

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: *Consume Me*

Platform: Windows, macOS

Genre: Strategy life simulation role-playing game

Release Date: September 25, 2025

Developer: Jenny Jiao Hsia, AP Thomson, Ken "coda" Snyder, Jie En Lee, Violet W-P

Publisher: Hexecutable

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Jenny Jiao Hsia

Overview

Consume Me is a semi-autobiographical game based on Jenny Jiao Hsia's life depicting a Chinese American girl's downfall towards self-optimization and self-destruction as she struggles with body image, romance, academic pressure, and fulfilling others' expectations. With charming comic-style panel transitions and WarioWare-like minigames, the game tells a dark story of feeling "stupid, fat, lazy, and ugly" and the feeling of having to improve oneself to deserve success in a humorous way.

Every day has the same structure.

- Choose an outfit that boosts stats.
- Make lunch.
- Survive a random event that affects stats.
- Choose how to spend two hours of free time.

Players manage Jenny's daily life through balancing different stats: MOOD, ENERGY, GUTS, BITES (fictional unit for calories), and MONEY. The player helps Jenny achieve her goals by choosing what activities she does in her limited free time. These activities raise or lower her stats, and the player must carefully balance them all. She begins her mission of self-improvement with her first to-do item of dieting to prove that she is not lazy and has self-control. This soon expands into a lengthy list of impressing her crush, winning the approval of her boyfriend's strict mother, keeping a long-distance relationship alive, defeating her rival, and maintaining academics. Each chapter adds new expectations and more pressure while keeping the amount of time Jenny has the same. Her life soon becomes less about balancing everything and more about strategically making trade-offs, where achievements in one area need a sacrifice in another. This story explores her battle to become her best self and appease others by piling goal after goal as

she develops a worsening relationship with herself, her loved ones, and food. As players observe Jenny's spiral into self-destruction, players inevitably come to the question: "Is this who we want our best self to be?"

Characters

Jenny — The protagonist.

She is a Chinese American high school junior when the game begins. She is insecure and driven with the mindset that hard work can lead to the life she wants. She aims to become her best self to satisfy herself and her peers' expectations, no matter the cost. She starts by dieting to prove she has self-control, but this mindset soon expands to other aspects of her life: academics, dating, college applications, and friendships. She measures her worth through how many items on her to-do list she completes, ultimately measuring her worth through productivity and achievement. She adopts unhealthy habits as she chases an ideal life of beauty, intelligence, love, and success.

Mirror Jenny — Jenny's reflection in the mirror and the voice of internalized pressure.

She is harsh and critical, as she insults Jenny's weaknesses and is the one who assigns tasks to Jenny's to-do list. She represents Jenny's self-doubt and internalization of external expectations, and pushes Jenny to resolve these issues through productivity regardless of the consequences. While she seems to have a more "realistic" view on things compared to Jenny, her views are pessimistic as she ties worth with discipline and productivity. She represents how Jenny views herself.

Jenny's Mother — Jenny's strict and judgmental mother, who ties thinness with discipline and moral value.

She calls Jenny lazy, fat, and ugly, and never gives compliments to Jenny unless she completes her tasks 100% perfectly. She represents the harsh side of immigrant parental pressure. Despite her cold appearance, she cares for Jenny deep down, exemplified by her comforting Jenny after her break-up.

Oliver — Jenny's crush and later boyfriend.

He is kind yet secretive, as he hides his relationship with Jenny out of fear that his perfectionist mom would judge him. He is one year older than Jenny, and leaves for Cornell University while Jenny is in her senior year of high school. Maintaining the long-distance relationship becomes another task Jenny has to manage, until he eventually drifts away and breaks up with Jenny.

Joanna — Jenny's former friend, now rival.

After Joanna expresses concern and doubts that Jenny's long-distance relationship with Oliver will last, Jenny interprets her words as a competition. Joanna then transforms from a friend into a rival in Jenny's mind. Everything they do becomes a competition: academics, BITES counting, fashion, extracurriculars, and romance. It is later revealed that Joanna never intended to compete. Jenny's internalized pressure is what made Jenny start that rivalry, ultimately damaging their friendship as Joanna no longer wants to be friends with Jenny. Joanna highlights how pressure turns friends into enemies when under pressure, stress, and gamified goals.

Florence — Jenny’s schoolmate and the admired golden child.

