

Article

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Otome Games and Fictosexuality: Exploring Queer Narratives in Digital Spaces

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Abstract: This article explores the dynamic interaction between otome games and fictosexuality, focusing on how these digital spaces provide a platform for challenging traditional gender norms, particularly within the context of Chinese society. Through the lens of queer theory, the study emphasizes that otome games are not only sources of entertainment but also cultural tools that reflect and shape attitudes toward gender, desire, and intimacy. The increasing acceptance of fictosexuality—sexual or romantic attraction to fictional characters—within the context of otome games disrupts mainstream notions of heterosexuality and opens new avenues for understanding both real and virtual relationships. Additionally, the analysis reveals the potential of social media in fostering these discussions, enabling players to form communities where they can express their desires, emotions, and identities without the constraints imposed by traditional societal norms. While queer identities in otome games have been commercialized, this genre significantly contributes to the empowerment of women and queer players by offering alternative narratives that allow for self-exploration and resistance to societal expectations. The article provides unique insights into the impact of intimate relationships in digital spaces on real-world social norms, promoting broader discussions of gender and sexuality within Chinese digital culture.

Keywords: otome games; fictosexuality; queer narratives

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1. Introduction

The digital age has critically revolutionized the relationships of people with media, thus affecting many aspects of life, including matters of romance and sexuality (Leeds Trinity University, 2024). Interestingly, one of the results is the creation and popularity of love games, for instance, otome games, which attracted a huge audience, mainly female gamers. Otome games are those video games devised initially for women and were narrative-based in form. In them, players took on the role of a female protagonist who threads her way through a series of interactions with males, and player choices can result in romantic pairings, combining gameplay and narrative in an innovative interactive form (Chen, 2023; Jarrett, 2024). These games do not only entertain but serve as actual cultural artifacts that reflect and potentially shape the views of society on gender roles, sexuality, and the concept of romance (Han, 2023).

The rise of otome games has changed societal perceptions of romantic relationships and increased the acceptance of digital intimacy (Yuan, 2022a), playing a key role in broadening the understanding of fictosexuality. Otome games often feature complex plots

that not only involve courtship and love triangles but sometimes also dramatic conflicts, providing players with firsthand experiences of intense emotional interactions. Moreover, the characters in otome games are carefully designed to be relatable, attractive, or emotionally engaging. As players interact with these characters, they develop deep attachments to them, experiencing joys, love, sadness, and betrayal as intensely as they would with real-life counterparts. In this context, the players' emotional attachment to the characters extends from the virtual world into the real world, profoundly impacting them (Yuan, 2022b). The rise of otome games suggests that for some, digital interactions with game characters can provide emotional satisfaction just as relationships with real people do, challenging long-standing, traditional norms about sexuality and relationships.

Queer theory provides an enlightening way to evaluate these phenomena. As McPhail (2004) argues, through the destabilization of identities and disrupting binary oppositions of gender and sexuality, the queer theory allows a more complex investigation of the functioning of otome games and ecosexuality in digital spaces. Therefore, this article will use *Love and Producer* and other popular otome games as examples to discuss, through qualitative research methods, how otome games and fictosexuality disrupt traditional gender norms and challenge identity formation in digital culture, using mainland China as a case study

2. Literature Review

2.1. Otome Games: Evolution and Impact

Otome games, also known as "乙女ゲーム" in Japanese, are a genre of video games based on romantic video stories aimed primarily at women. The term "otome" translates to "maiden" or "young woman" in Japanese, reflecting the games' focus on romance and relationships from a female perspective. The concept of otome games can be traced back to the early 1990s. And the first widely recognized otome game is "Angelique," released in 1994 by Koei for the Super Famicom. It was developed by Ruby Party, an all-women development team division of Koei (Kim, 2009a). The game mainly tells the story of a typical high school girl, Angelique Limoges, who is chosen as a candidate for queen and how she becomes the next queen with the help of nine guardians. Although the game was initially targeted at pre-teen girls, it unexpectedly gained popularity among older teenagers and women in their twenties. Additionally, Keiko Erikawa, who is one of the co-founders of the game manufacturer Koei, mentioned that as a child, she fantasized about a very wealthy prince on a white horse marrying her, which inspired her to create the game (Young, 2020). Following the success of "Angelique," the otome game genre began to grow. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, more developers entered the market, creating games that catered to the romantic fantasies of female players. For example, "Harukanaru Toki no Naka de 3," released in 2004, is the third installment in the Harukanaru Toki no Naka de series. It primarily tells the story of how Kasuga Nozomi, after being taken to a place called "Kyō" by a mysterious boy, acts as the Priestess of the White Dragon to seal the disruptive spirits and seeks a way to return to her original world. According to Kim (2009b), "Harukanaru Toki no Naka de 3" broke down the traditional genre and gender norms of women's games and shoujo manga, crafting a new kind of feminine identity and narrative. It demonstrates that games targeted at women can transcend their roles as mere educational tools aimed at acclimating girls to technology or reinforcing stereotypes. Instead, they can significantly enrich female cultural expressions within the gaming world, contributing to the growth of women's culture and broadening the diversity of the gaming industry.

