# Emotional Utopia or Distortion in Spouse Selection - A Study of Otome Game Female Players' Satisfaction with Men of the Same Group

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Abstract: "Light and Night" "For All Time" "Mr.Love Queen's Choice" and other otome games gradually fill the gap of the women's mobile games market, and give female players a high sense of immersion and companionship. However, this also raises some questions, that is, while the girl games satisfy female players' love fantasies, some female players begin to have idealized expectations about relationships and unconsciously compare real-life men with the male virtual characters in the games. In this study, we used in-depth interviews to find that virtual lovers fill the players' real-life emotional deficits and relationship needs to a certain extent, and shape the idealized expectations of female players for relationships. However, the majority of female players' perceptions of marriage are not influenced by the game, as female players do not compare their real-life male counterparts with the male virtual characters in the game. Moreover, we found that the depth of the parasocial relationship between female players and the virtual male characters in the game does not absolutelly make an influence on women's satisfaction with real-life men in the same group.
Keywords: parasocial relations, media dependence, quasi-social interactions, otome game

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

The game industry in the Internet era has gradually developed and female users have gradually increased. At the end of 2017, "Mr.Love Queen's Choice" as the first otome game was launched, which led to a huge amount of topics and hot discussions and generated huge economic benefits. At present, the launch of "Light and Night", "For All Time", "Tears of Themis" and other otome games have broken the situation that men are the main consumer group in the game market, which has become an important part of the game market. We have observed that the otome games satisfy women's fantasies and demand for love. At the same time, many experts and scholars believe that women start to have unrealistic fantasies about relationships because of the games and unconsciously compare real-life men with the virtual characters in the games, thus decreasing their satisfaction with real-life men. Faced with the increasing divorce rate and decreasing fertility rate in our society, we are curious: why is this phenomenon occurring? Are these phenomena really caused by the game? Do the games really affect the marriage concept of female players?

Does the virtual role in the game make women less satisfied with men in real life? Is it true that long-term immersion in otome games can create unrealistic and idealized expectations for real-life relationships?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Literature review of otome game

When it comes to otome games, we have to start from female games. Our game market has always been dominated by male players, but since female-oriented games have been online and have generated huge economic benefits, the female market has become a part that cannot be ignored. Female-oriented games are games designed specifically for women and suitable for women to play. The design and style of female-oriented games are very different from those of male-oriented games.

In 2018, Yu'er proposed in Game of "Her Era" that the success of female-oriented mobile games cannot be separated from the design of worldview and plot, as well as exquisite appearance, painting style and interesting game soul, so the success of games such as "Mr.Love Queen's Choice" is not a coincidence. 2022, Zhang Xueying and Chen Ziyan proposed How to capture female users with "Paper Man" - the emotional communication of female-oriented games, and they suggested that female games bring emotional satisfaction and reverie for love and real life to female consumers in many ways. In 2020, Yao Yao, a scholar, proposed in her article The Development Strategy of Female Games from Chengguang Games that female players are very important is a concept generally accepted in the international game market, and due to the increase in the number of female players and their consumption ability, female players' power has started to rise in recent years. In 2022, Chen Changkai and Hu Xinzhe proposed in the article Otome games: the landscape window of female players' view of marriage that Otome games have been trying to cater to women's view of marriage nowadays, and Otome games are more like a landscape window. Through its development and change, we can not only see young women's pursuit of equal status, benign interaction and emotional support in intimate relationships such as love and marriage, but also observe that with the improvement of women's sense of autonomy, their strong blessing for personal independence from self-growth.

### 2.2 Literature review of quasi-social interaction

The concept of "quasi-social interaction" was introduced by Horton and Wall in 1956 to describe a relationship of interaction based on imaginary emotional attachment to the medium's characters as the audience continues to watch television. This relationship is similar to, but different from, real social interaction, and is therefore called "quasi-social interaction". The female players who have been immersed in the female games for a long time have already attracted research from multiple perspectives, and the virtual characters in the female games have already constituted a "quasi-social interaction" relationship with the female players.