She is the captain of the girls’ swim team, president of the Asian American student association, a girl who fits the Chinese beauty standards, and everything Jenny is told she should be. With Jenny’s mother and Oliver’s mother comparing Jenny with Florence, Florence becomes a source of comparison and insecurity. Despite having a perfect image, Florence later reveals to Jenny that she struggled in high school and constantly thought about dropping out. Her honesty shows Jenny she is not alone in her struggles and helps Jenny towards a path of healing.

Breakdown

Consume Me is a story of internalizing external pressures into an unhealthy lifestyle, presented as a personal struggle with self-image and dieting. Upon further observation, it’s also a reflection on the struggles growing up as an Asian American and as a daughter of immigrant parents. The game critiques how the model minority myth and the American Dream combine to teach Asian Americans that their worth is only earned through hard work — even when it consumes them to the point of self-destruction. Through its narrative arcs and mechanics, *Consume Me* shows how the desire to become the best version of yourself slowly expands into a system of self-critique with no time for rest, happiness, or genuine connection with others.

Jenny’s Mother and Asian Cultural Expectations

Jenny’s relationship with her mother demonstrates how Asian cultural expectations believe beauty, discipline, and overall worth are all tied to each other, which marks the beginning of Jenny’s internalization of self-control as the core of her identity.

In the beginning, Jenny only has one stat: GUTS (how full Jenny is). The player is first introduced to her relationship with food in a playful minigame where Jenny piles as much food as she can on the plate until her GUTS are full. There is an endless amount of food, and Jenny can eat to her heart’s content.

She is happy and satisfied until her mother catches her in the act. Her mother scolds, “You really need to start watching how much you eat. Otherwise you’re going to turn into a Pang Zi”, using a Mandarin term that brings cultural shame. She blames Jenny’s “ugliness” on her laziness and lack of self-control. In this particular moment, the game establishes the central theme: Jenny’s worth is tied to her ability to discipline herself.

Fast forward to Jenny’s room, Jenny stares at herself in the mirror. Her reflection, Mirror Jenny, speaks to her and orders her to look at the scale to prove that her mother is right. Mirror Jenny is a visual representation of Jenny’s internalization of the model minority myth: a stereotype that Asian Americans are academically talented, hardworking, and high achievers because of the values in Asian culture — a description that may seem positive on the outside, but hides the pressure and harmful mental health implications. Asian Americans who fall outside of this category are deemed failures. Mirror Jenny is the strict voice that insists Jenny must fit the model minority myth, that Jenny must be disciplined and productive to earn success by meeting what is expected of her. This is symbolism for the conflicting states Jenny has. While Jenny hesitates and

tries to be gentle with herself, Mirror Jenny mimics her mother's harsh tone, showing how external cultural pressure has transformed into internal pressure and criticism. Jenny's conversation with Mirror Jenny represents Jenny's internalization of her mother's expectations and Asian beauty expectations.



Mirror Jenny telling Jenny her mom is right.

There's a popular saying in China that "A good woman cannot weigh over 50kg (around 110lbs)". Women heavier than that are unfairly judged as lazy, lacking self-discipline, and unmotivated. The belief is that if they cannot take care of themselves, they cannot be expected to take care of their jobs or partners well. If you cannot control your body (the one thing you are fully in control of), you can't control your future (where many factors are out of your hands). With Asian beauty standards tying beauty to discipline, it also ties beauty to character. When Jenny's mom calls Jenny lazy, criticizes her as lacking self-control, and claims she'll never find a husband, she's saying that Jenny is failing as a woman and that she's failing the family. This links to Chinese values of family and collectivist expectations. Jenny is pressured to follow beauty expectations to prevent outward shame towards her body, and by extension, prevent shame towards her family in order to represent her family well.

This sparks a desire in Jenny to have self-control over how much she eats. She wants to prove to her mother that she is not lazy and that she is hard working by starting a diet. She wants to prove that she has self-control by keeping under her BITE count, no matter how hungry she is.

Dieting Mechanic and Ludonarrative Critique

As a first step to show how hard-working she is, she creates a to-do list. It turns her life into a gamified productivity checklist, echoing the American Dream's promise that everyone has the opportunity towards success, as long as you earn it through pure hard work and effort. This also ties into Jenny's immigrant parent background, where they often teach: If you work hard enough, you can work towards a better future in this land of opportunity. Jenny latches onto that mindset and applies it to her body.