In recent years, China's otome game industry has experienced significant growth and development, although its history spans only a few decades. According to research by Lin (2019), unauthorized otome games began entering the Chinese market from Japan in the late 1990s to the early 2000s. However, as otome games grew in popularity, Chinese de-

velopers began to realize the potential of localizing Japanese games to better suit the Chinese cultural context and language. Localization involves more than just translating text; it often includes changing character names, settings, and cultural references to more deeply resonate with Chinese players (Phan, 2024). This period marked the beginning of domestic otome game development by Chinese companies, although it was on a smaller scale compared to Japanese imports. According to a report, female gamers accounted for 48% of the total number of gamers in China, nearly half (Jen, 2024). In 2020, the female-oriented game market generated 25% of the total revenue in China's mobile gaming market, attracting numerous companies and merchants due to the substantial profits (Wu, Weijia Cai and Mensah, 2023a). Thus, in the 2010s, driven by market forces, Chinese gaming companies began developing original Chinese otome games and achieved considerable success. The year 2017 is widely considered a milestone for the emergence of otome games in China. According to Cowley (2018), "Love and Producer," launched in December of that year, had generated \$32 million in revenue by January 2018. As of 2022, *Love and Producer* continues to maintain a steady monthly user engagement and player activity, and has even expanded into markets in Japan, South Korea, Europe, and the United States.

2.2. Queer Theory, Gender Studies and Fictosexuality

When some players lose interest in real-life romantic relationships after playing games and prefer to pursue romantic relationships with virtual characters, these feelings are referred to as "fictosexuality." The term "fictosexuality" derives from the root "ficto-" meaning "fiction." It refers to sexual attraction to fictional objects, but these individuals rarely experience similar feelings towards real humans. In simple terms, it denotes sexual, romantic, and marital desires for fictional characters (Karhulahti and Välisalo, 2021a). In fact, scholars have long noted the increasing prominence of romance and eroticism in "fantasy relationships" under media consumption, as seen in Japan and the United States (Karhulahti and Välisalo, 2021b). Hazan and Shaver (1987) pointed out that the idea of falling in love with fictional characters began to take root after the historical and cultural invention of romantic love in 13th-century Europe. According to Shamoon (2012), in Japan's Meiji era (1868-1912), after the influence of these European romantic cultures on the Japanese context, ideal stories combining Western intellectuals and erotic emotions also began to surge in Japanese media. With the emergence of explicit celebrity worship and fan culture, these emotions were further expanded in early 20th-century Japan and the United States. In recent years, some researchers in Western countries have recognized the presence of fictosexual individuals and pointed out the importance of further research on them (Yule, Brotto, and Gorzalka, 2016). Recently, queer researchers have advocated that those who feel sexually attracted to fictional characters should not be regarded as merely having an interest or hobby but should be examined from the perspective of gender studies.

Gender studies originated from women's studies in the 1970s. As women's studies evolved, the focus, concepts, and perspectives of the field changed (Kilden, 2021). Gender studies gradually became an interdisciplinary field encompassing research on class, race, ethnicity, gender, and location. This includes traditional women's studies, men's studies, and studies of masculinity, as well as queer and sexuality studies (Race, ethnicity, gender, and class, 2024). Gender studies responded to the third wave of the feminist movement and became gradually accepted and understood in the 1980s. As the name suggests, gender studies primarily analyze various disciplines using the concept of gender. Historically, most people confused sex (biological) with gender (social). It wasn't until the 1960s, during the second wave of feminism, that Western feminists began to differentiate between the two. In 1968, the renowned American sexologist Robert Stoller challenged Freud's notion that all individuals possess bisexual traits, making the first theoretical distinction between biological sex and social gender (Harrison, 2005). From then on, gender was understood as the roles, behaviors, and attributes differences formed under the constructs of

society, culture, and politics, while sex refers to the biological attributes of humans determined anatomically.

