

GROWING THE OTOME GAME MARKET: FAN LABOR AND OTOME GAME COMMUNITIES ONLINE

Sarah Christina Ganzon
Concordia University
Montreal, Canada

Abstract: *Otome games are a niche category of Japanese games marketed toward women. Outside its country of origin and the infrastructure of the anime media mix, its predominantly female player communities traditionally have defined these games as those that feature romance or dating simulation. In this paper, I look into how fan bloggers talk about their own work in marketing and distributing otome games beyond Japan. In the case of otome game fan blogging, the ability to shape discussions surrounding otome games also relies upon maintaining the image of players as good consumers. Although this work focuses on the practice of fan blogging, it is part of an ongoing study on otome games in English and otome game players outside Japan.*

Keywords: *otome games, postfeminism, women and games, fan blogging, Japanese games.*



INTRODUCTION

Otome games are a niche category of games typically featuring topics related to romance and dating simulations that originated in Japan and are marketed specifically to women. Given its niche status and the very minimal commercial distribution of otome game titles, especially due to the lack of the media infrastructure that otome games have in their country of origin via the anime media mix (Steinberg, 2012), the distribution of otome games beyond Japan relies on its small but dedicated networked, predominantly female fanbase—calling themselves the Otome Armada—to promote existing localized titles via blogs, forums, and social networking sites.

Otome games have an interesting position in Japan's anime media mix as a category of games marketed specifically to women. Hyeshin Kim (2009) specified otome games as a categorical distinction more than a genre definition. Genres in otome games can vary from role-playing games to visual novels, with the latter being the most common, especially among titles made available to English language players. Although otome game genres do vary, they have a few features that make them similar to one another. Kim defined the features common to otome games: easy game controls, a connection to other media (particularly *shoujo*, or girls' manga), and systems that allow players to interact, flirt with, or date male characters in these games. This definition has its roots in the Japanese game industry and media mix industry whose history that remains unexplored, and players, such as my respondents, may have their own definitions of otome games.¹

Apart from Kim's (2009) piece on early otome games, other literature mostly presents analyses of individual games (Hasegawa, 2013; Lamerichs, 2014; Richards, 2015). Marc Steinberg and Edmond Ernest Dit Alban (2018) described *otaku* pedestrian practices in Japan. Leticia Andlauer (2018) described otome game culture as romantic fantasy in her examination of *Uta no Prince Sama* (Broccoli, 2010) and its young fans. Outside these, the literature on otome games is very scant and, in this particular study, I hope to address some of this gap in the literature.

Elsewhere (Ganzon, 2018a, 2018b), I described how systems in a number of otome game titles in the visual novel category hinge on the player's performance of emotional labor, mostly demonstrated through selecting empathetic responses toward the male character being romanced. Arlie Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as that act of managing feelings and certain expressions, pointing out how differences in social situation, gender, or race can vary the degrees in which individuals are socialized into performing emotional labor. While Hochschild specifically underscored that her definition excludes those outside a work context, others have expanded this to include invisible labor and emotion work that women are expected to do perform outside workspaces (Chess, 2017; Hartley, 2018). The performance of emotional labor in games is of course nothing new. Shira Chess (2017), in her study of time-management games, pointed out how games designed for women often highlight expectations for women to perform emotional labor. Otome games are no exception to this, and romance in a number of these games becomes the reason for the performance of emotional labor, especially given that "winning" or getting the best endings for these games entails demonstrating empathy for romanceable characters often via selecting correct dialogue options.

Although otome games enjoy a long-term niche status in Japan, it took a while for the category to migrate to North America and other anglophone regions. Many otome game players trace the history of otome games in English to *Yo-Jin-Bo* (Hirameki International, 2006), localized to the English title *The Bodyguards* that same year for the PC by Hirameki International. It is not known how much this particular game sold, but it took years for another

attempt at localizing the category. Aksys' localization of *Hakuoki: Demon of the Fleeting Blossom* (Aksys Games, 2012) for the Playstation Portable in 2012 is noted to be one of the first bestselling English titles that led to the localization of more otome game titles in English. In addition to *Hakuoki*, Aksys Games also released a number of titles in the following years, such as *Sweet Fuse: At Your Side* (2013), *Code: Realize—The Guardian of Rebirth* (2015), *Norn9* (2015), *Collar x Malice* (2017), *Bad Apple Wars* (2017), *Period Cube* (2017), *7scarlet* (2018), *Psychedelica of the Black Butterfly* (2018), and *Psychedelica of the Ashen Hawk* (2018). Companies such as Voltage and NTT Solmare also started to localize titles for mobile devices around the same time in 2011. Recently, other publishers, such as MangaGamer, 3DP, and Red Entertainment, localized titles for the PC. Idea Factory, Otomate's parent company, released *Amnesia: Memories* (2015) for the PS Vita and the Steam, as well as their own localized version of a two-part edition of *Hakuoki*. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of Steam has allowed global releases from established to independent companies. More recently, otome games have received more attention because of the mobile game, *Mystic Messenger* (2016) by the all-female South Korean developer Cheritz.

In anime media mix scholarship, the idea of fans taking charge of the circulation and cultural production around the texts that they love is nothing new. The positioning and activities of many otome game players outside Japan can best be described by Ian Condry's (2013) concept of dark energy and collaborative creativity. Drawing from Jenkins' (2006) idea of media convergence, Condry wrote about collaborative creativity, which "operates across media industries and connects official producers to unofficial fan production" (p. 2). In this light, he described dark energy as

a collection of social forces that enlivens the connections between content and desire, which in turn helps drive the circulation of media products ... More broadly, it provides a way to conceptualize fluid links among fans, media content, technology and producers. (Condry, 2013, p. 283).

Within this framework, fans are key to media success because they are keen to spread the love around their beloved texts.

Blogs and online communities have been indispensable in niche marketing (D. M. Scott, 2010), especially those that help circulate translations and walkthroughs and provide tools to unofficially distribute content among the Otome Armada. In most cases of informal marketing or global distribution, fans prove vital to creating markets for titles. Otome game fans are no exception. A number of independent sites and blogs are notable for educating non-Japanese reading audiences to the category. Although, on the surface, fan blogs have much in common with many other review blogs and gaming blogs, the key difference is that they also become vehicles through which fans as players and consumers can share materials with other players and sometimes to protect their own labor. This has become very apparent in the case of the English release by E2 Gaming of *Taisho Alice* (Primula, 2017). After the localization company bought the rights from Primula, fans called out E2 Gaming for reusing the translations of game information from the fan site *Otome-Jikan.net* for their own website. Following the release of the game, many fan blogs documented numerous errors in the translation and the various ways in which much of the content for E2 Gaming's localization may have been machine translated. As a result, many have called for a boycott of the localization while voicing fan support for the original game in Japanese. Arguably, it is this act of claiming ownership of the labor, the

discourse, as well as their own time and money, that make these actions comparable to Radway's (1984) book clubs, as is explained more fully below.