She sets a goal of 500 BITES per day. As Jenny commits to dieting, the game visually and mechanically shows her distorted mindset. Before she reads a dieting book, food looks three-dimensional and realistic. Afterwards, food is broken down into two-dimensional Tetris-like blocks. In a ludonarrative shift, this resembles her emotional detachment from nourishment and pleasure from food, and her growing obsession with optimization. Food is reduced to numbers.



Before



After

Frowning tiles are Unfilled Hunger Spots.

In this minigame, the player's goal is to fill all Hunger Spots with food while making the food fit on the plate and stay under the BITE count. The more Hunger Spots left empty, the more GUTS she loses. However, if she fills all Hunger Spots and is over her BITE limit, Jenny feels guilty and panics about failing her diet.

This minigame forces Jenny to make a difficult decision. She can either satisfy her hunger and break her self-imposed dieting rules or stay disciplined and remain starved. This reflects how Jenny can meet expectations and suffer, or meet her needs but feel like a failure. This lose-lose situation represents the Asian American pressure, where choosing passion can lead to guilt for not meeting the expectations others and you had for yourself, but choosing duty can lead to emptiness and lack of self-fulfillment. This shows that the American Dream is unattainable

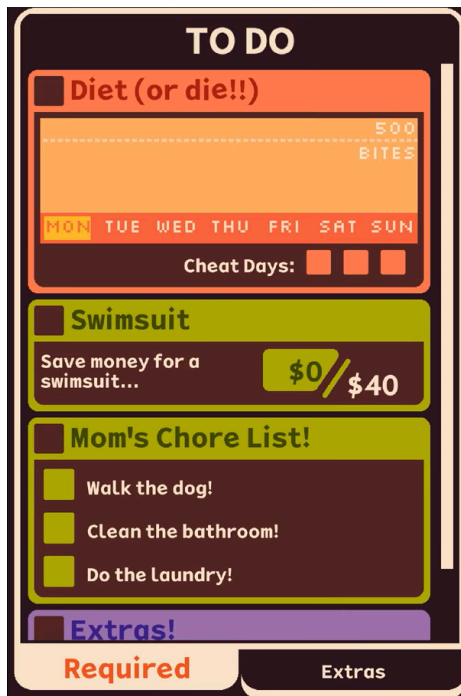
without having to erase or sacrifice some part of yourself. The system is designed for Jenny to endure endlessly, not win.

Jenny's Boyfriend and The American Dream

Oliver, Jenny's crush and later boyfriend, represents the next stage of the American Dream: romance, social validation, and academics in prestigious universities like Cornell University. While Jenny's mother teaches Jenny that self-control defines worth, Oliver's presence teaches Jenny that she must be remade into an entirely different person to be worthy of love.

Mirror Jenny advises, "If you wanna win his heart, you gotta be interesting". Despite her passions for art and achievement of winning an art competition, Jenny doesn't believe her true self and real interests are enough. She suffers from low self-confidence and internalized inadequacy, as she embarks on a mission to create a more impressive version of herself: prettier, smarter, and well-rounded.

What was previously just 2 required goals of dieting on her to-do list has rapidly expanded into 9 goals. New tasks for practicing makeup, studying, saving money to impress Oliver with a cute swimsuit, and more pile up. Along with the "required" to-do list, there's now an "extra" goals list. This ties into the Asian American experience, where it's not enough to excel in just one area, but it's emphasized to excel in leadership, hobbies, and have a well-rounded resume, where life turns into a portfolio. Her to-do list models after the model minority myth, where worth is achieved through constant achievement.



Required Goals



Extra Goals

After Jenny and Oliver become official, the pressure does not end. It intensifies. She now has to win the approval of Oliver's perfectionist mother. Jenny stacks new goals to impress her and puts herself under a stricter diet of 450 BITES instead of the usual 500. Dates with Oliver become checkmarks to keep her accountable for maintaining the relationship — instead of going on dates for pure connection. She checks off “completed date” on her to-do list, even when she's so tired she struggles to stay awake and is unable to form a genuine connection. Sacrifices must be made when Jenny has to choose whether she should cancel her dinner date plans to instead eat at home so she can stick to her strict diet. This marks the turning point in the game where success does not bring expected relief, but brings heavier expectations.