In 2021, scholar Guo Qin proposed Exploring Fan Cult and its Multi-causal Psychological Mechanism and found that individuals immersed in quasi-social interactions have similar experiences and emotions as in real social interactions. That is, from not knowing each other to getting to know each other better. But in face-to-face real social interactions, understanding and communication are two-way and equal, while in quasi-social interactions, they are one-way and even controlled by the mediator's role. For example, entertainment stars can create a persona to deepen the audience's fantasy of interaction. And in 2017, Quan Yan mentioned in A Study of Trust Alienation in Social Networks in the Post-Truth Era that quasi-social relationship is an interpersonal relationship for the audience and a relationship of control in the face of anonymous collectives for the media characters. The hierarchy of communication and relationships determines that the parasocial phenomena is illusion, which starts and ends with performance. In 2022, in his article The Non-Reciprocal Nature of Parasocial Interaction: A Meta-Perspective, Cheng Bo proposed that the mediator is the central actor in the parasocial phenomenon, and it dominates the formation of parasociety and parasocial relations, in which the mediator induces the target audience to create an imaginary friendship and adopt the corresponding social relationship through his role imitation.

### 2.3 Problem formulation

In the search on the Internet, the number of literature for the keyword "Otome game" is not much. There are only 10 related papers, which shows that the domestic research on Otome game is not deep enough. Domestic research on female games is still in its infancy. And there is a lack of research from many perspectives. For the research on the female games, most of the literature stays on the marketing strategy, the reasons and sources of the explosion and the influence of otome games on the female players' view of marriage, but lacks in-depth analysis on the changes of users' psychology and the influence on the change of the real-life mate selection. In this paper, the author mainly answers the questions of whether female players who have been immersed in otome games for a long time are really influenced by the games and whether women's satisfaction with men in the same group is really related to the degree of game immersion.

## 3. Research Methodology

This paper adopts the in-depth interview method to try to answer the following questions: Do the otome games really affect female players' view of marriage? Do virtual characters in games make women less satisfied with men in real life?

### 3.1 In-depth interview method

3.1.1 Interview outline production

The interview questions were divided into three main parts. In the first part, it mainly deals

with the basic information of the interviewees, which includes the age, gender, and occupation of them. In the second part, the research questions were transformed into interview questions. It includes their views on the otome game, specific experience of using it, and so on. In the third part, the preparation mainly deals with the questions that may be dug deeper.

During the interviews and the conduct of the study, the researcher was keen to avoid the fourfold ethical issues and transgressions highlighted by scholar Alan Brightman: (1) causing harm to research participants; (2) not using informed consent documents or materials (3) invading the privacy of research participants; (4) deceiving research participants. In addition, if the interviewee has any questions or grievances that he or she does not wish to answer during the interview, he or she may remain silent or withdraw. Interview materials that the interviewees stated they did not want to disclose were not included or cited in this study.

3.2.2 Selection of interviewees

In this study, 10 interviewers aged 15-25 who are in-depth users of Otome mobile games conducted a 15-minute semi-structured in-depth interview.. The interviews began in January 2023 and ended in February 2023. The interviewees included college students, high school students, freelancers, and other professionals, and a larger research sample was collected through the social side. According to the maximum sampling principle of the qualitative research method, by the time the 10th interviewee was recruited, all interviews were sufficient to answer the research questions and the sample collection was closed. The respondents differed in age, occupation, education level, and region they lived in, with a low degree of homogeneity.

The interviews were conducted by wechat text. The results of the interviews were organized into verbatim scripts, and the total word count of the interview scripts interviewed was 12,000 words. The process of processing the interview content was done by myself. The basic information of the interviewees is shown in the table.