In this paper, I look into the practices of fan blogging of otome games outside of Japan. For this case study, I am interested specifically in understanding how female fans and players discuss their work and labor particularly which discourses arise during these conversations and postings. Examining the practice of fan blogging can offer insights into the complex negotiations taking place between fans and the game industry in allowing the entry of certain niche titles into global markets. In the case of otome game fan blogging, the ability to shape discourses surrounding the games that one loves also hinges upon being a good consumer. This article focuses on the practice of fan blogging, but the research presented here represents just a part of an ongoing study on otome games in English and otome game players living outside of Japan.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this work were collected from a combination of participant observation and interviews over a period of 2 years.² For my larger otome game project, I contacted bloggers, fan translators, and indie game makers. This paper presents the data from interviews with fan bloggers and involves autoethnographic elements as well. As an otome game player for more than 5 years and an occasional blogger about otome games on Tumblr, I observed and interacted with otome game players via online networks including my blog, Facebook groups, and Internet relay chats prior to beginning this project, as well as during. For the purpose of language convenience—as my primary languages are English and Filipino—I specifically focus on otome game players who play games in English and/or players who play in Japanese but create fan content in English.

Recruitment for interviews for my overall research, and specifically my concentration on bloggers, involved primarily a form of snowball sampling. I contacted most of my interviewees personally. Notably, some of my interviewees also helped find additional participants for the projects. Others, particularly those who worked in teams, encouraged their friends to participate. Some compiled a number of other bloggers for me to contact and helped spread the word about my project.³ I also conducted a wider call on Tumblr and Reddit, which earlier participants helped circulate via their own blogs. All these factors indicate how much the Otome Armada functions as a close-knit community.

The use of snowball sampling here is two-fold. Firstly, because otome game players comprise a niche section of the game culture, my sampling process mirrored ethnographic work on game players and populations on the margins (Browne, 2005; Krobová, Moravec, & Švelch, 2015; Shaw, 2013a). Secondly, it points to specific forms of knowledge construction, power relations, and forms of constructing social capital within otome game player communities (Noy, 2008). Understandably, as participants knew of my own position as an aca-fan (i.e., an academic who identifies as a fan) of otome games who will be writing about the larger player community, this notably shaped our interactions within these recorded interviews. I have been entrusted with this information because I too am a member of the wider fan community who they could share their favorite games with and raise their own concerns over how otome games are being discussed.⁴

The 14 participants range from ages 22 to 40. The majority of participants are in their 20s. Three identified themselves as nonbinary, 11 identified themselves as cisgender women, and one chose to not specify. Other information is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Demographic Information on Otome Games Blogger Participants.

Participant*	Country of Residence	Race Identification	Age	Occupation
Anne	Australia	White	31	Student
Pandora	Canada	White	27	Student
Claire	Canada	White	Not specified	Not specified
Giselle	Brazil	White	24	Student
Jane	Canada	White	25	Not specified
Tara	USA	White and Native American	21	Student
Charlee	Canada	White	37	Writing specialist (higher education)
Yona	USA	White	25	Fraud detection
Myxprint	USA	White	23	Cat groomer, baker, pet specialist
Zenri	the Philippines	Asian	24	Student
Two Happy Cats	Australia	White	23	Student
Cecilia	USA	White	27	Student
Alyssa	the Philippines	Asian	22	Student
Jill	Canada	White	40	Finance manager

Note. Participants were allowed to choose how they would be identified. Some used their actual names, others their online names, and the rest were assigned pseudonyms.

Although the larger study is racially and geographically much more diverse,⁵ most bloggers in this sample come from predominantly anglophone regions or areas where English is at least a strong second language. Moreover, the predominance of white women in this data set reflects how this demographic tends to be the most vocal in voicing issues about otome games and cultures around otome games outside Japan.

Four participated in live-recorded interviews—two live on-campus interviews and two recorded interviews via Skype. The rest elected email interviews, mostly because of their busy schedules alongside massive time zone differences. I allowed participants to determine their level of anonymity for this study. Among these, Anne, Pandora, and Jill elected to use their real first names to be used for this study. Myxprint, Zenri, and Two Happy Cats chose to use their online usernames. The rest of the participants elected to be anonymous and were assigned pseudonyms, especially because some participants indicated that their own friends and family do not know that they write about otome games and that they prefer to keep it that way.

Interviews involved two sections. Questions in the first part primarily addressed the interviewees as otome game players. Most questions dwelt on how they define and describe otome games, their game preferences, and how they play these games. The second set of questions dealt with how they define the practice of blogging and about creating material for their blog. More specifically, I asked them questions about how they started their blogs, what their favorite posts are like, who they think their readers are, and how they position themselves in the wider

otome game community. Although in live interviews I was able to immediately ask follow-up questions, written interviews relied on email correspondence for clarification and additional questions. Recorded interview data were transcribed and matched with my interview notes. I coded and classified patterns in all interview responses. Interestingly, answers to both sets of questions, as will be noted later in this article, were not mutually exclusive, as both player and blogger identities tended to blur the boundaries between work and play.

In regard to a theoretical framework, the literature demonstrates that both audience studies and fan studies have tackled ways of characterizing how readers collaboratively read texts in the form of interpretative communities (Ang, 1985; Bennet & Woollacott 1987; Fish, 1980; Radway, 1984). Janice Radway's (1984) *Reading the Romance* is the most pertinent to this study. Radway began with a critical feminist examination of the romance novel industry and romance literature. However, it was her interviews with a specific romance novel reading group that showed how these readers found multiple points to resist patriarchy, despite having more or less conservative beliefs about romance and relationships. Focusing on interpretative communities foregrounds the social aspect of interpretation and possible resistance, one that also is observed in ethnographic work mostly in player communities composed of nongamers (Shaw, 2013b) or predominantly female player communities (Consalvo & Begy, 2015). During this phase of my study, I continually noticed the similarities in otome game player communities' resemblance to Radway's book clubs, particularly in how the members of both groups participated in circulating these texts via recommendations and the way they attempted to shape discourses surrounding their beloved texts.

