is his family's eldest child. He seems to be reliable and mature and adopts morally upright principles cultivated from stable foundations such as having advanced formal education and a supportive family environment. Pre-time skip, he is almost the same person. Both have mourned Mari, but the stark contrast in their developments appears explicitly in one in-game cutscene where Aubrey pushes Basil into a lake. Sunny follows to save Basil but fails. Luckily, Hero dives in to save both kids, scolding Aubrey afterwards.

Ecological System 4: Macrosystem

Culture, at its very core, is structured by a certain kind of social blueprint, with various criteria that need to be met for stable communities to grow. A macrosystem is a prominent ideology and

organisation system arising from these intricacies, which are directly changing from the evolving meanings of each culture's norms, values, and developed traditions. *OMORI* is set in a contemporary world, where the cultural backdrop itself influences the characters' perceptions, beliefs, and actions. The game's lead creator, Omocat, has Asian-American roots, implicating an area for analysis that highlights a combination of Eastern and Western cultures in her choice of game portrayal and content. In essence, examining the macrosystem helps to better understand the characters' motivations and answers to various questions, such as whether staging Mari's suicide is ethical, and to what extent guilt should last for acts perceived as "wrong." Aside from cultural and societal contexts, the macrosystem also encompasses the economic and religious conditions that play a significant role in shaping the characters' development. The game's narrative, for instance, implies capitalism in Headspace when characters are coerced into signing a contract that forces them to work for MR. JAWSUM, a businessman non-playable character (NPC) who only appears in Headspace and employs deceptive tactics to coerce people into working for him. Moreover, the presence of religion in Faraway Town is also significant in interpreting how Sunny reacts to Mari's death.

Relating the Ecological Systems

What these systems reveal is that a study of the characters necessitates a thorough examination of the larger contexts they are participating in. By applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, we can analyse the development of Sunny alongside other main characters and synthesise them into a cohesive whole to learn how the characters have developed at the end of the True Route. Consequently, this emphasises how each character's behaviour should be studied in light of the environment that has cultured it.

Throughout the game, only three examples can be considered as part of the macrosystem because of their lingering presence: the ideology of neoliberalism, the economic system of capitalism, and the religion of Christianity, which is explicitly portrayed with a church in Faraway Town. We infer that these three influences have indirectly exacerbated the psychological impact of Mari's absence and may have been a hidden cause of Sunny and Mari's argument.

In recent decades, a shift in cultural values has been observed in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, which can be attributed to the various significant social and economic events starting in the late 1970s. The rise of neoliberalism globally has altered the cultural, political, and economic landscape (Blyth, 2002). This has been related to a noticeable rise in behaviours associated with competition and the pursuit of social standing (Kasser et al., 2004). One value that neoliberalism emphasises is perfectionism—the idea that the self can be bettered to approximate perfection (Curran & Hill, 2019). Capitalism-powered neoliberalism is a modernising force that targets non-market

institutions and activities and relies on an active role of the state to enforce a vision of competitive activity and inequality as positive principles for societal progress (Davies, 2014). This is noticeable in the game through the values espoused by the NPCs whom the main party interact with.

The NPCs display a profound admiration for a range of personal qualities, including leadership, intellect, agreeableness, and charm. Hero's character exudes these qualities, and the NPCs, in turn, hold him in high regard. MR. JAWSUM notes that Hero is among the finest employees he has ever worked with, viewing him with fatherly affection and care. On the other hand, other qualities are seen as dishonourable by people in Faraway Town. During a sermon in the church, Sunny and Kel, after being reunited, discover why Aubrey has become a delinquent. Further interactions between Aubrey, Kel, and Sunny in the church draw unwanted attention towards them, and the NPC churchgoers, motivated by religious beliefs, quickly judge Aubrey for being uncontrollable and disrespectful since her father left. As shown in Figure 3, one of them says after Aubrey left: "It's about time that girl ran off. Now, maybe all my friends will come back to CHURCH again!" This indicates that Aubrey has an unwanted presence for opposing the churchgoers' ideals. The contrast between Aubrey and Hero recalls biblical virtues of self-control and gentleness (see English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Galatians 5:22–23; Swain, 2019). Aubrey is shown to have resisted biblical virtues while Hero adheres to and embraces them. Aubrey, then, is perceived as a deterrent for social progress.



Figure 3. A cutscene within the church featuring an NPC making remarks about Aubrey. Screenshot by Ronnel Bermas.

The connection between the macrosystem and the related ecological systems is evidenced by Stephen Butler (2021), who hypothesised that young individuals in advanced capitalist societies are influenced by prevailing cultures to adopt external values, leading young people to mould their identities based on market-driven ideals of status, success, and improved self-image. The significance of such values aligns with the developmental stages of adolescence and is evident in the emphasis on physical attractiveness, displays of wealth, academic achievements, and extracurricular accomplishments. As young people are inclined to learn from successful individuals, Butler argues that successful individuals transmit culture. A sense of good and evil and of a perfect self appears in the Christian religion as in neoliberalism, whose values and conceptions of morality intertwine, as seen from this narrative. Thus, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, we observed that the characters' exosystems—encompassing the realities of their parents and the individuals they interact with—are moulded by the macrosystem, in turn exerting an indirect influence on the characters' development. Below, we present the exosystem for each of OMORI's main characters.