Additionally, according to Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker (2005), queer theory, which emerged in the early 1990s, is a new critical theory based on sex and gender. It pioneered a fresh perspective to explore issues related to sex, gender, and desire. While gender studies generally categorize research into male, female, and homosexual studies, queer theory extends beyond these classifications, broadening the scope to include a wider range of people (Intersections between feminist and queer theory, 2006). As such, the focus of this theory is not merely limited to any specific group, such as lesbians or gay men, but includes all individuals whose sexual behaviors and orientations do not conform to the dominant mainstream societal norms. Queer theory challenges traditional norms and binaries, questioning the ways in which individuals navigate and construct identities within society. Thus, when queer theory is applied to otome games and fictosexuality, it challenges and subverts the existing assumptions and traditions within the heterosexual hegemony.

2.3. Research in China

In this connection, the study of otome games and fictosexuality is marked by the particularities that arise from the cultural background, ancient gender practices, and expectations of the society in China. Various other researches prove that the gender norms which evolved along with the ancient agrarian systems in China had an undisputable historical continuity of at least two thousand years or more, further strengthening heteronormativity and maintaining patriarchal patterns in their every further stage of development, thus irreversibly impacting Chinese society to the present day (Tang, Chua and O, 2012; Qing, 2020). Therefore, the rising popularity of otome games and fictosexuality in China has reflected a more varied and individualized approach to gender and sexuality. Ren, Simon, and Wu (2018) opine that by engaging in otome games and becoming fictosexual, Chinese women find an alternative site to problematize and affirm their identities beyond the binary of gendered roles. This exploration is particularly important in a society where discussions about gender and sexual behavior are often limited by cultural and political factors. Chen (2023b) in her article analyzes the construction of female images in otome games, pointing out that existing female character images remain stereotypical, highly similar, and carry stereotypes of being gentle, fragile, and non-aggressive. Liu (2024) uses detailed data to illustrate how the number of female gamers in China's electronic game market has significantly increased, gaining a substantial market share, and how this growth has crucial implications for challenging established societal gender biases and influencing the shift in social attitudes. Wagner and Liang (2021) start with the "office romance" culture in otome games, analyzing the potential of fictional dating and its neoliberal characteristics in otome games, offering options for the development of RPG-type game content. Wu, Weijia Cai, and Mensah (2023b) explore the correlation between female-oriented RVG consumption and players' offline romantic relationships and the underlying psychological processes. Their research indicates that the popularity of female-oriented RVGs may reduce the marriage rate in China, with the influence of otome games significantly increasing the likelihood of young women choosing to remain single. Similarly, Giard (2024) finds that in Japan, otome games are linked to national panic about declining birth rates. The study also focuses on how, in this context, otome games become collective design strategies for identity construction, fostering friendships among players as a means of resisting social norms and stigma. Overall, although interest in otome games and fictosexuality continues to grow, there remains a large gap in the research of these phenomena within the Chinese context. Most studies are based in Japan or Western countries, thus leaving this significant gap in the unique understanding of how these digital narratives would function within the socio-cultural landscape of China. Hence, this paper

makes an attempt to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of otome games and fictosexuality in China within the theoretical framework of queer studies.

3. Research Method

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Through the lens of queer theory, this paper looks into the framing critical research of how fictosexuality and otome games fracture and reframe traditional gender norms and, in turn, structures of desire. This approach has a strong critique against cultural institutions such as heteronormativity, homonormativity, traditional family values, and monogamy—cultural institutions that many queer theory scholars argue show insistence on examining those sexual performances and sexual identities rendered non-normative by dominant culture; in turn, also emphasizing fluidity, complexity, and the inability to fit into a fixed category (Browne, 2019). According to Wiegman and Wilson (2015), the counter-normativity of queer studies appears almost ubiquitously in current queer critical practices, guiding scholars to question the normativity of sexuality and explore the relationships between norms and transgressions, thereby challenging and dismantling the processes of establishing and accepting norms. Thus, this article will elucidate the following two questions by applying the counter-normativity of queer theory:

RQ1: How do the narratives and interactions promoted by otome games help women gain a sense of autonomy and empowerment?

RQ2: How does the popularity of fictosexuality break the hegemonic position of heterosexual paradigms in China?