Literature in fan studies also points to the commercialization of fan spaces, describing "an emerging hybrid model of circulation, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 1). Studies on fan labor point out particular gendered hierarchies, especially as gift economies and fan labor are continually being co-opted (Busse, 2013; De Kosnik, 2009; Hellekson, 2009; S. Scott, 2015). In this way, fan labor can be framed as a feminist concern and should be tied to analyses of the gendering of digital labor (Banet-Weiser, 2011; Duffy, 2016; Jarrett, 2014).

Game studies also have long explored immaterial labor. Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter (2009), for example, included a generalized history of how gender plays into the professionalization of video game labor—not only by limiting the participation and representation of women within games and game industries, but also by rendering invisible certain forms of work, such as emotion work. Many other studies provide analyses of specific cases of gendered game labor in production, promotion, spectatorship, and cocreation (Harvey & Fisher, 2015; Huntemann, 2013; Taylor, Jenson, & de Castell, 2009). Echoing McRobbie's (2004) and Gill's (2007) critiques of the postfeminist media culture, which recenters women's agency toward heteronormativity and consumer culture, game scholars have pointed out the existence of postfeminist ethos in games designed with female players in mind (Anable, 2013; Chess, 2012, 2017; Harvey, 2018; Vanderhoef, 2013), as well as in digital game production (Harvey & Fisher, 2015). Moreover, studies have noted how player communities have shaped discourses around Japanese games (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2011) and how players themselves have contributed to bringing Japanese games to the West, at times through nonofficial channels (Consalvo, 2016).

For my contribution to these bodies of work, I seek to realign the work of predominantly female interpretative communities with studies on game labor and fan labor in order to think

about how players and fans position themselves. Taking an intersectional feminist lens (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991), I also consider how gender, race, nationality, and/or class may factor into how players talk about otome games and their work around otome games. If taken together in analyzing how fans talk about their own work, perhaps one could find ways of seeing forms of negotiated agency in the way female fans may talk about their own work.

KEY INTERVIEW RESULTS

The data analyzed for this article focus on the interview data. In the next few sections, I provide extracts of the interviews from otome game fan bloggers, looking specifically at how they discuss their roles in helping create the otome game market.

Sharing Otome Games to the World: Why Otome Game Players Start Blogs

The earliest known otome game-focused blogs date to the late 2000s. Even so, most bloggers interviewed for this project can trace the history of otome games to Japan in the 1990s, with a number being able to name Angelique (Ruby Party, 1994) as the very first otome game created. However, this is not too surprising considering that some of the first fan blogs were created for the specific purpose of telling the world about otome games.

Cecilia started her blog in 2008. She wrote English-language reviews of Japanese otome games. She narrated,

I wanted to talk about all the games that I was playing that no one else was playing, or I wanted to talk more, and I wanted to talk about the characters that I loved, which were often not the most popular. (Cecilia, USA)⁶

Notably, her compiled list of reviews and games on multiple platforms was one of the most comprehensive lists of otome games from 2000 to the mid-2010s. She is also one of the few reviewers to date who writes on games rated 18+.

Similarly, Pandora began EnglishOtomeGames.net around 2011, pointing out how little information about otome games in English existed online at that time. She started her site to help people know more about otome games. For this, she started compiling lists of otome games, as well as games that she thought were similar to otome games, including games with dating-sim elements, such as the Persona series and Dragon Age. As the list grew, she also started posting specifically about otome games, new otome game releases, as well as kick-starter campaigns to garner support for the groups creating otome games. Further, she began conducting surveys on her site, posing questions such as players' age groups, game preferences, preferred playing platform, and other questions related to otome games and player practices. This information is still available on her site and is accessible to player communities and developers alike. After some time, companies and otome game makers started contacting her to provide information about their games that she could post on her site. Eventually, her site became a revenue source for her.

Others respondents indicated they started blogs to write about otome games for specific reader communities. Charlee, for example, reported starting her blog for her friends who love reading about romance:

My friends were constantly asking me about these games: what do you play? How do I play? And I would also post jokes about them on my Facebook. And my friends were like: we would really like for you to start a blog...I was like: that sounds like a lot of effort and they were like, please? So I started a blog. ...My friends are like, what should I play? I'm into wizards. Right now I am working on an entry about guys with eye patches. And romanceable cats. Do you like cats? If you're interested in cats, I have a lot of cats. [Proceeds to name all the dateable cats in otome games.] A lot of the work I do in my blog is finding stuff for my friends. But also putting it out there that in some of these...there's most likely going to be a guy who's going to push you off the wall. And oh, pay attention to the parts that are rapey, so others can just pass that.... (Charlee, Canada)

From this comment, one could gather that Charlee primarily writes about otome games in the vein of other forms of romance reading. In comparison to many of the other blogs listed here, her blog notably has a smaller readership of friends of friends of friends, as she called it, in comparison to many other blogs described previously. Similar to Pandora's site, Charlee's blog maintains a community and, to a smaller extent, archives of humorous content from otome games. Because she is writing for her friends, she also posts content warnings on her blog to alert readers to content some may want to avoid. Such recommendations denote a sense of intimacy within this form of exchange.

Content in otome game blogs includes reviews, translated promotional material from Japanese game magazines with otome game content, drama CD content particularly related to otome gaming, walkthroughs, and individual reflections about otome games and industries around otome games. Although many of my respondents wrote about otome games that are localized to English or created originally in English, a number of bloggers also write about Japanese exclusives in the hope that those games they write about could be selected for future localization. Claire, who writes walkthroughs and translations on her site, argued how translations can work as promotional material for games:

Translations help [the] audience become aware of a game/drama CD and verify if they might want to support it by reading its content. My translations project in particular help my audience discover products that cater to tastes similar to my own. Since those tend to be less popular, I received messages thanking me for picking X project since they lost hope of ever knowing what it was about. (Claire, Canada)

She also translates this content and creates polls on translation projects.

Because very few game sites pick up otome games for review, the work of these respondent bloggers helps provide otome games visibility. Cecilia, for example, translates otome game news from Japan and writes reviews of otome games in both Japanese and English. In her interview, she argued that through her reviews and translations, *"I can get other people excited about games I'm interested."* While reviews definitely help promote otome games, some bloggers also tend to think about writing reviews as a way of keeping a personal record of the games they have played. Alyssa reflected, *"I started blogging about otome games so I can properly log my thoughts about the games I played."* Some interviewees indicated that they started their blogs to amplify other people's content. Claire, for example, writes blogs for this reason but also stated that she started her blog as a way of keeping track of otome game news.

