

## Participation and Empathy in YA Narrative Gaming

Participatory narrative spaces in interactive media invite a form of empathy not found in other types of young adult texts, as the player's engagement with the events, choices and outcomes encourages investment and identification. Award-winning narrative games *Life is Strange*, *What Remains of Edith Finch*, and *Night in the Woods* explore emotional experiences of young female characters through immersive spaces, in first-person or third-person framing, that invite the player to experience a world that is not her own. These games explore the supernatural, as Edith moves into the minds and memories of her lost family in *What Remains of Edith Finch* and Max can manipulate time in *Life is Strange*; or, the games focus on mundane frustrations, like Max's high-school life in *Life is Strange* or Mae's return home after dropping out of college in *Night in the Woods*. The young protagonists reinforce exploration and discovery in the game, while very different styles of gameplay encourage investment and empathy. The emotional weight of these games, Max experiences impending disaster and newfound power, Edith faces grief, and Mae struggles with depression, asks the player to move the protagonist through her struggles. The participatory nature of gameplay, through embodiment, projection, ludics and narrative framing, bring the player through an emotional experience. Narrative-centric gaming is a powerful space for young-adult audiences who can engage in worlds and challenges beyond their own and learn empathy through immersion and participation.