**Table 1 Basic information of interviewees**

| Serial number | Gender | Age | **Career** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Female | 23 | Freelancer |
| 2 | Female | 20 | College Students |
| 3 | Female | 16 | High School Students |
| 4 | Female | 17 | High School Students |
| 5 | Female | 21 | College Students |
| 6 | Female | 18 | College Students |
| 7 | Female | 24 | Makeup Artist |
| 8 | Female | 15 | High School Students |
| 9 | Female | 19 | College Students |
| 10 | Female | 20 | College Students |

## 4. Research findings and discussion points

When we further interviewed the interviewees on the aspects of "marriage perceptions of otome game players", "game immersion and female satisfaction with men in the same group"

and tried to get answers, we found that there is no necessary correlation between "female players' satisfaction with men in the same group" and “game immersion” : female players with high game immersion do not reduce their satisfaction with men in the same group because of the game. Similarly, most female players with a high degree of game immersion do not have unrealistic expectations of marriage relationships because of the game.

### 4.1 Otome games meet the emotional needs of female players

Through interviews with 10 players, it was found that 90% of the players said that the otome games to some extent fill the missing part of the emotional needs of female players in real life, and is a kind of Tachiman-style emotional compensation.

The concept of "quasi-social interaction", introduced by Horton and Wall in 1956, is used to describe an interactive relationship based on imagination and emotional attachment to media characters as the audience continues to watch television. This relationship is similar to but distinct from real social interaction. This is exactly the kind of relationship that female players form with their virtual lovers in otome games. Since the introduction of otome games, they have attracted a large number of female players because of their beautiful graphic design. The spending power of female players cannot be underestimated, and they have made huge profits in the game market. But the game can not only rely on beautiful graphics design to retain players, more importantly, the game's plot design. The virtual lovers in otome games are gentle and considerate. The reason why female players are addicted to the game is that they are willing to spend money because the game provides emotional value to female players that men in real life cannot provide. Many players said that the care and warmth given by virtual lovers and the respect and tolerance for their partners are what men lack in real life, which is specifically reflected in the details and a lot of social news they come into contact with in real life.

But women also know more about how to deal with romantic relationships in real life during the process of playing otome games. Unlike the program in the game setting, modern women's work and life are more stressful, and emotional problems are also very complicated. The setting of "paper man" can provide emotional value for women, so women are also more willing to spend time and energy for "paper man" than to deal with the complex relationships in real life. In the new media era of explosive information growth, the speed of spreading bad social news also has a certain guiding effect on women's thoughts.

### 4.2 Games do not directly affect women's satisfaction with men

While satisfying women's emotional needs, the otome game also creates stereotypes about men and marriage in the mimetic environment created by the otome game. In the interviews, we found that some underage female players, who were exposed to otome games when they had not yet formed the concept of marriage, would have unrealistic fantasies about marriage relationships, such as that men should be gentle and considerate, and that men are the salvation of women. However, the socialization of people is not only influenced by the media, but also by the primary groups and sub-groups in people's social interactions, so this part of players will also change their

unrealistic expectations of marriage relationships to a certain extent after establishing a marriage view that fits reality.

It is worth mentioning that during the interview process, I also found that some women's low satisfaction level with men in the same group is not caused by the otome game, but a large part of the reason comes from the reality of women getting along with men in reality. In addition, some of the female players who have partners in real life do not have disappointment or dislike for their partners because of the perfection of virtual lovers in otome games. To some extent, this also indicates that the influence of the otome game on how women view men is not decisive.

News reports about gender dichotomy also produce the environmentalized "distrust of men" perception of women in the information environment under the trigger effect of the media. In the circle of social events such as the shocking Hangzhou wife-killing case and the Thai cliff fall of a pregnant woman, nodal users advocate the assertion of "no marriage and no children, keep women safe" in the open and shared cyberspace. This has led to a certain one-sided guidance for underage women who have not yet formed the concept of marriage and have a small domain of experience, which in turn has aggravated the spiral of silence such as "male widowhood".