Some sites focus on walkthroughs. Blah-Bidy-Blah, for example, is primarily a walkthrough site maintained by a team of bloggers. Zenri noted that she initially wrote walkthroughs for another site (Kokoro-café) until she started her own blog. Currently, Blah-

Bidy-Blah is maintained by a team of five members, with each member focusing on designated game titles or specific game categories.⁷ Regarding how walkthroughs help other otome game players, particularly those who play on mobile, she wrote,

It's really hard for some people to play these games on their own the first time and get a good ending, especially since most games these days require people to buy with real money and is very time consuming. So, I'd like to think that our site and all other sites similar to ours that post up walkthrough guides encourage viewers to play more of the otome games. Our walkthrough guide help people achieve a good play through without having to waste time re doing a character route again for the better ending and it helps save money for those that cannot afford to spend money on otome games. (Zenri, the Philippines)

Myxprint, who also writes for Blah-Bidy-Blah, similarly discussed how writing walkthroughs becomes a means of sharing with the wider community a means of information to help other players achieve satisfying endings. At the same time, she indicated how walkthroughs are ways of promoting games, pointing out how some gaming companies publish their own walkthroughs to help players. Notably, the majority those interviewed for this project indicated that they themselves use walkthroughs to varying degrees.

Some otome game blogs circulate fan fiction written around otome games as well as other fan work. Tara's and Giselle's blogs, for example, contain fan fiction on otome games. Tara narrated that one of the things that motivated her decision to post fan fiction on her blog is the notion of revising relationships in otome games, particularly those that she deemed problematic. As a result, she has rewritten heroines in otome games to give them more agency and occasionally adding lesbian relationships, which are often lacking in otome games. She argued, "*Fan fiction writers are here for the fantasy and I write something that I want to read.*" Although this notion of the fix fic (i.e., fan fiction wherein the fan writer changes something s/he/they is not happy with in the canonical story) is not new (Lee, 2011), what is notable about the way Tara spoke about her fan fiction and her readers is her desire for changing gendered discourses in otome games.

Not all otome game bloggers write exclusively about otome games, and not all their content on otome games is published on their own blogs and sites. Zenri, for example, also writes about *yaoi* games (i.e., games on boys' love or romances between male characters) on Blah-Bidy-Blah. Anne, who writes about otome games outside her blog, posts frequently about Japanese popular culture in general. Similarly, Two Happy Cats, maintains her site primarily for otome game reviews, walkthroughs, and news, but also blogs about other anime and manga categories. Yona, whose blog contains her own art, fan art, and fan fiction on otome games (mostly on the game *Ikemen Sengoku*), noted that the site is a good venue to discuss other things that matter to her.

On my main blog, I'll talk about whatever is pertinent to my life—especially Native rights. I think this fits along fine with otome gaming because there are real people playing these games, and they should also be informed. (Yona, USA)

The discussion of racial representations in otome games is exceedingly rare in otome games or even among otome game players. While many tend to point out problematic gendered representations within otome game communities and in these interviews, Yona is one of the few who brought race into the discussion.⁸

Some bloggers also indicated personal reasons for starting their blogs. Two Happy Cats recounted how she started her blog:

I started my blog on the 31 August 2015, I had just come back from a 6 months exchange to the UK and pretty much came back home to no friends, and nothing to do. I was feeling pretty miserable and one of my friends in the UK was talking about her own blog, so I figured I might as well make one. (Two Happy Cats, Australia)

Anne similarly indicated how moving geographically for her PhD studies factored into how the blog was started:

I started it in 2010 or 2011. Long ago. I can't remember. After I moved to Australia because I was a bit bored and lonely, and I thought that I could start writing about the things I like, and I can hopefully make some friends in the internet. I really like writing so I wanted an outlet. And I quickly decided that I didn't just want to write about whatever, because it was too broad, so I narrowed it to Japanese media, nerdy media basically, and now I like to think about it as a site, where I target a niche fan or niche media, and make it more welcoming to women in particular. So I want to talk about media that would appeal to women like me hopefully. (Anne, Australia)

In many ways, these stories indicate how fan communities allow intimate forms of connection, especially for people who migrate or relocate. This demonstrates not only how fandoms are cultural contact zones, as Morimoto and Chin (2017) described them, but also how these contact zones can create support for individuals. In the case of the otome game community, these spaces are where women can find other women—oftentimes outside their country of residence—who also play otome games. Although this is not always the case, as some players have noted some experiences where some of their discussions online turned toxic,⁹ the expectation exists that one can find safe spaces to discuss games in their own blogs with other women.

Issues Related to the Localization of Otome Games, Fans, and Communities

Contact with localization companies tend to vary among bloggers. Some bloggers operate independently; others discussed working with companies. Otome game companies tend to contact blogs with a large number of followers. For example, Pandora receives requests from companies to post their games on her site. Two Happy Cats indicated that one company contacted her once to correct information about its game. Others, such as the writers of Blah-Bidy-Blah, have contacted companies on their own, offering their support in promoting game titles. Noticeably, a number of bloggers, particularly those who work with otome game companies, tend to blur the dichotomies of work and play when discussing their own playing and the content writing for the blog. For example, Myxprint indicated how she often selects games and character routes to play, depending on walkthroughs that she will write and the availability of walkthroughs online for each game. Those activities also are related to forming relationships with developers.

I'll play games from any developer from any plotline, mainly because I want to be the first to write the walkthrough for it and I want to experience with the developer as they grow in community and have that opportunity to introduce it to those that I already speak to in my community, or our community as I probably should say. Because it's fun to grow with the company. (Myxprint, USA)

Similarly, Pandora described blogging as work, noting how her site provides a source of income for her.

In regard to fan following, the practices among these blogs tend to vary, with many interviewees agreeing on how their activities and their blogs are vital to the survival of otome games for English language players and the English language market. Claire argued,

Fan blogs contribute to the growth of the otome market the same way Gothic Lolita blogs contributed to the Japanese brands offering international shipping a few years ago. By blogging about it, you create awareness; more awareness brings more fans; more fans means more customers, and more customers means more money for the industry, enough that companies take notice (be it as localizations or indie teams trying their hands at it). If the demand is high enough, companies take fan's responses into account. (Claire Canada)

Some interviewees pointed out that they would not have played otome games if not for other otome game bloggers. Alyssa reflected,

I think fan blogs help people learn more about otome games and ultimately nudge them to try playing the genre. I myself wouldn't delve deeper into this hobby if not for Hinano's otome game reviews which I loved reading 7 or 6 years ago. (Alyssa, the Philippines)

Pandora discussed how fan blogs help create public opinion, “*I think fan blogs in general, particularly ones that are more personal or review oriented—definitely help create a particular atmosphere for the community, and help cultivate general opinion.*” Giselle noted that blogs also are useful in circulating warnings:

I think fan blogs, including mine, contribute in the market and culture in a kind of person-to-person advertising alongside with a feeling of ‘quality control’, warning people about trigger elements, and helping people keep track of new releases. (Giselle, Brazil)

These comments point to how otome game blogs tend to create a form of circulation that relies on individual recommendations in a way similar to how Radway (1984) described romance reading benefited from book clubs.

What also is notable among these interviews is how many participants seemed to express their work as a way of sharing to the wider otome game community. Studies in fan cultures point to how fandoms are gift economies (see, e.g., see Hellekson, 2009; S. Scott, 2009; Turk, 2014). Gifting becomes a way of creating communities and defining status and distinction within these communities. Although much of the content discussed are paratexts around otome games, these texts are an important means of distributing gaming capital (Consalvo, 2007) among otome game players. Much of the literature on fandoms as gift economies tends to describe these as alternative regimes to capitalism. Yet a number of interviewees also noted that their activities also benefit game companies. Although much of the content, particularly translation work, tends to fall within the grey areas of copyrights, many interviewees did not frame their practices of sharing as mutually exclusive from capitalism.

When asked if they could identify certain issues within the communities they participate, a few respondents mentioned a level of tension between the players who play both Japanese and English games and the players who play otome games exclusively in English. Noticeably, the two Filipinas in this study expressed various ways that cultural politics of playing in English and blogging in English come to the fore. Zenri indicated that she stays away from writing about subjects other than what she writes about otome games, lamenting her English grammar. Alyssa mentioned certain tensions with some players who only play games in English:

I usually tend to stay away from a group of “English otoge¹⁰ only gamers” that think of people who can play Japanese otome games as elitists. My friends and I have had really bad experience with them talking bad about us just because we told some not so good things about a game that was just localized to English when we actually only wanted to help people decide whether to get that game or not. They say that not buying all localized otome games hurts the Western otome game market, but our argument is that we are only saying what we think about the games to help people on a limited budget decide which is the best otome game to play. In any case, I now tend to keep my circle only within trusted friends because otome gaming is a hobby that should help you enjoy and not make you be stressed out. (Alyssa, the Philippines)

Notably, Alyssa described one particular tension between some players who only play in English and players who can play in both English and Japanese. Although I have not encountered English-only players with such sentiments as Alyssa described among my interviewees, I have come across such discussions on Tumblr and in forums. What’s interesting in this is how Alyssa specifically calls the English otome game market “*the Western otome game market*,” thus implying certain hierarchies where English-language marketing is almost equated with Western marketing. Moreover, even though these two are not the only respondents to mention these particular issues (i.e., Pandora and Anne commented on this issue in passing), it is interesting that these discussions about English as a barrier to participation or English-only players tending to champion the “Western otome game market” are more pronounced in my interviews with Zenri and Alyssa. Mastery of a language—English or Japanese—in this context denotes power. Given that English language use in the Philippines has its own neocolonial moorings (Bolton & Bautista, 2004; Ruanni & Tupas, 2004), and given the history of both American and Japanese colonization in the Philippines, writing in English and playing in English or Japanese is a way of positioning one’s self as a subject within neocolonial gaming contexts. At times, such positioning becomes a form of subtle critique of media cultures that privilege the voices of white North American or European women. Consequently, the discussion regarding sharing and participation in the wider otome game community becomes even more complicated, especially given that many bloggers have strong views against piracy.

Arguments about Piracy and Censorship

Piracy is notably a sore subject among otome game players. Though what counts as piracy may vary from player to player—definitions could vary from illegal downloads to cheating in real-time-based otome games like *Mystic Messenger*—the majority of interviewees for this project tended to bring it up, principally because these discourses shape images of otome game players. Pandora observed, “*The otoge community is really strongly anti-piracy compared to other sectors of the visual novel community from what I’ve noticed, which was definitely started by a few bloggers.*” This perspective was noticeable in my interview data, as a number of interviewees commented on piracy even if the question was not on piracy. Two Happy Cats, for example, on a question about her general opinion about the wider otome game community responded,

Generally, I think the otome fan community is pretty fantastic, everyone is very friendly and we’re all fighting the good fight of bringing stuff over to the west. However, I know there are some major issues with piracy in the otome community, most recently I know backers for the Bell Chimes for Gold had issues accessing their rewards because one or two backers were

exploiting the download link. I believe I even read somewhere that one otome game company in Japan has refused for any of their games to be translated as they think that all Western fans pirate—so yeah it kinda sucks and it gives us all a bad name. (Two Happy Cats, Australia)

The opinions of some interviewees regarding freemium games appeared to be shaped by notions of piracy, especially if players find ways to keep playing these for free. Claire, for example, indicated she is not fond of the increased numbers of freemium games for this very reason:

I understand it is easier to reach a customer this way, it creates this sense of entitlement that otome games should always be free, which in turns feed the mindset of pirates and undermine promising games not subscribing to that format. (Claire, Canada)

Cecilia also commented on how she thinks some players in the community tend to have a sense of entitlement:

I say this as an old fogie who has a full-time job, but it's a little depressing to see how much people expect for free. Artists, actors, programmers, and writers spend their time on producing these games, and if it's good enough that you want to spend time playing it, I think it's good enough to spend some money on. (Cecilia, USA)

Not all participants in the study, however, felt this way about freemium games. Zenri, for example, called herself a “free player” and confessed to staying away from mobile games that she has to pay for. Pandora also remarked that while many in the community are “anti-free” otome games, she would not have been able to discover otome games for herself if not for Sakevisual’s free game RE: Alistair (2010).

Piracy in some ways affects how some people think about certain forms of cultural production. Cecilia remarked, “*I don't like when people post ‘Let's Play’ videos (where they upload video of themselves playing games) because in my opinion it's not that different from pirating the game.*” Thus, these notions of piracy assign regimes of value (Appadurai, 1996) in particular forms of cultural production within otome game player communities.

Although many bloggers seldom mention censorship, some bloggers in this study mentioned an instance where a company asked people to take down walkthroughs with certain elements. Myxprint recounted,

What really irks me about it all is that we cannot have written walkthroughs that say which point requirements give you the most on the love meter or affection meter for their games. So this means we can't write walkthroughs so you can get the best ending. We get around that a little bit. I keep my walkthroughs now on Google docs. I give them out privately. Because I don't want to replay a game 500 times just to get a good ending. (Myxprint, USA)

She does indicate that, when privately sharing content, she tends to warn people to not post it “*so no one would get in trouble.*” What these takedowns indicate, particularly as bloggers try to also form relationships with developers, is that often players must police themselves and self-censor to avoid getting into trouble.

From all these comments, one could observe how negative opinions about piracy are linked to the idea of showing otome game companies that English-language otome game players are good consumers. Piracy, as a result, is seen as a deterrent for Japanese titles to gain English-language localization. In relation to piracy, Ramon Lobato and Julian Thomas (2015) discussed the existence of informal media economies, which they described as “a range of activities and processes

occurring outside the official, authorized processes of the economy” (p. 7). They specifically noted how, on occasion, informal media economies can be formalized. Arguably, this is the case of otome games, as more titles receive localizations into English. As otome games move toward official releases and as some practices around otome games become formalized and professionalized, copyright regimes tend to become stricter. Thus, the implication of these copyright regimes on female game players in this case is clear: Either become good consumers of these games or do not expect access to desired games and, by extension, their own predominantly female game spaces. In this way, copyright regimes can echo certain postfeminist ethos in disciplining its players.

DISCUSSION

An interesting aspect in exploring the content on many otome game blogs and forums and in the conversations on these matters in the current research is how many participants speak for the interests of companies that make otome games or the companies that localize them, so they could get more games from these companies. The responses from these interviewees appeared to take on a sense of public relations tasks and community management, and the respondents seem to try to shut down anything they deem as piracy. In some ways, these sentiments could indicate how the discourses of aspirational labor, which Duffy (2016, p. 6) described as “as a forward-looking, carefully orchestrated, and entrepreneurial form of creative cultural production ... individuals performing social roles through aspirational consumption.” Often, the kind of cultural and creative work that she characterized can be explained by the ethos of being able to do what one loves. Duffy also pointed out that, within these contexts of creative production, aspirational labor “ensures that female participants remain immersed in the highly feminized consumption of branded goods” (p. 3). Moreover, although aspirational labor, as Duffy described it, often works on the promise of future work, in the case of labor by otome game players, the promise hinges on the continued releases of the games they love. Thus, to encourage game companies to localize more otome games, bloggers have to do the work of reviewing, producing walkthroughs, and at times upholding copyright through self-censorship to show continued fan support.

Nonetheless, within these sites these women also help rewrite discourses on otome games. These are spaces where female and nonbinary game players connect with other female and nonbinary game players to talk about games that were supposedly created specifically for them. Elsewhere (Ganzon, 2018a, 2018b), I noted how many otome game communities are critical of gendered representations in their games. The participants of this study are no exception. Critiques I found on their sites and comments within these interviews occupy numerous pages of my notes and transcripts. While much of this criticism is not included in this study, this criticism can be found in participants’ review blogs as many of these blogs also point out some sexist tropes in certain game titles. It is evidenced in the way bloggers do the work to signpost content that could potentially be triggering. To some extent, this criticism is also evidenced in blogs that contain fix fics, since fix fics noticeably fix gendered tropes in otome games. These all indicate interventions on the part of these individuals to change gendered discourses within otome games. In this way, they function similarly to Radway’s (1984) book clubs in the way that they create publics and spaces of their own. Moreover, as seen in some of the interviews with participants outside North America, Europe, and Australia, the ability to participate in these discourses also depends on one’s ability to write well in English and engage with the politics of these postfeminist spaces where white “Western” women

are some of the loudest voices to be heard. Thus, it is important to acknowledge these as various demonstrations of agency. Yet many arguments for more diverse representations are contained within the logic of benefiting game markets rather than diversity for its own sake (Shaw, 2015).

Additionally, apart from circulating promotional content or humorous content around otome games, the respondents' statements also seemed to focus on keeping otome games as happy objects (Ahmed, 2010). A common theme in many of these interviews is about happiness. Some bloggers talk about playing otome games and starting blogs after feeling miserable after a big move. At times, it is to keep personal records of their feelings and experiences in these games whether good or bad. Walkthrough writers make walkthroughs so other players can get happy endings in these games with the least amount of money and effort. Some players make fix fics to rewrite unhappy experiences in these games. Others mention avoiding parts of the community altogether to keep themselves happy. In a lot of these accounts, these describe how bloggers find ways to keep otome games and their communities "happy." In her work on affect, Sara Ahmed (2010) pointed out how "affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (p. 29). Moreover, given how many respondents expressed various forms of dissatisfaction with representations in otome games or disappointment in some form with a part of the otome game community, much of the work—whether in reviewing games, making walkthroughs to help other players, or writing fan fiction to adapt the stories in these games—is about keeping otome games "happy" and thus valuable for circulation. These individual cases indicate how women must work to keep themselves and their own games happy. For some of the women of color in this study, the amount of work invested in keeping these games happy for themselves is sometimes doubled, especially in spaces where white women dominate the conversations on these games.

In this way, the practice of otome game fan blogging becomes imbricated with postfeminist sensibilities, which celebrate individual choice, independence, and self-expression mostly rooted in consumer cultures (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004). Gill (2007) pointed to how postfeminism envisions "individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating" (p. 436) within the context of neoliberal capitalism. In the case of otome game fan blogging, this is evidenced in the way these women continually have to show that they are good consumers. This is also shown in the study's demographics: Although otome game players come from various regions of the world and are much more ethnically diverse, it is predominantly white women from anglophone regions who do the front-facing work with otome game companies. Postfeminism ensures that white women's voices and interests—primarily those with money—are heard and addressed first before those of other marginalized women. Evidence of postfeminist sensibilities as shown echoes Dosekun's (2015) characterization of postfeminism as one that is "readily transnationalized ... because it is a fundamentally mediated and commodified discourse and a set of material practices" (p. 961). The existence of this form of gendered labor within this niche, predominantly female, game community hints how postfeminism mediates discourses within the community.

CONCLUSION: GAME CULTURES OF THEIR OWN

Much of the labor on otome games relies on the visibility of advocacy blogs and smaller game sites, yet ironically, many of these gendered forms of aspirational labor often are rendered unpaid and invisible. Notably, much of the labor that focuses on growing the English-language

otome game community is affective, particularly the emotional work associated with forming relationships with companies and the performance of being good consumers. It carries the notion that women have to work for their own games.

Nonetheless, it is also important to note how these blogs have provide spaces where women can discuss games supposedly created for them and about them, and where they could share issues with other women. In her book *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway (1984) described a community of women who reads sexist texts but, at the same time, insists on claiming agency of their own time in the act of novel reading. Results from both interviews and my wider ethnographic work indicate that many fan bloggers perceive their activities as key not only to promoting the games and creating larger audiences for otome games, but also as a way of contributing the discourses and circulation surrounding otome games. In the same manner as Radway's romance novels book clubs, otome game blogs allow women spaces of their own but via more contemporary contexts. As such, it is important to celebrate agency. But is also helps to see how postfeminist media culture influences how agency is uttered and negotiated.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, APPLICATION, OR POLICY

In my research, I sought to examine how agency is uttered in game communities that are predominantly female. The findings from this study open avenues for future research into how niche game communities utilize blogs to create game publics of their own that may be separate from the wider gaming public and wider gaming community. They also provide a foundation for exploring more broadly the role that female bloggers play in establishing spaces for discussing gender issues in gaming, in connecting game designers/producers and a specific community of players, and meeting the needs of their specific communities. These negotiations between individual players, communities, and game companies denote the existence of postfeminist sensibilities within these practices. Therefore, further research should consider how postfeminist sensibilities mediate discourses and create hierarchies in female-centered game communities. Further research on otome games could examine nonJapanese and nonanglophone players of otome games to shed light on the practices of these communities.

ENDNOTES

1. In my not yet published dissertation (Ganzon, 2020), I present a chapter on how players define otome games differently as an extension of Berlant's (2008) *Female Complaint*, which can be read as an act of resistance and containment to discuss individual experiences. See also Ganzon 2018a and 2018b.
2. The data were collected between April 2017 and May 2019. However, this article contains results only from those who were available to be interviewed or to complete an email questionnaire during that time frame. Additional responses remain outstanding and will be pursued in the future.
3. Some of my interviewees also recommended contacts of some otome game creators they know, understanding that I am researching game creators outside of Japan as part of my wider thesis project. Another interviewee also helped me find a contact for a localization company whose game I was writing about for my thesis project.

4. Particularly in the live interviews, participants brought some of their favorite games and walked me through some titles with which I was unfamiliar. Some have also signposted examples that I could use from these games, though admittedly I was unable to use them for this particular study.
5. The larger study was the foundation for my doctoral dissertation. Interviews for that study investigated otome game makers and translators; the blogger interviews were not part of that study. Noticeably, the wider data set is much more geographically and ethnically diverse, with more nonwhite participants and participants from countries such as Vietnam, Singapore, Russia, Bangladesh, and South Africa.
6. All responses, no matter what the geographic location of the respondents, were provided in English and are presented verbatim in the extracts provided.
7. Zenri, for example, is the Blah-Bidy-Blah's designated *yaoi* writer in addition to creating the walkthroughs on specific games.
8. Interestingly, the two nonwhite women did not mention race during the interview, but some tension was noticed when they discussed the politics of playing games and writing in English.
9. For instance, some participants noted that the easiest ways for conversations to turn toxic is to bring up piracy or the game *Diabolic Lovers*, which tended to trigger reactions from fans and antifans alike.
10. In the otome game community, the term *otoge* is used as shorthand to refer to "otome games"

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2010). Happy objects. In G. Seigworth & M. Gregg (Eds.), *The affect theory reader* (pp 29–51). Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press.
- Aksys Games. (2012). *Hakuoki: The Demon of the Fleeting Blossom* [Playstation Portable]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2013). *Sweet Fuse: At Your Side* [Playstation Portable]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2015). *Code Realize: The Guardian of Rebirth* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2015). *Norn9* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2017). *Bad Apple Wars* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2017). *Collar x Malice* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2017). *Period Cube: Shackles of Amadeus* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2018). *7scarlet* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2018). *Psychedelica of the Black Butterfly* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA, USA: Aksys Games.
- Aksys Games. (2018). *Psychedelica of the Ashen Hawk* [Playstation Vita]. Torrance, CA: Aksys Games.
- Anable, A. (2013). Casual games, time management, and the work of affect. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 2 [online]. <https://doi.org/10.7264/N3ZW1HVD>
- Andlauer, L. (2018). Pursuing one's own prince: Love's fantasy in otome game contents and fan practice. *Mechademia*, 11(1), 166–183.
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. New York, NY, USA: Routledge.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2011). Branding the post-feminist self: Girls' video production and YouTube. In M. C. Kearney (Ed.), *Mediated girlhoods: New explorations of girls' media culture* (pp. 277–294). New York, NY, USA: Peter Lang.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). *Authentic: The politics of ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York, NY, USA: NYU Press.

- Bennet, T., & Woollacott, J. (1987). *Bond and beyond: The political career of a popular hero*. New York, NY, USA: Methuen.
- Berlant, L. (2008). *The female complaint: The unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture*. Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press.
- Bolton, K., & Bautista, M. L. (2004). Philippine English: Tensions and transitions. *World Englishes*, 23(1), 1–5.
- Broccoli. (2010). Uta no Prince Sama [PlayStation Portable (PSP)]. Tokyo, Japan: Broccoli.
- Browne, K. (2005). Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 47–60.
- Busse, K. (2013). Geek hierarchies, boundary policing, and the gendering of the good fan. *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 10(1), 73–91.
- Cheritz. (2016). Mystic Messenger [Android]. Seoul, South Korea: Cheritz.
- Chess, S. (2012). Going with the Flo: Diner Dash and feminism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 12, 83–99.
- Chess, S. (2017). *Ready player two: Women gamers and designed identity*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. New York, NY, USA: Polity.
- Condry, I. (2013). *The soul of anime: Collaborative creativity and Japan's media success story*. Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press.
- Consalvo, M. (2007). *Cheating: Gaining advantage in video games*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.
- Consalvo, M. (2016). *Atari to Zelda: Japanese games in global contexts*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.
- Consalvo, M., & Begy, J. (2015). *Players and their pets: Gaming communities from beta to sunset*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- De Kosnik, A. (2009). Should fan fiction be free? *Cinema Journal*, 48(4), 118–124.
- Dosekun, S. (2015). For Western girls only?: Postfeminism as transnational culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(6), 960–975.
- Duffy, B. E. (2016). The romance of work: Gender and aspirational labour in the digital culture industries. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 19(4), 441–457.
- Dyer-Witheford, N., & De Peuter, G. (2009). *Games of empire: Global capitalism and video games*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class?: The authority of interpretive communities*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.
- Ganzon, S. C. (2018a). Making love not war: Female power and the emotional labor of peace in Code: Realize—The Guardian of Rebirth and Princess Arthur. In H. MacDonald (Ed.), *Digital love: Romance and sexuality in games* (pp. 37–58). Boca Raton, FL, USA: CRC Press.
- Ganzon, S. C. (2018b). Investing time for your in-game boyfriends and BFFs: Time as commodity and the simulation of emotional labor in *Mystic Messenger*. *Games and Culture*, 14(2), 139–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018793068>
- Ganzon, S. C. (2020). Playing at romance: Global flows and otome games in English. Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Dissertation manuscript in preparation.
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166.
- Hartley, G. (2018). *Fed up: Emotional labor, women and the way forward*. New York, NY, USA: HarperCollins.
- Harvey, A. (2018). The fame game: Working your way up the celebrity ladder in Kim Kardashian: Hollywood. *Games and Culture*, 13(7), 652–670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018757872>

- Harvey, A., & Fisher, S. (2015). "Everyone can make games!": The post-feminist context of women in digital game production. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(4), 576–592.
- Hasegawa, K. (2013). Falling in love with history: Japanese girls' otome sexuality and queering historical imagination. In M. W. Kapell & A. Elliot (Eds.), *Playing the past: Digital games and the simulation of history* (pp. 135–150). New York, NY, USA: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hellekson, K. (2009). A fannish field of value: Online fan gift culture. *Cinema Journal*, 48(4), 113–118.
- Hirameki International. (2006). Yo-Jim-Bo [PC]. Diamond Bar, CA, USA: Hirameki International Group.
- Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA, USA: University of California Press.
- Huntemann, N. (2013). Women in video games: The case of hardware production and promotion. In N. Huntemann & B. Aslinger (Eds.), *Gaming globally: Production, play and place* (pp. 41–58). New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Idea Factory International. (2015). Amnesia: Memories [PC]. Shibuya, Japan: Idea Factory.
- Jarrett, K. (2014). The relevance of "women's work": Social reproduction and immaterial labour in digital media. *Television & New Media*, 15(1), 14–29.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, bloggers, gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. New York, NY, USA: NYU Press.
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York, NY, USA: NYU Press.
- Kim, H. (2009). Women's games in Japan: Gendered identity and narrative construction. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26(2–3), 165–188.
- Krobová, T., Moravec, O., & Švelch, J. (2015). Dressing Commander Shepard in pink: Queer playing in a heteronormative game culture. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 9(3), article 3. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2015-3-3>
- Lamerichs, N. (2014). Romancing pigeons: The deconstruction of the dating-sim in Hatoful Boyfriend. *Well Played*, 3(2), 43–61.
- Lee, A. (2011). Time travelling with fanfic writers: Understanding fan culture through repeated online interviews. *Participations*, 8(1), 246–269.
- Lobato, R., & Thomas, J. (2015). *The informal media economy*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- McRobbie, A. (2004). Post feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4, 255–264.
- Morimoto, L. H., & Chin, B. (2017). Reimagining the imagined community: Online media fandoms in the age of global convergence. In J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, & C. L. Harrington (Eds.), *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* [2nd ed.; Kindle 1.26.1]. New York, NY, USA: NYU Press.
- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327–344.
- Pelletier-Gagnon, J. (2011). Video games and Japaneseness: An analysis of localization and circulation of Japanese video games in North America (Unpublished master's thesis, McGill University, Canada).
- Primula. (2015). Taisho Alice [PC]. Tokyo, Japan: Primula.
- Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy and popular literature*. Chapel Hill, NC, USA: University of North Carolina Press.
- Richards, T. (2015). Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side: Enacting femininity to avoid dying alone. *ToDigra*, 2(1), 101–127.
- Ruanni, T., & Tupas, F. (2004). The politics of Philippine English: Neocolonialism, global politics, and the problem of postcolonialism. *World Englishes*, 23(1), 47–58.
- Ruby Party. (1994). Angélique [Super Famicom]. Yokohama, Japan: Koei.
- Sakevisual. (2010). RE: AListair [PC]. Los Angeles, CA, USA: Sakevisual.

- Scott, D. M. (2010). *The new rules of marketing and PR: How to use social media, news releases, online video and viral marketing to reach buyers directly* (2nd ed). Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley and Sons.
- Scott, S. (2009). Repackaging fan culture: The regifting economy of ancillary content models. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 3 [online]. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0150>
- Scott, S. (2015). "Cosplay is serious business": Gendering material fan labor on heroes of cosplay. *Cinema Journal*, 54(3), 146–154.
- Shaw, A. (2013a). Rethinking game studies: A case study approach to video game play and identification. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 30(5), 347–361.
- Shaw, A. (2013b). On not becoming gamers: Moving beyond the constructed audience. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 2 [online]. <https://doi.org/10.7264/N33N21B3>
- Shaw, A. (2015). *Gaming at the edge: Sexuality and gender at the margins of gamer culture*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Steinberg, M. (2012). *Anime's media mix: Franchising toys and characters in Japan*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Steinberg, M., & Ernest dit Alban, E. (2018). Otaku pedestrians. In P. Booth (Ed.), *A companion to media fandom and fan studies* (pp. 289–304). Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley.
- Taylor, N., Jenson, J., & de Castell, S. (2009). Cheerleaders/booth babes/ Halo hoes: Pro-gaming, gender and jobs for the boys. *Digital Creativity*, 20(4), 232–252.
- Turk, T. (2014). Fan work: Labor, worth, and participation in fandom's gift economy. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 15 [online]. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0518>
- Vanderhoef, J. (2013). Casual threats: The feminization of casual video games. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 2 [online]. <https://doi.org/10.7264/N3V40S4D>

Author's Note

All correspondence should be addressed to
Sarah Christina Ganzon
Concordia University
mLab, 501 Faubourg Building
1250 Rue Guy
Montreal, QC
scvganzon@gmail.com

Human Technology
ISSN 1795-6889
www.humantechnology.jyu.fi