IMAGINING, GUIDING, PLAYING INTIMACY

- A Theory of Character Intimacy Games -

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Weitere Personen waren an der geistigen Herstellung der vorliegenden Arbeit nicht beteiligt. Insbesondere habe ich nicht die Hilfe eines Promotionsberaters in Anspruch genommen. Dritte haben von mir weder unmittelbar noch mittelbar geldwerte Leistungen für Arbeiten erhalten, die im Zusammenhang mit dem Inhalt der vorgelegten Dissertation stehen.
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時に、悪い木が良い実を結ぶこともある。

ABSTRACT

Within the landscape of Japanese media production, and video game production in particular, there is a niche comprising video games centered around establishing, developing, and fulfilling imagined intimate relationships with anime-manga characters. Such niche, although very significant in production volume and lifespan, is left unexplored or underexplored. When it is not, it is subsumed within the scope of wider anime-manga media. This obscures the nature of such video games, alternatively identified with descriptors including but not limited to 'visual novel', 'dating simulator' and 'adult computer game'.

As games centered around developing intimacy with characters, they present specific ensembles of narrative content, aesthetics and software mechanics. These ensembles are aimed at eliciting in users what are, by all intents and purposes, parasocial phenomena towards the game's characters. In other words, these software products encourage players to develop affective and bodily responses towards characters. They are set in a way that is coherent with shared, circulating scripts for sexual and intimate interaction to guide player imaginative action. This study defines games such as the above as 'character intimacy games', video game software where traversal is contingent on players knowingly establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate bonds with fictional characters. To do so, however, player must recognize themselves as playing that type of game, and to be looking to develop that kind of response towards the game's characters. Character Intimacy Games are contingent upon player developing affective and bodily responses, and thus presume that players are, at the very least, non-hostile towards their development. This study approaches Japanese character intimacy games as its corpus, and operates at the intersection of studies of communication, AMO studies and games studies.

The study articulates a research approach based on the double need of approaching single works of significance amidst a general scarcity of scholarly background on the subject. It juxtaposes data-driven approaches derived from fan-curated databases – *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan* – with a purpose-created ludo-hermeneutic process. By deploying an observation of character intimacy games through fan-curated data and building ludo-hermeneutics on the resulting ontology, this study argues that character intimacy games are video games where traversal is contingent on players knowingly establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate bonds with fictional characters and *recognizing themselves as doing so*. To produce such conditions, the assemblage of software mechanics and narrative content in such games facilitates intimacy between player and characters. This is, ultimately, conductive to the emergence of parasocial phenomena. Parasocial phenomena, in turn, are deployed as an integral assumption regarding player activity within the game's wider assemblage of narrative content and software mechanics.

SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES

The German Research Foundation

The final form of this study was conceived during the author's tenure at the Japanese Visual Media Graph Project (JVMG), which served as the main source of funding for the author's PhD candidacy. The JVMG project is a digital infrastructure project funded by the German Research Foundation [*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG*]. It has the goal of developing a research database on Japanese visual media – anime, manga, visual novels, Japanese video games – for researchers located in the fields of Japanese studies, media studies and other interested disciplines. It is envisioned as a highly interconnected structure, gathering, and correlating multiple data sources with its own research interface and array of data tools. The JVMG project has been able to enlist the support of a number of fan-curated repositories which have generously donated their data to the project's developing database. Such data has been the backbone of this study's initial approaches. Although the data presented within this study are more recent, and derived by the author at a later date, this study's development is rooted into what has been initially donated to the JVMG. Therefore, it is important that the JVMG project's own developments be appropriately recognized as the first, necessary steppingstone for bringing this study to fruition. In the same vein, the author is deeply thankful to the German Research Foundation for its generous support: the development of this study would have not been possible without the funded research position provided through the German Research Foundation's *e-Research Technologies* funding program.

The Japanese Visual Media Graph Project

The Japanese Visual Media Graph project has gathered data from the following sources: *The Visual Novel Database*, *Anime Characters Database*, *AnimeClick* and used publicly available data from *AniDB*. These data sources have been instrumental into evaluating this study's first hypotheses, along with separate 'tiny use cases' which have tested, in one way or another, the capabilities of the data structure. While this study does not employ data coming strictly from the JVMG in favor of more recent datasets from *The Visual Novel Database* and a dataset from an external source, *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-*, the development of this study's data-driven approaches has all happened within the context of the project, calling for proper acknowledgement of staff and resources. The author thanks Magnus Pfeffer, Zoltán Kacsuk, Senan Kyriakos and Tobias Malmsheimer for the precious assistance and contribution. The author also thanks the communities (ACDB, VNDB, Aclick) which have generously provided their datasets for usage within the context of the project. Without your collaboration, this study would not be here.

The datasets employed within this study

The datasets employed as the primary data sources for this study's approaches have been derived through usage of freely accessible SQL forms present within both repositories. Data from both sources has been consulted and compared, but otherwise not altered, except for the operations required to use this study's datasets. Data is presented as-is and does not constitute a new database or any attempt to create a new data repository. Data is employed in respect of database rights and in accordance with freedom of research provisions as per European and German legislation.

On the Erogescape dataset

This study includes portions of one of the datasets employed – the one derived from *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan* – within this study for ease of reference. It includes tabular lists of the traits and tags that allow users to describe videogames catalogued on the website, the descriptions of said traits where provided (in Japanese) and translations thereof into English. The author has deemed the addition of such a dataset as an appendix to this study productive due to the challenges presented in accessing said information from outside Japan, especially by researchers not proficient in the Japanese language.

The terms reported within this study

The subject of this study are video games not intended for generalist circulation, and several terms therein, either in the original English or translated from Japanese, may refer to sexual practices where consent is either blurred or absent, or is explicitly presented as deviant – intended as in clear departure from accepted dominant standard in social and/or sexual conduct – or that implies misogynistic attitudes, especially within source material coming from this study's sources. While this study is not born out of an intent to do harm, and steps have been taken to minimize possible distress, the width and breath of the subject matter cannot be overlooked nor reduced to euphemism. Therefore, the translations of problematic terms are presented in a matter of fact and in the most reasonably accurate way possible. This study deems such actions necessary in order to fully acknowledge the breadth and width of the subject matter whose status as unsuitable for generalist consumption requires repeated and continuous (re)statement.

The video games approached within this study

As discussed above, the vast majority of the games approached within this study are not intended for generalist consumption and feature explicit content. While this study does not include pornographic material, it features images that are intended to be sexually suggestive and to induce arousal in users. While research requires that no mystery should be made of these game's contents,

it is also important to maintain this document's accessibility to multiple research audiences. Figures and visual references – located at the end of each chapter – are included as deemed necessary by the subject matter approached.

Japanese, Chinese and Korean names, language, and work titles

Japanese, Chinese, and Korean names are written according to the Japanese and Korean order of surname first throughout the present work, apart from reference lists, where English name order prevails as per existing style norms. Japanese words are romanized according to the modified Hepburn systems, except when the original source transliterates the name in different fashion. In the case of work titles, the translation provided is either the official translation as released in the Anglosphere, with the North American area taking precedence over Europe and British Commonwealth in case of multiple translation or, when such official translations are absent due to the work not being released outside Japan, the translation provided is the author's own.

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PRESENTATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

- Overview of video games of intimacy in Japan -

Adult computer games [*adaruto gēmu*] in Japan (cf. Galbraith 2021a, 74)[1] focus on establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with anime-manga[2] characters. Within adult computer games, romancing one or more of the game's cast of characters is neither one feature amongst many nor one of the systems within a wider "macrostructure" (Backe 2012); rather, it is the center of the gamic activity, the course of in-game action that allows or denies traversal of the video game work. Adult computer games feature a plethora of settings and themes, ranging from fantasy and science fiction epics to high school romantic comedies. Featured interactions with characters run the gamut from simulated conversation to sexual intercourse, usually presented in explicit fashion (Galbraith 2021a, 74). The term 'adult computer game,' in its most immediate and intuitive meaning, evokes associations with pornographic entertainment. Its connection with Japan evokes concerns about media effects of explicit sexual content featuring anime-manga characters and their global circulation (Galbraith 2021a, 74–75). Amidst globalizing tendencies of anime-manga media products, spanning animation, printed matter, and video games (Hernández-Pérez, 2019; Suan 2020, 2017a; Brienza 2015; Bryce et al. 2010; Wood 2006), and, more generally, video games from Japan (cf. Hutchinson 2019, 2), adult computer games *stand out.* Geared toward specialist niches both at home and abroad, these video games have been, and are, subjected to increased scrutiny on the global stage as distinctively 'Japanese.' Amidst such

[1] Within this study, references to 'Japan' and 'Japanese production contexts' are intended in extended form, encompassing not just the physical, geo-social location of Japan proper, but also those production contexts, which refer to, reproduce, and circulate Japanese content production and reception practices, especially with anime-manga media, visual aesthetics, and narrative tropes.

[2] Usage of the two terms in hyphenated form takes after Zoltan Kacsuk's (2016a) highlight of the "strong interrelation of the two forms not only with regards to their production and consumption (cf. Ōtsuka 2010 [1989], Steinberg 2012), but also the conjoined nature of both the European and North American fandom and the scholarly discourse surrounding them (cf. Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013a)" (Kacsuk 2016a, 1). While deeper examination will reveal hosts of differences between countries and region (ibid.), this study will refer to such aesthetic systems in their cojoined nature.

international scrutiny, 'Japanese' relates to discourses of perversion and danger (Galbraith 2021a, 75). Sold in specialist shops – physical and virtual and zoned into special, age-restricted sections of more generalist store locations – adult computer games bring sexuality only hinted at in anime-manga products to fruition (cf. figure 1 and figure 2).

Closer examination of adult computer games undermines first impressions of unbridled, unrestrained, and dangerous explicit content being the sole focus of gaming experiences. Despite the presence of explicit anime-manga content, most of the time spent running an adult computer game may not feature explicit images. Indeed, some works, although contiguous with adult computer game production by way of maker and distribution circuits, may not feature explicit content at all. At times, originally explicit video games may be re-released on home consoles with enhanced graphics, updated content, and the explicit content excised, an apparently self-defeating proposition. Nevertheless, there is a minority of works where explicit content is the main fulcrum of gamic activity, along with works that do indeed feature extreme pornography, and excessive depictions of violent and immoral sexual conduct, such as rape and incest. The majority, however, do not, and can be described as romantic comedies featuring explicit sexual scenes.[3] In fact, works featuring extreme depictions of intercourse and sexual violence do not generally enjoy significant sales volumes, even amidst the limited amounts commanded by the wider adult computer game industry (Galbraith 2021a, 77).

Explicit pornographic content – mostly involving female characters – produces another type of intuitive association, i.e. that these video games are aimed exclusively at male, heterosexual audiences. While most are indeed aimed at such audiences and broadcast themselves as such, production of women-oriented, intimacy-focused video games featuring anime-manga characters is growing (Andlauer 2018; Kim 2009). These women-oriented games [*joseimuke gēmu*] are more

[3] See chapter 5.2 for extended discussion

likely to eschew pornography (cf. Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 181), while at the same time presenting significant continuity in game structure, practices of production, and circuits of distribution (cf. Morikawa 2012, 139–141; 2008 [2003]). And while adult computer games are increasingly positioned as unsuitable for global audiences, mechanics simulating amorous and intimate interaction between characters are increasingly featured within wider Japanese video game production, especially in works such as *Fire Emblem: Fūka Seitsugetsu* [Fire Emblem: Three Houses] (Intelligent Systems 2019) and *Bokujō Monogatari* [Harvest Moon] (Vic Software Interactive 1996).

What is going on? Firstly, adult computer games cannot be reduced to the mere presence of pornography, nor to their aesthetic continuity with other anime-manga media. Secondly, while most adult computer games feature at least some explicit content, to collocate them as being exclusively focused on erotic and pornographic content is incorrect. Such a class of software does exist, in the form of so-called *nukigē* [fap game] (Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 36), whose primary purpose is to provide masturbatory entertainment to male users. However, the way in which a game deploys erotic and pornographic content varies greatly amongst makers and players, and may be juxtaposed with emotional engagements of varying intensity in players (Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 36; Au Yeung 2008, 149). Finally, while adult computer games may broadcast their status as niche, specialist media, unsuitable for generalist consumption, they are still porous with the wider anime-manga industry in terms of aesthetic and production practices (cf. Kobayashi and Koyama 2021; Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe], and Nakamura 2019).

Select titles, such as *Rapelay* (Illusion 2006), have become the object of public concerns and, at times, international scandals, (cf. Galbraith 2021a, 77–80; deWinter 2015, 244–246; Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015; Nakasatomi 2012 [2009], n.p.). Character intimacy games have historically been at the center of public concerns on the indiscriminate circulation of explicit

content perceived as harmful for the public (Galbraith 2021b, 95–101; Koyama 2020 [2016], 137–140; Pelletier Gagnon and Picard 2015, 33–34), and, in particular, "sexual minorities" [women and children] (Nakasatomi 2012 [2009], n.p.). These concerns intersect and mobilize with wider debates regarding otaku culture and their media consumption habits (Galbraith 2021b, 46–59; Kamm 2015; Morikawa 2008 [2003], 262–269). Despite public concerns, arguably, most adult computer games generally promote pro-social behavior toward one's intimate partner(s). That is to say, most adult computer games fall into the milieu of romantic comedies, and encourage players to take courses of actions that benefit the character they wish to romance. However, this study is not, and should not be taken as a defense of adult computer games against criticism coming from within and without Japan. Rather, it seeks to take the above-mentioned contradictions as a starting point for a wider investigation into adult computer games.

Reiterating the questions, what is going on with adult computer games? Why do they *stand out*? In light of the contradictions listed above, it is certainly not because they feature explicit content; nor is it because they might feature mechanical systems and frameworks to simulate affections between two or more characters within a work of interactive software. If explicit content is taken as the distinctive criteria for adult computer games, they would be no different from *eroanime-eromanga*[4] and similar static media. On the other hand, taking the presence of simulated affection as the sole criteria would collocate adult computer games with video game works where such systems are present but not fundamental to the game experience. There are many video game works featuring such "systems of affections (SA)"; that is to say, ludic processes, inherently procedural in nature, which allow the player to create and shape relationships between characters in dynamic fashion (cf. Blom 2020a, 197), without the need for explicit sexual content or erotica.

[4] Hyphenated usage of the terms follows the same rationale as the hyphenated anime-manga, namely, that it highlights the interrelation between the two forms, with a similar unity of fandom and scholarly discourse.

These facets of player-software interaction, be it players consuming explicit content or engaging with a system that simulates affections between in-game characters, while interesting, are far from groundbreaking. There are plenty of video games where developing affection for one (or more) of the game's characters may be represented by intimate interaction, although usually not in an erotic fashion. To reiterate, the presence of erotica and pornography, even when deployed for shock value or directed at niche tastes, is not special. Nor is simulated affection between video game characters, regardless of player control. The two do not make a video game, or a corpus thereof, special by virtue of their presence alone.

It is also difficult to argue for a distinction between adult computer games and other media formats featuring anime-manga characters. On the one hand, scholars such as Patrick Galbraith emphasize the need for an adult computer game industry that is separate from globally recognized products such as *Super Mario Bros* (Nintendo 1985), *Final Fantasy* (Square 1987), and *Pocket Monsters Red/Pocket Monsters Green* (Game Freak 1996) (Galbraith 2021a, 76; Mizuho Survey, 2014: 117–118). On the other hand, game scholars, such as Koyama Yūsuke, Kobayashi (Hichibe) Nobushige, and Nakamura Jin, argue that the adult computer game industry represents a sorts of talent pool for the wider *kontentsu* industry, namely, specialist anime-manga media with generalist distribution (Koyama 2020 [2016]; 216; Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe], and Nakamura 2019, n.p.).

Another issue, no less important, is the level of interactivity found within adult computer games. Adult computer games tend toward passive content consumption, tasking players with reading, looking at images, and listening to aural performances. Are they interactive enough to be collocated as video games proper, or would they be better approached as static media? "Featuring graphics that are rarely computer-generated or realistic, they also do not allow players to freely roam in open environments. Instead, players read on-screen text and make choices in something approaching choose-your-own-adventure novels" (Galbraith 2021a, 76; cf. figure 3).

Echoing Espen Aarseth and Gordon Calleja's discussion of the ontology of video games (Aarseth and Calleja 2015, 2), adult computer games would be more accurately defined as pieces of interactive software featuring navigable pre-set storylines. At times, for example in the case of so-called kinetic novels,[5] the possibility of influencing the outcome of the game's narrative is absent, placing such pieces of software closer to a digitized piece of fiction or to an "incremental game" (Alharti et al. 2018; Khaliq and Purkiss 2015) without systems for player incentive outside of narrative and pornographic content. Aside from clicking, adult computer games task players with imagining how the narrative is unfolding based on information updated every time the player advances the story. Visually, players are presented with essential art assets – character sprites (also known as *tachi-e*), portraying characters in a variety of emotional states, superimposed onto a background illustration depicting the locale where the narrative is taking place. Linguistically, players read prose text located either in a box in the bottom portion of the screen – the AVG setup – or superimposed onto the two images – the so-called NVL setup (Jiang 2019, 36). Aurally, players listen to background music and to voiced character performances, along with a selection of sound effects. None of the three channels features a complete array of information concerning the game's narrative: visual assets are re-used through the game, detached from specific happenings or the game's own narrative storyline (Bruno 2019, 45).

Prose text usually recounts only character lines, like a TV script. Aural performances may not cover the entirety of the game, and usually the player-controlled protagonist is left unvoiced to facilitate identification. Even when the protagonist character is voiced, their thoughts and inner dialogue is never expressed, so that the player can make such thoughts their own (Galbraith 2021b,

[5] A sub-type of adult computer game software where there is no chance for players to influence the game's outcome in any way. Examples include *Planetarian: Chiisana Hoshi no Yume* [Planetarian: The Reverie of a Little Planet] (Key 2004), *Shinkyokusōkai Polyphonica* [Polyphonica, The World of Divine Instrumentalists] (Ocelot 2005), and *Meitantei Shikkakuna Kanojo* [The Girl Unfit to be a Great Detective] (issue 2009).

142–143). Players must constantly "fill in the blanks" (ibid., 134–135) between information deployed across visual, linguistic, and aural channels. The only exceptions to this constant state of incomplete information are the so-called reward images [*gohobi-e*] (Miyamoto 2013, 24): full screen images depicting pivotal, emotionally charged moments of the game's storyline(s), centered on character intimacy (cf. Bruno 2019, 45–47). Most, but not all of these illustrations are erotic and/or pornographic (cf. figure 4). They break the flow of the game, serving as markers of video game completion, eliciting an "erotic scavenger hunt" (Wood 2011, 369).

In describing the mechanisms of player/software interfacing in adult computer games [*bishōjo games*], Galbraith argues that players are called to "fill in the blanks" between the discrete elements in order to imaginatively "complete the action" (Galbraith 2021b, 135). In doing so, he draws parallels with sequential art, and, in particular, with Scott McCloud's theory of comics (1994, 68–69, cit. in Galbraith 2021b, 119), to derive his theoretical vision. Just as readers of sequential narrative (comics, manga) need to connect each panel by imaginatively engaging with the blank space of the gutter, players of adult computer games connect prose, visuals, and aural performances. However, while such a process may represent a form of interaction in the same way that readers of sequential arts 'interact' with the gutter to connect two panels, it does not connect with interactivity as intended in the field of game studies.

Actual interaction within game software – its assemblage of aesthetic, narrative, and computational properties – consists, for the most part, in clicking on the screen to make the story advance to the next line, in a way that pre-empts parallels with so-called incremental games. The game presents players with only a handful of chances to alter the game's outcome, in the form of multiple choices at set points in the game's narrative. Players are presented with choices between one story path and another. Different story paths lead to different characters, each culminating in one or more endings, on a sliding scale of how much the intimate bond has been fulfilled.

Engagement with the game software, its narrative, and its characters, is personal and solitary, without scores, rankings, or leaderboards. There is no competitive or cooperative multiplayer experience, only one-on-one interaction between players and the software.

The above descriptions reinforce the idea that adult computer games may barely qualify as 'video games' – i.e. interactive software with rule-based mechanical systems featuring clear victory and defeat conditions – and thus would be better collocated and studied as static media. In fact, the lack of constant interaction within a simulated environment has already invited the generalization of adult computer games from Japan into static media formats. Emily Taylor defines dating simulators, a subset of adult computer games, as "interactive anime/manga with erotic content" (2007, 198). Forrest Greenwood subsumes *bishōjo* games – adult computer games featuring cute girl characters and aimed at a male heterosexual audience – into an "anime/manga media sphere" (2014, 238–239). Animation historian Jonathan Clements, on the other hand, envisions *bishōjo* games as a separate form – the "apotheosis" of limited animation (2019, 194). Other approaches within game studies have categorized adult computer games, in their 'visual novel' descriptor,[6] as a form of interactive fiction (cf. Douglass 2020; Crawford and Chen 2017; Kamei-Dyche 2017). Jaqueline Berndt also highlights a similar tendency toward subsuming anime media under wider labels, such as 'Japanese pop culture' (Berndt 2018, 57). She also points to the continued usage of a socio-cultural lens-based approach favoring sociological and anthropological readings, which "abet generalization" (2018, 58).

However, approaching adult computer games as interactive fiction, and focusing on adult computer games as static media obscures the existence of works that are far from static. While the setup detailed above is, indeed, employed by the near totality of adult computer games for

[6] Visual novel is one of a plethora of descriptors for adult computer games, and, more generally, video game works centered on intimacy with anime-manga characters.

character interaction, it is far from being the sole framework that may be present within adult computer games. In fact, there are a substantial number of works that combine the passive content reception framework detailed above with increased modes of interaction, which can include fully fledged virtual environments. Examples include the *Rance* series (Alicesoft 1989–2020, role-playing, and strategy), *Amayui Labyrinth Meister* [The Amayui Labyrinth Meister] (Eushully 2021, role-playing game), *Ritaania no Seirei Tsukai -Meikyū o Yuku Mono-* [The Spirit Master of Ritaania: Conqueror of the Labyrinth] (Luna Soft 2017, dungeon crawler RPG), *Haha Ranman* [Mother in Flourishing Splendor] (Alicesoft 2016, simulation/puzzle game), and *Hello, Good Bye* (Lump of Sugar 2015, puzzle game), amongst others.

Yet again, what is going on with adult computer games? The above discussions and descriptions, which implicitly attempt to establish the boundaries and criteria for a stable definition of adult computer games, are unable to pinpoint a single unifying criterion. Even the presence of explicit content is seemingly not universal, especially if non-male audiences are included. How, then, can a bounded definition be established for the pieces of interactive software introduced within this study as 'adult computer games'? Is there even a need to do so? In fact, is there anything special about video game software where players romance anime-manga characters that requires a bounded definition, given that it is seemingly impossible or unwise to derive a set of non-contradictory key features? While every video game work possesses the potential to be a complex emotional experience (cf. Tavinor 2005a, 2005b), the deliberate engendering of emotional engagements is not recognized as an element for classification and collocation efforts, in favor of criteria rooted in aesthetics (Goetz 2012; Schell 2008; Hunicke et al. 2004; Carr, 2003) and modes of interaction (Clearwater 2011; Arsenault 2009; Wolf 2021 [2002]; 2015). It also does not figure within archival and data-driven approaches at video game classification (Faisal and Peltoniemi 2018; Clarke, Lee and Clark 2017; Clearwater 2011; Apperley 2006). In the same vein, the

presence of characters capable of eliciting emotional engagement from a player does not seem to fit within the scope of existing genre-classifying efforts. Different adult computer games may therefore fall into different video game genres. An adult computer game such as *Rance 01: Hikari wo Motomete* [Rance 01: The Quest for Hikari] (Alicesoft 2013), which juxtaposes text-based interaction with RPG segments, will ultimately fall within the wider label of Japanese Role-Playing Games. An adult computer game such as *Eiyū*Senki* [Eiyu*Senki: The World Conquest] (Tenco 2017) can alternatively be collocated as a strategy game or as a Tactical Role-Playing Game. Different adult computer games may belong to different video game genres, falling under different taxonomies.

The only apparent core feature of adult computer games is the usage of erotic, pornographic, and emotionally charged content as a reward for player progression, with the intent to emotionally engage and arouse, and with a system of reward images and resulting in an erotic scavenger hunt. Taking into account both works that feature explicit content and works that do not, reward images, which break the flow of the game to mark pivotal moments in relationships with characters, seem to be the only common characteristic of adult computer games. Beyond this core feature, the other hallmark of adult computer games in Japan appears to be the employment of aesthetics contiguous with anime-manga and *eroanime-eromanga*. These aesthetic systems inform characters, relationships, settings, narrative themes, and genre, with varying specifics based on the game's intended audience.

The above discussions all point toward considering adult computer games as simply that: video games aimed at an adult audience and featuring content proper for an adult population; that is, dealing with subjects that are unsuitable for generalist consumption. However, focusing on reward images reveals nuances that provide a case for distinguishing adult computer games beyond featuring 'adult content.' As stated above, reward images break the flow of the game, shifting

players from whatever they are doing in-game at that particular moment to being a recipient of finished, complete pictorial content that stands alone as a finished image, rather than as an ensemble of discrete elements requiring external completion. Especially in male-oriented works, reward images may, and generally will, depict sexual intercourse in a pornographic fashion. Non-pornographic reward images include depictions of the player character and the character that they are romancing enjoying a moment of emotional closeness – kisses, hugs, moments of emotional solace and relief etc. The focal point of the illustration is always the romanceable character, rather than the protagonist or the romanceable character and the protagonist in relation to each other (cf. Galbraith 2011a, n.p.). In general, reward images titillate players, eliciting arousal, be it sexual, emotional, or a combination of both.

The above process can certainly be attributed to the necessities of pornographic entertainment – eliciting sexual arousal – however, the framework tends to be repeated in non-sexual scenes and in works without explicit content. The player, as the protagonist character, endeavors to romance one or more characters, in a gamic framework that may or may not be articulated. At the same time, the player interacts with characters outside the strictly gamic framework of adult computer game software: reward images are designed to elicit emotional, erotic, and sexual engagement in the player, not in the protagonist character they are controlling. Galbraith envisions the above mechanism in adult computer games [*bishōjo* games] as a sort of "split subjectivity," revolving around shifts in player perspective from those of regular in-game activity to the reward image (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 142).

> [T]he player character has no interiority, because the player fills it with his own thoughts and feelings. This split subjectivity continues in that the thoughts and words of the player character are written by someone else. These thoughts and words appear in the text – never voiced by an actor, an "other," but rather heard in the player's imagination as his own. So one sees the thoughts and words of the player character and scenario writer even as these thoughts and words imaginatively become one's own (Galbraith 2021b, 142–143).

The above mechanism, combined with the obscuring of the protagonist character, both visually and due to a lack of excessive characterization and interiority, encourages players to become highly involved with the game's romanceable characters (ibid., 143). Galbraith's vision, however, relies on three assumptions, which do not apply to all adult computer games and to all adult computer game players. Firstly, that not all adult computer games feature a protagonist or characters lacking characterization and interiority.[7] Secondly, and with respect to players becoming involved with the material, it is not a given that an adult computer game player will engage with the game in the same way as the "model" (Sicart 2013, 25) or "ideal player" (Neely 2017) envisioned by developers would, even in the face of the articulate aesthetic systems and media literacies required for *moe*/BL-Yaoi narratives to make sense (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 129–130, 227–230; Santos 2020b, 5; Kagami 2010, 131; Azuma H. 2007, 67). Thirdly, is the assumption that player identification with the protagonist character is constant, and the same implications are made for character empathy.

While some adult computer games may, indeed, encourage moral reflection, there is no way that they can *force* players to do so (Neely 2019, 5). In fact, as Erica Neely argues, video game players might make characters "take an action, evaluates the consequences, and then decides whether those are good consequences for the game as the player wishes it to progress. Admittedly, this represents a form of meta-gaming: the player is not necessarily concerned with the moral consequences as evaluated by the game" (ibid.). The erotic scavenger hunt framework encourages

[7] Minato Kageaki, the player character of *Sokō Akki Muramasa* [Fullmetal Daemon Muramasa] (Nitroplus 2009) is one such example. Kageaki clearly has a cynical outlook on life and has committed heinous crimes before the story of the game begins, which the player cannot reasonably ignore if they want to interface with the game's plot. Aster, *Evenicle*'s (Alicesoft 2015) main character, has an obvious disposition toward polygamous relationships that players, who are obligated to romance and have more than one sexual and romantic partner simultaneously through the game, cannot avoid.

such meta-gaming, and the same effect can be attributed to the overarching knowledge of aesthetic systems. The emerging media literacies of niche anime-manga and *eroanime-eromanga*[8] – knowing how to parse character designs, deriving arrays of potential stories, interactions, and narratives, as is the case with *moe*[9] (Galbraith 2021b: 74–75; Kagami 2010: 158; Azuma H. 2009 [2001]: 39–54, 79–81, 2007: 196) and *BL-Yaoi* (Santos 2020a, 5, 2020b, 4–8; Galbraith 2011b, 222) – can be seen as such a form of meta-gaming.

At the same time, it is necessary to reiterate that reward images, featuring emotional, erotic, and pornographic content, are not directed at the protagonist character or at the player-as-the-protagonist character. Rather, *it is players* who consume emotional, erotic, and pornographic content as part of the game's system for rewarding progress. Reward images interface with the player directly, eliciting responses regardless of the level of immersion that players might be enjoying as protagonist characters. In doing so, adult computer games – including works devoid of explicit content – not only feature interactive frameworks for romancing characters, and generally 'play at intimacy,' they also facilitate intimate engagement between players and characters (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 141); or, at the very least, endeavor to do so deliberately. In the same vein, *tachi-e* character sprites, their design rooted in eroticism, always looking at the player through the game's first-person perspective (Galbraith 2021b, 143–144; Greenwood 2014, 243), are another facet of how adult computer games facilitate player/character intimacy. Consequently,

[8] It is also important to note that the emergent literacies at the base of *moe* should not be considered coincident with wider media literacies employed in and called upon by generalist anime-manga. They should rather be described as a subset of literacies nested within wider competences pertaining to anime-manga and *eroanime-eromanga* (Santos 2020b, 5; Galbraith 2011b; Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 82–85).

[9] The term has fallen out of sustained use within Japan, partially in favor of terms such as *tōttoi* [precious]. Within the course of this study, the term is used out of convenience, to aid reference to existing scholarship and to delimit aesthetic systems. This study, in fact, seeks to decouple its subject matter from subcultural terms such as *moe*/*tōttoi*, in favor of stabler frameworks untied to subcultural norms.

adult computer games should not be merely considered video game works featuring adult content, sex scenes, or intimacy between characters, but rather as a distinct typology of video games centered on player/character intimacy.

Within generalist video games, such as *Bokujō Monogatari*, character affection is directed toward player-controlled characters, with the player ultimately a spectator. The player might imagine (being involved in) amorous and erotic interactions with the game's characters but the game never facilitates such player/character engagement. In another, non-Japanese example, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red 2015), any affection directed toward the player-controlled protagonist Geralt of Rivia is continuously remarked on as being *for Geralt* and *not for the player*. When Geralt intimately engages with one of the game's romanceable characters, up to and including sexual intercourse, the game's assemblage of narrative, aesthetics, player perspective, and mechanical framework separates players from Geralt. It is Geralt's story. It is Geralt's love life. *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* calls on players to empathize, not to identify with Geralt, especially in matters of love and sex. The same can be said for games such as *Persona 5* (Atlus 2016) or *Fire Emblem: Fuuka Seitsugetsu* [Fire Emblem: Three Houses] (Intelligent Systems 2019): as players proceed through the game, they are called on to *empathize, not identify*, even when the player-controlled entity is supposed to be an embodiment of the player themselves.

This is not the case in adult computer games in Japan. While the game's narrative might state that the object of a character's affection is the protagonist, the assemblage of visual design, aural performances, and reward images interface with the player and the player only. Players interfacing with adult computer game aesthetic assemblages undergo a process of emotional and sexual

arousal, which, in turn, produces a state of heightened physiological activity.[10] In consuming the assemblage, players *substitute* themselves for the character they are controlling; they are no longer immersing in or empathizing with the protagonist character (cf. Blom 2019, 24–25; Newman 2002, n.p.; Aarseth 1997, 142; Bartle 1996, n.p.).

To substitute themselves, however, a player needs to be in the right disposition and the right context. While the game software partly provides this by calling for a specific context and a specific framework – pornography – the player must contribute with a context of their own, facilitating substitution. This orientation is combined with diverse gamic frameworks that allow players to play at developing intimacy with characters, in ways akin to non-adult computer games. This allows 'adult computer games' to be grounded as a distinct object of and for research.

Adult computer games in Japan, with and without explicit content, are therefore better considered as video games of character intimacy. Such 'character intimacy games' (CIG) are works of interactive software centered on simulating intimate relationship between characters, featuring systems that facilitate imagined intimacy between game players and characters. This latter aspect is twofold: intimacy is both depicted in-game under the affordances of anime-manga and *eroanime-eromanga* and it is offered for imagination to players outside the game software proper. At the software level, players interact with mechanical systems, mobilizing strategic thinking and development of optimal play strategies. At the game's narrative level, players identify with characters and act accordingly with the game's plot and the choices it provides, geared toward depicting intimacy between characters.

[10] Examining character intimacy games, Patrick Galbraith (2021b, 118) cites porn scholar Roberta Williams's comparison of pornography with 'body genres' such as musicals, 'weepies,' comedies, and horror (Williams 1989, 5, cit. in Galbraith 2021, 118).

Beyond software and narrative, character intimacy games interface with players directly, through the use of emotionally charged, erotic, and pornographic content. The above three dimensions combine to align the experience of adult computer games with character intimacy. Users play at character intimacy, and, at the same time, they substitute themselves for – not immerse themselves in or empathize with – the entity they are controlling during intimate character engagement with romanceable characters. To substitute themselves, however, players need to be in the right disposition and the right context. The third dimension, interfacing players and characters without in-between avatars, regardless of gamic systems, is what distinguishes character intimacy games from games dealing with intimacy and/or sexual intercourse. The combination of simulated intimacy and player substitution is what distinguishes character intimacy games from other video games typologies. Character intimacy games juxtapose gamic systems simulating intimacy between characters of varying complexity and, at the same time, they provide content and contexts designed to facilitate intimacy between players and characters with no in-between layers. This study deals with the ramifications of the above discussions.

Figure 1: *a screenshot of Senren ＊Banka [Senren Banka: A Thousand Colors of Love] an adult computer game published by Yuzusoft in 2019. This is how adult computer games in Japan look like, and the type of screen presented to players for the majority of in-game time. Screenshot taken by the study's author.*

Figure 2: *a specialist shop in Akihabara. Source: Christian Kadluba* (2009, CC BY-SA 2.0).

Figure 3: *at this point of Senren ＊Banka's narrative, the player is elicited to choose between multiple options. This is how players navigate through the vast majority of Japanese character intimacy games. Screenshot taken by the study's author.*

Figure 4: *a reward image from Riddle Joker (Yuzusoft 2018), marking an important milestone within the game's story. This is the prelude to one of the game's sexual intercourse scenes. Screenshot taken by the study's author.*

PART 1: GOALS, SCOPE, AND GAPS

- What This Study is About and What It is Not -

This study is an exploration of character intimacy games – video games centered on establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with fictional characters. It is a work of game studies located in 'AMO' (anime, manga, otaku) studies, a theoretical discourse related to Japanese cultural industries, the production and consumption of its products, and their fans, who are known as otaku (Kacsuk 2016b, 275). It provides a descriptive examination of character intimacy games, as understood in select but influential fan-curated databases. It examines the interpolation of video game mechanics, player engagement with characters, and the role of intimacy as the central element of a typology of video game works, regardless of setting, plot, or the presence/absence of explicit content. It re-formulates practices such as *moe*, foundational for Japanese adult computer games, in the context of parasocial phenomena – parasocial interactions and relationships – and studies of media reception. It is, ultimately, a theory of video games incorporating and centered around parasocial phenomena – imaged media receptions, engagements, relationships with fictional characters, and emotional bonds between media users and media characters (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 12).

Being part of game studies clarifies that, unlike previous approaches in AMO discourses, CIG software is not approached as an adaptation of, or subsumed into anime-manga media. CIG software, despite existing collocations and reductions into static media (cf. Clements 2019; Taylor 2007), generates different affordances and different modes of relating to content. It is not the same as reading printed matter, or watching animation, or assembling a plastic model kit. It is not the same as a generic interfacing with immaterial commodities disseminated in a media-mix[11] fashion

[11] Industrial paradigm for transmedial content production developed within the Kadokawa publishing conglomerate by the work, amongst others, of Ōtsuka Eiji and his Media Office (cf. Steinberg 2015a, 2012; Ōtsuka 2010 [1987]). It emphasizes the role of characters as an avenue of expression for fictional, overarching storyworlds, and social practices in physical and virtual spaces independently of media affordances (Ernest dit Alban 2020, 2016;

(cf. Steinberg 2015a, 2012). In fact, if one looks closer, the modes of content interfacing with immaterial commodities disseminated as media-mix were influenced by digital media and video games (Steinberg 2019, 2015b). Niche anime-manga media contiguous with the same immaterial commodities also extensively remediates the affordances of digital media and video games within static formats (Azuma 2009 [2001], 2007). As static as character intimacy games may appear, they are interactive software designed to entertain and amuse users, and thus deserve appropriate research approaches. Moreover, they *warrant* approaches rooted in the study of video games – navigating interactive software is not the same as turning the page in a book.

Finally, this study employs and interfaces with research located in studies of media reception, and in particular those concerning so-called parasocial phenomena. As anticipated above, parasocial phenomena describes one-sided modes of relating with media characters by media users, in a way that resembles relationships between living beings. Parasocial phenomena are divided between parasocial interactions (PSI) and parasocial relationships (PSR), the former tied exclusively to events of media reception, the latter building on PSI to extend connection beyond media works proper (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 12; Schramm 2015 [2008]). Parasocial phenomena vary in nature (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 13) and encompass amicable, negative (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008), and romantic (Tukachinsky 2010) interactions and relationships, although historically, the focus has been on studies of amicable bonds.

Parasocial phenomena connect with concepts such as presence (Hartmann 2008; Minsky 1980) and transportation (Green et al. 2008; Green and Brock 2000). Presence is where users no longer perceive, or only partially perceive, content as being mediated (Hartmann 2008, 1; Lee 2004; Riva et al. 2003; Biocca 1997; Minsky 1980). Transportation concerns immersion in a story,

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Yamamura 2020, 2015; Baffelli and Yamaki 2018; Sugawa-Shimada 2020, 2019a, 2019b; Steinberg and Ernest dit Alban 2018; Steinberg 2015a, 2015b, 2012; Saitō 2014, 2011 [2000]; Sharp 2014).

characterized by imagination, emotional response to events, and focus (Hartmann 2008, 2; Schubert et al. 2001; Draper et al. 1998). As users connect with media characters on a deeper level, they enjoy increasing ease of access, which, in turn, influences the emergence of parasocial phenomena. In the context of character intimacy games and AMO studies, *moe*, user-based responses occurring in interactions and relations with images, objects, etc. toward fictional characters (Galbraith 2019, 64) become a culturally connotated description of parasocial interactions and relationships.

Reappraising *moe*, the foundational aspect of Japanese CIG software, in the light of media reception studies generates this study's preliminary assumption: the focus on developing intimacy with characters, interpolating software operation, reception practices, and production practices cannot be reduced to 'just another video game mechanic' or one of the possible tools of the developmental toolbox. Rather, centering the experience of a video game on establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with fictional characters produces a distinct typology of video game software. Therefore, this study reframes adult computer games and similar software as character intimacy games, where parasocial phenomena are an integral, foundational, non-ignorable segments of in-game operations. Building on what has been espoused in the previous paragraphs, the key arguments of this study are framed as follows:

1) Interactive software centered around establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with characters – visual novels, dating sims, *bishōjo* games, *otome* games, *BL* (Boys Love) games, etc. – merit renewed classification as 'character intimacy [video] games.'
2) Explicating and emphasizing character intimacy as the foundational element of 'character intimacy games' decouples studies of CIG software from unstable subculture terms (*moe*).
3) Decoupling CIG from Japanese subculture allows the emergence of a character intimacy game as a distinct analytical category, employable across disciplines and geo-social contexts.

For now, this study's research territory lies, broadly, in Japanese adult computer games [*adaruto gēmu*]. In Japan, adult computer games are non-generalist video games featuring anime-manga characters, who "can be involved in any imaginable form of sexual interaction" (Galbraith 2021a, 76). They may include material that is considered immoral and obscene, and considered illegal in several jurisdictions, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (Galbraith 2021b, 70–71; Mclelland 2016, 11–13). The presence of obscene content, styled in *eroanime-eromanga* fashion, poses "legal, cultural, and ethical challenges" to teaching and researching this segment of Japanese cultural industries (Cather 2016, 70). As content meant for a restricted, adult audience, it runs contrary to shrinking boundaries of acceptable knowledge in an "increasingly conservative and even litigious climate that puts a premium on avoiding offense, be it legal, moral, religious or simply a matter of taste" (ibid., 71).

Adult computer games have mostly remained confined to the margins of AMO studies and other disciplines dealing with computer games in Japan, despite their intersection with key anime-manga industries (cf. Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe] and Nakamura 2019, n.p.). AMO discourses, for their part, have remained tied and influenced by studies of static media. From their origins in manga research (cf. Kacsuk 2018b; Brienza 2015a; Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013; Berndt 2010; Johnson-Woods 2010; Itō 2011 [2005]), AMO discourses have expanded to include research across interconnected media formats and their users. This encompasses anime (Suan 2021, 2020, 2018, 2017a, 2017b; Lamarre 2018, 2013, 2009; Uno 2018, 2009), user-based facets of content reception such as otaku, *fujōshi*, and *otome* (Galbraith 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Santos 2020a, 2020b; Andlauer 2018; Lamarre 2013; Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 2007), social practices in physical and virtual space (Sugawa-Shimada 2021, 2020, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Dit Alban 2020, 2016; Baffelli and Yamaki 2018; Steinberg and Dit Alban 2018; Steinberg 2015a; Yamamura 2015;

Saitō 2014, 2011 [2000]; Sharp 2014, 2011; Morikawa 2012, 2008 [2003]) and, more recently, generalist anime-manga video games as well (Bruno 2021, 2019; Kacsuk 2021b).[12]

The field has built an informal canon of works and approaches based on static media, centering on auteur directors like Miyazaki Hayao and Studio Ghibli (Denison 2020, 2018, 2007), Oshii Mamoru (Orbaugh 2015; Ruh 2004), Kon Satoshi (Ortabasi 2014; Napier 2006), Shinkai Makoto (Yoneyama 2020; Swale 2018; Walker 2009), Hosoda Mamoru (Boyd 2020; Denison 2019); debates around genre/demographics (Ting 2019; Takeuchi 2010; Prough 2010; Mihara 2009; Thorn 2004); and "epoch-making" works like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Gainax 1994; cf. Iglesias and Baena 2021). Japanese video games, albeit growing in importance (Hutchinson 2019), have historically played a secondary role in Japanese studies, subsumed into media-mix industrial practices (cf. Steinberg 2015b; Allison 2006) or viewed as adaptations/expansions of existing franchises (Greenwood 2015, 2014).

The focus on the interconnected nature of Japanese cultural industries has led to increased scholarly attention on overarching phenomena such as transmedia production in the form of the media-mix (cf. Ōtsuka 2010 [1987]) and industrial histories (cf. Denison 2011), together with a focus on the growing hybridity of anime-manga as a global media format (Kacsuk 2018b; Suan 2018, 2017a; Brienza 2015, 2014; Denison 2015; Condry 2013). The tendency toward interpolating anime, manga, and otaku, emphasizing interconnectedness across media produces an ambiguous research territory. On the one hand, emphasizing commonality across media formats and the immaterial nature of characters and content is necessary. On the other hand, this has led to the conflation of media and practices into what is the dominant media of reference – anime-manga. Beyond the examples of subsumption of adult computer games into anime-manga, this has also

[12] Akiko Sugawa-Shimada, deliberately omitting otaku from the definition, envisions a similar field of both scholarly approaches and objects of research as ACG – Anime, Manga Comics and Games (cf. Jenkins 2021, n.p.).

led to other conflations, such as the identification of Japanese gaming culture in general with otaku culture (Picard 2021, 21, 28–29).

An exception to the general dearth of approaches to character intimacy games in AMO studies is research engaging with character intimacy games as dangerous media. Character intimacy games have been present within Japanese media discourses from the late 1980s through the 1990s, explicating growing concerns with "virtual worlds" (Galbraith 2021b, 46; Kinsella 2015 [2000]; Allison 2006, 80, 85; Leheny 2006, 39; 126–129; Schodt 1996, 45–47). Historically, they have been at the center of public concerns regarding the indiscriminate circulation of explicit content perceived as harmful for the public (Galbraith 2021b, 95–101; Koyama 2020 [2016], 137–140; Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 33–34), and in particular, "sexual minorities" [women and children] (Nakasatomi 2013 [2009], n.p.). These concerns intersect and mobilize with wider debates regarding otaku culture and their media consumption habits (Galbraith 2021b, 46–59; Kamm 2015; Morikawa 2008 [2003], 262–269), another tendency toward conflation.

Another, continuing example of conflation is a recent contribution by Saito Kumiko (2021), which emphasizes connections between character intimacy games [visual novel and romance simulation games] and literary texts, with no engagement with CIG software as video games. Galbraith's (2021b) examination of character intimacy games [*bishōjo* games] in Akihabara also shirks from examining CIG software as video games. How, then, can a research territory be delineated in clear enough fashion to prevent a continuous renegotiation of boundaries, exceptions, and borderline cases? In what cases is a video game 'centered around intimacy'? Is it even possible or appropriate to do so, given the apparent lack of gamic-ness that accompanies most works?

Falling back onto 'adult computer game,' on the other hand, does not provide an exhaustive picture. While one can intuitively pinpoint where these games circulate and the sector(s) of the Japanese mediascape in which they are developed, not every character intimacy game is an adult

computer game. That is to say, not every character intimacy game is an adult computer game, but, arguably, all adult computer games are, in one way or another, about some sort of intimacy, whether depicted in a pornographic fashion or not. Devoid of pornography, women-oriented video games such as *otome* games or some BL games are nevertheless centered on establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with one or more characters. If raising simulators are also taken into consideration, then it is possible to make a stronger case for not focusing exclusively on pornographic and explicit content. Intimacy, in the wider sense, cannot be reduced to sexual intimacy or its representation, as erotic and/or pornographic as it may be.

At the same time, however, it is adult computer games that provide the prototype for the structure of most CIG software, both in Japan and abroad. Players engage with interactive software and are presented with at least one – generally more – character to romance, with progress marked by reward images, what Andrea Wood calls an erotic scavenger hunt (Wood 2011, 369). Reward images, in addition to marking game progression – successful traversal – also contextualize one or more characters in an intimate situation, which may range from the first physical contact to full sexual intercourse. Through the reward images, players gain contact with the character in an intimate situation. In other words, players are stimulated to receive such media content as a parasocial interaction.

Intimacy, or at the very least, a depiction-cum-elicitation of parasocial reception is deployed as a reward for player progress. This is present both within video games featuring explicit content and those that do not. It constitutes an excellent distinguishing feature for contouring the corpus of video game works that serve as this study's research territory. While most of these games will certainly fall into the category of adult computer games, it allows for the inclusion of works that, while not featuring explicit content, are nevertheless centered on intimacy. This study therefore establishes its research territory as those video games produced in Japan whose progress is

contingent on character intimacy, as exemplified by the reward image system.[13] This productively reformulates the game's broad topic, from adult computer games in Japan – a matter of zoning and circulation – to character intimacy games in Japan – a matter of video game ontology(ies) – what character intimacy games *are* or *may be*. By setting character intimacy games in Japan as its research territory, this study investigates what CIG software is or may be, delineating a theory of video games centered on character intimacy. In doing so, this study contends that video game genealogies, such as character intimacy games, require a (re)acknowledgment of in-game and extra-game parasocial phenomena – from incidental and derivational to foundational for the gamic experience.

[13] It is necessary to note that the reward image framework should not be considered the sole possible articulation of character intimacy as a marker of game progress. It is, however, a distinctive characteristic of CIG software production in Japan, and thus constitutes the best possible recognizable marker for the games that are of interest to this study.

1.1. Establishing the research gap

1.1.1. AMO studies and their limits in approaching character intimacy games

This study originates within AMO studies and its broad concerns with anime-manga media, the industries that sustain its production, its media users, and their practices. However, this study cannot accomplish its goal of reframing adult computer games in Japan as character intimacy games and deriving a suitable theory by relying on AMO studies alone. AMO studies are beholden to approaches, methods, and research foci characteristic of research in static media and area (Japanese) studies. This privileges static, ancestor media – animation, printed matter – and the examination of phenomena around character intimacy games, rather than an examination of the software itself. Character intimacy games are subsumed into wider phenomena and approached as symptomatic of larger tendencies such as media-mix (cf. Steinberg 2015b; Ōtsuka 2010 [1987]; Allison 2006) or the adaptation/expansion of existing immaterial commodities (Greenwood 2015, 2014). Generally, approaches to Japanese video games tend to overlook or refuse to engage with character intimacy games, while iterating approaches appropriate to area studies.

For example, Rachael Hutchinson's *Japanese Culture Through Videogames* (2019), one of the most recent works on video games in continuity with Japanese studies, approaches Japanese video games – video games whose creating entity's main office is located in Japan (ibid., 2) – as unique loci for engaging with wider Japanese culture. Hutchinson's work resembles tendencies highlighted by Jaqueline Berndt concerning studies of anime works (2018). As with anime, Japanese video games are (re)purposed as "an occasional tool for the exploration of societal issues concerning Japan and Japanese audiences, the Japanese audience is first generalized and then short-circuited, i.e. immediately correlated, with individual media texts" (ibid., 3). Such approaches share a "modernist preference for leveraging discrete art objects against large social forces and power relations" (Berndt 2018, 5; Lamarre 2018, 29).

In other words, the geo-social-industrial context of provenance is privileged as distinctive, and dependent on local conditions (Picard 2021, 2013). The emergence, production, and reception of distinctive video game typologies, such as character intimacy games, require local conditions; character intimacy games – *bishōjo* games, BL games, visual novels, etc. – are first and foremost anime-manga (Japanese) games and approached accordingly. It is certainly foolish to ignore local socio-technological conditions, especially given the types of machines that may run character intimacy games and their adoption across the Japanese population (cf. Koyama 2020 [2016], 19–20; Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 30–35; Miyamoto 2013; Uemura, Hosoi, and Nakamura, 2013; Picard 2013; see also Kobayashi (Hichibe) and Koyama 2020, 75–76). However, it is also foolish to ignore tendencies regarding the emergence of games centered around intimacy outside Japan, such as in North America. In fact, video games centered on establishing, developing, and fulfilling imagined intimate relationships may not be – or may not have been – an exclusive prerogative of anime-manga media. Isolated cases, such as *Softporn Adventure* (OnLine Systems 1981), *Romantic Encounters at the Dome* (MicroIllusions 1987), *Plundered Hearts* (Infocom

1987), and *Girlfriend Construction Set* (Tom Scheffler 1989) can be found in 1980s North America, featuring a similar focus on establishing intimate relationships, ranging from the raunchy – *Softporn Adventure* – to the therapeutic – *Romantic Encounters at the Dome*.[14]

There is seldom interest in approaching character intimacy games – whenever they are referred to as adult computer games, *bishōjo* games, visual novels, etc. – as video games within AMO discourses. Galbraith, one of the most prolific voices on character intimacy games [*bishōjo* games] research in English, adopts an anthropology-focused approach (2021b). Kumiko Saito (2021) approaches character intimacy games from the perspective of literary analysis, privileging written prose over software. If remediation of video game aspects by static media has been widely acknowledged (cf. Steinberg 2015a, 2015b, 2012; Azuma 2009 H. [2001], 2007), character intimacy games see an inverse process: rather than highlighting gamic elements within static media, there has been a highlighting of the static elements of a software's assemblage of code and narrative content (Galbraith 2021b, 141). Interaction with characters as part of game operations is intended to be imagined (Galbraith 2021b, 134–136). Gamic aspects tied to the nature of CIG software as video games are overlooked – the preponderance of static, apparently passive reception appears to be enough to fold character intimacy games into ancestor media.

In AMO studies, character intimacy games become a sort of non-video game: interactive enough to be seen as separate from static digital media formats such as hypertext fiction but not 'interactive' enough to be classified together with 'proper' video games (cf. Douglass 2020; Crawford and Chen 2017; Kamei-Dyche 2017). Mirroring this, character intimacy games have been collocated as a sort of (non-) anime-manga media: similar enough to be contiguous with

[14] The development team was counseled by Veronica Thomas, a psychologist, and Allan Rabinowitz, a licensed social worker, in order to better develop the simulated interactions offered within the game (cf. MobyGames 2022).

anime-manga media but lacking sufficient aspects of either animation or sequential art to be fully subsumed in either media format. At the same time, continuity with other anime-manga media – video games, animation, sequential art – brings issues affecting cognate media into the discussion of character intimacy games. To what extent is anime-manga a CIG software work? To cite Stevie Suan's framework of the anime-esque (2021), does it feature enough anime-esque acts? Probably it does. But, as a typology of video game centered on intimacy with fictional characters, does the study of character intimacy games *require* anime-manga scholarship?

While character intimacy games in Japan have emerged in continuity with anime-manga media, scholarship such as AMO studies is *not required* to approach character intimacy games. This should not mean that AMO studies has nothing to contribute to the study of anime-manga media, its industries, its users, and their practices. Rather, it serves to support explorations of character intimacy in Japanese CIG software as *one* of the possible avenues by which imagined intimacy may be operationalized in a work of interactive software. The limits of AMO studies lie in the entangling of Japanese character intimacy games, whatever their descriptor, with the wider panorama of anime-manga media. Untangling CIG software from an indissoluble connection with anime-manga media, on the other hand, opens the way for new approaches that take character intimacy into account as a definitional element of video game software.

To do so, however, it is necessary to develop a codified terminology for how intimacy may be articulated within video game software, its influence on the game's mechanical frameworks, and the avenues of engagement between players and characters, within and without software. This terminology must account for the multiple avenues by which the processes of character intimacy may be simulated, and how it may influence players' own imaginations of intimacies. Rather than filling the role of a cultural curiosity, as happens with select 'Japanese' video game genres such as the JRPG (Pelletier-Gagnon 2018), character intimacy games represent a fruitful new frontier

in the study of video games. Not as a (g)local niche, but as a new facet of global video game production requiring appropriate instruments and approaches.

1.1.2. Studies in media reception and their limits in approaching character intimacy games

Parasocial phenomena are one-sided psychological states in which a human media user interacts with a media character (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 5). The study of parasocial interactions and relationships dates to the mid-1950s and *Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance*, by anthropologist Donald Horton and sociologist Richard Wohl (1956), and *Interaction in Audience-Participation shows*, by Horton and fellow anthropologist Anselm Strauss (1957). The concept of 'parasocial' did not enjoy widespread following (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 1) until the 1970s (Rosengren and Windahl 1972), specifically the publication of the Parasocial Interactions (PSI) scale by Rubin et al. (1985). From that point, it established itself as one of the most popular themes of research in communication studies (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 4; Gilles 2002). Nicole Liebers and Holger Schramm's (2019) inventory of sixty years of research in parasocial phenomena account for four research foci in the study of parasocial phenomena, each possessing its own trajectory. The first is the influence of media users' characteristics on parasocial phenomena (ibid., 14). The second concerns the influence of media characters' characteristics on parasocial phenomena (ibid., 14–15). The third focuses on the reception phenomena accompanying parasocial phenomena (ibid., 15). The fourth deals with the effects mediated or influenced by parasocial phenomena (ibid., 15). In the context of character intimacy games, the second and third foci of research are the closest to the purposes of this study.

One key shared assumption in research on parasocial phenomena until the last decade has been that parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships are amicable (Lieber and Schramm

2017, 12; Colliander and Dahlén 2011; Eyal and Cohen, 2006; Auter and Moore, 1993). Only recently has scholarship drawn a distinction between types of parasocial relationships, distinguishing between parasocial relationships of a romantic and those of an amicable nature (cf. Liebers and Schramm 2017; Erickson and Dal Cin, 2017; Driesmans, Vandenbosch, and Eggermont, 2016; Adam and Sizemore 2013; Tukachinsky 2010). Despite existing research covering a wide range of static and interactive media formats, ranging from radio serials and TV broadcasters to social media and video games, research in parasocial phenomena envisions parasocial interactions and relationships as a *derivational* aspect of user engagement with media characters. That is, the process by which users engage with media characters is a-symmetrical, centered on user response and, at least outside of social media research, not within the scope of the intended uses of media works. (Calvert 2017; Brunick, et al. 2015; Calvert and Richards, 2014; Howard Gola et al., 2013). Examples include PSRs of an amicable and romantic nature with book characters such as Harry Potter (Schmid and Klimm 2011), television characters (Keren and Rubin 2003), and parasocial interactions with characters as a potential teaching tool for children (Brunick et al. 2016).

There is scant consideration of envisioning media characters and media works, even those that are interactive, as *deliberately* featuring parasocial interactions and engendering parasocial romance with a fictional character. In fact, as the inventory of sixty years of research by Liebers and Schramm (2019) outlines, most research on new media focuses on communications conducted over social media between the public image of celebrities or media characters and between users (cf. Chen 2016; Yates 2015; Kim et al. 2015; Sanderson 2009; Thorson and Rogers 2006). Beyond studies of PSIs and PSRs in relation to children's media, approaches that posit media fostering deliberate PSIs and PSRs with media characters in adult users appear to be rare (cf. Song and Fox 2016; Jin 2010). While there is research on parasocial phenomena in video games (Banks and

Bowman 2016a, 2016b; Bowman et al. 2012; Jin 2011; Jin and Park 2009), these are limited to interactions in online games and avatars. One exception is Song and Fox (2016), which deals explicitly with character intimacy games (romantic video games).

This study seeks to complement this gap by interfacing relevant studies located within AMO studies and game studies with research located in studies of media reception. It integrates existing approaches to Japanese cultural industries in AMO studies and medium-specific expertise of game studies with insights originating from research on parasocial phenomena, understood in terms of parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships. The former exclusively concerns the act of media reception, and is tied to media engagement (Schramm 2015 [2008]). The latter, by contrast, represents a more long-term response to media characters, and extends beyond instances of media usage (Schramm and Hartmann 2008; Klimmt et al., 2006). Comparatively, real social interactions "feature bidirectional communication between individuals, whereas PSI is one-sided and not dialectic, because the media character controls the PSI, which makes reciprocal development of the relationship impossible" (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 13; Schramm, 2008).

Research concerning parasocial phenomena, despite possessing different foci and residing at a distance from game studies, is not easily integrated with AMO studies and game studies. While it is extremely easy to re-envision existing media literacies as a process where users learn how to produce parasocial phenomena through media reception, it is not easily attached to video game analysis. Parasocial phenomena are, first and foremost, a product of user media reception. It is not reasonable to argue for an embedding of parasocial phenomena into software operation, which in a wide sense, is intended as the act of playing the game by operating the software. And yet, if there are, indeed, systems of emergent media literacies, learned through peer networks, some sort of deliberate invitation – through practices of game content creation – should be envisaged.

In a sense, studies of media reception are limited by the object of research – they are engaging with user reception, and not with engendering such states in other actors. Nevertheless, the drive toward engineering parasocial phenomena as part of software operation must be considered, beyond self-evident needs such as making characters appeal to users. It posits the question of the extent to which parasocial phenomena can be engineered – how fuzzy and blurry emotional states like love and affection can be subordinated to design choices and shared media languages. Examining character intimacy game production in Japan, with its media literacies, may provide an answer to the question.

At the very least, it can provide a general orientation of how to engender parasocial phenomena in users, and how engaging parasocial phenomena can represent an element of distinction for a typology of video games. Each template for character design, each prototypical situation, becomes evidence of a sedimented design language for producing sequences of parasocial interactions, arraying parasocial relationships in gamic form. Connecting parasocial phenomena to game design choices, embedded in software structure – code and narrative content – uncoupled from strict user reception, further unearths a research object calling for distinct approaches and discussion.

1.1.3. Game studies and their limits in approaching character intimacy games

This study, while originating within AMO studies, positions itself as part of the interdisciplinary field of game studies. It supplements the gaps within AMO studies with methods and insights developed as part of the study of video games. It seeks to account for the specificities of interacting with software, even when said software appears to be contiguous with ancestor static media. Following Espen Aarseth and Sebatian Möring (2020), it emphasizes the central role of gameplay as the praxis by which video games come to be understood as video games. If, one the

one hand, there is a growing use of terms such as ‘visual novel’ and ‘romance simulator’ in both academia (cf. Saito 2021; Salter et al. 2018; Crawford and Chen 2017; Lu 2014) and online data repositories, such as *The Visual Novel Database*, the focus has been primarily on general elements such as empathy (Bostan et al. 2020; Sierra Rativa et al. 2019; Gilbert 2019; Wulansari et al. 2019). Intimacy has been more thoroughly approached as a by-product of player engagement (Anderson 2019; Anable 2018; Lehrer 2017). Furthermore, there is a predominant focus on female-oriented media (Saito 2021; Blom 2020; Rojas 2020; Okabe and Pelletier-Gagnon 2019; Ganzon 2017a; Kim 2009). In contrast, studies encompassing male-oriented works have been comparatively rarer (cf. Galbraith 2021b; Bruno 2019; Au Yeung 2008; Taylor 2007), while books on the matter are limited to Japanese fannish works of media criticism, which may remain untranslated in English (cf. Kimi 2021 [2017]; Miyamoto 2013).

There are persistent gaps, however, within game studies, which, ironically, still require the insights gathered from discourses such as AMO to better understand the subject matter at hand. Game studies continues to lack a stable, defined language for engaging with video games. It lacks a stable ontology – what a video game is – and, in fact, it might not be possible to create one in the first place as per Wittgenstein’s position on the impossibility of games as a formal category, although description of digital games is certainly possible (Aarseth and Calleja 2015, 1-2, 5). This also does not preclude the creation of sub-ontologies, such as card games, mancala games (Aarseth and Möring 2020, 1) or, in the context of this study, Japanese adult computer games.

While developing a sub-ontology around Japanese adult computer games is easy – one has to look at circulation and zoning – developing an ontology for character intimacy games is problematic. What is intimacy, and how could it be incorporated as part of software operations? How does intimacy factor in game traversal? Is intimacy merely a number, a Boolean or integer variable existing within game software? This is certainly not the case given existing approaches

in AMO studies. Then, it is necessary to ask how a game studies approach may account for a player's emotional engagement with characters that are supposedly "designed to trigger affective responses" (Galbraith 2021b, 38).

Game studies has observed a broadening of the "emotional territory" covered by video game works (Isbister 2016, xvii). There has been an increase in approaches emphasizing emotional responses in users during gamic activity (Quesnel and Riecke 2018; Shinkle 2008; Sykes and Brown 2003) and how emotion might factor in the design of game characters (Bopp et al. 2020; Plass et al. 2020). Audrey Anable argues for video games to possess different modes of affect for users, distinct from non-interactive, static media such as films or printed matter (2018, 7). Games "engage and entangle us in a circuit of feeling between their computational systems and the broader systems with which they interface: ideology, narrative, aesthetics, and flesh" (ibid., 10). However, While Anable and other scholars (cf. Dicken 2017; Miller 2017; Pozo 2017) do approach player engagement at the emotional level, these studies are seldom useful for deriving pointers that may help distinguish character intimacy games.

Peter Kelly (2015), in his examination of *Dragon Age II*'s (Bioware 2011) courting system, argues that "it is very difficult to talk about, describe, define, and implement a media product that encapsulates the concept of 'love.' Humans have dedicated centuries of artistic expression in written, verbal, musical, and visual media to the topic and it remains a philosophical and moral conundrum" (ibid., 57). Kelly defines love within video games as an "uncanny valley" devoid of a final definition (ibid., 57–58). He further argues that "love and romance, as difficult, fluid, and esoteric concepts, may prove too elusive for programming without the ability to transcend the confines of structural and systematic game design. Without unpredictability and chance, digital characters are always-already bound to the rules of the game, even if that unfolds across a spectrum of possible experiences" (ibid., 58). Kelly exposes the underlying problem with simulating love

inside a software environment, namely, that of reducing the fuzziness and unpredictability of human love relationships to states in a program, which lead to love and sexual intercourse as a result of strategic navigation through a game (ibid., 69).[15] Players navigating the formula have no choice but to follow pre-determined steps laid out in the software (ibid., 71). If the development of intimate relationships with characters within a video game can be reduced to a series of navigational steps, it no longer encapsulates the emotional and fuzzy aspects that make intimacy intimate.

Mitu Khandaker-Kokoris (2015) poses the question of what counts as love in the context of video games, highlighting that "mainstream games offer an extremely narrow view of love and relationships" (ibid., 93). Both Kelly and Khandaker-Kokoris concur in their assessment of mechanics-driven character interaction – dialogue trees – as inherently problematic, with an underlying current of determinism that reduces love and affection to the consequence of a series of strategic navigational moves. The process becomes a matter of pressing the correct sequence of buttons to get the other to sleep with you (Khandaker-Kokoris 2015, 96–97). Sebastian Möring (2015) examines the use of metaphors to indicate love and affection within video games, juxtaposing abstract depictions, such as those in *The Marriage* (Humble 2007) and those in *The Sims* (Maxis 2000) (Möring 2015, 213). Through in-depth examination of the abstract assemblage within *The Marriage* – moving shapes, navigation, and shape alteration following collisions – Möring concludes that video games about love abstract a series of metaphors and metonymies about love (ibid., 224). Within game software, this leads to an abstracted and incomplete simulation based on overarching, culturally dependent models of love and affection (ibid., 225).

[15] Kelly structures the strategic nature of navigation through character intimacy as masculine. However, examination of women-oriented video game works, especially *otome* and *BL* games, reveal a similar strategic outlook (see Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 180−181, see chapter 2.3, 6.4 and 6.5).

In the case of character intimacy games, within and without Japan, the issue is not whether a software framework may or may not be capable of simulating intimacy, love, and affection. This has already happened, in the sense that a segment of Japanese gaming culture perceives such games as simulating intimacy, love, and affect (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 64–65, 175–177; Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 177–195; see also Andlauer 2018; Kim 2009) and even their darker side (Galbraith 2021b, 61; Nagayama 2014, 226–228). The shared, semi-formal media literacies at the basis of character intimacy games in Japan are certainly dependent on local socio-technical conditions. However, they *do* facilitate the reduction of intimacy, love, and affection to software states, steps, and scripts. This happens both at the level of software, namely, in the code and narrative content, and in terms of the players viz. the level of intimacy that players might be expected to have at a particular stage in the game. Permitting this reduction to software states, steps, and scripts produces the distinction that allows us to approach character intimacy games as video games.

1.2. Occupying the research gap

1.2.1. Assumptions, research questions, and fields addressed by this study

Existing approaches to character intimacy games show significant gaps. Within AMO studies, there is a general scarcity of approaches that account for the nature of character intimacy games as video games. Within game studies, there is a reluctance to engage with in-game character intimacy in terms of interactive software. Within studies of media reception, approaches are limited by an exclusive focus on user-based phenomena and a scarcity of approaches to video games. This study assumes that centering the focus of video game software – as an assemblage of software operations and narrative content – on parasocial phenomena (intimacy, love, and affection with fictional entities) produces distinct modes of engaging with in-game characters, game traversal, and of relating with software.

Romancing, gaining the trust and then the affection of a character, imaginary as it might be, produces different effects and affects than endeavoring to surpass an opponent or kill an enemy character. In fact, the processes that may embed embodied connections, emotions, and affects in

player engagement have already been explored significantly (cf. Anable 2018; Isbister 2016; Enevold and MacCallum-Stewart 2015). However, approaches to games centered on intimacy, explicated in non-metaphoric forms and/or outside of the realm of 'serious games,' remain limited in number and scope (cf. Galbraith 2021b; Blom 2020b for examples). In investigating its assumptions, this study addresses:

1) The scant consideration for character intimacy games as a distinct typology of video game software centered on parasocial phenomena.
2) A lack of mapping efforts for character intimacy game production, in Japan and abroad.
3) A lack of models for researching video games centered on character intimacy.

By offering character intimacy game as a theoretical construct and as an analytical tool, this study seeks to promote increased awareness of video games centered on character intimacy within global and (g)local video game production. While such works certainly intersect with Japanese pop culture and cultural industries, they are not indissolubly tied to them, and should not be treated as such. Consequently, this study moves from the existing focus on intimate responses and engagement being the sole purview of the player to propose increased consideration of game software. Building on character intimacy as the foundational element of CIG software, and seeking to understand *what is going on* with character intimacy games, this study proposes four research questions:

1) What is 'intimacy' in character intimacy games? What is intimacy pointing at, and what kind of phenomena emerge from 'intimacy' in character intimacy games?
2) How is intimacy embedded in the assemblage of character intimacy games? How does it concern mechanical systems? How does it relate to player engagement?
3) What is the role of characters in character intimacy games? Are certain characters better suited to eliciting intimacy in players than others?
4) What is required of players in order that they may engage intimately with characters?

This study decouples video games centered on character intimacy away from a strict, automatic connection with Japanese cultural industries. In doing so, it seeks to articulate discussions about character intimacy games away from the current perception, i.e. that they are dangerous (Galbraith 2021a, 74) cultural curiosities (cf. JRPGs, Pelletier-Gagnon 2018), toward their examination as a part of global gaming culture. In responding to the four research questions, this study engages with AMO studies, games studies and, indirectly, with studies of media reception. It is written in a way that makes it comprehensible for scholars of all three fields and for readers interested in similar phenomena located in other fields. It is my hope that all the above readers may make sense of this study, engage with it, and find it useful for their own efforts.

1.2.2. The need for a comprehensive approach

To address the scant consideration of Japanese character intimacy game production, this study adopts what can be called a comprehensive approach. It engages with CIG software production in Japan *at scale*, addressing when, where, and how character intimacy games are produced and circulated, and for and to whom. Production of character intimacy games in Japan is both vast in scale and significantly scattered: there are around 500 releases (visual novels) per year (Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe], and Nakamura 2019); average sales volume is around 2,000 units (Kagami 2010: 136); and cost recouping generally positions itself at 3,000 units sold (Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe], and Nakamura 2019, n.p.; Koyama 2020 [2016], 210). Within the wider *kontentsu* industry (niche anime-manga, cf. Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe], and Nakamura 2019, n.p.; Deguchi et al. 2009), entities producing CIG software – companies and individuals – may lie in-between hobbyist/semi-professional production [*dōjin*] and media production segments, such as generalist anime and manga (Hernandez 2016; Hichibe and Tanaka 2016; Picard 2013).

Small release volumes, a low threshold for placing works in circulation, and limited circulation of individual works, generate their own set of challenges: devising an approach that accounts for these facets of CIG production requires different avenues that deal with emblematic contexts such as Akihabara, Denki-Gai, and Otome Road (Galbraith 2021b; Kobayashi and Koyama 2021; Morikawa 2012, 2008 [2003]) or the Comic Market convention (Tanigawa 2012; Lam 2010). Even approaches based on sales data and player-based ratings (cf. Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 177–195) are risky: there is no guarantee that such approaches do not overfocus on a corpus of select titles at the expense of their wider production context.

The situation is similar, albeit on a smaller scale, to that described by Lev Manovich in *Cultural Analytics* (2020) regarding the study of digital cultures: the scale-cum-scatteredness of character intimacy game software production in Japan causes approaches to limited portions of the field, such as exemplar case studies or collections thereof, to be at risk of being excessively arbitrary. There is another striking similarity with Manovich's call for new methods in the study of contemporary digital culture (2020, 42–44): the scatteredness of character intimacy game production means that most works will not – have not – achieved notoriety of any kind, and may be further obscured by a focus on the highest ranking titles or supposed contrasting/competing canons.

While comprehensiveness does not imply exhaustiveness, this study still seeks to provide as wide a possible exploration of character intimacy games. Such a task, given more than forty years of video game production in and, more recently, beyond Japan, is daunting. It elicits methods and data sources arguably outwith the scope of traditional methods in the humanities. At the same time, it is unwise not to consider the individual peculiarities of each character intimacy game in terms of characters, narrative, and gameplay. This requires both the development of techniques for

character intimacy game analysis[16] and a mapping of the territory detailed enough to draw case studies from it. This study therefore complements the development of an analytical model for character intimacy games with large-scale, data-driven approaches interrogating data produced by players of CIG software – specialist, fan-curated repositories such as the English-speaking *The Visual Novel Database* [vndb.org] and the Japanese *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-* [Erogescape – A Space for Erotic Game Criticism – https://erogamescape.dyndns.org].[17]

Fan-curated repositories represent a primary source for the overall goal of grounding character intimacy games as a distinct typology of video game software. This is especially true as character intimacy game production in Japan does not enjoy the same level of cataloging as mainstream video game media production. Database ontologies – the way knowledge is modeled through a set of fundamental attributes (cf. Gruber 2008) – of mainstream repositories may not include ways to represent information that might be of value for CIG software research, especially in institutional sources. The Japanese government-sponsored *Media Arts Database*, for instance, is not interested in the kind of relationship that may be entertained with in-game characters. *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape*, on the other hand, feature information about the kind of relationships that may be entertained with characters, in addition to other, database-specific information, responding to users' needs and preferences. Lastly, fan-curated repositories might provide access to hard-to-find source material, or records thereof, structured in a way akin to professional cataloging and classification systems (Kacsuk 2021b, 119; Picard and Pelletier-Gagnon 2015).

These data sources, interrogated as socially produced documents (Royal and Kapila 2009, 146), reflect "viewpoints, interests, and emphases of the people who use it," with an emphasis on interests (ibid., 146, as cit. in Kacsuk 2021b, 128). Each database provides information on CIG

[16] See chapter 3.2

[17] See chapter 3.3

software in encyclopedic fashion, thus generating its own perspective on character intimacy games in Japan and abroad. This may help to reposition the (research) results in a way that allows for conclusions even in the face of potential bias (Kacsuk 2021b, 128). In fact, biases can be highlighted as a quality of a socially produced document and the fan communities that coalesce around them (cf. Benkler et al. 2015; Kimmerle et al. 2015), serving as an additional source of information for this study's overall approach.

1.2.3. Drawing case studies against wider data perspectives

Deploying a data-based perspective to engage with character intimacy game production at scale, this study does not recuse itself from also engaging with individual case studies. Individual case studies, although far from being a guaranteed representation of the wider territory, can nevertheless be significant in terms of grounding character intimacy games as an object of research. This study does not, however, derive case studies through researcher expertise or through evaluation by critics. Rather, it obtains its corpora of case studies in juxtaposition with perspectives derived from large-scale, data-derived perspectives, one for each of its sources. Each data source allows derivation of a conceptual 'prototype' for what constitutes an 'average' character intimacy game. Namely, it is possible to derive a set of characteristics – as defined by each source's descriptive data – which represent a sort of middle ground, encompassing most works detailed within one data source. It is subsequently possible to draw a corpus of case studies that reflects the 'prototype' – or, working in inverse fashion, draw a corpus of case studies that is as far removed from the 'prototype' as possible. By doing this for each of the data sources employed,[18] this study provides preliminary outlooks of what may be recognized as a character intimacy game in different

[18] See chapter 3.5

contexts. After derivation, the prototype becomes a reference point against which all kinds of individual case studies can be juxtaposed.

The process of prototypal derivation allows for a re-examination of case studies and works already deemed of interest by scholars and critics. An example may lie in the triptych of *ONE ~Kagayaku Kisetsu e~* [ONE ~ Towards a Shining Season~] (Tactics 1998), *Ever17 -the out of infinity-* (Kid 2002) and *Higurashi no Naku Koro Ni* (07th Expansion 2002-2006), the three case studies proposed by Azuma Hiroki within *Gēmutekina Riarizumu no Tanjō* (2007). Another example could be the three bestselling titles of 2014, which Galbraith deploys as representative of CIG software (*bishōjo* games) in opening his PhD dissertation (2017, 2): *Sakigake Jenerēshon* [A Generation Charging Ahead] (Clochette, 2014), *Koi Ga Saku Koro Sakuradoki* [Saku: Love Blooms with the Cherry Blossoms] (Palette 2014) and *Tenbin no La Dea. Ikusamegami Memori* [Dea of Balance: Memori, Goddess of Battle] (Eushully, 2014) (Haya no Sorane 2015, cit. in Galbraith 2017, 2). Juxtaposition between data-derived prototypes may highlight tensions between the research territory and software works deemed as worthy of scholarly attention.

The same process can be – indeed, it already has been – adopted for character intimacy game characters. Approaches by Bruno (2021) and Kacsuk (2021b) in the context of the Japanese Visual Media Graph project show how the average number of traits in a character deemed to be archetypical (Kacsuk 2021b, 129–135), or arrays of character elements (Bruno 2021, 154–161) can be measured and operationalized. This allows for the analysis of characters in CIG software – what kind of characters are present in character intimacy games? Do they possess distinctive features that encourage the development of intimacy in players in a way that characters in other games do not? Each prototype – be it game or character – establishes an ontology of character intimacy games, their characters, and, in a wider sense, of video games centered around character intimacy.

Each ontology, in turn, produces a taxonomy of character intimacy games and their characters that may be compared to other video game typologies and genealogies. Doing so establishes what a character intimacy game may be in the eyes of different communities of players, and allows for this study's theoretical assumptions and the frameworks derived from them to be tested at scale. For instance, how is intimacy recognized and cataloged within data sources, if, indeed, it is cataloged in the first place? What is deemed important to be cataloged and retained within the data on character intimacy games? How does this differ across data sources? Finally, what type of information can be derived from each source for the purpose of distinguishing character intimacy games? Engaging with these questions in relation to data sources and individual case studies allows this study to produce the comprehensive approach required by its subject matter. Through such a combined approach, it is possible to highlight blind spots in data approached at scale and what cannot be garnered through exemplar case studies. The process is one of double de-obscuration and de-obfuscation: computation can highlight what is not covered by case studies and influential works, while traditional, humanities-based approaches can highlight what can become invisible at the scale offered by cultural data. This, in turn, may bridge discrepancies between computational and traditional approaches.

1.2.4. Establishing what this study is not about and its limits

This study, by seeking comprehensiveness, requires us to account for thousands of individual works of interactive software, as described by data sources. It seeks to make sense of what character intimacy game are about. Its goal is ontological: defining what a character intimacy game is and what it means to play such a game. It seeks to develop a model to engage with CIG software, drawing on existing theoretical approaches supported by recognition, circulation, and usage of character intimacy games as represented by fan-curated data-building efforts. In electing to engage

with data-driven perspectives juxtaposed with individual case studies, this study produces its own set of limitations. Firstly, this study does not include empirical players in its approach. It looks at fan-curated databases as socially produced documents, employing them as sources of information on player perspectives. The scale at which fan-curated databases operate makes the contrast with limited player samples challenging and requires additional methodologies that this study cannot include due to lack of space. Furthermore, this study seeks to be an approach *at scale*, which a limited number of players cannot hope to reproduce. Nevertheless, a contrast between a data-driven perspective and empirical players is an interesting next step for further research.

Secondly, this study does not seek to ground character intimacy games as a video game genre, especially given that CIG software may feature other genres in their assemblage. Just as classification practices may change over time, so can the data sources that this study relies upon. The plethora of circulating genre descriptors – visual novel, *ren'ai game*, bishōjo game, *gyarugē*, *nukigē* – are unstable and variable, making any approach aimed at defining character intimacy games as a video game genre potentially unfeasible. At the same time, video games labeled as belonging to a particular genre may ultimately possess similar goals. A real-time strategy game and a team sports simulation are both centered on defeating a human or AI opponent through the employment of tactics involving several entities under player control, for instance. In the same vein, different character intimacy games may belong to different video game genres as defined by their mechanical frameworks – adventure, visual novel, puzzle, RPG – but still retain a central focus on establishing, developing, and fulfilling character intimacy. In fact, character intimacy might enjoy different levels of integration within a game's mechanical systems.

Lastly, this study is not, and should not be, taken as a defense of character intimacy games against the manifold critiques that have been levied against them in recent decades. Nor should it be taken, in an opposite fashion, as a critique of character intimacy games. It does not seek to

discuss media effects or character intimacy games/intimacy-centric video games/adult computer games as dangerous media. It does not seek to engage with the clinical effects of pornography on individuals in character intimacy games, which are located well beyond the scope of this study. Finally, this study does not deal with the recent emergence of "fictosexuals" (Dooley and Ueno 2022) as a recognizable population – that is a connected but separate project necessitating radically different approaches and methodologies.

1.3. Outline of the present work

Beyond part 1 outlining goals, scope and gaps of this study, the work is articulated in five parts, genealogy, method, theory, conditions and case studies plus conclusions. ***Genealogy***, draws upon existing research to identify the various strands of video game development that have led to the emergence of what this study calls 'character intimacy games'. It firsts presents a perspective on interactive software characterized by static content reception, featuring what would later become the screen configuration associated with visual novel software and character intimacy games in general. It then produces a perspective on intimacy-centered video games which featured pornographic rewards juxtaposed with numerical management frameworks. By working in tandem, these two chapters provide a two-sided perspective to the evolution heterosexual, men-oriented character intimacy games in Japan. Concluding and contrasting the two perspectives is a third chapter on women-oriented video games, whose general absence of pornography precipitates the need for examining intimacy in wider fashion: if rewards can be more than pornography, and straddle into emotional engagement, then intimacy needs to be considered in the widest possible fashion, beyond pornography or sex-based entertainment.

Method articulates the two-pronged approach of this study. It starts with a statement of the underlying problem of character intimacy games, namely what needs to be considered for successful interpretation. It builds upon proposal for game hermeneutics into a process that accounts for how games may elicit users to 'play at intimacy': produce the ensemble of actions that allow the development of imagined intimacy with one or more of the game's characters. Juxtaposed to the above single-work-focused approach is an outline of the sources and the tools employed to engage with character intimacy games at the levels required for this study to produce effective results. If, on the one hand, this study needs the development of appropriate ludo-hermeneutics to engage with single works, on the other hand, it is also necessary to map the

surrounding environment needed to ground individual works. Method discusses the tools and the sources employed by this study, and provides a first demonstration of their usage.

Theory delineates existing avenues of research which provide the steppingstones into delineating a theory of character intimacy games across AMO studies, studies in media reception and game studies. *Theory*'s first segment, which concerns AMO studies, discusses the need to de-couple research on CIG software from 'Japan' intended as a geo-socio-technical context and, at the same time, the opposite necessity of accounting for Japan as the context in which CIG software has emerged and stabilized in such great numbers. It discusses the need to separate research on character intimacy games from automatic connections to Japan and Japanese subculture. It traces similarities with other avenues of research into Japanese pop culture – anime-manga especially – and how it is necessary to avoid existing tendencies towards conflation and immediate correlation-cum-generalization with Japanese social issues. It also argues for still taking the wider conditions, practices and aesthetic sensibilities in character intimacy games, and how they should be operationalized in the analysis of CIG software.

Theory's second segment, which concerns studies in media reception, produces a reformulation of *moe*, collocating it under the umbrella of parasocial phenomena. This shift is an attempt to bring the study of the above phenomenon into a framework which is free from the subcultural instability that makes approaching engagement with attractive anime-manga characters problematic. It deals with matters of mediation, and of how users may find themselves immersed and transported into a context where they interact with characters in ways that may allow the deeply intimate relations between users and characters reported within existing literature. Finally, it discusses matters of media literacies, and how user imagination can be conveyed along the common ways, archetypes, tropes that populate character intimacy games in Japan. It does so by engaging with scripts theory, developing so-called sexual scripts into intimate scripts, known

avenues and templates that regulate intimate interactions, beyond the confines of the story, and into user/character imagined interactions.

Theory's third and final segment, *Game studies*, produces a discussion of game mechanics in order to reconcile the seemingly open-ended, fuzzy nature of player imagination with the ensemble of mechanical systems that may be found in character intimacy games. In particular, it seeks to reconcile the manifold systems and game genres found within CIG software, ranging from visual novel to JRPGs, and how every one of these software typologies may still fall under the purview of character intimacy games. It discusses the systems which allow players to develop bonds with characters within the games, and the possibility spaces that emerge out of them. Finally, it argues for the envisioning of two parallel possibility spaces within character intimacy game software: one emerging out of the software proper, one emerging out of the player's imagination, moderated by their media literacies.

Conditions discusses the environment in which character intimacy games are received, produced, and circulated, and validates each discussion with data-driven approaches. It first deploys a discussion on the interfaces employed within CIG software to depict character encounter, and how they elicit players into continuous projection of incomplete information – prose, visuals, aural performances – to form a coherent, imagined picture. In doing so, they elicit a deep, personal connection between players and characters, facilitating direct relationships between players and characters. Subsequently, it discusses the media environment in which CIG have emerged and operated, highlighting three flashpoints which have positioned character intimacy games as harmful media within the Japanese media discourse. Finally, it discusses the environmental conditions of character intimacy games through an examination of the personal computer as the platform on which CIG software has emerged and continues to circulate. It engages with the socio-

technical conditions around personal computing machines, contrasting them with those around home consoles.

Case studies discusses how players encounter characters in the context of software-based interactions. It presents how players and player characters interact with the game's intime scripts. It approaches how intimate scripts intersect with the intimacy progression. Finally, it deploys an examination of how the intimacy progression might be operationalized, defining 'character encounters', movements with a before and a after, within the game's overall structure. Subsequently, it presents this study's five case studies, each juxtaposing a single work with wider, data-driven and data-derived perspectives. Each of the five case studies represents a work of interest from a traditional perspective, which is then juxtaposed with the work's position in the wider media landscape.

PART 2: GENEALOGY

- Lineages of Character Intimacy Games in Japan-

Before moving on to discussing how this study approaches character intimacy games more specifically, it is important to reinforce what 'character intimacy game' refers to in concrete terms. Following the evocative but nevertheless unexhaustive presentation of subject matter, this part of the study provides an overview of video game lineages that, in one way or another, have contributed to the emergence of character intimacy games as they circulate today. To do so, this study builds on the iconic, three-layers screen configuration that is found within the near totality of circulating CIG software.

Farthest from the player, occupying the first, deepest layer on the screen, are the background illustrations depicting the locale where the narrative is unfolding. Superimposed onto backgrounds come character sprites, also known as *tachi-e*, depictions of characters in essential emotional and mental states. Closest to the player is a semi-transparent box, usually located in the lower portion of the screen area, which houses prose-text and interface buttons, such as save/load functions and access to options and pause screens. This is where players may read prose text and make their choices when prompted. Jiang Yehang argues that this screen configuration is what makes a visual novel video game recognizable as such (2019, 38–40). Most of a character intimacy game may be spent within such a screen configuration.

Within software that features increased gamic segments – strategy, JRPG, puzzle, etc. – the screen configuration is what marks character encounters as such. Following the trail of the screen configuration described above, this study identifies three software lineages that comprise the ensemble of software that this study refers to as character intimacy games. The first lineage is one rooted in early adventure games and experiments with the adaptation of static media forms into digital software. It is connected to text-parser video games and video games made for non-gamers, privileging narrative content over software mechanics. The second one is connected to the growth in production of video game software where pornography is used both as a marker for position

within media discourses and as a reward for players assumed to be male. The third lineage is connected to the production of video games for women (Kim 2009), where intimacy represents a marker of difference in software focus, oriented toward Japanese female audiences.

These lineages are located within the geo-socio-technical context of Japan, and to the study of Japan this research is indebted. However, the location of these lineages in Japan should not be taken as an implicit declaration that character intimacy games are a uniquely Japanese product or that their emergence is a symptom of society-wide tendencies.[19] Rather, the Japanese media landscape is one where CIG software has managed to thrive and sediment into a recognizable segment of video game production. Its size makes it the most suitable candidate for approaching character intimacy game in a way that allows for the appraisal of the highest possible number of variations, allowing for a better definition of character intimacy games in general.

[19] See Chapter 4.1.1. and 4.1.2

2.1. Adventure game, novelware sound novel, visual novel

The first lineage showcased within this study is, as argued by Jiang Yehang (2019, 36) and echoed by Koyama, Kobayashi (Hichibe), and Nakamura (2019), originates within text-parser adventure games and concludes with Leaf's *visual novel series* (1997–2004). These games present screen configurations that are reminiscent of later character intimacy games; they present a progressively heightened focus on narrative content rather than producing reflex-based challenges or complex gamic systems. In particular, there is a tendency to force players to abstract and adapt information, visual and otherwise, both to render narrative situations and to traverse the game. In the case of modern character intimacy games, this is evident in the incompleteness of information provided to players: they are forced to abstract and adapt visual information to narrative situations as depicted within prose text as they play (Jiang 2019, 45–47). Not doing so may not only hamper the narrative experience – as most scenes feature only limited descriptions, if any at all – but also privilege some sort of inner monologue (Suzumoto 2008, 131 cit. in Jiang 2019, 39–40) left unvoiced to facilitate player immersion (Galbraith 2021b, 143). In fact, Jiang Yehang argues that one of the preconditions for the emergence of visual novel games – the now dominant framework for character intimacy games – is the "synchronization between the player's thoughts with the game (2019, 36–37). Jiang's statement emphasizes that, by way of mechanical systems and narrative design, players are drawn into the world of the game, and compelled to act. Hichibe Nobushige identifies video games with these features as visual novel games [*bishuaru noberu*], articulating a definition in six points (2006, 70: see also Koyama 2020 [2016], 218–219):

1) The presence of multiple, branching storylines that can be read through, and the possibility for the player to reach different outcomes in the narrative through decisions made at key points during the game.
2) The presence of full-screen illustrations (CGs, Computer Graphics) depicting the locale in which the narrative is taking place or specific events in the game's narrative.

3) The presence of character sprites [*tachi-e*], which can be superimposed over background illustrations.
4) The text of the narrative is displayed in a box in the bottom of the game window or superimposed over the CGs.
5) Aural performances (music, SFX, and voice acting) [*BGM ya kōkaon*] matching character's current emotions and the state of the narrative.
6) The presence of visual effects (flashes, shaking of the screen, distortions, etc.) interacting with the illustrations on screen [*gamen effekuto*]. (Hichibe 2006,70).

There is no mention of intimacy, or similar criteria in favor of a focus on software mechanics concerning game traversal (branching storyline) and graphic interface (presence of character sprites, background illustrations, where the text is displayed, etc.), and a note on juxtaposition of aural performances with the current state of the narrative. Jiang Yehang (2019) also emphasizes a series of four elements with a similar focus:

1) An emphasis on the enjoyment of text narratives, with a wide variety of themes and settings.
2) The game's screen is generally comprised of a text box, character sprites [*tachi-e*], and background illustrations.
3) Progress through the story is marked by effects such as changes in character's expressions, or their sprite's position on the screen, other visual effects such as flashes, or a change of the background illustration. SFX such as sound effects, character voice, and a soundtrack are also present.
4) Players can effect change in the story via multiple choices, experiencing the 'reading' of multiple scenarios and multiple endings (Jiang 2019, 36).

Both Hichibe (2006) and Jiang (2019) emphasize reading rather than playing, intended as continuous interaction within a game's world. Jiang, however, highlights that some visual novel games do not fall into his four criteria, and therefore additional historical perspectives are needed (ibid., 36). Jiang does so by locating the origin of the visual novel game lineage into two works of interactive software, *Omotesando Adobenchā* [Omotesando Adventure] (ASCII 1982) and *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* [The Portopia Serial Murders Case] (ENIX 1983). The first is a

game in the vein of Will Crowther's *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1975–1977), distributed as a supplement to *Zasshi Gekkan ASCII* magazine in 1982 (Sudo 2016, 13, cit. in Jiang 2019). The second is an adventure text parser game, putting the player in the shoes of a detective in charge of solving a series of murders. Jiang then sees an intermediate stage in a diptych of works produced by Chunsoft on the Nintendo Super Famicom, *Otogirisō* [Hypericum] (1992) and *Kamaitachi no Yoru* [Banshee's Last Cry] (1994) (Jiang, 36–38). The lineage then culminates with the *Leaf Visual Novel Series* (1997–2003), a quartet of software works by Leaf – *Shizuku* [Droplet] (1996), *Kizuato* [The Scar] (1996), *ToHeart* (1997), and *Routes* (2003) – credited with the emergence and popularization of the visual novel term (Kabashima 2009, 21, 39).

Jiang emphasizes a progressive reduction in the need for spatial awareness in visual novel games – from a player's need to orient themselves in the game world of *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* to the impossibility of independent movement in the *Leaf Visual Novel Series* – and a progressive increase in importance of characters' presence on the screen – from their absence in *Omotesando Adobenchā* to their constant presence as the focus of the story in the *Leaf Visual Novel Series* (Jiang, 36–37). The shift is from a need to explore and move to experiencing the character's inner world through narrative (ibid., 38). Hichibe, on the other hand, focuses on the technical aspects of visual novel software, but nevertheless traces a similar genealogy of visual novel games, with *Otogirisō* and *Kamaitachi no Yoru* as the origin point of visual novel games today, with Leaf's Visual Novel Series as the culmination of the format.

Koyama Yūsuke (2020, 222) traces an even earlier origin to *DOME* (SYSTEM SACOM Industry Corp. 1988), as an example of software focused on reading rather than playing. *DOME*, a digital adaptation of *Dōmū Shūmatsu he no Jokyoku* [Overture to the End of the Dome] (Natsuki 1986), was marketed as a 'novelware' and emphasized passive consumption of content whilst leaving the user freed to affect the narrative through choices at select points of the software. *DOME*,

Otogirisō, and *Kamaitachi no Yoru* all place an emphasis on reading text prose juxtaposed with visual aids dependent on the current state of the narrative. *Omotesando Adobenchā* and *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* were based in text due to the technical limitations of the time, but also feature heavy doses of movement and other modes of interaction. More generally, these two games did not focus heavily on reading text to access and traverse the game's narrative in favor of making players process information to find the correct solution (cf. figure 5; figure 6; figure 7).

Themes and settings in games focused on reading vary: *DOME* can be classified as science fiction, *Otogirisō* places the player inside a horror story, while *Kamaitachi no Yoru* locates the player in a murder mystery. Regardless of each game's setting or narrative theme, *DOME*, *Otogirisō*, and *Kamaitachi no Yoru* task their users with getting to the end of the story by navigating a series of multiple choices. All three works feature elements highlighted by Hichibe and Jiang, with the exception of character sprites,[20] which would be introduced in the late nineties within the *Leaf Visual Novel Series*. The main feature of the series is the juxtaposition of the sound novel/novelware framework; specifically, privileging reading prose text juxtaposed with the visual aesthetics of anime-manga, and an increased explication of the importance of interacting with characters and erotic intimacy (Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 35–37; Miyamoto 2013, 129–131; Takahashi and Harada 2001a, 2001b).

The first two titles in the series, *Shizuku* and *Kizuato*, re-employed the setup of *Kamaitachi no Yoru*, tasking the player, at least nominally, with solving a murder mystery. However, the resolution of the mystery could only be achieved at the side of one of the game's romanceable characters, whose personal narratives and growing intimacy with the player intertwined with the murder's plot. The third work in the series, *ToHeart*, did away with murder mystery altogether, in

[20] An expansive 2018 remake of *Kamaitachi no Yoru*, *Kamaitachi no Yoru - Rinne Saisei*, would add anime-manga style characters and character sprites to the game, bringing it closer to other visual novel games.

favor of love comedies focused on romantic engagement, with the setting shifting to high school. Such a setup, along with an explicit focus on amorous engagement with anime-manga characters would become archetypal for visual novel games (Takahashi and Harada 2001b, n.p.). The shift to a high school romantic comedy setting, however, did not come out of the blue, nor was it an adaptation from anime-manga. Rather, it was the result of transactions with a separate genealogy of video games, which were already explicitly focused on character intimacy, as part of pornographic entertainment. This separate genealogy of video games is known as 'love simulators' [*ren'ai shimyurēshon gēmu*].

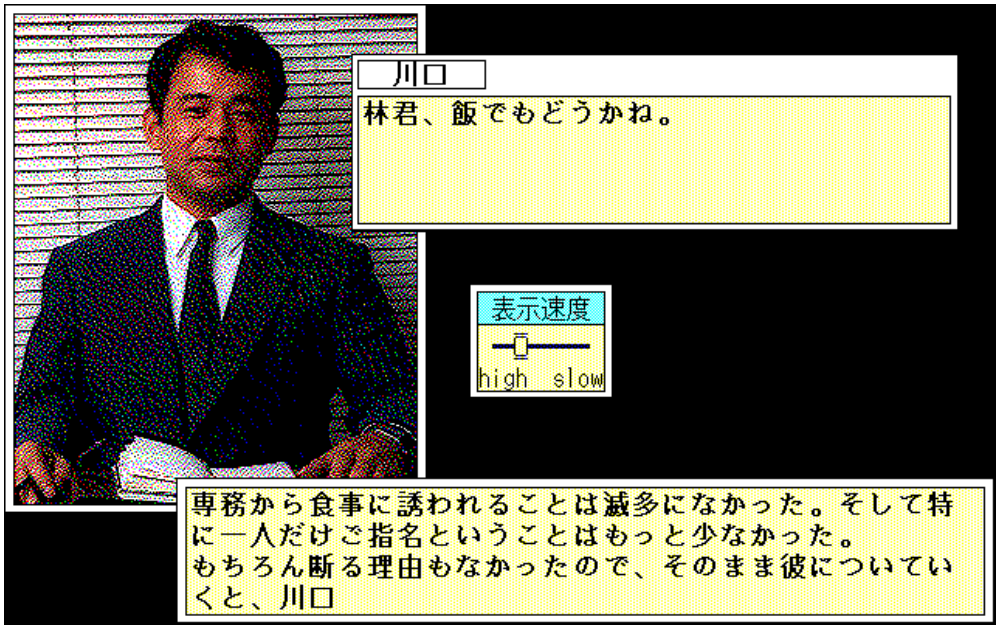


Figure 5: *DOME. Screenshot from MobyGames* (https://www.mobygames.com/game/dome/screenshots).

Figure 6: *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken (left) and Omotesandō Adobenchā (right). Screenshots from HardcoreGaming101.net* (http://www.hardcoregaming101.net/portopia-renzoku-satsujin-jiken/) and ADVGAMER (https://advgamer.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-930.html).

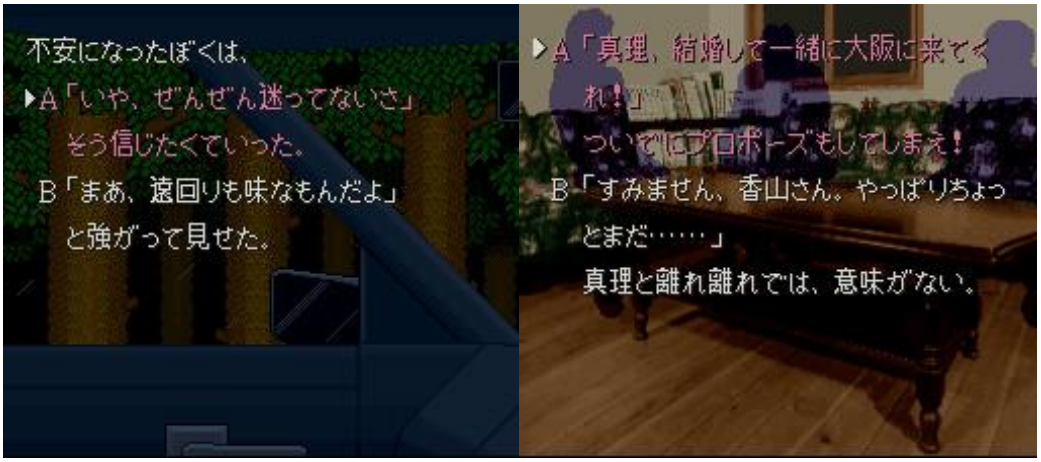


Figure 7: *Otogirisō (left) and Kamaitachi no yoru (right). Screenshots courtesy of The Visual Novel Database* (https://vndb.org/v1241).

2.2. Rewarding management skills with intimate encounters: love simulators and raising games

The second lineage of video games coalescing into what this study calls character intimacy games is that of so-called love simulators. This parallel lineage of video games descends from the wider field of pornographic games in Japan (cf. Pellettier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 30–34; 35–37), As a typology of video games emerged within Japan, it comprised software where players must negotiate traversal through the game's world by managing various statistics. Successful traversal is rewarded with explicit depictions of intimate character encounters. Statistics-based management may be deployed in conjunction with other challenges, such as spatial navigation or the need to take temporal restrictions into account. Different from the adventure game-novelware-sound novel-visual novel lineage, there is not a diminishing focus on spatial awareness. The game is also not limited to only moving forward: players can usually move around the game world, sometimes in a top-down view reminiscent of role-playing games. Also different is the collocation of this lineage vis-à-vis wider video game production in Japan, in that this lineage featured pornographic content, aimed at a male audience, from its inception.

The earliest examples of this lineage can be found in works such as *Oranda Tsuma Wa Denki Unagi wo Yume Miru no Ka* [Do Dutch Wives Dream of Electric Eels?] (Koei 1985) and *Danchizuma no Yūwaku* [Tempting Housewives] (Koei 1983). Both games, whose settings differ significantly – the former a Blade Runner-inspired porn parody, the latter set in the present day – task the player with navigation and statistics-based challenges that must be completed to obtain a sexual encounter. While neither works feature the anime-manga aesthetics of later works such as *Tenshitachi no Gogo* [Angels' Afternoon] (JAST 1985), they do feature a framework in which player success is rewarded with intimate and sexual content. This would later carry on to the already mentioned *Tenshitachi no Gogo* and a plethora of other works, such as *Tōkyō Nanpa Sutorīto* [Tōkyō Pickup Street], (Enix 1985), *Ritoru Purinsesu* [Little Princess] (Champion Soft

1986), *Gāruzu Paradaizu Rakuen no Tenshitachi* [Girls Paradise: the Angels of Heaven] (Great 1988), *Rūjyu ~Manatsu no Kuchibeni~* [Rouge ~Midsummer Lipstick] (Birdy Soft 1990), and the first two installments of the *Rance* series (Alicesoft 1989, 1990) to name but a few.

The earliest example of what would sediment as love simulators proper is *Dōkyūsei* [Classmates] (élf 1992). Therein, the player is put in the shoes of a young man a few months from his final high school graduation, whose objective is to get to know women to find a romantic and sexual partner. In *Dōkyūsei*, in a slight departure from earlier examples, players are explicitly directed toward romancing characters, which is accomplished by managing a series of parameters. They traverse the game by performing a series of activities over a period of several months, managing school deadlines and day-to-day living. It is the player's responsibility to uphold dates, be at the right place at the right time, etc. They are not driven to places or within events by simple decision points. Along with later examples, such as *True Love ~Jun'ai Monogatari~* [True Love ~ A Story of Pure Love ~] (Software House Parsley 1995) and *Tokimeki Memorial* [Heartbeat Memorial] (Konami 1994), among others, *Dōkyūsei* employs an interactive framework resembling the pragmatics of role-playing games, subordinated to an ultimate goal of gaining character intimacy (cf. figure 8). While character interaction segments resemble the latter framework of visual novel games (character sprites, locale illustration, prose text in a box occupying the lower portion of the screen), the player is not guaranteed an intimate interaction from the start of the game. The player must find encounters with characters by navigating within the game's world, which, in turn, requires the player to successfully manage a set of numeric values. Unlike later examples of the *Leaf Visual Novel Series*, love simulators set the gaining of character intimacy as the ultimate goal of software traversal.

Shizuku and *Kizuato*, on the other hand, setup players as being enveloped within gruesome murder mysteries. While traversing the game requires selecting one person that will become the

player character's romantic partner, this is not clear from the start. At the same time, successful traversal grants the player ever more details about the chosen character's inner life, personal narrative, rewarding the player with intimacy. While sexual intercourse is depicted and offered as part of the feedback loop centered on reward images, the player is, for most of the game, treated to intimacy in a wider sense, and grows closer to the personal narration. The explication of character intimacy as the goal of traversal, although factually present in visual novels, would only come with *ToHeart* (1997), *ToHeart 2* (2004), and *Routes* (2004).

Love simulators, in contrast, would explicate the possibility much earlier: when the player triggers an event with one of the game's characters, they are treated to a portion of that character's storyline and with it, her interiority. Intimacy is intended in a wider sense: it includes sexual encounters, but also focuses on non-sexual intimacies, such as familiar relationships, or states of illness, or grief. For example, within *True Love ~Jun'ai Monogatari~*, players romancing Sayama Misako interface with her condition as an orphan, away from her public image as the school nurse.[21] To get to the character encounter involving Sayama Misako, however, players must regularly commit to doing activities pertaining to the 'pleasure' statistic in the night part of the day. And the reward for players still consists of sexual encounters. Character engagement is more rarefied throughout the course of the game compared to the focus offered by visual novel software.

Another, albeit marginal, subset of works known as raising simulators [*ikusei gēmu*] places players in the role of a father figure – usually not related by blood – in charge of a minor and its education from pre-puberty to adulthood, in what is the development of an intimate, but non-sexual – ambiguity notwithstanding – bond. Examples include the *Princess Maker* series (Gainax 1991–

[21] While it is also necessary to acknowledge the use of pornographic anime-manga character archetypes, especially in respect to Sayama's role as the school nurse, it is through the deployment of the sexy nurse archetype that the player achieves increasing intimacy with Sayama, and this process should not be discounted.

2005) and the *Ikusei Keikaku* [Raising Project] (2001, 2004) diptych of works located within the Evangelion media-mix (cf. figure 9). Therein, statistics management is also rewarded with intimate encounters, but these are of a parental kind, with the game's endings each representing a different fate for the player's protégé. By sharing a similar framework and, arguably, also a focus on intimacy in the wider sense, raising simulators also fall within the scope of character intimacy games. However, the two lineages reviewed until now are intended for male audiences. What of video games of character intimacy oriented at female audiences?

Figure 8: *Dōkyūsei*. *Screenshot from MobyGames* (https://www.mobygames.com/game/pc98/dkysei/screenshots). Note the calendar tracker (lower left corner), the time of day and the amount of money available (lower right corner).

Figure 9: *Princess Maker 2*. *Screenshot from MobyGames* (https://www.mobygames.com/game/pc98/princess-maker-2/screenshots).

2.3. Women-oriented games and emotional intimacy as a reward

Visual novels and adult computer games, as a corpus of video game software works and as a niche of video game production, can be considered exclusively male-oriented until the release of *Angelique* (Koei 1994), the first video game of character intimacy oriented toward female players (Kim 2009, 170). *Angelique* is also considered to be the first example of women's video games in Japan (ibid., 170–171). Developed by Ruby Party, an all-female programming team at Koei under the auspices of honorary company president Erikawa Keiko, Angelique sought to appeal to growing female player bases in genres such as role-playing games (Hasegawa 2013, 166–167; Kim 2009, 170–171).

> Erikawa was 'particularly insistent about developing a game for girls made by girls, being a woman herself' (Matsushita, 2008) and summoned female Koei game planners to work on the project. The planners brainstormed and collaborated with female staff from programming and graphic departments, acquired feedback from other female Koei employees,[11] and developed a dating simulation game heavily influenced by the sh[ō]jo manga genre (Kim 2009, 171)

Angelique set a third trend, becoming the first of what is now the *otome* game niche (Andlauer 2018, 166–167; Matsushita 2008), i.e. software works focused on intimacy, oriented toward a female audience, aesthetically rooted in the *shōjo* manga milieu. A second, key difference lay in the platform of choice for the game: *Angelique* released on the Nintendo Super Famicom, entailing the complete absence of explicit content of any kind. A third, even more important difference was in the way the game was played, and how the player engaged with the game's characters: the player is not put in the shoes of a character looking for love, but rather the player is placed in the position of being pursued by the game's characters.

The player is in the shoes of the eponymous protagonist Angelique Limonges, a candidate to become the queen of the cosmos in a fantasy universe. The ascension to the throne is competitive:

she must defeat rival candidate Rosalia De Cartagena, in a contest of magic and strategic prowess, to develop a kingdom better than her opponent's. Nine guardians can be enlisted to either aid a candidate's efforts or to hamper those of her rival. The guardians also serve as judges for the contest, and their ruling will decide who ascends to the throne at the end of the contest. As the player goes about their duties of building the kingdom, traversing what is "a combination of an extremely simplified type of city-building simulation game and a conversation-based dating game" (Kim 2009, 173), they can interact with the other nine guardians. Interaction with the guardians leads to the player discovering more and more about a character's personal history and their relationships with other guardians. Such knowledge is then tested during character encounters (dates) in character intimacy games fashion, where the guardians ask the players questions, which they must answer correctly. A wrong answer leads to a termination of the character encounter, while answering all questions correctly leads to a massive boost in the character's intimacy with the player, which will, in turn, influence the final outcome of the game (cf. figure 10).

The game follows an open-ended structure, and the player may pursue characters on their own or even be pursued by characters in a key departure from games of intimacy aimed at a male audience. As argued by Hyeshin Kim (2009), while the system of game traversal revolves around city building and resource management, "the real objective lies in achieving romantic endings with any one of the Nine Guardians" (ibid., 175). Intimacy is the focus of the gameplay experience, and while the player might elect to concentrate on the city building aspect to win the game, they cannot really refrain from interacting with the nine guardians, or from suffering the consequences of rejecting their advances. At the same time, seeing all the game's content requires the player to romance all nine of the guardians, and to see their personal stories to conclusion.

There is yet another difference in *Angelique*, however, beyond the extensive interactive elements: at the game's conclusion, should the player be the winner of the contest, they must

choose whether to ascend to the throne, renouncing character romance, or whether to reject the throne and fulfill the intimate relationship they have developed. Renouncing intimacy is not presented as a failure state, but rather only one of the possible conclusions to the game. At the same time, even though the player might decide to reject a character's affection in their bid for the throne, intimacy is the fulcrum of game traversal, and cannot reasonably be ignored by the player. *Angelique*, beyond its role as a trailblazer for women-oriented software in Japan, integrates intimacy within its gameplay systems together with an absence of explicit content[22] as a reward for player progress. By not featuring explicit content as a reward for player progress, the *Angelique* franchise (Koei 1994–2021), its sequels, and other examples of women's video games illuminate the need to focus on intimacy in a wider sense, rather than pornography and erotica, for discussing visual novel game/erogē as games of intimacy in Japan. The later proliferation of *otome* video games, beyond the eleven works in the *Angelique* franchise and Koei's own later productions, such as the *Harukanaru Toki No Naka De* [Haruka: Beyond the Stream of Time] series (Koei 2000–2015), followed in these footsteps. Examples include *Arubaria no Otome* [The Maiden of Alvaria] (Gimmick House 1997), *First|Live* (Amedeo 2000), and *Tanbi Musō Meine Liebe* [The Aesthetic Vision of Meine Liebe] (Konami 2001), all of which were released on home consoles and did not feature explicit content.

The above works reprised *Angelique*'s general structure, with one female protagonist character interacting with a cast of romanceable male characters. *Arubaria no Otome* reprised *Angelique*'s general setup of one female player character set to ascend to a high-ranking position – the Sacred Maiden who protects the kingdom from evil – within a fantasy setting, with a cast of

[22] There has been a slight trend toward the inclusion of explicit content in *otome* games, starting from the latter half of the 2010s, but *otome* games usually show a tendency toward remaining devoid of explicit content. This is not to say that intercourse is not present or mentioned but will generally be implied rather than shown (cf. Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 191).

characters serving as her protectors whom she can romance, and having to choose between love and duty at the end. *First|Live*, on the other hand, reprises the high school love comedy tropes of *shōjo* manga instead of Angelique's fantasy setting. The game is a text-driven romantic comedy where the female protagonist and the game's cast of character rotate around one common effort – a school music band. In *First|Live*, there is no choice between love and duty, the framework shifting in a way that is functions similarly to Leaf's own visual novel series. *Tanbi Musō Meine Liebe* also presented an exclusive focus on romance, albeit in a European-inspired fantasy setting more reminiscent of the *Angelique* series.

The three aforementioned works represent an expansion of the field of production of games of intimacy in Japan, featuring character interaction similar to character intimacy games, with a diminished emphasis on sexual interaction in favor of emotional rewards. While it is very easy to attribute these differences to gendering of game and anime-manga cultures (cf. Ganzon 2019, 171; Anable 2018; Chess 2016, 2014, 2013; Vanderhoef 2013; Juul 2010; see also Morikawa 2012, 2008 [2003]), they also reinforce the need for increased discussion of character intimacy, where the end point of the relationship is not necessarily located in imagined sexual intercourse. At the same time, women's games integrate activities meant to grow more intimate with characters into a wider framework where the fulcrum on becoming intimate with characters might not be as apparent as with visual novel/ *erogē* proper.

As the example of *Angelique* shows, growing intimate with characters is a means to achieving player progress in the competition with rival candidate Rosalia. It is also an end, in the form of fulfilling the relationship and obtaining the character's ending. While on the surface it might not appear substantially different from male-oriented works – getting players to aim toward character intimacy, which, in turn, is structured as a set of variables whose activation allows or impedes player progress, its interaction with other game systems elicits more interrogatives. As video

games of character intimacy, *otome* works divorce sexual interaction from intimacy. This does not mean that eroticism is removed from the equation (cf. Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 191–192) or that *otome* games are fully iterating the 'sexless' ideal of *shōjo* in digital form (Shamoon 2012; 2008; cf. Takeuchi 2010). Sexual intercourse is hinted at, present, but not shown, oscillating between continuity with existing *shōjo* manga aesthetics and their latter shift into what is known as *josei* [ladies] manga (Hasegawa 2013, 138–139). While it might also be case with select character intimacy games, the combination of a release on generalist platforms (home consoles) and gendered practices connected with *shōjo* aesthetics produces an expanded paradigm of character intimacy within video game software (cf. figure 11).

As games of intimacy, both *otome* software works and male-oriented character intimacy games feature similar interfaces for character interaction and navigation, even when juxtaposed with other mechanical systems. *Otome* works, with *Angelique* as trailblazer, present an ampler way of intending intimacy compared to the non-generalist self-positioning found within male-oriented character intimacy games. Regarding content, the similarities and differences between *otome* works and male-oriented character intimacy games are inherited from the aesthetic systems they employ, iterating what is a highly gendered media culture, whose facets develop in 'symmetrical' isolation (cf. Morikawa 2012, 139–141). Amidst the gender-based divide, there is also a second category of women-oriented works, BL games, which, having inherited the aesthetics from BL/*yaoi*, self-position themselves as a niche along similar avenues as character intimacy games. BL games are nevertheless in an intermediate position between *otome* games, emotionally focused and devoid of explicit content, and character intimacy games, self-positioned as non-generalist and featuring explicit content. As the name attests, BL games are rooted in the aesthetics of BL (Boys Love) *eroanime-eromanga*, depicting homosexual relationships between young men, designed in aesthetic continuity with *shōjo* and *josei* manga. Akin to c*hara-moe*, BL

presents a series of sub-descriptors, *shōnen-ai*, *yaoi*, *tanbi*, *June*, and *boys' love*, with varying connotations pointing at media format, tone, and settings (cf. Suzuki 2015, 1998; see also Williams 2015; Zanghellini 2015, 2009; Mizoguchi 2008).

BL media in general repurposes practices from *shōjo* and *josei* media (cf. Santos 2020a, 4; Aoyama 2005), such as a focus on emotional engagement and interior life and relations (Santos 2020a, 5; Monden 2015; Prough 2010, 2). Depictions of intimate interactions are highly stylized according to shared practices of production and reception, in a way similar to *chara-moe* works, detached from verisimilitude (Sihombing 2011, 151). In the case of intimate character interaction, it translates into "highlight[ing] the emotions of the protagonist during the sexual act rather than their sexual pleasure" (Santos 2020a, 5), away from the focus on sexual appeal proper of early male-oriented character intimacy games.[23] The first BL software work to enter the Japanese video game market was *Boy x Boy ~Shiritsu Kouryou Gakuin Seishinryō~* (King Record 1999), a game of character intimacy in the vein of *Dōkyūsei*. Despite a lack of explicit content, it released on personal computer machines, placing players in the shoes of Hayasaka Akira, a high school student interacting romantically with a cast of male characters. Other works released subsequently to *Boy x Boy*'s market success include *Plastic Boys ~Mizuiro no Kimochi~* [Plastic Boys ~ Water-Colored Feelings] (Gaia 2002) and *24-ji, Kimi no Heart wa Nusumareru ~Kaitō Jade~* [In Twenty-Four Hours, I'll Steal Your Heart ~Jade the Phantom Thief~] (Pink Clover 2004), to name but a few. These works replicated the shift to a framework privileging static content consumption over continuous interaction, akin to the *Leaf Visual Novel Series*, with event CGs serving as the main gauge for player progression (cf. figure 12).

[23] Interestingly, there would be a subsequent shift toward increased focus on sexual intercourse in later BL works in the form of so-called hard BL. For an extended discussion, see Santos 2020a; Mori 2010 and 2007.

Introducing women-oriented video games within the scope of character intimacy games, in addition to revealing shared usage of mechanical systems, exposes strongly gendered circulation of content. Male-oriented character intimacy games can be considered as generally intertwined with adult entertainment (cf. Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015; Miyamoto 2013). On the other hand, women-oriented video games emphasize emotional forms of intimacy, iterating existing gender-based divisions in the circulation of erotic and pornographic content. At the same time, the focus on non-pornographic renditions of intimacy and erotic content, while iterating mechanical systems of existing, intimacy-focused video game software, further reinforces the need to discuss intimacy in an extended fashion. Properly considering all the various facets of character intimacy production in Japan, accounting for sexual, non-sexual, and non-romantic forms of intimacy is thus the only sensible way to approach video game software centered around character intimacy. This is true of both Japan, where such games emerged, and abroad, where other games with similar foci might be found.

Figure 10: *Moments of Angelique's in-game operations. Screenshots from MobyGames* (https://www.mobygames.com/game/snes/angelique/screenshots).

Figure 11: *First|Live. Screenshots from DLSITE.com* (https://www.dlsite.com/pro/work/=/product id/VJ005169.html). Note that the URL leads to a site not suitable for generalist viewing. User discretion is advised.

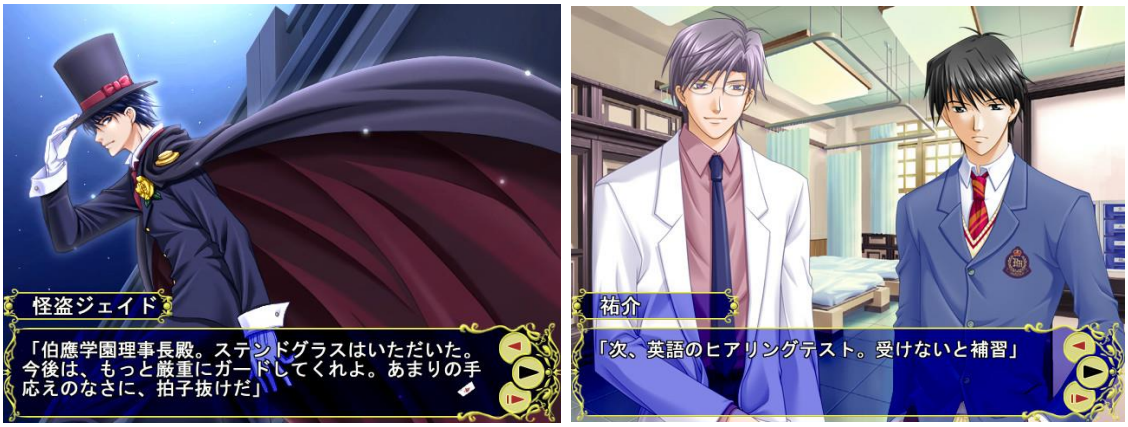


Figure 12: *First|Live. screenshots from The Visual Novel Database* (https://vndb.org/v3448)

PART 3: METHOD

- Ludo-Hermeneutics for Character Intimacy Games -

To successfully explore character intimacy games, this study requires the development of a framework that allows for the analysis of CIG software as video game software centered on character intimacy. Such a framework must accomplish a threefold task: 1) it needs to engage with video game software centered on intimacy within the boundaries of software proper – the ensemble of narrative content and mechanical systems contained within the game files; 2) it must engage with player/character intimacy beyond the boundaries of software proper – accounting for the emergence of parasocial phenomena as part of player interaction with game software (characters, narrative, systems); and 3) it must take into account the wider media environment in which character intimacy games are developed, circulated, and received. In other words, the framework needs to enable an understanding of character intimacy games as video games where character intimacy (within and outwith software proper) is central to playing/traversing the game.

Understanding a video game is a loaded task, particularly in the case of character intimacy games in Japan. What may 'count' and/or should be privileged for scholarly analysis is an even more loaded task: most character intimacy games in Japan are dominated by static, non-interactive content, which encourages the usage of appropriate methods of literary or visual analysis. Textual hermeneutics can have free reign, especially as most CIG software possesses interactivity in such a limited fashion that prospective researchers might be able to forego their ludic aspects. And they may not be wrong. Works like *Planetarian: Chiisana Hoshi no Yume* [Planetarian: The Reverie of a Little Planet] (Key 2004) do not feature any way of altering the course of the game, and yet, like "incremental games" (cf. Deterding 2019; Kacsuk 2017b), they make the act of clicking compelling via a series of progress mechanics and emotional engagement.[24] Similarly, it is

[24] It is also important to note that auto-read functions – automation of progressing through text – are a standard feature of character intimacy games in Japan. Activating the function makes the gamic experience akin to an idle game (cf. Spiel et al. 2019; Alharti et al. 2018).

important to consider that users of CIG software consider it to be different from printed matter, animation, or other static media. CIG software works might share content and aesthetics with cognate anime-manga media forms, but they are not *exactly* the same.

At the same time, as Aarseth and Möring (2020) argued in their discussion of the prerequisites for ludo-hermeneutics that one might ask if ludo-hermeneutics for character intimacy games are really necessary. Building upon Aarseth and Möring's examples, CIG software would not be very different from games like *Dragon's Lair* (Advanced Microcomputer Systems 1983), an adventure game with reflex-based puzzles possessing a very limited number of possible trajectories for analysis. They are not video games in the vein of persistent multiplayer worlds like *Eve Online* (CCP Games 2003), where "a particular observer cannot come near exhausting even a tiny fraction of all the possible trajectories; they are infinite, like space itself. Faced with ludic infinity, game studies need a hermeneutic theory that can account for both the philological incompleteness of the ludic object and the *in-medias-res* of the playing subject" (Aarseth and Möring 2020, 1).

> [T]he notion of games or even computer games is far too wide to comfortably fit into a single hermeneutic mold, whether textual or ludic. A highly likely reason for the lack of successful game hermeneutic theories at this point, just as the similar lack of narrative game theories until recently [7], is the lack of an ontological basis on which to build the ludo-hermeneutic theory. The hermeneutics of film (until the advent of CGI), literature and visual art all have stable ontological foundations. In those fields, it has not been necessary or even welcome to discuss the material, informational, formal and mental preconditions – they are given and therefore taken for granted. With the indefinable and problematic category of games, however [9], there exists no stable ontology (although sub-ontologies are possible, say, for mancala games, or card games), and therefore no viable ludo-hermeneutic theory has hitherto been created (Aarseth and Möring 2021, 1).

Mechanically, character intimacy games are very similar to *Dragon's Lair* with regard to their possibility space: what players may do to alter the course of the game is limited to a set of discrete checks, without the possibility to alter the traversal in-between in any way. When imagination is taken into account, however, they might be closer to *Eve Online,* and exhausting all possible trajectories might be impossible. Therefore, discussions of video game hermeneutics and proposed methodologies of video game analysis also contend with the manifold ways to approach video

game software by employing textual and ludic perspectives. In the case of character intimacy games, deploying ways to account for what CIG may be, beyond the apparently exhaustive definition of video game software centered on character intimacy, is therefore paramount. Doing so assist performance of the first task set for the development of a framework for CIG analysis, i.e. engaging with a character intimacy game within the boundaries of software proper.

The second task, engaging with player/character intimacy beyond the boundaries of software proper, is instead tied to the philological incompleteness of the ludic object and the *in-medias-res* of the playing subject, as detailed by Aarseth and Möring. Engaging with such conditions is arguably harder because it is not possible to assume that every player will respond intimately in the same way to a character intimacy game. The above is especially true if we consider the highly gendered affordances of CIG content in Japan. Male-oriented works are much more likely to 'appeal to the body,' deliberately eliciting sexual arousal, while female-oriented works are more likely to attempt to elicit emotional arousal before sexual responses (cf. Galbraith 2021a, 2021b, 118, 125–133; versus Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 190–191). While accounting for what CIG software might be allows us to contour, to a degree, video game software of interest, it is much harder to grasp the mechanisms that lead to the emergence of player/character intimacy.

The third task, accounting for the wider media environment in which character intimacy games are developed, circulated, and received, while, arguably, more straightforward, necessitates the mobilization of *at scale* approaches. As previously outlined, CIG software production is simultaneously too scattered and too vast to make traditional approaches such as case studies viable for this study's efforts. At the same time, the apparent tendency toward aesthetic self-sameness, while offering manifold varieties of narrative content, makes attempts at generalization even riskier. This is where fan-curated databases as socially produced documents come in.

However, this means combining different methods to account for two distinct but connected research dimensions: individual works and the wider media environment in which they operate.

To engage with the wider media environment, this study employs two fan-curated repositories as its data sources for its approaches at scale: *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-*. The former has been integrated as part of the JVMG project, while the latter is an external, Japanese source. Both occupy a specific, authoritative position amidst their relative media landscapes. *The Visual Novel Database* has the stated goal of "becoming the largest, most accurate and most up-to-date visual novel database on the web" (Heling, 15 February 2022), and de facto occupies such a position among English-speaking anime-manga audiences. *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-* occupies a similar position within the Japanese media landscape, offering a similarly comprehensive view of character intimacy game production in Japan.

Both data sources make their data available to users, albeit in different ways: VNDB provides regular data dumps under the Open Database License and a SQL query system, while *EGS* offers its own SQL form to interrogate its database. Each repository thus offers a privileged, at-scale perspective into Japanese character intimacy game production and reception. VNDB provides such a perspective in the context of anglophone/global audiences. *EGS* does so from the context of the Japanese media landscape. However, this does not prevent these data repositories from being messy, fragmentary, and fragmented (Muhleder et al. 2020). While repositories cataloging niche media may be less so by virtue of drawing upon tighter communities, with a diminished number of actors to regulate, several challenges persist. These include, but are not limited to, comparing different models for describing a media work. A case in point is the fact that the two sources employed by this study present significant differences in terms of their data models, in addition to differences in userbase.

For example, there are, in fact, two different data models within VNDB: one for software releases and one for character entities. Within *EGS*, on the other hand, there is a sole data model, focusing exclusively on software releases. Although users have written functions to link characters to tags by way of scanning text comments, characters do not exist as entries within the database. This is an extremely significant difference, which this study needs to reconcile when comparing the two repositories. At the same time, this difference highlights the different "viewpoints, interests, and emphases" of a database's underlying community (Royal and Kapila 2009, 146). Consequently, the following chapter discusses this study's two data sources, highlighting their perspectival foci, modes of describing Japanese character intimacy game production, and how these can offer greater insight into the phenomenon at large.

3.1. Ludo-Hermeneutics

3.1.1. What to interpret? Character intimacy game is more than a genre label

The analysis of individual works falling within the 'character intimacy game' descriptor is the most obvious step in developing ludo-hermeneutics for CIG software. On the one hand, it is certainly possible to reduce 'character intimacy games' to another video game genre, just as Japanese role-playing games constitute a local articulation of role-playing games. This fails to address the wider challenge of isolating what is needed to develop ludo-hermeneutics for character intimacy games. Collocating video games into genres has been beholden to preceding media forms or, in the words of Thomas Apperley, "loose aesthetic clusters based around video games' aesthetic linkages to prior media forms" (2006, 7).

Video game software may include multiple media in one single software work (Aarseth et al. 2003), a perspective, shared by Mathias Fuchs (2015), which argues for video games as a "super-medium." Video games can "cannibalise sister media and pretend to be film, radio, narration, performance or sculpture. Games can adopt genres, or masquerade as medieval, futuristic, elegant,

brutal or Gothic" (ibid., 7–8). And with every cannibalized media typology or narrative genre comes an array of potential trajectories for analysis, and with it, potential hermeneutics. In the context of character intimacy games, it is a reprise of the issues arising from the subsumption of CIG software into anime-manga media. At the same time, the status of the character database as a 'meta-genre' or 'genre-zero' [*zero janru*] (Azuma H. 2007, 45) becomes a specular issue when character intimacy games are engaged from the perspective of anime-manga media. Just as video games may cannibalize existing media forms, the *moe* database can cannibalize media forms, adapting them to their needs (cf. Bruno 2019, 51–52).

Continuity with static media formats (cf. Karhulati 2011), together with their more-or-less stable ontological foundations,[25] obscures the nature of interactive software as video games. Aki Järvinen offers a similar perspective, emphasizing "the junction of game themes, system behavior, and emotions and moods" (2008, 333). Relying on an extant video game 'genre', or creating a new one, is therefore insufficient, and, arguably, leads to a continuation of existing instabilities in terms of meaning and usages. It is simply not possible to classify character intimacy games into a genre based on themes, or as a continuation of previous media forms, or on the basis of mechanical systems. Just as anime-manga might host a plethora of themes and narrative genres – SF, fantasy, love comedy, etc. – the same is true of character intimacy games. At the same time, mechanical systems are also unable to define character intimacy games as a genre: there are multiple genres within what this study calls character intimacy games – visual novels, puzzle games, strategy, action games. Even if visual novel software comprises most character intimacy games, they are not all CIG software. And yet, playing character intimacy games entails a different experience

[25] It needs to be noted that the ontology of anime-manga is also still disputed, divided between the formal criteria and geo-social context of its origins. For discussions, see Berndt 2021, 2011; Kacsuk 2018b; Suan 2021, 2017; Brienza 2016.

than playing a shooter game. What can be done, then, to produce an effective hermeneutics for CIG software? Neither theme nor mechanical systems appear to be a definitive solution: both leave excessive blind spots.

Despite these difficulties, fan communities seem to have no doubt about what constitutes what this study calls character intimacy games. In fact, the Hirameki International Group, one of the earliest distributors of visual novel software in North America, promoted visual novel software as: "A visual novel is a GAME that you play by READING, LISTENING, WATCHING and CHOOSING" (Hirameki International Group Inc. 2005). And yet, this cannot account for software such as *Dōkyūsei*, or the more recent *Dohna Dohna* (Alicesoft 2020), where character intimacy is juxtaposed with clearly non-static modes of interacting with software. Descriptors such as visual novel or love simulators, to name but a few, feature a focus on character intimacy – the player must engage in some sort of character intimacy to traverse the game – albeit under a descriptor that communicates surface mechanical affordances. The act of playing one of these games – their "praxis of gameplay" (Aarseth and Möring 2020, 2) – is something distinct, and needs to be considered as integral to any game analysis. Such approaches, however, seem torn between the incorporation of gameplay as a fully-fledged hermeneutic process and a separation between gameplay and narrative content (ibid.).

Within game studies, gameplay, the act of playing the game, is proposed as a hermeneutic process (Karhulahti 2015, 2012, 2011; Arjoranta 2011), sometimes in opposition to a focus on understanding the narrative content of the game (cf. Aarseth and Calleja 2015; Calleja 2011; Aarseth 2004, 2003). At other times, hermeneutics is primarily classified as a process that concerns static content, while the act of playing the game is not obscured but rather placed into a secondary position, as per Arsenault and Perron's model (2009), or as attested by Murray's seminal analysis (1997). Finally, there is a third current, which acknowledges the manifold possibilities of

interactive software, accepting both perspectives as part of the range of possible interpretations of video game software (Roth 2018; Schulzke 2014; Bogost 2007, 2006).

Aarseth and Möring (2021, 3) highlight the possibility of oscillating between textual and ludic hermeneutics, building on Karhulahti (2015), Pias (2004), and Elverdam and Aarseth (2007). They contextualize Karhulahti's (2015) envisioning of the process as dual, reducing it to a "distinction between a practical hermeneutics of gameplay and a text (or aesthetic/poetic) hermeneutics" (Aarseth and Möring 2020, 3). In more practical terms, observing the manifold, unstable hermeneutics of dealing with video games, Aarseth and Möring emphasize the ontological pre-conditions that enable the interpretation of video games (ibid., 4). Players need to know that they are playing a video game and engage with its peculiarities in full awareness of its status as a video game, with its own arrays of possibilities.

> Each game (or, depending on how we delimit games, game genre; see [31]) comes with its own implied hermeneutics. This hermeneu-tics is its own circular process or interpretive "feedback loop" [2], by which we play, learn and grasp. […] As the game is played, it becomes itself and changes itself in an endless double hermeneutic feedback loop between the player and the game; both are played by the other, and both change – the player more quickly, the game more slowly. The game itself has, or better, is a hermeneutic method, whereby it becomes itself via repeated play. Ironically, however, the game encountered by the player is not the hermeneutic process, but its ontological result – its here-and-now. The exceptions to this argument would be game design processes and formation of house-rules etc., but in computer-mediated play (and unlike, say, board-gameplay), these formative and transformative practices are precisely exceptions, and therefore not commonplace play practices [5]. What has been called game hermeneutics (see [11], [36]), is rather the player's hermeneutics: the process of becoming-a-player. This is also the uncovering of the game's ontology; the realization of what it takes to be a player of that particular game, and of getting to know the game's here-and-now. (Aarseth and Möring 2020, 6).

Aarseth and Möring's proposal regarding game hermeneutics precipitates questions about how to approach and analyze character intimacy games. One could simply engage with character

intimacy games on a case-by-case basis and employ textual hermeneutics. On the other hand, the fuzzy and open-ended presence of parasocial phenomena remains unaccounted for. Ignoring parasocial phenomena reduces CIG software to other video game typologies, obscuring the centrality of character intimacy. Players recognize the centrality of intimacy in character intimacy games and thus separate them from other types of video games accordingly – specialist fan-curated databases such as *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape* are proof of this. Therefore, analyzing CIG software means asking what it takes to be a self-aware player of character intimacy games. How do character intimacy games become themselves; that is, how do they become the ontological results that are encountered by players? These are the crucial interrogatives underpinning the analysis of character intimacy games as an assemblage of mechanics, affective responses, and content that facilitates player/character intimacy.

3.1.2. Accounting for 'playing at intimacy': The intimacy progression

Approaching character intimacy games at the level of individual works requires its own ludo-hermeneutics framework. The name of this framework is 'intimacy progression' and its objective is to account for the praxis of 'playing at intimacy': the ensemble of imaginative actions envisioning players and characters as the actors in an intimate relationship of varying types – romantic, filial, antagonistic – as part of in-game activity or activities correlated to game software. The framework rests on the assumption that character intimacy games must, in some way, be able to facilitate intimacy between players and characters (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 24, 141). This study does so by envisioning character intimacy games as concatenations of events where players may recognize themselves as playing a character intimacy game, i.e. of being players of CIG software. Within the confines of software proper, this takes place as a progression of in-game character encounters, which may or may not be interactive. Such character encounters are sufficiently contextualized as to explicate to players that the focus of video game traversal is character intimacy, and that everything else is secondary. A piece of CIG software is therefore a concatenation of events where intimacy between players and characters deepens or is otherwise altered. It starts from an initial state of little to no player/character intimacy eventually arriving at a final state where intimacy is total, and the imaginary intimate relationship is considered fulfilled.

In Japanese character intimacy games, this is most evident in the erotic scavenger hunt description proposed by Wood: by providing the right answer[26] to questions posed by the game, players are rewarded with special images. While the most bare-bones form of this feedback loop

[26] It is important to state that such questions in CIG software usually pertain to choosing courses of actions rather than answering questions in the traditional sense. They are, first and foremost, *navigational* choices pertaining to traversing a flowchart, not tests of knowledge. Although they can also be seen as the latter in the sense of knowing enough about a character to answer appropriately, their primary effect is navigational.

lies in the correct answer leading to pornographic images, it is not always so. The tendency toward including emotionally charged content transforms the framework into an 'emotional-erotic scavenger hunt,' applicable to non-romantic and non-erotic intimate bonds as well. Frameworks such as the emotional-erotic scavenger hunt contextualize in-game action in a sufficiently definite way, allowing for assumptions about player identification as part of ludo-hermeneutics. This is not to presume the existence of an ideal/model player (Neely 2017; Bergstrom et al. 2014; Sicart 2013, 25), or to re-litigate existing scholarship about empirical players (cf. De Wildt 2020; De Wild and Aupers 2019; Vella 2015; Jørgensen 2010; 2009). It is rather a statement about preconditions: to play a character intimacy game, players must understand themselves as players of CIG software. If there is no awareness of this, there is no CIG software or praxis of playing at intimacy, and any facilitation toward character intimacy or playing at that cannot take place, even if called for by game software. In other words, CIG software is the ontological result of players being receptive to 'playing at intimacy.'

The intimacy progression is distinct, but complementary to frameworks such as the "system of affection" envisioned by Joleen Blom as part of dynamic game character possibility space within video games (2020, 197).[27] Rather than limiting itself to the confines of software proper, the intimacy progression seeks to account for the ways in which players may interface with characters. By doing so, users play at intimacy with these characters beyond the software, as part of the imaginative action that intimacy may entail. CIG software's assemblage of characters, narrative situations, and modes of player involvement facilitates imagining characters intimately.

Therefore, ludo-hermeneutics for character intimacy games must account for the dual nature of engaging with CIG software: intimacy as depicted within software operations – characters as part of in-game narratives, actors in a fictional world, playing a part in the game's plot, if there is

[27] See Chapter 4.3.2 for a full discussion.

one – and intimacy as developed within and as part of player imagination. At the same time, it is also important to note that intimacy with characters may be refused: players may opt to simply enjoy the story or may not be affected by characters in a way that results in player/character intimacy. Intimacy progression does not envision specific sequences of events or archetypical scenarios, although those can be reasonably drawn by looking at the contexts in which CIG software emerges and circulates. Rather, intimacy progression revolves around watershed moments, milestones where a *before* and/or *after* can be drawn and made significant.

These moments, no matter the culture, no matter the media landscape, can be encapsulated within a starting state and one or more end states. Deepening of the intimate bond is dependent on the degree of intimacy achieved by players, or, more accurately, the degree of intimacy that is *also* recognized as being achieved as such by players as part of the praxis of playing at intimacy. By acting through praxis, the intimacy progression is a form of "affective hermeneutics," that is "a set way of gaining knowledge through feelings […] inextricable from the fannish discourses that produce it" (Wilson 2016, n.p.). While Anna Wilson's approach is made in reference to fan fiction and literary texts, the predominance of prose within CIG software allows us to draw ready parallels. In particular, Wilson highlights that "[a]ffective hermeneutics direct focus toward moments of high emotion in a text that stimulate equally strong feelings in the reader" (ibid., n.p.). She further argues:

> For example, in order to write a character's backstory or a pastfic, a fan writer draws on her understanding of a character, gained through her knowledge of the character's actions, behaviors, and affective expressions. Her imaginative projection of a backstory increases both her and her readers' emotional understanding of the character's canonical actions and further develops empathy and intimacy with the character. Because of this value placed on emotional knowledge in fandom, comments praising a good piece of fan fiction often say that it is in character – that is, that the fan fiction gives a recognizable and believable account of a character that readers already know and love. Fan fiction thus provides an opportunity for readers and writers to mutually affirm their intimacy with a text and with

> its characters. This hermeneutic model provides a useful way to understand the importance of love to fan fiction and complements the understanding of fan fiction as a transformative work.

While character intimacy games are not fan-fiction, their media landscape, Japanese or otherwise, operates in similar fashion.[28] Wilson argues for placing increased attention on the "affective, empathetic, excessive reading practices of fandom" (ibid., n.p.). In this regard, Wilson produces a passage from Michael Warner's *Uncritical Reading*. It describes Warner's students, whose practices Wilson connects to fandom:

> They identify with characters. They fall in love with authors […] they shop around among taste-publics, venturing into social worlds of fanhood and geekdom […] Their attention wanders; they skim; they skip around. They mark pages with pink and yellow highlighters. They get caught up in suspense. They laugh; they cry. They get aroused (and stay quiet about it in class). They lose themselves in books, distracting themselves from everything else, especially homework like the reading I assign. (Warner 2004, 13, cit. in Wilson 2016, n.p.).

The renewed emphasis on affect, empathy and excess is arguably also necessary for CIG ludo-hermeneutics: to develop imagined intimacy with a fictional character is to produce excessive reading. And producing such excesses requires self-recognition. In this way, it is akin to the description of *moe* provided by otaku critic and fannish writer Okada Toshio (2008): *moe* is not merely the act of producing responses, but is actually to do so and also being meta-aware of being in such a state, of producing such responses (ibid., 27–28, 100–101).

The praxis of playing at intimacy, therefore, is a praxis of affective hermeneutics, which cannot be untangled from its host discourse. Japanese character intimacy games, in fact, already explicate such a progression through reward images: each is a pivotal moment in a character's narrative. Sexual intercourse, iconic and obscuring of other intimacies as it may be given the

[28] See chapter 4.1.2.

stylistic conventions of anime-manga, *does* represent a pivotal moment in a character's personal story as much as other emotionally charged events, such as the first kiss or other forms of reciprocated physical contact. Regardless of production context, identifying pivotal moments in the game's narratives, where players are directed toward character intimacy, allows us to approach video games as character intimacy games. Organizing these moments into a progression, identifying how events are organized into causes and effects, and ultimately into a succession of linked events allows us to, at the very least, draw a tentative map of how a character intimacy game deals with intimacy. In doing so, the progression of intimacy becomes a tool for CIG ludo-hermeneutics that is ultimately capable of accounting for, albeit tentatively, both intimacy within software proper and for the praxis of playing at intimacy, which extends beyond software proper and cannot be accounted for by engaging only with software proper.

3.2. Cultural analytics and data-driven approaches

3.2.1. Approaching character intimacy games at scale through fan-curated databases

In *Cultural Analytics*, Lev Manovich argues that "the scale of culture in the twenty-first century makes it impossible to see it with existing methods" (2020, 9). He calls for new avenues of approach to cultural production and digital cultures in particular. Japanese character intimacy game production, as previously stated,[29] is both vast and scattered, making singular case studies or corpora thereof at risk of being excessively arbitrary. This is especially important if the manifold niche tastes and preferences (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 161–167; Morikawa 2008 [2003], 93–101) are to be taken into account. Some visual elements and sub-currents and associated works within Japanese CIG software production might come under increased public scrutiny[30] due to historical contingency. However, there is no guarantee that they are actually representative of CIG

[29] See 1.4.2. The need for a comprehensive approach.

[30] One case being the Tokyo Metropolitan Government restricting the sales of *Imōto Paradise* following the coming? [something missing here?]

production as a whole. This study responds to these challenges by turning to fan-curated databases in order to map CIG production. It does so by interrogating both the data housed in these databases and their data model, i.e. the way data is structured and turned into human-readable information.

Amelia Acker and Tanya Clement argue that "all data are related, indexical, built up, organized, named, understood in relationship to other data, things, phenomena, or human processes in the world. […] [D]ata is not just given, it is taken up by people and given forms, standards, names, putting it into relationships with cultural practices.[4] Data is not nature, waiting to be tamed; it is always already a cultural product" (2019, 2). Kath Albury, together with Jean Burgess, Ben Light, Kane Race, and Rowan Wilken (2017), deploy four lenses for the examination of data cultures. First, as cultures of production – "institutionalized routines, habits and knowledge practices" amidst data users and infrastructure producers (ibid., 2). Second, as the ways data are 'cultivated,' "namely created, cleaned, ordered, harvested, and cross-fertilised – by multiple and distributed but connected actors, including corporations, governments, developers, advertisers and users" (ibid., 3). Third, as the "datification of culture" through algorithmic logics of digital media and their broader integration into social media logics, which are increasingly shaping society (ibid.). Finally, as "cultures of use" – data structures and data processes may be "encountered, experienced, exploited and resisted by users" in everyday life practice – and how informal practices and regulations for safety and ethics in data are managed and contested amidst user communities (ibid.). Acker and Clement argue for distinguishing between data and the culture around them, building upon Albury et al.'s four lenses of data culture to add a fifth avenue of approach, calling for the envisioning of data cultures as "collections of data" (Acker and Clement 2019, 3).

> Understanding data cultures as underwritten by collections of data (as relata [data in relation]) means understanding data cultures as phenomenon shaped by ideas about the cultivation and production of data that reflect epistemologies about, for example, ordering,

> classification, and standards. Like an underpainting, data is an initial layer, a starting point against which the authors look at the cultures that have been painted in the background of data collecting and collections. Seeing collections of data as they shape and are shaped by human life, perspectives, and experience, these authors provide alternative histories as well as possible futures for the cultures that develop in these sociotechnical landscapes (ibid.)

The five lenses for examining data culture may – and arguably almost always do – intersect with one another, just as multiple data culture may also intersect with one another. In the case of databases about anime-manga media works – including character intimacy games – the five lenses allow us to understand the recurring practices of database curators and users. One example of the first 'lens' might be the hair color of anime-manga characters: as hair color plays a fundamental role in determining a character's visual and behavioral identity, fan-curated repositories including character profiles all feature hair colors as foundational information for data entries ("Hair Color", AniDB 2022; "Trait: Hair Color", Heling 2022;). An example of the second 'lens' might be the networks of interconnected actors orbiting around a repository: companies offering advertisements; apps such as *Kitsu* legitimately and non-legitimately scraping database contents for a variety of purposes; users recording data on the latest media works released in circulation. An example of the third 'lens' may be recommendation engines, building upon descriptive metadata within a repository to direct users toward other media works they might like. An example of the fourth lens in anime-manga fan-curated repositories is the openness/closeness of select communities toward usage of their data, especially with respect to commercial uses – data licenses, permission/negation of automated scraping, data-flagging as suitable/not suitable for minors in the case of explicit content. Finally, an example of the fifth lens in the data culture of anime-manga can be found in how properties and tags coalesce into full data entries, and how select properties might herald other properties – an example of this is *The Visual Novel Database*'s eight trait trees

for description characters, which reflect underlying perspectives about what should and should not be recorded about characters in Japanese character intimacy games.

Fan-curated data repositories of anime-manga, or cases like *The Visual Novel Database*, each represent a distinct way of 'painting' both media and culture, with each database responding to specific needs, explicit and implicit. Accessing and understanding such sources is therefore an avenue for gaining a multifaceted understanding of media reception and the culture(s) that may emerge around it in a given socio-technical context. Moreover, comparing multiple data models provides a nuanced understanding of culture production and reception in a given context at scale. Comparing fan-curated data repositories is a way of highlighting commonalities and differences in media reception. In the case of character intimacy games, it paves the way to highlighting commonalities and differences vital to establishing a distinction of CIG software that reflects of scale of production and scale of reception.

3.2.2. Suitability of computational approaches for character intimacy games research

Data-driven, at-scale approaches may miss the more unique elements of cultural production (Manovich 2020, 40–41). "The small "islands" of global culture – groups of unique cultural artifacts, unique cultural behaviors, and unique tastes – can easily become invisible when we aggregate all data together and analyze it as though it is coming from a single population" (ibid.). Character intimacy games in Japan, by virtue of their peculiar position within the Japanese media landscape and the relative ease of distinguishing thme from other media formats, are, arguably, not as susceptible to the above risks as mainstream media production. At the same time, they are a small island amidst a globalizing gaming culture originating in Japan, which, in turn, is an island in the global landscape of video game production (cf. Hutchinson 2019, 2; Picard 2013, n.p.). Furthermore, these approaches also run the risk of obscuring developments such as the explosive

influence-cum-popularity of characters like Ayanami Rei from *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, as highlighted by Azuma Hiroki (2009 [2001], 51–52). As much as Azuma metaphorizes otaku culture and niche anime-manga-*gēmu* production as a database, he still highlights the emergence of Ayanami Rei as a flashpoint for Japanese anime-manga production. Character creation after Ayanami Rei was indebted to her popularity, leading to a radical shift in the creative landscape and a continuous quoting and reformulating of the Ayanami archetype into new entities. Engaging with *actual* fan-curated databases, however, may yield different results.

As part of the Japanese Visual Media Graph project development efforts, Zoltan Kacsuk (2021b) produces one such approach by testing Azuma's hypothesis vis-à-vis actual fan-curated databases. He posits that "if Azuma is correct in that such a shift did take place in the way characters become more dependent on characters that came before them, as opposed to the potentially more diverse creative input of creators that supposedly characterized previous eras, then we should find that the portion of new characters with shared traits should increase over time especially in the case of works aimed at the otaku market" (ibid., 122). Following the examination of two datasets originating, respectively, from two fan-curated data repositories, *The Visual Novel Database* and *Anime Characters Database*, Kacsuk's analysis could not substantiate its initial hypothesis (ibid., 136). Rather, the result brings forth the implication that anime-manga production could always have followed a 'database'-like framework, especially on the production side. Kacsuk subsequently drew parallels with the material affordances of the Japanese animation industry – the so-called cel-bank – to provide supporting evidence for the plausibility of his alternative position (ibid., 136–138). Looking at culture through data in a comprehensive fashion might lead to alternative positions, each with a degree of plausibility. In Kacsuk's case, looking at cultural production with computational approaches has provided a new angle that supplements and integrates Azuma's original position. Looking at the same dataset without considering Ayanami

Rei as a paradigm shift would have, instead, completely obscured the role played by her and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in otaku culture (cf. Galbraith 2019, 88–92, 2014, 159; Morikawa 2012, 144–147, 2008 [2003], 56–62), and, by extension, niche products such as character intimacy games.

Arguably, the diminished focus on named entities, due to the size and data models of the sources employed, would have hindered or completely prevented the identification of Ayanami Rei as the center of a paradigmatic shift in the production of otaku media. Characters such as Hoshino Ruri from *Kidō Senkan Nadeshiko* [Mobile Battleship Nadesico] (Xebec 1996), one of Azuma's examples of characters resulting from Ayanami Rei's influence (Azuma 2009 [2001], 49), may have emerged as the focal entity of the paradigm shift. Hypothetically, characters antecedent to Ayanami Rei could also emerge as other, still unseen paradigm shifts: one example is Ple Two from *ZZ Gundam* (Nippon Sunrise 1986), who possesses a set of attributes that were later found in Ayanami Rei (mass-produced cloned human being, enthralled by another character, aloof demeanor). These hypotheses, which only take into consideration hypothetical data-driven approaches at scale, are irrespective of the fact that it was *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and its characters that led to the paradigmatic shift in production and consumption and was recognized as such by human actors. While alternative narratives might exist and/or be envisioned (cf. Kacsuk 2021a, 241), they are envisioned based on *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s influence and diffusion – which may not be – or perhaps cannot be – garnered as immediately from data-driven approaches (ibid., 242).

Kacsuk's own data-driven approach shows that, even with the background of *Evangelion* and Ayanami Rei and the explicit acknowledgement of their influence, such effects might not be distinguishable by at scale perspectives. At the same time, looking at cultural production at scale enables alternative hypotheses, and the drawing or reinforcing of new and existing scholarly connections, such as Kacsuk's emphasis on Azuma's indebtedness to previous work, such as

Okada Toshio *Otakugaku Nyūmon* [Introduction to Otaku Studies] (1996), in the otaku criticism space (Kacsuk 2021b, 139). This raises overarching interrogatives regarding information visible to a human actor and information visible for a computing machine. Although the full ramifications of such interrogatives are well beyond the confines of this study, it is helpful to remember that some data might be inherently more readable by human actors than computational machines, and vice versa.

An example of the above challenges within character intimacy game production is the number of recorded *nukigē*, whose purpose is purely pornographic (cf. Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 36; Au Yeung 2008, 149). Works considered pivotal for character intimacy games production, such as *Shizuku* (cf. Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 35–37; Miyamoto 2013, 129–131; Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 49–51; 75; Kabashima 2009, 21, 39; TINAMI 2001a; 2001b), *Air* (Key 2000) (Azuma 2009 [2001], 78–80), *Ever 17: The Out of Infinity* (Kid 2002), and *Higurashi no Naku Koro Ni* [When They Cry] (07th Expansion 2002–2014) (Azuma 2007, 218–234) are emphasized for their emotional engagement vis-à-vis a seemingly contradictory diminishing of pornographic content (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 28, 132; Kagami 2010, 136–138). Despite such recognition, the number of *nukigē* video games remains high.[31] Their sheer numbers can obscure works such as those listed above when production is approached at scale with computational data. Another example is the influence of Ayanami Rei over the landscape of anime-manga media outlined previously in this chapter. If, on the one hand, the at-scale perspective opens new paths, this should not dissuade approaches at the level of individual works, pinpointed via traditional methods in the humanities. In fact, given the above examples, approaches at scale are best employed in a complementary role: computational, data-driven approaches can illuminate avenues invisible at

[31] See chapter 3.5

the ‘ground level’ of case studies, while individual case studies can shed a light on the small islands of culture that may disappear from the view of approaches at scale.

3.3. Sources for approaches at scale

3.3.1. *The Visual Novel Database*

The first data source employed by this study is *The Visual Novel Database*, also known as VNDB. It is an English-speaking database dedicated exclusively to visual novel video games. Its focus is primarily on visual novel video games produced in Japan, but the site also accounts for visual novel video games produced outside the Japanese context, in a variety of commercial and non-commercial spheres. *The Visual Novel Database* has the stated goal of "becoming the largest, most accurate and most up-to-date visual novel database on the web" (Heling, 15 February 2022), cataloging data on visual novel video games, characters, and the industry at large, offering profiles on professionals such as programmers, story writers, and character voice actors. The cataloging efforts by its community have led to an encyclopedic survey of visual novel game production: as of August 22nd 2022, vndb.org has over 36,298 entries for visual novel games, over 100,903 entries on visual novel game characters, over 12586 entries for producers (corporate entities), and over 24,484 entries for people in the industry (staff), with the oldest game dated to 1980 (Heling, 15

February 2022). VNDB also features relational diagrams of visual novel works, detailing sequential relationships (sequel, prequel, fandisks, expansions) and commonality of fictional universe. The database also connects to other fan-curated databases, especially in cases where a visual novel title possesses animated adaptations or is an adaptation of an existing franchise, featuring hyperlinks to other fan-curated databases such as *MyAnimeList* [https://myanimelist.net/] and *Erogescape*, this study's other data source.

Firstly, it is important to note that VNDB catalogs visual novel software. As self-evident as this might be – especially as 'character intimacy game' is a product of this study – this may produce slightly different foci regarding the software and characters cataloged within the data repository. Specifically, it has a geo-social focus – software released in Japan, or in anime-manga style. At the same time, its search for objective criteria for inclusion has led to VNDB also including software produced beyond Japan, in a variety of commercial and non-commercial contexts, which may fall outside anime-manga media. This has nevertheless led to an encyclopedic survey of visual novel game production, mostly overlapping with what this study defines as character intimacy games. As a socially produced document on visual novel video games, *The Visual Novel Database* offers what is an apparently a comprehensive mapping of visual novel production and reception, as compiled by the enthusiast community of vndb.org. This begs the question, what is a visual novel video game for VNDB, and, more generally, what kind of works does it catalog? *The Visual Novel Database* provides its own definitions and criteria for inclusion:

1. What is a Visual Novel?
   A visual novel can be seen as a combination of a novel and a computer game: they're computer games with a large text based storyline and only little interaction of the player. A typical visual novel consists of text over an anime-style background image and is accompanied by background music. Throughout the game, the player usually has to answer a few questions which will have an effect on the story, thus playing a visual novel a second time while giving other answers may result in an entirely different plot. (Heling, 15 February 2022)
2. How about Eroge, H-Games and Dating Sims?
   An eroge or H-game is basically any Japanese game that features sexual content. Many visual novels are eroge and many eroge are visual novels, but this is not a rule. The

> definition of dating sim is a bit more vague, but it's usually the same as a visual novel, except that a dating sim generally uses a gameplay based on statistics. There are no strict bounds to the definition of "visual novel", most eroge and dating sims include elements of visual novels, but may - strictly speaking - not be visual novels themselves. VNDB has its own rules for inclusion in the database, see the guidelines and the list of special games for more information. (Heling, 15 February 2022)

Following these two definitions, the site offers the following guidelines for including works on The Visual Novel Database:

- Visual Novels that have the following characteristics:
  - Choices are the only allowed (but optional) form of interactivity. There are no other gameplay elements (including stats-based gameplay in dating/raising sims). Mini-games and simple mechanics, such as map-movement, are only allowed when they play a very minimal role - at least 99% of the title should be made of pure reading.
  - The story is told employing one of the known Visual Novel presentation methods such as ADV, NVL and their variations.
- Visual Novel / Game hybrids that have the following characteristics:
  - The game consistently uses the novel narrative for telling its story. Examples include describing visuals, events, character actions or thoughts.
    This point is ESSENTIAL - dialogues, no matter how extensive, are a characteristic of such game genres as RPGs, adventure games, dating simulations, etc., NOT of visual novels.
  - The story is told employing one of the known Visual Novel presentation methods such as ADV, NVL and their variations, consistently and for a significant length - at least 50% of the game should be made of pure, VN-style reading.
  - The storytelling segments should continue uninterrupted for a significant amount of time. The game should refrain from interrupting the reading and prompting the player to interact with the environment too frequently, lest the interactive elements overshadow the novel-like narrative. Depending on the presentation and the narrative techniques, some visual novels can be more prone to interrupt the narrative than others. Ultimately, if a game belongs in the database will be determined by examining the game as a whole, rather than just the sum of its parts.
  - Grandfather Clause: Old school adventure games that serve as precursors to visual novels as a genre are in the database due to their historical value, and thus are exempt from some of the defining characteristics of a modern visual novel. There are already plenty of such exceptions in the database, so further additions are unlikely, and would fall solely on the decisions of moderators (Heling, 15 February 2022)

The focus of *The Visual Novel Database*'s guidelines appears to follow three overall criteria. The first concerns the *mechanics* of the game: "Choices are the only allowed (but optional) form of interactivity […] at least 99% of the title should be made of pure reading" (ibid.). The second relates to the *storytelling* of the game, when hybridization is concerned, with "at least 50% of the game should be made of pure, VN-style reading" (ibid.) The third criterion concerns *historical value*, to allow for the cataloging of video games preceding the emergence of visual novel works. Despite the myriad of datapoints and two trait trees dedicated to character conduct in intimate

settings, intimacy is not a formal criterion for inclusion on the site, with visual novels counterpointed solely by “Eroge, H-Games and Dating Sims” (ibid.) While categorizing software works in the former category is relatively easy, for it mandates that “at least 99% of the title should be made of pure reading” (Heling 2021), collocating software as a visual novel/game hybrid is challenging, mandating that the game should be “at least 50% of the game should be made of pure, VN-style reading” and that ultimately, “if a game belongs in the database will be determined by examining the game as a whole, rather than just the sum of its parts” (ibid.).

At the same time, the presence of a data model specifically tailored for character descriptions, up to and including the intimate situations they engage in, produces wider interrogatives. Within visual novel games, interacting intimately with characters is far from secondary: the character trait trees, in their granularity and extensions, are testament to that. At the same time, character intimacy is not a formal criterion used to catalog games in *The Visual Novel Database*. If it is not unimportant, where does intimacy with characters fit within *The Visual Novel Database* as a socially produced document and as a data source? While one can argue that intimacy is not as quantifiable as a character’s visual design or their depiction in an intimate situation, the same could be said for traits describing a character’s personality. Another argument could be that character intimacy is taken for granted. Explication as a formal criterion is therefore not needed.

VNDB’s guidelines provide, albeit implicitly, a reprise of the issues explored within chapter 3.1.1 of this study: describing software as a video game of character intimacy is problematic and unstable. For archival purposes, re-inventing the wheel when the term visual novel more than suffices, is, arguably, superfluous. The possibility of describing character intimacy in an intricate and granular fashion, vis-à-vis the absence of formal criteria to catalog character-based intimacy, is one salient characteristic of *The Visual Novel Database* as a socially produced data source. A second characteristic, which it shares with *Erogescape*, is a bias toward male-oriented software

and characters. While there appears no bias in the manner in which a title is cataloged, there is a significant disparity in the average number of cataloged traits in female romanceable character data entries versus data entries detailing romanceable male characters. There is also a disparity in terms of volume of releases. Historically, there have been significantly fewer female-oriented works released than male-oriented works, hence there is a significantly higher average number of cataloged traits in data entries about female romanceable characters than male romanceable characters. This hints at a generally male and heterosexual userbase, which must be taken into account when considering engagement with VNDB as a data source.

3.3.2. *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-*

The second data source employed by this study is *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-*. In the Japanese language media landscape, *Erogescape* occupies a position akin to *The Visual Novel Database* within the Anglosphere. It is the premier site for discussing, cataloging, and evaluating character intimacy games within Japan. The repository models itself after another site, *CinemaScape -eiga hihyō kūkan-* (Hiroin 2022), styling its purpose as a space to discuss media, *erogē* rather than movies, in this case. The site functions as a recommendation engine: by analyzing user's rating of existing eroge, *Erogescape* derives personalized *erogē* recommendations for its users (*ibid.*). As of August 22nd, 2022, the site records over 16,938 video game works, 16,623 of which are described by the tag selection derived by this study. The site is Japanese-centric, and users do not seem to actively record non-Japanese works. Exceptions, such as Blue Sky Software's *Softporn Adventure*, are nevertheless cataloged, but are far outnumbered by the number of non-Japanese produced works cataloged on *The Visual Novel Database*. This results in an inferior number of recorded works vis-à-vis *The Visual Novel Database*'s over 32,503 recorded titles. Unlike its Anglosphere counterpart, *Erogescape* does not feature guidelines for

inclusion on the site, presenting *erogē* in a self-evident fashion. This does not mean, however, that *Erogescape* only catalogs software featuring pornographic content. For example, a title such as the *Tokimeki Memorial* series, which was released on consoles, does not feature pornographic content in any official capacity and yet is still cataloged on *Erogescape*. Nevertheless, most releases recorded on the site *do* feature pornography: out of a total of 27,993 data entries, 20,739 – circa 74 per cent – are labeled as pornographic. This can also be seen, without engaging with data, from the featuring of a specific field [*jyuhachikintō*] for the *nature* of explicit content feature. A software's content can be either explicit [*jyuhachikin*] or non-explicit [*hijyuhachikin*] and can also be categorized according to whether the intercourse depicted is consensual [*wakanmono*] or not [*ryōjokumono*]. Moreover, the game itself can be classified as being a focused mostly on pornographic entertainment [*nukigē*] or not [*nukigē*]. Unlike *VNDB*, *EGS* offers a *software-centric* perspective, where the need to catalog and reference video game works is arguably greater than the need to record characters: there are no independent data entries for the characters in an *erogē* work, while video game software is described in great detail. *Erogescape*'s system for describing video games uses a series of 145 attributes [*zokusei*] and 215 evaluations [*POV*].[32] Games may also be tied to user-created game groups, which are usually employed to identify games belonging to a specific franchise or developed by a specific creator entity.

Traits, divided into fourteen groups, describe a game's more quantifiable aspects, such as its required operating system, its genre mechanics, highly identifiable character conducts – whenever the protagonist is the only character to engage in intercourse with the game's characters, for instance – aesthetic markers such as *ahegao* faces, the presence of copy protection systems, the regulating authority responsible for the game's release, etc. Tags, divided into twenty families, on

[32] Note: there are actual tags [*tagu*] within the database, but they are not implemented yet, and thus have not been employed within this study.

the other hand, catalog aspects of a video game that may not be as quantifiable as those cataloged by traits. Examples of tags include the nature of the game's characters or the kind of general trend followed by the game's narrative. Notably, there is a significant imbalance as the only family dedicated to a game's romanceable characters is limited to female characters [*onna no ko kyarakutā*]. There are no equivalents for male romanceable characters, and the status of a game as not being oriented toward male users can only be marked via the Otome Game [*Otome Gēmu]* genre trait and the *Yaoi* tag, located under the erotic scene [*eroshīn*] tag family.

There is significant difference in the way traits and tags are used. Traits are deployed as a means to identify a specific software release and are meant to be univocal – if a data entry is marked with an attribute, that aspect of the game is not up for debate. It is a description of an aspect. Tags, on the other hand, are different, and are meant to express user evaluations: each tag within a software's data entry may be ranked as either A, B, or C, with different usages depending on the tag. In this way, each tagging action by a user represents not only a description, but also an evaluation, which, moreover, comes with its own set of issues. It is a potentially significant source of information and a veritable window into *Erogescape* as a socially produced document. However, in the context of this study's approach, it is not reasonable to engage at such a level of capillarity, especially when there is no equivalent information within *The Visual Novel Database*. Therefore, this study will eschew this aspect and approach tags solely in terms of their descriptive function, i.e. it is presumed that where a specific tag is attached to a software release, that aspect described by said tag is present regardless of critiques that might be levied by users.[33]

[33] Engaging with granular user evaluation(s) represents one possible future approach to character intimacy games. This, however, would require a more focused approach engaging exclusively with *Erogescape*, rather than comparatively with other sources, which is outside the purview of this study.

Another distinctive aspect of *Erogescape* as a socially produced document and data source is the difference in tone that it presents compared to *The Visual Novel Database*: while VNDB tends to favor a neutral tone in the traits and tags descriptors and descriptions used, this is not the case with *EGS*. Rather, the site sometimes adopts a tongue-in-cheek approach, especially with regard to the description of game tags. Descriptions may be informative in tone, as in the case of the "swimsuits" [*mizugi*] tag: "This tag denotes games where the appearance of heroines in swimsuits is important, or games which are oriented towards swimsuit fetishists. Assign A, B and Cs according to the frequency of swimsuit appearances and how impactful is the character in her swimsuits during story events" (Hiroin 2022). Descriptions may also be much more than merely informative, as is the case for the "domineering mistress": "a domineering mistress, you got me. It fires me up! (It's not moe). It's that feeling of splashing someone with your paint, if you know what I mean. It's the pleasure and sense of accomplishment when you win her over. (It's also cute when she becomes strangely obedient after). Tell me which games have these characters" (ibid.).[34]

By oscillating between informative and tongue-in-cheek, *Erogescape* provides insight into the internal practices of the underlying community. Its tone and use of highly connoted language reveals a community that may be tighter in number and scope. This might lead one to think that *Erogescape* is less prone to the encyclopedic tendencies shown within *The Visual Novel Database*. This is not the case: the discrepancy between the number of total software releases as registered on the site, 27,993, and the number of releases that feature at least one trait or one tag, 27,272, is minimal. At the same time, the number of works that are tagged as being o*tome* or BL, and thus oriented toward female audiences, is only 744 and 633, respectively, accounting for, respectively 3 per cent and 2 per cent of all cataloged software and 4 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively of Eroge works. *VNDB*, on the other hand, has 3356 software releases tagged as being *otome* games

[34] See *Appendix: Zokusei/POVs in Erogescape* for tables of tags, traits, and their translations.

(circa 9 per cent), and 1582 tagged as being Boys Love games (circa 4 per cent). If the field is narrowed to Japanese visual novel games, there are 2192 *otome* game releases and 896 BL releases out of 24,959 total releases, putting the niches at 8 per cent and 3.5 per cent, respectively. On the one hand, this may imply that EGS is more male-oriented than VNDB, but it is also necessary to consider that *otome* games and BL games may not feature as much explicit content as male-oriented software and therefore fall less within the purview of *Erogescape*. Both repositories, although different, seem to absolve an encyclopedic function.

As a socially produced document and data source, *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-* presents interesting differences from *The Visual Novel Database*. Both sources appear to be the expression of communities that are predominantly male, with specific preferences and interests in visual novel games, on one side, and Japanese adult computer games on the other. However, *The Visual Novel Database* appears to have adopted a more neutral approach. Such a tendency may be due to increased scrutiny of adult computer games and visual novel games outside Japan (cf. Galbraith 2021a; Khan and Ketterlin 2019; Cather 2016; DeWinter 2015), although there is nothing on the site that allows us to formulate a definitive opinion. On the other hand, the relative insularity of Japan vis-à-vis the global video game market (Galbraith 2021a) might be a reason why *Erogescape* maintains its tongue-in-cheek tone, even when dealing with sexual content and the tastes expressed by its users. Examining differences such as these allows this study to articulate a comparison between character intimacy games as seen from a Japanese context and character intimacy games as seen from an Anglophone context.

In the context of CIG ludo-hermeneutics, each source produces its own ontology of video games centered around character intimacy – geared toward static content reception in VNDB and centered on pornography in *EGS*. Given the necessity for player self-recognition in CIG ludo-hermeneutics, highlighting different perspectives allows us to move closer to the moments and

elements – visuals, performances, prose – where players may indeed self-recognize themselves as playing character intimacy games, and produce the parasocial responses that CIG software is contingent upon. In turn, highlighting which aspects are shared and/or in continuity between both sources allows us to build an ontology capable of acknowledging CIG software across contexts.

3.4. Tools: Data analysis, visualization applications and limits

This study produces its more complex data analyses and visualizations through Gephi 0.9.2, an open-source network analysis and visualization software package. Beyond visualization, Gephi provides an array of data analysis tools that facilitate further investigation into this study's data sources, and, by extension, character intimacy games in Japan. It allows for the visualization of this study's data sources as network diagrams or graphs. A graph is a mathematical structure employed to model relations between objects related to each other by way of pair relations. Visually, a graph appears as a network of more or less connected nodes. The presence of a connection, an edge between two nodes, means that the two nodes are related. In the case of our data sources, every node represents a data point, namely, a fact or a piece of information. Within this study's data sources, a data point mainly refers to the characteristics of what is being described – character, software, game studios, etc. – i.e. attributes within a descriptive data entry.

Using VNDB's character entries as an example, a data point would be the 'Ahoge' trait. *Ahoge* describes a strand of hair that acts differently from the rest of the character's hairstyle, often in response to changes in the character's emotional status. The presence of the trait within a data entry means that whatever is being described (in this case, a character) possesses an *ahoge* hair strand. If another trait is present within the data entry, let's say 'Blue Eyes,' then those two traits possess a pair relation by co-occurring in the same data entry. Turning such a relation into a graph data structure means that the two traits become two nodes in a network, connected by a line, also known as an edge. Data visualization methods allow us to visualize which data points co-occur with one another, and also to gauge the strength of their connection – in this case, how many times one pair of data points occurs across the database. By gauging which data points co-occur together, and how often, it is possible to build a picture of the information recorded within the data source.

It is through this process that this study accesses fan-curated databases as socially produced documents.

A network may be measured in several ways, all of them potentially fruitful in accessing the at-scale information and perspectives that a data source may represent as a socially produced document. Which information may constitute a data point that may turn into a network node, however, depends on the descriptive data model employed by the data source. For example, *The Visual Novel Database* describes video game characters through a hierarchical system of traits while *Erogescape* describes video games via traits and tags grouped into non-hierarchical 'families.' Both sources are effectively approached through data visualization because they use closed data models to describe tens of thousands of objects. A more open descriptive data model, such as one where users are allowed to freely add new tags as they see fit, would be ill-suited to visualization as a network. It would not be able to account for the scale of the object being described, not to mention the risk of duplicates increasing confusion.

Furthermore, the nature of a source's descriptive model conditions how the network diagram might be measured, and which instruments might be used. In the case of Gephi vis-à-vis *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape*, the two data sources are both based around two restrictive data models. Both models are used to describe tens of thousands of characters and software releases in the case of VNDB, and tens of thousands of software releases in the case of *EGS*. It is not reasonable to list all possible ways in which a graph might be measured or structured, and not every method is profitable.[35] Within this study, the measures employed within data-driven approaches are network modularity, node centrality, eccentricity and value overlap.

[35] For a comprehensive overview of data visualization methods and possible approaches with Gephi, see Cherven 2013.

Network modularity is the measure of how many communities – or sub-networks – can be derived from an existing graph based on the strength of inter-nodal connections. It allows for the determination of where and how nodes may cluster with one another, highlighting the makeup of entities on the data source – and the perspective it offers as a socially produced document. These characteristics might be – often are – invisible to human actors, who are limited in their perspectives and can only engage with a limited number of data entries at a time. By structuring the graph into node communities, however, at-scale information on what is being described within a data source becomes visible and comparable. Measurement of which nodes enjoy the strongest connection to highly connected nodes, for instance, may allow very specific insight into a dataset: which nodes are positioned at the core of a network. It allows us to map a dataset's internal connections in a way that highlights the potential presence of traits, or attributes that could be considered archetypical by the communities curating the data sources.

Node centrality is the measure of how important a node is within a given community given a specific property. It can measure which nodes are most recurring as intermediaries between other nodes – also known as *betweenness centrality*. It can calculate which nodes possess the highest number of edges, the highest number of connections – *degree centrality*. It can account for which nodes are positioned at an inferior degree of separation from all other nodes – *closeness centrality*. It can gauge which nodes are most connected to other highly connected nodes – *eigenvector centrality*, also known as *prestige score*.

Eccentricity refers to the highest degree of separation present within a given node community. It allows us to gauge how tightly connected a network is. Less tightly connected graphs might lead to the discovery of veritable 'islands' of described objects, which would also be challenging to observe by human operators. Tighter networks, on the other hand, might elicit further questions, for they would suggest that most nodes recur with most other nodes. In general, measuring

eccentricity allows us to distinguish between inner and outer ‘regions’ in networks. Which nodes are present within the inner regions, and which are present in the outer regions represent another way of gauging fan-curated data repositories as socially produced documents.

Overlap is the measure of how much a series of value are similar to another set of values. Overlap analysis allows to gauge the uniqueness of a set of values. Within this study, it is employed to gauge the uniqueness of select case studies against the rest of the wider dataset. Obtaining such information allows to gauge how much individual case studies fare against all other, and to investigate the seemingly aesthetic self-sameness at the scale of our data sources. Overlap analysis is accomplished within this study by taking all possible values within a data source – evaluations/attributes in the case of *EGS*, tags in the case of *VNDB* – and setting them as either 1 or 0, 1 if the value is present, 0 if the value is not. Each value returning the same result as the data entry of interest returns ‘true’, every value returning a different value than the data entry of interest returns ‘false’. By looking each entry’s number of true/false results and dividing the result by the number total number of values (460 in EGS’ case; 2764 in VNDB’s case), it is possible to obtain the overlap percentage for each title, namely, how much that title is similar/different to the case study.

3.5. A brief demonstration – mapping the CIG production landscape on EGS and VNDB

What follows is a demonstration of the tools outlined in the previous chapter. It is an approach that showcases the conversion of this study's two dataset into node networks for further measuring, followed by a demonstration of what overlap analysis may do with data derived from fan-curated databases. Subsequently, analysis of the network's modularity and eccentricity will be conducted to provide an at scale glimpse of both *EGS* and *VNDB*. The datasets derived from *Erogescape* and *The Visual Novel Database* are imported in Gephi as matrixes. Co-occurrences are turned into edges, while values are turned into nodes. Both datasets are massive, and visualization is not conductive to human eyes.

Figure 13: *EGS's dataset (left) and VNDB's dataset (right). The number of nodes and connections is so great that it is not feasible to look at, even when subjected to visualization algorithms.*

Rather than attempting to find a suitable visualization algorithm, it is arguably more productive to produce measurements straight away. When measured for network modularity, node centrality, eccentricity, EGS's dataset gave the following results: a set of four nodes scoring 1.0 on eigenvector centrality – 'attractive heroine,' 'inspiring', 'good prose' and 'needs sequel' – and a majority of values concentrating at an eigenvector value of 0.9; an eccentricity tending towards 2, and the emergence of two node communities. Each node is, at maximum, separated by two

nodes from any other, that most nodes are tightly interconnected with every other and there is a very limited core is found in almost every release and connects all other nodes. In other words, EGS' dataset is tightly interconnected: most evaluations/attributes feature across most data entries. Four of them, those with an eigenvector centrality score of one, are almost certainly featuring in the vast majority of data entries. The two node communities, however, are what is most interesting about this measurement: nodes that denote emotional engagement cluster in one community, while content that might be fetishistic or paraphilic in nature clusters in the other. None of the four values with an eigenvector centrality of 1 clusters in the fetishistic/paraphilic community.

Although there are no differences that may suggest a clear-cut distinction between the 'emotional engagement' community and the 'fetishistic/paraphilic' community, the distinction reminds of the cliques of players contoured by Au Yeung (2008): in engaging with players of character intimacy games [*bishōjo* games], Au Yeung Yu Leung highlights three currents of players, 'nakigameists' [*nakiha*], 'nukigameists' [*nukiha*] and 'moegameists' [*moeha*] (147-150). Nakigameist privilege melodramatic games which elicit emotional reactions of sadness, empathy and compassion [*nakigē*]. Nukigameists privilege video games geared towards pornographic entertainment [*nukigē*]. Moegameists privilege games which focus on specific *moe* elements [*moegē*]. A divide similar to that existing between Nakigameists and Nukigameists is reflected in the two communities emerging from EGS's dataset.[36] At the same time, the presence of the four nodes scoring an eigenvector centrality of 1 in the 'emotional engagement' community may hint of increased importance over fetishistic/paraphilic content. It is more probable, even if incrementally so, to find those four nodes and the nodes they connect to than other nodes.

[36] *Nakigē works may also fall into the category of moegē and viceversa. At the same time, some moegē may also be labeled as nukigē. Therefore, the divide emerging out of EGS' dataset might be more reflective of current conditions than the number of communities might suggest.*

VNDB's dataset, emerging out of a different data model, presents significant differences from EGS. When measured for network modularity, node centrality, eccentricity, VNDB's dataset gave the following results: only one node scoring 1.0 on eigenvector centrality, with an increased variance in eigenvector centrality; an eccentricity tending towards 3 and the emergence of three node communities. In other words, The *Visual Novel Database*'s dataset is not as tight as Erogescape's, although not as much as to say that it is describing character intimacy games in radically different ways. Interestingly, the only node that scores 1.0 in eigenvector centrality is one denoting video games which possess an 'ADV' screen configuration – the screen configuration where text is located in a box in the lower portion of the screen.[37]

This paints a different picture, which provides information on the focus of the data model, on the biases of VNDB's community, and what gets recorded and what does not get. At the same time, of the three communities emerging out of VNDB's dataset, there is a similar distinction as EGS, in that nodes denoting 'fetishistic/paraphilic' content cluster together. At the same time, there is also a clustering of nodes denoting emotional engagements cluster in their own community, mostly, although the much higher number of traits compared to EGS makes distinction blurrier. The commonality in nodes denoting 'fetishistic/paraphilic' content clustering together is interesting. This suggest a core of features which has been detected within both *Erogescape* and *The Visual Novel Database*. Furthermore, the similarities in how nodes denoting emotionally engaging content cluster with each other in both databases is also another finding worthy of note: it means that, at the very least, the two communities curating EGS and VNDB have similar priorities in describing software centered around character intimacy games.

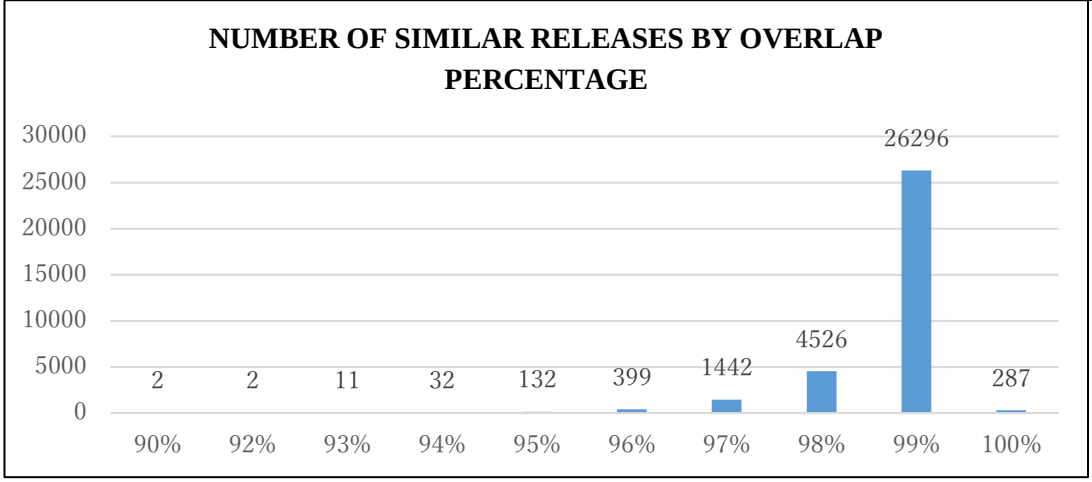
However, the above approaches to do not allow to pinpoint a singular release in particular, engaging with co-occuring tags/evaluations/attributes in general. This is were overlap analysis

[37] See chapter 5.1 for a detailed discussion of screen configurations in character intimacy games.

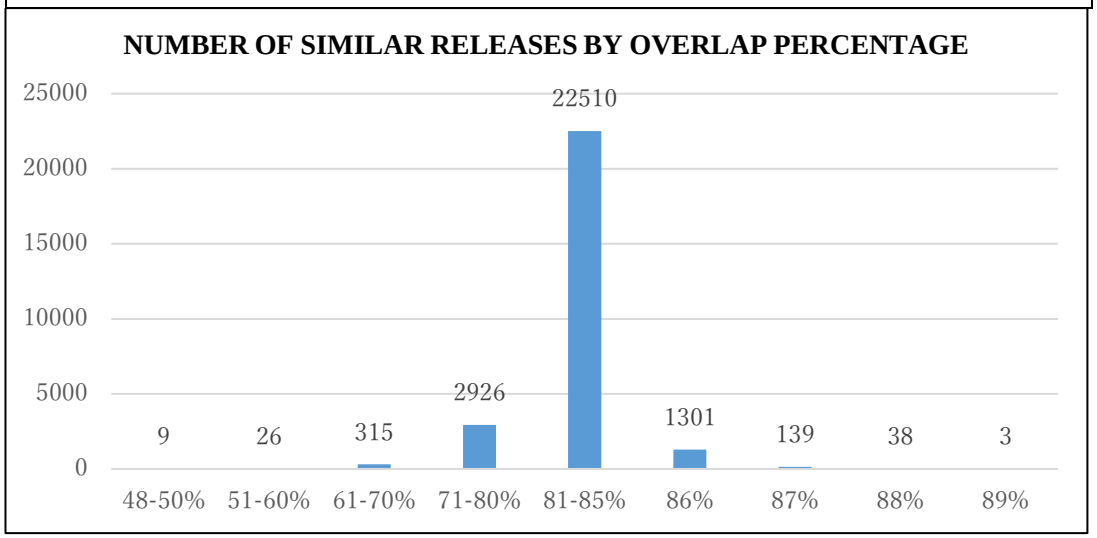
comes into play, which will be the subject of the next demonstration. Overlap analysis is, generally speaking, the identification of overlapping or redundant data in columns. Within the context of this study, it is the identification of similar sets of tags and attributes. To reiterate the previous chapter, it should not be intended as *solely* looking whenever a group of data possesses the same values. Rather, it is to look for what is within a data entry and what is not within a data entry and comparing how many values return the same results as the data entry of interest.

To demonstrate how this study will carry out its overlap analysis, there will be a brief analysis of *Master×Re:master* (Silver Bullet Automatic 2011). The work is present both on *Erogescape* and on *The Visual Novel Database*, which makes for a very accessible comparison. Looking at how *Master×Re:master* overlaps with all other games on the two repositories nets very different results: while the overlap of values on VNDB tends towards 98% (4526 entries) and 99% (26296), on EGS the tendency is opposite: most works are between 81% and 85% similar (22510 entries). In other words, it seems that the game might seen in very different fashion on this study's two data sources. What to make of this result?

MASTER×RE:MASTER – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



MASTER×RE:MASTER – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EGS)



The tables above are certainly the result of many factors in play, the chief of which might lay within each repository's data model. For example, it is much easier for entries on VNDB to be similar: the high number of tags (2764) plays a significant role in this regard, because such a high number of tags implies that it is much more probable that games might share the absence of tags, rather than seeing the emergence of distinctive releases. From the perspective of *VNDB*'s data model, the absence of tags to describe characters, in the way that *EGS* does, together with its underutilization compared to the character data tree, produces a tendency toward self-sameness in software data entries. Generic tags, such as the number of endings or the type of interface, are never lacking. *Erogescape*'s data model, on the other hand, is more restricted (360), which greatly reduces the influence of a high number of data values returning as false. With a narrower breadth, it is easier for a data model like EGS' to return more dissimilar results. This exposes differences between the two data models: a high number of tags leads to many tags not being featured in a data entry, and, in turn, being similar to all those works that also do not feature that tag as well. While this allows to gauge differences in views in different data-curating communities, it is not by itself a very accurate information. It is only a glimpse that may beget further analysis, maybe through case studies. Attempting to balance data sources is a challenge for future research.

PART 4: THEORY

– A Conceptual Framework for Character Intimacy Games –

Up until this point, this study has employed the term ‘intimacy,’ both as part of ‘character intimacy game’ and on its own, in self-evident fashion: both to point at sexual intercourse – usually in the wake of heightened emotional engagement – and to point to a state of heightened disclosure and sharing of emotional states, aspirations, distresses, etc., between two or more actors in a relationship. However, this self-evident use of intimacy is not sufficient for discussing character intimacy games – what kind of intimacies should be approached as the intimacy developing within the game? Up until this point, this study has emphasized player/character intimacies, developing as part of player engagement with CIG software. However, within CIG software, there are player-controlled characters, sometimes with their own developed personalities, which also develop intimate bonds with the game’s character. In fact, if one is to follow a character intimacy game’s narrative content, they are the object of other characters’ affection. In reverse, the same objection can be levied toward romanceable characters: they are developing feelings for the player-controlled character, not for the player, if narrative content is taken as-is.

It is not sufficient to say that a character intimacy game is centered on player/character intimacy. What about the events and the personal relationships that take place within the game’s diegetic world, as shown above? Is the intimacy of CIG software only between players and characters, or only between characters within a diegesis, which players happen to control? Of course not. Saying that character intimacy games are centered on intimacy is thus not sufficient for developing a sense of what intimacy in character intimacy games is. Consequently, it precludes the development of CIG-specific ludo-hermeneutics. Therefore, it is important to distinguish intimacy as depicted in narrative media – romance, erotica, pornography, but also filial and/or parental relationships – and the actual processes that engender intimacy between actors, human or otherwise, in a relationship. While the latter processes certainly inform the former depictions, they are not coincidental. In the same vein, the depiction of intimacy between characters within the

diegetic worlds of CIG software should not be confused with the intimacy, imagined as it might be, which may develop between players and characters. A proper, workable definition of what intimacy in character intimacy games means needs to be developed and operationalized to develop the ludo-hermeneutics necessary to bring this study to fruition.

Intimacy, as an object of critical inquiry, has emerged across fields and disciplines (cf. Donovan and Moss 2017), ranging from business and communication (Seol et al. 2016; Cahir and Lloyd 2015; Jamieson 2014; Hassenzahl et al. 2012; Kivits 2009), developmental pedagogy (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2010), specialized healthcare (East and Hutchinson 2013; Fritsch 2010; Schultz-Krohn 2004), and information science to linguistics, in addition to the humanities (Berlant 2012, 2000, 1998; Berlant and Posser 2011) and the social sciences (Jamieson 2014, 2011). Intimacy possesses a wider semantic breadth, accounting for the manifold modes by which two or more actors come to entertain close personal bonds. Pamela Moss and Courtney Donovan, in their introduction to *Writing Intimacy into Feminist Geography* (2017), provide a long but comprehensive overview of the many ways in which intimacy may manifest:

> Intimacy takes many forms. It can be a long-term emotional connection with, a familiar awareness of, or a deep attachment to someone or something. It could relate to a life partner. A colleague. A child. A knowledge. An image. A colour. A piece of music. A sensation. A fragrance. A distant thought. Connections, awareness and attachments have varying intensities, tempos and arrangements. Intimacy emerges through affect, feeling and sensation. It can be an ambient blushing, settling around your shoulders while sitting in a coffee shop on a stormy afternoon, even if only among strangers. It can be a conversation via hastily exchanged words, emoticons, hand gestures or bodily movements, the effects of which languish throughout the day. It can manifest in a shared understanding, communicated in a seeming secret code between people, across species, with technology or amid nature. It can be weekday morning sex before waking the kids to get ready for school. It can be a daily, mid-morning swim in a public pool, lap after lap after lap. Though often cultivated through setting a scene or creating an atmosphere, intimacy can unexpectedly pop up through a chance encounter at a party, on a bus or in a corridor. And,

> while not singularly emotional, there is an element of sentiment, as light as a brief impression or as strong as a deep-seated bond (ibid., 3).

It goes without saying that presenting intimacy in CIG software as the encounter of two or more actors eventually ending up in sexual intercourse should not be regarded as its only potential articulation as part of the video game's overall experience. It needs to be said, however, that most, although not all, character intimacy games in Japan *do* focus on intimacy culminating in sexual intercourse. Anthony Giddens frames intimacy as "a matter of emotional communication, with others and with the self, in a context of interpersonal equality" (2013, 94). It is the "disclosure of emotions and actions which the individual is unlikely to hold up to a wider public gaze" (ibid., 100).

Guo Freeman, Jeffrey Bardzell, and Shaowen Bardzell (2016) augment this definition by referring to Ethel Spector Person's (1980) explication of such disclosure as "a conduit of sexuality, which symbolizes union with the loved object" (Freeman et al. 2016, 4326), intended in a broader sense, including friends, kinship, lovers, etc. The widening of the semantic spectrum of intimacy needs to be accompanied by a distinction between sexuality and intimacy. Not all intimacies are sexual, although a significant portion is, and not all sexual activity is intimate. Lauren Berlant (1998) locates intimacy in reference to the sharing of emotional states, feelings, common aspirations, and significant events in one's existence between two (or more) persons or its representation (ibid., 281). Berlant highlights an interplay between public and private, and, more importantly, with the act of disclosure – of thoughts, of emotional states, aspirations (ibid.). Berlant, Giddens, and Freeman et al. illuminate the need for intimacy to be discussed in relation to where, when, and how it may happen, subsist, and eventually thrive. Intimacy is (also) an ensemble of cultural and social tenets mandating what intimacy is and what may happen in conditions of intimacy (Cooke 2013, 9).

Then, what of ‘intimacy’ in ‘character intimacy games,’ as part of playing CIG software, of engaging with their characters? Building from previous discussions, intimacy should refer to both a state and a process, or, more precisely, to the end state. At the same time, it is the prerequisite of and for a process of disclosure – emotional and, potentially, physical – between two or more actors. Such process may be accompanied by observable states and behavior – including but not limited to physical contact, sexual intercourse, shifts in modes of mutual address, depending on the wider culture. While these signifiers should not be automatically conflated with actual intimacy, they are, in the context of narrative media, what comes closest to markers of movement and progression within a diegetic environment. From there, these markers may be structured, through practice and precedent in game design and reception of game content, as ready templates for making the manifold, blurry and fuzzy processes and states that comprise ‘intimacy’ into a set of states and goals for video games.

These states and goals are represented in-game through the depiction of the processes of disclosure of intimacy, eliciting intimate responses from players. Precedent for this can be found extensively within Japanese contexts (Galbraith 2021b, 132–138; Santos 2020b, 6; Takeuchi 2009, cit. in Santos 2020b, 6; Azuma et al. 2003a, 2003b) and in scattered examples from North America (Lankoski et al. 2022; Lankoski and Dimenek 2020; Salter 2020; Mills 2015). In other words, character intimacy games reward players for their engagement with content designed to elicit emotional, sensual, and sexual arousal responses toward the game’s characters. Through the game, players are increasingly exposed to one or more character, creating the conditions for further and lasting intimate engagements. This happens both within the game proper and outside, as players inevitably turn their imagination beyond the software (Galbraith 2021, 161–168; Nagayama 2014, 196–197; Kagami 2010, 131–132; Au Yeung 2008, 147–148, Sasakibara 2004, 162–166).

Superficially, the intimacy of character intimacy games is a marker of the nature of in-game content: of the presence of intimate relationships between characters and of a set of specific goals for traversing the game. Beneath the surface, intimacy is a marker for distinct modes of approach toward video game content, its assemblage of narrative and software mechanics – solitary, non-agonistic, win-win – in the same way that 'first-person-shooter' marks another mode – agonistic, win-lose, using force as a solution – of interacting and relating with in-game content. Intimacy has culturally connoted places, modes, and times for where it might emerge, develop, thrive, or even wither away and disappear; this carries over to character intimacy games. Equally, intimacy has culturally connoted goals; this carries over to CIG software. Intimacy within character intimacy games is therefore a process with culturally dependent, recognizable start, intermediate, and end states. These would depict a progressive emotional and/or sensual and/or sexual disclosure between two or more actors or its failure if the game calls for such a possibility. Players playing through this process are directed toward emotional and/or sensual and/or sexual responses, which concur with facilitating intimacy between players and characters.

4.1. AMO studies

4.1.1. Decoupling character intimacy games from 'Japan'

Character intimacy games are perceived as being a Japanese product, intimately tied to its local social, cultural, political, and geographical conditions. They are intimately tied to studies of otaku culture and to approaches emphasizing affection toward anime-manga characters and the affective-performative *moe* responses they engender in media users (Galbraith 2019, 62; Sone 2014, 199) and the moving effects these responses produce (Galbraith 2021b, 36, 89, 95–101; see also Galbraith 2011b for manifestations in female fans). *Moe* describes an act of media reception that plays a fundamental role in creating player engagement within and without CIG software operations. It is associated with specific aesthetics, represented in iconic fashion by heterosexual male-oriented *bishōjo* aesthetics (cf. Sasakibara 2004) and connected with concepts such as "*moe* elements" [*moe yōso*] and "database consumption" [*database shōhi*] (Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 33–44; 62, 2007, 36–45). It also points to a system of emergent, peer-learned media literacies (Galbraith 2021b, 35, 64, 75, 2011, 224; Santos 2020b 4–7; Nagayama 2014, 301–303; Aoyama

2013; Azuma S. 2010, 258; Azuma H. 2007, 45–49) for parsing character designs in a way that elicits *moe* responses.

Research on *moe*, especially English-language AMO studies, is tethered to Azuma Hiroki's diptych of treatises on otaku culture – *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* [*Dōbutuka suru posuto modan. Otaku kara mita nihonshakai*] (2009 [2001]) and its yet untranslated sequel, *The Birth of Game-Like Realism* [*Gēmutekina Riarizumu no Tanjō. Dōbutsukasuru Posutomodān 2*] (2007). Therein Azuma produces a systematic examination of cultural production and reception tendencies in Japan at the turn of the millennium through an analysis of Otaku culture. He posits the decline of unified, shared modes of producing and relating with fiction in favor of a fragmentation into smaller, separate contexts (Azuma 2009 [2001], 26–35, 2007, 17–20), each producing its own underlying system for engaging with media content (cf. Ōtsuka 2014, 2010 [1987], 2004; Itō 2011 [2005]; Saitō 2011 [2000]; 2007, Azuma 2009 [2001], 2007; Azuma et al. 2003a, 2003b). Understanding each context's underlying principles is fundamental to making sense of media works produced therein (2009 [2001], 37–38, 54–58, 2007, 45, 76).

Azuma Hiroki describes the shift in 'environmental' terms, positing an "imaginative environment" [*sōzōryoku no kankyō*] (2007: 60–73, 196), a distinct, recognizable context of media production and reception that is highly aware of its internal affordances. It is a shift in production and reception of contents, from overarching stories to discrete elements of character design. These templates are free-floating, metaphorized as a common 'database' of otaku culture, whose understanding is required for content production and reception to make sense (2009 [2001], 31–33, 39–54, 79–81, 2007, 41–45; 67). As a foundational part of otaku culture at the turn of the millennium, *moe* is symptomatic of a shift toward novel modes of producing, relating with and consuming fiction (Kacsuk 2018b, 2016b; Greenwood 2015, 2014; Ruh 2014; Saitō 2014, 2011; Lamarre 2018, 2013, 2009; Morikawa 2012, 2008 [2003]; Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 2007).

However, despite the apparent formalization into what may seem like a sedimented, tightly regulated system, *moe* is highly unstable: there is no shared, stable canon of *moe* elements; nor are there any authoritative sources into the matter beyond fannish texts (cf. Kimi 2021 [2017]; Kagami 2010; Suzumoto 2008; Shinjō 2006). Rather, it follows a continuous development in flux-like capacity, devoid of an apparent origin point (Suan 2017, 73–75; Ruh 2014, 171). This has prevented individual and systemic approaches toward *moe* media beyond acknowledging the presence of the phenomenon (Ganzon 2017b; Ruh 2014). This has compounded difficulties in engaging with *moe* content in a more structured fashion: engaging with specific *moe* elements and the ramifications they produce on media content cannot be done from a stable position.

Data-driven approaches may certainly counteract the issues above by providing a perspective at scale about shared commonalities such as *moe*, or the closest approximation possible. However, relying on unstable, subcultural-rooted terminology, does not help in developing the necessary conceptual framework for character intimacy games. In fact, the existing connection between *moe* and Japanese character intimacy games prevents further analysis of their nature as videogames. As is the case with anime-manga, the status of CIG software as 'Japanese media' or media of Japan seems to obscure what lies below. And while *moe* is a phenomenon that pertains to developing imagined intimacy with fictional characters, it is connected to specific times and spaces – in this case, turn-of-the-millennium Japan and the reception of its image abroad. As the term *moe* falls into disuse in Japan in favor of new descriptors,[38] it turns into an artifact of its time, a time capsule no longer usable for more recent endeavors. Furthermore, Azuma himself short-circuits *moe*, otaku culture, and Japanese society, describing these tendencies as reflective of wider societal developments to come (cf. Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 93–95, 111–116, 2007, 13–24, 168–181).

[38] *Tōtoi* (尊い), for instance, is emerging and slowly supplanting *moe* as a descriptor for affective-performative responses to fictional character, highlighting further *moe*'s own instability.

This is not to say that research should look for *moe* or similar concepts in non-anime-manga products, such as the early examples of American CIG software of *Plundered Hearts*, *Romantic Encounters at the Dome*, and *Softporn Adventure.* It is to say that the situatedness of character intimacy games in the media geo-social-cultural-political context of Japan produces such a strong link that character intimacy games ultimately end up as a cultural curiosity, in the same vein as JRPG (cf. Pelletier-Gagnon 2018), or as non-normative media essentializing Japan and Japanese studies (cf. Nagaike 2018). Therefore, this study argues for the need to de-couple character intimacy games from their Japanese context. Again, this should not be intended as obscuring or erasing the peculiarities of CIG software in relation to the Japanese mediascape.

Rather, this study takes a page from Jaqueline Berndt's (2018) exhortation regarding anime studies: rather than studying Japan through media works, employ expertise about Japan to better study media works. In other words, just as Berndt argues for reversing "the focus on "animation as an alternative way to understanding Japan"" (ibid., 1), this study proceeds to reverse the focus from character intimacy games as an alternative, niche way of understanding Japan, to employing Japan expertise as an alternative way to understand video games centered around character intimacy. Expertise regarding local conditions – the media landscape of Japan – should be "employed as a tool to consider historically specific local situations that conjoin transnational aesthetic and economic configurations" (ibid., 10). But what, then, should the un-coupling of character intimacy games from Japan look like? How should it take place? As remarked previously, this should not result in the obscuring of local peculiarities, such as *moe*, *moe* elements, database consumption, and their connected aesthetic, production, and commercial affordances.

Instead, this study returns to the software itself, and (re)examines them from the ground up, as assemblages of code, narrative content, and visuals. Only afterwards are the aesthetic and industrial affordances of anime-manga taken into consideration. This situates character intimacy

games in a specific media landscape and provides blueprints for its analysis amidst global video game production. Taking the Japanese media landscape of origin into consideration after (re)considering software from the ground-up also aims to avoid what Galbraith (2021a) describes as a re-inscribing and reinforcement of nationalizing tendencies in CIG software, especially given their explicit nature (ibid., 74–76). Citing Mia Consalvo's position against the foolishness of ascribing essential and/or fundamental national qualities to video games (2006, 127), however, Galbraith remarks that:

> …this is exactly what happens when adult computer games, even extreme examples, are taken by journalists, activists, and even academics in the Anglophone sphere to reveal the 'perversion' and 'social illness that's embedded in Japanese society' (Alexander, 2009).[1] As this content crosses borders, which gets some pundits crowing about Cool Japan, critics in other nations respond to Japan as an imagined source of danger and perversion (Hinton, 2014: 56, 65). This points us to, first, the re-inscription of national and regional borders through regulation and new regulatory regimes, and second, the push and pull of (inter-)nationalised content across borders[2] (Galbraith 2021a, 75–76).

By taking the software as-is, and juxtaposing it with fam-curated databases, this study seeks to contrast the tendencies toward employing character intimacy games as a marker of perversion, short-circuited with Japan as a locus of abnormality and social illness. These operations appear to be a defense of character intimacy games, in contradiction with previous announcements that this work is not a defense or accusation of CIG software. However, the intent is not one of argumentative defense, but rather to provide precedents for at-scale approaches and the perils of taking single examples in a field too vast and scattered for case studies to function in a vacuum. The only way for character intimacy game case studies to function properly is in constant juxtaposition with the wider production and reception environment in which they operate. Decoupling character intimacy games and Japan – as a geo-social-cultural-political entity – is

therefore a necessary precondition for proper examination of video games of character intimacy, within, without, and in-between Japan and abroad.

4.1.2. Accounting for moe/'Japan': Commonalities, media responses, (re)familiarization

Specular to the need to decouple character intimacy games from Japan comes another, opposite necessity: that of situating CIG software within their media landscape of origin, accounting for its affordances. And while it is important to move on from character intimacy games as anime-manga media, it is neither feasible nor desirable to obscure the influence of anime-manga media works on CIG software. James Newman (2013 [2004]), in his examination of video games, invites increased attention for the ludic context in which video games take place, and its influence on the video game software itself (ibid., 12). He argues that it is "[a]n underused means of differentiating types of videogames and, more importantly, types of experience, structure and engagement, centres on the location of play" (ibid., 13). 'Japan,' both as the geographical location and as the imaginary ensemble of aesthetics, practices, and perceptions thereof, at home and abroad, is the location where character intimacy games are intended to be played (cf. Galbraith 2021a, 73–76, 80–83, 2021b, 83–84). And it is within 'Japan' that the cultural industries producing, circulating, and iterating CIG software operate.

However, the position of the character intimacy game industry within Japan's media landscape is hard to pin down – it is distinct but connected in fuzzy and blurry ways with the rest of Japan's cultural industries. The practices revolving around character intimacy games, especially as players imaginatively engage with media content, are not easily defined by either media or peripherals – they may be shared with niche anime-manga (cf. Santos 2020b) or otherwise not be exclusive to video game software. Finally, the 'Japan' in which character intimacy games are intended to be played might not be the same 'Japan' perceived by knowledgeable users, who are

removed from it for various reasons. Therefore, the space in which character intimacy games should be played might, in fact, be a collection of multiple *similar* spaces. 'Japan' might be a kaleidoscope of spaces similar enough to be overlapped with one another, but still not the same.

Connected to 'Japan', the system of practices for content production and reception signified by *moe does* require consideration, for they provide extensive information on how character intimacy games may function as video games centered on character intimacy. To reiterate, *moe* refers to "an affective response to fictional characters" (Galbraith 2019, 64) while *moe* media is "meant to trigger an affective response, which it does through characters" (ibid., 83). Character intimacy games in Japan, situated at the center of otaku culture (Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 75–79, 2007, 108–116, 191–207), are *moe* media par excellence. With characters at the forefront of the gamic experience, users are free to focus on them at their leisure. Images are static, and the pace of the character encounter is fully under player control. Regarding *moe*, Galbraith produces three important notations:

> [F]irst, moe is a response, something that occurs, not a state; second, moe occurs in interactions and relations with images, objects, and so on, but is not located in that to which one responds; and third, the response is to fictional characters. This last qualification is crucial, because "moe" is a term that emerged out of manga/anime fan interactions and relations with fictional characters and indicates an affective response to them (Galbraith 2019, 64).

With *moe* media come characters featuring *moe* elements, which, in Azuma's view (2009 [2001], 39–48), are discrete, isolable templates for character design, capable of triggering *moe* responses. However, As Galbraith points out (2019, 64), *moe* responses require a character to be produced, and not merely images or elements of character designs, such as animal ears [*kemonomimi*] or maid outfits, for example (ibid., 64, 211). The parcelization of characters – more precisely, character identity – into discrete *moe* elements, however, is not directed at just *any*

character entity within the domain of anime-manga. *Moe*, in its wider sense, is rather directed at and expressed through *specific typologies and genealogies* of character entities, namely, the male-oriented *bishōjo* [girl cutie] and the female-oriented *bishōnen* [boy cutie]. *Bishōjo* juxtapose cuteness and hypersexualization (Nagayama 2014, 134–136), drawing upon the aesthetics of *moe* (Sasakibara 2004, 16–26). *Bishōnen* juxtapose a sense of gender-fluid, androgynous youthfulness (McLelland and Welker 2015; Welker 2015, 2006, 865–866; Sihombing 2011, 151; McLelland 2010) with "heterosexual romance stereotypes and common hetero-normative expectations such as trust, fidelity" (Andlauer 2018, 173), rooted in the aesthetic continuum of *shōjo*, *josei*, and *BL/yaoi* works (cf. Shamoon 2012). Both character typologies address media users, eliciting "orientation towards fiction" and mobilizing "desire for fictional characters" (Galbraith 2021, 21, 54–59, 2019, 59–96; Saitō 2011 [2000], 16) which "fictionalizes sex" (Saitō 2011 [2000], 23).

Combining discrete *moe* elements into a recognizable character design arrays possible interactions, stories, and narratives, which may be recontextualized – as part of user imagination or as actual derivative products – within, without, and in-between stories and media (Galbraith 2021b, 130; Azuma 2007, 133–134). This process "cannot be characterized by free association, because there are particular codes and styles through which the otaku feels '*moe*'," and is driven to consume such images (Sone 2014, 209). Galbraith (2019, 173) combines Teri Silvio's position of *moe* elements as "specific formal qualities" that "stand for specific character traits" (Silvio 2010, 430) with linguists Teshigawara Mihoko and Kinsui Satoshi's examination of Japanese *yakuwarigo* [role language], idiolect patterns "associated with particular character types" (Teshigawara and Kinsui 2011, 38), emphasizing an underlying tendency toward formalization. More generally, character design templates form a common language between content producer and content recipient, upon which both sides must agree on if the story content is to make sense (Azuma H. 2007, 67).

Examples of *moe* elements include keywords such as "narcissistic (*oresama*), cruel (*kichiku*), exhausted (*tsukushi*), younger (*toshita*), straight (*nonke*), and loser (*hetare*)." For BL/*yaoi* characters, keywords are "seductive (*sasoi*), old man (*oyaji*), cool (*kūru*), narcissistic (*oresama*), buff (*kinniku*), laudable (*kenage*), impish (*shōakuma*), queen (*joōsama*), and princess (*hime*)" (Galbraith 2011b, 222). Other examples of *moe* elements include "'attributes' (*zokusei*) and 'erotic parts' (*eroi bubun*)," such as "'committee chairperson' (*i'inchō*), 'teacher' (*sensei*), 'lolita' (*rorīta*), 'sweet, supporting, underclassmen' (*amai ōen kōhai*), 'older sister' (*o-nē-san*), 'younger sister' (*imōto*)" in male-oriented characters (Galbraith 2021b, 170). The identity of a character, along with their recognizability, becomes formalized as a sequence of identifiable elements (Bruno 2019, 51; Iwashita 2016, 166–167), each identified as capable of eliciting *moe* responses. Combinations thereof index databases of characters for players, practitioners, and creators to (re)create across contexts (Galbraith 2021b, 125–133). In the context of CIG software, this gives a player instructions about where to direct their imaginative gaze, producing arrays of anticipated results, which generate affective feedback upon confirmation/subversion of player expectations (Bruno 2019, 49–50).

Galbraith (2019) quotes Jonathan Clements (2019, 341; earlier edition [2013, 201–202] cit. in Galbraith 2019, 88) when defining the viewer of *bishōjo* images as a viewer/interactor (Galbraith 2019, 88–89). While neither Galbraith nor Clements provide an explicit definition of an interactor, Galbraith evokes the sense of an interactor as "one who interacts with an object" (ibid., 88–89). He provides a demonstration of a scene from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Gainax 2004), where the character of Ayanami Rei, herself a flashpoint amidst the evolution of *bishōjo* characters (Azuma H. 2009 [2001], 48–52), smiles to the male protagonist, and by extension, the spectator. "In this moment, a close-up of Ayanami almost seems to have her looking at the screen and the viewer,

who becomes an interactor in relation with her, and a combination of visuals, sound, and direct appeal trigger an affective response" (Galbraith 2019, 89).

The close-up highlighted by Galbraith is interesting in that it is a three-second still or almost still sequence. The image, almost static, creates a situation that encourages viewers to imagine Rei, to interface with her interiority. In doing so, the player response creates what Stephan Packard calls the "third semiotic space" (2006, 137–141 cit. in Berndt 2021, 172). In this space, "icons are recognized but not necessarily in correspondence to real life; indexical relations develop within the storyworld but also between image and recipient; 'literacy' leans on familiarity with conventions, arbitrarily established and shared symbols that work metaphorically" (Berndt 2021, 171). In recognizing, co-joining, indexing, establishing, and relying on familiarity, users create a personal relationship with the images in front of them. In character intimacy games, this produces intimate connections with characters through their images, and the assemblage of visual, linguistic, and aural information. In character intimacy games, *bishōjo* and *bishōnen* appeal directly to players, eliciting an intimate connection mobilized through emergent, peer-learned media literacies (Galbraith 2021b, 60, 2011, 224; Santos 2020b 4–7, Nagayama 2014, 301–303; Aoyama 2013; Azuma S. 2010, 258). This is consistent with Olli Tapio Leino's (2018) account of forms of affection within video games: the game artifact does not force players to confront the character's existence. Instead, it allows them to fall into "a position to ignore all the narrative affordances suggesting the impossibility of such attraction" in favor of subjective interpretation" (ibid., 185).

The above reflection provides an additional angle to media scholar's Fujimoto Yukari's argument for framing anime-manga sexual media, amongst others, as a space of "simulation" [*shimyurēshon*] (2015, 78), a safe space for exploring and thinking about sex (Galbraith 2017a, 10; Fujimoto 2015, 78). She argues for examining "'playing sex(uality)' [*sei wo asobu*] (2015, 79), which leads to exploration and understanding of sex(uality)" (Galbraith 2017, 10). Her reflection

can be extended to intimacy in wider terms, framing the mechanisms of *moe* media, and CIG software, as 'playing intimacy,' sexual and non-sexual, which leads to its exploration and understanding. For instance, within *Shizuku* (Leaf 1997), players romancing the character of Ruriko interface with her shift from school idol to school outcast and, finally, toward a healthy framework for social relationships once more. Taking commonalities such as *moe* into account provides vital windows into what may underpin, facilitate, and, ultimately, make the production of character intimacy games possible. But what of the processes within individual users, compelling players to go further into exploring a character's interiority, into developing a personal relation with the character image in front of them?

4.2. Studies in Media Reception

4.2.1. Presence, transportation, immersion

The deliberate focus on the individual in studies of media reception is at odds with this study's decision not to engage with empirical players. However, when fan-curated databases are considered as socially produced documents, this attrition becomes less pronounced: fan-curated databases represent at-scale, consensus accounts of how individuals may select, process, and re-employ information obtained as part of their engagement with media works. In the case of character intimacy games, the continued reliance on subculturally charged terminology, such as *moe* – as emphasized in preceding chapters – has obscured and prevented attempt at understanding such phenomena in more stable fashion. *Moe* is a response to fictional characters, in equal parts performative and affective (cf. Galbraith 2019, 59–96; Sone 2014, 199; Azuma 2009 [2001], 42–48; Sasakibara 2004, 190–194). Media users are preoccupied with when, where, and how to engage in such responses (Galbraith 2021b, 83–88; Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 183; Au Yeung 2008, 147–

148). *Moe* leads to and requires emergent media literacies, peer-learned (Galbraith 2021b, 115, 192), whose semi-formalization develops in flux-like fashion (Suan 2017, 73–75; Ruh 2014, 171).

Beyond the above statements, there has been little preoccupation with how the processes of media reception signaled by the *moe* descriptor may actually function. Without an exploration of the mechanisms underneath 'responses to fictional characters,' *moe* remains in limbo: it cannot be meaningfully compared with examples from other fields or production contexts, even though video games centered on character intimacy are not a Japanese unicum. What factors are in play when players produce responses in the direction of character intimacy? What compels them toward the imaginative action required for the emergence of player/character intimacy? First and foremost, *moe* characters – *bishōjo* and *bishōnen* alike – refer to design practices that engage with media users. They look at users, who gaze back. Citing media critic Sasakibara Gō, Galbraith argues that:

> In *bishōjo* games, the character looks out at the player with large eyes filled with emotion and expressing inner life; she meets and returns the gaze, speaks to the player and demands that he act with concern and care. When the player responds to these demands, Sasakibara asserts, the character "comes to life" (Sasakibara 2003: 107). As someone, human and alive, the character who looks back at the player, the character who has a face, name and interiority, is able to "make actual demands" (Greenwood 2014: 250)" (Galbraith 2021b, 144).

Beyond the emotionally charged accounts reported by Sasakibara, the above description is apt in pinpointing what is happening. However, it does not provide a precise account of how this happens, or how it might emerge beyond a focus on characters gazing at media users. A similar argument for characters urging media users to action could be made for characters on the cover of videogame series such as *Mass Effect*. Therein, the main character, Shepard, in their default male appearance – Shepard's gender and appearance can be decided at the start of a new game – stands as the centerpiece of the visual composition, looking at the player. Despite Shepard looking at

players, there is nothing that might suggest some identifiable quality that may help make sense of character intimacy without resorting to *moe* and its local context.

But what, then, are players of character intimacy games doing, in general, without resorting to *moe*-connected explanations? They are *drawn in*, so to speak, by characters who are constantly depicted as addressing the player directly. Within media reception studies, there are two related but distinct concepts that may aid in understanding what is taking place: presence and transportation (cf. Liebers and Schramm 2017, 20). Both concepts engage with shifts in perception and a general 'drawing in of users,' with presence being more focused on immersive media, such as virtual reality apparatuses, while transportation concerns less immersive media, such as books.

Presence is a state where media users – readers, players – no longer perceive, or perceive only partially, that the events taking place within a media work are no longer mediated, or give the illusion thereof (Hartmann 2008, 1). As a psychological state, presence is "determined by the interplay of both situational or enduring individual factors, and environmental factors, which include qualities of the media technology and aspects of the content" (ibid.). It is a "binary experience, during which perceived self-location, and, in most cases, perceived action possibilities are connected to a mediated spatial environment, and mental capacities are bound by the mediated environment instead of reality" (Wirth et al. 2007, 497). It is connected to the "feeling of being there in the mediated environment" (Hartmann 2008, 1; Lee 2004; Riva et al. 2003; Biocca 1997). Presence is connected to virtual reality and apparatuses such as simulation rides, 3D cinemas, and video conferencing (Lombard and Ditton 1997, n.p.). Research concentrates on similarly immersive media such as online video games and escape rooms (cf. Videgor 2021; Flavián et al. 2019; Boellstorf 2015).

Presence in relation to less immersive media is less considered and mostly confined to the context of mediated, online communication (Kim and Song 2016; Kim, Song and Luo 2016). In

this regard, presence is intended as *social presence*, namely, the "subjective experience of being present with a 'real' person and having access to his or her thoughts and emotions" (Oh et al. 2018, 1; Biocca 1997). Social presence is influenced by "contextual and individual factors that impact perceptions of the psychological distance between interactants" (cf. Oh et al. 2018, 1; Verhagen et al. 2014; Kang and Gratch, 2014; Siriaraya and Ang 2012). In the case of character intimacy games, the focus remains on overly static frameworks centered on reading and imagination, which is closer to the cognate concept of transportation. At the same time, presence may also take place within less immersive media (Rodriguez and Martinez-Lopez 2013; Schubert & Crusius, 2002), dependent on emotional involvement (Wirth et al. 2012) and user position (Dubbelman 2016, 2013, 2011).

Transportation refers to immersion within a story, characterized by imagination, emotional responses to events and focus. Different from presence and its focus on immersive media, transportation has been developed with increased focus for the act of reading prose text. Scholars of transportation reaffirm three relevant features (Van Laer et al. 2014, 10) – that transportation requires mental processing on the side of users, reception, and interpretation; transportation takes place via empathy and mental imagery (Van Laer et al. 2014, 10; Slater and Rouner 2002; Green and Brock 2002); and users undergoing transportation lose track of reality in physiological sense (Van Laer et al. 2014, 10). Tom Van Laer and his team define transportation as "the extent to which (1) a consumer empathizes with the story characters and (2) the story plot activates his or her imagination, which leads him or her to experience suspended reality during story reception" (ibid.). Emotional engagement appears to be particularly relevant for transportation to take place (cf. Kuipers et al. 2014; Mar et al. 2011). Approaches have engaged with positive (Perks 2014) and negative emotions (Menninghaus et al. 2017) in relation to user engagement with media, before, during, and after actual media consumption (Van Laer et al. 2014; Mar et al. 2011).

A similar concept employed within game studies is *Immersion*. As per Janet Murray's definition, immersion refers to continued presence in a consistent environment where players are motivated to initiate actions that lead to the feeling of agency (Murray 2017, 114). Pierre Gabriel Dumoulin and Emmanuelle Lescouët (2022) propose to expand the concept of immersion with contributions from Calleja's concept of incorporation, described as a new way to account for "the sense of virtual environment habitation" (Calleja 2011, 169). They conclude that immersion, or similar concepts, in the case of digital fiction and/or digital narratives, coexist with interactivity. Immersion participates in the creation of player agency, and it is enabled by interaction and in interaction, understood as a two-way, reciprocal action between two parties. Immersion "arises when players act within the virtual world and the world will move to their interactions' rhythm. All interactions take part in the creation of the player's experience within the game, and thus help to sustain agency" (Dumolin and Lescouët 2022, 3). Following Souvik Murkherjee (2015, 179), they argue that "immersion and interaction occur exactly at the same time, but at different degrees and levels, following the player's implication or, more aptly, 'incorporation'" (Dumolin and Lescouët 2022, 3).

Discussing presence, transportation, and immersion/incorporation reconfigures *moe* in a clearer fashion: *moe* is an affective/performative response to fictional characters; it is also, more importantly, an ensemble of practices describing and facilitating phenomena where media users no longer perceive interaction with media characters as mediated. The emergent media literacies at the basis of engaging with *bishōjo* and *bishōnen* and their media worlds are the sedimentation of such practices into a semi-formalized, recognizable fashion. It may, in fact, be one of many possible systems whose aim is to ultimately facilitate intimacy between one human actor – the player – and one or more fictional entities – the game's characters, for the purpose of simulating intimate encounters. However, there is still one facet of Sasakibara's account of character

engagement that requires discussion: the ability of characters to "make demands" (Galbraith 2021b, 144) of players. How it is that characters tied to narrative, devoid of open-ended interaction possibilities in-game, can do so?

4.2.2. Parasocial interactions and relationships in context

Presence and transportation, as distinct but linked concepts, provide precious assistance in making sense of the conditions that push players toward producing the responses described by *moe*. However, presence and transportation cannot offer any assistance in making sense of how characters in CIG software may make demands of players. Sasakibara's own description (2003, 105–107, cit. in Galbraith 2021b, 143–144) is as cryptic as it is evocative: how is that a static character, whose interaction with the player will always be the same every time that segment of the game is traversed, actively demands something of the player? The key lies in Sasakibara's emphasis on when characters make their demands, and what the results are of players meeting said demands. Sasakibara argues that players meeting the demands of characters allow the characters to "come to life" (2003, 107). The description, as evocative as it is difficult to operationalize, points to players assuming prescribed roles in an imagined relationship with the character. This is particularly evident if Galbraith's addition to Sasakibara is taken into account: Galbraith argues that the character's demand is a request to not visit hurt on them (2021b, 144). Even more interesting is the footnote that accompanies the addition:

> The dynamic of the character facing the player and looking out at him recalls philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' approach to the face of the other, which says, "You shall not commit murder" (Levinas 1969: 199). The face, in its nudity and defenselessness, offers "ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers" (Levinas 1969: 199). Put slightly differently, the face compels me not to act: "Do not kill me." The face offers "passive resistance to the desire that is my freedom" (Bergo 2011). It is startling how resonant Levinas is with Sasakibara, who advances that the character, in her nudity and de-fenselessness, says, "Do not hurt me,"

> which limits the player's freedom to act (Sasakibara 2003: 126; also Kulick and Rydström 2015: 274–276). For Sasakibara, as for Levinas, ethics point us toward nonviolence. For both, it begins with an "interruption," or affective moment. (Galbraith 2021b, 144; 196).

The appearance of the character on the screen, static, with eyes gazing beyond the screen, is an elicitation for players to assume a role, one that entails not hurting the other.[39] Players are called on to care and protect, which, despite the presence of pornography in most Japanese CIG software, is not connected indissolubly with sexual intercourse. Galbraith does emphasize, implicitly and explicitly, the contradictory nature of *bishōjo* characters offering youthful innocence and sexual appeal (2021b, 133–134, 149–150, 168–169) and of the characters called to be with them (2019, 68–70). This duality, also remarked on by Sasakibara (2004 16–26) and Nagayama (2014, 134–136), while interesting in itself, becomes more important when taken in the context of ludo-hermeneutics: while sexually and emotionally charged rewards can, indeed, lead to embodied responses in players, it is only by recognizing and assuming the role mandated by characters that players become players of character intimacy games. And this, role, at least in the case of Japanese CIG, is not automatically linked to sex, allowing the inclusion of raising simulators, whose focus on intimacy, parental as it might be, is self-evident. While Galbraith's discussion is centered around *bishōjo* games and *bishōjo* characters, this process can be extended to other character types and other forms of CIG software. *Bishōnen* characters, whenever they engage in homosexual or heterosexual relationships, are also depicted as gazing at users, also relying on *moe*, *moe* elements, and similarly emergent media literacies (cf. Santos 2021a, 2021b; Galbraith 2011b).

[39] While Galbraith's position is accurate for most character intimacy games in Japan, a minority of works put players in a role that entails *voluntarily* and *deliberately* hurting characters. Therein, players are made to exert sexual violence and other heinous acts on characters who are demanding not to be hurt. While, on the one hand, this does not make Galbraith's description generalizable at first, actually highlights such a position as a starting point internal to the landscape of Japanese CIG production.

By assuming the role mandated by characters, players mobilize the assemblage of *moe* elements, archetypical situations, prototypical character interactions, plots, etc. into a continuing relationship. In generalized, abstracted terms, this implies the existence of specific roles for actants in an imagined intimate relationship. Players are to assume such roles to recognize themselves as players of CIG software. In doing so, they produce what studies of media reception has deemed parasocial phenomena, those one-sided psychological states – as anticipated before within this study – where a human media user interacts with a media character (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 5). Users perceive the interaction as similar with that of an actual living being, capable of responding and interacting in freeform fashion, despite the staticness of their host media. These responses are assumed to be similar to face-to-face interactions between two individuals, except for the lack of mutuality between the two interactants (ibid.), In fact, approaches to *moe*, since its early approaches, have often emphasized, in practice, the continuing relationship between media users and fictional characters (Galbraith 2019, 95–96; Condry 2013, 192; Steinberg 2012, 188–190; Honda 2005, 212–215).

Research on media reception distinguishes between two typologies of parasocial phenomena: parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships. Parasocial interactions are media reception responses produced as part of media engagement. Parasocial relationships, on the other hand, represent "a more long-term response to media characters," which may exceed the limitations of single acts of media reception and "develop into a long-term relationship between two individuals, beyond their face-to-face interaction" (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 13; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). They expand reception into long-term engagements between media users and figures (Klimmt et al. 2006), in an experience of friendliness, companionship (Levy, 1979), and "affective participant involvement" (Rubin and Perse 1987, 248). A parasocial relationship can thus "endure beyond a single reception and develop into a long-term relationship between a media user and a

media character" (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 5; see also Schramm, 2015 [2008]). At the same time, the nature of reception may influence the formation of parasocial relationships (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 14; Auter et al. 2008; Klimmt, et al. 2006). Such relationships are not, however, eternal or fixed in stone: they may also end in what constitutes a "parasocial breakup" when, for example, the media character of a TV series suddenly dies.[40]

Amicable parasocial relationships are distinguished by "liking the character, feeling solidarity with and trust in the media figure, and desiring self-disclosure and communication with him or her" (Tukachinsky 2011, 76). Romantic parasocial relationships are characterized instead by a need for the other's physical presence, their approval, and their care (ibid., 77). Another underlying assumption is that characters are imagined by media users to be human-like (cf. Liebers and Schramm 2017, 16–17). This clashes strongly with the claims of fictiveness and non-reflection of reality of *moe* characters (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 59–76, 2019, 59–96, 2011, 220–222; Sugawa-Shimada 2020, 158; Okamoto 2015, 51–54; Nagayama 2014, 158, 198, 83; Sasakibara 2004, 37).

Users develop infatuations with media characters, including "feeling emotionally and/or physically attracted to and having passionate thoughts about him or her" (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 13). Such feelings are characterized by "physical attraction, commitment and positive affect, and lack only reciprocity" (ibid.). While currently unapproached, the emergence of ulterior types of parasocial relationships – hateful, filial, to name but a few – is also conceivable (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 15; Tian and Hoffner, 2010). However, studies attempting to make a link between parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships, outside of Nicole Lieber and Holger Schramms's work (2017), and exploratory studies in 'fictophilia/fictosexuality' (Karhulahti and Välisalo 2021) and reception of *eroanime-eromanga* [hentai] pornography (Park, Blomkvist and Mahmut 2021) remain limited. Particularly interesting for character intimacy games is the

[40] See Cohen 2003 for an extensive discussion of parasocial breakup.

relevance of the fictionality of media entities (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 15), with fictional entities commanding more intense relationships than non-fictional ones (cf. Hu 2016).

Accompanying phenomena to media reception, which are the purview of the third research focus, are also particularly interesting for approaching character intimacy games: interaction is associated with "increased cognitive, emotional and conative involvement" (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 15; Calvert et al. 2014; Hartmann et al. 2008; Kim and Rubin, 1997; Rubin and Perse, 1987). Also extremely interesting are some results showing that "intensified PSI could correlate with high relaxation and decreased emotional stress" (Liebers and Schramm 2019, 15; Madison and Porter 2015). This draws instinctive connections to existing perceptions of *moe* characters, media, and spaces offering solace or healing from the troubles of everyday life (Baffelli and Yamaki 2018; Ijima et al. 2017; Wada et al. 2014; Sharp 2014, 2011).

Moe, by its nature, as a response to media characters, is to all intents and purposes a parasocial phenomenon reliant on emerging, peer-learned media literacies (Galbraith 2021, 64, 75, 2019, 16, 46, 62–64; Sone 2014, 199). It manifests as parasocial interactions – responses during media engagement – and parasocial relationships when users are away from media engagement. However, the very existence of a semi-formal system for mobilizing parasocial responses is at odds with the spontaneous, one-sided nature of parasocial phenomena. There is a discrepancy between the free-form, open-ended nature of parasocial phenomena – any instance of media reception may develop into parasocial responses – and the closedness of software operations, where every moment in which the software is running can be ultimately reduced to a machine state. At the same time, it raises a no less important question: how do players determine the extent and nature of the role they must assume to meet the character's demands and thus initiate the imaginative process?

4.2.3. Sexual scripts, software scripts, intimate scripts

Playing character intimacy games is contingent on players assuming the role demanded by characters. It is to act in accordance with said role in the development of an imagined, intimate relationship, which may lead to the emergence of parasocial phenomena. While the previous chapter has briefly surmised the role of the player to be, implicitly, and generally, one of care and protection, as per Galbraith's position (2021b, 144), it is not enough. What are players called upon, concretely, to do as they interact with characters in-game and imagine intimacy to be? In what direction should a player go, both within the game and within their imagination, to fulfill the role that characters demand they take? In investigating these interrogatives, this study assumes that meeting character demands – acting in accordance with the role mandated by character interaction – produces or leads to, at the very least, parasocial interactions.

However, from the perspective of approaching video game software, connecting parasocial responses to software operations proper is a contradictory endeavor. Parasocial phenomena are not tied to specific, identifiable, and repeatable acts of media reception, only to acts of media reception in general. Parasocial relationships persist outside of media engagement proper. Software operations, on the other hand, can ultimately be reduced to a series of scripted calculations, which, given the same starting conditions, will lead to the same result at every software execution. Nevertheless, it is now possible to produce reasonable assumptions regarding a player producing parasocial phenomena in response to characters in CIG software – if there is no response or predisposition to response there is no CIG software, and analysis is moot. It is neither possible nor reasonable, however, to indissolubly connect specific in-game acts with parasocial responses. Ulterior stabilization is needed. To make sense of and resolve the discrepancy between parasocial phenomena – open-ended, freeform, untied to media typology – and the logic of software operation,

this study connects studies in parasocial phenomena with *sexual scripts theory*, a sedimented framework within the purview of sex research.

Sexual scripts theory [SST], first elaborated by William Simon and John H. Gagnon (2003, 1987a, 1987b, 1984) approaches the spectrum of human sexual interaction, from macro to micro-level, and, in particular, gender-based meanings and conducts (Mahay et al. 2001). Sexual scripts are "culturally available messages that define what 'counts' as sex, how to recognize sexual situations, and what to do in a sexual encounter" (Frith and Kitzinger 2001: 210). Sexual scripts are made up of "widely shared ideas about sexuality through which people learn what sex is, what is sexual, what is sexy, how to experience pleasure, and how to conduct oneself sexually" (Nagar 2016: 1). They are composed of "a number of logical if-then statements" (Bargh 1996; see also Andersen et al. 2013), guiding "expectations of what will or will not occur" (Lenton and Bryan 2005, 484). Each "typically comprises beliefs concerning events and their proper sequence and roles" (Lenton and Bryan 2005, 484; Fiske and Taylor 1991). As such, they are "organized cognitive schema, which people employ to understand their own actions and desires sexually, to consider certain bodily activities as pleasurable, to interpret certain social situations as potentially sexual, and to recognize appropriate behavior for each situation" (Nagar 2016: 1).

> [S]cripts consist of three distinct levels: cultural scenarios at the macro societal level, interpersonal scripts at the interactional middle level, and intra-psychic scripts at the micro level of oneself (Simon and Gagnon 1986). At the macro level, cultural scenarios prescribe the How, When, With Whom, Where, and Why of expected sexual conduct. These cultural arrangements are neither universal nor uniform but particular to a given society. Despite similarities in repertoires of bodily activities usually associated with sexuality, there is no similarity in the meanings attributed to them. At the middle level, people learn the scripts by picking up cues and directions unintentionally and intuitively from their environment, and apply them in specific social contexts in ways that facilitate sexual exchange. The interpersonal scripts serve to mediate individuals' relation to the norms and regulate their social interactions. At the intrapsychic level, cultural meanings are internalized, allowing individuals to manage their experiences and construct sexual "selves:" desires, beliefs,

fantasies, and values (Lenton and Bryan 2005, 484).

Despite not pertaining to studies of media reception proper, sexual scripts theory has already seen employment as part of media reception, especially in the case of media featuring sexual content (cf. Vera-Gray et al. 2021; Sun et al. 2016; Hald et al. 2013; Ross and Coleman 2011). Character intimacy games in Japan, whether explicitly or implicitly, generally feature sexual content. In doing so, via a combination of software mechanics and *moe* emergent literacies, they arguably generate sexual scripts regulating imagined intimacy with anime-manga characters. In fact, character intimacy games should be thought of as generating their own sexual scripts regardless of their production context: the peculiarity of the game's narrative, the interplay between software mechanics and character intimacy, the character's own combination of gender and sexual orientation (or lack thereof) in the context of the role they assume all concur to create a specific sexual script for that game. Such scripts might not be necessarily accord with wider cultural milieus. For instance, if players choose to behave condescendingly to a *tsundere* character within Japanese CIG software, they can be expected not to win that character's attention. However, there is no such formalization in software works such as *Softporn Adventure* – the sexual script therein is different. At the same time, the Japanese production context is arguably the only case where components for sexual scripts may have been formalized to a very high level of granularity:

> Different colors of hair and hairstyles might suggest character, for example "blond in pig-tails" (*kinpatsu tsuin tēru*), which I was consistently told referred to characters with a bad attitude and soft heart. There are hundreds of these combinations. A strand of hair sticking up, which is called "stupid hair" (*ahoge*), suggests a character that is energetic but not too bright. Glasses may convey intelligence or shyness, and a girl with glasses be-comes a character type, "glasses girl" (*meganekko*). Having the character eating food suggests energy and vitality, or a "healthy girl" (*genki na ko*). Big breasts suggest mature sexuality, and smaller breasts innocence. Different underwear suggests character, for example white cotton with an animal print as code for "child" and black lace as code for "adult" (Galbraith 2021, 128-129).

Applied to the systems and literacies of *moe*, SST allows us to make sense of how players may direct their imaginative gaze, producing arrays of anticipated results, which generate affective feedback upon confirmation/subversion (Bruno 2019, 49–50). In fact, as a system, *moe* mimics game design and modes of interacting with video games (Azuma H. 2007, 168–174) while being far from exclusive to digital games. Sexual scripts informed by pornography viewing may become a "heuristic model for decision making" during sexual encounters (Sun et al. 2016, 983, 994), namely, a model for "the way in which information is processed quickly and without much deliberation" (ibid., 994). Such models outline "what should or should not be happening, how people should or should not behave in response to what is or is not happening and what the outcomes of a particular course of action should be" (Wright 2011, 348, as cit. in Sun et al. 2016, 994).

Applied to CIG software, sexual scripts operationalize character intimacy in the software macrostructure by telling: who romances whom, who is attracted by whom, who is sexually pro-active and who is sexually passive, and, finally, how to deploy knowledge of the script to achieve one of the game's success states. If sexual scripts are "a number of logical if-then statements that guide our expectations of what will or will not occur" (Lenton and Bryan 2005, 484), they can be turned into rules for a video game, with clear success states, failure states, and their relative pathways. If in-game sexual scripts mark certain situations as sexual, erotic, or sensual, it is then possible to presume a level of embodied responses in users, as sexual and/or emotional arousal toward the characters, which, in turn, fosters the emergence of parasocial phenomena.

SST, of course, pertains to sexual intercourse and to sexual interaction. However, given the breadth and width of character intimacy games, CIG software that does not feature sexual intercourse, implicitly or explicitly, may also possess their own scripts. For example, the *Princess Maker* series puts players in the role of a tutor/slash father figure, in charge of raising the titular

princess until she is of age to go into the world. In this case, a similarly functioning, culturally connoted 'parental script' composed of logical if-then statements guiding expectations of what may/may not occur can also be envisioned.[41] In the same fashion as sexual scripts, the parental script would guide players in what to expect of characters and what to expect of themselves if they meet the character's demands. Other scripts for less constructive relationships – kidnapping, sexual violence, etc. – may also be envisioned as part of a character intimacy game's assemblage of software code and narrative content.

To accommodate for the wider breadth of situations covered in character intimacy games, this study proposes a derivation of sexual scripts into 'intimate scripts': a structured ensemble of logical if-then statements that guide expectations of what will or will not occur in intimate situations, regardless of the nature of intimacy – parental, filial, sexual, parasexual, romantic – or its moral or ethical standing. Intimate scripts, paraphrasing Nagar (2016), would therefore be made up of widely shared ideas about intimacy through which people learn what intimacy is, what is intimate, how to experience intimacy, and how to conduct oneself intimately. Analyzing intimate scripts allows us to assume to a certain degree when, where, and how responses might take place. Through such assumptions, a tentative map, or at least some indications of where parasocial phenomena might emerge can be drawn and operationalized for CIG analysis. However, intimate scripts are culturally and context dependent – they do not mobilize anytime, anywhere, they require

[41] The wider field in which sexual scripts theory developed, scripts theory, *does* envision 'cognitive scripts' (Hart 2017; Calvete 2013; Gioia and Poole 1984; Goffman 1963, 1959), similar cognitive schema about "the sequence of behaviors that can be expected in a certain context, how the individual should behave in that context once the individual has assumed a role in the script, and what might be the expected consequences" (Calvete 2013, 1). Comprehensive analysis of scripts theory in relation to CIG software and imagined intimacy is well beyond the scope of this study. Its presentation here is to provide primers for further analysis of CIG software.

proper context. How this appropriate context can be communicated as part of in-game interaction is a different matter requiring its own discussion.

4.3. Game studies

4.3.1. Mechanics maketh game: Understanding software through systems for interaction

One of the most immediate ways of contextualizing in-game actions within video games is to look at video game mechanics, defined as the processes allowing players to interact with and traverse video game software. As discussed before, the ensemble of software systems and narrative content in character intimacy games is dependent on players taking prescribed roles in an imagined intimate relationship with the game's characters. It is not sufficient for players to simply engage with the game's mechanical systems, whatever their nature. Rather, players must take roles as mandated by the intimate scripts within a character intimacy game's assemblage of software code and narrative content. This produces a question of how intimate scripts interact, cohere, or, at times, collide with the software mechanics of each character intimacy game, when players have met character demands.

While intuitive distinctions in mechanics are employed by players and developers alike, research into video games does not enjoy the same ease: there is a lack of shared vocabulary (Lo

et al. 2021, 336; Aarseth and Grabarczyk 2018, 3–4), a lack of agreement about the field to which video game research should belong to, along with an ever-growing number of fields interested in research video games (Aarseth and Grabarczyk 2018, 3). The consequences, as pointed out by Aarseth and Grabarczyk, are a proliferation of models, hierarchies, and definitions, along with a circulation of terms of vague and uncertain definition, like 'gameplay,' 'mechanics,' 'interactivity,' 'immersion,' and 'virtual reality.' This study, for its part, while it relies heavily on Carlo Fabricatore's discussion of game mechanics, does not seek to re-invent the wheel, or to produce yet another hierarchy or model. Rather, this study seeks to reconcile existing definitions with the imaginative efforts elicited of player by CIG software.

Järvinen defines video game mechanics as "a functional game feature that describes one possible or preferred or encouraged means with which the player can interact with game elements as she is trying to influence the game state at hand towards attainment of a goal" (2008, 255). Fabricatore defines video game mechanics as player-centered "proper tools for gameplay, atomic rule-based interactive subsystems capable of receiving an input and reacting by producing an output. Such output translates into a state change of the mechanics itself and/or into the triggering of new interactions with other game mechanics" (2007, 5).

Miguel Sicart proposes mechanics as "methods invoked by agents, designed for interaction with the game state" (2008, n.p.). Ernest Adams and Joris Dorman explicate mechanics as "everything affects the operation of the game" (2012, 3–4). Building on Jesper Juul (2005) and Katie Salen Tekinbas and Eric Zimmerman (2003), Toups et al. refer to mechanics as moments in which "a player makes a choice and observes the outcome," with core mechanics being the foundational part of a video game (2014, 258). Imre Hoffman offers a further definition of video game mechanics as "the objective structures and properties of a game that cybernetically organize the changes of a game's states through rule-based interaction and causal relationships" (2018, 85).

Mechanics, it seems, cannot be reduced to an exclusive examination of software mechanical systems, and instead require recognition of the role of players as agents. Fabricatore, in an expansive discussion of mechanics, invites "perspectives allowing the focus on both the game system and the player in an integrative way" and argues that if video games "can be regarded as systems, then we should also regard players as system thinkers who play through making sense of things, consciously and subconsciously interpreting meanings and establishing relationships to understand what has happened in the past, what is happening in the present, and predict what could happen in the future" (2018, 88–89).

Employing action theory (AT), Fabricatore envisions the playing activity as a goal-oriented endeavor aimed at satisfying psychological needs, which is also a meaning-making process. Through meaning-making, the player processes "mental representations in order to project possible future states to attain and organize her actions accordingly" (2018, 91). In performing tasks, a player attempts to transform a system of entities in order to achieve their desired goal states. By way of this process, "the player interprets the situation she faces, evaluating target object, enablers, hindrances and other relevant contextual conditions. Accordingly, she identifies possibilities to act and plan her interactions" (ibid., 98). A tasks context is vital for meaning making through interacting with mechanics, and implicitly allows the distinction between video games featuring similar mechanical systems. Game contexts "foster meaning-making through relating things and events within a specific spatiotemporal dimension, defined by sociocultural, physical and historical environmental conditions" (ibid., 100–101).

> All accounted for, game contexts foster meaning-making through relating things and events within a specific spatiotemporal dimension, defined by sociocultural, physical and historical environmental conditions. Contextual conditions allow the player to wholly understand the schemas that define and regulate interactions between entities, and comprehend the significance of these interactions as defined "by design". Interpreting schemas in context allows making sense of game entities, the possibilities to transform

> them to achieve game goals, and the enabling and hindering functions that they may have in the process. Interpreting background conditions allows for comprehension of the immediate causes and effects of defining events as they happen in the game space, as well as the way these are valorized in the game world (ibid, 100–101).

In CIG software, the presence of *chara-moe*/*shōjo-josei-BL-yaoi* aesthetics, combined with the circulation on the personal computer or other platforms, such as the PS Vita, is an immediate marker of contextual conditions: the game is about character intimacy with *bishōjo/bishōnen* characters. Navigation, interaction, and movement through the game world are contextualized based on such aesthetics, and players are encouraged to act accordingly. This is not to say that context can turn every mechanical system to its figurative service. Rather, mechanics provide context, and context may, in turn, inspire mechanics. Japanese character intimacy games are wholly focused on intimate character interaction, compounded by featuring of aesthetics productive to such engagements.

> Contextual information can overall foster situational sense-making, allowing the player to understand that things and events are driven by more than abstract cause-effect relationships. By extension, contextual feedback may lead the player to attribute a deeper sense of purpose to a task. This may be the case when feedback relates to implications of the task that transcend the practical transformation of objects in the game, and which reflect how the task outcomes will be valorized based on the socio-cultural circumstances in which the task unfolds (i.e. moral value of saving people from slavery, and implications for their future lives). Thus, game feedback should be analyzed to determine the extent to which it allows the player to comprehend the significance of her acts in the game world, as defined "by design" (Fabricatore 2018, 107–108).

Character intimacy games, through a combination of mechanics and narrative content, focus on the simulation of intimate character interactions. What is peculiar in Japanese character intimacy games, and, in particular, within face-to-face character interaction, is that interaction with the game state is not performed in a procedural fashion through software. Rather, it is performed

prevalently via player imagination – filling the blanks, mentally rendering the scene, bringing the affordances of literature within software environment. Such statements may not fully apply to character intimacy games that feature extensive gamic segments, such as *Eiyū*Senki*. However, even in the presence of extensive gamic segments, the mechanics of character interaction are *the lack of* software mechanics in favor of imagination. It is no isolated accident – the framework has sedimented over nearly forty years of character intimacy game production in Japan, regardless of intended audience, presence/absence of explicit content, or the presence/absence of other systems for interaction, whatever their nature (cf. Jiang 2019; Kabashima 2009; Hichibe 2006).

When presenting players with character interaction, Japanese character intimacy games rob players of control or alternatives, leaving them together with characters gazing at them. The lack of mechanical interactivity is itself a mechanism for character interaction: when players are left with only the option to coalesce information into a coherent whole and to advance the storyline, they are alone with characters. This contextualizes the character encounter as being a character encounter within a CIG – there is nothing else that can be done outside the character encounter. Therein the player is, imaginatively, once more called on to meet the character's demands, as per the sexual scripts featured within the game.

This is arguably what allows video games such as *Planetarian*, or other so-called kinetic novels, to be considered as video games. Even though they feature minimal interaction with the software itself – limited solely to incremental software states, one click at a time – they are, to all intents and purposes, one uninterrupted character encounter, where players are continuously called on to meet the character's demand and assume a prescribed role within an imagined intimate relationship. When players meet character demand, they produce, or are pushed toward producing parasocial interaction, which may develop into parasocial relationships. However, this discussion leaves one significant blind spot: what of the actual software mechanics that may be present in

CIG software? How do they aid, or hinder, the processes underneath player/character intimacy? This study has offered a theoretical discussion of how mechanics, the lack thereof, and the context in which tasks, or the lack thereof, might aid in contextualizing in-game action as moving towards character intimacy. However, it has still not offered any kind of concrete example of mechanics that may be geared toward character intimacy. What, then, is an example of a system that may offer the condition for a video game to be distinguishable as a character intimacy game? Is it actually something that can be distinguished from other gamic frameworks?

4.3.2. The mechanics of intimacy: Systems of affection in character intimacy games

In her theory of dynamic game characters – game characters whose development structure branches into different outcomes (Blom 2020, 144) – Blom envisions the presence of a mechanical framework, which she calls the "system of affection (SA)." The SA is a "a ludic process, inherently procedural in nature, which allows the player to create and shape relationships between dynamic game characters" (ibid., 197), dependent on the character's development structure. An example of such a system lies in 'affection meters' – explicit or implicit counters for measuring the level of affection/depth of bond existing in the player's relationship with characters. Such relationships are embedded in the game's possibility space; that is, in the variety of possible actions, decisions, and outcomes that a video game makes available to the player, structuring their playstyle (ibid., 147–149; Westecott 2009; Bogost 2008; Canossa and Drachen 2009a, 2009b; Jones 2008; Tychsen and Canossa 2008; Aarseth 1997). Players affects these relationships by "executing specific sets of actions – procedures that differ per game" (Blom 2020, 197). Therefore, in the context of a character intimacy game's focus on character intimacy, the SA – or any similar mechanical system – should coincide with the game's mode of game traversal and be the primary focus of in-game operations.

In a character intimacy game, players may be confronted with such a system in a more or less explicated fashion: for example, in *Shinjitsu no Princess* [Princess To Be] (DeareaD 2017), players may track the progress they have made with one of the game's four romanceable characters; the same happens in *Oyako Rankan* [Mother and Daughter in a Raging Manor] (Alicesoft 2012), where players may track current character affection vis-à-vis game progress. Systems of affection are not exclusively tied to romantic engagements and can bring about a variety of relationships – amicable, romantic, or antagonistic. Blom also makes an important clarification: systems of affection appear in games that are "oriented towards character development, and which have at least some role-playing elements. But the SA's existence does not determine the game's genre" (2020, 197).

Blom's work interfaces with a scattered ensemble of approaches in game studies preoccupied with the depiction of emotion, love, and affection within video games. These approaches interrogate how love is depicted, how video games may or may not be able to reproduce and/or simulate love, intimacy, and affective relationships. The employment of intimacy in game design has been associated with possibilities for games with no conflict (Trammel and Waldron 2015), while the featuring of sexuality in games effects choice, sexual desire, and reproduction (Youngblood 2015). Peter Kelly argues that human love and affections are too complex and fuzzy to be adequately simulated under software conditions (2015, 47). Ashley Brown (2017, see also Brown and Gallagher 2017), offering the example of *No More Heroes* (Grasshopper Interactive 2007), highlights a possible immaturity by the media format itself (Brown 2017, 246), a position in contrast with the historical examination provided by Gianmarco Giuliana (2017, 42–43).

Giuliana also argues that it is the player's sense of finitude that bestows meaning on love and sex in digital games. Players are dependent on the game's system closeness ensuring "safety of exploration of different regimes of scarcity and values of love and sex features" (2017, 58–59).

Rather than love being too complex for video game software, it might be that its reduction to a closed system is necessary for its simulation. This is the mechanical counterpart to sexual scripts within character intimacy game assemblages: the finitude of the systems provides concrete counterpoints to freeform animation. Players see their efforts concretize as part of video game navigation, and together with confirmation or subversion of one's imaginative action come affective responses (cf. Bruno 2019, 49, 52–56; Huron 2006, 18).

Blom's framing of systems of affection indirectly corroborates Giuliana's position: to play intimacy, rules delimiting the space in which player play intimacy are needed. The same can be said for the imaginative actions that player take in service and toward character intimacy: a delimitation of where, when, and how character intimacy may be imagined might be equally necessary to bestow the meanings necessary for players to develop parasocial responses. The affection mechanics – *Ren'ai Shinkō* [love system] – in *Fire Emblem: Fuuka Seitsugetsu* are one example of how SAs might be manifested in software works. The presence of SA in video game software represents only a first step in determining whenever a piece of video game software can be classified as a character intimacy game. CIG software are video games where intimacy with characters must be the central focus of the video game experience and constitute a vital threshold for video game progress and completion. In contrast, a video game with character intimacy is a game where character intimacy is an optional system, and is not vital for video game traversal and completion. Within *Fire Emblem: Fuuka Seitsugetsu*, progress in the Love System is not vital for progress, although highly encouraged by way of combat bonuses resulting from furthering one's relationship with other characters. In-game traversal is contextualized around winning battle encounters, tying in with the general narrative of putting an end to the war and the conspiracies around Garreg Mach Monastery. In *Bokujō Monogatari*, players endeavor to run a farm, and

should set their in-game conduct appropriately. While they might court other characters as part of their in-game voyage, with systems similar to CIG software, the goal lies within the farm.

It is the opposite in the case of character intimacy games. In *Dōkyūsei*, players are tasked with managing multiple statistics, to navigate a map and to be in the right location at the appropriate time to initiate character events. In *Hakuōki ~Shinsengumi Kitan~* [Demon of the Fleeting Blossom: The Tale of the Shinsengumi] (Design Factory Co., Ltd 2008), players are tasked with choosing the right path at the right time to collect all reward images in an erotic scavenger hunt. Both video games contextualize player action – through aesthetics, packaging, and underlying expectations of media literacies – as being about engaging in character intimacy. It is not sufficient for a game to present some kind of score-dependent variable labeled as intimacy or affection and make it a reward for player actions. An explicit contextualization of character intimacy as being vital for game progression is necessary. Without such contextualization, *Dōkyūsei*'s system could be the one underneath a role-playing game, while *Hakuouki ~Shinsengumi Kitan~*'s mostly static framework could be collocated as an adventure game. In fact, both software systems *become* systems of affection through contextualization, which makes mechanics dependent on how in-game actions are contextualized as being about character intimacy. The presence of a system of affection alone does not transform a game's genre or typology (cf. Blom 2020, 198). And yet, games of character intimacy like visual novels, *erogē*, *bishōjo* games, *BL* games, etc. *require* the player to intimately engage with characters.

Examining systems of affection reinforces the call to holistic consideration of the sum of the game's mechanics in conjunction with narrative, aesthetic, and social affordances affecting game operation in one way or another. However, how should we relate to SAs, which are embedded in the game's possibility space, with the wider, non-mechanics-based ensemble of demands and conditions that players must meet and uphold? In the Japanese case, where such practices have

been structured to a considerable level of granularity, the systems around *moe* articulate *another* possibility space, tethered but parallel to video game software. This space, interfacing with the finiteness of what may take place and not take place within software proper, offers regulation for player imaginative actions. It primes users to engage intimately with characters, urging them toward imagined intimacy. Furthermore, the focus on character intimacy requiring finiteness implies, in turn, a sense of finitude, not unlike that envisioned by Giuliana in his examination of love and affect in digital games (2017, 58–59). Accounting for *two* parallel possibility spaces – one emerging out of software proper, one tied to player imaginative action – might be the decisive step in studying character intimacy games.

4.3.3. Mechanics and imagination in parallel: Possibility spaces in character intimacy games

In proposing the system of affection, Blom locates it within the game's possibility space (2020, 149–156, 197). In envisioning character intimacy games, this study posits that, mechanically, a game's system of affection should coincide with the game's mode of traversal. By locating the SA as the game's main mode of traversal, this study narrows down the possibility space for a CIG game to that generated by systems of affection. However, such space is confined to the game's software proper, and cannot account for player imaginative action toward intimate character engagement. Player imaginative action, which is fundamental for players to recognize themselves as players of CIG software, and thus for the game to become its ontological result, needs to be accounted for and operationalized.

Broadly speaking, 'possibility space' refers to the range of possible actions within a number of constraints of varying type and nature. Game theorists Katie Salen Tekinbas and Eric Zimmerman argue that the possibility space can be understood both metaphorically and literally. Metaphorically, as "an abstract decision space or conceptual space of possible meaning," in

reference to the systems that dictate which courses of action are available to players and which are not (Tekinbas and Zimmerman 2003, 67, 390) – literally as the organization of spatial elements shaping the player's in-game course of action (ibid., 390). It is a space of possible conflict, as part of video game navigation involves selecting a goal (ibid., 255). It generates meaning – it is "the space of all possible meaning" – it is a system – it is a space by the way "elements of the system can relate to each other" – it is interactive – it is "through the interactive functioning of the system that the space is navigated and explored" (ibid., 67). More concisely, Tekinbas and Zimmerman cite veteran game designer Warren Spector, arguing that possibility spaces are "spaces that provide compelling problems within an overarching narrative, afford creative opportunities for dealing with problems and then respond to player choices with meaningful consequences" (ibid., 390). Game scholar Ian Bogost highlights that a possibility space consists of "all of the gestures made possible by a set of rules" (2008, 120). More generally, it is the space that allows free exploration within a more-or-less rigid rule structure.

Within the system of affection, the game's possibility space is what facilitates the focus of Blom's attention, characters, into becoming dynamic game characters, and provides the player with a non-trivial role in the characterization process (2020, 144). By engaging with the system of affection, players assume a fundamental role in determining how a character's narrative will play out. By providing such a possibility space, a character becomes dynamic. In doing so, "games give the player the impression that the character's development structure contains a plurality of potentials and outcomes" (ibid., 149). Nevertheless, it is not possible to account for parasocial responses to characters in CIG software by looking solely at software proper. It is not possible to assume that every player will approach CIG software because they are attracted by one of the game's characters or wish to become attracted to one. Some players might enjoy the story; some

might play CIG software like *Eiyū Senki* or *Daiteikoku* (Alicesoft 2011) because they enjoy them as turn-based strategy games.

Of course, this study operates on the ludo-hermeneutical assumption that players need to recognize themselves as playing a character intimacy games – which requires them to assume the role demanded by characters. Focusing solely on the software proper, as the system of affection does, removes the necessity for players to respond to characters. With it, the ontology necessary for CIG ludo-hermeneutics ceases to be. Therefore, any conceptual framework to approach character intimacy games must account for the ways in which player imagine intimacy and how the roles they must assume to meet the character's demand condition and channel imagined intimacy. The most salient, most decisive characteristic of character intimacy games, therefore, is that they present two possibility spaces, tethered to each other but distinct.

The first possibility space emerges out of software proper; that is, the ensemble of narrative content and mechanical systems that may include the system of affection. In cases such as kinetic novels, where there is no way to alter the character's fate, such an ensemble creates the illusion of choice, of alterability of the character's fate, which contributes to contextualizing game traversal. It is composed of and emerges out of software assets and other directly connected paraphernalia, to account for the possibility of video games including haptic devices for sexual feedback, amongst other things. The second possibility space, on the other hand, refers to the avenues by which imagined character intimacy can be envisioned by players. It regulates how imaginative action can be perceived as coherent with the roles demanded by the game's characters. It is the ensemble of emergent media literacies, intimate scripts, aesthetic conventions, and associated practices that enable players to recognize themselves as playing CIG software. Thus, players produce the imagined intimacy, and responses thereof that turn video games into its ontological result as video games centered around character intimacy – character intimacy games.

Certainly, each user may react to in-game events designed to elicit parasocial phenomena: the level of euphoria will be different, as will be the level of emotional and sexual arousal. Some players might be attracted by a certain set of database elements, some may be attracted by others, depending on personal preferences and their current personal situation (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 167–177; Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 190–193). The way players imagine intimacy and subsequently produce parasocial phenomena toward characters differs for each person. However, the common point for every player is that to produce such responses they must recognize themselves as playing at intimacy as part of playing a character intimacy game.

Different from other typologies of video games, where collocations may be drawn from either software mechanics, narrative content, or a combination of both, character intimacy games require explicit recognition from the player's side. This is different from video game works that can be categorized as strategy games, for example: a player's refusal or failure to recognize that traversal is contingent on achieving success conditions through direct or indirect control of a number of virtual entities does not invalidate that game's nature as a strategy game. The game's assemblage of mechanical systems and narrative content makes it so that collocation as a strategy game is always reasonable, even considering the manifold potential perspectives on a single video game (Aarseth and Calleja 2015, 1–2, 6).

In the case of character intimacy games, the matter is different: character intimacy games are not only contingent on their ensemble of software mechanics and narrative content featuring characters to romance in appropriate contextualization, but they also require that players assume the role of a CIG player – that they metaphorically meet the character's demands. To assume such a role is to take a position that leads to the ontological processes that transform a work of interactive software into a character intimacy game. This process requires both sides to collaborate. It is not a process of willful distortion of an existing video game, nor it can be reduced to software

proper – a character intimacy game may present a number of mechanical affordances that categorize it in other genres, just as *moe* may be thought of a meta-genre for fiction. *Moe* works may be enjoyed as one of its sub-genres – a *moe* SF work such as *Muv Luv Alternative* (âge 2006) can be enjoyed as a SF story. In the same way, character intimacy games can be enjoyed, on their own, as a video game collocated into the typology closest to is ensemble of mechanics and narrative content.

It is only through the combination of player self-recognition and the game offering elements to produce such recognition that a piece of interactive software becomes a character intimacy game. Consequently, it is not only vital to analyze what CIG are at the individual level, but also to interface with the interpretative communities that form around game types (Aarseth and Möring 2020, 6–7). In fact, character intimacy games may be one of a few video game typologies where analysis *cannot* be meaningfully conducted without accounting for their wider communities. This is the decisive step in approaching character intimacy games – visual novel, *erogē*, BL game, *galgē*: character intimacy games cannot be approached without accounting for "the game and the player in communion" (ibid., 7). The way in which this communion emerges – player/character, player/video game – is dependent on the interplay of the game's two tethered possibility spaces. Building on the continuing discussion made until this point, a character intimacy game is:

- A video game where traversal is contingent on players knowingly establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate bonds with fictional characters and *recognizing themselves as doing so*.
- A video game where the assemblage of software mechanics and narrative content facilitates intimacy between player and characters conductive to the emergence of parasocial phenomena.
- A video game where intimate interaction takes place in two co-joined possibility spaces: the space emerging from software and the space emerging out of shared player imagination(s).
- A video game where player/character intimacy is contingent on (sub)culturally dependent roles – interpretative communities, intimate scripts, etc. – which the player must take to complete the engagement process.

Despite this study being situated within Japan's media landscape, the four points above are made to be independent of wider media landscape and can hopefully be employed to engage with character intimacy games in general. In particular, the cornerstone of the four-point framework is player self-recognition. In reference to Aarseth and Möring's perspective on ontology before ludo-hermeneutics (2020), CIG software is peculiar in that self-recognition is, more-or-less explicitly, required to play character intimacy games as intended. Approaching character intimacy games, as the above discussion has shown, is therefore contingent upon the acknowledgement of imagination, and the commonalities that may regulate it. It requires the integration of parasocial responses not as tangential or an accidental consequence of the work's gaming experience, but as both its prerequisite and deliberate consequence. Integrating the commonalities around video game software allows in turn for a deeper examination of player/character interaction, and how communities may guide and regulate imaginative action – which actions are privileged, which actions are hindered or made impossible within the game – and how modes of interacting with characters and playing video games develop within and without video games software proper.

PART 5: CONDITIONS

- What it Means to Play Character Intimacy Games -

Following the establishment of a conceptual framework aimed at defining the ontology of character intimacy games, this study now moves to more analytical matters. It starts with an examination of the conditions in which users play CIG software, both within software proper and around it – interface, media discourse, platform. Conditions here is meant in the extended sense, encompassing both the environmental conditions – media landscape(s) and discourses – and the ensemble of dispositions that users assume as CIG players. The first perspective concerns the screen configuration employed in CIG software to present character interaction. It approaches the assemblage of visuals, prose text, aural performances, and their arrangement into distinct layers as an interface that indexes character intimacy, facilitating the production of imaginative action in players. The second perspective concerns media discourses around character intimacy games, and, in particular, on Japanese adult games. It examines four historical flashpoints: the release of the first adult game themed around sexual violence in Japan in the early seventies; the linkage between a heinous murder series and *eroanime-eromanga* aesthetics; the accidental distribution of an erotic horror adult video game to a younger audience in the late eighties; and the rise to global infamy of yet another a rape-themed Japanese adult video game in 2009.

The three overviews provided within part 5 are not meant to be taken in isolation. Rather, they should be subsequently checked against the data originating from this study's fan-curated sources. At this point, the juxtaposition of single works with data, with the aim of producing general perspectives, is even more necessary: fan-curated databases are one of the few avenues into the overlying conditions that may allow players to recognize themselves as players of character intimacy games. Such self-recognition is, arguably, also influenced by conditions such as the game's interface, media discourses, and platforms. Juxtaposing perspectives rooted in traditional methods in the humanities and social sciences – software examination, overview of media

discourses, and platform studies – with data-driven approaches allows us to build a multifaceted, and perhaps a clearer picture of the conditions of playing CIG software.

Due to its explicit nature and the time investment required to make sense of it (cf. Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe], and Nakamura 2019, n.p.), as well it its tendencies toward aesthetic self-sameness, CIG software is a difficult object to research. Engaging with the underlying conditions that make such media production possible (cf. Azuma 2007, 156–157) is a necessary step in buttressing approaches to software that may be of interest to researchers. The combination of approaches also aids in providing an indirect comparison between character intimacy games as an object of interest for academic and media discourses and the contexts in which CIG software is actually played, circulated, and iterated upon. Such a combined approach, at the very least, provides a trace of what the conditions for self-recognition as a player of character intimacy games may entail.

5.1. Indexing intimacy

5.1.1. Screen configuration and interface in character intimacy games

Branden Hookway (2014) defines interfaces as producing "a supplementation and augmentation of agency; this is also to say that the interface comes into being as it is actively worked through by its user. At the same time, by imposing itself as a condition necessary for the expression of human agency, the interface comes to define human agency" (ibid., 17). In other words, interfaces present an initial situation where a range of actions is offered, some of which are encouraged, some are hindered, and some are downright blocked from ever happening. The interface is "the zone of relation that comes into being between human beings and machines, devices, processes, networks, and even organizations (ibid., 40). It exists in "the drawing together of elements into a relation and in eliciting from these elements the properties, behaviors, and actions that constitute a state of augmentation, from which control is made possible" (ibid.). In character intimacy games, the screen configuration highlighted by Jiang (2019), as barebones as it might be, mobilizes discrete elements and elicits players to draw them together. To fill the blanks

between incomplete visual, aural, and linguistic information, which define player agency within a character intimacy game, especially imaginative action is required.

Serjoscha Wiemer argues that the configuration of the screen in video games – the "presented screen space and its graphical display"– articulates a "scopic regime" (2012, 85) enforcing an "order of vision" (Jay 1988, cit. in Wiemer 2012, 85; see Sendyka 2013 and Jay 2011 for updated discussion), and, by extension, an ordering of possible, impossible, recommended, and discouraged in-game action(s) and conducts. User interfaces allow players to interact with video game software, setting "point[s] of view," visual representations, and perspectives afforded to the player, and the "point of action," the player's position of having relative agency within the in-game world (Neitzel 2008, 100 cit. in Wiemer 2012).

The development of user interfaces into an iconic element shared by a corpus of video game software is part of the process that stabilizes a video game genre and its corresponding "grammar of action" (Wiemer 2012, 78). Japanese character intimacy games, apparently, enforce a very limited scopic regime: looking, reading, hearing, making limited choices and, ultimately, imagining. At the same time, none of the three layers of the CIG screen configuration provides a complete description of the unfolding narrative: visual assets are re-employable within the game and are not tied to the current scene (cf. figure 14; figure 15). In contrast, video games such as *DOOM* (Id Software 2016) strive to provide as complete an array of information as possible: a shotgun is a shotgun is a shotgun. There is no way or need for players to imagine beyond what is happening on the screen. In character intimacy games, a character's *tachi-e* is just that, an image.

It is up to the player to react to it and the accompanying linguistic and aural information and make that relationship their own. Instead of focusing solely on choices, every act of video game advancement done in conjunction with prose reading, listening to aural performances, and appraisal of visual arts, should be considered a potentially meaningful interaction with the game

software. Such acts elicit the imaginative actions needed to complete the video game experience, while also calling the player toward ever-increasing engagement with the game's characters. In terms of scopic regime, of ordering of possible and impossible action(s), CIG screen configurations first and foremost encourage the player to imagine, project, and build expectations based on existing character information (Bruno 2019, 48). Comparatively, the scopic regime of Real-Time Strategy Games may be characterized by "the interplay between two different and in some ways opposed cultural concepts of space" – the map and the territory in the form of the mini-map and the action window (Wiemer 2012, 85).

The scopic regime of character intimacy games in Japan, in contrast, privileges character-based imaginative processes, which are indexical in nature, at the expense of every other avenue of interaction. As they parse the layers of visual arts on the screen, players employ their imagination to merge visual information with textual and aural cues, intimately engaging with and being engaged by the multimodal information assemblage (cf. Galbraith 2021a, 119). It elicits imaginative action from players, which may have bodily effects and feedback loops, in turn leading to further engagement (ibid., 119–120). The ensemble of visual, prose, and aural performances in character intimacy games channels imagination toward entire gameplay experiences: *tachi-e* mobilize the wider systems of *moe*; prose expresses character idiolect and compelling, "fictionalized orality" (Galbraith 2021b, 129–130; Teshigawara and Kintsui 2011, 38); and aural performances – character voices first and music second – index character types and narratives, furthering affective in-game interactions (Galbraith 2021b, 130; Ishida 2019a, 25–27, 2019b, 238). The interface constraints – prose text, character, 'filling in the blanks' – schematize the indexing of intimate engagement with characters, explicitly and implicitly (cf. Giuliana 2017, 51–52). Examining CIG screen configurations thus reveals a scopic regime, privileging what is a

continuous imaginative engagement with characters producing bodily, emotionally moving effects (Galbraith 2021b, 131–132, 2019, 83; Paasonen 2013, 11; Williams 1999 [1989], 5).

It is a regime that calls for a continuous imaginative projection of existing visual assets onto narrative situations, and vice versa (cf. Bruno 2019, 47–48). By shifting through visual assets and prose narratives while assuming player responses at key markers during the game, character intimacy games in Japan inform players of the status of the intimate engagement. CIG screen configurations and the interfaces emerging from them privilege, facilitate, enhance, and aid engagement with characters, above other considerations. Is this really the case, however, for players of character intimacy games? What has been outlined until now is an approach rooted in academic expertise, in an attempt to provide an overview of the conditions arising out of CIG interfaces. However, this does not guarantee that such perspectives are shared or, for that matter, acknowledged by players. Therefore, the need to validate the above discussion against perspectives at scale is ever more pressing. But how should one structure the validation of the above discussion against the data models of this study's sources? Which data points might be viable to validate exactly when players are required – or not – to coalesce information in order to meaningfully engage with character intimacy games? And even if suitable data points are present, how should they be considered? Which perspectives are viable and which are not?

Figure 14: *a screenshot from Evenicle. Screenshot taken by the study's author.*

Figure 15: *the same screenshot, with the various levels of the screen configuration – Background image (green); tachi-e (light blue);text box (yellow). Screenshot manipulation by the author of this study.*

5.1.2. Validating screen configuration(s) and interface(s)

The previous chapter has made the following claims: that there is a particular screen configuration in Japanese character intimacy games; that such a configuration makes character intimacy games recognizable as such (cf. Jiang 2019, 38–40); that said screen configuration produces a 'scopic regime' privileging interaction with characters, encouraging players to imagine, project, and build expectations on existing character information. Validating these claims within the scope of this study's data sources may prove challenging, if, indeed, such validation is at all possible. First, it is necessary to interrogate when *EGS* and *VNDB* are able to answer such a question. Neither are able to directly answer the overall question of when the screen configuration of character intimacy games produces the scopic regime that privileges interaction with characters. Both, however, do focus on characters and how they may effect players within the context of the game's plot and/or fictional universe. For example, *Erogescape* has 'attractive heroine,' 'inspiring', and 'good prose' as three of its four highest eigenvector centrality scoring nodes. These three nodes are evaluations, and employed in an evaluative function, so their presence within a software data entry may not signify a positive evaluation. However, the presence of these evaluations, no matter their actual evaluation, is a sign that users are looking for engagement with characters (attractive heroine), emotional engagement (inspiring), and, possibly, imaginative engagement through reading (good prose). Taking the three nodes together with their most important connections – measured by edge weight, i.e. the number of times they co-occur – leads to the emergence of the following networks:

Node	Ten Most Important Connections
attractive heroine	‘beautiful cg’, ‘good character voices’, ‘immersive world building’, ‘online retail version available’, ‘good scenario’, ‘porn for the sake of it’, ‘good prose’, ‘good background music’, ‘good character sprites’ ‘beautiful’.
inspiring	‘good scenario’, ‘immersive world building’, ‘beautiful cg’, ‘good background music’, ‘attractive heroine’, ‘good prose’, ‘good character voices’, ‘good supporting cast’, ‘beautiful protagonist’, ‘good songs’.
good prose	‘beautiful cg’, ‘good scenario’, ‘immersive world building’, ‘good character voices’, ‘attractive heroine’, ‘good background music’, ‘online retail version available’ ‘beautiful’, ‘good character sprites’, ‘good supporting cast’, ‘porn for the sake of it’.

The network that emerges is extremely tight, but, even more significant, is the recurring of nodes such as ‘good character voices,’ ‘immersive world building,’ ‘good background music,’ ‘good scenario,’ ‘good character sprites,’ ‘beautiful,’ and ‘good songs.’ The aspects evaluated by these nodes are such that they signify that players are looking for specific features of the game. They are looking for, or noticing stories (good prose, good scenario), they are looking for, or noticing attractive characters (attractive heroine, good character voices, beautiful cg), and they are looking, or noticing aural performances (good character voices, good background music). The fact that ‘attractive heroine’ is one of the four highest scoring values for eigenvector centrality is a symptom of the importance of characters in CIG software for *Erogescape* users. However, it is not an indicator of when the screen configuration leads to the scopic regime described or not. Nodes such as ‘good scenario,’ ‘good character sprites,’ good prose, and good character voices, on the other hand, do hint at the processes highlighted by the examination of scopic regimes in CIG screen configurations. Their connection with high scoring nodes is a symptom of their importance, and how they, literally, ‘come before’ other elements. That is to say, they provide some initial substantiation to the presence of a scopic regime privileging what is a continuous imaginative engagement with characters producing bodily, emotionally moving effects.

Within *The Visual Novel Database*, on the other hand, there are two tags that point at the screen configuration: ADV and NVL. The former is the only node with an eigenvector centrality score of one; that is, it is connected to – or connected to nodes that connect to – all other nodes within the network. While this is important information, it must also be said that both tags are not mutually exclusive, although the number of games featuring both is minimal – 271 entries. Nevertheless, the fact that ADV has an eigenvector centrality of one validates a claim made in the previous chapter, that the screen configuration makes character intimacy games (visual novel games) recognizable as such. It is present in a considerable number of software releases (19,576 out of 36,220, more than 54 per cent), while NVL accounts for 1274 entries. Furthermore, of the 15,644 entries that feature neither NVL nor ADV, there are many works that should be tagged as either ADV or NVL, but are not because, either they have not yet been released, as is the case with *Dorico no Toshokan* [The Library of Dorico] (Rejet TBA, cf. https://vndb.org/v20633) or they are poorly described due to the obscurity of the software itself. By featuring in such a prominent way, the ADV tag substantiates the importance of the screen configuration. But, as with *Erogescape*, it does not provide an easy answer regarding the previously described scopic regime. Indeed, as is the case with *EGS*, it is necessary to look elsewhere.

Within *VNDB*, answers may be found in the group of tags describing the type of character featured within a software release. Similarly to *EGS*, *VNDB* has tags denoting the type of characters, 155 for female characters and 100 for male characters. The sheer number of tags denotes the importance of describing the kind of characters present within a game. The separate trait tree for characters, and the existence of characters as distinct entities to be described, is also symptomatic of the importance of characters for *VNDB*'s userbase. In fact, the way the traits trees for character attributes are articulated, and the granularity of description they allow, from a character's demeanor to the type of sexual intercourse they engage in during the game, is testament

to the importance of characters in visual novel games. As was already mentioned in Chapter 3.3.1, while the software present on *VNDB* are defined as 'visual novels,' they are about character intimacy. The importance of the ADV tag in conjunction with the possibilities for describing characters means that *VNDB* users are: 1) looking for or noticing video games with a certain screen configuration; 2) are looking for, or noticing characters, whose granularity of description strongly hints at the extent of engagement between characters and users.

Considering the above discussions, it is therefore possible to attempt to validate the previous chapter's claims. Data from *EGS* and *VNDB* suggest that, yes, there may indeed be a scopic regime privileging continuous imaginative engagement with characters producing bodily, emotionally moving effects. On *Erogescape*, this is explicated by the importance of tags denoting heroine attractiveness and the evaluation of visuals, prose, and aural performance. On *The Visual Novel Database*, it is explicated by the importance of ADV as a tag for software data entries and by the existence of a granular system for character description and of characters as distinct entities, whose number is massive (nearly 110,000 as of August 22nd2022). Both sources allow for the validation of theoretical approaches at the scale of software production, albeit in different ways.

5.2. Dangerous imaginations

5.2.1. Character intimacy games as harmful media

In Japan, character intimacy games have historically been at the center of public concerns on the indiscriminate circulation of explicit content perceived as harmful for the public (Galbraith 2021b, 95–101; Koyama 2020 [2016], 137–140; Pelletier Gagnon and Picard 2015, 33–34). In particular, the potential harm coming from perceived abnormal tendencies toward what are deemed "sexual minorities" (i.e. women and children) (Nakasatomi 2013 [2009], n.p.) has been a dominant concern (Cather 2016; Kamm 2015; Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015). These concerns intersect and mobilize with wider debates regarding otaku culture and their media consumption habits (Galbraith 2021b, 46–59; Kamm 2015; Morikawa 2008 [2003], 262–269). Within Japanese media discourses, character intimacy games occupy a specific position, which can be considered both marginalized and self-marginalized (cf. Au Yeung 2008). The tense relationships with dominant media actors leads to interrogatives amongst CIG players, regarding where, when, and how such imaginative engagement may take place. There is a focus on appropriate "atmosphere"

[*kūki*] and "TPO" [Time, Place, Occasion] on where to play and discuss character intimacy games (Au Yeung 2008, 147–148). Arguably, this has created a sense of marginality in players of character intimacy games (ibid., 152), which, in turn, may reverberate in the conditions of playing character intimacy games.

CIG software, together with niche *eromanga-eroanime*, featured in Japanese media discourses during the late 1980s and through the 1990s, explicating growing concerns with "virtual worlds" (Galbraith 2021b, 46; Kinsella 2015 [2000]; Allison 2006, 80, 85; Leheny 2006, 39; 126–129; Schodt 1996, 45–47). The term 'virtual worlds,' although it evokes its sister term 'virtual reality,' and points to apparatuses and peripherals that fill the user's senses. In fact, it should not be associated with either. Rather, it should be considered a byword for public concerns about media effects, namely, excessive consumption producing dissociation from reality, and intended to signal the dominant social norms (Galbraith 2021b, 46–47) and ethical and moral positions that enable prosocial behavior and inhibit/sanction antisocial conduct (cf. Nakasatomi 2013 [2009], n.p.).

While the specific, clinical effects of pornography on individuals is beyond the scope of this study, the presence of explicit, pornographic content significantly influences individual software works. Its mere presence in media works zones them as unsuitable for general distribution, hence its restricted circulation. Accidental circulation, especially in 'protected' segments of the population, such as among minors, mobilizes discourses about obscenity and "unpopular" pop culture (Cf. Cather 2016, 72; Galbraith 2016), within national and international spaces (cf. Nagayama 2014; Galbraith 2019, 2017a, 2017b; Takeuchi 2015; Nakasatomi 2013 [2009]; Akagi 1993). In Japan, historically, there are three significant flashpoints that have shaped the position of character intimacy games as dangerous media: the release to market of *Ichinananana* [One-Seven-Seven] (Macadamia Soft 1986); the Tōkyō-Saitama serial murders [*Tōkyō Saitama renzoku yōjo yūkai satsujin jiken*]; and the so-called Saori Incident [*Saori Jiken*]. These moments saw the

Japanese character intimacy game industry intersect with generalist media discourses, explicating the "history of the difficult relationship between Japanese video games and government, police forces, and mainstream society" (Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 29–30).

The first of the three historical flashpoints centers around *Ichinananana*, a video game work by Macadamia and soft released in 1986 (cf. figure 16). The work, referencing article 177 of the Japanese penal code (Rape, cf. Ministry of Justice, Japan, 2022), places the player in pursuit of an escaping, unnamed woman across a series of trails. *Ichinananana* tasks players with reaching the woman before she can get home and call the police. To do so, the player must avoid obstacles such as rocks and passing animals. To slow the woman down, players can throw a series of various implements – up to and including cartoonishly depicted bombs – which progressively remove the woman's clothes on impact. If players complete their pursuit, the game shifts to a second screen, and players must get the woman to orgasm before they themselves ejaculate during the resulting forced intercourse. A satisfactory performance leads the player to a success state, represented by a screen showcasing the player character and the woman as a married couple. Any other outcome, be it the woman escaping to her home or a failure during the second stage, leads to a failure state, and a game over screen depicting the player character being arrested by the police.

Ichinananana prompted questions within Japan's National Diet, the game serving as a case study for "illustrating how unregulated use of computers and game consoles, a technology also initially thought to be useful in an educational context, could have negative side effects for the development of children in Japan" (Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 32). The game would be the first software work designated as harmful by Japanese authorities, prompting the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (METI) to issue recommendations to the Japanese video game industry with respect to establishing procedures for self-regulation (ibid.). The government, reluctant to regulate content production, would not produce ulterior enforcement until

six years later, in the wake of the Saori incident, itself a semi-direct consequence of the effects of the Tōkyō-Saitama serial murders.

Nevertheless, *Ichinananana* did not feature graphics derived from *eroanime-eromanga*, which would only start to become prominent with works such as *Tenshitachi no gogo*.[42] *Eroanime-eromanga* and *bishōjo* characters would instead be at the forefront of the next historical flashpoint for character intimacy games in Japan, the Tōkyō-Saitama serial murders. While the nature of the crime is beyond the scope of this study, the ramifications following the discovering of *eroanime* tapes in the killer Miyazaki Tsutomu's house was significant. Despite no computer software ever being found or proved to have been in his possession, the undeniable interconnectedness of anime, manga, and video games, with franchises spread across media formats in a media-mix fashion, inevitably impacted character intimacy games. In particular, the status of Miyazaki's *eroanime* tapes as *lolicon* anime would prove to be decisive. In the context of wider Japanese visual media production, *lolicon* is originally (1979–1984) employed to refer to all non-photorealistic manga and manga-influenced erotica and pornography featuring girl characters and connected with male fan populations and, initially, synonymous with *bishōjo* (cf. Galbraith 2019; Nagayama 2014; Yoshimoto 2009). The *lolicon* descriptor became prominent in

[42] While not the very first software work to feature anime-manga characters or their related aesthetics, *Tenshitachi no gogo* is the first software work that positions intimacy with anime-manga characters in a gamic milieu. While previous examples can be found in earlier works such as *Marichan Kiki Ippatsu* and *Lolita Syndrome* (Enix 1983), the aesthetics were, arguably, not as pronounced and did not feature the narrative tropes of *eroanime-eromanga* in the same way as *Tenshitachi no gogo.* Another important factor in the progressive adoption of anime-manga/*eroanime-eromanga* aesthetics was the increase in resolution by computer machines. Koyama Yūsuke (2020 [2016]), in this respect, defines NEC's PC-Engine machine as an "hardware for *bishōjo* games" (ibid., 159–160) due to the machine's superior image resolution capabilities and superior storage space offered by CD-ROMs allowing software to feature sound performances.

media discourse, exacerbating media panic due to its ambiguously pedophilic connotations (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 54–59; Kamm 2015, 58–59; Takatsuki 2010).

Miyazaki Tsutomu's actual engagement with *bishōjo/lolicon* content notwithstanding, the Saitama serial murders produced a shift in cultural ordering within the media discourse, both within the sphere of otaku media – *bishōjo/lolicon*, niche anime-manga – and generalist mass media (Kamm 2015, 52–54). *Bishōjo*/*lolicon* characters, for their part, were identified with perceived danger, capable of shifting users into an "orientation towards fiction" (Galbraith 2019, 51–55; Nagayama 2014, 83; Sasakibara 2004, 37) and social deviancy. Subsequent conflation with wider anime-manga production became part of the global response to segments of anime-manga and video game production being considered harmful, influencing Japanese internal policies (Galbraith 2019; Nakasatomi 2013 [2009]; Harata 2010).

A few years later, the so-called Saori Incident of 1991 would become the first concrete example of the effects of the aforementioned shift on character intimacy games. *Saori: Bishōjotachi no Yakata* [Saori: The Mansion of Beauties] (FairyTail [as X-Shitei] 1991) is a pornographic adventure game where the player controls the titular Saori, a young girl of apparent high school age (cf. figure 17). Saori is kidnapped and taken to a seemingly haunted mansion, uncovering various heinous acts of sexual violence ranging from gang-rape to incest as she explores the rooms and hallways of the building. The owner of the mansion is revealed, in a plot twist at the culmination of the game's story, to be none other than Saori herself. The experience is later revealed to have been a mere dream, with the implication that Saori is both perverted and perverse (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 51).

The incident around *Saori* is one of accidental distribution: in 1991, the game was found in the possession of a middle school student from Miyazaki Prefecture by his father. While the student later admitted to shoplifting the game out of a store, increased public scrutiny of the

software found the game in contravention of Japanese obscenity laws on pornography, (Cather 2016, 76–81; Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 33) due to uncensored genitalia. The resulting public scandal and arrests of the game's creators and distributors cemented the scandal within the industry, pushing for the creation of an industry self-regulating body, the Ethics Organization of Computer Software (EOCS), also known in Japanese as *Ippan Shadan Hōjin Konpyūta Sofutowea Rinri Kikō*, or *Sofurin*. This move by the industry meant that the public authorities deemed no further intervention necessary – a move later criticized by Nakasatomi Hiroshi of the anti-pornography research group (2013 [2009], n.p.). Lasting developments from the scandal and its ramifications included the move away from an exclusive focus on sexual rewards and explicit content to the development of a romantic narrative with one of the game's characters (cf. Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 36). At the same time, the move marginalized the personal computer as a platform for video games, leading to a focus on home console software development by generalist market actors (cf. Fiadotau 2019, 220; DeWinter 2015, 244; Picard 2013, n.p.).

Two decades later, a fourth, this time global flashpoint unfolded in the accidental exposure of *Rapelay* (Illusionsoft 2006) by English-speaking media (Cf. Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015; Nakasatomi 2013 [2009], n.p.). *Rapelay*, a portmanteau of Rape and Play, put players in the shoes of a serial rapist, with the explicit intent of kidnapping and turning three young women – one of them prepubescent –into sex slaves (cf. figure 18). The game generated international scandal, which led to critical voices within and beyond calling on Japan to amend its laws to explicitly prohibit the circulation of such material (Galbraith 2021a, 77–80; Nakasatomi 2013 [2009], n.p.). On the other hand, the industry reacted by reinforcing and reinscribing boundaries, emphasizing that adult computer games such as *Rapelay* are intended to be played and circulated only within the boundaries (legislative and physical) of Japan, and taking steps to enforce circulation control by a variety of means, mostly limited to preventing online sales (cf. Galbraith 2021a, 80–83).

These measures also applied to character intimacy games such as *Wind -a breath of heart-* (Minori 2003), which focused heavily on emotional engagement and not on sexual rewards or pornography. While later developments led to re-increased circulation of Japanese character intimacy games outside Japan (Galbraith 2021a 83–86), the tendency is for character intimacy games to remain confined to Japan, subjected to existing stigmas and pathologizing views (cf. Bogost 2011, 107), emphasizing existing relationships with 'Japan' (Galbraith 2021a, 76; 89, 2019; Hinton 2014).

The common point among the above historical flashpoints is a belief that, as adult computer games, character intimacy games in Japan emerge as video games featuring deviant sexual conduct and sexual violence. But, how much of this is actually the case, especially in light of the availability of potentially comprehensive data from fan-curated databases? One might resolve the conundrum of providing a counterpoint to the above claims by constructing a theme/genre-based list of character intimacy games in Japan through the years. There is certainly more, however, that should be compared with available data within the above perspective. For example, how does a sense of 'deviancy' emerge – or not emerge – in CIG software players? If it does emerge, then is it helpful to view it via the data points present within *EGS* and *VNDB*? What kinds of questions can our data sources be answer, as perspectives become less compatible with data-based approaches?

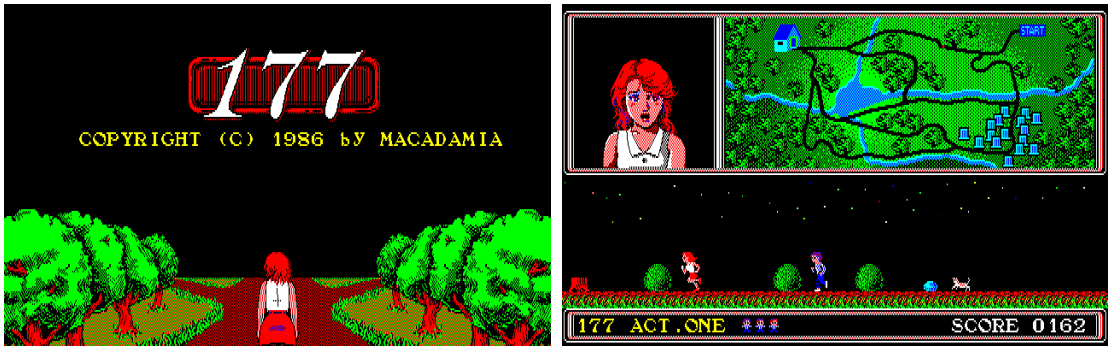


Figure 16: *Screenshots from Ichinananana – main menu (left) and gameplay screen (right). Screenshots from MyAbandonware.com (https://www.myabandonware.com/game/177-7yo)*

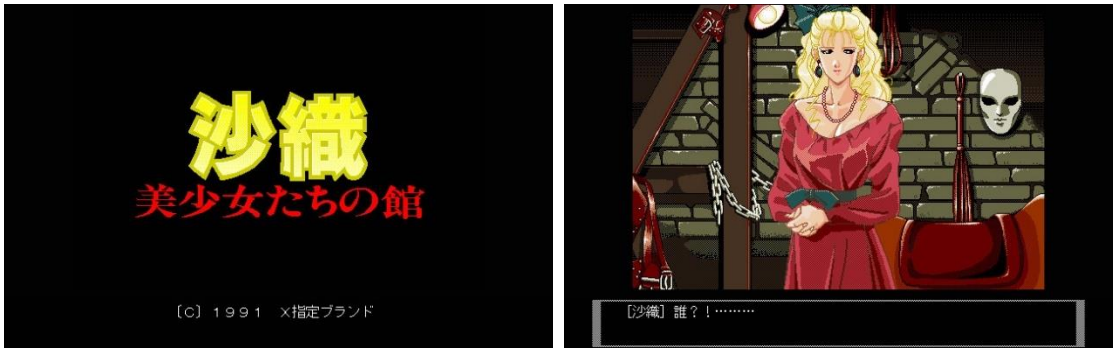


Figure 17: *Screenshots from Saori: Bishōjotachi no Yakata – main menu (left) and gameplay screen (right). Screenshots from The Visual Novel Database (https://vndb.org/v9070)*

Figure 18: *Screenshot (right) and cover image (left) from RapeLay. Images from Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RapeLay).*

5.2.2. Validating claims of danger: a data-driven perspective

The previous chapter outlined the discussion around character intimacy games as harmful media. In doing so, it implicitly presented a claim that CIG software, as a typology of media products, is characterized by tendencies toward featuring women characters as objects of sexual violence (*Ichinanana*, *Rapelay*) and/or as the focus of deviant sexual activities (*Saori: Bishōjotachi no Yakata*). A question such as 'are these three titles, which are the object of scandal, representative of character intimacy game production in Japan' does seem like a question that a defense of CIG software would pose. Yet, it is also necessary to know the extent of these products within wider production. This is not meant to put eventual criticisms to rest, but rather to provide a further indication of what approaching character intimacy games might entail, and, moreover, to open such a first approach to further critique and comparison. Engaging with the dark side of niche products such as character intimacy games is necessary, if character intimacy games, within and beyond Japan, are to be approached from a better position, scholarly and critically.

Validating the above claims is apparently simpler than validating screen configurations and interfaces, but because of this apparent simplicity, any examinations must be broader and more in-depth. How, then, can we validate the claims of CIG software as harmful media using the data available from *VNDB* and *EGS*? First, it is necessary to identify datapoints signifying the presence of deviant or violent sexual content within a software release. Within *Erogescape*, games can be labeled as containing consensual or non-consensual sexual activities, a pretty clear distinction, in addition to whether or not it is a *nukigē*, i.e. focused exclusively on pornographic entertainment. The latter becomes interesting as a supporting datapoint for highlighting the potential context of deviant and non-consensual sexual activity: is it provided exclusively for its own shock and fetishistic value or is it also contextualized within some sort of narrative? Finally, we can also

garner information from an evaluation known as ‘not recommended for the general public’ about how many games are tagged as not being acceptable for the general population.

Within *VNDB*, under the ‘sexual content’ tag group, there are several ensembles relating to deviant and/or non-consensual sexual activities. For instance, there are several variations of tags pertaining to sexual slavery, as well as an entire group pertaining to variants of sexual harassment. There are also multiple groups pertaining to grotesque depictions such as necrophilia (cf. https://vndb.org/g747). Targeting the *VNDB* tag groups providing descriptions of deviant and/or non-consensual sexual activity (https://vndb.org/g382) is the cleanest way to identify games featuring such themes and to compare them with the rest of the database. A ‘*nukige’* tag also exists and may provide similar support to that of its *Erogescape* counterpart. However, there is no immediate way to account for the level of consensual sexual activity and presuming that any work not explicitly marked as dark is consensual is excessively arbitrary. Any other attempt at increased granularity at this scale is not feasible due to the massive number of works cataloged within both databases (27,993 for *EGS* and 36,220 for *VNDB*).

A separate discussion should be conducted for *lolicon* content, for its iconic value in marking Japanese character intimacy games as dangerous media. In particular, as articulated by Nakasatomi Hiroshi, by depicting “sexual minorities” [women and children] as sexual objects, GIG software “normalize extreme sexual violence against women and girls” (2013 [2009], n.p.).By producing a fictive, fetishized, and oversexualized image of pre-pubescence and puberty, *lolicon* content is a major contributing factor in the marking of CIG production as dangerous and deviant (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 47, 57–58, 62; Nakasatomi 2013 [2009], n.p.; Harata 2010). Content marked as such therefore constitutes a separate datapoint that is included within this examination, both as a segment of CIG production in general and as a segment of *nukigē*. A data-driven approach, derived from user-curated repositories, represents an important opportunity for contextualizing such

content within wider CIG production. Gathering the above discussion into datapoints and comparing them against wider production leads to the following results (table 1 and table 2, all values rounded up by excess):

TABLE 1 - EROGESCAPE -EROGĒ HYŌRON KŪKAN-				
Total software entries	27,993	% of total	% of erogē	% of nukigē
Erogē	20,739	74%	100%	N/A
Nukige	12708	45%	61%	100%
Non-*erogē*	7254	26%	N/A	N/A
Consensual *erogē**	6962	25%	34%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	5893	21%	28%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant non-*nukigē*	200	1%	1%	N/A
Consensual *nukigē*	3995	14%	19%	31%
Non-consensual/deviant *nukigē*	5646	20%	27%	44%
Games featuring lolicon characters	4812	17%	23%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	2236	8%	11%	18%
Games not for the general public	2824	10%	14%	N/A
Nukigē not for the general public	1620	6%	8%	13%

* The total absence of this value should not be taken as an indication of absence or presence of consensual/non-consensual sexual activity within the game.

TABLE 2 - THE VISUAL NOVEL DATABASE				
Total software entries	36,220	% of total	% of erogē	% of nukigē
Erogē	20,492	56%	100%	N/A
Nukigē	6527	18%	32%	100%
Non-*erogē*	15,747	44%	N/A	N/A
Consensual *erogē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	5706	16%	28%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant non-*nukigē**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Consensual *nukigē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *nukigē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Games featuring lolicon characters**	3425	10%	17%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	1109	3%	6%	17%

*No co-occurrence of ‘nukige’ and tags denoting deviant/non-consensual sexual activities.
** Count determined by combination of character traits and game tags.

While broad in strokes, the above approach reveals several significant results regarding the panorama of character intimacy game production and its relationship with depicting non-consensual and/or deviant activities in an interactive environment. Over its 40-year history (1979–2022), an extremely significant number of character intimacy games have featured non-consensual/deviant sexual conduct – as much as one in five, as per *Erogescape*, and nearly one in three according to *The Visual Novel Database*. Within *EGS*, where it is possible to compute the numbers in relation to *nukigē*, the percentage is almost the same. Within the scope of *nukigē* there is also another significant datapoint: the percentage of *nukigē* that are explicitly labeled as consensual is minuscule (1 per cent). *VNDB*, on the other hand, does not feature co-occurrence of 'nukige' and tags related to non-consensual and/or deviant sexual activity, while at the same time highlighting the presence of such depictions in a much higher percentage of software works. The increased granularity of *VNDB* may have filed select works that might have escaped classification as *ryōjokumono* in *EGS*.

Even if accounting for such discrepancies brings the *VNDB* count down, however, it is reasonable to assume that a percentage similar to that for *EGS* is very likely. The fraction of games featuring *lolicon* content is close to one fifth for the total titles recorded in *Erogescape* and one tenth in the case of the *Visual Novel Database*. The percentages are closer when confronted with the overall number of *erogē* in both databases – 23 per cent for *Erogescape* vis-à-vis 17 per cent for *VNDB*. The above tables concern character intimacy game production as a whole, however, while *Ichinananana*, *Saori: Bishōjotachi no Yakata*, and *Rapelay* all came out at specific points in time, each into a different situation. Therefore, the next step is to draw tables for the years 1986 – for *Ichinananana*, 1991 – for *Saori: Bishōjotachi no Yakata*, 2006 – for *Rapelay* at the time of release, and 2009 – for *Rapelay* at the time of global exposure. The results (rounded up by excess) are as follows:

TABLE 3 – EROGESCAPE -EROGĒ HYŌRON KŪKAN- (1986)				
Total software entries	39	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	33	85%	100%	N/A
Nukige	1	1%	1%	100%
Non-*erogē*	6	16%	N/A	N/A
Consensual *erogē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	1	1%	1%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant non-*nukigē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Consensual *nukigē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *nukigē*	1	1%	1%	1%
Games featuring lolicon characters	7	18%	22%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	1	4%	4%	100%
Games not for the general public	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nukigē not for the general public	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

TABLE 4 – THE VISUAL NOVEL DATABASE (1986)				
Total software entries	81	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	17	21%	100%	N/A
Nukigē	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%
Non-*erogē*	19	24%	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	8	10%	47%	N/A
Games featuring lolicon characters	1	1%	6%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

TABLE 5 – EROGESCAPE -EROGĒ HYŌRON KŪKAN- (1991)				
Total software entries	74	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	71	95%	100%	N/A
Nukige	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%
Non-*erogē*	3	4%	N/A	N/A
Consensual *erogē*	3	4%	100%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	1	1%	1%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant non-*nukigē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Consensual *nukigē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *nukigē*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Games featuring lolicon characters	1	8%	8%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Games not for the general public	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nukigē not for the general public	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

TABLE 6 – THE VISUAL NOVEL DATABASE (1991)				
Total software entries	189	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	64	34%	100%	N/A
Nukigē	2	1%	3%	100%
Non-*erogē*	22	12%	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	18	10%	28%	N/A
Games featuring lolicon characters	1	1%	2%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

TABLE 7 – EROGESCAPE -EROGĒ HYŌRON KŪKAN- (2006)				
Total software entries	1117	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	883	80%	100%	N/A
Nukige	540	48%	62%	100%
Non-*erogē*	234	21%	N/A	N/A
Consensual *erogē*	696	63%	79%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	241	22%	28%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant non-*nukigē*	11	1%	2%	N/A
Consensual *nukigē*	219	20%	25%	40%
Non-consensual/deviant *nukigē*	227	21%	26%	42%
Games featuring lolicon characters	320	29%	37%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	132	12%	15%	25%
Games not for the general public	137	13%	16%	N/A
Nukigē not for the general public	79	7%	9%	15%

TABLE 8 – THE VISUAL NOVEL DATABASE (2006)				
Total software entries	1973	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	1611	82%	100%	N/A
Nukigē	400	20%	25%	100%
Non-*erogē*	218	10%	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	455	23%	29%	N/A
Games featuring lolicon characters	173	9%	11%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	44	3%	11%	21%

TABLE 9 – EROGESCAPE -EROGĒ HYŌRON KŪKAN- (2009)				
Total software entries	1231	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	936	76%	100%	N/A
Nukige	681	56%	73%	100%
Non-*erogē*	295	24%	N/A	N/A
Consensual *erogē*	438	36%	48%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	269	22%	29%	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant non-*nukigē*	2	1%	1%	N/A
Consensual *nukigē*	298	25%	32%	44%
Non-consensual/deviant *nukigē*	266	22%	29%	40%
Games featuring lolicon characters	320	26%	47%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	132	11%	15%	20%
Games not for the general public	157	13%	17%	N/A
Nukigē not for the general public	88	8%	10%	13%

TABLE 10 – THE VISUAL NOVEL DATABASE (2009)				
Total software entries	2459	% of total	% of *erogē*	% of *nukigē*
Erogē	1783	73%	100%	N/A
Nukigē	662	27%	37%	100%
Non-*erogē*	723	26%	N/A	N/A
Non-consensual/deviant *erogē*	576	24%	33%	N/A
Games featuring lolicon characters	203	8%	12%	N/A
Nukigē featuring lolicon characters	74	3%	4%	12%

When juxtaposed with the claim of danger and the implicit assertion that character intimacy games are all dangerous and all feature deviant content, the data derived from *Erogescape* and *VNDB* paints a different picture. Firstly, it needs to be said that this is not a contradiction or a complete disproval of descriptions such as those offered by Nakasatomi (2013 [2009]). Rather, the data highlights that a segment of games featuring such content has always been present within character intimacy game production, but not, it seems, in a dominant role. Nevertheless, games featuring deviant sexual conduct consistently range from one tenth to one fifth of CIG production, especially when considering character intimacy game production after the 2000s.

If *nukigē*, i.e. video games whose main purpose is to provide pornographic entertainment, are considered, almost half of them feature deviant and/or non-consensual sexual activity – the global survey ranks them at 44 per cent and the surveys from 2006 and 2009 have *nukigē* at circa 40 per cent, according to *EGS*. Furthermore, the number of games that *Erogescape* users deem unsuitable for the general public is significant, at one tenth of all recorded games. The existence of such a tag, however, implies a certain self-awareness on the part of users regarding the ramifications stemming from the circulation of select CIG software. Comparatively, *VNDB* is much more limited, and has only about a fifth of releases described as such. Nevertheless, despite these lower *VNDB* numbers, clearly, a significant quantity of CIG releases comprises of extreme pornography that may depict non-consensual and/or deviant sexual acts. The same issues arise with respect to games featuring *lolicon* content: again, even taking into account *VNDB*'s lower figures – *VNDB*'s average is at 10 per cent of all releases – it is still an amount that may be problematic, and that cannot be ignored when researching character intimacy games.[43]

[43] Furthermore, due to linguistic and commercial barriers between the Anglosphere and Japan in the case of CIG software, it is not unreasonable to think that *Erogescape*'s numbers would be the more accurate source between the two.

5.3 Intimate platform

5.3.1. Character intimacy games and personal computers in Japan

In his examination of character intimacy games [*bishōjo* games], Galbraith begins with an account of technical difficulties regarding running a character intimacy game on his laptop computer, due software compatibility issues (2021b, 83–84). The issue he experienced is common to non-Japanese, Euro-American users of Japanese software, CIG software in particular. Non-Japanese computer machines, and, more specifically, machines operating in languages employing the roman script, cannot encode the thousands of symbols required to display Japanese kanji while using the default 1-byte large encoding, Unicode. The operating system must be set to run non-Unicode software to Japanese character encoding, SHIFT-JIS, whose 2-byte base allows for more complex characters, such as Japanese kanji.

The software limitation described by Galbraith is not as intentional as the historical flashpoints concerning CIG software as dangerous media might have suggested. It is rather the byproduct of different socio-technological conditions influencing the development of the personal computer

platform in Japan. Unlike the United States, the personal computer in Japan occupies an ancillary position vis-à-vis the rest of the Japanese landscape of software production (Fiadotau 2015, 2). CIG software is predominantly played on personal computer machines, with the notable exception of women-oriented software, which can be found predominantly on portable devices (cf. Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 138). The centering on specific platforms, whose affordances in the Japanese media landscape make them distinct from mainstream computing machines, is yet another influence on the underlying conditions of playing character intimacy games. This precipitates a discussion of personal computer platforms in Japan, and their role in the circulation of character intimacy games.

Platform here is intended both in the computing sense of a "hardware and software framework that supports other programs" (Bogost and Monfort 2007, 196) and of "an infrastructure service for distributing or consuming video games" (Kobayashi [Hichibe] and Koyama 2020, 75). In the computing sense, it originates, in its purest form, as an abstraction, or a standard, which manifest materially as chips, materials, peripherals, and connected operating systems and programming languages (Bogost and Monfort 2007, 196). In the infrastructural-distribution-consumption sense, platforms extend beyond personal computers, home consoles, and operative systems, including events, publishing and regulatory entities, and stores (cf. Deguchi, Tanaka, and Koyama 2009, 6–9). In a wider sense, platform here encompasses all the factors, tangible and intangible, that contribute to or hinder the circulation of software. It determines the range of actions that can be performed through and with software on a specific hardware configuration. It influences the range of software works that might be developed, circulated, received, and consumed on a given machine or set thereof. It shapes the nature of regulatory action that might be undertaken upon it, and which

actors possess the power to enact it (see *platform governance*, cf. Gorwa 2019; Helberger et al. 2018; Gillespie 2018a, 2018b, 2014, 2010).[44]

In Japan, the personal computer, and the software works that circulate and may circulate on it, operates under a different set of circumstances than home consoles and their software. Home consoles, along with their range of software works, are generalist-oriented products, subjected to specific content regulations – initially based with console manufacturers (cf. Fiadotau 2019a; Elkins 2019; Burke 2016; Arnone 2010 [2004]), and later regulated in a concerted effort by bodies such as Japan's Computer Entertainment Rating Organization (CERO) (Tsuji 2018). The personal computer, by contrast, is not a generalist-oriented platform; products developed on the personal computer are niche-oriented. They respond to a different industry self-regulatory body, EOCS/Sofurin, which, while capable of evaluating software as suitable for generalist audiences, in practice regulates almost only CIG software. At the same time, character intimacy games command different, indeed, much lower sales volumes (Sakakibara 2016; Yano Keizai Kenkyūjo 2012, 2; Kagami 2010, 136), far removed from the figures commanded by generalist works on consoles or the sales volume of personal computer releases outside Japan.

In his industrial history of the Japanese video game industry, Koyama Yūsuke (2020 [2016]), describes the emergence of three "co-evolving markets": arcade cabinet games, PC games, and home consoles, each a different paradigm for hardware-software development; each nevertheless subjected to mutual influences and transactions. Arcade cabinets catered to fast plays, featuring reflex-based video software, such as shooters or fighting games; personal computers were developed for office work [word processing] and scientific calculations; home consoles, marketed

[44] Platform governance finds employment in reference to approaches to digital-first platforms, such as Google, and market actors, such as Microsoft and Apple, and their power over data and content circulation. The term is nevertheless apt for describing the range of actions that may or may not be taken toward more materially inclined platforms, such as personal computers and home consoles.

as toys, followed arcade games in a stripped down capacity (ibid., 17–18). Despite such influences and transactions – e.g. arcade video games being subsequently released, in a degraded form, on home consoles – each market catered to profoundly different audiences and uses, with a widening gulf between play-focused hardware, such as home consoles and arcade cabinets, and multi-purpose, business-oriented personal computer machines.

Personal computer machines in Japan did not possess the technical capacity to host reflex-based video game genres, such as shooters or fighting games, which require a fast screen refresh rate. On the other hand, they could draw higher-resolution images and large quantities of Japanese text characters.[45] Another key difference was the presence of floppy disk drives, allowing for the digital storage of recorded work. A third difference lay in older user age compared to arcade platforms and later home consoles, driven by the high cost of personal computer machines and computer game software (ibid., 19–20). While the technological configuration of personal computer machines was not suitable for hosting reflex-based games, due to lower refresh rates, it facilitated the execution of more complex software:

> These characteristics led to development of games targeted towards enthusiasts and adults, "games which could be played for a long time thanks to save functions", "games displaying a lot of text on the screen", "games featuring high resolution static visuals" and "games that took advantage of high-speed computational power by featuring elaborate scripting routines". In terms of video game genres, this led to the development of role-playing games (i.e. video games requiring elaborate scripting routines) (Koyama 2020 [2016], 20).

In *Erogē Bunka Kenkyū Gairon* [Overview of Pornographic Game Culture Research], Miyamoto Naoki (2013) opens by focusing on home computers as the platform that saw the

[45] While it is no longer an issue within present-day computer machines, the difference between the Latin alphabet and Japanese characters in early personal computer machines was significant, as each character within the Japanese script was double in byte size compared to scripts featuring only Latin characters.

emergence of software featuring explicit content (ibid., 13–16). He highlights early models of personal computers [*minikonpyūtā*] as expensive objects coveted by interested fans, clustering into specific fan groupings. Mini-computers represented the first instance of computers that were both small in size and aimed at personal, hobbyist usage, rather than full-time professional usage (ibid., 17–18). Personal computers are inherently multi-purpose machines, and using them to their full potential is contingent on possessing specific know-how, setting a higher threshold for operation than home consoles or other devices. The multiplicity of operations allowed by personal computers, and the complexity they engender, makes them unsuitable for the kind of pick-up and play activity encouraged by home consoles. Not every mini-computer fan owned a computer, but they were still able to engage their interest by reading specialist magazines and by exchanging information with fellow fans (ibid.; see also Kobayashi (Hichibe); Koyama 2020, 75–76).

At the same time, a general orientation toward personal computers being used as business machines led to a lack of innovation in hardware and software development. The development of software for the personal computer was driven by business use-cases, requiring the highest possible compatibility with the widest range of machines in circulation. This led to a general stagnation in both software and hardware development practices and programming languages, and an overall stability in terms of platform and practices (Koyama 2020[2016], 21–23, 140–142). Different from the United States and European contexts, such as Finland, (Mäyrä 2015; Kuorikoski 2015; Tyni and Sotamaa 2014; King and Borland 2003; Levy 1984), Japan never saw the emergence of a university-centered culture of amateur and experimental programming (cf. Uemura, Hosoi, and Nakamura 2013), “subsidized by the military-space complex” (Picard 2013, n.p.; Kline et al. 2003, 86).

Focusing on the personal computer platform in Japan reveals how its niche position as a machine for and used by adults contributed to the creation of the bounded spaces emphasized by

Galbraith. Personal computer machines call for a configuration of furniture, peripherals, and other devices for man/machine interface. Operations take place at a closer physical distance from the screen than home consoles. There is much less space between the user and the display, and the same can be said of the peripherals, which allow for interaction with the machines themselves. Keyboards, and keyboard/mouse combinations, are not conductive to the same avenues of interaction as console controllers. The user is closer to and obscures the screen, preventing the kind of communal play possible with home consoles located in the living room. The complexity of the personal computer is a barrier of its own: knowing how to properly operate one involves a higher threshold than picking up and playing with a home console.

In this regard, Gajadhar et al. (2010, 2008a, 2008b) highlight that gaming activities are intrinsically influenced by the presence (and co-presence) of other actors (players and spectators) in addition to the players themselves. In the case of character intimacy games, the presence of actors other than players may preclude its production in spaces, time, and associations that are not appropriate (Time, Place, Occasion – TPO; see Au Yeung 2008, 147–148). At the same time, the private nature of character intimacy means that it is, first and foremost, a deeply personal matter, the disclosure of which might not be optimal, even within one's household, in the presence of one's family. For example, female players of game of character intimacy [Otome Games], likewise, create personal, solitary bubbles of comfort, away from other people, highlighting time and space to play.

> Many players of Otome enjoy them in handheld devices, like the PlayStation Vita console or their mobile phones, which makes for a very intimate playing experience as they hold their machine in their hand and are enveloped in the universe of the game, often also through the use of headphones. These players mention playing on their couch, or in bed, warm and cosy, creating a personal bubble. Some others play on their commutes, and very consciously use the games to shut out the uncomfortable aspects of travelling. Even those who play on their PCs or television consoles report preferring solitary moments and getting

> close to their machines. If the device is shared with a family member or boyfriend, players mention the importance of carving their own play space, finding the times where full access to the machine is available, for example, playing when the others have gone to bed (Tosca and Klastrup 2019, 183).

With other players close by, it is no longer possible to deploy the undivided attention necessary to imagine intimacy and self-recognize oneself as a player of character intimacy games: explicit images, prose, and aural performances are made to elicit responses that are seldom fit for sharing with other actors. The personal computer, with its assemblage of peripherals and furniture setup, is contingent on creating a personal bubble. At the same time, the personal computer creates another bubble, one created by the possibilities of circulating software on it with diminished gatekeeping. The lack of regulations concerning software circulation, combined with higher image resolution, a generally older userbase, and the niche status of personal computers, arguably represent an underlying enabling factor for the emergence of character intimacy games, which, in turn, are stratified with other, niche interests, such as *dōjin* media production (Koyama 2020 [2016], 134–135; Kobayashi [Hichibe] and Koyama 2020, 75–78; Tamagawa 2012; Lam 2010; Morikawa 2008 [2003], 83–88).

Morikawa Kaichirō argues that the progressive stratification of retailers and consumers of digital electronic products such as personal computers underpins the emergence of the Tōkyō district as a space dominated by CIG software characters (2012, 136–139, 2008 [2003], 48–55, 83–89). The progressive increase in concentration of niche products and interests, especially those propelled by personal computers, has led to the emergence of iconic venues, such as Akihabara in Tōkyō (Galbraith 2021b, 80–83; Morikawa 2012, 141–147) and Nipponbashi in Ōsaka (Kobayashi [Hichibe]; Koyama 2020, 75). The personal computer platform, in a wider sense, produced a sense of separateness, thus generating different conditions for content circulation while also distinguishing itself from a more generalist landscape. At the same time, it led to the stratification

of conventions marking software as character intimacy games beyond aesthetics and the presence of explicit content. The computer would cement itself as a platform for developing software not suited for generalist audiences. The share of pornographic video game software on the personal computer market in Japan would rise from 17.7 per cent in April 1993 to 35 per cent the following year (Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 35), to over 90 per cent about a decade later (Koyama, Kobayashi [Hichibe], and Nakamura 2019, n.p.). Home consoles and cabinets, on the other hand, followed an opposite trajectory, one that led to the supremacy of select hardware manufacturers employing restrictive frameworks for circulation control.

Nintendo is the quintessential example of tendencies toward control of software circulation, the epitome of which is its "Nintendo Seal of Quality" system (O'Donnel 2011; Arnone 2010). By requiring certification for every step of software and hardware production, Nintendo moved toward control of every aspect of the production process (Fiadotau 2019a; Altice 2015), a framework later replicated by other console manufacturers, such as SONY and SEGA. The system was supported by hardware-based measures, including the Nintendo's Checking Integrated Circuit (CIC), a 4bit microcontroller that would pair with a similar circuit located in game cartridges (Altice 2015, 90–91). Similar measures would be adopted by both SEGA within its Sega Saturn and by Sony in its Play Station Consoles. Motivating factors included both quality assurance and concerns about software piracy (ibid., 64–67), and as a way of guaranteeing a suitable environment for playing video games by its intended audience of youths.

In this regard, the term '*terebi gēmu*' (cf. Picard 2013; Uemura, Hosoi, and Nakamura 2013; Masuyama 2001), which, in Japanese, refers to console video games, exemplifies the gap existing between home console and personal computer in Japan: the television set, along with its limitations, is integral to the conditions for playing video games on home consoles (cf. figure 19). With character intimacy games, the monitor, the computer, the keyboard, the private chair, the desk,

and, by extension, the private bubble one creates in conjunction with gaming hardware are inherent to playing character intimacy games (cf. figure 20). This conflicts with the communal nature of play suggested by console video games, producing the potential for friction with other actants entering the space in which video games are played. In particular, character intimacy games played on the computer reproduce discourses of gendered (mostly male-oriented) solitary play, which are re-enacted and re-performed within the physical conditions generated by the home computer. In a specular fashion, otome games reproduce a discourse of gendered, this time mostly female-oriented solitary play, in a way that retraces the personalized and intimate use of mobile devices by female audiences (cf. Mäyrä and Alha 2020; Ganzon 2019, 2017), especially in Japan. The gradual shift of women-oriented video games from portable consoles to mobile phones is symptomatic of differences in modes of playing at intimacy with CIG software. While divided across gender lines, both modes are distinct from playing with software on home consoles, calling for different configurations of player, furniture, and machines, and mandating the presence (absence) of other co-actors.

5.3.2. Validating platform through at-scale data-driven approaches

The previous reflection on the platform on which CIG software are played and enjoyed is different from the discussions in Chapter 4.1.1 and Chapter 4.2.1. While the two chapters presented wide-ranging questions, which could be tackled through data in a variety of ways, the focus on platform is much narrower. Within *EGS* and *VNDB* there are, in fact, few data that can offer insights into the conditions enabled by the personal computer in the case of male-oriented software and by mobile platforms in the case of female-oriented video games. Rather, the only available data points that can shed some insight into the matter are those pertaining to platform. On *Erogescape*, of the 17,223 releases with a listed platform, 15,931 are recorded as being released

on personal computer machines. Furthermore, there are multiple attributes for software releases that imply that the registered games are meant to be played on the personal computer; tags include: ‘cannot be run on windows xp’; ‘can be run on windows 11’; ‘can be run without disk’; ‘dvd-pg’; ‘cannot be run on windows nt’; ‘ms-dos game’; ‘requires activation disk’; ‘can be run without disk has drm’; ‘has dvd-pg release’; ‘can be run on windows 7 32bit’; ‘can be run on windows 7 64bit’; ‘can be run on windows xp’; ‘can be run on windows 2k’; ‘cannot be run on windows 7 64bit’; ‘has windows 7 version’; ‘has smartphone version’; ‘can be run on windows 8’; ‘can be run on windows 8 32bit only’; ‘can be run on windows 10’, to name a few. At the same time, just as there are limited evaluationss for female-oriented games (‘boys love’ and ‘otome game’), there are limited attributes for games not released on the personal computer. Including, ‘adapted from arcade center,’ ‘made for cellphones,’ and ‘has cellphone version,’ among others.

While the repository catalogs a total of thirty different hardware platforms – ‘PC’; ‘NS’; ‘PS4’; ‘iPhone’; ‘PS5’; ‘BROWSER’; ‘Android’; ‘PSV’ (PlaystationVita); ‘3DS’; ‘XBO’ (Microsoft Xbox One); ‘iOS’; ‘PS3’; ‘Wii U’; ‘PSP’; ‘XB360’ (Microsoft Xbox 360); ‘PS2’; ‘NDS’; ‘Wii’; ‘GBA(GB)’; ‘DC’ (Sega DreamCast); ‘MOBILE’; ‘XB (Microsoft Xbox)’; ‘PS’; ‘WS’ (Bandai WonderSwan); ‘NGP’; ‘SS’; ‘SFC’; ‘PCE’; ‘MCD’; ‘FC" – most of the attributes employable in software cataloging concern personal computer software. There is no similar level of granularity for home console releases. *Erogescape* confirms a focus on male-oriented software – the number of software releases cataloged as ‘boys love’ or ‘otome game’ is minimal, 623 in the case of Boys Love and 744 in the case of *otome* games. If the presence of pornography is considered, out of the 14,410 software releases featuring explicit content, 14,368 are cataloged as being on PC. Of these, 14,368 entries, only 81 are recorded as being otome games, while 79 are recorded as being boys love games. The scarcity of female-oriented titles and the focus on the personal computer is a significant bias, which, in turn, is symptomatic of views regarding the

personal computer as a platform for male-oriented character intimacy games, at least according to *Erogescape*'s users.

In the case of *VNDB*, by contrast, the platform on which the software is available is not expressed through tags, but through its own section, and here the range also tends toward the encyclopedic. The platforms cataloged include: 'Windows'; 'Linux'; 'Mac OS'; 'Website'; '3DO'; 'Apple iProduct'; 'Android'; 'Blu-ray Player'; 'DOS'; 'DVD Player'; 'Dreamcast'; 'Famicom'; 'Super Famicom'; 'FM-7'; 'FM-8'; 'FM Towns'; 'Game Boy Advance'; 'Game Boy Color'; 'MSX'; 'Nintendo DS'; 'Nintendo Switch'; 'Nintendo Wii'; 'Nintendo Wii U'; 'Nintendo 3DS'; 'PC-88'; 'PC-98'; 'PC Engine'; 'PC-FX'; 'PlayStation Portable'; 'PlayStation 1'; 'PlayStation 2'; 'PlayStation 3'; 'PlayStation 4'; 'PlayStation 5'; 'PlayStation Vita'; 'Sega Mega Drive'; 'Sega Mega-CD'; 'Sega Saturn'; 'VNDS'; 'Sharp X1'; 'Sharp X68000'; 'Xbox'; 'Xbox 360'; 'Xbox One'; 'Xbox X/S'; 'Other (mobile)'; 'Other'. *VNDB* also provides no specific information regarding the conditions of playing character intimacy games as expressed within the previous chapter.

Nevertheless, the repository's different perspective can provide increased insights. Here, too, the presence of the personal computer is preponderant: of the 36,220 software releases cataloged on the site, 31,633 are PC releases. Of these releases, 1917 are cataloged as being *otome* games, while 1343 are tagged as featuring boys love content. Of the remaining 28,461, 19,856 feature male-oriented pornographic content. Without stratifying the data for platform, a total of 3360 are tagged as *otome* games, while 1591 are tagged as boys love. *VNDB* thus shows a limited, but still increased attention toward women-oriented software. In particular, by excluding personal computer releases from the data, a total of 1442 *otome* game releases emerges, whose circulation concentrates on Android (794 entries), iPhone (669 entries), PlayStation Portable (186 entries), PS Vita (151 entries), and Nintendo Switch (114 entries). Boys Love games, on the other hand, if

releases on the personal computer are excluded from the count, are left with nearly a seventh of the original number, i.e. 248. The latter count substantiates approaches from scholars of boys love media, who posit that the importance of sexual intercourse is much greater (Santos 2020a, 2020b) than within *shōjo* and *josei* manga, from which *otome* games descend (cf. Andlauer 2017; Kim 2009).

Looking at the data from *VNDB* and *Erogescape* cannot provide information regarding the physical conditions in which to play CIG software. However, does substantiate the report that circulation is concentrated on select platforms, which are, indeed, conducive to the modes of solitary play described in the previous chapter. Doing so provides, at the very least, insights into what may constitute another facet of the conditions required and entailed by playing character intimacy games. According to this study's sources, there is a tendency in both male-oriented and women-oriented software toward circulation on platforms that offer spaces for private, non-communal play, and which require the non-presence of other actors in the vicinity.

5.4. Delineating character intimacy game conditions

In producing and validating three perspectives on character intimacy games in Japan, this study has also produced a perspective on the context around playing CIG software. The three perspectives have spanned both environmental conditions, namely, the media landscape(s) and discourse(s) at specific points in time, and the ensemble of dispositions toward software and the act of playing character intimacy games. All these factors, implicitly (platform, interface) and explicitly (media discourse) combine into an ensemble of conditions that influence self-recognition as a player of CIG software. To play a character intimacy game is to assume a position as a content recipient, who, upon engagement with an appropriate screen configuration, becomes able to interface with characters and produce intimate engagements. Such responses are contingent on knowing what kind of information to parse, collate, and coalesce into a coherent whole. To play a character intimacy game is to accept a marginal position, both within the original context of Japan's media landscape and abroad. It is to accept that one might be playing as and interactive with characters, conducts, and situations deemed immoral and/or anti-social. To play a character intimacy game is to gravitate toward platforms and affordances that allow the creation of personal intimacy in which to produce intimate engagement. It is to be, in a sense, anti-social. In other words, the conditions of playing character intimacy games entail awareness of one's position vis-à-vis other video game players and other sectors of pop culture (cf. Au Yeung 2008).

In validating the three perspectives via *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape*, this study has shown that such perspectives can be seen at scale, and that they emerge within fan-curated data repositories. In doing so, the study showcases that some questions, which may not apparently be compatible with the strict, numerical nature of databases, can be answered with at-scale data. While it is not possible to ask every player, it is possible to ask communities as a whole in the form of databases. For example, attempting to validate the role of the screen configuration within

character intimacy games has exposed that such a screen configuration is more or less taken for granted within both *VNDB* and *EGS*. This is made more explicit within *The Visual Novel Database*, which, by virtue of not being limited to Japan, deploys specific criteria for what should and should not be included in the database. In attempting to substantiate claims to the presence of a scopic regime privileging imagined character interaction through data, this study has validated the importance of character engagement and of passive content reception. It has demonstrated so through the analysis of the two data sources as node networks and, in turn, it has substantiated the importance of character engagement and passive content reception in playing CIG software.

Following interfaces and scopic regimes, this study has presented and examined media discourses claiming character intimacy game software as harmful media. In examining its two sources of data at different points in time, this study demonstrates that the users themselves deem a not insignificant portion of CIG software to be unfit for consumption by the general public. This is echoed, in less direct terms, by tags in *VNDB* signaling whenever a game features sexual depictions that "are not for everyone" with the "Darker Sexual Content" tag (Heling 2022 - https://vndb.org/g382). By presenting an at-scale perspective juxtaposed with existing media discourses, this study highlights what might not be visible at the ground level of individual, infamous cases of note, such as *Ichinananana*, *Saori: Bishōjotachi no Yakata*, and *Rapelay*. Namely, that there is a significant, but not dominant segment of games whose content features depictions of deviant, non-consensual, extreme sexual activity and it is deployed in fetishistic fashion. The communities underneath repositories such as *EGS* and *VNDB* have preoccupied themselves with the wider ramifications of such works. This signifies that to play character intimacy games, in general, is to be *self*-aware that such content exists, and that it might impact the way one plays and how it relates with the media typology in general.

Finally, attempting to validate the importance of the personal computer vis-à-vis other peripherals has, in reverse fashion, highlighted when the personal computer is passed over in favor of other platforms, and what video game software might be found therein. Looking at games released on the personal computer highlights the gendered nature of adult computer games. As much as the descriptor provides us with low-hanging fruit in terms of engaging with a sector of Japanese media landscape, it obscures other forms of intimacy and playing publics, such as women, from consideration. This study's data sources may be factual insofar as intended audience does not prevent video game software from being cataloged; indeed, it strives for comprehensiveness. However, the scarcity of richly described data entries for games that are non-male-oriented and not released on the personal computer exposes the underlying community, which, in turn, influences data models and descriptive foci, as noted by Royal and Kapila (2009).

The combined data-driven examination, validation and, at times, substantiation of the three perspectives presented paints a surprisingly coherent picture of what it means to play character intimacy games, in the eyes of *VNDB* and *EGS*. To play CIG software is to interface with content and software located outside of mainstream video game production, and to do so in ways that are different from generalist video games. It is to play games in a passive manner, and to enjoy emotional and bodily feedback through emotional storylines and pornographic content. It is to call upon distinct circuits of production, distribution, and iteration of content, which reflects in users as they interface with character intimacy games. It is to recognize that it is not content that can freely circulate. To employ and curate repositories such as *VNDB* and *EGS* is to admit one's self-recognition as a CIG player, and the conditions entailed by playing CIG software, without which there would be no character intimacy games in the first place.

PART 6: CASE STUDIES

- Player/Character Intimacy in Japanese CIG Software -

Following the examination of conditions and their validation through data-driven approaches, this study now moves towards examining specific case studies. Before doing so, however, this study showcases its approach to intimate relationships between players and characters. It produces contextualization with examples of how intimate scripts might be approached as part of player/character relationship analysis and CIG ludo-hermeneutics. Subsequently, it articulates how such intimate scripts may be operationalized for analysis as part of the intimacy progression, and how it may interact with a game's intimate script(s). It then produces an example – *Senren ＊ Banka* – of how the interplay between a game's assemblage of narrative and mechanical systems, before presenting this study's five case studies right afterwards.

Case studies were deemed representative of the following phenomena within character intimacy games at large: a focus on emotional feedback both positive and negative (*Crescendo ~Eien da to Omotte Ita Ano Koro~*); an explication of implicit polygamist tendencies within male-oriented character intimacy games (*Evenicle*); the usage of emotional feedback and pre-set, gendered roles in women-oriented character intimacy game software (*Angelique*); the reduction to known intimate scripts even when there is an apparent subversion thereon (*Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! -Horny Magical Princess-*); the featuring of non-romantic, non-sexual intimate relationships within a character intimacy game (*Princess Maker*). The five case studies presented are meant to be a first showcase of what may be accomplished through the juxtaposition of data-driven approaches and case studies approached through the ludo-hermeneutics outlined in chapter 3.1. In particular, the juxtaposition is meant to highlight potential differences, commonalities and blind spots between data-driven approaches – top-down in nature – and traditional approaches in the humanities – which should be considered as being bottom-up in nature – in concrete fashion.

6.1. Approaching player/character relationships in character intimacy games

6.1.1. Player, player characters, and intimate scripts

As argued in Chapter 3.2.2, the array of potential interactions involving characters in character intimacy games software produces "sexual scripts" (Nagar 2016, 1) "made up of a number of logical if-then statements (Bargh 1996) that guide our expectations of what will or will not occur" (Lenton and Bryan 2005, 484). Each "typically comprises beliefs concerning events and their proper sequence and roles (Lenton and Bryan 2005, 484; Fiske and Taylor 1991). In character intimacy games, these scripts are better expanded into what has been defined as intimate scripts, operating in similar fashion, with an expanded focus on wider intimacy rather than sexual intercourse. Character intimacy games operationalize one or more sets of intimate scripts into an interactive framework decisive for game progression, and of great interest for CIG ludo-hermeneutics. However, existing approaches to character intimacy games, if they mention sexual and/or intimate scripts at all, do so within isolated studies of female-oriented works (cf. Okabe and Pelletier-Gagnon 2019; Andlauer 2018). And yet, *bishōjo* and *bishōnen*, intended both as character

entities and the systems they mobilize, do produce arrays of sexualized behaviors – or, more accurately, depictions thereof – that follow similar avenues as the gendered sexual scripts outlined by Michael W. Widerman.

> For boys, earlier and more extensive masturbation experience, combined with gender role ideals based on interpersonal separation and self-reliance, sets the stage for a bodily centered set of sexual scripts (Garcia & Carrigan, 1998; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). Sexual stimulation is viewed in isolation as simply physical pleasure. Especially among young men, sexual activity with a partner is goal directed (toward self-pleasure and tension release) and easily divorced from the more general relationship to one's partner. To view sexual activity in a vacuum – as an experience of bodily pleasure devoid of further meaning – is a relatively foreign concept for girls. Less experience with masturbation, combined with ideals based on behavioral restraint and self-protection, set the stage for a relationship-centered set of sexual scripts for females. Sexual activity is viewed as potentially dangerous to a female's body and to her reputation. So there has to be more incentive to engage in sexual activity with a partner than simply physical pleasure. The result is that female sexual behavior is framed within the context of a meaningful relationship and is imbued with meaning consistent with that context (Purnine, Carey, & Jorgenson 1994; Sedikides, Oliver, & Campbell 1994; Taris & Semin 1997) (Wiederman 2005, 497–498).

Male-oriented software is centered on a bodily focus – increasingly varied pornographic content. Female-oriented software instead tends to frame intimacy and sexual behavior in the context of meaningful relationships, which generally subscribe to the tenets of heteronormativity (Andlauer 2018, 179–180). For example, there is no female-oriented equivalent of *nukigē*, software preoccupied exclusively with providing pornographic entertainment. Viewing sexual activity in a vacuum, in female-oriented works, software or otherwise, seems to be present solely within the context of BL (cf. Santos 2020a, 6–9), which, in turn, can be connected with existing positions regarding re-appropriation of masculine forms by female readers (cf. Aoyama 2013). Also of interest is the progressive tendency toward "depornification" (Galbraith 2021b, 132; Kagami 2010, 137) along with the increase in male-oriented works focusing more on emotional

engagement through the years, as it happens in so-called *utsugē* [Depressing Game] and *nakigē* [crying game] (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 132–133; Pelletier-Gagnon and Picard 2015, 36).

Sexual scripts, and, by extension, intimate scripts can be seen as another side of the literacies required to parse *bishōjo* and *bishōnen* content. In the context of character intimacy games, they act as primers for video game navigation. They operationalize character intimacy in the software macrostructure by telling, who romances whom, who is attracted by whom, who is sexually aggressive and who is sexually passive, who cares for whom and, finally, who gets to deploy knowledge of the script to achieve one of the game's success states. If sexual scripts/intimate scripts are "a number of logical if-then statements that guide our expectations of what will or will not occur" (Lenton and Bryan 2005, 484), then they can be turned into rules for a video game, with clear success states, failure states, and their relative pathways. The media literacies required for parsing *bishōjo* and *bishōnen* are operationalized as sexual scripts that ultimately regulate when the character interaction in character intimacy games is successful or not – marked by a reward image – or to a failure state – marked by a game over screen.

Sexual/intimate scripts, however, should not merely be present: they need to be operationalized to a degree that abiding by them is vital for video game traversal. Just as a system of affection might be a part of a wider video game work, depiction of romantic and sexual interaction between characters in a video game will follow some sort of sexual script. That alone does not make a video game of character intimacy: video game traversal must follow the same pathways traced by the 'logical if-then statements' generated by the sexual script animating character-based intimacy. Depending on disposition, aesthetics, or, in the specific case of *bishōjo* and *bishōnen*, how their design elements are arranged, each character entity presents, implicitly or explicitly, a sexual script for the player to navigate and interact with, making the software a game of character intimacy. System of affections represent the bare-bones structure that allows the

software to operate; it assigns the one and the zeros regulating software operations. Operationalized sexual scripts inform feedback loops and how the player should conduct themselves to achieve a specific result. Setting, plot, and narrative themes are made in order to facilitate situations ideally suited for the development of intimate bonds such as afterschool clubs, cafés, or cohabitation. More exotic works place players and characters in science fiction and fantasy settings, as well as unsavory locales, such as prisons. Many fill a variety of roles, from naïve student to action-hero to damsel-in-distress to dominant and submissive characters – always in a position that facilitates continuous interaction with the game's cast of characters.

Narrative setups range from all-female military squadrons – as in *Muv Luv Alternative* (âge 2006) – a male student being sent to an all-girls school for various reasons – as in *Ojō-sama wa Sunao ni Narenai* [The Lady Shall Not Settle Down] (Ensemble 2017) – or the protagonist having to take care of one or more characters in various settings – as in *Kana ~ Imōto~* [My Little Sister Kana] (D.O. 1999). In works oriented toward female audiences, while they might place players in the role of students in a way specular to male-oriented works – as in *Hitofuta Gakuen* [One-two School] (Profitrolle 2012) – there is a sizeable portion of works that feature fantasy settings. Examples see the protagonist character as a princess or as a similar, gendered role allowing interaction with a series of suitable bachelors, as is the case in *Arabians Lost ~The Engagement on Desert~* (QuinRose 2012).

It is necessary, however, to distinguish between roles as dictated by the game's story and roles as dictated by the game's various romantic interactions. A player character might be described in a certain fashion but their actual role within character interactions might differ, as is the case in works such as *Collar x Malice* (Design Factory 2016). In *Collar x Malice*, the female player character, Hoshino Ichika, is a policewoman described as strong-willed and depicted as being able and willing to use firearms in the course of her duties. Despite the suggestion of agency that such

a description implies, the plot develops in a way that removes the player character's suggested agency and places her in a subservient role to the game's cast of romanceable characters. Affections develop in a way that, while 'organic' to the situation in a sense, see Ichika Hoshino *reacting* to romantic attention coming from the game's cast of characters rather than actively pursuing one or more of them herself.

Musicus! (Overdrive 2019), a male-oriented work, on the other hand, presents a situation where (male) player character Tsushima Kei is positioned as the leader of a rock band composed of fellow (female) classmates). Differently from *Collar x Malice*, the player pursues romanceable characters rather than being pursued by other characters; they are trusted in a leading role (front vocalist), and they are given substantial agency to influence how the narrative will unfold, as well as their relationship with the game's cast of characters. Unlike players such as Hoshino Ichika in *Collar x Malice*, who are carried, so to speak, through the storyline to respond to other characters, players like Tsushima Kei decide their own path through the game's plot. Such differences highlight deeply gendered roles for romantic and sexual interaction within character intimacy games: male characters pursue, female characters are pursued. Player-character relationships are thus coded across traditional heteronormative lines – male/masculine pursues, female/feminine is pursued, regardless of the player's gender orientation. In the case of homosexual characters, pursuer and pursued characters map onto the BL *odō* [noble road], with pursued characters taking more feminine mannerisms and roles compared to pursuer characters (cf. Santos 2020a, 5; Nagaike 2012, 103–136; see also Mizoguchi 2003, 65; Nagaike 2003, 84–86).

6.1.2. Intimate scripts and the intimacy progression in character intimacy games

Examining how intimate scripts are operationalized within character intimacy games provides an important bedrock upon which to base further analysis of CIG software. The next step is

examining how intimate scripts may relate to the intimacy progression portion of CIG ludo-hermeneutics. The presence of an intimate script in a character intimacy game's assembly of software and narrative content is certainly a necessary condition for analyzing CIG Software. However, the presence of an intimate script is no guarantee that its operationalization within the game will be recognized as part of the intimacy progression by players. As argued in Chapter 2.1.3, it is unreasonable to account for every single player and their reaction. And yet, it is arguably fruitful to examine the interplay between the intimate scripts in single character intimacy games, their operationalization, and the wider context in which they operate. Is it possible to map intimacy progression(s) onto a game's intimate script, or vice versa? How can we reconcile player self-recognition, vital for the intimacy progression to function, with the actual presence of intimate scripts in character intimacy games and their influence? What of the discrepancies between player self-recognition of 'playing at intimacy' and the intimate scripts within one software release?

Discrepancies between what the game features as its intimate scripts and what the player is feeling, even considering their media literacies, should be expected. However, as it does not concern empirical players, all it is possible to do within the confines of this study is: a) produce reasonable speculation that may hint at player/game frictions; b) assume that players interacting with game software are at the very least not in contrast with the sexual orientation and the gender identity that are proposed for the player's role within the game. This allows this study to engage with the multitude of perspectives that might exist within one production context, and how it may affect player self-recognition. In retrospect, hints of these multiple perspectives have already been highlighted within the demonstration provided in Chapter 3.6 and by research approaches such as Au Yeung's examination of *bishōjo* game players (2008). This process, which is an approximation before anything else, is a prime demonstration for employing data-driven examination in juxtaposition with individual case studies.

Particularly important for these juxtapositions are CIG software that are located on the periphery, or which otherwise express intimate scripts that do not reflect those expressed by the majority, even relative, of CIG players. These include infamous works in the vein of those detailed within Chapter 4.2, examples of which include works such as the *Taimanin* series (Black Lilith 2005–2019; also cf. Pelletier and Gagnon 2015, 37). In *Taimanin*, as in *Rapelay*, intimacy between the player character and the game's cast of characters is forced, featuring sexualized degradation, humiliation, and violence. This is in contrast with the predominant view of CIG players, at least when it comes to *bishōjo* characters, assuming the role of a protector figure. However, works may also express views deemed unprecedented amidst the wider media landscape.

One example is *Yumemiru Kusuri* [Yume Miru Kusuri: A Drug That Makes You Dream] (Rúf 2005): therein, each of the romanceable characters' narratives is centered on specific tribulations, each an attempt to comment on social issues in turn-of-the-millennium Japan. In particular, Cat Sidhe Nekoko, the character that uses the titular 'drug that makes you dream,' presents an articulate interplay of *moe* design templates, whose articulation is, however, subversive in nature. She presents herself in a way that is contiguous with other characters with animal-like mannerisms – a visual feature reminiscent of cat ears, an energetic disposition toward the player, and idiosyncrasies in the way she acts. As players progress through the game, all of Nekoko's mannerisms and uncanny behaviors are revealed to be the effect of drug addiction, rather than some actual magic spell or her status as an 'actual' fairy.[46]

While the drug itself is not depicted in verisimilar fashion – it is powdered in nature, akin to cocaine, while also having effects that are both stimulant and hallucinogenic in a way somewhat

[46] Uncanny, fantasy and SF-like developments in this vein are amongst the array of possibilities for a potential outcome for *bishōjo*- and *bishōnen*-centered narratives. One example is *Minna de Nyan Nyan* (Yamikumo Communications 2003) where most of the cast of romanceable characters is composed of characters coming from other dimensions, each having animal-based mannerisms and physical traits (cat and dog ears).

similar to 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) – addiction to it and withdrawal are rendered in a way that harks back to verisimilitude. Cat Sidhe Nekoko in *Yumemiru Kusuri* appears to generate an intimate script that is consistent with other *moe* characters and CIG software. However, the way in which it attempts to render issues such as substance addiction, amongst other things, generates a gulf between the game and the wider media landscape in which it operates.

Another example is *School Days* (0verflow 2005), which is a character intimacy game, structured around time-based dynamic choices amidst continuing animated sequences. Unlike visual novel games, the player must choose in a limited time frame and refusal to make a choice is, in itself, a choice. The game places the user in the shoes of Itō Makoto, a young man attending the fictional Sakakino Academy in the fictional Japanese city of Haramihama. Makoto is characterized in a way that is prototypical of many player-controlled characters in Japanese character intimacy games: mild-mannered, subservient, and passive in nature. He wants to get closer to Sakakino's most admired girl, the aloof Katsura Kotonoha, but his shyness and her aloofness prevents him from doing anything. To an extent, he is content to long for Kotonoha from afar, but a change in seating arrangements in class puts him next to another young woman, Saionji Sekai, who, upon noticing a photo of Kotonoha on his cellphone, decides to help Makoto. Sekai sets up Makoto on a date with Kotonoha but becomes infatuated with Makoto in the process, starting a love triangle.

The game's initial situation is not in any way different from other character intimacy games: the player character is tasked with attaining intimacy with one or more characters. However, the game punishes the player for conduct encouraged in playing character intimacy games, namely, trying to achieve as much intimacy as possible with as many characters as possible, without regard for the character's feelings or what would happen if such conduct were actually to be undertaken in tangible reality, toward flesh-and-blood human beings. Up until this point, there is no significant

difference from other character intimacy games both in terms of looking at the narrative itself and in the consequences of the player's actions. Other works with a love triangle at their focus, such as *Shōjo Graffiti* [Girl Graffiti] (Pure More 2018) or *Kanojo x Kanojo x Kanojo Dokidoki Full Throttle*! [Girl x Girl x Girl – Hearts Pounding at Full Throttle!] (ωstar 2009) also offer similar setups.

This does not happen within *School Days*: Kotonoha's aloofness is revealed to be the product of an isolated upbringing and a controlling family environment, to the point where Kotonoha is crippled in social relationships. This makes her scared of physical contact such as kisses with the opposite sex, which causes frustration in Makoto as his attempts at intimacy are rebuffed. Sekai is outwardly designed as being an energetic, friendly, and not overly brilliant person, signified, amongst other design templates, by her *ahoge* hair strand (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 128–129). She, however, resorts to increasingly underhanded means to conquer Makoto's attentions. Should the player act in a way that is encouraged in other character intimacy games, then both characters end up resorting to degrading behaviors. Both Kotonoha and Sekai expose deeply seated personal problems and, ultimately, end up murdering Makoto or being driven toward suicide.

Examples such as the above showcase why it is necessary to investigate the interaction between the wider context in which users come to self-recognize as CIG players and the intimate scripts within individual software releases. It is certainly necessary for imagined intimacy to be an accepted and shared mode of engagement with media within a given context. At the same time, however, focusing exclusively on the conditions for self-recognition by proceeding at scale leads to obfuscation. It obscures interactions between single software releases and their wider media landscape of production, reception, and circulation. Examining the script, in turn, allows us to expose possible courses of action adopted by players and, subsequently, to trace intimacy progressions through the game. In turn, juxtaposition with the wider production context allows us

to expose interactions, frictions, and commonalities between single works and their wider environment.

6.1.3. Operationalizing intimacy progressions: defining character encounters

What is a character encounter within a character intimacy game? As much as the term seems self-evident, operationalizing the intimacy progression framework by looking at 'character encounters' is anything but simple. What constitutes a character encounter? This study has already employed another similar term, 'character interaction' to mark in-game sequences where player/character interaction is facilitated. The term, employed in reference to the screen configuration first identified in Chapter 2.1 and further discussed in Chapter 4.1.1, is useful as a general reference. However, it breaks down when software that does not distinguish moments of character interaction in a clear fashion is taken into consideration; That is, most Japanese character intimacy games, whose in-game operations are constantly deployed in the visual novel screen configuration.

This makes attempts to distinguish moments of character interaction from moments of non-character interaction extremely difficult. It is comparatively easy to do so in video games such as *Tokimeki Memorial*, *True Love ~Jun'ai Monogatari~*, or *Evenicle*, where character interaction is clearly distinct from moments where the player is called to navigate within the game world. It is not the case for CIG software that adopts the visual novel framework. Where does navigation start and where does it end? Where does character interaction start and where does it end? Even if a distinction could be made, the fuzzy nature of interacting with characters in character intimacy games means that any moment where a character is present on the screen could be considered a character interaction. Adopting such an approach means that there can be no reasonable way of comparing different CIG software with one another, or at least, not at the scale adopted by this study. It is therefore necessary to delimit what constitutes a character encounter in a way that can

be operationalized for both at-scale approaches and individual case studies. It needs to account for the many layers in which intimate scripts, game mechanics, and media literacies facilitating intimate responses in players operate. It needs to facilitate the drawing of possible intimacy progressions for game analysis, successions of watershed moments in player/character relations.

To this end, a first attempt at contouring character encounters comes from engaging with the erotic scavenger hunt framework centered around reward images. Reward images, as their name suggests, serve as feedback for successful navigation by players. What they depict, be it emotionally charged interaction, sexual intercourse, a character being removed from the player's care, etc., provides important clues about the avenue of imagined intimacy elicited by the game software. At the same time, the requirements to obtain that particular image, the narrative that leads to it, and the in-game conduct that leads to the reward is also important. What choices are required of players to get to a certain outcome? And what conduct do these choices imply? If affection meters or similar mechanisms are present, what kind of parameters need to be raised or lowered? How significant is the moment when the reward image is bestowed on the player, and how reasonably is assumed to be a watershed moment as part of players intimacy progressions?

The conditions required for unlocking the reward image and the narrative content that accompanies and contextualizes it, along with the reward image itself, represent the two parts of each statement within an intimate script. The conditions are the *if*, while the reward image is the *then*. In enclosing both a *before* and an *after*, reward images represent the most unambiguous approach toward delimiting character encounters in character intimacy games. The character encounter is thus delimited by: a) the piece(s) of game content featuring character intimacy that serve as player reward; b) the conditions for obtaining the reward – navigations, managerial, skill-based – at the moment of in-game time where they are presented, explicitly or implicitly, for the

player to engage with. Rewards may be sexual/pornographic, or may consists of an emotional disclosure by the character, to which players are elicited for a response.

This approach, like this study as a whole, is clearly indebted to Japanese CIG production, but it is arguably re-fashionable for usage regardless of media or geo-socio-technical contexts. Japanese character intimacy games explicate rewards in a very unambiguous manner by listing reward images within galleries serving as a measure of game completion. Other character intimacy games, on the other hand, while differing in the way they produce their character intimacy rewards, would still need to set conditions for players to unlock them. *Angelique*, for example, while devoid of reward images, has clearly defined character encounters, preconditions, and rewards in the form of narrative content and character-focused endings. By distinguishing character interaction from character encounter, and focusing on the latter, it is possible to draw a progression of significant watershed moments. These can subsequently encourage players to produce the parasocial responses upon which CIG rely upon to function. As with players' self-recognition, the drawing of a map of intimacy progression rests on the assumption that players will at least be non-hostile towards producing emotional responses towards the game characters.

Mapping the intimacy progression is therefore: a map of the pathways for player traversal, irrespective of when players self-recognize as CIG players; an explication of the intimate scripts present within a single character intimacy game; an outline of its relationships with the wider media environment; a trace of what kind of deepening intimacies – intimacy progressions – that players may entertain with characters within CIG software. Despite the implications of such approaches being similar to close reading, the examination of the game's diegesis requires instead a level of distance: while highlighting the peculiarity of an intimate script is necessary, it still needs to be relatable to the wider media literacies to produce proper at-scale comparisons.

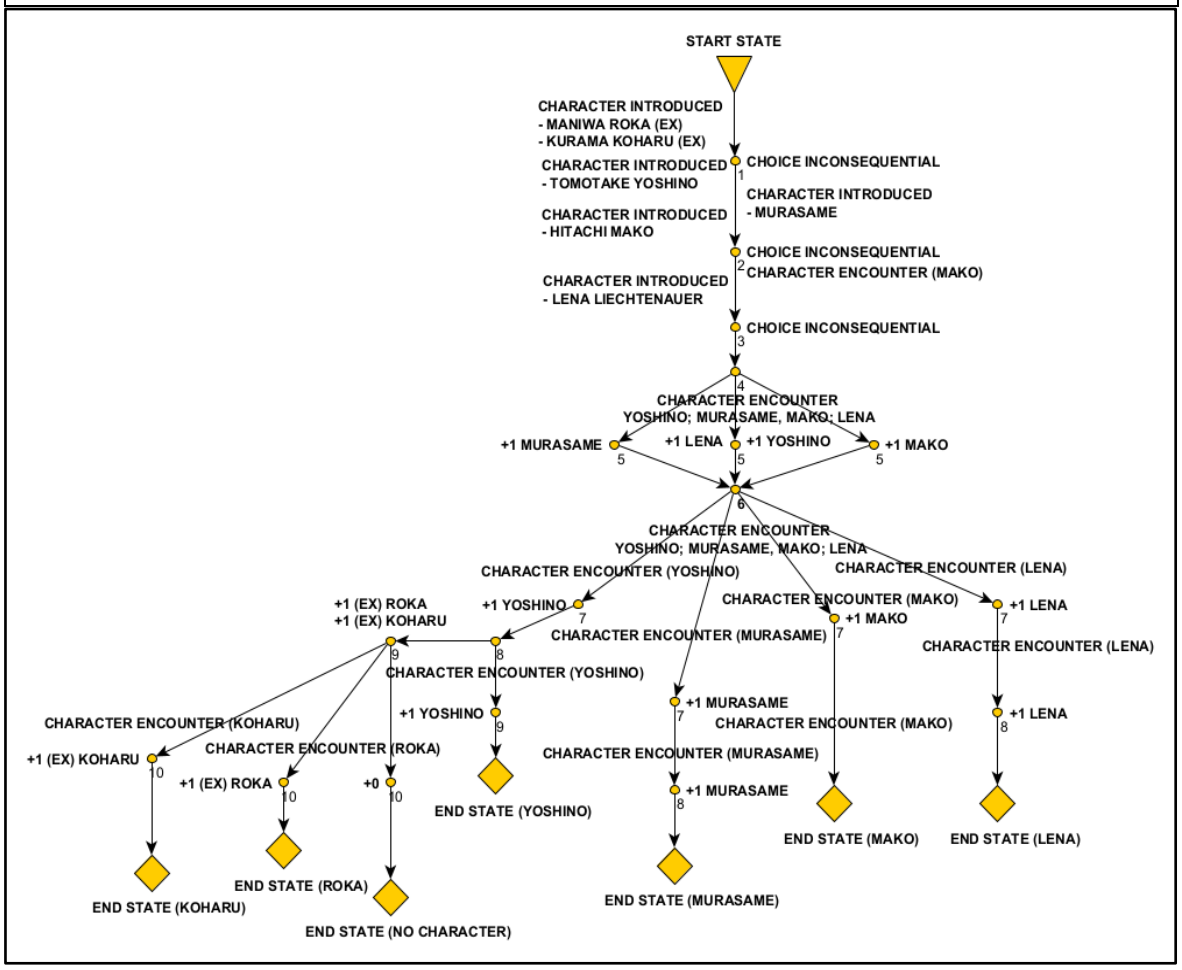
The way mapping efforts translate visually into actual maps depends on the game's proposed mode of traversal. CIG software deploying the visual novel framework may end up looking akin to a flowchart, reflecting the game's focus on navigation. CIG software deploying a role-playing framework or action games might instead look more rhizomatic. CIG software such as *Kara no Shōjo* [The Girl in the Shell] (Innocent Grey 2008), featuring an open-ended schedule, might instead look like a map of maps or a series of thresholds. To develop common ground across the manifold ways in which CIG software may present modes of game traversal, this study will present each study's narrative context juxtaposed with maps of the game's possibility space, and reasonable approximations of each character's intimacy progressions. As a foundation to each approach, this study will map the game's possibility space, as presented within software proper. Subsequently, it will provide a map of each character's story path, outlining successive character encounters, eventual conditions required to unlock them, the kind of reward offered – emotional, sexual – when the conditions are presented to the player – implicitly and explicitly.

Finally, the game is compared with its wider production context as described by this study's data sources. Concretely, it means that the game's set of descriptive data (evaluations/attributes on *EGS*, tags on *VNDB*) are rendered as a series and checked for overlapping sequences against the rest of the dataset. By providing a measure of commonness/distinctiveness of the game's assemblage of characters, plot, and mechanical system, it is possible to gauge, even if tentatively, how much players can be expected to adhere to the wider practices of CIG production/reception for the game. The goal is to show intersecting interactions, frictions, and commonalities, within, without, and in-between games, in a media landscape characterized by apparent self-sameness. By visualizing games as map and as maps of maps in the case of possibility spaces, this study hopes to account for player imagination, characters as recipients of player intimacy, and the wider media literacies upon which CIG production relies on.

Before moving onto case studies, this study will showcase a few example maps using *Senren ✻Banka* as a reference. Subsequently, this study will present five case studies for character intimacy games in Japan, as played by the study's author and as described by this study's data sources. The maps presented in the next chapter are each an example of how this study deploys ludo-hermeneutics for character intimacy games. Using Yuzusoft's *Senren ✻Banka* as a test case, they outline the game's possibility space, one character story path, one character profile – Hitachi Mako – and the subsequent juxtaposition as a map of maps. Different from proper case studies, this example case does not include an outline of the game's narrative and focuses only on showcasing the types of maps that will be employed in the next five case studies.

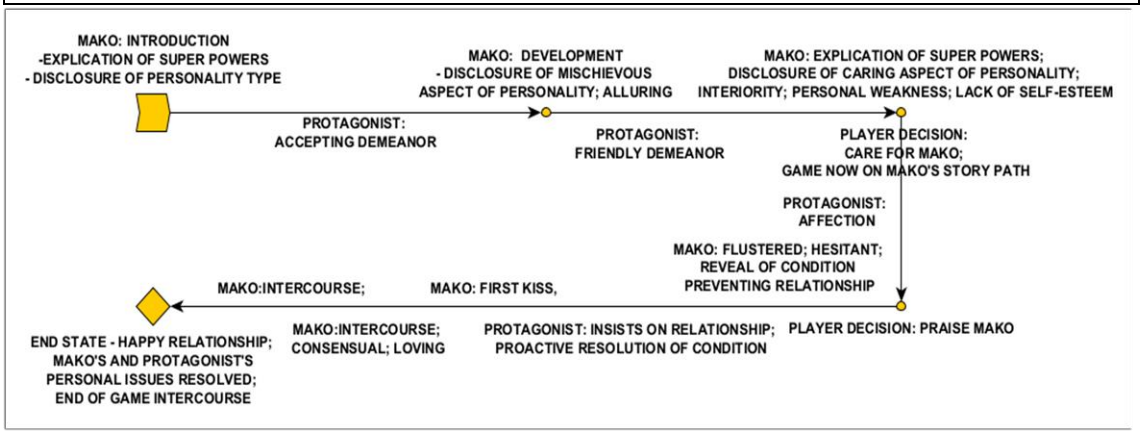
6.1.4. Examples of intimacy progression(s) mapping: *Senren ＊Banka*

EXAMPLE: SENREN BANKA – POSSIBILITY SPACE FLOWCHART



This is Senren Banka's possibility space, mapped according to the intimacy progression suggested by each character's navigational path. The 'EX' affixed to Maniwa Roka and Kurama Koharu is there to signify their status as secret characters. Each increment signifies a growth in the intimacy with that particular character. This is a general view of the game and does not deal with the peculiarities of each character as their personalized maps may do. It still provides a bird's-eye view of how players may navigate a single character intimacy game, and what possibilities it offers.

EXAMPLE: SENREN BANKA – HITACHI MAKO NAVIGATIONAL PATH



This is a scheme detailing navigation through the story path of Hitachi Mako in Senren Banka. Mako's path is simple and does not present forks or alternative paths. In between each node there are intervals of narrative content, scenes, and contextualization where players are invited to imagine, anticipate, and then respond to the character until the next choice. Descriptions of character encounters, player decisions, and protagonist actions are kept as synthetic as possible due to the potential length of a character intimacy game. While the above scheme is simple to read, characters may present alternative storylines or intersect with other characters, making schema harder to devise. The schema is divided between Mako, the protagonist character (player-controlled), and the player themselves.

6.2. Case Study: *Crescendo ~Eien da to Omotte Ita Ano Koro~*

6.2.1 *Crescendo* – an overview

Introduction: *Crescendo ~Eien da to Omotte Ita Ano Koro~* [Crescendo ~The Moment We Thought Eternal~] is a character intimacy game released in Japan in 2001 by software house D.O. As with the majority of CIG software released in Japan, Crescendo employs the visual novel framework, putting the player in the shoes of Sasaki Ryō, a high school student living his last days of high school. Ryō is an orphan, characterized as an anti-social person, quick to anger and foul-mouthed, but hiding a kind personality, not unlike the main characters of other character intimacy games of the early 2000s, such as *CLANNAD* (Key 2004) or *Wind -a breath of heart-*. The setting serves as the backdrop for what is, on the surface, a romantic comedy, with one male character interacting with several female characters, eventually branching out into one of several possible storylines. There are no fantasy or science fiction elements, only scenes of everyday life centered around Ryō's home life with his stepsister Ayame – both are orphans – and his friends and acquaintances from school: underclassman Ashihara Kyōko, harboring a strong infatuation

towards Ryō; literary arts club president Nagira Kaho; classmate Otowa Yuka; school nurse Shitō Kaori; and his friend Sugimura Tomonori, which is currently dating Kaho. All except Tomonori can be romanced. All romanceable characters have scenes depicting them during sexual intercourse, in explicit fashion. All such scenes are deployed as reward for successful navigation. As a visual novel, the game is composed almost entirely of character encounters, framed as Ryō coming to terms with his relationships. The game features a system of affection in the form of branching choices, which affect not only the character that Ryō ends up romancing, but also the reaction of other characters. Singularly for character intimacy games, *Crescendo* places an emphasis on perspectives other than the player character: choosing one character can and will hurt other characters as well. The game accomplishes this by providing scenes where the perspective shifts from that of Ryō/the player to that of other characters, showcasing past interactions. The player is forced to become intimate with all characters before being put in the position to make their final choice, and to endure negative emotional feedback resulting from their actions.

Possibility space: players, as a male, heterosexual character, interact with female heterosexual characters, each designed according to known archetypes. Successful navigation eventually achieves a point of intimate communion symbolized by passionate sexual intercourse. The game features a system of affection in the form of branching choices, which affect not only the character that Ryō ends up romancing, but also the reaction of other characters. Singularly for character intimacy games, *Crescendo* places an emphasis on external perspectives, and how choosing one character can and will hurt other characters as well. The game accomplishes this by providing scenes where the perspective shifts from that of Ryō/the player to that of other characters, showcasing past interactions. The player is forced to become at least partially intimate and develop responses towards all characters before being put in the position to make their final choice. They are then made to endure negative emotional feedback resulting from their actions. While this is

not unique to *Crescendo*, within the game the player is not allowed to focus exclusively on accessing the interiority of just one character at a time. The possibility space connected to software proper does not allow for navigating out of unwanted character intimacy.

In preventing exclusive focus on a single character, *Crescendo* builds a sense of intimacy with all characters, and places the player in a position in which characters are making the demands that Galbraith (2021b) and Sasakibara (2004) speak of: characters are encouraging players to consider their feelings and ultimately not hurt them. As the player proceeds through the game, they learn more and more about each character's interiority, eliciting the affective, empathetic modes of interfacing with characters as emphasized by Warner's *Uncritical Reading* (2004). If players recognize themselves as players of a video game centered around intimacy, they become incentivized to know more about the characters, and to respond to them in a way that does not hurt them. Players are therefore channeled towards recognizing the growing intimacy with characters, which is ultimately an intimacy progression mapping itself onto the game's feedback loop. However, as they finally choose the girl they want to end up with, the game showcases the effects of their commitment, and, pending their self-recognition, players are presented with painful feedback. At the same time, it is not possible to attempt the sort of 'gigolo plays' – trying to romance as many characters as possible at the same time to complete as much of the game in a single sitting – that other works might allow.

Intimate script(s): within *Crescendo,* sexual encounters are not sought explicitly by Ryō, nor suggested as being the focus of the gamic experience by the game's ensemble of software code, prose, visual assets, and aural performances. In fact, seeking sexual encounter explicitly is deployed as a red herring within Yuka's story path: doing so leads to a failure state. Consent to sexual intercourse is signaled by depicting characters waiting for an appropriate moment and inviting the player into intimacy. While it is important to remark that this may represent the most

efficient way of rewarding the player by depicting the character other as opening to him, it also generates its intimate script: taking care of the other leads to intimacy. At the same time, there is also another, parallel script: taking care of one character other leads to pain in other actants within the game's entangled relationships. Referencing Galbraith, Forrest Greenwood, and Sasakibara Gō (Galbraith 2021, 144; Greenwood 2014, 250; Sasakibara 2003, 105–107), *Crescendo* invalidates the basic intimate script of 'do not hurt the other, cherish the other, answer to the other, and get intimacy in return,' and makes the player hurt other characters. Assuming players respond to characters, they are forced to face the consequences of their actions: when they are not hurting one character, they are hurting another. This is born out of the game not offering the possibility of opting out of intimacy with all the game's characters. Another example of this setup lies in the story path of Nagira Kaho: to win her affection is also to make, albeit consensually, her relationship with Tomonori end and to break Kyōko's heart, for example.

Crescendo's assemblage of code and narrative assets, in turn, reflects that the game expects players to develop a strong sense of intimacy with *more than one* character in the game's cast and not being able to opt out. This is possible only through self-recognition as CIG players as they become intimate with the game's characters. As players navigate *Crescendo*'s narratives, each moment of interaction acquires the potential to become significant, a watershed moment from which a before and after can be derived. Each of the game's end states, as players are shown the effects of their commitment – or lack thereof, should their choice lead to a bad end – is not only an end state for the intimate relationship they have committed to, which they have fulfilled, it is also an end state for the other intimate relationships the player was encouraged to develop as part of the game's traversal.

Furthermore, *Crescendo*'s own possibility space tends toward entanglement, especially with Kaho and Kyōko. Players are constantly reminded of other characters, of other stories that intersect

with their own, and, consequently, of other intimacies. This has the effect of making players the subject of other characters' attentions, or at least it facilitates the emergence of parasocial phenomena that make it so. These intersections are, however, contingent on the player engaging intimately with each of the game's characters; of responding, even a little, to their demands, and of facing the consequences of their actions. Players navigating *Crescendo*'s intertwined relationships are facilitated in developing parasocial responses toward several characters at a time. In fact, the intimate scripts can be summed as 'if players listen and 'read' characters correctly, with care and affection they are rewarded with intimacy, emotional and sexual', in the form of reward images, both sexual and emotional.

Depiction(s) of sexual intimacy(ies): depictions of sexual intimacy in *Crescendo*, while not prominent or indeed the focus of the game's flow – even though they feature prominently on the back cover of the game's disk case – still subscribe to the tenant of *eroanime-eromanga* oriented towards male heterosexual users, with significant visual foci on female character's secondary sexual characteristics and expressions of pleasure. Interestingly, it is the character other who is depicted as being the initiator, while the protagonist/player character is depicted as agreeing to the intimacy. There are only two exceptions to this, one being during Ayame's story path and the other being within Yuka's own branch. In Ayame's case, choosing to not engage in sexual intercourse leads the player towards a negative conclusion to the storyline, in which the feelings of the two remain unresolved. In Yuka's case, players deciding to make a move onto her instead confirm to Yuka that they cannot see past her status as a prostitute, and the game ends on a very negative note. On the other hand, players making their decisions while successfully 'reading' the embedded cues in a character storyline, not just in their visual design, will see their relationship fulfilled. This is a clear distinction from other releases, which cannot be detected by at-scale approaches, which may only detect what users register based on the relevant data model.

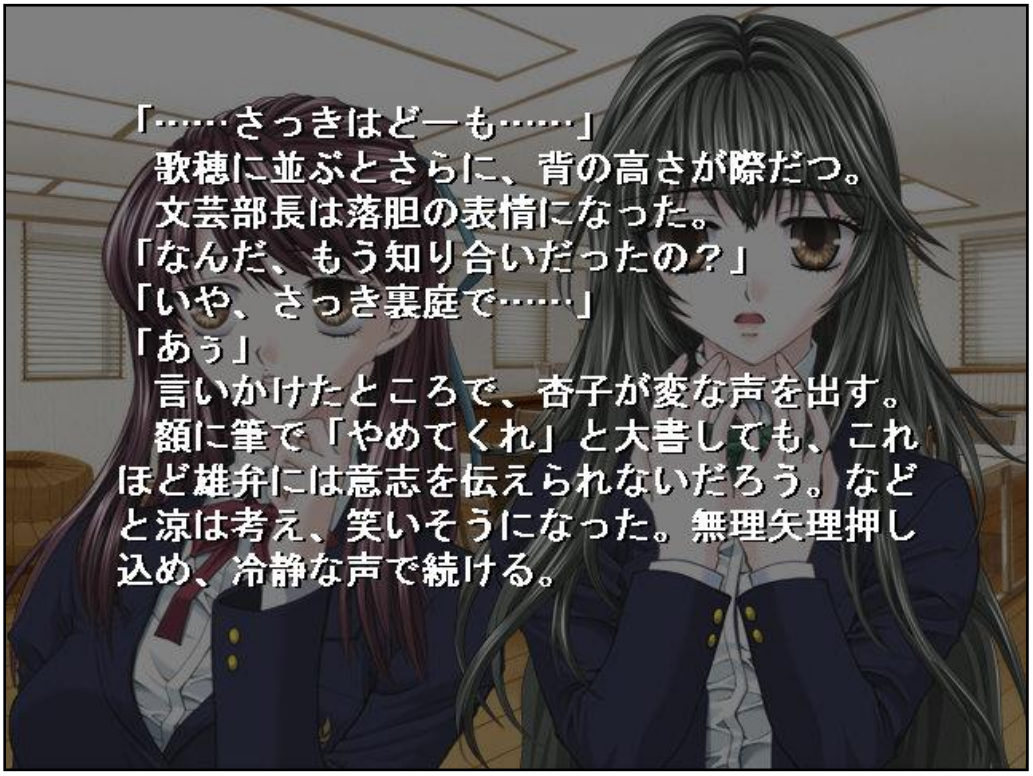
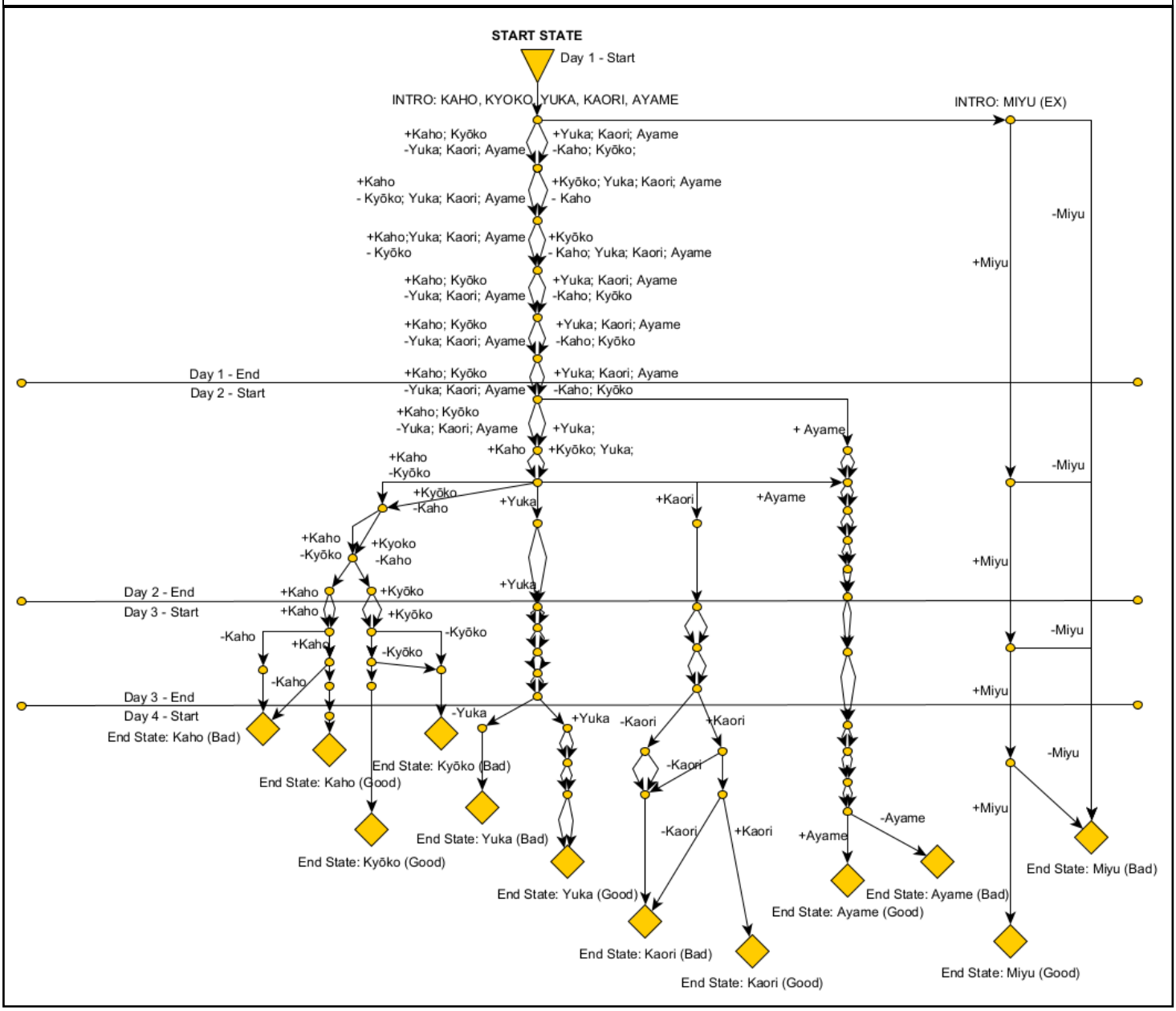


Figure 19: *Screenshot from Crescendo. This exchange takes place during the common portion of the narrative. Screenshot taken by this study's author.*

Figure 20: *Screenshot from Crescendo. This image is taken from the game's prologue, showcasing main character Ryo and the game's cast of romanceable characters. Screenshot taken by this study's author.*

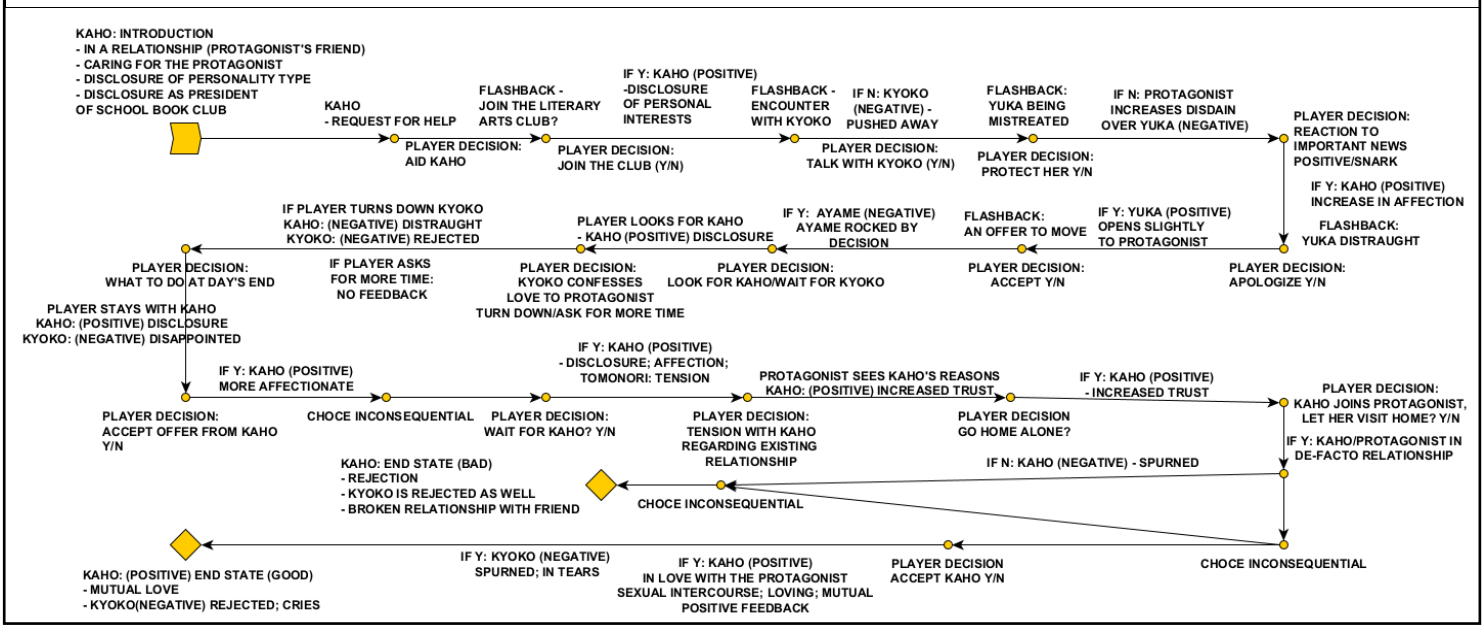
6.2.2 *Crescendo* – possibility space(s) and character intimacy progressions

CRESCENDO – POSSIBILITY SPACE FLOWCHART



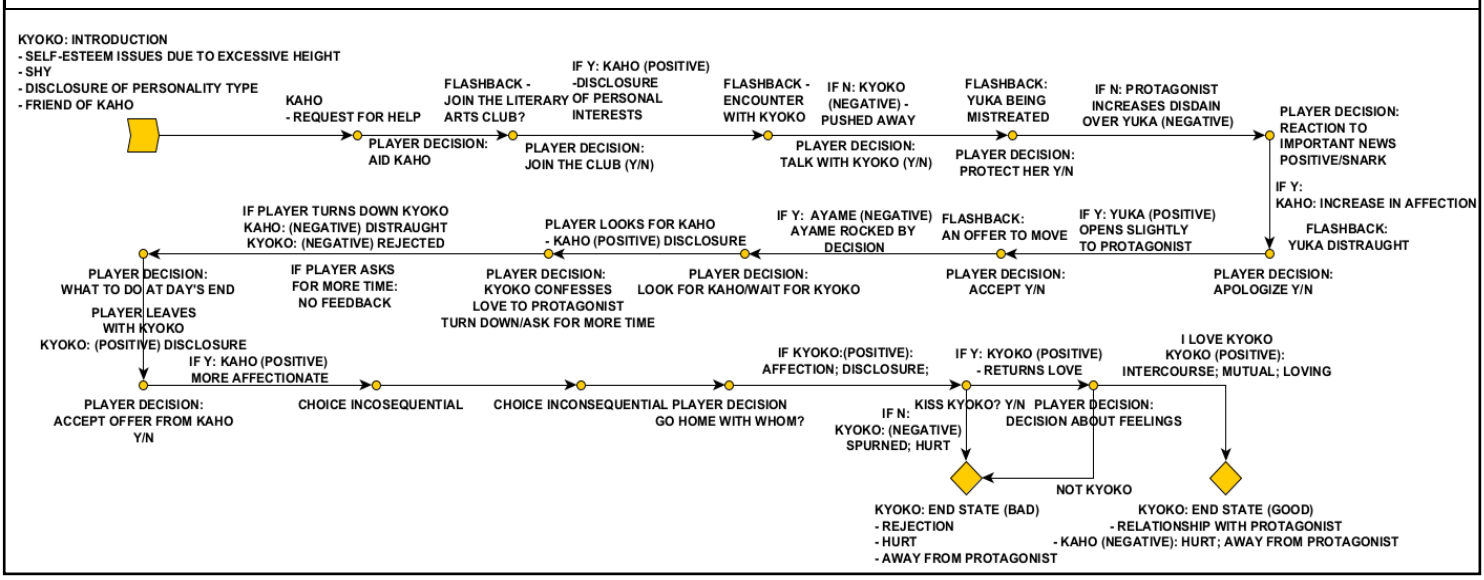
COMMENT: *the possibility space between day 1 and day 2 continuously produces an emotional entanglement between the player and two groups of characters. There is simply no way of focusing just on one character for the first segment of the game. The entanglement continues with Kaho and Kyōko's story paths, while it separates for the others. This leaves the attachment developed by players during the first segment of the game in the background, but still presumably extending their effect on players.* ***NOTE****: the marking of Miyu as EX denotes her status as secret character, separate from the rest of the game.*

CRESCENDO – NAGIRA KAHO'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



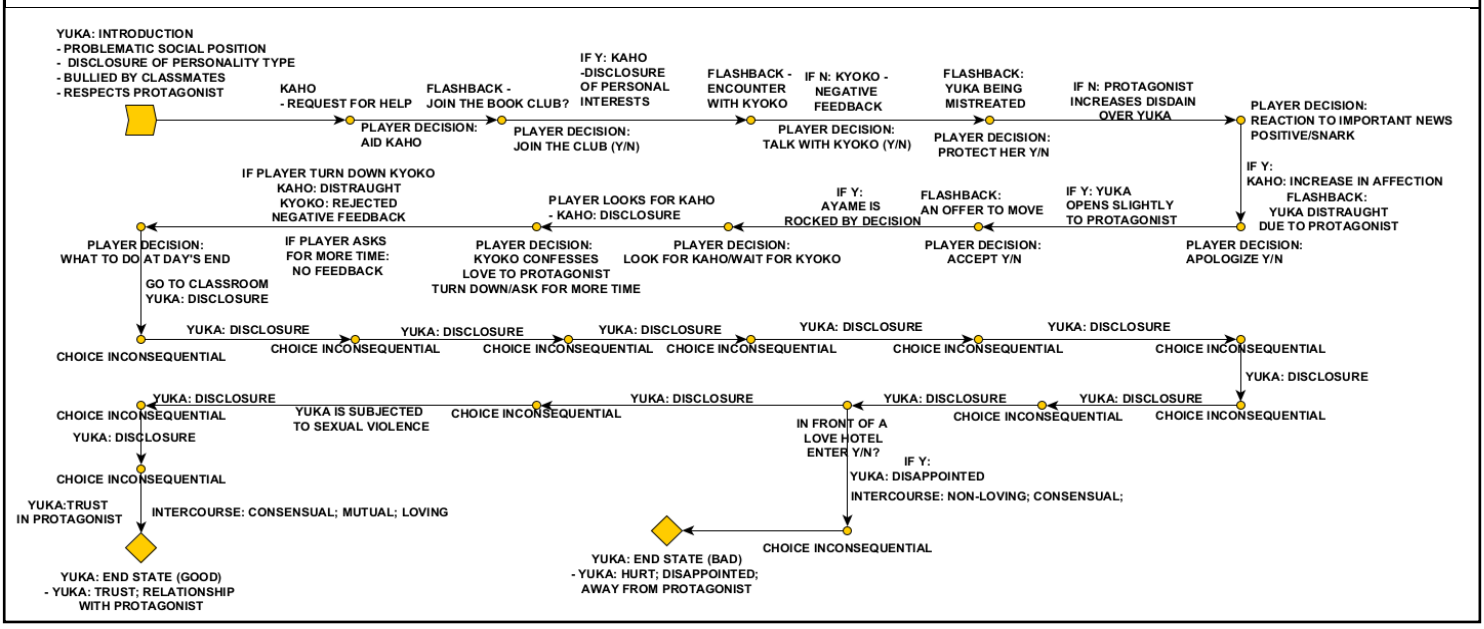
COMMENT: Within Kaho's intimacy progression, *the game will punish the player for being excessively blunt in turning down Kyoko's confession. This design choices integrates in the game's intimate script, pushing players towards consideration of all the parties involved in the game, nudging them towards facing the emotional ramifications of their decisions.*

CRESCENDO – ASHIHARA KYŌKO'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



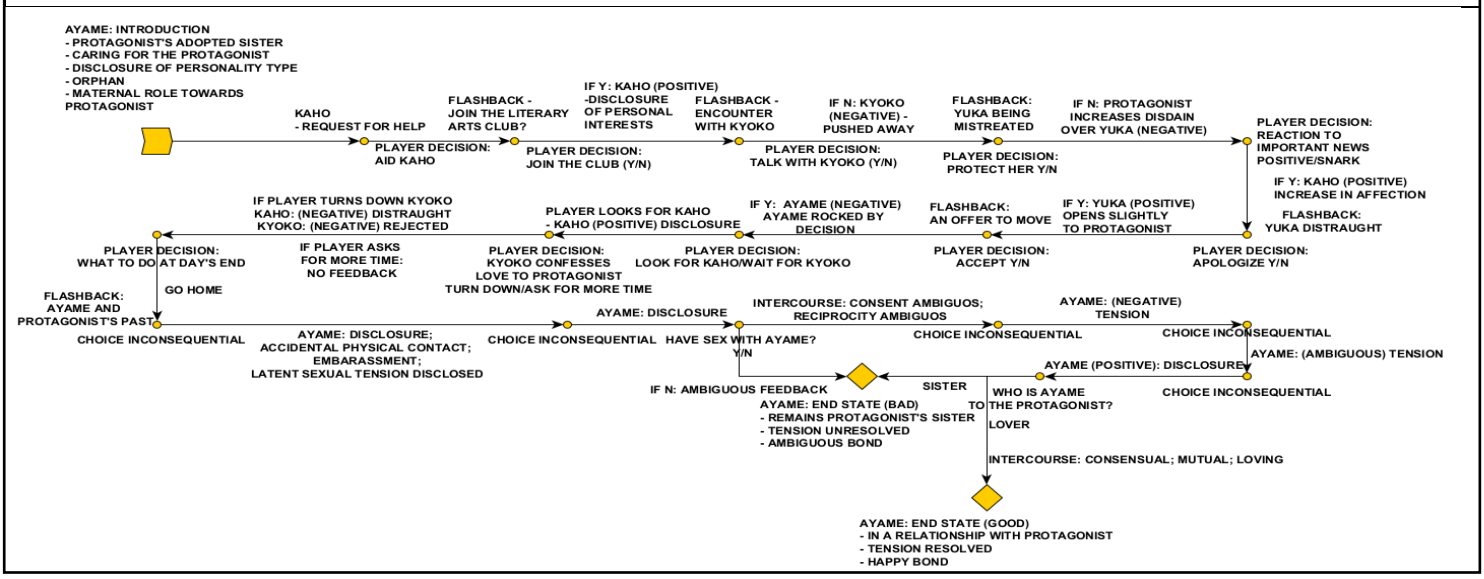
COMMENT: *Kyōko's intimacy progression is a mirror to Kaho's. As with Kaho, the game will sanction any player conduct that decides to privilege only one of the two. In a way, this is another facet of Crescendo's attempts at verisimilitude: relationships are never born in a vacuum.*

CRESCENDO – OTOWA YUKA'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



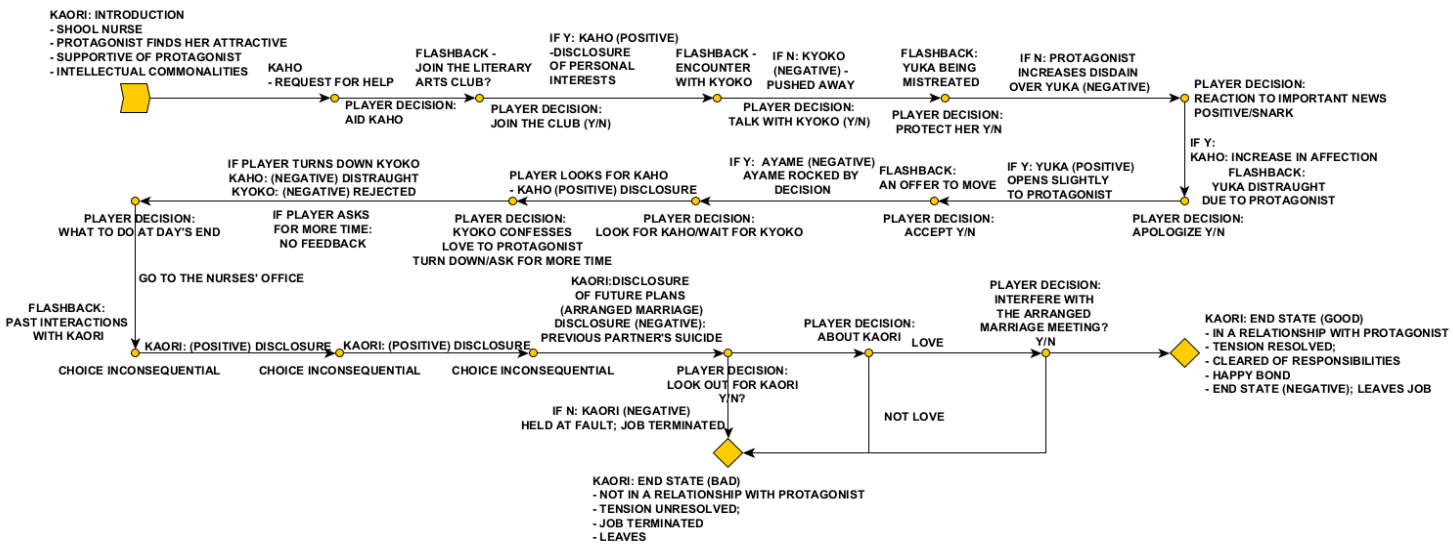
COMMENT: *Yuka's intimacy progression takes the player away from Kaho and Kyōko. As mentioned in previous descriptions, it is interesting how Yuka's status as an underage prostitute interacts with the choice of pursuing sexual intercourse at the first possible occasion. If players do so, they lose Yuka's trust and the game concludes with a bad end state. This is an extension of the character's demanding to not be hurt by players.*

CRESCENDO – SASAKI AYAME'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



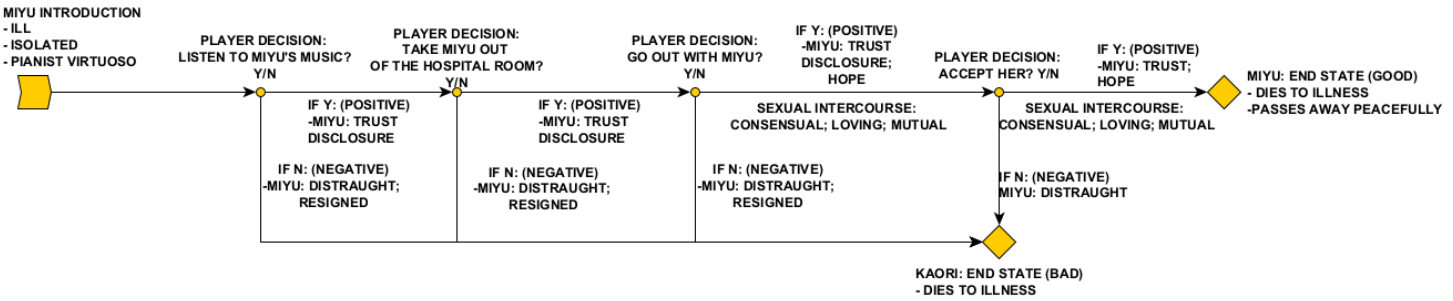
COMMENT: *Ayame's intimacy progression is interesting because it reprises a tradition of para-incestual relationships within anime-manga media. The most problematic choice is players walking away from sexual intercourse, especially given the dubious consent depicted, which nets the player the less positive ending of Ayame maintaining her status as Ryō's sister. Ayame's intimacy progression is an example of how Japanese CIGs might be positioned as out of touch with global norms and mores.*

CRESCENDO – SHITO KAORI'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



COMMENT: *Kaori's intimacy progression places the player in the context of romancing a character other who is clearly depicted as being significantly older and preoccupied with a different set of issues than those faced by the player-controlled character. Importantly, starting and prosecuting the intimate relationships with Kaori will force her to quit her job due to the conflict-of-interest present. Beyond the melodramatic setting of Kaori having a previous partner taking his life, players are called to face a depiction of Japanese social mores and the consequences for breaking them a spart of the emotional feedback provided by the game.*

CRESCENDO – SHIZUHARA MIYU'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



COMMENT: *Miyu's intimacy progression as a secret character is the most barebones of the six characters. As a secret character, Miyu reprises character tropes with characters affected by a terminal illness. This subjects players to a loop of emotional feedback, that while positive if the player makes the correct choices, making Miyu happy, it doesn't change the fact that Miyu is dying. Differently from other games, love cannot heal terminal illnesses.*

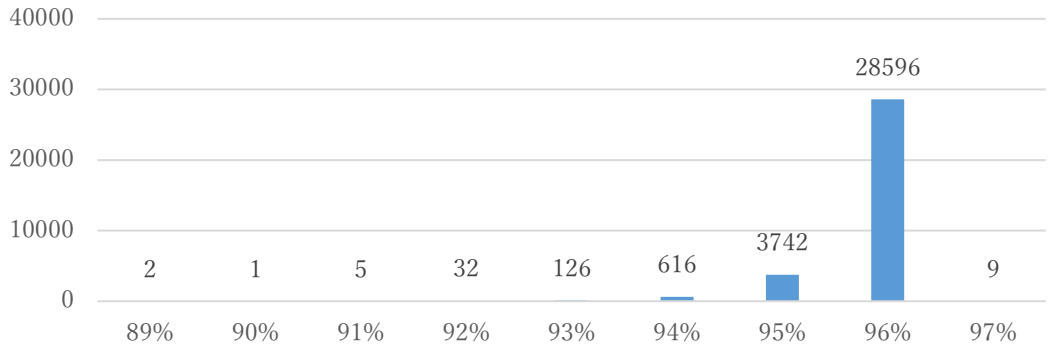
6.2.3. *Crescendo* and CIG production – similarity by overlap (with tables)

From a data standpoint, measuring *Crescendo* against all of the titles recorded within *The Visual Novel Database* returns an interesting result: if, on the one hand, playing *Crescendo* gives the impression that the game is different from other character intimacy games, especially in how it deals with stratified character archetypes and connected practices, it does seem to be the case when its tags are confronted for overlaps – specifically when they feature or do not feature the same evaluations and attributes – against all other recorded games on *VNDB*. In fact, what happens is that *Crescendo* appears to be a character intimacy game that is very similar to many other CIG software releases. Of 30,000 data entries, 96 per cent are similar, for instance. However, the way *Crescendo* deploys its assemblage of narrative content and code, arguably, makes it harder for *VNDB* tags to capture and record it. *EGS*, in contrast, returns a very different result, in that the game is, in fact, a quite unique release, with most releases cataloged on *EGS* featuring somewhere between a 61–70 per cent overlap.

In other words, for *Erogescape*'s community, *Crescendo* is seen as different from other character intimacy games recorded on the site. This produces two opposite perspectives: for *The Visual Novel Database*, *Crescendo* is like most other works recorded, while for *EGS*, *Crescendo* tends toward being different from other releases. While it is foolish to discount the influence of different data models as highlighted within chapter 3.5, it is still an important discrepancy that needs to be highlighted. In light of the overview produced in Chapter 6.2.1 and of the game's possibility spaces outlined within chapter 6.2.2, EGS' data model appears to be more apt towards capturing differences. As *Crescendo* reinjects verisimilitude into character and story archetypes, but does not depart from the entirely, Erogescape's assessments appears to be more in tune with the actual case study. Further research is necessary on how similar or divergent a case study might be from its exploration through data-driven methods.

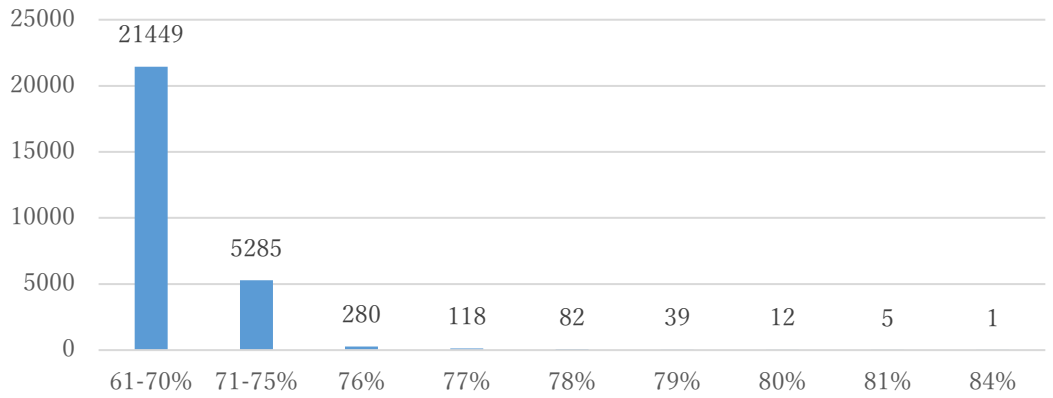
CRESCENDO – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)

NUMBER OF SIMILAR RELEASES BY OVERLAP PERCENTAGE



CRESCENDO – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EROGESCAPE)

NUMBER OF SIMILAR RELEASES BY OVERLAP PERCENTAGE



6.3. Case Study: *Evenicle*

6.3.1 *Evenicle* – an overview

Introduction: *Evenicle* is an adult computer game developed by Alicesoft and released in 2015. Counter to the majority of adult computer game production, *Evenicle* is not a visual novel. *Evenicle* presents itself in the form of a JRPG, complete with a battle system, characters leveling up, an overworld in the form of a world map, and other genre-defining elements of a Japanese-style role-playing game, limiting the visual novel framework to character encounter. Within *Evenicle*'s diegetic world, there are specific, ontologically enforced rules for engaging in intimacy and sexual intercourse between male and females: each person is permitted only one partner of the opposite sex. Once two people engage in vaginal intercourse, a golden ring appears on their respective ring fingers, a mark coming from Mother Eve, the world's goddess.Transgressors of the rule suffer punishment of an ontological nature: whoever breaks the rules is cursed never to be able to bear children, and to inflict the same plight on any other person they have sexual intercourse

with. Such persons are marked by the golden ring turning black. Intent is inconsequential: survivors of sexual violence receive the mark just the same. The only exception to this rule is those who pledge themselves as knights of Mother Eve, who are allowed a number of sexual partners proportional to their rank and standing.

Aster, a young man, leaves his isolated home on a faraway island to become a knight so that he might marry and have sex with both his – fully consenting – adopted sisters. *Evenicle*'s thematic focus is explicitly centered around establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with a cast of characters. *Evenicle* opens akin to many role-playing games, with the player character going into the world looking for adventure. However, what the game does with the narrative setup immediately tasks players with a polygamous search for more wives. More wives means more party members and, when applicable, bonuses in combat. Aster is male and heterosexual, and the player is rewarded with pornographic images when he fulfills relationships between Aster and his wives. While the player is not punished if they neglect one of the ten wives, there is no way to be sexually monogamous. Sexual intercourse with every member of Aster's polygamous family is both depicted and implied. Neglecting the characters who are not part of Aster's party prevents the player from unlocking upgrades and prevents players from seeing extra story scenes, but the core narrative is always accessible. Players will always be rewarded for progress into the game with scenes of intimacy, both emotional and sexual.

Possibility space: *Evenicle* enmeshes character intimacy; that is, a system of affection, with the mechanics of JRPGs: while the player's party gains experience through combating monsters, bonuses to character growth, in the form of skills and equipment slots, are directly related to how much the player has deepened their bond with the game's characters. It is important to highlight that such progression is related to the player's progress, and not Aster, the player's character and hero of the story: the narrative content – including explicit reward images – is not deployed as one

of many possible narratives, but rather as a facet of the main narrative that is presumed to have happened. For *Evenicl*e's overall setup is one of polygamy, with no way for players to eschew themselves from it. Just as the player cannot eschew themselves from character intimacy of some kind – the narrative is about romancing and having sex with pretty girls, so the player cannot meaningfully traverse the game without engaging in character intimacy of some kind. An active effort by the player to avoid such events during their playthrough of the game would make traversing past a certain point early in the game impossible.

The game's overall intimate script exerts a fundamental influence on how players may perceive themselves in relation to the game software, Aster as the player character, and the world of the game. *Evenicle* is unapologetically in players' faces: it is not reasonable to argue that players may not recognize that they are playing a video game centered around character intimacy or, in less prosaic terms, about 'having sex with pretty girls', as Aster would put it. And by doing so, it forces players to recognize themselves as players of such video games, and to engage in affective hermeneutics through intimacy progression. Player self-recognition as engaging with the game through intimacy progression opens reward images and interactions within flirting events as objects of player gazes, from which sexual pleasure might be derived in masturbatory fashion.

With polygamy unavoidable, players recognition of intimacy progressions in *Evenicle* also need to take into account that there is more than one partner. By setting up a polygamous framework, *Evenicle* also shifts focus from single characters in a storyline, serving as a focal point, onto the game's overall plot, and focus that is choral. In doing so, it encourages players to play at intimacy, not as an imagined relationship between two actants (male/female), but rather between one male actant and multiple female actants. It forces players into imagining polygamy in a way that may not coincide with wider media literacies. At the same time, the nature of *Evenicle* as a JRPG makes its status as a character intimacy game even more contingent on player self-

recognition: players can concentrate on the JRPG framework and, if not ignore, not engage with the intimacy portion of the game by skipping content – although deciding where the intimacy-centered content starts and ends outside of explicit content is not something that can be determined clearly. In fact, *Evenicle* broadcasts its focus on intimacy in a way that still facilitates players in developing responses toward characters: Aster is not voiced, rarely interjects in dialogues, and does not have a personality that is so developed as to prevent players from interfacing with characters directly.

Evenicle's possibility space is substantially different from those character intimacy games employing the visual novel framework, in that it cannot be visualized as a flow chart. Rather, it is better visualized as a series of thresholds, which progressively allow players to interact with more characters – as many as ten – as the game's story progresses. There is no way to 'lose' or miss a character; Aster, and the player with him, will have ten wives by the end of the game. There will be no jealousy and no conflicts within his extended polygamous family.

Each character features its own distinctive behavior, demeanor, and interactions, expressing different character archetypes proper to Japanese CIG production. From the perspective of the game's possibility space, all of Aster's wives follow a similar pattern: as soon as their event chain is available, the first stage features a sexual interaction, followed by two stages of disclosure, another sexual interaction during the fourth stage, and, finally, a conclusion with a final disclosure and reinforcement of love toward the player as Aster, with a final reward image. *Evenicle*'s paradox is that, while it is easier to conceptualize an intimacy progression around the continuous prose reading of games like *Crescendo* with its forking path, it is much more challenging to do so with *Evenicle*. By not offering negative feedback or featuring ways in which players may hurt characters with whom they are engaging intimately, and thus avoiding self-hurt, *Evenicle* prevents players from hurting the character other, at least within the game.

While it is certainly possible to operate such conduct within one's mind and through secondary creations, this does not happen within the software proper, nor is it hinted at or encouraged by the game itself. In doing so, *Evenicle* not only sets the tone of its characters, but, arguably, also conditions how players produce parasocial responses. Character intimacy games focusing on a harem and/or polygamy might deploy female characters as items to be gathered or as entities to be preyed upon. *Evenicle*, on the other hand, by preventing players from deliberately hurting Aster's wives, produces a distance from such imagined conduct, and, in doing so, conditions the range of intimacy that might be imagined within and around *Evenicle*.

Intimate scripts: Diegetic affordances notwithstanding, the game's intimate script is clear: romance results in sex, and multiple agents, one male and many females along with their sexual preferences, can be reconciled in a polygamous relationship. Within the game's assemblage of content and software system, this is a system centered around reward images and character upgrades: reward images mark game completion, rewarding player progress. This, however, does not translate into a wide possibility space: Aster's relationship with his wives – and vice versa – is never really in doubt. Furthermore, the system of affection of the game concerns only the discovery of intimate events, rather than altering a character's personal narrative: as players deepen their relationship with one of the wives, they are rewarded with a continuing narrative of everyday life, sometimes with erotic developments.

The assemblage of software systems and narrative content that composes *Evenicle* can also be seen as a work interconnected with the metagaming aspects of Japanese character intimacy games: romance all characters, one at a time, to complete the game. The potential for clashes and discrepancies, however, remains a clear possibility. Examining *Evenicle* poses the question of how much behaviors such as polygamy can be accommodated within user imagination vis-à-vis their usage in a fetishistic fashion. This leads to an overarching interrogative: how much actual space is

there for imagining courses of action such as polygamy, in a way that leads to player self-recognition? Is 'polygamy,' in a sense, 'par for the course,' given that game completion is contingent on gathering all reward images, and thus romancing all characters in one way or another? *Evenicle*, in this regard, might be an explication of understated tendencies within character intimacy game production, especially since only a minority of games feature just one romanceable character.[47]

As a side quest, one of the game's collection mechanics tasks players with capturing so-called gal monsters [*onna no ko monstā*] – *bishōjo* characters which anthropomorphize several categories of fantasy monsters, ranging from spirits to improbable World War 2 Imperial Japanese Army Tanks. Each successful capture rewards player with an explicit image, and inevitably injects a preying aspect into gameplay. Gal monsters are presented as separate from characters, and in fact stated as being non-human, and that they reproduce by egg laying, and that sexual intercourse with them is diegetically perceived as being akin to bestiality. Their male counterpart, guy monsters [*otoko no ko monsutā*], are instead depicted as actual fantasy monsters (goblins, dragons, skeletons etc.), to be killed when encountered by Aster and his wives. Guy monsters are depicted as possessing very high libido, stated, and depicted as prone to sexual violence on human women.[48]

Depiction(s) of Intimacy(ies): Intimacy, emotional and sexual, within Evenicle is depicted from a male, heteronormative perspective, and with polygamy being an exclusively male affair. There is no depiction of female knights of mother eve in a relationships with more than one spouse, there is no depiction or mention of male homosexual relationships and female homosexual intercourse, although present, is depicted for male titillation. Emotional intimacy, especially in

[47] In total, there are 3703 such releases in *VNDB*'s case, while no useful datapoints exist within *Erogescape*.

[48] Most adult computer games featuring sexual violence place male heterosexual characters as the rapist. The ramifications of this gendered split are sadly outside the scope of this study but represent an important future avenue for research.

Aster's case, however, does not involve male assertiveness or forceful behaviors. Rather, the development of intimacy between Aster (and the player) and other characters can be considered as more similar to 'stumbling upon' favorable events, in which Aster's personality engineers intimate situations proper of *eroanime-eromanga*. Aster, in particular, is depicted as being acceptive, kind and appreciating of all facets of his wives' personalities. Such acceptance rewards Aster (and the player) with sexual intercourse, which follows the tenets of *eroanime-eromanga*. Sex is depicted as being generally penetrative, with Aster's being extremely skilled at pleasuring his wives. Female orgasm is depicted as coming together with or as a consequence of male ejaculation, which facilitates sexual imagination in players responding to the game's content.

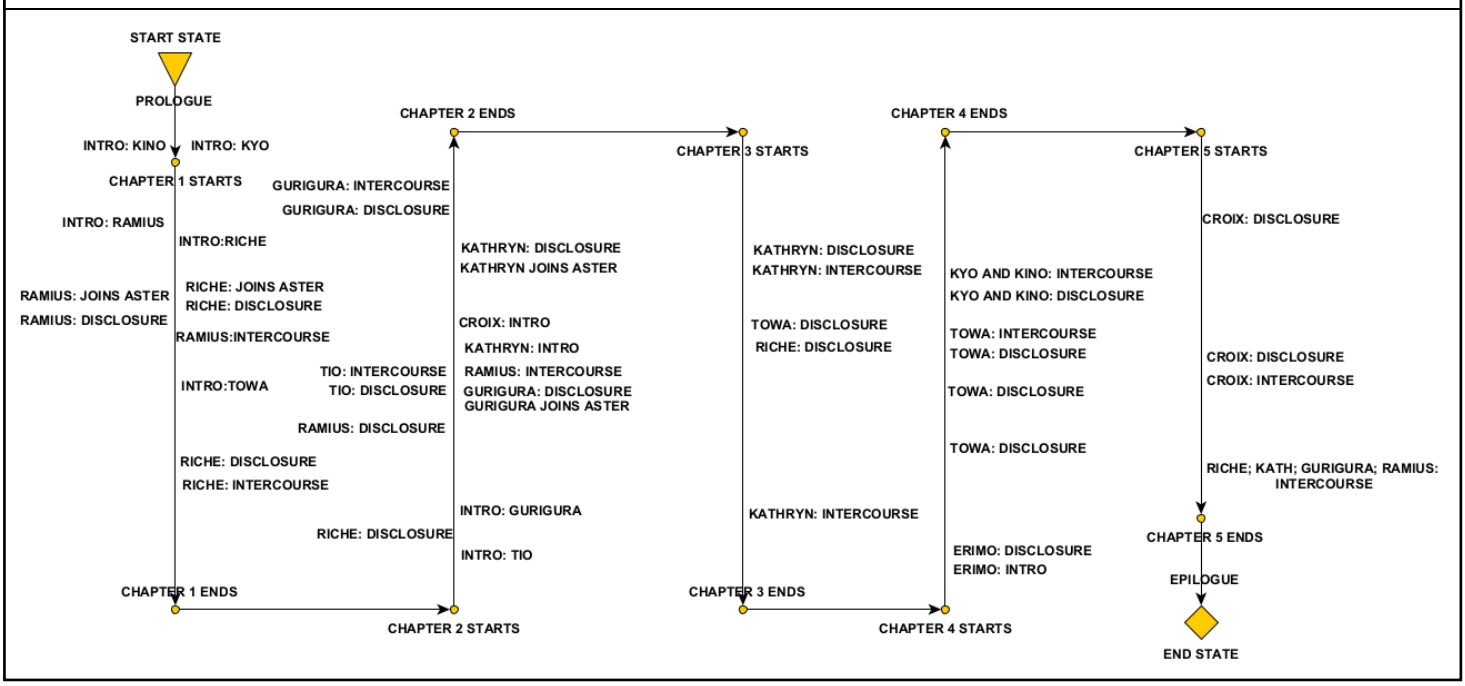
A different discussion needs to be made regarding gal monsters: capturing one means getting rewarded with erotic content depicting the gal monster tied up in a way reminiscent of *shibari* practices. As discussed previously, this bestows a predatory nature on capturing gal monsters, whose responses when captured range from the humorous to the alluring. It is certainly problematic, but also beyond the particular scope of this study. Regarding *Evenicle* in particular, it represents an interesting source of data regarding sexualized depictions in CIG software.

Figure 21: *Image collage showcasing Evenicle's JRPG mechanics. Image taken from the game's promotional site (https://www.alicesoft.com/evenicle/game/index.html).*

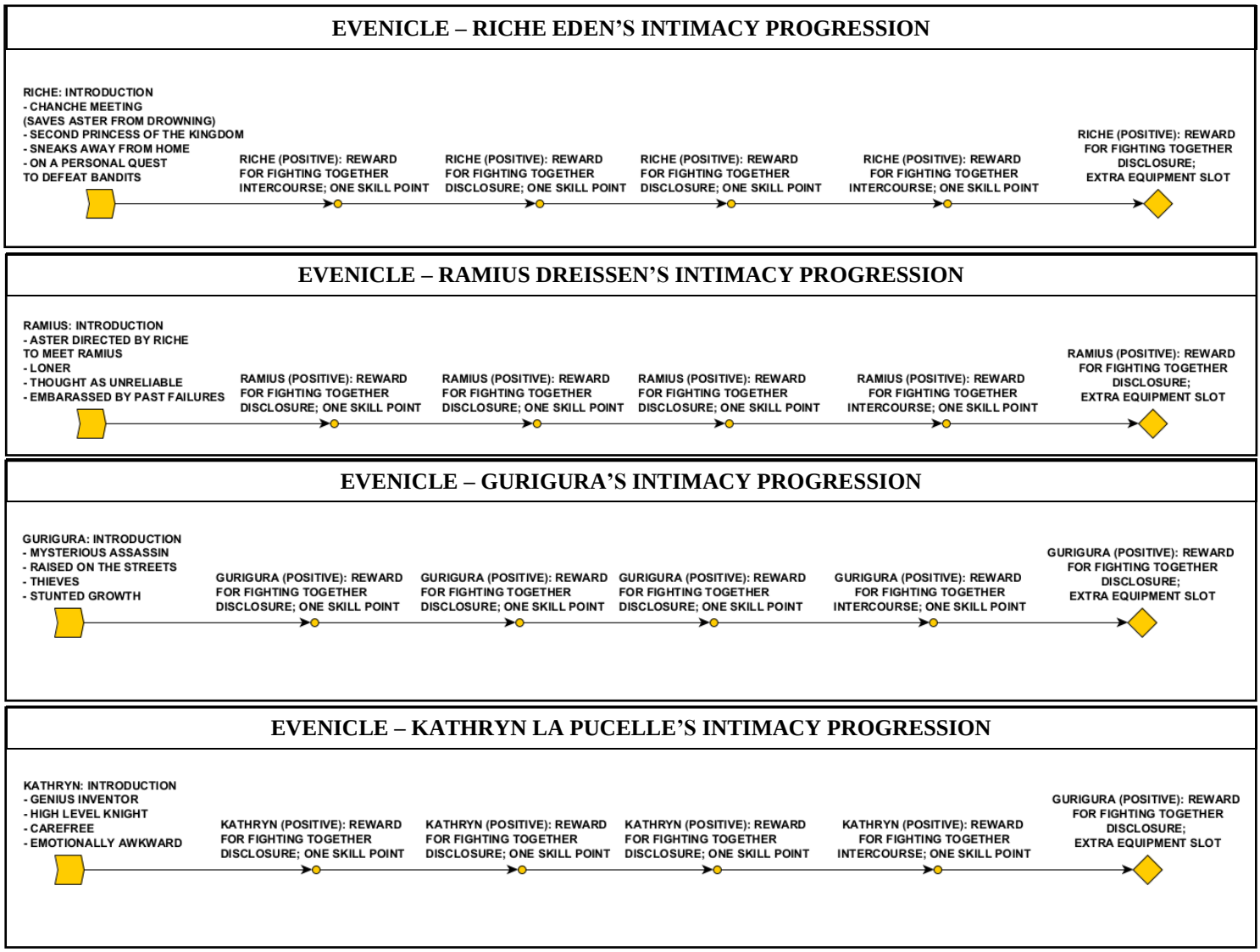
Figure 22: *Screenshot from Evenicle. This is a reward image following one of the game's wife events. Note how, in this case, the focus is on emotional intimacy, rather than sexual. Screenshot taken by this study's author.*

6.3.2 *Evenicle* – possibility space(s) and character intimacy progressions

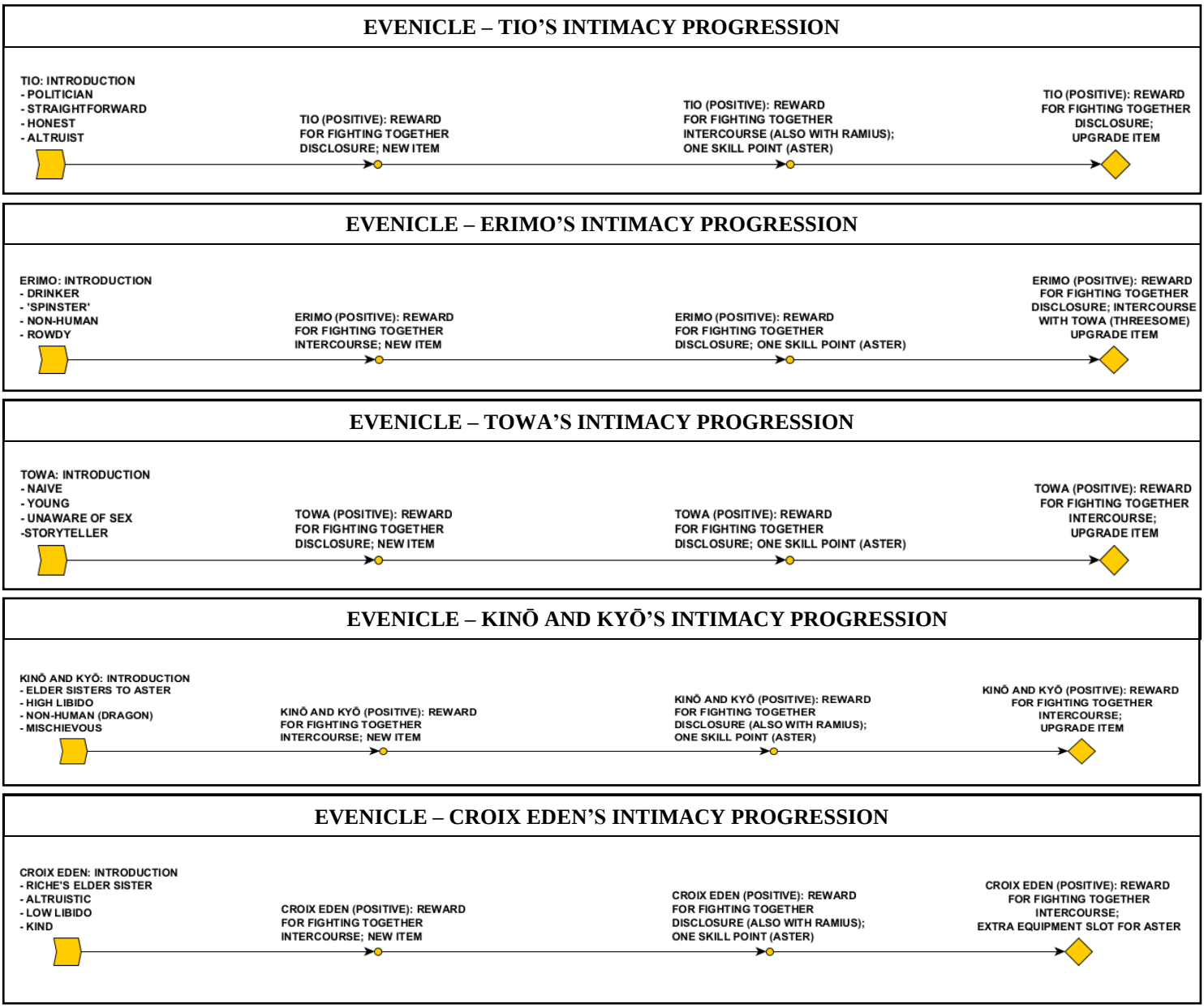
EVENICLE – POSSIBILITY SPACE FLOWCHART



COMMENT: *As highlighted within the previous chapter, Evenicle does not challenge players to choose one character over another, and to do so in a way that does not hurt them. Rather, it presents a linear progression where successful advancement is rewarded with increasing disclosures by characters and eventually sexual intercourse. Differently from Crescendo, Evenicle presents player with pornographic content early on, promising more and delivering more. In fact, sex – heteronormative, penetrative – permeates Evenicle's diegetic world, and represents the fulcrum of its inhabitants' lives, which could also be interpreted as a commentary on Japanese CIG production in general. What is also interesting, and maybe not sufficiently explicated in the previous chapter, is that sexual intercourse between people of the same biological sex does not trigger Mother Eve's sanction or any retaliation. At the same time, it is interesting how explicit content rewards are almost constantly accompanied by disclosures on the part of the character: explicit content rewards seem to go hand in hand with an increased awareness of the character's interiority. Nevertheless, as much as character intimacy is continuously leveled towards players, the game's mechanical structure is that of a JRPG, with its own modes of traversal. Therefore, the player self-recognizing as a player of CIG is fundamental for Evenicle to function as a character intimacy game first and as JRPG later and not the other way around.*



COMMENT: *The four main characters of Aster's party in Evenicle – Riche Eden, Ramius Dreissen, Gurigura and Kathryn Lapucelle all share similar intimacy progressions, parallel to the main game. As the player's love gauge fills up following random encounters, they can spend a full charge into viewing one 'wife event'. These events are optional but are taken as having happened within the game's story regardless of players viewing them or not. They all present explicit content as a reward for player progression, but at the same time disclosure of character interiority always outnumbers explicit content reward. Also significant is the last stage of each character, which never consists of pornographic content. Rather, they all consist of emotional disclosure for the player. Given Evenicle's heightened focus on pornographic content, the number of character disclosure versus pornographic, the fact that the culmination of character events is an emotional disclosure highlights the necessity of considering character intimacy even within releases centered on pornographic entertainment.*



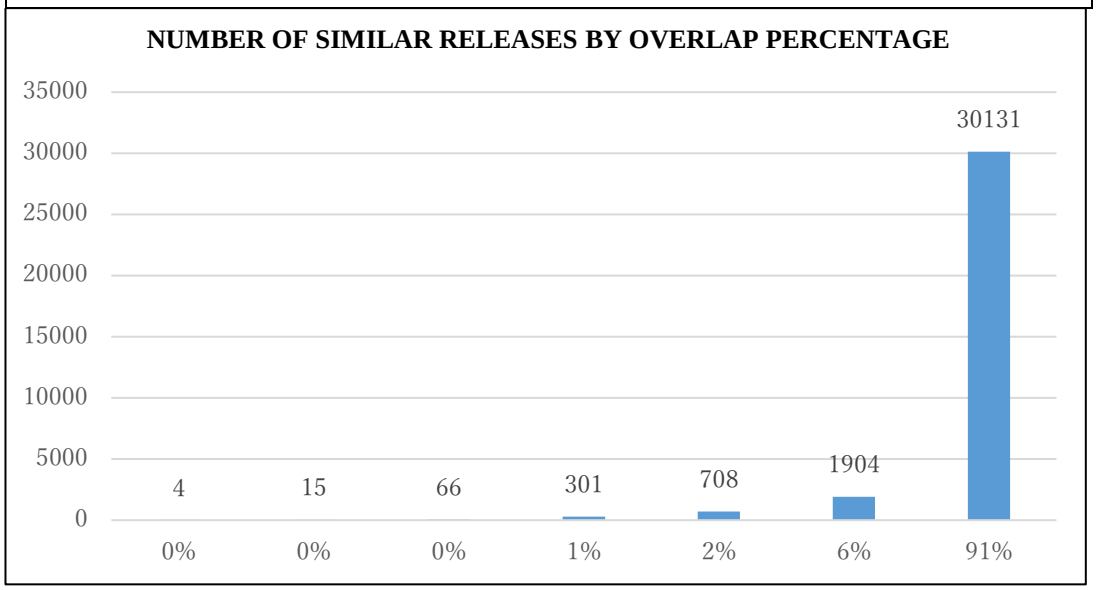
COMMENT: *The five (actually six) other characters with whom Aster develops intimate relationships and become part of his extended polygamous family do not fight together with him as the same party. However, each character has a reduced but still present progression path. As with Aster's four fighting wives, most rewards coming from engagement is emotional disclosure, rather than pornography. Seeing a character's storyline produces more emotional engagement, together with mechanical rewards tied to combat.*

6.3.3 *Evenicle* and CIG production – similarity by overlap (with tables)

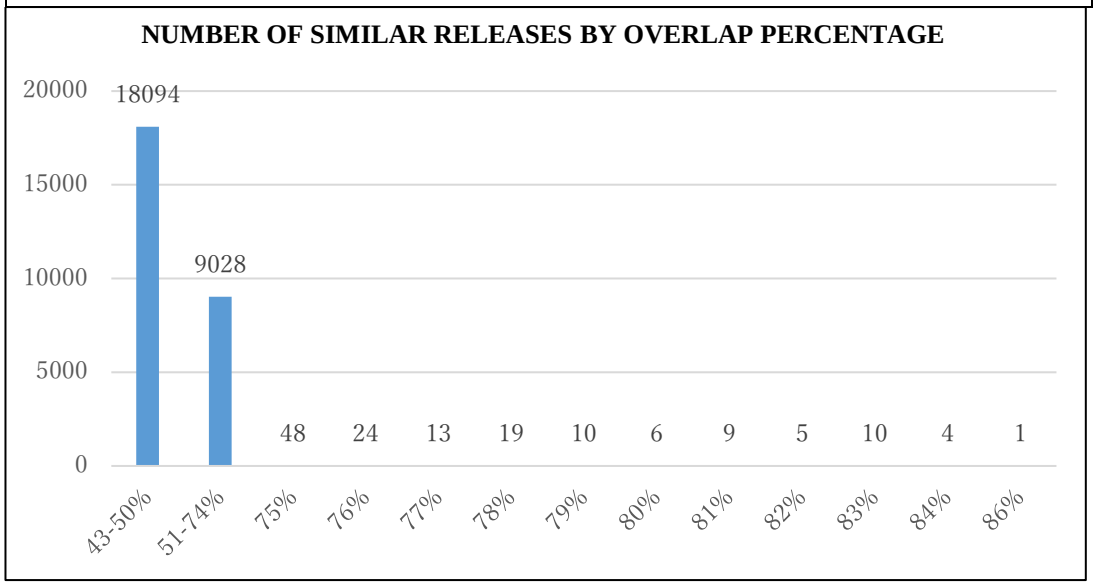
Interestingly, from a data-based standpoint, *Evenicle* presents two very different perspectives. Performing a comparison of overlapping values in VNDB data entries returns high similarity (91%) in a across almost all (30131 entries) software releases. On the other hand, performing a comparison of overlapping values in EGS data entries produces very low similarity: most entries (18094 entries) are 43% to 50% similar, while a smaller segment (9028 entries) is 51 to 74% similar. It is an interesting comparison, which retraces the similar gap found with the analysis of overlapping data entries in *Crescendo*: for *VNDB*, *Evenicle* is a release that is very similar to all other entries recorded within the database, while for EGS, the release is in fact, quite unique. Yet again, the nature of the two data models makes it easier for works on *VNDB* return high similarity: it is very easy for the absence of a specific tag to be registered as true, and thus generate a very high number of overlapping values where the absence of a tag equals true. *EGS*, on the other hand, registers *Evenicle* as a quite unique release, and not at all similar to the majority of entries registered therein.

The distance in time between the release of *Crescendo*, a game released in 2001 and *Evenicle*, a game released in 2016 may propel further examination on whenever the distance between *VNDB* and *EGS* might be a recurring result. If that were the case, such differences would mean that even more attention to each source's data model is required. At the same time, it would signify that the communities underneath *VNDB* and *EGS* see character intimacy games in a very different light. Finally, it might also mean that certain data models might be overly problematic for certain types of approaches such as overlap analyses: excessive granularity, as it's the case with *VNDB*, might be end up being counterproductive. Many more comparisons, much more than those presented within this study are needed to draw a definitive conclusion.

EVENICLE – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



EVENICLE – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EROGESCAPE)



6.4. Case Study: *Angelique*

6.4.1 *Angelique* – an overview

Introduction: Koei's trendsetter title *Angelique*, released in 1994, has already been approached previously within this study as part of the discussions around women-oriented character intimacy games. Beyond its role as an example of women-oriented CIG software, it also serves as an important case study for how a game's intimate script may interact with its wider media landscape and how they may articulate the possibility spaces necessary for player self-recognition. As mentioned in Chapter 2.3, players control the young Angelique, a candidate for ascending to the throne as Queen of Cosmos. She is to compete against a rival named Rosalia, in a test of managerial skill – populate a continent before the rival does, build a bridge toward the seat of power on the island halfway between the two continents, and get there before a certain number of days elapses. As already mentioned, to accomplish their task, players can and should enlist the aid of nine guardians, whose power depends on the level of affection they have for Angelique. The guardians can either employ their powers to bolster a region's population,

facilitating the creation of settlements, or visit destruction upon the region's controller by Rosalia, hampering the rival's progress. Furthermore, developing one's continent is also influenced by the needs of the land, each element corresponding to the magic employed by one of the Guardians.

Of course, the Guardians' help is not free: they require specific magical energies tied to their element, and the cost of usage raises as the game progresses. Players are called to manage time and resources: deepening one's affection with a guardian takes time away from populating the continent, or they might have to deepen their affection for a guardian they do not actually like because they need their particular power for advancement. The intertwining parameters deploy a different mode of videogame traversal, when compared to releases such as *Dokyūsei* or later visual novel CIG software. At the same time, players are rewarded with emotional intimacy upon deepening their bonds with the guardians. Should the bond (in the form of a parameter called Intimacy) reach a high enough level, the Guardian in question will confess their love to Angelique and influence the game's ending.

Possibility Space: *Angelique*'s intersection of mechanical systems and narrative content makes the need for player self-recognition as CIG players even more important; indeed, it implicitly explicates such a divide with the game's final choice: either get one of the character's romantic endings, contingent on hearing their confession of love, or ascend to be the queen of the cosmos. The drive toward completionism edges players into engaging with characters – just winning the contest rewards player with only one ending out of the possible 25 (six for the main story and two for each guardian). At the same time, however, the possibility of ignoring romance in favor of winning the contest is always present. It is also reasonable to see players not caring about character intimacy, other than for the strategic benefits the character encounter provides. It is only when players recognize themselves as responding to the game characters that *Angelique* becomes a character intimacy game. Similarly to *Evenicle*, players must recognize themselves as

players of CIG software, because the mechanical system of *Angelique*, while certainly sufficiently contextualized around character intimacy, cannot offer intimacy by itself. Nevertheless, the game, like other CIG software, is built to facilitate self-recognition and responses:

> The appearance of Angelique, the design of her room, and the lively, girlish language she uses in speech clearly indicate the strong shoujo influence. The structure and system also work in a certain way to intensify player identification and immersion. First, Angelique is not voiced like the other main characters. Second, Angelique's dialogues are kept to a minimum; most of her lines are functional, such as the monologues she speaks to the player in decision-making scenes. In conversation, other characters do most of the talking while Angelique mostly remains silent or chimes in if necessary. Third, Angelique is depicted on the screen as a deformed, doll-like cursor. Because Angelique's response is so limited, the player can position herself in the avatar and imagine her own response to the characters while simultaneously encouraging the romance between Angelique and the Guardian, as the barrier between player/avatar collapses – the player and avatar move towards a singular objective of female heterosexual romance (Kim 2009, 175).

By setting romance behind a certain numeric threshold, which may be reached in a non-linear way, *Angelique* arguably provides a different framework for game traversal in CIG software. At the same time, however, it still falls into the basic definition of a video game where traversal is centered around establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with characters. Such relationships, whether players recognize themselves as playing at intimacy or not, are fundamental for effective game traversal due to the strategic effects they have on the game. Just as *Evenicle* can be played as a JRPG but requires a substantial player effort to ignore character intimacy within the game, the same can be said for *Angelique*. Both games, in the absence of player self-recognition, nevertheless explicate their focus on character intimacy in a way that may only

be actively repulsed, and not merely ignored.[49] From the standpoint of emotional feedback, winning the contest and ascending to the throne of the queen of the cosmos is not presented under the same positive light as winning the affection of one of the guardians. Furthermore, like *Evenicle*, there is no active way to hurt the character other. There is a possibility to lose intimacy with one of the guardians because of in-game action, but it can always be recovered through subsequent dates. The only way to lose intimacy with a character's permanently is to refuse one Guardian's confession: should players do so, that character's love ending is lost. As Hyeshin Kim (2009) has already outlined above, the pace of the game, although, to all intents and purposes, a management simulator, is leisurely, and allows players to tackle all aspects of the game at their own pace.

The leisurely aspect of *Angelique* is reflected in the possibility space of the game, which, in similar but not equal fashion as *Evenicle*, is better described as a series of thresholds across a slowly developing timeline. These thresholds, which, from the standpoint of character intimacy, point at the numeric values that must be attained for a Guardian to declare their love to Angelique, are not bound by in-game events or developments within the game's narrative. This is different from both *Evenicle* and *Crescendo*, as the former elicited players to navigate a JRPG world whose plot is divided into chapters, which are, in turn, divided into subsections, while the latter is a series of binary choices moving along a series of pre-determined paths. While the player is not free to move around diegetic space and diegetic time in *Crescendo* and is not free to move within diegetic time in *Evenicle*, they can move through both in *Angelique*. This allows players not only to approach the game at their own leisurely pace, but also to generally dictate the time of their intimate engagement with characters.

The ramifications of such freedom cannot be visualized effectively within an image, nor can it be computed through fan-curated data. At the same time, however, it means that character

[49] This might be an additional defining characteristic of character intimacy games, but further research is necessary.

encounters need to be tailored to the freedom offered to the player. As such, each Guardian's events are a succession of disclosures, information for players to memorize and, subsequently, to re-employ at key moments during the game. In a sense, the game's intimate script can be reduced to a game of memorizing facts. Knowing those facts – which may then be re-used in and around *otome* game practices – serves as a marker of intimacy with that character. The fact that the ones holding the necessary knowledge are players and not Angelique Limonges facilitates character intimacy, in a way that, again, is reminiscent of the affective hermeneutics proposed by Wilson (2016).[50] The retaining of character facts by players in *Angelique* produces a similar effect, and, in turn, enhances the affective hermeneutics underneath players' intimacy progressions.

Intimate Scripts: within Angelique, the script for intimate encounters during the game sees the player character approaching other characters not as an equal, but rather as a person that requires guidance. As highlighted by Kim (2009, 175), Angelique Limonges speaks little, and mostly in ways that serve to facilitate other characters. Date events, in which Angelique spends time together with one of the guardians, are structured as to reveal as much as possible of the character's background while moving the interaction forward. At the same time, while it players

[50] Supporting of the affective nature of CIG hermeneutics, albeit in a roundabout way, is the view proposed by veteran game designer Uchikoshi Kotarō, whose career includes *Memories Off*, *Never 7: The End of Infinity* (Kid 2002; 2001; 2000) and the later *Zero Escape: Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors* (Spike Chunsoft 2009), which he introduced during a 2011 talk at the Game's Developer Conference. After discussing the nature of visual novel games – as games focused on reading a story – Uchikoshi remarks that one of the distinguishing features of a visual novel game is that "the player's brain is used as a computer memory" (Games Developers Conference 2011). He articulates his view by highlighting the lack of flags (boolean logic triggers) within Chunsoft's *Kamaitachi no Yoru.* Players are not influenced by a set of strict decision points through the game, each activating a switch in the software code that allows or inhibits certain courses of action. Indeed, *Kamaitachi no Yoru* presents only one such choice, naming the culprit to the murder. Rather, information is disseminated through the game's story. It is up to the player to retain information in any way they see fit. What remains unspoken during the presentation is arguably that it is also up to players to compute information in any way they see fit.

that mostly initiate these encounters, they are also put in a position that might be considered inferior to the character, perpetuating dominant social mores embedded in the *shōjo* manga aesthetics in which the game is designed. Interestingly, in what might be a specular tendency to male-oriented works such as Crescendo and Evenicle, Angelique is not depicted as being a person who would independently look for relationships. Rather, it is, in line with *shōjo* media aesthetics, depicted as apparently naïve and devoid of sexuality. Rather than asking, she listens, and any Guardian that confesses to Angelique will take a leading role within the relationship. The intimate script in Angelique might thus be considered as one where 'if players listen and remember, they win a character's affection, and are rewarded with intimacy'.

Depiction(s) of Intimacy(ies): in keeping with the sex-lessness of *shōjo* media, no hint of sexual interaction between Angelique Limonges and one of the nine guardians is ever present within their interactions. These depictions, as noted by Andlauer (2017), "revive conventional ideas about femininity and heterosexual romance" (168). With the absence of sexual intercourse from the picture, it is possible to extend increased focus on the actions of characters towards Angelique, and by extension, players. Players of Angelique are elicited towards playing a role that is not equal, and most certainly not higher in power than the guardians they might romance. In fact, they are put in the role of a listener, which needs to pay close attention to what the character other is saying, and to recall that information, on pain of the character ending the encounter. If they listen and pay attention, on the other hand, characters are ultimately rewarded with the character other confessing their love and opening the opportunity for a character-centric ending. The possibility for sexual intercourse is not even contemplated or mentioned.

In fact, the way the guardians are presented makes them more akin to parental figures, halfway between a mentor and a protector. Echoing Leticia Andlauer, in *Angelique*, "the relationships that the male characters will develop with the heroine [Angelique Limonges] will depend on the

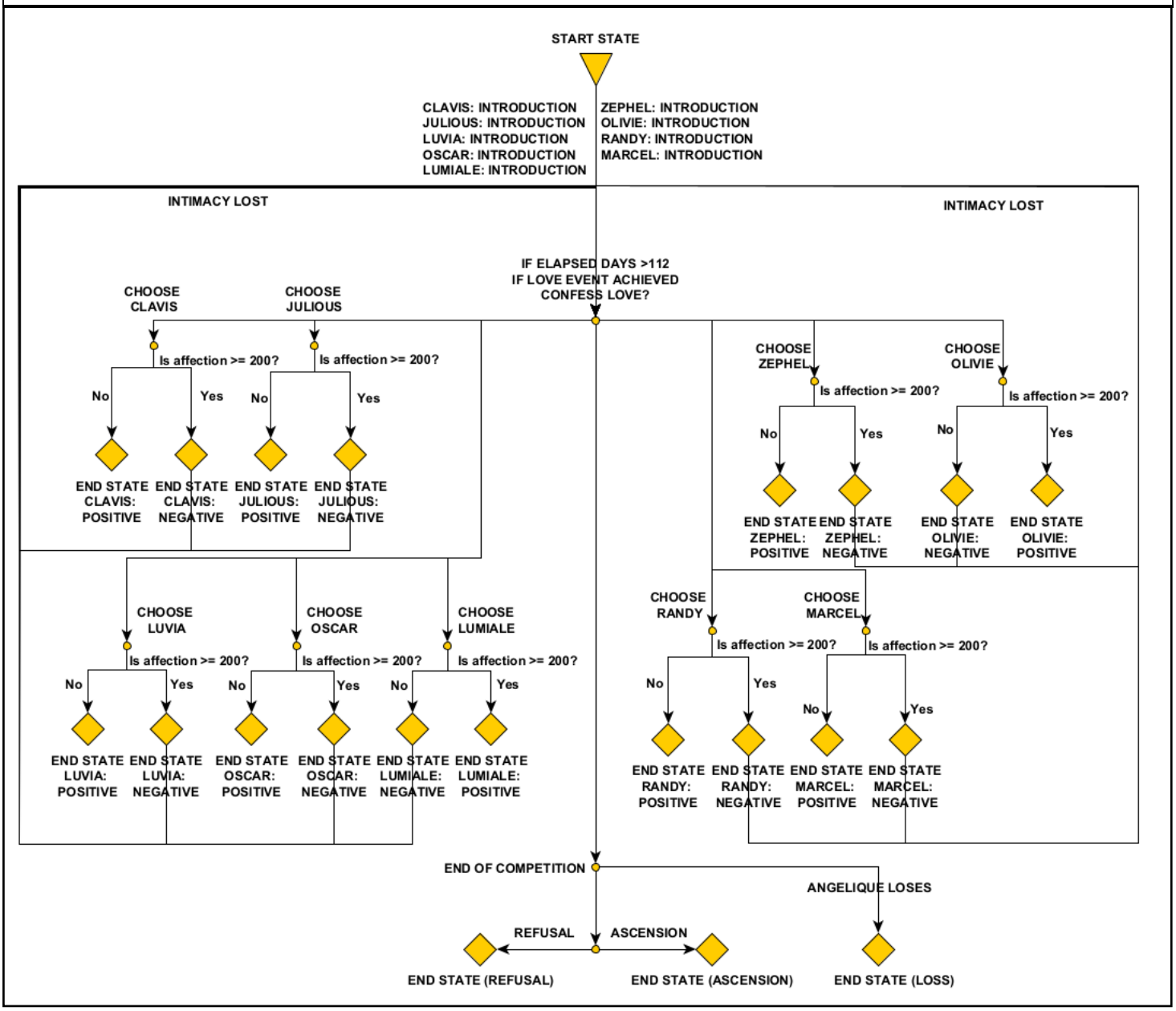
personality of the boys, more than the heroine: she will adapt herself to their expectations to become a “"good girlfriend."” (2017, 173). Furthermore, both sides have “determinate roles that correspond to roles in a heterosexual relationship built through the culturally established imaginary world and language of “romance”: a story of the helpless, beautiful, young girl who needs to be saved, and the heroic, brave, and handsome boy who is there to save her, marry her, and make her a princess.” (175). These depictions confirm the existence of strong intimate scripts, while also produces an interesting contrast with Andlauer’s perspective: if on the one hand, there are otome media in which the desire of the protagonist come before the character other (176), the undeniable fact is that doing so within Angelique or in other software with similar narrative setups may not lead players to success states. Within Angelique, for example, ascending to the throne is only one possible ending out of many. Overlooking the love endings means missing a sizeable portion of the game. The same happens in Himehibi -Princess Days- (Takuyo 2006): the implicit goal of the game is to romance characters, and to do so in a way consistent with the aesthetic continuum(s) proper to *otome* games.

Figure 23: *Screenshots from Angelique. This is how the game operates for most of the time. Screenshots from MobyGames (https://www.mobygames.com/game/snes/angelique/screenshots)*

Figure 24: *Screenshots from Angelique. These two images illustrate a portion of the character creation screen (where one can select Angelique's zodiac sign, each entailing bonuses and maluses to specific characteristics) and the relationship status screen detailing the guardians' current statuses. Screenshots from MobyGames (https://www.mobygames.com/game/snes/angelique/screenshots)*

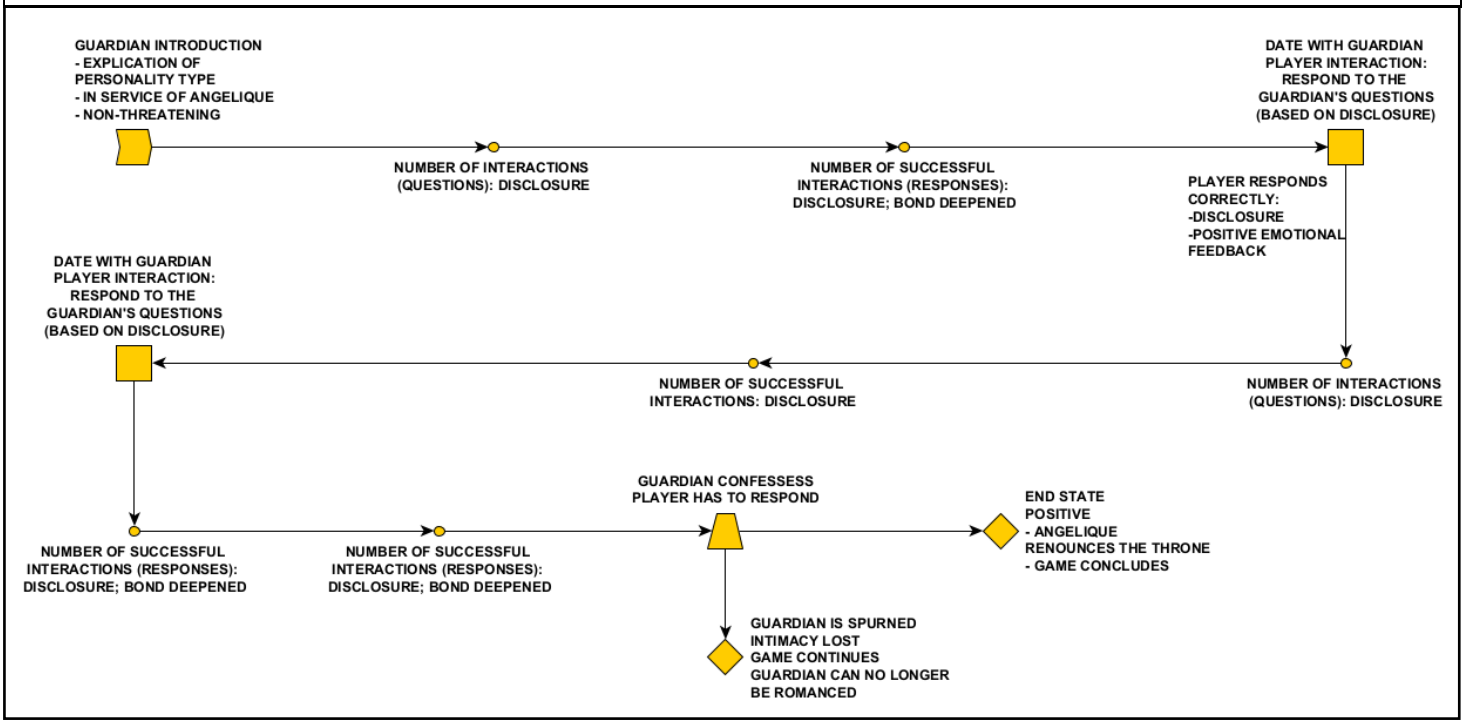
6.4.2 *Angelique* – possibility space(s) and character intimacy progressions

ANGELIQUE – POSSIBILITY SPACE FLOWCHART



COMMENT: *Angelique's possibility space is, by all intent and purposes, revolving around two thresholds: one pertaining to character intimacy and one pertaining to the competition with Rosalia. In fact, it is possible to argue that playing Angelique to win the game and playing Angelique to romance the guardians may be in fact seen as two different games altogether, albeit running on the same mechanical system. As with Evenicle, this further reinforces the necessity for players to self-recognize as players of CIG games, vis-à-vis a more or less present focus on becoming intimate with the guardians (enlisting their help with low intimacy becomes harder and harder as the game progresses). The fact that a refusal of love sends the player back to the game is also of note.*

ANGELIQUE – GUARDIANS INTIMACY PROGRESSION

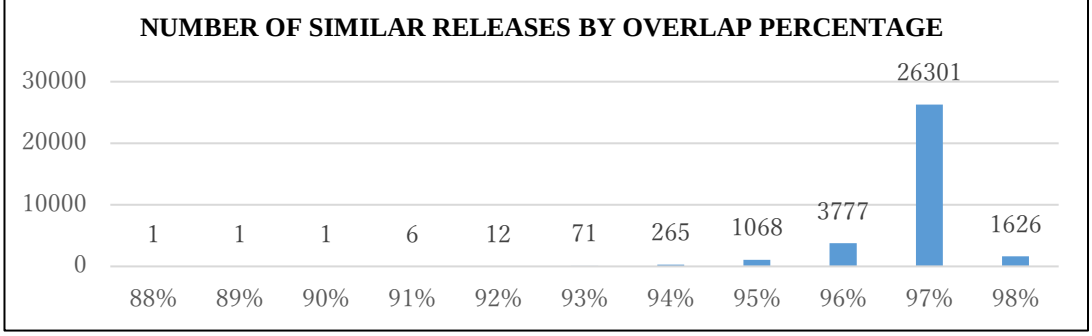


COMMENT: *Within Angelique, each Guardian's intimacy progression is tethered to the same basic structure. what is most interesting and important about Angelique is that, differently from Crescendo or other character intimacy games, the need to 'read' characters is made explicit, rather than being implicitly nested within the game's narrative. In fact, character details are turned into mental items for the player to collect and re-use to gain intimacy. Also important is that there isn't a fixed number of interactions between the three level of progression in every guardian's intimate relationship with Angelique Limonges. On the one hand, love events certainly serve as watershed moments, from which it is possible to distinguish a before and an after. On the other hand, it is certainly harder to pinpoint how much of the various interactions within a game's duration will be received by players as significant, as part of their parasocial relationships with the guardians. Within Angelique, players are given more chances at interacting in parasocial fashion through the possibility of asking information, which allows a modicum of control on the relationship with the guardians, and to maybe satisfy some sort of preference on the player side. Examining the intimacy progression in the Guardians further reinforces Angelique's case as evidence of the need for CIG players to identify as such and to seek character intimacy while playing character intimacy games.*

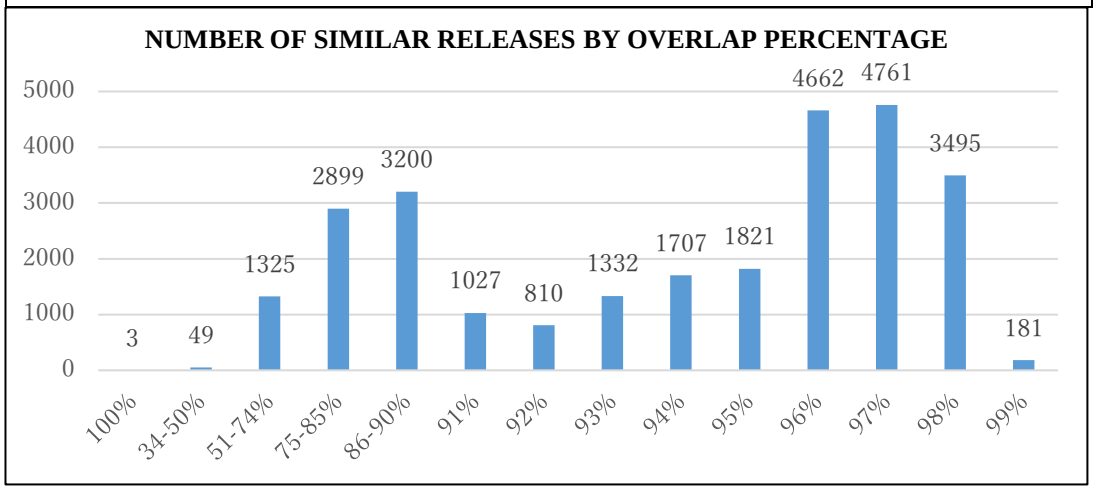
6.4.3 *Angelique* and CIG production – similarity by overlap (with tables)

Comparing *Angelique* with the rest of CIG production produces unexpected developments: there is not the same gap between *EGS* and *VNDB* as there is with *Crescendo* and *Evenicle*. In fact, there is a level of overlap in both data sources, which rather dents the previous hypothesis of the gap between perspectives being structural. Furthermore, *Angelique* is an *otome* game, and therefore belongs to a more restricted segment of the market, with its own similar but independent practices. This prompted a more limited check for overlap with its own small segment, which revealed a significant, but not unexpected level of general similarity between releases on *Erogescape*, testament to the status of *Angelique* as the first *otome* game. There is an analogous situation on *The Visual Novel Database*, with similarities both at the general level and at the otome game level. In fact, there are even a number of works that feature a complete overlap, something that is not seen on *VNDB*. More generally, *Angelique*, itself the ur-example of an *otome* game, is an example of a restricted segment producing a very strong adherence to a limited set of design and possibly reception practices. This, in turn, has the power to exert very strong influences on games designed with these practices in mind, regardless of their narrative contextualization.

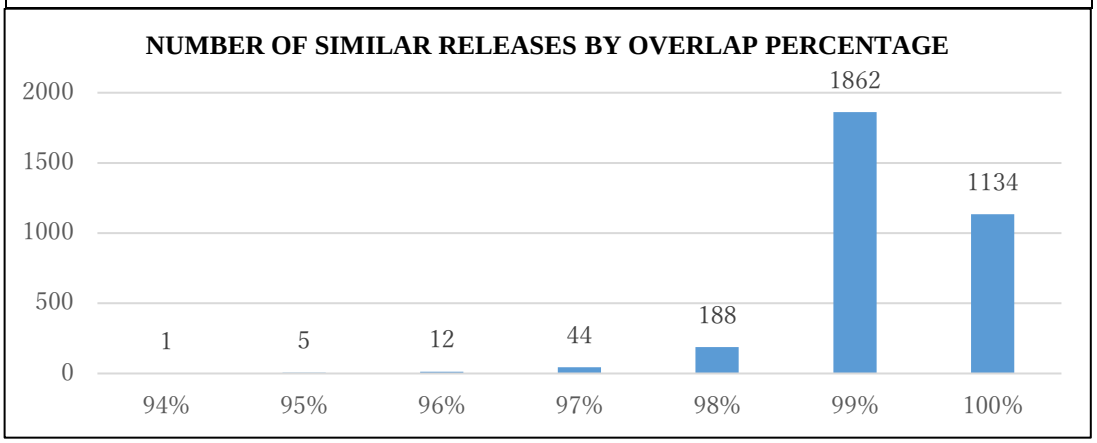
ANGELIQUE – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



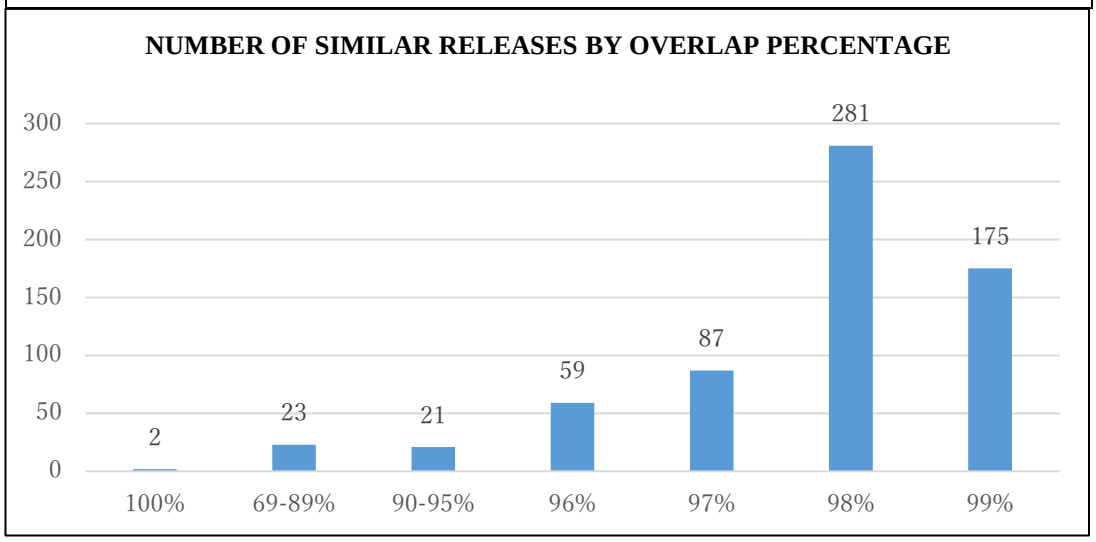
ANGELIQUE – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EROGESCAPE)



ANGELIQUE – SIMILARITY WITH OTOME CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



ANGELIQUE – SIMILARITY WITH OTOME CIG PRODUCTION (EROGESCAPE)



6.5. Case Study: *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! -Horny Magical Princess-*

6.5.1 *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! -Horny Magical Princess* – an overview

Introduction: *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! -Horny Magical Princess-* [Fxxx Me Royally!! Horny Magical Princess] is a women-oriented character intimacy game released in 2018 by Kalmia8. Unlike *Angelique* and other *otome* game works, *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* features explicit content and its main character is contextualized as being both aware of her sexuality and as being neither virginal nor sexually inexperienced. The game places players in the role of Kawai Marika, a princess from another dimension, where there is no value in chastity. Broadcasting its intentions with the tagline "if a kiss is a greeting, sex is a conversation," the game inverts the premise of otome games such as *Angelique*, putting the players in the role of the pursuer, rather than the pursued. Both Marika and her assistant maid Sana are characterized as being *nikushokukei* [carnivores] in the game's opening movie.

In Japanese media discourses, *Nikushokukei* is a sensationalist Japanese term for women who are proactive in their love life rather than adhering to normative gender roles in Japanese society.

The term is deployed in opposition to so-called *sōshokukei* men, who have supposedly lost interest in love and sexual relationships, and are characterized by tenderness, passivity, indecisiveness, and unreliability (Ōta 2016, 223, 227). Such men are depicted in media as being "ineffective communicators, sexually passive and uninterested in sexual relationships" (McLaren 2020, 346). Carnivore women, on the other hand, are characterized as being predator-like (Ōta 2016, 226). By characterizing their main, player-controlled characters as *Nikushokukei* women right from the game's intro animation, *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* elicits an assemblage of expectations from its players regarding what kind of relationships will be entertained and how the game proceeds. To that end, the game features two main romanceable characters: Nagatsuma Kaoru and Takai Ryūsei, with Marika's maid Utsumi Sanae becoming romanceable – as an extra finale and not as a fully-fledged story path – after the player has completed at least one route. Players navigate the game in a visual novel fashion, and the game can be said to be composed entirely of character encounters deployed in the visual novel screen configuration.

One interesting aspect of *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* is the contextualization of its main character and the reasons for developing intimacy. Different from *Angelique* or other women-oriented CIG software, such as the *Harukanaru toki no naka de* series, Marika, as the main character, is aware of her sexuality and is neither virginal nor sexually inexperienced. For example, Marika is described by Sana as being influenced by depictions of romance within Earth-made TV dramas,[51] which leads her to decide to find the one person to settle down with. This shifts the game back onto the tenets of *otome* games and *shōjo/josei* aesthetics, and the main female character falls back into being, for all intents and purposes, pursued and reacts to other character's attention, rather than being the pursuer.

[51] It should be noted that, in this case, Earth should be seen as a byword for Japan and its hegemonic cultural mores regarding sexual agency and gender roles.

Possibility Space: The game's possibility space, despite initial diegetic contextualization away from the player character being pursued by romanceable male characters, re-performs the heteronormative tenets of otome games, as already highlighted by Leticia Andlauer (2017, 179–180). At first glance, Kaoru and Ryūsei are deployed by the game as targets to be pursued, at least for the player, but examining the game's possibility space in relation to player conduct reveals otherwise: engaging with one character or another still maintains traditional avenues of navigation, character interaction, and imagination proper of otome games. This might, in fact, be necessary to push players toward self-recognition and toward producing adequate responses to the game's characters – to mobilize otome game imagination(s), as the game must adhere to otome game tenets when it comes to imagining characters. Despite being contextualized in a different fashion, the game's possibility space – especially in terms of what can be imagined as happening with the game's characters – is remapped to fit the existing practices and media literacies around *otome* games. As character intimacy games, releases like *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!*, no matter the distinctiveness in its narrative contextualization, fall back onto known practices. This, together with the mapping of the game, validates Azuma Hiroki's (2007) position regarding imaginative environments, and, in particular, the diminishing importance of individual creators (ibid., 67). The strong influence of an imaginative environment contouring otome media in turn supports the need for finiteness conceptualized by Gianmarco Thierry Giuliana (2017, 58–59). Another small point of interest is the possibility to rename the main character and to toggle her voice, in a way that may allow increased/diminished distance between players and character they control. This of course produces a strong impact on the intimacy progressions within the game. For the purposes of this case study, this study assumes that players have turned off Marika's voice, facilitating intimacy between them and the characters of the game.

Intimate Scripts: The game's cast of romanceable characters, even though it is composed of two males and one female, is focused on heteronormative romance, with main love interests, Kaoru and Ryūsei, conforming to *otome* game tenets. Kaoru is coded as a super-dedicated and serious individual, whose story path is ultimately oriented toward forming an idealized version of a Japanese nuclear family. Ryūsei, by contrast, is coded as a carefree individual, apparently at ease around women, even though he is not. Ryūsei's path through the story, which involves finding his own purpose in life, features increasingly fantastical elements. Romancing Sana, in what might constitute an option for players to engage in non-binary character intimacy, is presented as secondary, an extra for the player to achieve, rather than a fully-fledged option. The same conditions apply to the '3P'[threesome] ending, where Marika romances both characters.

As with Crescendo, the task of the player is to 'read' the game's characters in a way that allows them to choose the most appropriate navigation. Differently from Crescendo, however, the two main romanceable characters, Kaoru and Ryūsei, are not shifted towards increased verisimilitude as it might have happened with Crescendo's cast. Rather, the two are encoded as characters operating within the aesthetic continuum of otome/josei/BL/yaoi, with appropriate character designs pre-empty arrays of expectations. To produce the responses needed to imaginatively engage with characters in a fruitful fashion, players can – should – anticipate what may occur within the game, how a character will react to situations. Kaoru and Ryūsei, through their aesthetic encoding – the former as a carefree but apparently superficial *sasoi* character and the latter as a very serious *nonke* – elicit players towards mobilizing their media literacies. Consequently, the intimacy progressions that may emerge from Kaoru and Ryūsei's story paths are not made for the kind of emotional engagement found within *Crescendo*.[52] They both maintain

[52] This does not mean that all otome games are focused on one dramatic tone or a limited set of design and reception practices. One example of a game where players are encouraged to feel ambiguous and experience negative

a light-hearted tone, which rewards progress with positive feedback and sometimes long delays between decisions, encouraging players toward imagination and speculation. There is no way of hurting the two characters in any substantial way, although there is the possibility of incurring bad endings due to unsuccessful navigation, but they are not in any way built in a way that encourages players to produce negative emotional reactions. *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* is a piece of erotic entertainment and its overall assemblage is a reflection of that.

Depiction(s) of intimacy(ies): intimacy between Marika, Kaoru and Ryūsei in *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* merges aesthetic precedents from *otome* game narrative design with practices coming from men-oriented *eroanime-eromanga*. While there is a protagonist character that is stated to be sexually assertive and with sexual experience, she ultimately acquiesces and adapts to her chosen partner. There is a subversion in that both Kaoru and Ryūsei are stated, repeatedly, but be lacking actual sexual experience. The protagonist's stated sexual experience is in turn depicted as being intimidating towards both character others and, as stated above, partially re-shifts the story towards Japanese dominant social mores. Furthermore, Marika is described as being shy and clumsy about *romance*, rather than sex, which re-codes character interactions closer to existing *otome* game design practices. At the same time, it is Marika that mainly adapts to either Kaoru or Ryūsei, not the other way around, as the game's storylines become focused on either Kaoru or Ryūsei's personal tribulations.

Explicit content within *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!*, which serves as progress marker and as reward, although designed in continuity with *eroanime-eromanga*, places its focus away from female actant in favor of a focus on the scene as a whole. Also different from male-oriented CIG software and *eroanime-eromanga* is that the protagonist does not disappear from the image, as it

feedback is *Torikago no Marriage* [The Birdcage of Marriage] (Kalmia8 2014), which has the protagonist character trapped in a series of abusive relationships.

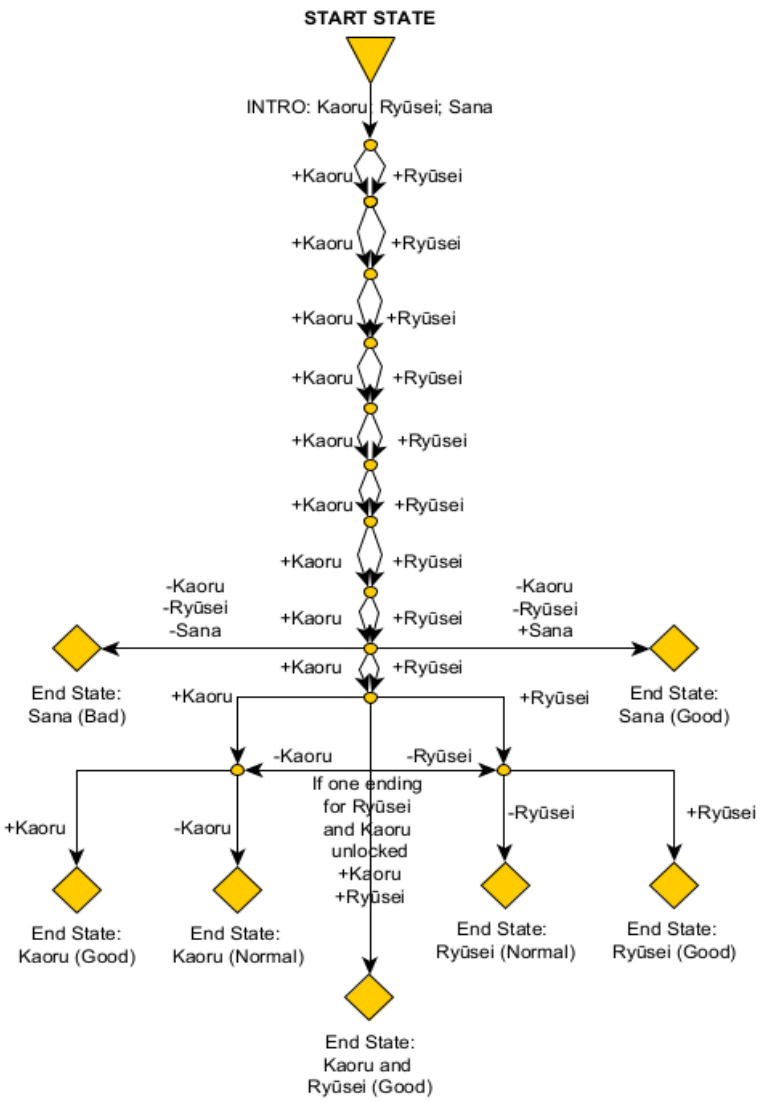
might happen in male-oriented CIGs (cf. Galbraith 2021b, 142-143; 2011b, n.p.). Instead, Marika's eyes are not obscured, and in fact contribute to setting the visual focus of reward images on all actants depicted therein, rather than the girl as it happens in male-oriented character intimacy games. This may arguably produce a distancing effect in players, which in turn may prompt additional avenue of research. How much distance can be put between players and characters before the game is no longer about character intimacy?

Figure 25: *Screenshot from Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! -Horny Magical Princess-. This image is taken from the game's introductory movie, and also reprised during the game. The emphasis on consensual intercourse is significant given precedent amidst Japanese character intimacy production in general. Screenshot taken by this study's author.*

Figure 26: *Screenshots from Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! -Horny Magical Princess-. Reward illustrations for completing each character's route. Note how the conclusion, despite the game's overall premises, reprise existing conventions in women-oriented video games in Japan. Screenshots taken by this study's author.*

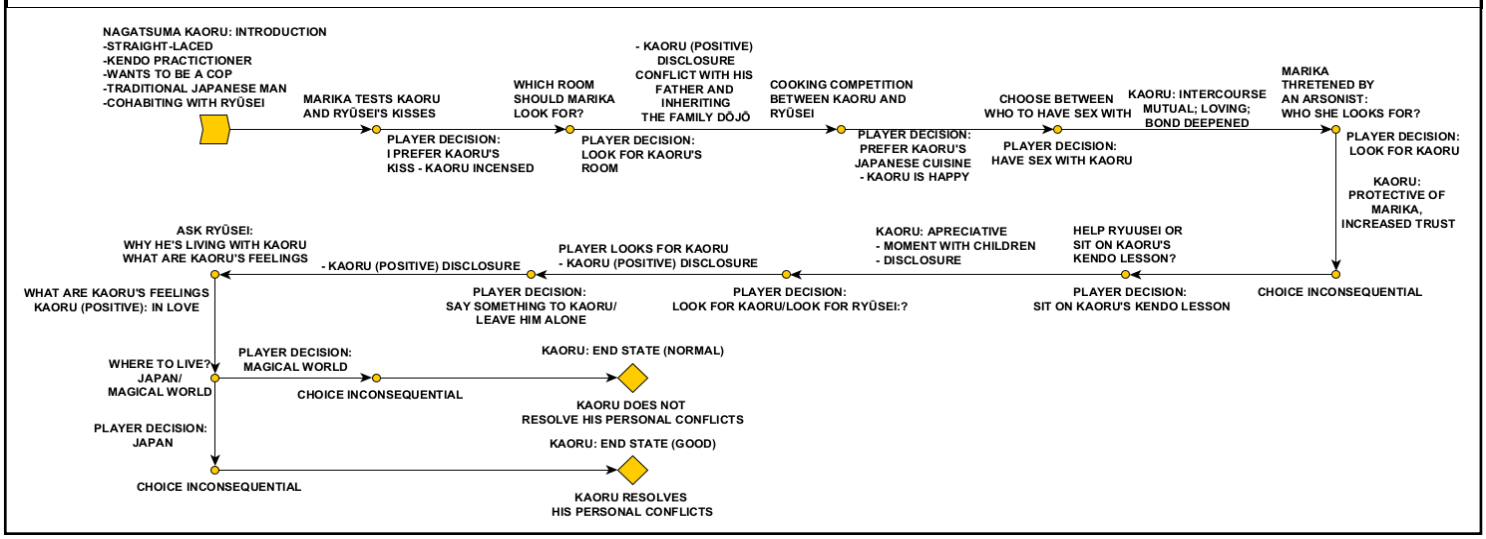
6.5.2 *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! – possibility space(s) and character intimacy progressions*

OHIME-SAMA DATTE XXX SHITAI!! – POSSIBILITY SPACE FLOWCHART



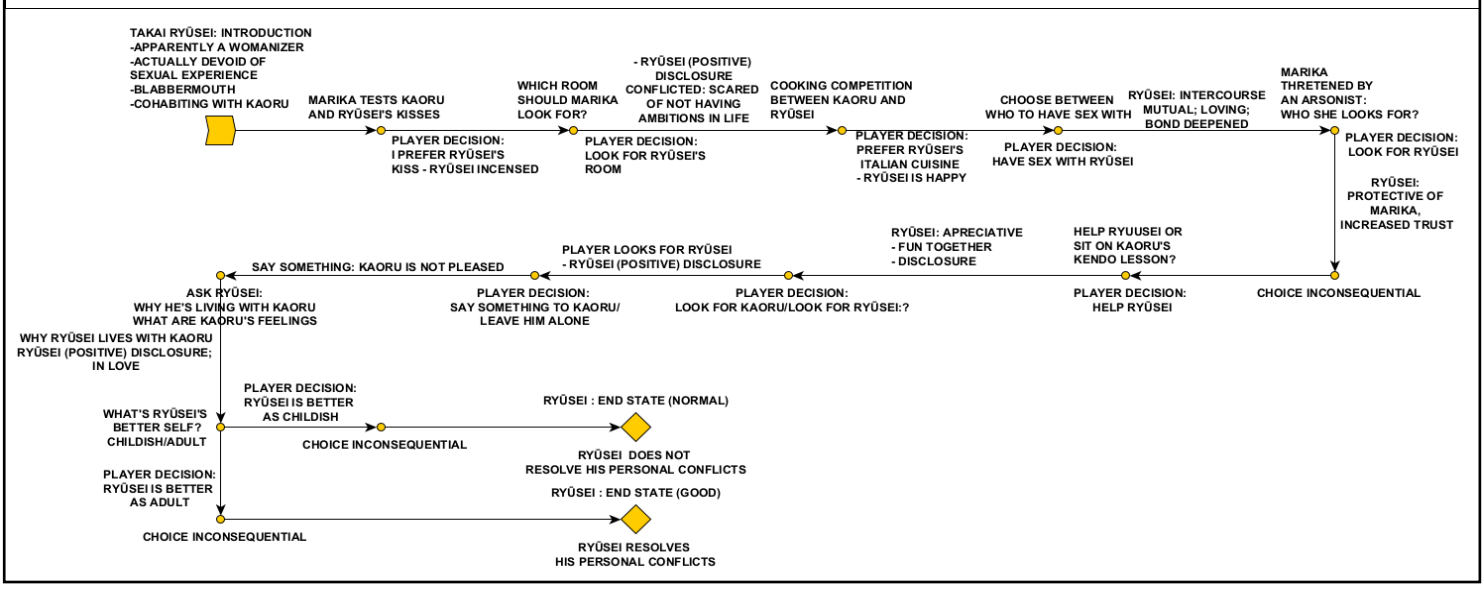
COMMENT: *As highlighted within the overview, Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! follows a straightforward structure, where player choices are presented in extremely straightforward fashion. This is very different from Crescendo, where players are exposed to multiple characters, all eliciting responses of players, while ultimately presenting choosing between characters as producing significant emotional feedback on the player. Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!! presents itself as being exclusively for entertainment value, and even the same-sex ending is presented as a small extra rather than a featuring of non-binary affections. This is reflective of the gap between women's media featuring depictions of homoeroticism and media produced by nonbinary persons such as Bara. The same statement can be extended to the game's non-monogamous ending, which is presented solely for entertainment value and neither possesses nor intends to possess or feature any other interpretation.*

OHIME-SAMA DATTE XXX SHITAI!! – NAGATSUMA KAORU'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



COMMENT: *Kaoru's intimacy progression is a foil to his less than strait-laced housemate Ryūsei. He is presented as traditionally Japanese, conflicted between the duty of inheriting the family dōjō and his dream of becoming a policeman. Community-oriented, Kaoru is struck by Marika's attractiveness but also put off by her sexual aggressiveness. The intimacy progression sees Kaoru opening in a more considerate matter, while also having Marika (and the player with her) producing a somewhat of an adaptation to Japanese social more. Also interesting is how choosing Japan over the magical world is the path that leads to Kaoru's better ending.*

OHIME-SAMA DATTE XXX SHITAI! – TAKAI RYŪSEI'S INTIMACY PROGRESSION



COMMENT: *Ryūsei's intimacy progression is presented in contrast with the events and personality present within Kaoru's, which are associated with depictions of traditional Japanese masculinity. At the same time, however, the way Ryūsei elicits responses out of players is contrasted in that the player is placed in a motherly role, towards nudging the character other towards adulthood and responsibility, while in Kaoru's case they are elicited towards assuming more of a traditional, heteronormative Japanese 'wifely' position in the end.*

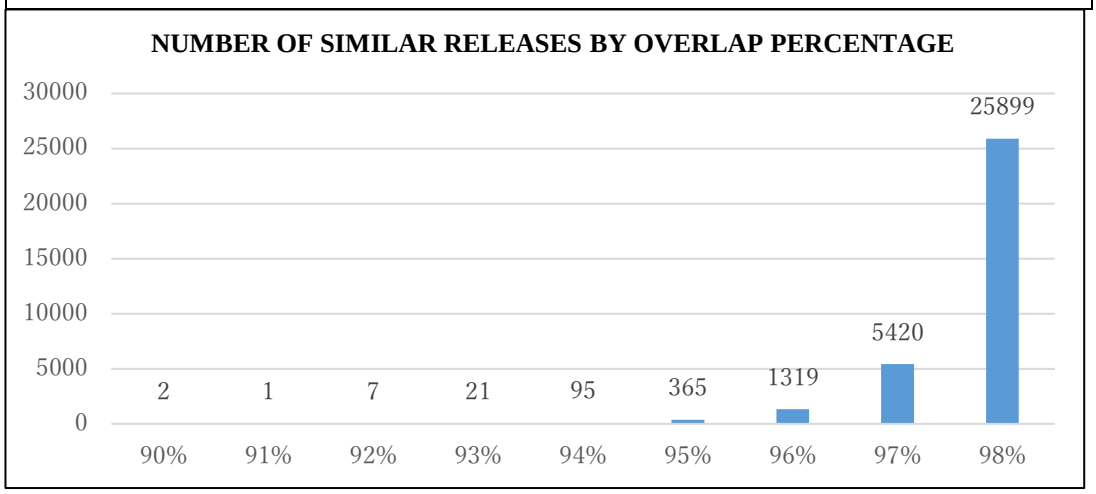
6.5.3 *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* – similarity by overlap (with tables)

Comparing *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* with the rest of the CIG production on *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape* yields interesting results. While like *Angelique*, the game confirms the absence of a marked gap within the two data sources, it also confirms it across two otome games. This can be a sign of differences in perspectives on male-oriented CIG software but a common, perhaps external perspective on otome games, given the general preference for male-oriented works on both fan-curated repositories. 'External' here is used in reference to the lack of instruments (tags, attributes, evaluations) for describing non-male oriented character intimacy games in an extended fashion. While *VNDB* is less lacking in this regard, its userbase shows a clear preference for male-oriented software. *EGS*, instead, does not feature enough instruments to describe BL and otome games in a level of detail resembling male-oriented software. Nevertheless, *Erogescape* shows a higher span within its data, with more works featuring increased dissimilarity to *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* When compared with other otome games, *VNDB* reports high levels of similarity, while *EGS* shows increased dissimilarities, even though the lowest margin remains at 68 per cent.

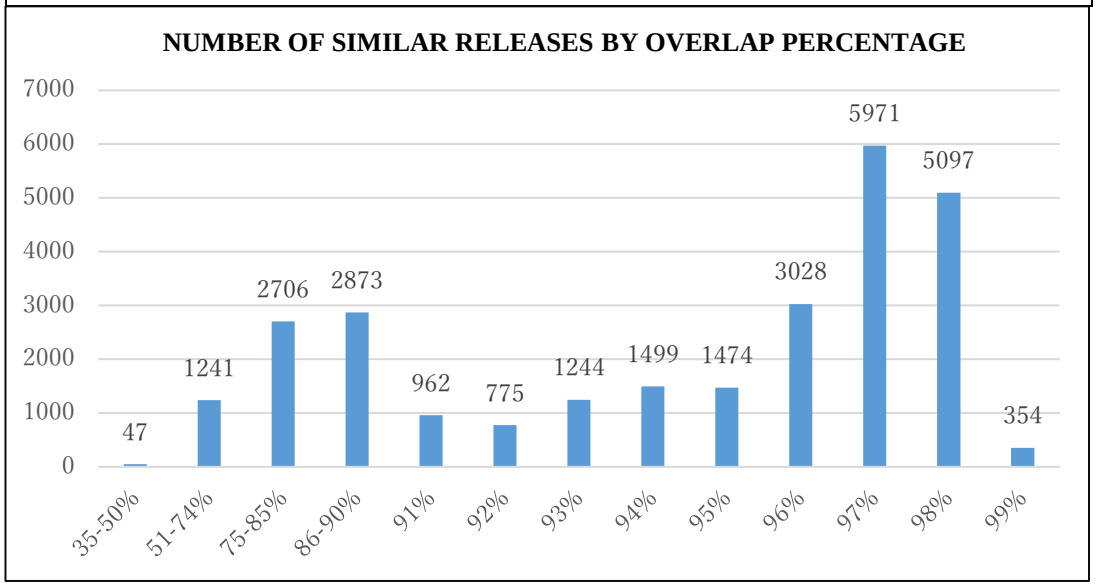
As an example of an *otome* character intimacy game, together with *Angelique*, *Ohime-sama datte XXX Shitai!!* appears distinct from wider character intimacy game production. This cannot be directly gauged through this study's data sources due to existing bias therein. However, different depictions of sexual and emotional intimacy, together with different player positioning toward character engagement substantiate the need for further research. The challenge, this time, is to find suitable at-scale data that allow for a better comparison between otome character intimacy games and the rest of CIG production. In *Erogescape*'s case, there seems to be a lack of interest in non-male-oriented releases. Cataloging instruments are present on *The Visual Novel*

Database but the community appears less interested in women-oriented titles. Lower quality data results in lower quality assessments and thus research affected by a higher degree of speculation and uncertainty. Nevertheless, these preliminary explorations in data about women-oriented CIG software constitute an interesting benchmark for future research.

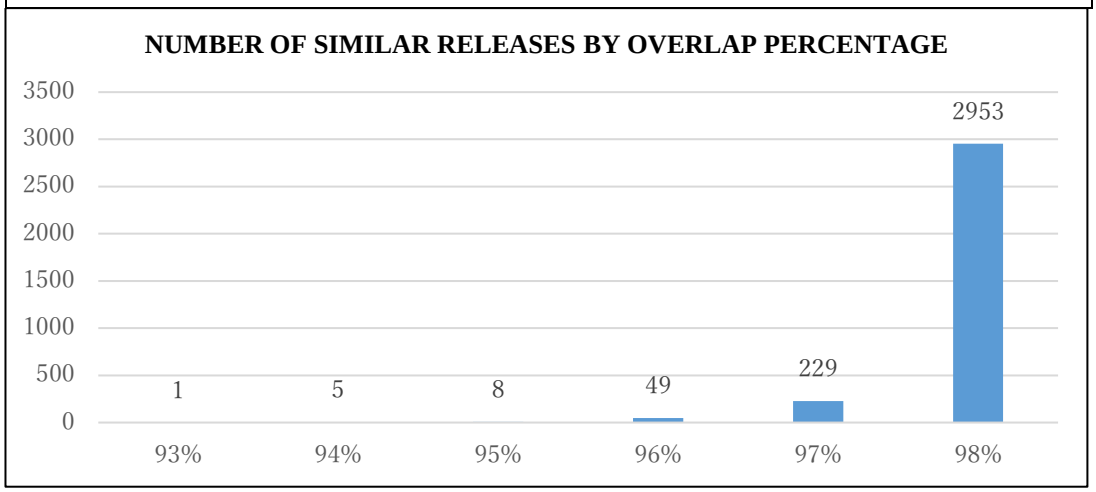
OHIME-SAMA DATTE XXX SHITAI!! – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



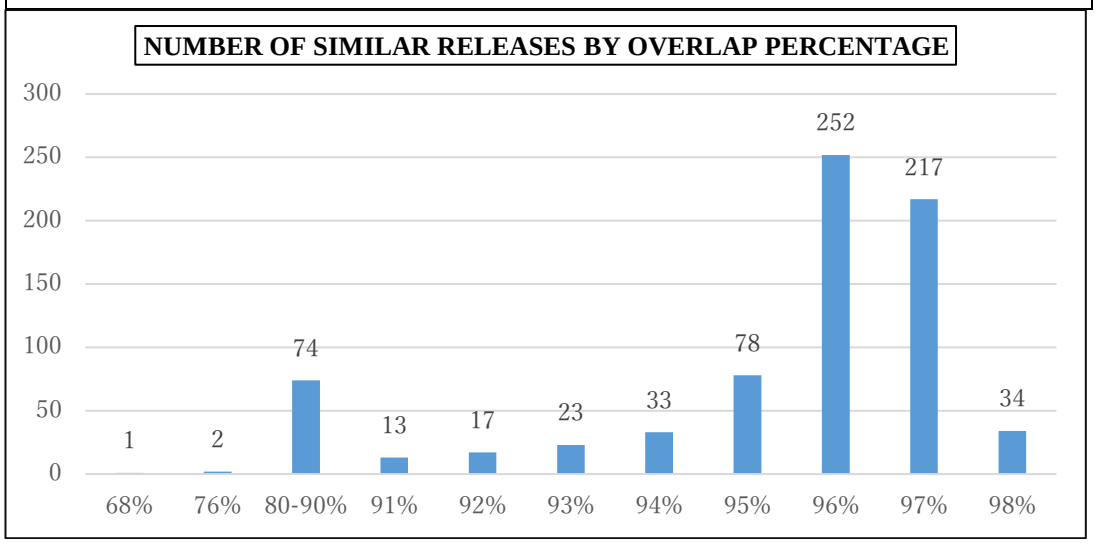
OHIME-SAMA DATTE XXX SHITAI!! – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EGS)



OHIME-SAMA DATTE XXX SHITAI!! – SIMILARITY WITH OTOME CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



OHIME-SAMA DATTE XXX SHITAI!! – SIMILARITY WITH OTOME CIG PRODUCTION (EROGESCAPE)



6.6. Case Study: The *Princess Maker series*

6.6.1 The *Princess Maker* series – an overview

Introduction: Different from all other case studies proposed until now, the *Princess Maker* series (Gainax 1991–1997; GeneX 2005; Gainax 2007) does not place players in the shoes of a protagonist character pursuing the affections of characters or being pursued by characters in love. Instead, it places players in the shoes of a parental figure, entrusted with raising a female child until she reaches an age capable of accomplishing a specific task. Usually, the protagonist character is a figure of past renown, such as a retired hero in a fantasy setting, or someone from present-day Japan, who is entrusted with the child from a parallel universe resembling Japanese-style fantasy. The circumstances of the child being entrusted to the player vary, and range from: the protagonist character adopting the child due to her being a war orphan (*Princess Maker*); the child being bestowed by a god (*Princess Maker 2*); a Faery wishing to live as a human child (*Princess Maker 3*); the protagonist being entrusted with the child by his lover (*Princess Maker 4*); and the player being entrusted with the protection of the last remaining heir to a royal family

(*Princess Maker 5*). All games in the series are, for all intents and purposes, management simulators, where players need to lay out their daughter's growth, setting up how she will eat, what kind of allowances she will have, what she will study, what kind of trade she will learn, what time she should be home at the end of the day, how she should conduct herself morally, etc.

The *Princess Maker* series is similar to early dating simulators, such as *Dōkyūsei*, in that it is a similar typology of schedule management game. However, the focus of in-game intimate relationships is shifted, away from directing players to engage in romance, toward relating to a character other, which is shown to be in total need of players in the role of parental figures. This makes the game related to Tamagotchi-like toys and software, fostering a sense of what Anne Allison (2006) calls "Techno-Intimacy": to play one such game is to enter "a disciplinary regime in which players become disciplined into assuming the subject position of (virtual) caregiver" (ibid., 172). This process produces intimacy both within the machine that runs the game and the character as a virtual entity (Galbraith 2011b, n.p.).

Possibility spaces: *Princess Maker* features a *filial* other, who always needs to be taken care of, rather than a *lover* character other. This produces different and distinct responses and provides us with a first example of character intimacy games that are concerned with intimate relationships other than love or sex. In the Princess Maker series, players are tasked with taking care of a putative daughter by setting her schedule through weeks and months for a variable span of years, usually covering the girl's growth from prepubescence to young adulthood. The game is about making the daughter's attributes – usually comprising of Love, Morals, Sensitivity, along with a set of professional skills and a set of hidden skills which may influence how the daughter responds to the player's commands. As players see their daughter grow, they are treated with depictions of her as a child, as a girl, and, finally, as a young adult. As she grows, she interacts with a cast of characters, which may grow with her, ranging from teachers and instructors to her classmates, re-

performing anime-manga archetypical situations. She may even fall in love with other characters, with her lover becoming decisive in determining which of the manifold endings (up to fifty in the case of *Princess Maker 5*) the player will reach when the daughter is mature enough for adulthood. What the daughter will do once she reaches adulthood is up to players: she might take up the mantle prepared for her and become queen, she can become a renowned warrior or wizard, dedicate her life to science and research, or marry one of many possible suitors. Finally, player control over the daughter is not absolute, and she can run away from home or spend money without her father's permission, amongst other things. All these outcomes are dependent on how the player has raised their daughter, and on which skills, traits and characteristics scores she possesses by the end of the game, in addition to specific conditions triggered by story events.

The way the game ends may not always be positive: negative conclusions range from the daughter being tricked into prostitution to her becoming the queen of demons in a fantasy universe. These negative conclusions do not come randomly or in a vacuum. Rather, players may indeed raise their daughters as a proficient adult entertainer or send her to work in a sleazy bar for pay, implying carelessness or outright bad parenting. Above every other ending there is always a conclusion that is only reached when all of the princess' stats are above the very high threshold, as a reward for player skill. Therein the daughter is depicted as ascending to the throne of the country/universe she originates from, becoming loved by the people and by her suitor. In earlier instances of the series (*Princess Maker 1* and *2*), such a conclusion awards the player with the highest number of points when final evaluations are handed over at the end of the game. In later instances, such conclusions lead to the most positive conclusion to the game's plot, where the daughter ascends to the throne, defeats the forces of evil, and marries the hero most resembling the main character of fantasy anime-manga. Other, non-standard conclusions may also occur, including, for example, the daughter marrying the protagonist character in a para-incestuous

relationship. Amongst character intimacy games, the *Princess Maker* series is interesting insofar as, out of the various typologies of CIG software examined and/or mentioned within this study, it is the only one where character navigation path, possibility space and, potential for intimacy progression coincide completely. The game's characteristic management system is about the daughter, the goal of the game is about the daughter and all decisions that players might take in-game are about the daughter.

Intimate scripts: Daughters in the *Princess Maker* series, always adopted into the protagonist's care, are never related by blood, but their visual designs connect to *moe* and its sexualization of cute femininity. These endings, which reference long-standing narrative conventions pertaining to para-incestuous relationships in anime-manga media, (re)categorize the player's position: they expose players' gazes, in conjunction with featured aesthetics, with such aims arguably acceptable only in the context of otaku/*moe*/niche anime-manga media, even in the absence of explicit content. within the *Princess Maker* series, it is difficult to trace a precise intimate script, especially as, while the games are visually design in accordance with *moe* aesthetics, they do not operate based on intimate encounters leading to sexual engagement. However the games are still about establishing, developing and fulfilling an intimate relationship with a fictional character, and place the player in the role to do so.

By reading of the visual designs of the daughters and their connections with the practices around *moe,* players are directed toward self-recognition as players of character intimacy games, even though affection is supposed to be parental and not romantic. If players endeavor to get the ending where the daughter marries their (non-blood related) guardian – which may happen only if players register themselves as male – the players are exposed to the ambiguity of *moe*-based aesthetics and practices, with the implicit question of whenever players may have responded to the daughter as fathers and not as lovers. The presence of recorded characteristics such as the

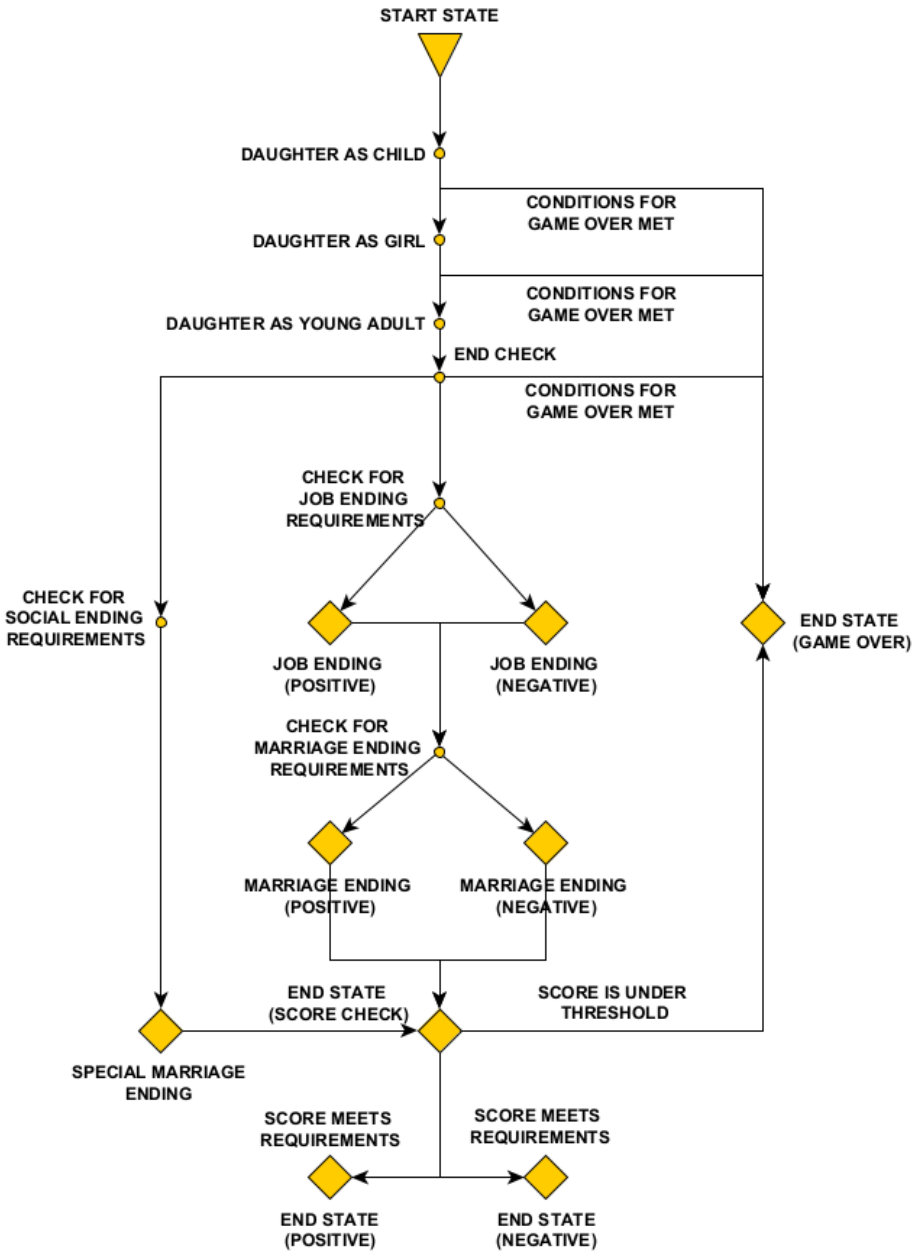
daughter's bust size is also of note, as it influences whenever the daughter will wear select outfits of a more risqué nature. The presence of said outfits reinforces the ambiguity of *moe*, and arguably more symptomatic of it, as it is much more probable for players to face the choice of whenever endeavor to have their daughter wear such outfits than to obtain the ending where the daughter marries them. Similar ambiguities are in play in games within the series which feature the daughter taking up prostitution as a job (*Princess Maker 1* and *2*). Sexualized depictions of the daughters, even if not as strong compared to adult computer games conjure up

Depiction(s) of intimacy(ies): the interesting characteristic of the princess maker series is that the player character is, by all intents and purposes, disembodied. They are never depicted, and while the daughter and other characters refer to the player, there is no depiction of intimacy or physical contact of any kind. The player is acknowledged as existing, but nothing beyond that. If, on the other hand, this might produce an increased sense of presence, it also may also create a sense of separateness that may prevent specific responses. Whenever this was intentional or not, it is a subject for future speculation. At the same time, the daughter responses, along with the way the daughter responds to the player and elicits the player towards responding to them is symptomatic of continued ambiguity, proper of *moe* aesthetics and connected practices of production and reception.

Figure 27: *Screenshot from Princess Maker 2. This screenshot showcases the degree of control that players may exercise over their daughter, in the form of choosing which job she should work at during the coming month, or whenever she should train in a certain field. Screenshot from Mobygames (https://www.mobygames.com/game/pc98/princess-maker-2/screenshots)*

Figure 28: *Screenshot from Princess Maker 4. This is a showcase of the manifold statistics that players are elicited towards keeping an eye on. Screenshot from The Visual Novel Database (https://vndb.org/v727).*

6.6.2 The *Princess Maker* series – *possibility space(s) and character intimacy progressions*

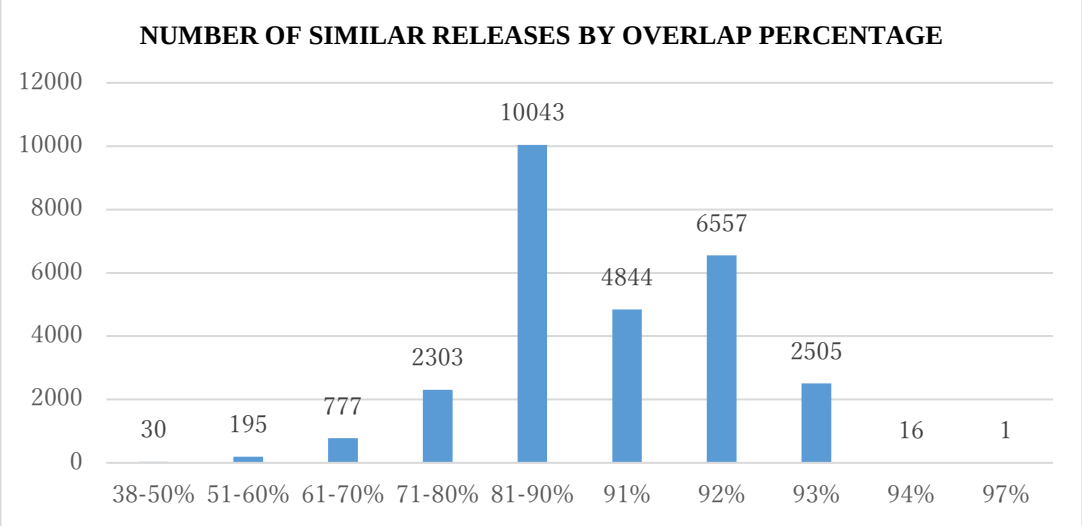


COMMENT: *all games in the series feature a possibility space that may be comprised roughly within the above graph. As highlighted within the overview, it is interesting to remark the importance given to marriage within the daughter's fictional existences. Not getting the daughter married nets a huge malus to the player's final score, reflecting both a reperformance of anime-manga tropes and a reflection of dominant social mores in the contest of production. Extricating where the anime-manga reperformances ends and where dominant Japanese social mores begin, however, is beyond the scope of this study.*

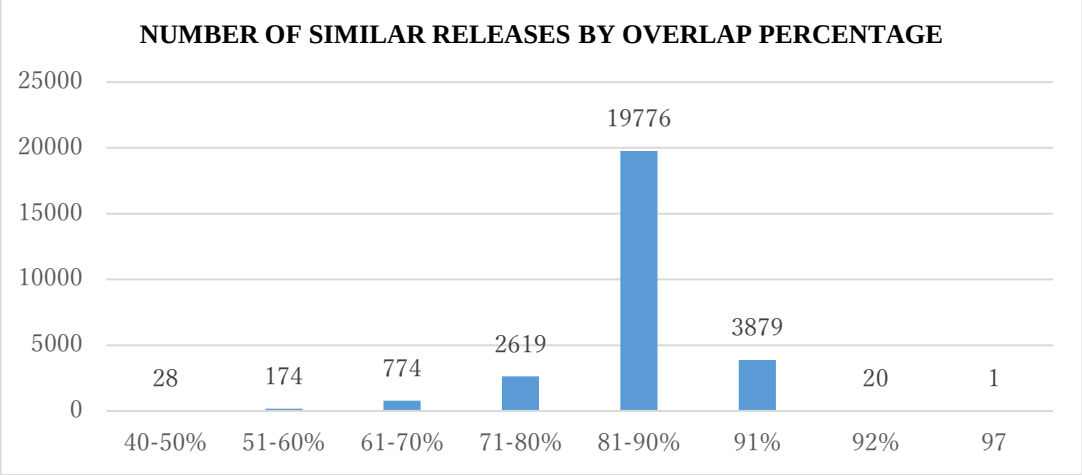
6.6.3 The *Princess Maker* series – similarity by overlap (with tables)

Looking at descriptive data on this study's sources and visualizing the game's possibility space and exposing the (dis)similarity between the *Princess Maker* series and wider CIG production also leads to interesting results: despite its distinctiveness amongst recorded character intimacy games, it still presents a significant overlap with key segments of the repository's data, despite not featuring the perspectival gap observed with *Crescendo* and *Evenicle*. For example, while it is possible to observe significant similarities between the *Princess Maker* series and wider CIG production on both *EGS* and *VNDB*, looking at *EGS* returns more significant differences, with 6401 releases featuring an overlap of 85 per cent or less. The results are different for *Princess Maker 4*: while 26325 releases on *The Visual Novel Database* are labeled as being 99% similar, releases on *EGS* are much more scattered, with 7191 works ranging from 90 to 35% similarity. Earlier instances of the series, cataloged solely on *Erogescape*, also return similarly scattered results when confronted with wider character intimacy game production. *Princess Maker*'s peculiarity, however, appears to be ill-fitting for both *VNDB* and *EGS*: the presumptions of both data models (characters are to be romanced and won over, there is sexual intercourse) make full at-scale comparison unwieldy with the data and classifications at hand. As emphasized within the overview, the practices and aesthetics of *moe* are deployed with romantic and sexual attraction as the main focus of engagement. While this ambiguity is acknowledged in-game through endings where the daughter marries their guardian – which, it needs to be restated, may happen only if players register themselves as male at the beginning of the game – it is not visible from the perspective of VNDB and EGS. There are no references to the possibility of such a para-incestuous relationship within neither of the two repositories. Therefore, additional data on raising simulations is needed. At the same time, their limited number may make at-scale approaches accessible by human researchers, rather than *requiring* massive data-driven approaches.

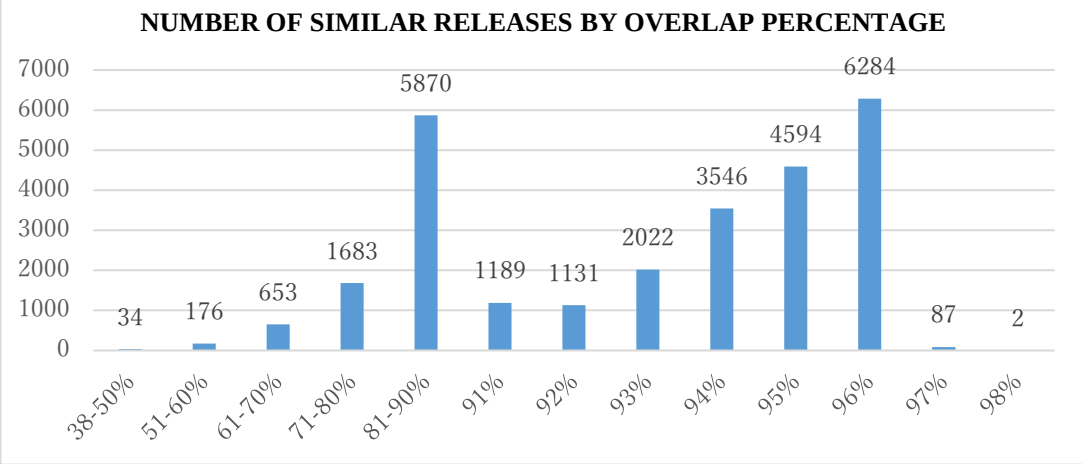
PRINCESS MAKER – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EGS)



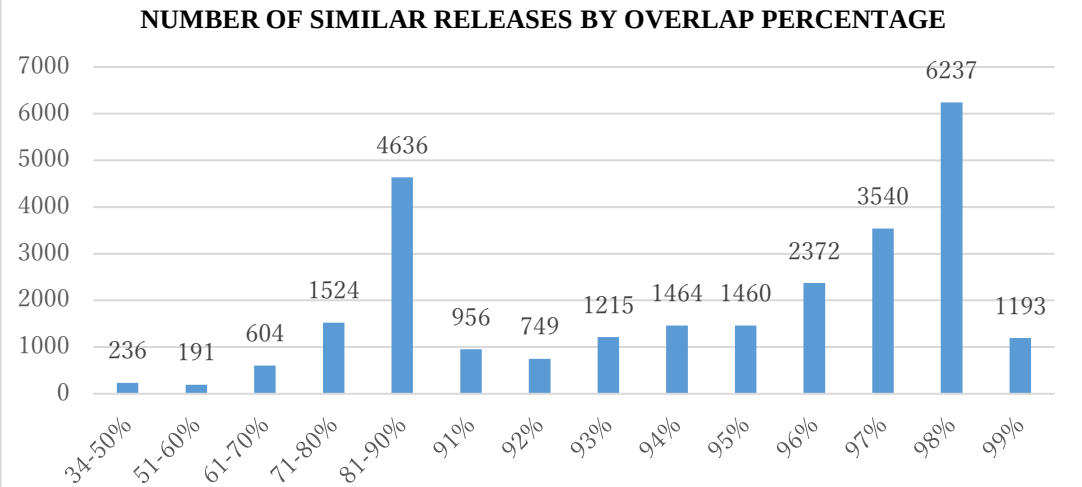
PRINCESS MAKER 2 – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EGS)



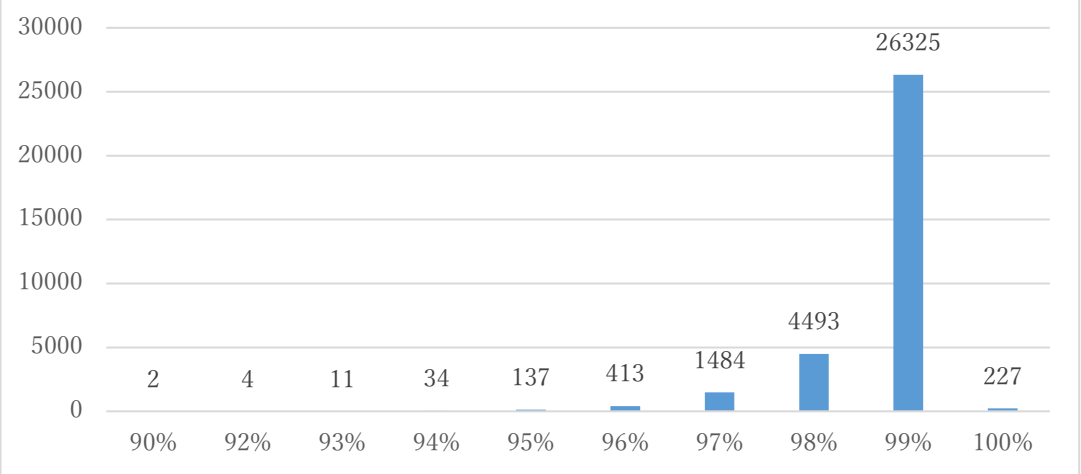
PRINCESS MAKER 3 – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EGS)



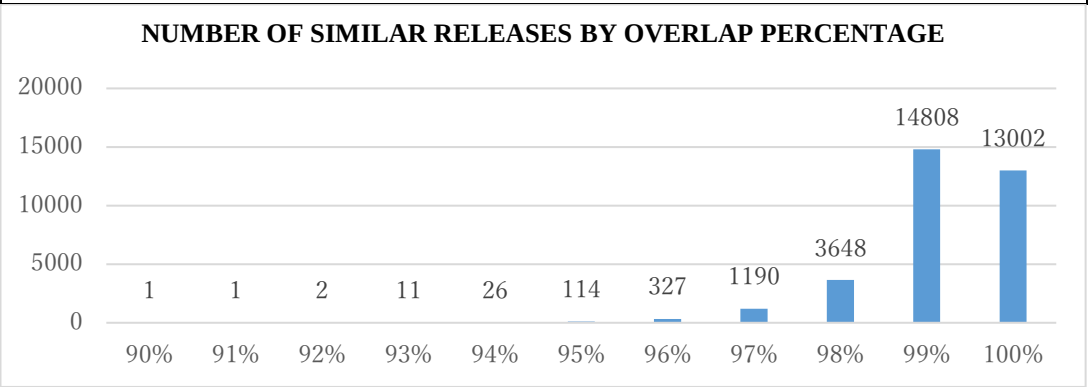
PRINCESS MAKER 4 – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EGS)



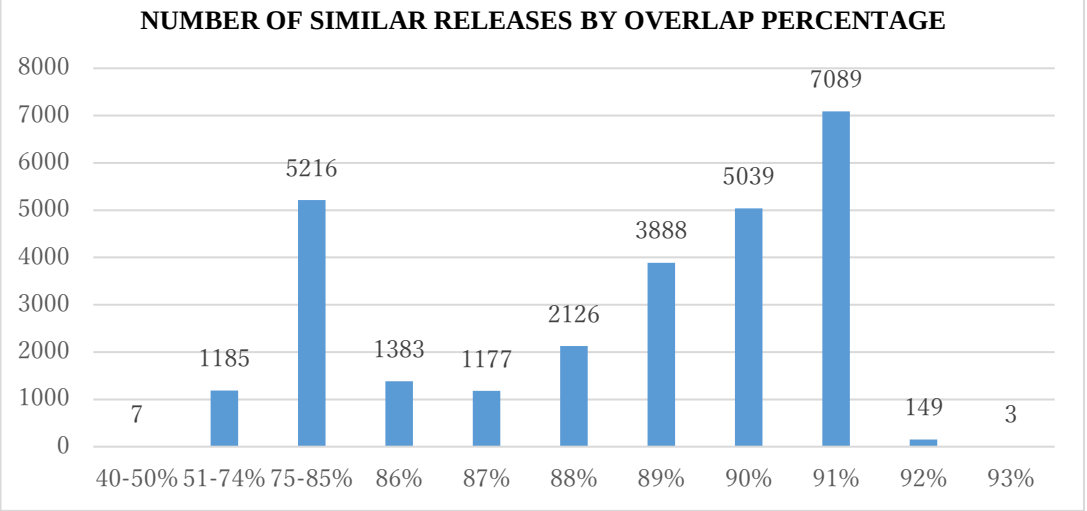
PRINCESS MAKER 4 – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



PRINCESS MAKER 5 – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (VNDB)



PRINCESS MAKER 5 – SIMILARITY WITH WIDER CIG PRODUCTION (EGS)



PART 7: CONCLUSIONS

- Being Aware of Playing at Intimacy -

This study started with a question, directed initially at a fuzzy ensemble of video game software, whose best descriptor was 'adult computer games,' or *adaruto gēmu* in the original Japanese. That question was simple in form, but unbelievably vast in its ramifications: "what is going on with adult computer games?" and subsequently, "Why they *stand out*?" Starting from adult computer games in Japan as its entry point, this study has identified significant gaps in scholarships, especially within disciplines concerned with Japanese pop culture and video games such as AMO studies and game studies. It has observed that the breadth and width of existing descriptors, be them pointing at content – adult computer games (Galbraith 2021a), *bishōjo* games (Galbraith 2021b), otome games (Andlauer 2017; Ganzon 2017a), romance simulation games (Saito 2021, or dating simulators (Taylor 2007), to name a few – or mechanical systems, such as a visual novel (cf. Douglass 2020; Crawford and Chen 2017; Kamei-Dyche 2017; Hichibe 2006). It has also examined such video games in light of systemic practices such as *moe*.

Finding the term to be excessively unstable due to its subcultural collocations, this study has reappraised *moe* as a foundational aspect of Japanese CIG software in the light of studies of media reception. It has re-appraised *moe* through the lens of studies of parasocial phenomena, namely, those one-sided responses where media users relate with media characters in way akin to relations with living beings (Liebers and Schramm 2017, 12; Schramm 2015 [2008]). Building from such a reappraisal, this study has produced its preliminary assumption: the focus on developing intimacy with characters, interpolating software operation, reception practices and production practices is distinct from other types of video games. Rather, centering the experience of a video game on establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with fictional characters produces a distinct typology of video game software, regardless of its geo-social-technical context of origin.

7.1. Reflections on the aims of the research

This study has framed three key arguments:

1) Interactive software centered around establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate relationships with characters – visual novels, dating sims, *bishōjo* games, otome games, BL games, etc. – merit renewed classification as 'character intimacy [video] games.'
2) Explicating and emphasizing character intimacy as the foundational element of 'character intimacy games' decouples studies of CIG software from unstable subculture terms (*moe*).
3) Decoupling CIG from Japanese subculture allows the emergence of a character intimacy game as a distinct analytical category, employable across disciplines and geo-social contexts.

The study has thus built on character intimacy as the foundational element of CIG software, seeking to understand *what is going on* with character intimacy games, proposing a quartet of research questions:

1) What is 'intimacy' in character intimacy games? What is intimacy pointing at, and what kind of phenomena emerge with 'intimacy' in character intimacy games?
2) How is intimacy embedded in the assemblage of character intimacy games? How does it concern mechanical systems? How does it concern player engagement?
3) What is the role of characters in character intimacy games? Are certain characters better suited toward eliciting intimacy in players than others?
4) What is required of players for engaging intimately with characters?

This study has subsequently looked at how best engage with character intimacy games, considering the relative scarcity of approach and information. With high production volumes, scatteredness of circulation, and a niche position within the media landscape, engaging with character intimacy games solely via exemplar case studies is unwise. To address such challenges, impossible for a single researcher to tackle, this study – itself developed within the context of the Japanese Visual Media Graph project – has deployed fan-curated databases as its at-scale data source, juxtaposing individual case studies with at-scale validation. This study has subsequently

built a genealogy of character intimacy games. It has highlighted the multiple evolutionary lines that have converged towards what now constitutes the landscape of character intimacy games in Japan. By highlighting common ground, converging toward character intimacy as the focal point of in-game activity, further reinforcing the need to focus on intimacy as an *in-game* activity.

Adopting an approach rooted in Espen Aarseth and Sebastian Möring (2020)'s proposal for ludo-hermeneutics, this study built on genealogies of character intimacy games to develop a method for CIG ludo-hermeneutics. In particular, this study has recognized a double nature in CIG software, namely, that it is a typology of video games that is reliant on the player co-operating with the game software by way of imagination. Players of character intimacy games in Japan produce *moe*; that is, parasocial responses usually of the loving kind. To do so, the player must subscribe to the game's prescriptions regarding intimacy and respond imaginatively to embedded cues in character designs (Galbraith 2021b, 128–129).

It is an employment of emergent media literacies, but also a process that, paraphrasing Aarseth and Möring, deploys character intimacy as a praxis of gameplay, and turns a character intimacy game in its "ontological result" (2020, 6). The software this study refers to as character intimacy games can be from a plethora of existing genres. This may allow players to ignore the intimacy aspect of the game in favor of other elements (such as, for example, strategy or puzzle solving, should these be present). Therefore, this study assumes that users playing character intimacy games recognize themselves as players of character intimacy game software, and knowingly seek character intimacy from playing such a game. This position is phrased irrespective of the subcultural contexts from which a CIG software may come from. While it is developed within the context of video games from Japan, it is developed to be usable across borders and across contexts. Reviewing the results of this study, a character intimacy game is a product of an assemblage of software code, art assets, and narrative content inviting players to produce parasocial responses to

fictional characters. As argued at the conclusion of the game's theoretical section, a character intimacy game is therefore:

- A video game where traversal is contingent on players knowingly establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate bonds with fictional characters and *recognizing themselves as doing so*.
- A video game where the assemblage of software mechanics and narrative content facilitates intimacy between player and characters conducive to the emergence of parasocial phenomena.
- A video game where intimate interaction takes place in two co-joined possibility spaces: the space emerging from software and the space emerging out of shared player imagination(s).
- A video game where player/character intimacy is contingent on (sub)culturally dependent roles – interpretative communities, intimate scripts, etc. – which the player must take to complete the engagement.

'Character intimacy game' constitutes a new descriptor for a significant portion of Japanese video game production, whose circulation is nevertheless global in scope (cf. Galbraith 2021a). By highlighting character intimacy as the focal point of in-game activity, character intimacy game becomes an ontological precondition for subsequent ludo-hermeneutics. The term also constitutes a clear term of reference for future research into video games centered around character intimacy. It is a new tool for research into what is an ensemble of video games. These games, while coming preponderantly form Japan and Japanese-aligned contexts, should not be confined exclusively to them. Uncoupled from the subcultural affordances proper to the Japanese media landscape and other aligned contexts – *moe*, anime-manga, *eroanime-eromanga* – the descriptor may be used within, without and in-between Japanese studies, game studies, media studies and, hopefully, by all scholars interested in video games centered around character intimacy.

7.2. Reflections on this study's contributions

This study has made a series of statements regarding video games of character intimacy, how they are capable of eliciting parasocial phenomena and how they incorporate said phenomena within their overall structure. These statements coalesce in a descriptor, *character intimacy game*, capable of organizing the manifold varieties of video games centered around character intimacy. Defined as 'video games whose traversal is contingent on players knowingly establishing, developing, and fulfilling intimate bonds with fictional characters', *character intimacy game* allows to de-couple approaches video games centered around character intimacy from subcultural phenomena such as *moe* and BL and characters entities such as *bishōjo* and *bishōnen*.

This study originates in the challenges present in delimiting and cataloging video games centered around character intimacy. It is certainly possible to stop at adult computer games, placing the focus on explicit, adult content obscures the significant number of software releases where adult content might not be the sole focus of the gamic experience or not present at all, such as women-oriented video games. At the same time, resorting to other existing descriptors based on software mechanics, such as visual novel, in turn obscures the minority but not insignificant segment of video games going beyond the static framework of visual novel games. Furthermore, employing other, subculture-based terms such as *bishōjo* game, *galgē*, *ren'ai* simulation, BL game or *otome* game leads to each descriptor producing obscuring others. Therefore, this study has argued for placing the emphasis on intimacy, intended in wider fashion, encompassing both emotional and physical form of intimacy. These include sexual intercourse, but also expand to include filial, parental, friendships. In this fashion, the character intimacy game descriptor is able to encompass both software exclusively focused on pornographic entertainment, the more subdued offerings that contextualize sexual content within their plot, releases which do not feature adult

content at all and even raising simulators, the very small subset of releases in which players assume the role of a parental figure.

This study has operated at the intersection of three fields: AMO studies, the English/Japanese language theoretical discourse related to Japanese cultural industries, the production and consumption of its products, and their fans; game studies, the study of video game software and finally studies in media reception, with a specific focus on the study of parasocial phenomena. All three fields present limitations which can be solved by the intervention of the other two: AMO studies is rooted in the study of static media, with a prevalence of animation and sequential art and subsumption of Japanese video games into static media; game studies, originating within northern Europe and the United States, has difficulties engaging with Japanese video games in Japanese due to linguistic barriers; studies in media reception have generally not engaged with video games, while also assuming until recently that parasocial phenomena were only of amicable nature. This study has combined perspectives from all three fields to properly address both the mechanical nature of character intimacy games – software states, limiters, progress bars, etc. – and the imagined engagements – parasocial phenomena – elicited in players, through the examination of a specific media landscape rooted in the Japanese geo-socio-technical context.

To approach character intimacy games, this study built on the definition provided before and expands it to account for how players might 'play at intimacy', that is accounting for the ensemble of imaginative actions envisioning players and characters as the actors in an intimate relationship of varying types – romantic, filial, antagonistic – as part of in-game activity or activities correlated to game software. This includes the imaginative actions and bodily feedback – sexual arousal, emotional engagement, empathy – that might be felt by players as they navigate the game. This ensemble of imaginative actions, a concatenation of events where intimacy between players and characters deepens or is otherwise altered, is defined within this study as the 'Intimacy

Progression', a framework for CIG ludo-hermeneutics. This highlights the requirement for players to self-recognize themselves to be playing a character intimacy game. It has deployed Espen Aarseth and Sebastian Möring's (2020) proposal for ludo-hermeneutics, emphasizing gameplay as a hermeneutical practice. Subsequently, this study has highlighted how CIG players must be aware and willing to feel certain types of emotional feedback. Without such self-recognition, character intimacy games revert to typologies connected to their software mechanics – visual novel, JRPG, strategy game, puzzle game etc.

Together with the definitional challenges outlined before, this study has had to content with a scattered but extremely vast production, which makes the reliance on supposedly representative case study at risk of being excessively arbitrary. Therefore, to properly engage with CIG production, the study juxtaposed a ludo-hermeneutical approach rooted in the definition of character intimacy game with at-scale approaches employing data derived fan-curated databases. By relying on two influential repositories – *The Visual Novel Database* and *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-* – this study gathers the views of potentially thousands of players, crystallized into their data recording efforts. In doing so, this study can approach character intimacy game production at scale. By juxtaposing wider production with case studies of interest, this study approaches character intimacy games from both 'above' and 'below', highlighting commonalities, frictions, and gaps between individual releases of note and wider CIG production.

This study, in reviewing existing theory in the field of AMO studies, has highlighted the need for both decoupling character intimacy games from their tight connection with Japan as a media landscape and as a physical place of origin and the opposite necessity of still accounting for local conditions. On the one hand, there is a tendency towards subsuming character intimacy games into anime-manga media, with limited attention given to their nature as video games. On the other hand, the conditions on the ground, namely the strongly interconnected nature of Japan's cultural

industries and the practices, both industrial and fan-based of content production and reception – *moe* especially – must be acknowledged. Both these approaches should not however cause for a reprisal of the style/aesthetics versus made in Japan distinction proper of manga studies. At the same time, it should also not lead to the immediate correlation of a media type with existing, Japanese societal problems, as it happens within fields preoccupied with Japanese cultural production. CIG software is a niche segment whose circulation is restricted.

In reviewing research in media reception, this study has draw attention to the existence of several phenomena which are able to better describe Japanese-specific practices such as *moe*. This study shifts away from employing *moe* in its role as descriptor for both an aesthetic lineage rooted in the late 80ies and a set of practices whose boundaries are fuzzy and blurry. In its stead, this study has highlighted the existence of continuing scholarship on media engagement – concepts such as presence, transportation and immersion into a fictional world – and parasocial phenomena. Building on parasocial phenomena allows to sever the link between *moe* and Japan. It is no longer a uniquely Japanese phenomena with essentialist undertones; rather it is a descriptor for a series of parasocial phenomena, valuable for their comparatively high level of formalization and commonality across players and producers. Furthermore, examination of the above phenomena has led to a review of existing scholarship on sexual interaction – sexual scripts theory. Sexual scripts theory [SST] (Simon and Gagnon 2003, 1987a, 1987b, 1984) posits that human sexual interaction as contingent on "culturally available messages that define what 'counts' as sex, how to recognize sexual situations, and what to do in a sexual encounter" (Frith and Kitzinger 2001: 210). This study has examined SST and expanded upon it, building a comparison with actual scripts in software, and expanded the focus from sex to intimacy. Character intimacy games each feature at least one such script, whose roles players must accept to properly engage with the game's feedback loop and the responses given by characters in-game.

Finally, in reviewing scholarship in game studies, this study has produced a review of software mechanics in video games, and how they can be conductive or not towards imagined character intimacy. Software mechanics are both dependent on their contextualization and capable of creating context, and thus creating the conditions for which a work of interactive software might be distinguished as a character intimacy game. As an example of such mechanics, this study has offered Jolen Blom's (2020) system of affection, which would mark a software as a character intimacy game when it constitutes the avenue of video game traversal upon which players may reach the game's success or failure states. However, the presence of such mechanical systems is a necessary but not sufficient condition, and alone cannot represent the sole way of distinguishing CIG software. Rather, it is necessary to envision a character intimacy game as two possibility spaces: one emerging from the game's mechanical systems, and another space, created by the avenues offered by the game for players' imagined character intimacy. This latter space is of course contingent on player self-recognition and on the intimate scripts featured within the game.

Self-recognition as a player of character intimacy games is in turn also dependent on environmental conditions within the media landscape in which CIG software may circulate. The three perspectives provided in this study encompass environmental conditions, namely, the media landscape(s) and discourse(s) at specific points in time, the ensemble of dispositions toward software and the act of playing character intimacy games. These conditions include the game itself and its scopic regime, namely the ordering of possible, impossible, recommended, and discouraged in-game action(s) and conducts; the position of character intimacy games within the wider media landscape – whenever playing them represents a socially acceptable act or not; the conditions generated by the platforms on which CIG software circulates. This study has provided a discussion and validation of conditions pertaining to playing character intimacy games, juxtaposing theoretical discussion with data-driven explorations. This study has revealed that, according to the

two data sources, most character intimacy games do feature a specific type of interface encouraging imagined intimacy, and in turn produce a specific scopic regime. It has also revealed that their position as dangerous media has obscured a substantial amount of works which do not feature the typology of content for which CIG software has been positioned as harmful. Finally, the position of personal computers in Japan has facilitated the concentration of character intimacy games on personal computer machines, while existing regulations have prevented vast circulation of CIG software on home consoles. Most character intimacy games in Japan are indeed released and circulated on the personal computer.

Finally, this study has examined how player/character relationships might be approached, operationalizing the intimacy progression in a series of five case studies. The intimacy progression within CIG software is approximated as a series of moments where it is possible to delineate a before and a after in the state of intimacy between the player and the character. It is subsequently superimposed onto a map of the possibility spaces offered by select games. While the majority of character intimacy games may feature restricted possibility spaces, some are not so, with manifold potential for player/character intimacy. If, on the one hand, a possibility space may call for a specific role to be taken by the player along with a specific gender orientation, another one may offer different roles, which may in turn elicit different intimacies, all tethered to the same baseline. At the same time, it is also important to remember that this study, by not including empirical players, assumes that players at the very least find no issue with the role they are called to play within CIG games. What the study has engaged with are data sources which may crystallize a consensus view, but cannot account for every possible player, every possible gender identity, every possible sexual orientation and combination thereof.

7.3. Future approaches and research avenues

While this study has grounded character intimacy games as a descriptor for games centered around character intimacy, it is far from being exhaustive. Hopefully, it will also be far from being the last words on the subject. This chapter provides a few possible avenues for research within, without, in-between and about character intimacy games.

The first avenue of potential future research lies in **non-Japanese character intimacy games**: while these have been mentioned through the course of these studies, the mentions are far and few in numbers, which may not be reflective of actual numbers. In fact, there has been a steady growth of character intimacy games from non-Japanese sources in the last ten years (2012-2022). These vary from works attempting to feature aesthetic continuity with Japanese media landscapes, such as *Katawa Shoujo* (Four Leaf Studios 2012) to other works which instead have adopted to pursue a unique aesthetic strategy such as *Subverse* (Studio FOW Interactive 2021). These works, while arguably fewer than their Japanese counterparts, are growing, and are increasingly recorded on fan-curated databases, as it's the case with *Katawa Shoujo* on VNDB. Together with the increased attention given to video games centered around character intimacy in general (cf. Sousa 2021; Saito 2021; Salter et al 2018), a systematic approach to non-Japanese developed CIG software is the logical next step in research about character intimacy games.

At the same time, it is also important to consider CIG software developed by non-Anglosphere and non-Japanese creators. Chinese and Korean-developed software are exemplary in number and ways in which character intimacy might be articulated. Of these games, *Azur Lane* (Shanghai Manjuu and Xiamen Yongshi 2017) and *Blue Archive* (Nexon Games 2021) are especially representative of tendencies in non-Japanese, non-Anglosphere CIG development. Their operating in what is complete continuity with Japanese competitors might, on the one hand, further the need for systematic approaches to non-Japanese CIG game development, on the other it poses the

interrogative on why such titles shouldn't be included together with their Japanese counterparts. Establishing new ground into such segments of (g)local CIG production is therefore a logical next step if research into character intimacy games is to continue.

The second avenue of potential future research lies in ***characters***: while existing research has clearly privileged characters and has emphasized user/character relationships, there is new ground to thread in the connection between characters and character intimacy games. While these considerations are extremely easy to extend towards *bishōjo* and *bishōnen* characters and their system of *moe* elements, as the work of Patrick Galbraith (2021b; 2011a; 2011b) and Nicolle Lamerichs (2019; 2015), to name but two scholars, has already shown that characters possess the power to elicit user interaction and imagination. However, is the featuring of characters within character intimacy games having an effect on their design, or is it because of their appealing design that characters are featured in CIG software?

While the above may certainly be a chicken and egg question, it is a question that is very well worth exploring. Are there commonalities across subcultural contexts that may lead to theories of intimate characters, just as character intimacy games may emerge in contexts other than Japan's? What set of attributes would character need to possess to become able to elicit players towards imagined intimacy, irrespective of their context of origin? While this study has provided a suggestion in the form of intimate scripts, examining their presence within characters is another research project altogether. Connected to this question is the influence of cute aesthetics: should characters in character intimacy games be cute, or otherwise sport cute aesthetics? The emergence of anglosphere-originating CIG software which does not feature cute aesthetics, and in fact, elects to present characters rendered in photorealistic 3D graphics like *FreshWomen* (Oppai-Man 2022) is already a direct counterpoint to Japanese and Japanese-inspired CIG production. These

emerging works, with their intimate scripts and gamic frameworks are a very interesting and arguably important successive step in research about CIG software.

The third avenue of potential future research is ***the ramifications of VR apparatuses and environments on intimate Imagination***: the number of works of interactive software featuring intimate interaction with characters within a VR environment is growing. Examples include the *Spice&Wolf VR* series (SpicyTails 2019-2020) and *Fate/Grand Order VR* (DELiGHTWORKS 2017), which feature interactions with select characters in an open-ended environment. The two examples still reference the ensemble of media literacies that are proper to the Japanese environment, but at the same remove the necessity for players to continuously bridge the gap between incomplete sets of information. Exploring the potential for and the modes for player/character interactions in a VR environment is another interesting next step in the study of character intimacy games. Distinctly from other avenues of future research, exploring VR-based CIG software is contingent upon the examination of peripherals and spaces where VR might be based.

The potential emergence of peripherals such as sex toys, tactile suits and other peripherals capable of providing direct feedback through avenues other than imagination would require substantial integration from fields such as platform studies. Connecting such peripherals with a VR character experience would in turn potentially shift the role of imagination away from the simulated environment. At the same time, a decline of the role of imagination in favor of more tangible feedback would also increase the importance of tangible, identifiable elements, while also increasing the level of separation between spaces where character intimacy may happen or not. The spaces of VR experiences in themselves and where VR experiences – where the peripherals are positions, where the player might be seen from 'outside' VR – would also become even more important for research. The level of separation between spaces where playing at intimacy is

possible and spaces would become even more important for research, and this would surely impact research approaches.

The fourth avenue of potential future research is the ***gendered nature of character intimacy games and intimate scripts***: due to its data sources, this study was not able to address the split between male-oriented and female-oriented players and the manifold variables in-between – such as male players playing female-oriented software and vice-versa. These unapproached variables are an important avenue of research that is ripe for further approaches. In fact, positing a series of 'non-ideal' players differing from an intimate scripts' intended recipient in either gender or sexual orientation constitute an additional piece of the puzzle to into how character intimacy may operate or not. In fact, as highlighted within the previous section, the impossibility for this study to address empirical players produces an open question regarding whenever a character intimacy game with an intimate script calling for roles to be filled by actors with a certain role and sexual orientation can produce similar effects in players of different genders and/or sexual orientation.

Expanding research on character intimacy games into the possible friction between player and intimate script is thus one of the logical next steps that future approaches may take. To do so, avenues of research include: research on empirical players such as approaches to segments of fan communities such as *fudanshi*, male fans reading women-oriented BL works (cf. Nagaike 2019; 2015) and exploration of segments of existing player populations for data on consumption and reception of works not oriented towards their respective niches. Another important avenue of approach lies in the minority of works which feature both male and female love interest, and which typologies of intimate scripts they may articulate in relation to their role as actants in an intimate relationship. Finally, exploring intimate scripts in comparative fashion across multiple media landscapes also presents significant potential: what kind of commonalities, friction and gaps may exist between intimate scripts operating in different media landscapes?

The fifth and final proposed avenue of potential future research is concerns **furthering data-driven research:** this work is an exploration of character intimacy games and a demonstration of how quantitative data from fan-curated data sources can be used in conjunction with traditional methods in the humanities. Building from fan-curated repositories, this study has grounded character intimacy games as a typology of media works, juxtaposing the researcher's perspective with the fan's perspectives as expressed by its data sources. Data-driven research in anime-manga media is beginning to take shape (cf. Kacsuk 2021b) and as more and more data sources become available, more complex approaches to data will also take shape. In particular, the employment of multiple data sources, the comparison of multiple descriptive data models, sources and geo-socio-technical contexts underneath may shed new light into existing debates.

For example, the introduction of data-driven research into the 'what is manga/anime/Japanese video games' debates might allow to better define what Japan is as a socio-economic-technical context – as the examination of EGS has suggested within this study – or what 'Japanese' means as an ensemble of aesthetic, production, and reception practices – as shown by approaches based in VNDB. Therefore, ulterior approaches employing fan-curated repositories are the fifth avenue of research that might stem from this study. In particular, more advanced ways of approaching data might not be limited to taking 'snapshots' of anime-manga production at scale. More articulate data-driven approaches could be used to validate existing propositions within AMO theory more accurately, one example of which is Zoltan Kacsuk's validation of Azuma Hiroki's positions through the use of statistical analysis (2021b). More generally, this study hopes to be a first precedent in a line of approaches to Japanese media employing data to answer large-scale questions which could not be properly verified until now.

APPENDIX

- Attributes/Evaluations in Erogescape -

A NOTE ON THE MATERIAL AHEAD

Due to the relative difficulty in accessing *Erogescape -Erogē Hyōron Kūkan-* from outside Japan, this appendix provides a list of all attributes and evaluations on the site, with English translations for both evaluation names and descriptions (there are no descriptions for attributes). It features four tables: A1.1 for attribute names, IDs and their translation in English; A1.2 for evaluation s, their IDs their name in the original Japanese and English translation; A1.3 for evaluation descriptions connected to their respective IDs in the original Japanese; A1.4 for evaluation descriptions connected to their respective IDs in English translation. Some description might pertain to sexual practices where consent is either blurred or absent, or is explicitly presented as deviant, or that implies misogynistic attitudes. Reader discretion is advised.

A1.1. Table of Attributes

ID	Attribute name	Translation
4	体験版有り	Demo available
5	SLG	Simulation game
6	RPG	Role playing game
7	コンシューマ版あり	Adapted from arcade center
8	修正ファイルあり	Updated version available
9	声なし	Not voiced
10	一部声あり	Partially voiced
11	主人公の名前を変更可	Renamable protagonist
12	OVA 有り(18 禁)	Has ova porn
13	ACT	Action game
14	麻雀	Mahjong game
15	3D	3d game
16	ファンディスク	Expansion pack
17	リニューアル作品	Remastered release
18	STG	Strategy game
19	ETC(その他)	Other video game genre
20	TBL(テーブル)	Tabletop game adaptation
21	同人(オリジナル)	*Dōjin* (original work)
22	ボーイズラブ	Boys love
23	ディスクレス起動可	Can be run without disk
24	XP 動作不可	Cannot be run on Windows XP
25	アクティベート有り	Has activation procedure
26	既読スキップ無し	Cannot skip already completed sections
27	オートモード無し	No auto read
28	シーン回想無し	No scene recollection
29	DVD-PG	Dvd-pg
30	MAC 版あり	Available on MAC computers
32	主人公声あり	Voiced protagonist
33	男性声あり	Voiced male characters
36	キネティックノベル	Kinetic novel
37	拡張ファイル・ダウンロードあり（有料・特典）	DLC available (paid)
38	拡張ファイル/追加ファイルあり(無料)	DLC available (free)

39	携帯電話専用	Made for cellphones
40	ED 時スタッフロール強制	Unskippable staff roll
41	選択肢選択時セーブ不可	Save unavailable during choices
42	NT 動作不可	Cannot be run on Windows NT
43	メディ倫(CSA)	Evaluated by CSA
44	MS-DOS	MS-DOS game
45	ダウンロード販売有り	Online retail version available
46	フォント変更可能	Font change available
48	単体動作不可	Non stand alone release
49	起動ディスク必要	Requires activation disk
50	ディスクレス起動可(機能制限有り)	Can be run without disk has DRM
51	廉価版・再版版有り	Low budget reprint version available
52	携帯電話版有り	Has cellphone version
53	無料配布	Distributed for free
54	同人(二次創作)	Doujin derivative work
55	デフォルメ絵あり	Has super deformed art
56	VN(ビジュアルノベル)	Visual novel
57	バックログ機能（テキスト巻き戻し）無し	No backlog feature
58	ボイスリピート機能（音声巻き戻し再生）無し	No voice replay
59	女性主人公がいる	Female protagonist
60	パックもの	Package release
61	ブランド解散	Creator has dissolved
62	選択肢に時間制限がある	Time limited choices
63	TV アニメあり	Has tv anime
64	主人公の声担当が女性	Protagonist voiced by woman
65	非売品	Not for sale
66	Nscripter	Programmed in Nscripter
67	吉里吉里	Programmed in Yoshiyoshiri
68	H アニメーション有り	Has porn animation
69	DVD-PG 版有り	Has DVD-PG release
70	ディスクレス起動可(修正パッチ要)	Can be run without disk patch required
71	ディスクレス起動不可(初回のみ)	Can be run without disk from the start
72	CDDA	Evaluated by CDDA
73	陰毛描写	Depiction of pubic hair
74	育成モノ	Raising simulator

75	ジョイパッド対応	Meant for joypad
76	フルスクリーン固定	Fixed in full screen mode
77	発売後回収	Withdrawn from sales after release
78	声優非公開	Voice actors unknown
79	Vista 動作可	Can be run on windows vista
80	Vista 動作不可	Cannot be run on windows vista
81	エフェクト（演出）カット不可	Sound effects cannot be skipped
82	乙女ゲーム	Otome game
83	雑誌付録	Sold with a magazine
84	主人公以外は H をしない	Only the protagonist has sex
86	選択肢無し	No alternative options
87	バックグラウンドボイスあり（H シーン）	Background voices in porn scenes
88	アヘ顔・白目描写	Ahegao moaning face
89	主人公が女装/男装	Protagonist crossdresses
90	タイピングゲーム	Typing game
91	ファンディスクあり	Has expansion pack
92	低価格(当初の発売価格が 4000 円以下)	Budget release (price never above 4000yen)
93	当初の発売価格が税別 4001〜7000 円	Price at release is 4001-7000yen (plus tax)
94	OVA 有り(非 18 禁)	Has non porn OVA
95	コンドーム描写有り	Depicts condoms
96	グロあり	Has guro
97	精気を吸い取る	Soul sucking game
98	リニューアル作品あり	Has remastered release
99	エロゲ版あり	Has eroge release
100	パック販売あり	Has pack release
101	戦う変身ヒロイン	Transforming heroine
102	単品販売なし	Part of bundle release
103	フルスクリーン時アスペクト比固定	Fullscreen mode has fixed aspect ration
104	ワイド画面固定	Widescreen resolution fixed
105	ワイド・スクエア画面切替可	Can be changed to widescreen
106	アニメ等のゲーム版	Adapted from anime series
108	BD-PG 版有り	Has Blueray release
109	UMD-PG 版有り	Has UMD release
110	目隠しあり	Depicts blindfolds
111	断面・体内描写あり	Internal body shots

112	お嬢様学園	School for young maidens
113	主人公声あり（フルボイス）	Voiced protagonist full voiced
114	JCRC(映像倫)	Evaluated by JCRC
115	配布終了	No longer distributed
116	人体改造	Body modifications
117	YU-RIS	Programmed in Yu-ris
118	LiveMaker	Programmed in Livemaker
119	バッググラウンドボイス有り（H シーン以外）	Voiced extras outside of porn scenes
120	7(32bit)動作可	Can be run on Windows 7 32bit
121	7(64bit)動作可	Can be run on Windows 7 64bit
122	XP 動作可	Can be run on Windows xp
123	Win2k 動作可	Can be run on Windows 2k
124	RPG ツクール	Made in rpgmaker
140	ダウンロード販売のみ	Download only release
141	卑語音声無修正	Uncensored vulgar language
153	7(64bit)動作不可	Cannot be run on Windows 7 (64bit)
154	Windows7 対応版あり	Has Windows 7 version
156	スマホ対応版有り	Has smartphone version
164	性転換	Sex change
165	アクティベート解除パッチ有り	Has patch removing activation system
166	アクティベート期限切れ	Has time limited activation
167	フルボイス	Full voiced
168	主要キャラのみボイスあり	Only main characters are voiced
169	女性キャラのみボイスあり	Only female characters are voiced
181	8 動作可	Can be run on Windows 8
182	8 動作可(32bit のみ)	Can be run on Windows 8 32bit only
284	ダウンロード販売有り(ルート単位)	Has download version single character route
322	10 動作可	Can be run on Windows 10
332	バックグラウンドボイスなし（H シーン）	No background voices in porn scenes
377	エロシーンがリアルタイム 3D	Porn scenes in real-time 3d
384	ノベライズ有り	Has novelization
385	コミカライズ有り	Has manga adaptation
392	エロ SE 有り	Has binaural erotic sound performances
404	ArtemisEngine	Programmed in artemisengine
412	E-mote	Has e-mote system

422	ファンブック付録	Includes fanbook
423	原画集・ファンブックあり	Has concept art book
427	製品版 DL カード同梱	Comes with product version dl card
484	ティラノビルダー	Programmed in Tyranobuilder
485	Unity	Programmed in Unity
486	Ethornell	Programmed in Ethornell
487	11 動作可	Can be run on Windows 11
488	受精描写あり	Depicts impregnation

A1.2. Table of Evaluations

ID	POV 名	Translation (short)
1	おかずに使える	Porn just porn (nukigē)
2	後味悪すぎ	Bad aftertaste
3	ゲーム性のある飽きないゲーム	Never gets tiring
4	ひたすら長い。長すぎるよ、このゲーム。	Long
6	BGM に惚れ惚れ(*'-')	Good background music
7	インテリなエロゲー	Intellectual
9	ハードボイルド要素が高い（作品）	Hard-boiled
10	コメディ要素が強い笑えるゲーム	Comedy
12	とんでもなく短い。短すぎるよ、このゲーム。	Short
13	主人公が素敵	Beautiful
14	ファンタジー	Fantasy
16	妹ゲー	Little sister
17	修正ファイルがあるゲーム	Requires Patch
22	インモラルなエロゲー（近親相姦含む）	Immoral (incest, etc.)
23	魂の作品	Soul Impacting
24	期待はずれだった作品（ゲーム）	Disappointment
27	ミステリーの世界	Mystery
28	エロゲー初心者にお勧めな作品	For beginners
29	声がいいゲーム	Good character voices
30	成長物語	Growth
33	萌えゲー	Moe
34	キャラを取り巻く世界観が良いゲーム	Immersive World Building
35	『薬品』がテーマ・伏線となっている作品	Drugs
36	ヒロインが朝起こしに来る	Heroine wakes protagonist
38	名作になりそこねた作品集	Failed Masterpiece
39	バグゲー	Many Bugs
40	歌がいいゲーム	Good Songs
42	死生観	Existentialist
43	演出の光るゲーム	Excellent visuals
44	恐怖・ホラー・伝奇物	Horror/Ghost Stories
45	脇役が光るゲーム	Good supporting cast
46	タイトルの良いゲーム	Title

47	ムービーが良い！(エロ動画除く)	Good cutescenes (except porn cutscenes)
48	伏線がしっかり回収されているゲーム	Good Narratives
50	炉利(ロリ)	Lolita
51	続編、リメイク版がプレイしたい！	Needs Sequel
52	声が合ってない！	Voices don't fit characters
54	年上スキー	Older woman
55	環境周りが快適	All settings
56	おロで GO!!	Blowjob
57	シナリオがいいゲーム	Good Scenario
59	♂×♂	Yaoi/Boys Love
60	人外のヒロインが魅力的（人間以外のヒロインが魅力的）	Non-human Heroine
61	名シーン・名台詞あります	Great scenes great writing
62	淫乱へと落ちていく「過程」が楽しめるゲーム	Corruption from madonna to whore
63	ヒロインが異邦人（外国人）	Foreigner Heroine
64	一般人にお勧めでないゲーム	Not for the general public
65	癒し系ゲーム	Soothing
66	メイドさん…	Maid
67	感動した（泣いてしまった）ゲーム	Inspiring
68	妊娠エロゲー	Pregnancy
70	プログラム技術が高いゲーム	Programming Technology
72	主人公がダメ！	No good
75	ゲテモノをつかったシチュエーション	Bestiality tentacles trash
78	テキスト GOOD	Good prose
80	Ｈシーンのある女の子がいっぱいいるよぉ	Many Girls
81	CG が美しいゲーム	Beautiful CG
83	着物・巫女・袴ゲー	Kimono Miko Hakama
84	男たちが集団で…(輪姦)	Gang Rape
86	ゲームバランスを評価する POV	Game balance
88	鬱ゲー	Utsugē
89	（熱く燃える）熱血系ゲーム	Hot Blood
91	スカッとするゲーム(スカトロのあるゲーム)	Scat
96	アニメが良い！(エロ動画除く)	Good animation (non-H)
97	締まりの悪いゲーム	Bad Narrative Structure
98	オリジナリティが無い（または少ない）	Unoriginal
99	ディスクレス起動 OK(ABC に御注意)	Diskless Booting

100	タカビーお嬢ヒロインがいるゲーム	Domineering Mistress
103	濡れ場必要なし！	H-scenes Unneeded
105	18禁ならではの大人の物語	Story untellable to generalist audiences
106	中だるみする＆テンポが悪い	Bad pacing
108	母乳が出るゲーム	Lactation
109	狂気をテーマにしているゲーム	Madness
110	シナリオ全般とエロのバランスが良い	Balance of Porn and Plot
112	キャラの立ち絵造形が良い	Good Character Sprites
113	攻略難度高い作品	Difficult
114	高スペック必要	High System Requirements
116	バカゲー	Super Silly Game
117	真の漢は背中で語る、ダンディズム	Manly Man
120	家族っていいなぁ	Family
121	女の子同士	Lesbian
122	調教の『虜』	Captivity Training
124	女の子に襲われちゃう	Bullied by women
126	夏ゲー	Summer
127	愛を確かめ合う初々しいぇち	Virgin Sex
128	ゴールが一つだけのゲーム	Only one goal
131	システムが斬新なゲーム	Innovative System
132	クリア後、本編以外のお楽しみ	Fun outside main story
133	オッパイ星人万歳なエロゲー	Huge Breasts
134	魅力的なヒロインがいるゲーム	Attractive heroine
135	埋もれている名作	Buried masterpiece
137	このキャラクターが不快（または単純に、ぶち壊し）	Bad Offensive Character
139	誰だよ！このタイトル考えたの！	Outlandish title
143	焼きもち万歳	Jealousy
144	春ゲー	Spring
145	秋ゲー	Autumn
146	冬ゲー	Winter
148	着衣・コスプレHに見どころあり	Sex with Clothes
150	リアルな近未来	Near Future
151	舞台が田舎	Countryside
152	「あまりにも」ご都合主義な展開	Too Convenient Situations
155	作業プレイなゲーム	Painful to play

156	悪役たる悪役	Villain
157	戦闘描写（シーン）が印象的	Combat
163	ヴィヴァ！学園物！	Academy
167	不思議世界に戸惑うキャラ達	Mysterious World
169	変な口癖	Strange habit
172	前作をやってから	Better played after prequel
174	春夏秋冬、複数の季節	Four Seasons
176	隊長！ 地雷を発見しました！(クズゲー)	Landmine work
177	心に残るバッドエンド（ネタバレ注意＋補足説明を参照願います）	Memorable bad ending
180	共通シーンが長い	Long common scenes
182	入手が困難なゲーム	Difficult distribution
185	聖水(おしっこ)	Pissing
190	起動ディスクが必要	Disk required
192	魅力的な攻略不可キャラクター	Attractive but unconquerable
193	主人公がバトルに強い！	Strong
194	背景設定の深いゲーム	Heavy foreshadowing
198	舞台が「過去」	Fairy Tale
200	3P 以上バンザイ	Threesome
205	ヤリゲー	Yarige
211	寝取られ属性	Cuckold
214	魅力に溢れた幼なじみ	Childhood friend
216	アナル SEX のあるゲーム	Anal
219	バカップル万歳	Idiot Couple
225	自慰美少女シーンのあるゲーム	Masturbation
226	看護婦さん…	Nurse
229	彼女はプリンセス（姫ゲー）	Princess
235	奇人変人・愉快なキャラクターが登場するゲーム	Freak
236	既婚者、未亡人との H があるゲーム	Married/Widow
238	SM のあるゲーム	SM
240	ツインテールが魅力	Twin-tail
244	眼鏡…眼鏡…	Glasses Girl
245	SF 仕立てのゲーム	Science Fiction
250	陵辱、レイプ	Humiliation
253	強気のあの娘が魅力的	Strong girl/Tsundere
254	推奨クリア順あるゲーム(ネタバレ注意)	Best played in a certain order

258	思わずツッコミ！パロディネタが面白い♪	Parody
261	得する？雑学、うんちく、トリビア	Miscellaneous
262	選択肢が印象的	Impressive choices
263	双子姉妹が魅力的	Twins
270	ちょっとした工夫のあるゲーム	Secret Extra
276	純愛物語	Pure love
279	精液描写の濃いゲーム	Semen
287	三角関係の描写（または葛藤）のある作品	Love triangle
298	購入特典が素晴らしい！	Feelies included
309	フタナリで二度美味しい	Futanari
310	姉妹	Sisters
311	姉と弟の関係	Treats protagonist like little brother
314	戦う女の子達	Fighting Girls
317	ケモノっ娘萌え！	Kemonomusume
318	シナリオが平易（またはシナリオの平易度）	Easy to understand
343	イキまくる女の子	Comics
346	お店が舞台	Stores
350	一緒にお風呂♪	Bath together
356	ザッピング・マルチサイト・複数視点	Multiple points of view
359	主人公がアンチヒーロー	Anti-hero
362	ドジっ娘・天然キャラ萌え	Dumb girl/Naive character
363	甘やかせヒロインのいるゲーム	Pampering
367	バイオレンス・スプラッター	Violence/Splatter
369	女装もの（女装ネタ）	Cross-dressing
377	イメチェンするヒロイン	Makeover
379	主人公はモテモテ！	Irresistible/Has Harem
399	足フェチ（脚）	Foot Fetish
402	魅力的な従姉妹！	Cousin
412	ヒロインと一緒の生活が楽しい	Everyday Life with Heroine
415	無表情な女性キャラが登場するゲーム	Expressionless
416	ヒロインの一人称が「僕」「ぼく」「ボク」	Bokko Daughter
420	オールクリアに価値あり	Requires All Routes Cleared
424	魔女っ娘·魔法少女	Magical Girl
426	「部活動」が印象的な作品	Club Activities
441	痴漢プレイ・痴漢行為のあるゲーム	Molestation

459	バカソングのあるゲーム	Silly Song
465	女教師	Female Teacher
468	キャラが集う印象的な場所	Special Place
470	露出・羞恥プレイのあるゲーム	Exposure play
476	友情発恋愛行き	From Friends To Lovers
486	ショタ、少年系キャラ	Shota
493	熟読･考察の価値あるシナリオ（ネタバレ注意+補足説明参照）	Game should be read with attention
501	システム・仕様が不満（コメント推奨）	System is Bad
502	CG が雑、乱れがある（コメント必読）	CG is messy
503	控え目・おとなしいヒロインがいるゲーム	Low-key
504	スリリングな展開のあるストーリー	Thrilling
505	精神を病んでるヒロインが魅力的	Yandere Mental Breakdown
506	歌うヒロインが魅力的	Singing heroine
507	病弱・身障者ヒロイン	Sickly weak
508	大きな不幸を背負った助けたくなるヒロイン	Misfortunate
509	体を売るヒロイン	Prostitution
510	姉御肌なヒロイン	Sisterly
511	主従の絆が魅力的	Servant
512	この歌・この曲が熱い！	Hot Song/Tune
513	ノスタルジックな、この歌・この曲	Nostalgic
514	事後（えっち後）の描写がいい！（ABC 表記に注意！）	Good After Sex Scenes
515	男装するヒロイン	Cross-dressing
516	縛り・拘束のあるゲーム	Bondage/Restraint
517	大人の玩具プレイ	Toy Play
518	ずぶ濡れ・スケスケ	Scantily Clad
519	褐色肌の女の子	Bronze Suntan
520	手のひらサイズのヒロイン	Tiny (Fairy-like)
521	パイズリに見どころあり	Tittyfuck
522	催眠・マインドコントロールでヒロインを陥落	Hypnosis
523	魅力溢れるお嬢様（タカビーお嬢除く）	Young Lady
524	水着姿にこだわりのあるゲーム	Swimsuit
525	アンドロイド・ホムンクルスな人造少女	Artificial Girl
526	委員長に惚れた！	Committee Chairman
527	黒髪ロングが魅力的	Black Hair
528	個別ルートがダメ	One Route is Bad

529	卑語が多い	Lots of Profanities
530	規律正しい生真面目なヒロイン	Strict Heroine
531	キモい男性キャラとのＨシーンがあるゲーム	Explicit content involving gross men
532	悪堕ちするヒロイン	Heroine becomes evil
533	見た目は子供(大人)、頭脳は大人(子供)	Character older than appearance suggests
534	エロ動画が良い！	Good Erotic Cutscenes
559	寝取り	Cuckolding
618	貧乳	Small breasts

A1.3. Table of Evaluation descriptions

ID	Description (Japanese)
1	エロい、ひたすらエロい。これをおかずに使わずしてなんとする、というゲームを集めてみました。
2	エンディングを迎えても気持ちよく終われず逆に 胸が悪くなった、納得がいかなかった、何かしこりが残ったと言ったプレイ後の後味が悪かった作品を登録してください。でも人を選ぶけどこういうのも悪くないよね。
3	エロゲーなんだけど、時間を忘れて出来るほどゲームが面白い。長い時間プレイしていても飽きのこない、繰り返しプレイに耐えられるやつ。
4	やりはじめたはいいが、なかなか終わらない。っていうか、いつ終わるのだこのゲームは。時間のない社会人には、ちと厳しいんじゃないの？って思うゲーム。 できればコメントにオールクリアあるいはフルコンプまでのプレイ時間など具体的に要した時間を含めていただけたら参考になるのでありがたいです。
6	このゲームの BGM はとにかくイイ！というもの。基本的にボーカル曲は除きます。 ボーカル曲の評価は「歌がいいゲーム」のほうで(*'-')ノ
7	哲学、心理学、民俗学、科学など、知性と教養のあふれたエロゲーの登録をお願いします。 なお、豆知識、趣味に走った知識などについては POV「得する？雑学、うんちく、トリビア 」のほうにお願いします
9	萌えゲーや泣きゲーだけが「美少女ゲーム」ではない！ 時にはクール＆ハードな登場人物が活躍するハードボイルドな作品も時には良いものでは。 シャープな切れ味を感じさせるそんなハードボイルド要素満載な作品を登録してみてください。
10	笑いはシナリオを構成する基本要素の一つ（かもしれない…） 冴えるギャグ、絶妙なボケとツッコミ、とにかく笑えるゲームの登録をお願いします。 さらに、コメディ要素によってシナリオが栄えるかコメントに書いてもらえれると良いと思います。 A:笑いが全編通して盛りだくさん B:量より質、随所にとまではいかないが笑える C:人を選ぶかもしれない、個人的に笑えたもの
12	やりはじめたはいいが、あっという間に終わってしまった。っていうか、なんてボリュームの小ささなんだこのゲームは。時間のない社会人でも、ちと納得できないんじゃないの？って思うゲーム。･･･すいませんパクリです(^^ゞ できればコメントにオールクリアあるいはフルコンプまでのプレイ時間など具体的に要した時間を含めていただけたら参考になるのでありがたいです。
13	男からみても惚れてしまいそうな、とにかくカッコいいと感じるやつを求む！！
14	ファンタジー作品を登録してください。 Ａ～Ｃはファンタジー要素の度合いで振り分けてください。
16	そのうち誰か作るだろうと思ってたんですが、一向にその気配がないので^^; 「お兄ちゃん」及びそれに類する言葉で呼んでくれるキャラと実際にＨできる ゲーム限定。お気に入りのゲームを登録して下さい。
17	この情報は必要でしょ。バージョンを確認してください。ご協力お願いします。 Ａ：修正ファイル必須（動作不安定、クリア不可等プレイに支障がある重大なもの） Ｂ：修正ファイル必須と推奨の中間（システム改善等） Ｃ：修正ファイル推奨（誤字脱字等プレイに支障がない些細なもの） ※複数当てはまる場合、上位優先
22	道徳的には NG だけど、虚構(ゲーム)だから OK、なもの。 マネしないように。 近親相姦もここに登録願います
23	「過去プレイしたゲームの中でもこれだけは私的に別格」と思うゲームを挙げてください。 この POV はゲームが自分に与えた影響で作品をランク付けするのが狙いです。完成度は低くてあまり高い点は挙げられないけど、

	一般に評価の高い作品より遥かに大きな存在だと思える作品もピックアップしてもらえればと思います。得点の高い作品と人に大きな影響を与えられる作品はまた別だろうという考えから作成しました。ランクは受けた影響の大きさと、他の作品でなくこの作品でなければならなかったという独自性を評価してほしいです。Ａランクは多少数を絞ってください。
24	パッケージを見て、雑誌の評価を見て、OHP を見て、ちまたの評価を聞いて期待してたのに買ってみたら「んだよ、これ～」と思ったゲーム。 また『売り』が実際にはゲームの中で発揮されていなかったゲーム。 落胆の大小でＡ～Ｃを入力してください。
27	犯人当てやトリック破りを主眼とする狭義の意味での謎解きものだけでなく、広義の意味でのミステリー全般を集めようというのがこのＰＯＶの主旨です。 但し、結末その他でその謎が解決していることが登録の条件です。解決していないものに関してはホラーやファンタジー系ＰＯＶを活用していただけると有り難いです。
28	初心者さんの為に、ささやかながら数多くのプレイ歴のある先達としての推薦作を挙げて貰いたいと思います。ポイントは、ただ名作や評価の高い作品を羅列するのでなく、あくまでも初心者の視点で作品を選ぶように心がけてほしいと思います。 推薦理由は、○○の王道、オリジン的作品、時代を語る上で避けては通れない、初心者時代にプレイして良かった（プレイしたかった）作品など、細かくは問いません。
29	声優のキャスティングや演技力がいいエロゲー
30	ストーリーを通じて主人公、ヒロインなど登場人物がひと皮剥けて成長していく様が印象に残る作品、 あるいは大人へと成長していく過程の中で苦悩や葛藤の描写が印象に残る作品を登録してください。 ＡＢＣ基準は成長していくことへの快い印象度を交えて投票をお願いします。
33	絵柄が萌えるヒロインが盛りだくさんな作品だから「萌えゲー」というのか、萌え転がるヒロインのシナリオやヒロイン属性がツボにはまりまくりな作品だから「萌えゲー」なのか、とかく「萌えゲー」といわれる割にはその基準は結構プレイする人それぞれで様々だったりします。 ということで、ここでは変にこだわった基準にこだわらず、「それぞまさしく萌えゲー」＆萌えゲーとしてお勧めな作品をあげてみてください。
34	ストーリーの先が気になると言うよりも、その世界に浸っていたいと思えるようなゲームを登録してください。コメントには、登場人物を取り巻く世界観、背景、設定の良さを記述してください。
35	薬を使った人体実験、薬物中毒、人格の破壊、催淫、狂気などをメインに扱ったゲーム。
36	ゲームの朝の舞台では欠かせない、寝ぼすけ or グータラな主人公をヒロインが優しく起こしてくれる場面にインパクトがある作品を教えてください。 作品によって優しくに？がつく場合があるかもしれませんが、それもまた愛情表現ということでアリにします
38	ここさえ良ければ名作！ 個人的には良作またはそれに近い評価をしているのだけど、この部分さえこうなっていればもっと評価が高くなったのに・・・というような名作一歩手前の惜しい作品を挙げて下さい。 出来ればコメントでその欠点部分とか個人的な希望とかを教えていただけると有り難いです。
39	バグが最悪。そのままでは、まったくゲームにならず、修正ファイルを当てても完全じゃない。 あきらかにメーカーの怠慢が見て取れるゲーム。
40	オープニングテーマ、エンディングテーマ、挿入歌が素晴らしいゲーム
42	生と死の狭間で織り成すストーリーによって人生を考えさせるゲーム。メメント･モリ。
43	画面効果、音声効果を駆使し、センス溢れる演出をしているゲーム

44	夏です。夏といえば怪談です。スリラーやオカルトなゲームを集めてみましょう。 (この POV は夏に作られたものです。)
45	主人公の友人や家族、非攻略可のサブキャラ等 脇役でありながら時には主役やヒロイン以上の 活躍を見せてくれる登場人物のいるゲームを
46	単にセンスがいいと思うタイトルのゲームや、 クリアした後に『このゲームにはこのタイトルしかない』 と思えるようなゲームを
47	ＯＰデモムービー・ＡＤＶパート・バトルシーンなど、非Ｈシーンのムービーがよくできているゲームを登録してください。 ランク分けは「絵や動きの綺麗さ」「演出の良さ」「音楽との調和」等の総合でお願いします。 【注意】Ｈシーンを評価する場合は「エロ動画が良い！」に登録してください。 アニメの綺麗さのみが印象的なら「アニメが良い！(エロ動画除く)」だけに登録してください。
48	張られた伏線が最後にばっちり解決。 なるほど、そういうことだったのかと思わず納得してしまう、そんなゲーム。
50	そのうち誰か立てるだろうと思っていたのに誰も立てない。 おい、みんな、自分の欲望には正直になろうぜっ（笑。 ランク付けに関して　Ａ：炉利メイン。んで炉利度満点。　Ｂ：炉利メインだがＡには及ばず。または炉利メインではないが炉利シチュが極めて秀逸。　Ｃ：炉利メインではないが炉利シチュに見るべきものがある。　てな感じでお願いします。　※炉利メインでも炉利度全然なら選外。　何が炉利度ってのは皆様の判断におまかせ。
51	終わらせるのはもったいない、続編を作ってくれと思えるような世界観/設定を持ったゲーム、完全版プレイしたいな～と思うようなゲーム、更には昔の作品をリメイクしてほしい！と思えるゲーム。 続編（ファンディスク含む）、リメイク版の有無に関係なく、プレイしたくなるゲームを登録してください。 Ａ：ぜひプレイしたい ～ Ｃ：プレイするかも でお願いします。
52	聞くだけで萎えるような声、演技力のなさすぎる声優、笑ってしまう挿入歌など、シナリオやゲームをぶちこわす声が入ってるゲーム
54	キレーなお姉さんに甘えたい、優しくリードしてほしい、大人の色気に翻弄されたいなど。素敵でエッチなお姉さんが出てくるゲーム。
55	ゲーム本編以外のトコで手を抜かず、あなたのエロゲームライフを縁の下から、支えてくれる機能が充実しているゲームを登録してください。 評価対象例は環境設定の充実（オートモードの速度設定の細かさや、スキップのスピード等）、回想モード完備、メッセージウインドウが機能的＆美しい、インストール時や起動＆終了時が楽しげ等です。
56	ズバリ”ふぇらちお”シーンがナイスなゲーム（最近はデフォだからね）。 A：このゲームから”ふぇら”シーンを取るなんて考えられない！！！ B：エロエロでナイスな”ふぇら”シーン完備！！ C：一見の価値ある”ふぇら”シーンが潜在、まぁ一度見てみる？てな感じで。
57	普通にシナリオがいいと思ったゲームを登録してください！
59	そのまんま、エロゲなのにボーイズラブ要素のあるゲームを教えて欲しいです！エロ+CG 有りは A、ED のみは B、雰囲気だけなら C って感じでよろしくお願いいたします。
60	設定上、人間では無いヒロインを登録してください。

61	その質は問わず、とにかく必見の価値のある名シーンや名台詞のあるゲーム
62	調教やＨを重ねるごとに変化が見れる作品。 嫌悪→戸惑い→恥らい→淫乱と認める直前→淫乱→奴隷→人格崩壊という過程がしっかりしているもの。 特に、中間の過程が重要。いきなり淫乱に早代わりだったり、ある部分では嫌悪剥き出し、他では淫乱といった矛盾が見られるものは×。 方法は特に限定しません。ヒロインの心理的変化と、その整合性が重要です。
63	文字通り設定上、外国人である魅力的なヒロインが登場する作品を登録してください。 ハーフ・クォーターでも外国人的なインパクトがあるならば登録可とします。 ABC 基準はそのヒロインの印象好感度の度合いで投票をお願いします。
64	気持ち悪いと感じたり、ある一部の人に受けの良いゲーム 難解すぎるゲーム
65	ストーリー・世界観・キャラ等、心が癒されるゲーム
66	最近ふと思いました。どのゲームのメイドさんがみなさんの人気をかっさらっているのか。基準はそのゲームに出てくるメイドさんがどれだけ素晴らしいか、です。できればどのキャラかもコメントしてくださいね。Ａ．最高！惚れた！Ｂ．こいつはお勧め。Ｃ．・・・人によっては好きかも。でお願いします。
67	感動したゲーム・泣いてしまったゲームを登録してください
68	斎藤美奈子「妊娠小説」に触発されて作ってみました。 エロゲーが H するのを基本としている以上、その後の妊娠についても考えているゲームもあるのではないかと。 子作り万歳。
70	実際、技術力の高い低いなんて素人には判らないものだと思いますが、 率直に高いと感じたゲームをお願いします。 コンシューマーと比較するとどーにもなりませんけど(^^;
72	ヒロインやシナリオが良くても、主人公の性格がダメで全体評価を低くするゲーム。 例えば、その性格がストーリーに必須でないにも関わらず、妙に横柄だったり、逆に弱気すぎたりするもの。
75	野外での蟲をつかったプレイや、獣姦、触手ものといったゲテモノシチュエーションのゲームを集めています。
78	テキストが最高と思える作品。あくまでもテキストでシナリオではありません。卓越された文章力を持っている作品。そんな作品あげてみてください。
80	とにかくタイトルのごとく、攻略可否だのやシナリオだのこだわらずとにかくＨシーンが存在しているヒロイン数がいっぱいいる作品を登録してください。ＡＢＣ基準はとにかく登場する女の子の多さっぷりで印象に残る度合いでつけてきてください。
81	ＣＧが美しいゲーム。背景のみ、キャラクターのみでも構いませんが、それぞれコメントで「背景」「キャラクター」など書いて頂けると参考になるかと思います。あとサイズが昔は 640*480 のゲームが多かったですが最近は 800*600 のものも増えてきました。CG のサイズも評価に入れて良いかと思います。ゲームはやっていなくても体験版などで CG が美しいと思った、と言う方も評価をお願いします。
83	着物や巫女衣装はたまた袴がメインな和服フェチなゲーム。 <<04.11.16 追加条件を削除しました>>
84	ヒロインをまわしちゃうゲームです。 評価はエロ度とか、嫌がってる度合いとかで決めてください。
86	RPG ちっくなゲームやパラメーターの上げ下げをするような類のゲームのゲームバランスを評価してみる POV です。 ちなみに評価を「C」にした場合は「ラク過ぎて」なのか「難しすぎて」なのかも書いてあると皆もニッコリさんだと思いますｗ

88	その名の通りゲームプレイ中､およびプレイ後に鬱ってしまうよーなゲームに対してつけてください。鬱るといっても単に悲しい気分になったり､物寂しい気分になったり、みたいなことでいいんであまり深刻に考えずにどうぞ☆Ａ，Ｂ，Ｃ判定は皆さんに任せます。
89	ほのぼの世界に萌えるのもいいけれど、ライバルとの熱い戦い、正義を貫く折れぬ心など とにかく世界観やシナリオやシーンなどで「熱い」血潮や気迫が感じられる作品の登録をおねがいします。 作品によってはアクションシーンで熱くなるものもあるかと思いますが、そちらは「戦闘描写（シーン）が印象的」に登録していただければ幸いです。 こちらはできればシナリオやシーン、キャラクターなどで「熱血」っぷりを感じさせる作品に重点を置いて登録願います。 ＡＢＣはその熱量でヨロシク！
91	文字通り、スカトロ描写があるゲームです。
96	Ｈシーン以外のアニメがよくできているゲームを登録してください。 エロゲにおいてフルアニメは稀で、ＯＰムービーやちょっとしたカットインでも貴重です。 ランク分けは絵の綺麗さ、動きの滑らかさ等でお願いします。 主に２Ｄアニメを対象にしています。 【注意】Ｈシーンを評価する場合は「エロ動画がいい！」に登録してください。 動画として総合的に素晴らしいなら「ムービーが良い！(エロ動画除く)」にも登録お願いします。
97	物語の起承転結で『転』と『結』がダメなゲーム。 性急過ぎる・謎解きが途中まで・安直な展開と終わらせ方で、納得出来ない代物。 期待していた展開でなく、感動し損ねたゲーム。
98	シナリオや展開などにオリジナリティーが感じられなかったり、はっきり言ってパクリ、二番煎じだと思うゲーム。その際には元ネタもあわせてコメントしてくれると助かります。 ABC 評価は他作品に総じて似ていると思ったら A、どことなく似ているなら C という具合でお願いします。
99	ゲームを起動する際にディスクが要らないゲームの登録をお願いします。 ＡＢＣ基準は、ディスクレス起動できても満足にプレイ出来なければ意味が有りませんので Ａ：無くても音楽、音声等機能に全く影響無くプレイできるもの Ｂ：無いと音楽、音声等一部機能に制限を受けるがそれでも許容できるもの(ＣＤ－ＤＡ等) Ｃ：無くても一応プレイできるが、機能制限や何らかの問題があって、その作品の魅力を著しく損なうもの という分類でお願いします。 基本的にメーカー側の推奨環境を満たし、フルインストール、特殊な操作無しの方向で。 もしパッチ等が必要でしたらコメントを頂けるとありがたいです。(ちなみに属性の「ディスクレス起動可」と併用しますと、より信頼できる情報になるかと思います)
100	タカビーなお嬢、私個人的にツボです。燃えます。（萌えではありません。） 「生意気なお前を俺色に染めてやる！」という意気込みです。 攻略したときの征服感、達成感が快感。（攻略後は妙に素直になったりして、そこがまた可愛い・・・） そんなタカビーお嬢ヒロインがいるゲーム、教えてください。 ※タカビーでないお嬢様についてはお嬢様 POV へどうぞ。
103	１８禁ゲームとくればエッチシーンはつき物だが、それを必要としないと思われるゲーム。むしろ、あると逆に不自然に感じられるゲーム。一般向けに開発してもよかったのではと思われるゲーム。
105	青春全開なストーリーも良いですが、登場人物の各々が一人の成熟した大人としての確固たる考えや行動が織り成していく人間模様の描写が深い物語をじっくり愉しむのもまた良いものでしょう。 ここではそういった大人の登場人物が多く登場する作品、あるいはそういった登場人物が見せる深い知識や見識がシナリオ全体に良い意味で深みを与えている作品があったら登録をお願いします。

106	シナリオ作品の理想形は読み進む際の没入感とそれに伴うテンポの良さは欠かせないものですが、 残念ながら描写が単調、回りくどい、冗長的、あるいは展開のぶつ切れやパターンのくどさ、ゲームシステムやデザインの不備、などなどでそのテンポが損なわれており、結果作品としてマイナスに感じさせる作品も往々としてあると思います。 ここではそういったシナリオを読み進めていく点でどうしても乗り切れなった、中だるみしてむしろ苦痛だった作品をあげてください。 ＡＢＣ基準はこれらテンポの悪さが作品のマイナスイメージに大きくかかってきていると感じるネガティブベースの印象度でお願いします。
108	ヒロインが胸から出すミルクを激しく吸いまくるようなシチュが見たい。乳が出る原因は妊娠でも薬でも魔法でもオケ。BISHOP の擬似母乳は画面を派手にするための演出で、乳汁として扱われてないのでＮＧ。女子高生や成人女性でもいいが、女子小学生が母乳を出すとか妊娠するようなパタンならウルトラオッケー。胸が胴体より巨大化して機械で搾乳するようなのは人間だか化けモノだかわからないのでＮＧ。健康な女の子から出るおいしそうなミルクを飲みたいデス。
109	登場人物の言動や物語の世界が狂っている、または精神的に破滅していると思われるもの、狂気をテーマにしているものなどを挙げてください。作者側が意図して狂った様子を表現しようとしているものに限ります。
110	エロゲーの基本かつ重要なポイントは、やはりシナリオとエロに尽きると思います。 本 POV ではそんな考えの元、「どちらかに的を絞るのも良いけど、両立させてこそ一本の｢エロゲー｣として成立するのでは…」というような思いを満たす為の、シナリオもエロも楽しめる欲張りゲームの登録をお願いします。 登録作品の例、目安としましては ・複数回Ｈ、濃厚Ｈがある純愛作品 ・エロ重視ではあるが、意外と読ませる ・シナリオに対しエロ(性的描写)が不自然無く調和している ・純愛、陵辱両ルートがある作品 という感じです。
112	せっかくギャルゲーやるのなら女の子たちと目で会話したいなあと。 きれいな女の子が出てきても立て看にしか見えないのでは張り合いがないので、相手が血の通った人間に見えるかどうか教えてほしいです。 このＰＯＶでは一枚絵以外のキャラ絵（以下立ち絵）を主たる評価の対象とします。 造形の良さやオリジナリティ高い作品を評価してください 立ち絵のヴァリエーションの多寡、クオリティー、テキストとの整合性など気がついたことについて書いてもらえればと思います。
113	選択肢やフラグの条件がシビア、クリアの為の謎賭けや条件がシビア過ぎて骨が折れる・手こずるなど、正直攻略ページのお世話なしじゃないとクリアが厳しい作品など、素でプレイするにはコンプリートはもとよりクリアするのもたいへんな作品を登録してください。
114	動作にはある程度のスペックを要求するゲーム。ちょっと前のパソコンじゃ話にならない。インストール容量が膨大だったり、高い CPU,メモリ能力を必要としたり。
116	シナリオやキャラ、設定、そしてノリがあまりにもバカでツッコミどころが多く、思わず（いろいろな意味で）笑ってしまうようなゲーム
117	軟弱な主人公が跳梁跋扈しているこの時代に、真の漢たる気質がビリビリと伝わってきたキャラが出演しているゲームの登録をお願いします。主人公、サブキャラ、チョイ役まで全てのキャラが対象です。頭脳明晰のクールメンや、むさ苦しいほどの熱血野郎、そして大人の魅力を持つ素敵な小父様などなど、真の漢たちを教えてください。
120	様々な作品の中で「家族」をテーマにした作品や、舞台設定としての「家族」の円満ぶりや「絆」の強さなどがシナリオをひきたてている良い作品がたくさん登場しています。 ここではそういった「家族の絆」が印象的な

	作品を集めてみたいと思います。 実・義理・込み入った事情の同居や居候などパターンは多いですが、「家族」の印象が強い作品であればその形態にはこだわらずにいきたいと思います。
121	男なんて必要ありません。要はレズプレイがあればなんでもアリです。そんな作品を求めます。評価の基準ですが、A と B は皆さんの自由に評価してください。ですが、 女の子同士でも、あまり絡んでいないものは C にしてください。
122	調教描写があるゲーム、主に調教ゲーを登録してください。 本 POV は、服従させるために、殴る、犯す、縛る、吊るす、打つ、刺す、剃る、浣腸など物理的な行為だけではなく、SSD のような心理水準のやり取りも調教と見なします。SSD は、ある意味で究極の調教ゲーだし。 調教はそのプロセスこそ命。 目的を達成するまでの過程が丹念に描かれていなければならない。レイプしてちょこちょこっと嬲ったら服従するようなゲームはちょっと勘弁。薬漬けでは張り合いがないのでつまらない。やはり獲物の反抗的な態度や泣いて嫌がる姿を見たい。簡単に屈伏してはつまらない。 その道のりが険しければ険しいほど辿り着いた時の達成感・満足感は何ものにも変え難い。堪らんよ、ほんと。 あと調教という現実で殆んど有りえない非日常の事柄だからこそ、リアリティの有無は重要なポイントの一つだと思う。有ると無しでは調教行為の面白さに差が出る。むろん有る方が断然楽しいし、やりがいがある。 余り数はありませんが、始めから相手が調教に肯定的な場合は、シチュ的にそそるかどうかを評価の基準にしてください。 ……え一と、「調教するより、調教されたい」という方向も一応ありです。はい。
124	キレイなお姉さんの童貞狩り、女王様からの調教、年下に強制射精させられちゃうなど、女性主導のＨが楽しめる作品の登録をお願いします。
126	眩しい日差し、蝉の声、生い茂る緑、風鈴の音、海水浴、西瓜、花火…そんな日本人のノスタルジーを思いっきり掻き立てる「夏」を舞台にしたゲーム。だいたい基準はこんなかんじで。 Ａ：夏という要素をシナリオ、演出に非常に効果的に取り入れている。夏でなければこの作品は成立しない。 Ｂ：夏という要素をシナリオ、演出にそこそこ効果的に取り入れている。夏という要素を抜くと作品の魅力もやや減る。 Ｃ：季節が夏であるだけ。
127	コンシューマでできない愛の形がエロゲにはあるべきだという考えに基づいた POV です。 ABC に着いての評価は登録者に依りますが、C 評価としてめちゃくちゃなエロや鬼畜やらを登録するのはこの POV の趣旨に反していますので別の POV でどうぞ。
128	マルチシナリオというのは、何度もプレイするのが面倒だとか、全体の統一を欠いてしまいがちなど多くの欠点を持っているものです。そこで、最終的なゴールが一つだけのゲームを集めてみたいと思い、この POV を作りました。評価基準は　A　エンディングが一つだけのゲーム。 B　細かい枝分かれはあるが基本的な筋は一本のゲーム。 C　エンディングは複数存在するが、一つの True End のようなものが存在する。でお願いします。
131	ゲームのシステムはどれも似たようなシステムを使っています（特に ADV に顕著です）が、時折そんな一般的なもの以外に、斬新なシステムを採用しているