

Analyse Female College Students' Emotional Needs from The Otome Game Perspective

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Abstract: Scholars have found that, to some extent, female players satisfy their emotional needs through the Otome Game. This text will take the female college students as the object of the study and explore the influence of the Otome Game on their views of love through in-depth interviews with a few female college students. According to the research findings, on the one hand, the Otome Game makes up a certain extent of female college students' emotional needs. On the other hand, there are also some findings that have presented those female college students with new views on the standards of spouse selection, love attitudes, love purposes, and so on. Female college students they should keep sober cognition all the time and contact more with realistic males. Besides, the Otome Game needs to strengthen content review to enrich the plot and the character design.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the game industry has released a dating sim game, which has been very popular, relying on diverse elements such as abundant plot designs, perfect protagonist images, exquisite pictures, and so on. The player will play a female role who can experience love stories with different heroes and choose different dialogue options to promote the improvement of the story and complete it in the end (Li, 2024). These games are called the Otome Game, which has attracted many female college students. Female group is the main audience of the game because it can satisfy their appreciation of beauty, interests and emotional needs. According to the latest data in Qimai, as for October 2024, the estimated amount of trade of Otome Game: *Love and the Deep Space*, *Like a kite*, *Outside of the world*, *Light and Night* ranked in the top four with the amount of 324 million, 288 million, 71. 4 million and 45. 12 million respectively, which have reached 728 million. In addition, according to the data from Frost&Sullivan, the market size of Otome Game has increased continuously and its proportion in the overall gaming market has increased from 19% in 2018 to 32% in 2023 (Fang & Tian, 2024). Thus, it can be seen that the Otome Game is rapidly rising.

There was a scholar who once analyzed the

generation and maintenance of Otome Game in his article, and he also thought the game uses symbol systems like language, narration, and interaction to make players indulge in the "Pure Love Utopia" of the game and complete the compensatory satisfaction of emotions as well as identification (Ding, 2023). At the same time, there was also a scholar who focused on studying single female players who satisfied their aesthetic and self pleasure through the game. Moreover, he found a new emotional satisfaction mechanism and concluded that the process of emotional satisfaction has broken the dimensional wall and has extended to real life by changing the game mechanics. In synthesizing domestic and foreign researches, a few researchers analyse emotional operation mechanism hiding behind the game from the generation and maintenance of players' emotional perspective in domestic. While some foreign scholars has found that the game gradually became a medium which help the new era women to make announcements. More studies focused on feminine emotions to analyse the connection between the game and feminine emotions and explain the specific content and playing methods of the game. However, this article will explore the influence of this game on female college students' love values and analyse their emotional needs nowadays through interviewing a few female college

students to promote further improvement of this field in the new era. As the female college students is the immature minded group, so it is definitely important to guide them to establish healthy and correct love values today because their experience and ideas are different from each other for the game.

2 METHOD

2.1 The Concept of Undoing Gender Theory

Undoing gender theory is the extension and development of Doing Gender Theory, it says that people proceed social interaction and carry out tasks according to their roles not the fixed gender norms. As fixed social norms and the characteristics of social structure are been highly questioned and have mobility, so people do this to eliminate gender difference in daily life (Pinho & Gaunt, 2021).

From a traditional perspective, people think "Women should lead inside while men should lead outside", just like girls should choose dancing or drawing as their hobbies while boys should like outdoor activities such as playing football, basketball or cycling. However, in today's rapidly developing era, there have appeared many new phenomena on vocational choice, family role division and some other aspects. For example, males can be stay-at-home fathers to take responsibility for taking care of children and cleaning the house, while females can also be a professional elite who is the economic pillar of the family (Pinho & Gaunt, 2021). Boys can choose dancing as their hobbies, and girls can be keen on playing football (Hills et al., 2021). Changes in these phenomena are presenting Undoing gender and interpreting people challenging traditional gender norms as well as gender inequality. One individual does something or generates some kind of behaviour is due to his/her interest or ideal not the fixed gender norms. As the female college students of the millennial generation, their views of love and marriage appear differently to some extent to traditional love views. In addition, the Otome Game has prevailed among female college students to what extent these games will impact their emotional attitudes. As a result, based on the influence of various factors, using the Undoing gender theory to analyse how female college students proceed undoing on their love and emotional appeal of women in new era, which may help to know further about women

today and also to some extent develop Undoing gender theory.