However, the results of the interviews with adult players differed significantly from those with underage players. In contrast to the rejection of men, the author found that some female players were not reluctant and were even looking forward to their future partners during the interviews. The adult players were also able to take a more dialectical and comprehensive view of the effects of the otome game and were more objective in their perceptions of men in the same group. This is due to adult female players' own personal education, social experience, age, and other factors. However, some of the underage female players interviewed had relatively extreme views compared to adult playes. Because they have no relevant emotional experiences in real life, coupled with the long-term culmination of reports of these men and women's marital misfortunes, their satisfaction with men in the same group has declined Although this group of players exists, it is a minority of the female game players, and these effects cannot be simply attributed to the female game itself.

### 4.3 Otome game reinforces women's existing dissatisfied attitudes towards men of the same group

Paul Lazarsfeld has presented the ipp index in the Erie County political election survey and further noted that the media has a limited role in changing audience attitudes, but usually reinforces the audience's established attitudes. During this interview, more than half of the women interviewed indicated that they had varying degrees of dislike or fear of men in the same group. After in-depth communication, we found that this group of female players had misogynistic feelings before they came into contact with otome games and rejected men even more after they came into contact with otome games. The root of this is closely related to their real-life encounters. With the existing disapproval of men, these women find that there is a big contrast between the characters in the game and their real-life counterparts, which will strengthen their dissatisfaction with men in real life.

After further data analysis, the author found that most of these female players are minors,

or women whose native families have been hurt. They have not established a correct concept of marriage or a complete concept of marriage from the beginning, so their views on men in the same group are more extreme under the influence of otome games. If we help these women to establish a complete and correct view of marriage, their view of men in the same group may change to a different extent.

## 5. Summary and Reflection

### 5.1 Otome game is not the main reason for women's dissatisfaction with men

From the market point of view, most of the game market was occupied by male players at first, so the design activities of game producers reversed from the consumer side to the production side were actually biased towards male preferences. Otome games originated from Japan, and these kinds of romance games were designed for male players at the beginning. With the rise of women's consumption, the production side of the game only gave rise to female-oriented games, such as the otome game, which is now more satisfying to women's expectation horizon.

After this study, I found that the decline of women's satisfaction with men in the same group is not entirely caused by women's exposure to the game. In real life, the decline of women's satisfaction with men in the same group does not lie in the game, but is closely related to women's age, education level, and social experience. Players, as the receiving end of the game, will also have a selective understanding and contact with the male image and marriage and love interaction in the game. Thus, the information receiver or the game player is not a single target in the magic bullet theory, but will make selective understanding based on their own experience domain, education level, economic status and so on. In short, otome games do not have a decisive influence on how female players view men.

### 5.2 Otome games are not a direct cause of female mate selection aberrations

According to the results of this interview, adult players with a healthy outlook on marriage will not have aberrations in their choice of spouse because of the game. In the era of digital communication where immersive screen consumption is prevalent, the users of data-based survival are dynamic, and people clearly know that reality and games are two completely different worlds, and will not look for a partner in real life based entirely on the settings of characters in games, nor will they have cognitive prejudice against men of the same group entirely because of the settings of perfect characters in games. At the same time, women's age, education level, economic status and other factors will play a role in whether women accept the concept of marriage in the game.

Games are one of the important ways for people to get information and entertainment in the modern era, and game developers should shoulder the social responsibility while making profits. In the face of minors with little experience, game makers should add an anti-addiction mechanism for underage players and limit the time and game scenes that minors can play. Relevant regulatory agencies should also do a good job of market supervision, so as to jointly build up a healthy and

green game platform. As consumers of games, female players should also improve their media literacy while being entertained, and should dialectically look at the reality of men and marriage relationships while relieving stress in games.

The selection criteria of contemporary women is a mirror of the times, and women of each era have different requirements for their partners. The amount of information received by each person in the frothy communication is huge, and everyone's concepts and ideas have become open and tolerant. Whether otome games such as love strategy games in the end will not have a subtle influence on the player's selection criteria, this issue is worth analyzing and studying.

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