When Oliver leaves for Cornell University, their relationship turns long-distance, and a Heart Meter is introduced. Every day, 3 hearts are lost unless Jenny calls for 2 hours or texts for 1 hour. Love becomes work, and Jenny's time becomes currency. This stat is a visual representation of how Jenny gamifies her tasks to the point of gamifying her relationship. A new activity is unlocked: stay up late (+1 hour of free time, -30 ENERGY). Jenny trades her sleep schedule, and ultimately her health, for more time to pursue her goals and keep the Heart Meter stable. Noticeably, Jenny assumes it's her sole responsibility to keep the relationship alive despite relationships being a two-way street, showing her internalized belief that if something fails, it's her fault because she did not try hard enough. Jenny even plans her college future around Oliver. Instead of choosing college based on her own interests, she chooses the one he goes to. She replaces what she wants with what's best for the relationship and what others expect from her in her role as a girlfriend.

The model minority myth and the American Dream fully converge here. Jenny believes that if she just works harder by dieting more strictly, becoming prettier, studying longer, and putting more effort into her relationship, she will finally be worthy and happy. However, the game reveals the lies and flaws in this myth and dream. Hard work does not lead to rest or fulfillment. It only leads to more tasks, distorted views on relationships, and the fear of failing.

A Rival, An Ideal, and A Decaying Social Life

As Jenny's checklist grows, she becomes so absorbed in completing task after task that she doesn't notice her social world slowly crumbling. Relationships become stats, and people around her become benchmarks or threats.

After Jenny's friend Joanna learns about her long-distance relationship, she warns that Oliver might dump her for a girl in Cornell as per college tradition. Joanna says, “So let's check back in a week and see how you're doing, okay? You might be able to make it to karaoke [with us] after all”. Jenny reads this as a challenge, and a new goal appears: *Defeat Joanna*. A competition sparks between who is the best: who eats less BITES for lunch, who has the better outfit, who kicks the other in the face with a soccer ball first. This gamification of rivalry — how her social relationships are reduced to checklist objectives — shows how Jenny's mindset has skewed her sense of connection. Instead of talking things out or trying to understand Joanna's feelings, Jenny does what she knows best: work harder. Emotional problems are treated as productivity problems, and connection is replaced by performance.

Similarly, Jenny's schoolmate Florence is the ideal against whom Jenny is constantly compared by her mother and Oliver's mother. As swim captain, president of the Asian American student association, and a girl who meets the Chinese beauty expectations, she is the adored golden child. Florence represents the model minority image Jenny feels she must become. Instead of seeing Florence as a peer and finding solidarity, Jenny sees her as silent competition and comparison.

It is later revealed that Joanna never meant to compete with Jenny. She was genuinely checking in with Jenny when she warned Oliver might break up with her. Now, Joanna no longer wants to be friends with Jenny because "everything seems like a competition" after Jenny started the rivalry. Florence reveals to Jenny that she was struggling during high school and daydreamed of dropping out of school, struggles that Jenny relates to. These revelations expose that the tragedy of Jenny's isolation was not caused by others, but rather through her competitive and gamified lens on life and social relationships the American Dream and model minority myth encourages.

The Embodiment of Jenny's Internal State

The game is effective in having players experience the struggles Jenny faces through its mechanics that represent Jenny's mental state. Her stats visualize emotional and physical limits. Her BITE count shows her obsession with self-control. To-do lists are a visual representation of intensifying expectations. Time scarcity shows burnout and panic of never having enough time to do everything. The Heart Meter turns love into work instead of a genuine connection.

This intersection between narrative and gameplay allows the player to not just observe, but also participate in Jenny's spiral. The discomfort of making optimal choices that feel morally wrong despite getting rewarded with game progression and Jenny's happiness of completing her goal reinforces the critique of self-optimization as a whole. There may be times where the constant addition of new tasks and overwhelming number of systems can feel exhausting and terrifying, but this precisely lets the player feel the weight and struggles of endless striving towards an impossible goal of improving yourself to perfection.

Strongest Element



Jenny's nightmare

Jenny's nightmare sequence highlights the game's critique of self-optimization and the failure of the American Dream in a single moment. After days of piling goal after goal, Jenny suffers nightmares in the middle of the night, entering a minigame where the player must balance as many objects as possible on a plate: food she's trying to diet, her mother, her boyfriend, her schoolwork, her rival, teachers, a doctor's stethoscope, and more. An endless stream of items keeps flowing in until the plate becomes too heavy and the floor cracks beneath her, swallowing her whole before she can balance everything. This minigame represents how she tries to balance every responsibility at once, but foreshadows that no matter how hard she tries, she will inevitably crumble. The sequence exposes what the system is truly building towards: endless striving does not lead to happiness and success, but instead to exhaustion, fear, and collapse. Here, the American Dream's promise shatters. The nightmare also visualizes what the model minority hides: behind discipline and achievement is silent suffering. It is here that I realized I'm no longer pushing Jenny towards her best self, but towards self-destruction. Jenny is so focused on an idealized future that she ignores her present pain. If she continues this path, she'll never be satisfied with who she is, doomed to feel the same emptiness in the future and chase impossible perfection forever. By forcing the player to participate in this mental breakdown, it invites the player to reconsider what it means for us to truly strive towards our "best self".

Highlight

The narrative highlight occurs when Jenny is pushing through finals week in college. Her day begins with waking up from an alarm at 4 AM to work on homework. She didn't get into Cornell, but is working to transfer so she can reunite with Oliver, who's grown distant physically and emotionally. This time, she has 10 goals to finish in one week with only two hours of free time each day: maintain her diet, study and ace her calculus and biology exams, complete at least 4 extra goals which include: saving \$30 to visit Oliver, finish reading for literature class, keep GUTS above 50% for four days, exercise to burn 999 BITES, do four activities within a single day, and finish reading four books. Everything (academics, dieting, body, personality, her relationship) boils down to this moment. It feels as though if she can just survive this final stretch, it will all finally be worth it.

At the start, her stats look strong, but they quickly become resources to be burned. With MOOD at 100, ENERGY at 140, GUTS at 100, and only \$32 to Jenny's name, I begin by spending MOOD to study for calculus, but quickly hit a mental block that requires I get MOOD back to 100% before I can continue. Rest would be the obvious solution, but there's no time. Instead, I stitch shortcuts together. I throw on outfits that enhance exercise to take 0 hours, then exercise by walking the dog to restore MOOD at the cost of ENERGY. But this isn't enough. I need more time. I force Jenny to stay up late until the early AMs to study, even as her ENERGY drains to 0. I swap outfits again to gain the ability to read faster, sacrificing even more time just to squeeze productivity in her exhaustion. I save \$30 to visit Oliver in the future, and the rest goes towards buying coffee to gain more hours, sacrificing money for time.

When my wallet is empty, I sell my clothes (my precious sources of stats boost) just to afford another cup of coffee, and by extension, afford another hour. When staying up late is no longer an option because I have 0 ENERGY, I buy energy drinks that give me ENERGY but push me dangerously close to her BITE limit. When I'm too close to the BITE limit and ENERGY hits rock bottom, I convert all her GUTS into ENERGY through intense exercise, leaving Jenny starving. I chew gum just so she can go to bed with something in her stomach. Jenny's stats fluctuate dangerously, as I trade and manipulate them so they rise or crash to an all-time low, going against the human body's desire for consistency. Once I reached the end of the day, Jenny's stats were all either in single digits or a flat zero. Yet I feel accomplished. Through this calculation, planning, and sacrifice, I know I can finish all my goals by tomorrow. All that's left is to wait for Oliver to call Jenny so Jenny can finally sleep. Everything is perfect and ready to go!

Until Oliver breaks up with her that night.

Jenny's entire structure collapses. She wipes her to-do list clean. All of her goals are created to make Oliver happy, and with Oliver gone, there are no goals left. Jenny doesn't know what to do next. There's nothing to optimize. There's just an empty silence exposing how her entire identity was built around fulfilling expectations for others like Oliver, and when that is taken away, she doesn't know what her identity is without him.



Jenny's to-do list after Oliver breaks up with her.

All the planning, all the exhaustion, all the hard work to carve Jenny out piece by piece just to check off another checkbox, and the future she was sacrificing everything for disappears in a snap. I did everything I was supposed to do: optimize harder, endure more, push past the pain, convert every part of Jenny into raw fuel for her goals. But we still lost. This highlight exposes the lie in her mindset and her internalized American Dream. The game confronts the player with the devastating realization that relentless effort can still leave you with nothing, and that in helping Jenny chase perfection, we have also helped push her to the brink of self-destruction, leaving her alone with nothing but the question: Who is she without a list telling her what to be?

Unsuccessful Element

The game's ending resolves Jenny's arc through a sudden time skip instead of letting the player experience her recovery. After Oliver breaks up with her, Jenny collapses. She is emotionally devastated and hollowed out. She empties her entire to-do list, loses all motivation to do anything, and moves back home with her mother. The systems of stats, goals, and optimization that once defined every second of her life and our gameplay fall silent. This moment powerfully conveyed burnout and emotional emptiness, leaving the player eager to see how Jenny pulls herself out of this collapse. However, instead of letting us experience her recovery, the game skips ahead 10 years and simply shows that she already improved through sliding panels. One panel shows that her relationship with food is healthier, where the food minigame changed the two-dimensional Tetris-like pieces back to three-dimensional realistic forms. Another panel shows she has new career goals that she chose for herself, represented through a checklist breaking down her next steps as she develops a game. Another panel shows she is trying new things, such as ballet.

However, the player does not get to actively experience how she overcomes her struggles. After spending the entire game embodying Jenny's downward spiral through mechanics, it feels abrupt to be told, instead of being shown and experiencing, that healing has happened.

We never get to see the crucial turning points of Jenny's healing process. We don't see how her relationship with food becomes realistic again, what inspires her to finally prioritize herself, or whether therapy, a conversation with a friend, or confronting Mirror Jenny helped her out of the toxic mindset. We don't experience the difficult conversation with her mother when Jenny abandons the medical path the model minority myth pushes and pursues game development instead. We don't see the vulnerability and hope involved in finding love again after Oliver. These are the moments where the game's mechanics would have shined. I imagine a new chapter, where Jenny learns she cannot balance everything, no matter how much she wants to have it all, where she *has* to choose what matters most and let the rest go. In this imagined chapter, Jenny would learn that rest and self-care are important, meaningful, and not just obstacles blocking her goals. Small mechanics, such as adding "do something fun!" or "take a break" as a required goal every week — or even Jenny learning it's okay to leave tasks unchecked, to not stick to the to-do list 24/7, and to be flexible with life — could have embodied her growth.

This is a missed opportunity for ludonarrative storytelling. Just as the game let players participate in her self-destruction, it could have also let players participate in her recovery and actively see her character development grow. Letting players experience the slow and imperfect process of recovery would have made Jenny's growth feel more earned, and the ending more emotionally resonant and fulfilling. It would have also emphasized the message that healing is not about optimizing or self-control, but it's about prioritizing what truly matters in life, and accepting that it's okay to not have everything.

Critical Reception

Checkpoint Gaming - Bree - 8/10

Bree claims *Consume Me* perfectly represents the struggles of university life, and how it's addicting to let Jenny fall into bad habits to squeeze more time into her schedule to be perfect. However, she thinks the game lacks "a moment where Jenny *crashes* [as a result] of her unhealthy habits... not something out of her control". While Jenny crashes after Oliver breaks up with her, players never see Jenny crash from her bad habits and toxic mindset, meaning we don't see the game explore Jenny's self-destruction to its fullest. The bad habits are never condemned, and the true negative effects beyond the temporary stats manipulation aren't explored (such as permanent health damage due to repeated lack of sleep on top of endless energy drinks on a starving stomach).

Inverse - Robin Bea - 7/10

For Bea, the best part of *Consume Me* is making the player feel accomplished for doing things we know are destructive in order to reach Jenny's goals. The story is extremely relatable, with its focus on pressure from the self, surrounding peers, and society to achieve, diet, have a glow-up, and never show the struggle on the outside. Bea writes, "While its mechanical representations of high school stress are remarkably evocative, a messy third act and abrupt ending keep its heartfelt story from really landing for me." Keeping the semi-autobiographic nature of the game in mind, she acknowledges the panels, akin to a montage, showing Jenny got over her struggles as a finale is reasonable. While valid, she questions why the game chooses to convey the finale in such a way instead of exploring Jenny's lowest point and letting players experience how she healed. There's a story waiting to be told involving hard work, therapy, relapses, and circumstances rather than simply saying Jenny outgrew her struggles. The game ends in an anti-climax, making the game feel unfinished as the healing arc of Jenny's life is unexplored.

Lessons

Mechanics can embody psychology.

The game shows that stats and minigames can represent a character's internal state. MOOD visualizes Jenny's emotional fragility, BITES represents Jenny's obsession with self-control, and the Heart Meter turns love into work. The nightmare plate-balancing minigame has no win state, as Jenny will always crumble before she can add everything onto her plate, making the player feel the impossibility of carrying everything. This demonstrates how mechanics can be used to communicate mental health struggles and character psychology more effectively than dialogue alone.

Ludonarrative discomfort is a powerful tool in storytelling.

Choices that feel morally wrong are rewarded. Starving Jenny earns a checkmark for keeping under her BITE count, depriving her of sleep allows her to fulfill one more task, and draining her stats is encouraged as long as it gets the job done. They're all expected and normalized because it's what we know as the optimal path to success. This tension and discomfort force players to confront our own hand and choices in Jenny's self-destruction, especially during her finals week where optimization intensifies. Adding discomfort to the player experience in games can help deepen self-reflection and narrative impact.

Repetition and escalation are tools to represent burnout.

Jenny's growing to-do list, limited amount of free time, and harsher goals must be fulfilled with several minigames. This constant management of having to deliberately plan ahead and repeat the same minigames exhausts the player. This repetitiveness may eventually feel tiring and boring, but it reflects the experience of burnout. Pressure is escalated in each chapter, and the system escalation through Jenny's expanding to-do list aligns with its narrative themes, as the player physically feels the same burnout Jenny is going through. Burnout is represented not just in narrative beats, but also in the system itself as choices become more challenging and repetition becomes unavoidable.

Symbolic changes in visuals represent character mindset.

The shift from realistic food to Tetris-like pieces after Jenny starts dieting demonstrates how changes in art can show changes in beliefs and viewpoints without saying a word. These symbolic design choices convey story without needed explicit exposition.

Empty space is just as meaningful as overwhelming systems.

After Oliver breaks up with Jenny and her to-do list is cleared, the sudden absence of goals is emotionally devastating. As the player, we don't know what to do next, and the familiarity of the game's rules we're so used to have been taken away from us. The game demonstrates that removing mechanics and adding silence, emptiness, and a lack of direction is just as powerful as introducing more systems or letting the player take new actions.

Personal stories can reflect and critique systemic myths.

With its critique of the American Dream and the model minority myth, the game shows how deeply personal and vulnerable narratives can expose systemic flaws and the pressure different groups endure from those systems. The game's autobiographical nature reveals the silent struggles the creator Jenny Jiao Hsia endured as an Asian American — the exact struggles that the model minority myth tries to hide. We also see how, despite Jenny's ruthless work, she does not end up with the life she was working towards, showing the failure of the American Dream. A key takeaway from Jenny's internalization of external pressure based on these systems is that cultural critique can be most effective when conveyed through a personal and emotional experience.

Summation

Consume Me demonstrates how deeply narrative and gameplay can intertwine to explore themes of cultural pressure, self-worth, hope for the future, and the cost of brutal self-optimization. The game explores Jenny's struggles by transforming systems of stats and checklists into pieces of a larger puzzle of burnout and internalized expectations, where the player is an active participant in her inevitable downfall. From its nightmare sequence to Jenny's devastating collapse after Oliver's breakup, the game shows how visuals and mechanics carry emotional weight. *Consume Me* is a gem — for its exploration of the Asian American experience, haunted by the model minority myth and American dream — and also for exploring the question: If becoming our best selves comes at the cost of health, happiness, genuine connection with others, and a sense of self-identity, is this who we really want our best selves to be?



Jenny's idea of her best self: who she expected to be in 10 years. A hyper-glamorous, wealthy, and exceptionally accomplished ideal with an unsustainably packed schedule and relentless expectations. In this imagined future, she's still dieting, trying to cover every Hunger Spot. Her success is built on the same pressure we experienced in the game.



Jenny's actual best self: who she actually becomes in 10 years. She becomes more genuine and self-defined. She pursues new hobbies like ballet. Food is realistic again with no Hunger Spots to fill. Her to-do list is filled with goals for a passion she has chosen: a game development career. Tasks show her in the process of creating the game Consume Me. Instead of chasing that glamorized ideal, she learns to live her own life, define success on her own terms, and accept it's okay to not be perfect.

Citations

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