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The data primarily comes from two sources: popular otome games and social media discussions. The otome games analyzed include *Love and Producer* and other top-ranked otome games in China, selected for their popularity and cultural impact. Discussions will be captured from Weibo platforms, where players often share their experiences and feelings about these games. Posts and comments related to fictosexuality and otome games will be systematically collected and categorized. And given the sensitivity and ethical concerns of the topic, all social media data has been anonymized to protect the identities of participants. Since the data is public, informed consent is not required, but care still needs to be taken to ensure that the analysis does not harm or misrepresent the people involved.

Thematic analysis of the data followed the six-phase process as outlined by Naeem et al. (2023) familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Initial coding was created from reading the narratives in the game and the social media posts through making notes in relation to recurring patterns or significant statements. The next task involved grouping them into higher-order themes which best captured the essence of the data.

4. Funding and Discussion

4.1. The Transformative Potential of Otome Games for Female Players

Otome games fundamentally subvert traditional gender roles, providing women with an alternative space to explore and affirm their identities and power. In China, the society still divides men and women into traditional roles according to Confucian values, and women are still dominant in completing housework, raising children, taking care of the elderly and other domestic work (Qiu, 2023). Unlike many mainstream video games, where female characters are confined to secondary roles and stereotyped figures, otome games position women as active agents in their stories. This means the female protagonist is no longer just an observer but leads the story by pursuing relationships, deciding how to tackle obstacles, and choosing the paths she wants to take on her journey. For example, in *Love and Producer*, the player's female protagonist must lead her company to success by

hiring staff and producing TV shows. McDonald's (2018a) research shows that the role assignments and romantic choices in otome games position female characters as a positive force within the narrative, empowering them with autonomy and independence. On all narrative paths, she encounters male characters, but she is not passively attached to the male leads; instead, at times, she helps or even saves them, gaining some agency. This narrative style is crucial because it allows players to navigate complex social dynamics, thereby granting the female protagonist initiative rather than making her passively accept help from male characters. By portraying women as the primary agents of identification and action, rather than merely objects of desire, this approach normalizes the concept of women as active and proactive participants in the narrative (McDonald, 2018b; Wang and Notary, 2023).

Furthermore, the advancement of internet technology has granted otome game players a new power to break away from traditional heterosexual choices. When players are dissatisfied with relationships or plot elements within the games, they can find new platforms to express their emotions, allowing them to create stories and characters that fully align with their needs and fantasies (Stein, 2015). For example, in March 2019, the game company behind *Love and Producer* introduced a new male lead, Ling Xiao, without prior announcement, which triggered a strong reaction from players on Weibo. On this platform, players expressed their emotions and attitudes through comments and posts. To make the data more comprehensive, the author randomly sampled 20 comments, covering both high and low-heat comments, and coded three themes (Figure 1). In the sampled data, 46% (n=92) explicitly expressed misunderstanding and lack of support for the newly introduced male lead. When players invest time, emotions, and even money in developing relationships with existing characters, the introduction of a new male lead disrupts the original game narrative and the established dynamics expected by the players, leading to subjective disappointment and anger. 49.5% (n=99) of the comments expressed love and support for the new male lead, but these comments received far fewer likes than those advocating resistance. Due to the players' resistance, the game company eventually canceled the new male lead's inclusion in the main storyline, relegating him to a "special encounter" side story instead.

Besides the mainstream reactions, it is noteworthy that 4.5% (n=9) of the comments expressed subtle resistance and an inability to accept emotions that deviate from conventional moral sentiments. Among this minority, some players felt uncomfortable with the introduction of the new male lead, Ling Xiao, primarily because of his familial relationship with the original male lead, Bai Qi. For these players, a romantic relationship between brothers conflicted with their moral and ethical beliefs, leading them to reject this plotline.

I don't mind him having his own storyline, and it would be fine if he weren't Bai Qi's brother. Ling Xiao's voice and looks are still up to standard, but brothers turning against each other over a woman is just too disgusting.

I refuse to have any romantic involvement with him in the main storyline unless the main story is just a straightforward, melodramatic otome tale, like a family drama where brothers turn against each other over a woman.

Another group of players expressed a sense of emotional betrayal, stemming from plot developments where the original male lead lost his memory of the female protagonist. Introducing Ling Xiao at this critical moment was seen as disrupting the long-established emotional bonds and narrative.

There is no emotional foundation with him, and he has previously hurt Bai Qi and Li Zeyan. His stance is still unclear, and the four main characters have lost their memories. I refuse to have any romantic involvement with him in the main storyline.

As highlighted in research by Koike, Loughnan, and Stanton (2022), virtual relationships in otome games often carry emotional weight comparable to real-life relationships.

Thus, any narrative deviations or the introduction of new characters can provoke strong emotional reactions from players who have invested time and emotional energy in these virtual relationships. Although otome games offer women a new platform to explore their identities and empower female autonomy, challenging heteronormative standards, the resistance to the new male lead observed in these comments also reflects broader societal norms and moral frameworks. These norms and frameworks shape individuals' views and interpretations of relationships, and to some extent, continue to bind women within the framework of heteronormative standards, even in the context of a fictional story.

4.2. Resistance and Breakthrough of Fictosexuality

Taking into account Judith Butler's concept of performativity, which holds that gender and sexual orientation are not innate traits, but are the result of being shaped by repeated actions and behaviors (Mambrol, 2023), this provides a deeper perspective on the study and observation of fictosexuality and its presentation in otome games. Fictosexuality is a phenomenon where individuals experience romantic or sexual attraction to fictional characters rather than real people, illustrating the performative nature of desire and relationships in virtual spaces. In otome games, players engage in romantic and desire-based performances by choosing dialogue options, making decisions, and forming emotional attachments to virtual characters. This performative engagement constructs narratives of intimacy and relationships that exist outside of traditional heterosexual norms, thus challenging the dominance of heterosexual narratives. As otome game players continually interact with male protagonists in romantic stories, their traditional understanding of gender desires and relationships is being challenged. As Judith Butler's research has shown, the hegemony of heterosexual standards requires power, which comes from people's continuous repetition, such as behaviors in daily life like walking and talking (Introduction to Judith Butler, Module on Performativity, 2002). For example, when Steam attempted to launch a live-action version of otome games, it met with substantial opposition, illustrated by the Weibo hashtag #Who Plays Real People In Otome Games. After randomly sampling 162 posts under this topic, four categories were identified (Figure 1).

Name of code	Description	Example from the data
Introductory class posts	Introduction to the plot and characters of the live-action otome game	"The live-action romance simulation game for women, "Oh no! What if they love me too much?" is now available on Steam, originally priced at 18 RMB, with a launch discount of 14.4 RMB."
Show class posts	showcasing the male characters from their favorite otome games	Most show the pictures of the male protagonist directly
Laugh at post and confusion	Expressing confusion and mockery towards the game, clearly stating that the male leads in otome games should only be of the 2D type	"Does anyone know why players play otome games? "Why does 2D always have to be related to 3D?"
Requirements class posts	Not opposed to live-action otome games, expressing the need for improvements	"Suddenly thought that AI real people might be a new track, one that doesn't exist in the real world with very hand some looks and is different from both 3D and 2D."

Figure 1. Who Plays Real People In Otome Game.

Posts explicitly opposing the live-action version accounted for 95% (n=154), with only 3.8% (n=6) of female players willing to accept real-life versions of the games. These posts indicate that the trend of fictosexuality is particularly evident among the otome game community. These statuses reveal that the rise of fictosexuality is particularly evident among otome game enthusiasts. As Judith Butler's research suggests, subversive acts within social norms are disrupted and redefined over time. The freedom to interact with male characters has led these players to prefer romantic engagements with virtual characters over real-life intimate relationships, making virtual characters the object of their emotional and romantic desires.

This is my husband, just look at the difference between the two (attached is a photo of a male character from an otome game). Does the 2D world really need to be linked to the 3D world? I turned to 2D characters to escape from some real-life guys, and now this happens. The 2D male protagonists are truly amazing, and many real-life guys just can't compare.

Choosing to establish romantic and sexual relationships with virtual male characters is fundamentally different from the dominant heterosexual romantic narratives prevalent in mainstream media and societal expectations. Traditionally, romantic relationships are depicted through a lens that views heterosexuality as the norm, where men and women form relationships that align with predefined gender roles and expectations. These narratives are often reinforced by cultural, religious, and social institutions, making it difficult for alternative expressions of love and desire to gain recognition and acceptance. In contrast, this choice to establish romantic and sexual relationships with virtual male characters breaks the traditional narratives of heterosexual romance prevalent in mainstream media and society, offering a new space for performative resistance against heteronormative standards.

4.3. The Commercialization of a Queer Identity

Otome games are largely shaped by market demands rather than genuine representation. Game developers might add queer characters and themes to attract a wider audience, but these additions are often superficial and profit-driven, not truly committed to diversity. Dawson (2023) argues that this turns queer identities into marketable assets, stripping them of complexity and authenticity. Like most other media, otome games are created with commercial interests in mind, often influencing story choices and character portrayals based on what will sell. Although this genre is widely praised for offering engaging and romantic stories primarily aimed at female players, otome games are essentially products designed for consumption. Developers occasionally incorporate queer characters or themes into their narratives to respond to market changes. The motivation behind these inclusions is not always based on a genuine commitment to diversity or a sincere desire to explore the complexities of queer identities. Instead, the commercial nature of otome games often dictates that these decisions are made to broaden appeal and potentially increase revenue. This means that queer characters and themes can be commodified tools to attract a wider audience rather than authentic representations of diverse life experiences (Caldwell, 2021; Emtrain, 2024). Profit-driven inclusivity in otome games can lead to tokenism, where marginalized identities are superficially included to create an illusion of diversity without challenging heteronormative norms or addressing systemic inequalities (Radney, 2023). This approach often fails to resonate with queer players seeking authentic representation and may alienate them by reinforcing stereotypes or offering shallow portrayals that don't reflect their realities. The commodification of queer identities in otome games raises ethical concerns about exploiting marginalized experiences for economic gain. Reducing queer characters to marketable assets can perpetuate harmful narratives and contribute to the silencing and stigmatization of queer voices in games and media (Worthen, 2023). Commercial otome games, like other media, can reinforce harmful stereotypes and either exaggerate struggles or trivialize triumphs of real people. While commercial otome games provide opportunities to express queer identities, they also require critical reflection on how these identities are shaped and their impact on players. Balancing commercial viability with ethical responsibility is crucial for fostering better development for all involved.

5. Conclusion

In summary, otome games challenge traditional gender roles by granting women the right to explore their identities and assert their power. In mainstream video games, female

characters are often secondary, whereas otome games position women as protagonists, allowing them to drive the story, pursue relationships, and make decisions. This approach enables players to navigate complex social dynamics and maintain their identities. Furthermore, technological advancements allow players to transcend traditional heterosexual norms, as evidenced by the “Love and Producer” incident, where player resistance led to a male character being demoted to a supporting role, showcasing the autonomy available to female players. Judith Butler's performative theory offers deep insights into the queer relationships in otome games, emphasizing that desire and relationships are shaped through performance. By forming romantic connections with virtual characters, players can explore desires constrained in real life and even resist mainstream heterosexual expectations. The emergence of fictosexuality fulfills players' emotional and sexual needs, challenging the notion that relationships are the sole valid expression of desire. However, while these games create space for non-normative relationships, they are often shaped by market demands rather than a genuine commitment to diversity. The inclusion of queer characters and themes is frequently superficial and profit-driven, reducing queer identities to sellable assets rather than authentically representing diverse sexual experiences. This commodification raises ethical concerns about exploiting marginalized identities for economic gain, as it may reinforce harmful stereotypes and fail to meaningfully challenge the structures of heterosexual norms.

The present study also has some limitations. This paper concentrates on player feedback on social media in China, with a particular focus on the microblogging platform. Although microblogs are extensively utilized in China, they may not fully encompass the perspectives of all demographic groups within the country. The sample was primarily comprised of active players who were inclined to share their gaming experiences. Consequently, players who are less vocal, such as those who are more private or play these games on an occasional basis, may have been inadvertently overlooked. Consequently, future research could benefit from additional analyses targeting underrepresented groups through surveys or interviews. It is essential to ensure that the sample is as diverse as possible across age groups, regions and economic status. This helps to mitigate any potential bias towards a topic by users active on the internet, providing a more comprehensive and representative analysis of the topic.

This article mainly focuses on the responses of Chinese online communities to otome games and fictosexuality, exploring how female players gain a sense of empowerment and autonomy while challenging traditional heterosexual expectations within specific socio-cultural contexts. To deepen the understanding of otome games and fictosexuality, as well as their broader discussions about gender and sexuality in digital spaces, future research could consider studying otome games across cultural contexts, investigating people's views and experiences with otome games and virtual sexual behavior in different cultural settings. For example, in the context of globalization, a comparison could be made between the narrative techniques and character archetypes popular in otome games developed by Western and East Asian developers, noting how these elements resonate with local audiences. Additionally, examining how these games depict romance and interpersonal relationships can reflect cultural values and influence players' perceptions of their own romantic lives. By studying these differences, a deeper understanding of how various societies comprehend and navigate gender, sexual behavior, and digital virtual relationships can be achieved.

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