Sunny

There is limited information available about Sunny's parents before Mari's death. However, it is known that Sunny's father left the family sometime after Mari's passing, leaving Sunny and his mother behind. One event in *Headspace* features Sunny's father chopping down the tree that was used by Sunny and Basil to stage Mari's suicide. During this event, his father is heard saying: "You are not my son." The true meaning behind this statement remains ambiguous, and it could be interpreted as a real event from Sunny's past, suggesting that his father disowned him, possibly upon discovering the truth about Mari's demise. On the other hand, Sunny's mother appears to be preoccupied with the preparations for their imminent move to a new home, rendering her physically absent throughout the entire narrative. Despite her absence, she still supports Sunny by giving him a list of chores to complete and leaving voicemails and sticky notes as reminders to take care of himself.

Aubrey

As with Sunny's parents, there is a lack of extensive information about Aubrey's parents. Prior to Mari's passing, Aubrey lived with both of them. However, sometime after Mari's death, Aubrey's father departs, leaving her and her mother behind. When Sunny, Kel, and Hero go to her house after they have reconnected, it is revealed that the house is in disarray. Aubrey's mother spends her days in a despondent state, surrounded by empty beer bottles.

Kel and Hero

Kel and Hero's parents remain present both before and after Mari's death. Their father is laid-back and less strict compared to their mother, often finding humour in situations that may irritate others, a trait he shares with Kel, whom he affectionately calls "champ." Despite this,

Hero appears to be the favoured child due to his achievements, resulting in Kel's issues often being overlooked. Furthermore, Kel and Hero's mother consistently expresses frustration with Kel's behaviour, as evident in her scolding him for the delays he caused in preparation for Hero's return from college.

A study conducted by Ünal and Boz (2020) discusses the relationship between child development and neglect to parent awareness, revealing a lack of self-cognizance from guardians who commit child neglect and abuse. A guardian's income status directly affects their performance: households with more income generally show greater self-awareness regarding the harm they may unintentionally cause to their children, whereas lower-income guardians often become absorbed in their own struggles, leading to an increase in acts of neglect and inadequate childcare (Ünal & Boz, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory has already defined exosystems as indirect factors that affect the direct factors influencing child development. The quality of parenting and home life is affected by the household's economic status. This is a significant point to build upon, as Aubrey's home life reflects child neglect which greatly influences her ability to cope after Mari's passing. Aubrey's parents are implied to have had extreme discord, enough for the father to depart their household, leaving Aubrey's mother as her sole parental figure, a role she seems unable to fulfil. Aubrey's mother is unresponsive, surrounded by empty alcohol bottles, her house left in a state of severe disarray with trash everywhere. Even when Sunny, Kel, and Hero enter Aubrey's house to look for her, Aubrey's mother merely stares at the television in the living room, not acknowledging the group's presence (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Aubrey's mother is unresponsive upon Sunny, Kel, and Hero's arrival. Screenshot by Jenelle Capati.

The microsystem and mesosystem of a child, then, are inextricably connected to their exosystem because the family, a primary unit that counts as part of their microsystem, assumes a fundamental role in their early education (Ünal & Boz, 2020). They offer essential support for a child’s physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development, contributing to the formation of a well-adjusted member of society. Psychologically, the types of parent-child interactions, exposure to neglect and abuse, and resorting to violence as a problem-solving approach can result in the family playing a significant role as a primary risk factor within the microsystem level for child development (Crosson-Tower, 2005; Polat, 2007).

Development After the True Route

Towards the end of the narrative’s True Route, the player can see how a shift in a character’s microsystem greatly impacts their development. This is expounded below, in Table 2.

Name of Characters	Development Towards the End of the True Route
Sunny	Having had no interaction with his friends for years, he regains his memories regarding his sister’s death. Only in the end does he finally let his emotions out.
Aubrey	At first, she is resentful towards her friend group, showing anger and hatred. However, after reconciling with them, she becomes more open and willing to reconnect. Despite this, she still feels annoyed with Kel, whom she believes to be the least affected by Mari’s passing.
Kel and Hero	No development occurs in response to their reunion; their developments happened sometime after Mari’s death. Kel dedicated himself to basketball, using it as a coping mechanism, while Hero chose to pursue medicine.

Table 2. The significant developments of the characters towards the end of the True Route

Conclusions

In sum, this paper has offered an analysis of the narrative of *OMORI*’s True Route, highlighting its exploration of the themes of grief and self-discovery, and its alignment with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory. By scrutinising the interplay of external factors—family dynamics, societal norms, and cultural influences—this analysis has shed light on how these elements relate to characters’ behaviours and development. The integration of culture, capitalism, and religion within the narrative stresses the influence of broader contexts on individual

development. Ultimately, *OMORI* is a video game that encourages players to engage in thoughtful reflection on the state of society.

This paper has focused on the interdependent relationships between the exosystem and macrosystem to the more closed microsystem and mesosystem proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The contextualisation of character studies within broader frameworks under the ecological systems theory enables a comprehensive analysis of character development, exemplified by Sunny, Basil, Hero, Kel, and Aubrey—all of whom have been subjected to the systems of neoliberalism, capitalism, and Christianity. These ideological systems emerge as persistent macrosystem influences in the game's narrative and contribute to specific psychological outcomes and character interactions. The link between societal changes, competition, and the pursuit of status illuminates the intricate interplay between characters and their cultural, economic, and religious surroundings, thus enriching our understanding of their motivations and choices. This can potentially reflect real-life experiences for the player.

Following Younis and Fedtke (2023), the results of this analysis offer insights about the situation of people who participate in any form of escapism. Young individuals in advanced capitalist societies are influenced by the prevailing culture to adopt external values, leading to the development of their identities based on the market-driven ideals of success and improved self-image. To explore the effects of such complex forces on ourselves, more studies about how games reveal the impact of modern society and culture on people's well-being should be conducted. The goal is, after all, to extend the discussion beyond the realm of games—to see how the world can become better than White Space: a place not just to survive, but to live.

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