An Analysis of the Identity Construction of Male Characters in Otome Game Based on Corpus from the Perspective of Redoing Gender—Taking *Light and Night* as an Example

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Abstract—**In an era where gender transcends traditional settings, the popularity of Otome Games has brought a new round of analysis and discussion to gender issues. This article will construct a corpus of exclusive dating event texts between five male characters and players, and use the corpus analysis tool ROST Content Mining 6.0 to observe the high-frequency words and semantic networks in the corpus of exclusive dates between male characters and female players in "Light and Night" and summarize their semantic characteristics. Research has found that the language characteristics of five male characters from the perspective of "redoing gender" meet the real needs and positive emotional experiences of female players for ideal partners in different aspects, and help players temporarily relieve their troubles and pressures in life.**

Keywords—**Otome game, corpus, redoing gender, *light and night***

I. INTRODUCTION

Otome games, is one of the fields in "female-oriented games," with "Otome" being a Japanese term meaning "maiden", are a genre of romantic simulation games that primarily target female audience. The objective in these games typically involves interacting with male characters, often leading to romantic relationships [1]. These interactions are characterized by a significant amount of emotional and verbal engagement between the player and the male characters. In the early 90s, some game companies in Japan have started producing games targeting female audiences, further expanding their market scope, breaking the stereotype that "games are for men only" and earning the title of "the originator of female-oriented games." In December 2017, Papergames launched "*EVOL×LOVE*," the first Otome game in China, which generated an Otome game craze in China. Since then, the development of games aimed at women has been on the rise, significantly impacting the gaming market. In June 2021, Tencent released "*Light and Night*," which gathered widespread attention from female players due to its high-quality voice acting, excellent visuals, and realistic event settings. But the organic combination of these three aspects mainly relies on the game text, so that the characters image could be achieved better.

In recent years, with the continuous rise of women's status, there has been a surge in academic research on gender studies and discourse analysis. However, most of the researches focus on describing the phenomenon. Such as researchers, through the methods of textual analysis and in-depth interviews, have found that female players regard the idealized romantic experiences developed with male virtual characters in games as a substitute for real-life romance [2]. And there is a relative lack of in-depth observations of how and why gendered interaction dynamics between players and game characters is formed only taking language as the medium. Research on gender identity construction in Otome games is even rarer. This paper aims to explore the construction of gender identities in Otome games from the perspective of semantic characteristics, which can help in observing emerging gender phenomena in contemporary Chinese society. It also provides a reflection on the current state and psychological needs of modern female players, assisting gender researchers in addressing contemporary gender issues and potentially alleviating the life pressures faced by women.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

A. Brief Introduction of Otome Games

Otome games represent a relatively new subject for scholars across various disciplines. Currently, domestic scholars' research on Otome games mainly focuses on areas such as identity, female image and intimate relationships, including fields like literature, linguistics, psychology, economics, and journalism and mass communication. Most of these studies began in 2018, the year when the first Otome game in China, "*EVOL×LOVE*" was released. In the early stages of research, Wen Caiyun and Zhou Xuanren used "*EVOL×LOVE*" as a case study to analyze the psychological mechanisms at play within Otome games, suggesting that these games reflect expectations for ideal romantic partner,permeation and dissemination of game logic into real life, achieving an effective masking of reality through the Proteus Effect [3]. Han Yunrong and Wang Xingyu further traced the origins, types, and patterns of Otome games, reflecting on the psychological journey of female players, thereby providing foundational information for understanding the psychological mechanisms of Otome games [1]. Starting from 2020, research on Otome games entered a dynamic stage, with a greater emphasis on the emotional intentions, aesthetic perspectives, and consumption identity and behaviors specific to female players.

B. Brief Introduction of Redoing Gender

In Western history, feminism has provided an ideology for questioning, resisting, and subverting established gender arrangements. Among these, one of the most significant contributions of second-wave feminism was conceptually

distinguishing between "biological gender" and "social gender," which means differentiating between masculinity and femininity associated with the gender category and their corresponding sociocultural meanings [4]. In 1987, Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman published an article titled "Doing Gender" in the journal "Gender & Society." As one of the most important documents in contemporary gender studies, the article argues that gender is not "what we are" but "what we do." In this article, biological gender refers to the classification of individuals as female or male based on socially recognized biological criteria, which can be external genitalia or chromosomes, although the external form of genitalia may not always align with chromosomal type. Social gender, on the other hand, is the activity of managing situational behaviors according to normative ideas that correspond to attitudes and activities expected of a person's biological sex category [5]. The groundbreaking significance of "Doing Gender" lies in its emphasis on the importance of social interaction, presenting gender as a product of ongoing social interaction, thus highlighting the limitations of focusing solely on socialization and structural approaches in gender studies. The "doing gender" perspective emphasizes the interactive and situational nature of gender, with gender becoming a product of the ongoing process of social interaction. The key mechanism by which gender is "done" lies in the "accountability" of gender membership. According to Garfinkel's definition, "accountable" means "observable and reportable," referring to aspects of social action that can be described, reported, seen, and talked about by participants or observers, and therefore can be understood [6]. The "doing gender" theory not only explains how gender order is maintained in context but also accounts for changes in gender traits at the micro-interactional level. Building upon the "doing gender" theory, West and Zimmerman proposed "redoing gender," which involves altering or expanding the norms associated with gender during interactions, redefining attributes linked to masculinity and femininity, and changing the role expectations imposed on men and women, thereby challenging essentialist notions of gender traits and power structures [7].

There is already a paradigm of male and female image behavior in contemporary society. The study of male traits in China, which started in the 1990s, was deeply influenced by Western theories, focusing more on male traits expressed as "historical," "textual," or "created," that is, macro level male traits expressed as gender expectations and norms. The "dynamic" male traits in real society are less reflected [8]. The male characters in Otome game are the "re-created men" who possess male physiological characteristics and the traits expected by women, such as respect for women, humor, and a sense of propriety. They have castrated some of the male traits in real society, such as low empathy and neglect of details. The following text will analyze the identity characteristics of characters based on their respective semantic network diagrams, high-frequency word lists, and interaction details with female players.

Overall, the research by Chinese scholars on Chinese Otome games has predominantly focused on the female side. While it is understandable and reflects societal progress in gender thinking and efforts to dismantle gender stereotypes, the majority of the existing studies adopt micro-level and meso-level perspectives to analyze Otome games and female players, overlooking the role of the male characters constructed within these games. Particularly, the discourse features and identity characteristics of the male characters, who are generally well-received by female players, have not been fully explored. Analyzing the emotional and spiritual needs of female players from the perspective of male characters could better inform an objective description of the contemporary female image. It may also shed light on the "female dilemmas" and "glass ceilings" encountered by female players in their daily work and studies, reflecting long-standing social and livelihood issues. Based on this, this paper takes "*Light and Night*" as a case study and uses corpus analysis to investigate the construction of male identities within the game and the reasons behind their formation, exploring the new dynamics of contemporary gender relations.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Research Questions

Based on the research object and with the aid of corpus-based research, seeks to address the following two questions:

RQ1: What are the primary identity features of male characters in Otome games?

RQ2: What are the reasons behind such features of male characters in Otome games?

B. Data Collection

In "*Light and Night,*" there are a variety of interactive segments and activities, with well-developed and detailed settings. For this study, the dating sections from the "Heartfelt Encounters", which is a single date event just between the players and characters, spanning from June 2021 to June 2024, were selected as the corpus. The size of the corpus is appropriate, and the selection avoids the influence of other characters, ensuring a clean data. To analyze the speech characteristics of the five male characters in "*Light and Night,*" the exclusive dating audio interactions between the male characters and the player were transcribed into text using Tongyi Tingwu. Separate corpora were established for each character, and the data were cleaned to remove invalid, repetitive, and error characters.

C. Analysis Procedure

The texts were then processed with Corpus Word Parser into ANSI format .txt files compatible with ROST Content Mining 6.0. Proper nouns and system-unrecognized vocabulary were input into a custom word segmentation list. After conducting a word frequency analysis, the top 100 high-frequency words for each male lead were identified, with the top 10 listed in Table 1. Semantic Net analysis was then performed to generate for each character, as shown in Figures of five characters. Based on this, the semantic features were summarized, and the identity characteristics of each character were concluded. Then based on analysis results and social realities, the main reasons for the formation of such character traits in the game were discussed. Below is a partial list of high-frequency words for the five male characters:

Table 1. Top 10 high frequency topic words list of the male characters' dating section
Annotation:SN=Serial Number,HFW=High Frequency Words,WF=Word Frequency

	Xiao Yi /Osborn		Lu Chen /Evan		Qi Sili /Sariel		Zha Lisu /Charlie		Xia Mingxing /Jesse	
SN	HFW	WF	HFW	WF	HFW	WF	HFW	WF	HFW	WF
1	Time	67	Maybe	58	Design	42	Fiancée	539	Miss	116
2	Remember	52	Rest	42	Human	28	Perfect	69	Sister	80
3	Mission	35	Worry	38	Plan	24	Satisfy	46	Worry	39
4	Xiao Xiao Wu	28	Sorry	31	Either is fine	20	Present	32	Magic	35
5	Nervous	27	Rabbit	28	God's will	16	Fiancé	32	Happy	32
6	Game	25	Little girl	24	Fox	16	Doctor	30	Wish	30
7	Contest	24	Clan	23	Clumsy	14	Wedding	20	Game	25
8	Motor race	22	Experience	23	Dull	13	Romantic	18	Willing	24
9	Boss	21	Understand	21	Childish	13	Beautiful	17	Performance	24
10	Ease	21	Try	19	Ben Niao	12	Status	16	Tang Yuan	22

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Xiao Yi: The Racer Living in the Present

Xiao Yi's profession is a racer, but his real identity is a "bounty hunter" who possesses special abilities similar to female players in the game. Female players have helped Xiao Yi in their childhood, and they only met each other when they accidentally stumbled upon Xiao Yi carrying out a mission.

Xiao Yi's Semantic Net mainly focuses on three aspects: First, character occupation. Words such as' speed ',' helmet ',' racing car ', etc; Secondly, a positive attitude. Words such as "it's okay", "give it a try", "happy", "simple", etc; Thirdly, specific locations. Words such as "at sea" and "returning home". Overall, Xiao Yi's personal style tends to be relaxed and leisurely, with many inquiries and suggestions in the Semantic Net. Moreover, the game text is mostly related to Xiao Yi's profession and hobbies, such as "racer" and "bounty hunter", which further highlights the character's cheerful personality and swift and decisive style of action. In the public perception of the real world, professions such as racers are usually exclusive or mostly male dominated fields, and are associated with terms such as speed and competition, while being paired with a warm and cheerful atmosphere.Xiao Yi is portrayed as a man has the typical traits of a racer, such as a love for adventure and an open-minded attitude, but it can also give female players a sense of security and trust. Gender culture has always emphasized the value of honor and achievement in male traits, while creating stereotypes that "women cannot/are difficult to achieve" considerable honors and achievements, marginalizing women's ranking in male success factors. Xiao Yi will not hesitate to praise players' achievements and work results in the game, respect and value the emotional changes of female players, and provide corresponding support. This setting breaks the stereotype that men cannot have both honor and care for women, and expands the scope of traditional male traits. Xiao Yi's behavior of respecting the work achievements of female players is not only in line with existing gender expectations, but also accommodates new male traits. From the above analysis, it can be seen that "respect" can also serve as a starting point for female players to evaluate male traits.

B. Lu Chen: The Meticulous CEO

Lu Chen's occupation is the CEO of the Wan Zhen Corporation. His true identity is a "blood clan" member, distinct from humans. He experienced family upheaval and a brutal succession contest within his clan during his childhood. After studying abroad in the UK, he returned to China at the age of twenty-six to take up the position of CEO at Wan Zhen Corporation. His relationship with the female player is that of a superior-subordinate, and due to the stance of his family, he is both adversary and ally to the player.

Lu Chen's semantic network diagram is primarily concentrated in two aspects: first, a cautious attitude, indicated by terms such as "worry" and "perhaps"; second, his family background, represented by words like "clan" and "memory." The red-colored words in the diagram are the exclusive terms Lu Chen uses to address the female player. Overall, Lu Chen's personal style is mature, with a bunch of concessive words in his Semantic Net, allowing for alternative choices for both the player and the character. The appearance of words related to his family background suggests a close connection between his personality and his upbringing, showing a character that is both courteous and aloof. In the public perception of real society, a CEO is often synonymous with decisiveness, dominance, and unreasonableness. Connell proposed "hegemonic masculinity" from a constructivist perspective, defining it as "the concrete manifestation of patriarchy that ensures men's dominant position and women's subordinate status" and "the pattern of practice that allows men to continue to dominate women[9]." However, the Lu Chen portrayed in the game creates a contrast: he is impeccable in both his professional capabilities and interpersonal skills, humble and polite despite his high position, adept at navigating the balance between personal emotions and family interests, and capable of handling multiple issues with ease. When interacting with the female player, he plans dates meticulously and pays attention to the player's emotions and requests. Typically, those in higher positions wield power, and those in lower positions must comply with the commands of their superiors. Under the influence of gender stereotypes, men are often seen in positions of power while women are frequently in subordinate roles, creating the impression that "women are habitually passive." However, Lu Chen's speech reveals a caring disposition that contrasts with the traditional authoritative figure. He integrates the care for women into his masculine traits and acknowledges its value. Yet, the traditional male consciousness is not entirely displaced, especially when a male individual perceives criticism (whether actual or perceived) from the interaction partner for not fulfilling these responsibilities. In such cases, the "care for women" may become ineffective, causing anxiety over masculine traits, and the "redoing gender" process is

impeded. The male character may then attempt to revert to traditional behaviors and dispositions to regain "legitimacy" in terms of gender.

C. Qi Sili: The Impeccable Designer

Qi Sili's occupation is the Chief Design Director in Wan Zhen Corporation. He has a mentor-student relationship with the female player. His true identity is that of a "Eldar" member, distinct from humans, and he carries the heavy responsibility of his clan's survival. However, he is fully devoted to fashion design and has no intention of returning to combat.

Qi Sili's semantic network diagram is primarily focused on two aspects: first, the character's background, indicated by terms such as "ability," "fox," and "talent," where "fox" refers to Qi Sili's true identity; second, the vocabulary related to the female players, such as "human" and "Ben Niao," which is an intimate nickname which Qi Sili gives to female players. Overall, Qi Sili's personal style is characterized by a preference for actions over words, and his Semantic Net contains many affirmative words, such as "believe" and "worthwhile," which evoke positive emotions in the female player, contrasting with the use of nickname and highlighting his inability to naturally express genuine praise. During the initial encounter with the female player, Qi Sili pointed out numerous flaws in her design, leaving a slightly negative "sharp-tongued" impression on many players. However, as the game progresses, Qi Sili is portrayed taking initiative in gardening, maintaining household cleanliness, and cooking. These activities embody an idealized male trait of "responsibility logic," which differs from the traditional notion of a "breadwinner." Qi Sili's "redoing gender" emphasizes shared economic and domestic responsibilities with women, focusing on and breaking down the hidden labor in everyday life that is often gendered. This highlights the process of gender performance and the construction of gender meanings, making players more aware of gender inequality in daily life and encouraging resistance against traditional gender roles and challenging conventional gender boundaries.

D. Zha Lisu: The Confident Dandy

Zha Lisu is the son of the chairman of the pharmaceutical company NOVATEN. His true identity is a half-human, half-Eldar hybrid. He does not share his father's ambitions and has frequently investigated the products of his father's company. He meets the female player due to an arranged marriage, and they are currently in a relationship as fiancée and fiancé.

Zha Lisu's Semantic Net is primarily focused on two aspects: first, self-evaluation, indicated by terms such as "perfect," "adorable," and "freedom"; second, preparations made for the player, such as "surprise," "romance," and "wedding." The red-colored terms "fiancée" and "fiancé" refer to the female player and Zha Lisu, respectively. Overall, Zha Lisu's personal style is opulent and extravagant, with a bunch of positive adjectives, indicating that he demands perfection in everything he does without financial constraints, emphasizing his "diamond bachelor" persona. In the public perception of real society, "rich second-generation" individuals are often stereotyped as spoiled and unaccomplished. However, while the game text

portrays Zha Lisu with the characteristic of spending lavishly, he also strives for perfection in both his abilities and appearance. He has had a tumultuous life filled with suffering and has navigated through various power struggles. Throughout his interactions with the player, he consistently showcases his personal charm, creating surprises and presenting his best self, demonstrating a redefined masculine trait that values romance.

E. Xia Mingxing: The Cheerful and Outgoing Musical Actor

Xia Mingxing's occupation is a musical actor, and his true identity is that of a Taoist. Later, he joins the Lianshan Association to uncover the truth behind his father's death. He and the player were childhood friends, and after a family upheaval, Xia moved abroad. They unexpectedly reunite when Xia returns to the country for a performance, reigniting their childhood friendship.

Xia Mingxing's Semantic Net is primarily focused on two aspects: first, his profession, indicated by terms such as "magic," "performance," which refer to his dual identities as a "Taoist" and a "musical actor"; second, his actions, such as "protect," "promise," and "guarantee." The term "sister" is Xia Mingxing's exclusive way of addressing the female player, and "tangyuan" (glutinous rice ball) is the player's exclusive nickname for Xia Mingxing. Overall, Xia Mingxing's personal style is lively and cheerful, with his Semantic Net containing many inquisitive and affirmative words, highlighting his optimistic and positive personality. The game text portrays Xia Mingxing as the player's childhood friend, who returns to the country to join the Lianshan Association" to investigate the truth about his father's death. Despite often engaging in playful banter with the player and being younger, Xia exhibits a calm and emotionally mature demeanor, valuing their bond. Xia Mingxing displays a set of masculine traits that differ from the typical "younger brother" role in real society, where he assumes a more senior and protective role.

It is undeniable that in modern society, there still exists a preference for males over females. The "younger brother" is a special identity, and in families with such preferences, elder sisters are often expected, either implicitly or explicitly, to provide support to their younger brothers. In reality, however, the "younger brother" often holds the upper hand. In the game, Xia Mingxing relinquishes control to the player and seeks advice and assistance from her in various aspects of life and work, creating a new dynamic where the younger character cares for the elder female, breaking the traditional paradigm of age-based caregiving.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the identity and discourse characteristics of the male characters, although each character has a distinct personality, they share common traits: First, they acknowledge and respect women as independent individuals, not dependent on anyone else for their existence. The characters offer encouragement and emotional support when the player engages in design work. Second, they are attentive to and responsive to the emotional fluctuations of the female player. The characters show concern for the player's setbacks and frustrations in real life, enhancing the

player's sense of participation and realism, and they possess a certain degree of feminine thinking, understanding what the player desires and accurately capturing the player's thought patterns in romantic relationships. Finally, the characters are often portrayed as having outstanding professional capabilities and stable inner cores, which to some extent satisfy the players' psychological need for admiration and provide them with a sense of security.

From the shared traits of these Otome game male characters, it can be inferred that such qualities are more appealing to women compared to other masculine traits which is an important concept in gender studies used to "explain, describe, and research the natural and social attributes, life experiences, behavioral patterns, issues faced by men, relationships between men and women, and the relationship between men and the patriarchal system[10]. The process of "redoing gender" is, to a certain extent, more direct and straightforward. Through the players' construction and role-playing of their virtual characters, they can intuitively experience the process of gender being created through repeated performances. By engaging in virtual intimate relationships, the deep impact of cultural traditions on players' gender perceptions can be examined, and this also indirectly reflects the true reasons behind the formation of such identity traits in Otome game male characters.

First, the emphasis on the spiritual needs of female players. The majority of female players who enjoy Otome games come from younger demographics, and they face pressures from family, studies, or work in real life. The idealized gaming environment and the sincere emotional support provided by the characters in Otome games give players a sense of being "noticed" and "affirmed." Compared to the "weakening" and "marginalization" that may occur in real-life interactions with peers or the opposite sex, Otome games empower the players by giving them decision-making authority, and their emotional relief and spiritual needs are well addressed within the game.

Second, the contrast between common sense and character design. The analysis of Otome game characters in the fourth section often reveals a discrepancy between the character traits and those found in real-life men. This contrast and the elements that do not align with reality are the idealized masculine traits that women aspire to. Such contrasting designs attract players to engage in romantic relationships with these characters, breaking the conventional stereotypes of masculinity and improving the standards for potential partners in real-life romantic relationships for female players.

Third, the diversification of female aesthetics. The aesthetic standards in Chinese Otome games are often influenced by Japanese Otome games and Chinese web literature, featuring male characters with handsome faces, slender bodies, and well-proportioned, tall figures. This stands in opposition to the traditionally popular masculine aesthetic standards. The aesthetic standards under the female gaze are now emerging to rival the male perspective, broadening the scope of female aesthetics and making significant progress toward gender equality in the realm of aesthetics.

Online games are an extension of real society, and "doing gender," as part of real life, has been unconsciously transplanted by players into the online gaming world, largely preserving the original performance rules and norms of real society. However, due to the unique virtual nature and open environment of the internet, there have been some breakthroughs in traditional gender concepts and gender identity. Perhaps we can hope that as the internet becomes more pervasive, the breakthroughs and acceptance of traditional gender performances in the online world will gradually change people's gender perceptions and have a new impact on the rigid traditional gender categories in real life.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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