2.2 Research Design

This study mainly used semi-structured interviews, starting with female college students who play the Otome Game to analyse the impact of the game on their views of love. By voice calls and video calls online or just by an offline face-to-face conversation with female college students to learn about their thoughts, attitudes, and views. The interview method is pretty flexible so it can help to understand more information about interviewees deeply. For example, this method may help to guess students' mental thoughts through their micro expression changes and adjust issues timely on the basis of their answers and reactions.

This research mainly choose 7 female college students who have played Otome Game not less than 6 months as interviewees (As shown in Table 1). There is more than one reason for choosing them as interviewees, not only the female college students are the major players of the game but also they are more typical and symbolic to show women's views of love and emotional needs in the new era.

On the basis of their answers on motivations for playing the game, achievements they got from the game, opinions on the game and so on, design the outline of questions. The questions mainly involve the duration of playing the game, how to contact with the game at first, the reason for insisting on playing the game, different experience on virtual love and real love and so on. The interview time for each interviewee is about 30 minutes.

Table 1: Information of each interviewee.

Number	Age	Duration of playing game	Relationship status
S1	21	8 months	Singe
S2	22	half a year	In love
S3	21	1 year	Single
S4	21	1 year	In love
S5	21	two and a half years	Single
S6	23	8 months	Single
S7	21	1 year	Single

3 RESULT

3.1 Analysis of The Influence of Otome Game on Female College Students

Learning from conversations with interviewees, the contact with heroes in the game has influenced them in some aspects and they represent their unique ideas about love as new era women.

3.1.1 Improve Self-Confidence and Self-Identification

Players have improved self-confidence and self-identification through Otome Game and at the same time, the game also develops their positive attitude to life. Each interviewee said that the hero in the game is almost perfect, even the appearances and characters of all heroes are consistent with players' ideal type. The hero's personality charm and sexual tension increase students' motivation to play the game. Except for the hero's good looking and good shape, what is most important is that the hero respects and takes care of female players. They give players unconditional love, companionship, understanding and sufficient emotional value in various stories. All the heroes centered around players and praised them for making players grow up to be loved. For instance, Xu Mo, a hero in the game *Love and Deep Space*, once told a player that "You are the only colour in my eyes". Acclaim and recognition like this are common in Otome Game, which will improve the self-confidence and self-identification of players gradually. From S5's saying "This is a game that helps me become a better and more confident person to love this world." Meanwhile, the positive attitude that heroes show to players also makes female college students feel they are valuable, cherished and important, so they should love themselves more and strive to become better.

3.1.2 Higher Standards in Choosing a Mate

When players usually interact with a nearly perfect hero, those female college students may project the hero image standard onto reality, thus increasing the standard and requirement that they look for a mate in real life. They may compare the image of heroes in the game and males in reality, which can be analyzed by the theory of network mimetic environment. The concept of pseudo-environment is proposed by Walter Lippmann who thinks the information

environment formed by mass media is not the mirror reproduction of the objective environment, but a reshaping pseudo-environment created by symbolical events or processed information (Xu, 2023). The image of those heroes in the Otome game is a recreated pseudo-environment. If female college students interact with these perfect virtual heroes, they will put the standard of men at a higher level. Although female college students may know that perfect people like in the game hardly appear in real life, their subconsciousness dominates their behaviors. Once their standards on men reach the top of the pyramid, they may be hardly willing to lower standards in their minds. Just like S5 once said that: "I have met such excellent men in the game, so it is sure that I don't want to meet a boy who has common abilities or even worse." Otherwise, there will be a sense of unevenness in her mind. What is even worse is when students find there isn't anybody who matches their standards in their minds, they may feel disappointed about men in real life and devote themselves to virtual love, which will strengthen their dependency on virtual emotion.

3.1.3 Pursuing Soulmates for Spiritual Bonding and Equal Relationship

In the traditional world, people think that women should choose men who have similar or even higher incomes economically (Shu-Li & Ying, 2024). However, findings from answers by interviewees show that female college students long to find an equal relationship of love with a soul mate who has a spiritual understanding with them. After interacting with heroes deeply in the game, what appeals to players most is not the hero's good looks and shape but the love and esteem that heroes give to female players (Ni & Zhang, 2023). For example, the hero in a game called *Like a Kite* once said a sentence "The destiny ought to fall in women." Notably, the hero doesn't oppose women's struggle for power, but they support women to do everything that they want in the game society. Similarly, Guang Lingwang, a role that a female player plays, is an intelligent and independent heroine in the game. She dares to love and hate with stable emotions, not a traditional woman who is mild and submissive under the patriarchal system but dares to be herself by challenging traditional social norms on her behaviors, which shows people how she is undoing gender. Guang taught each female player that soft and obedience are never pronouns of women, females

should live for themselves, just like the saying, "The ending of Otome Game is to teach each girl to love themselves more, loving myself makes me feel happy and warm." (S4, as shown in Table 1).

Heroes in the game never look at themselves with a higher status, not to mention that they oppose heroines to pursue their dreams and careers. Besides, the female player can be a supporter who stays with the hero facing difficulties to encourage him to cheer up. The love between them is pure and simple; they are lovers who make joint efforts for a better future. Female college students gain a spiritual understanding and experience an equal relationship of love from the hero. As a result, in a society full of fierce competition and distant interpersonal relationships at present, female college students want to find a soul mate who can achieve spiritual resonance with them, not just satisfy the economy simply (Li, 2024).

3.1.4 Be More Rational and Positive Times Love

The Otome Game makes female college students more rational and positive to love. The full emotional values and excellent love experience provided by the hero have made up single female college students' emotional absence to some extent. When the student has a date with the hero, she also learns about a healthy method of love, which will help to improve their recognition of playboys in reality. Moreover, female college students become more rational about love than before because they have been looked after well by heroes in the game, so they know what true love is, which will help them reduce the possibility of choosing a playboy as their boyfriend. In addition, female students become more peaceful to love. They don't want to fall in love with a boy hurriedly or casually but just let the nature to take its course. It is also glad that they are more positive about love than before S1 said: "Before playing Otome Game, I'm not interested in falling in love with others, I think I can look after myself well. But after playing it, I have found that I'm looking forward to finding a boy who can give warmth and love to me. Maybe he just stays in a corner of the world; I haven't met him yet." The interaction with the hero has made female college students have no expectations of loving, be more positive about love, and look forward to finding a boy to take care of them.

3.2 Problems

At the same time as Otome Game is bringing a few positive influences on female college students, there are also some problems and irregular phenomena generating, which should not be ignored either.

3.2.1 Increasing the Difficulty of Finding a Lover

An immersive experience in virtual love for a long time will make female college students bring the perfect image of the hero into reality unconsciously and increase the standards of spouse selection in real life. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses in reality, so it is impossible for real men to do everything perfectly as those heroes in Otome Game. If female college students keep that high standard in mind to find boyfriends in reality, it will even increase the difficulty of finding a suitable lover and generate a sense of unevenness by comparing the image of males between the virtual world and real life. If students can't address the sense of unevenness well, they will even rely on virtual love more than before to gain emotional needs and become resistant to real men.

3.2.2 The Irregularity of the Plot in the Otome Game

In addition, the Otome Game is designed for female players to play. However, some games' production teams are mostly composed of male producers, and there are some irregular phenomena, such as opening yellow guns and talking rotten memes in individual games, which spread unhealthy and incorrect loving values to female college students. Female players also feel uncomfortable with some heroes' inappropriate behaviors (Peng et al., 2023), it is harmful and disrespectful to female college students.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Increasing the Interaction vs. The Real World and Understanding of Real Men

Female college students should control the playing time of Otome Game, and when they enjoy it temporarily, they ought to return to real life and contact real men positively and actively. The hero is

shaped nearly perfectly in the game that has a large gap with real men in reality. Besides, the para-social interaction shaped in the process of interacting with heroes in virtual love caters to female college students' emotional needs (Wang & Yang, 2023). However, it is unavoidable that the Otome Game may make students out of touch with reality because some students are immature and addicted to the game (Zhang & Chen, 2022).

There are more than 2/3 of interviewees recharging in the game, and the money spent on the game is roughly up to 2000 or even more yearly. Some of the students think it is time-consuming and energy-consuming to have a date in reality, so they are attracted by the comfortable zone of the Otome Game (Ding, 2023). However, the essential purpose of the game is to pursue profit and efficiency, does the game solve single women's emotional problems fundamentally? The answer is not. Female college students are becoming involved in the "Emotional McDonaldization" system when they recharge and complete tasks in the game (Ding, 2023). The money, time, and energy that players pay in the game are converted into cold numbers that lack human feelings. Their emotional need is satisfied at that moment merely, but when players face troubles and ask for help in reality, it is clear that those heroes will not jump out of the screen to give help or care to players in a timely. As a result, female players should draw boundaries between the virtual world and real life as well as learn to accept and understand real men. Thus, it can reduce the sense of unevenness in players' minds possibly.

4.2 Regulate the Game Plot and Spread Healthy Values

For the Otome Game to spread correct and healthy values, it needs to regulate the plot and enrich character design. Learned from interviewees that there are some irregular phenomena, such as opening yellow guns and talking rotten memes in individual games, and players feel uncomfortable with some heroes' inappropriate behaviors. To eliminate these phenomena, on the one hand, it is significant for the production teams to review character role settings more carefully and innovate the heroes' images diversely, which may help to avoid the aesthetic fatigue of players. When designing the heroes' personalities, designers can also integrate the characteristics of real men to strengthen the reality in the game and avoid bringing one-sided cognition of

men's image to female players (Peng et al., 2023). On the other hand, game developers should check plots carefully to ensure that the contents of the stories ought to meet women's psychological needs and represent respect and equality of love. The developers can add some cases happening to real couples in life, which will strengthen the truth of interaction between heroes and players as well as spread healthy values of love to female college students. If the game designers and developers can innovate and check the details discussed above, it can not only promote the sustainable development of Otome Game but also guide female college students to view love in real life positively and correctly.

5 CONCLUSION

This study has found that female college students have built a mutually respectful and equal relationship of virtual love where students have gained sufficient emotional needs and excellent experience of loving with heroes. The warmth and care provided by heroes in the game make players improve self-confidence and self-identification. They have also realized their values and are known to love themselves more than before. Meanwhile, the game impacts students' views of love and marriage gradually. It is concluded that they become more positive and rational about love, but their standards of spouse selection are higher than before. What's more, they pursue finding a soul mate who has spiritual resonance with them and wants to construct healthy relationships with their boyfriends. In general, playing Otome Game promotes the consciousness of women to awaken and boost the growth of females in a new era. However, to prevent players from indulging in the virtual world, female college students are asked to improve self-control while playing the game and build correct, realistic cognition. Besides, the coordination of game designers is not neglected, they should stick to resist vulgar phenomena and ensure the spread of correct values to players. With the rapid development of the era, the emotional needs of female college students are becoming more and more complex, and the influence factors of their loving values are becoming more varied. There is still a need for comprehensive and in-depth studies on how to ensure their healthy growth and satisfy their diverse emotional needs in the future.

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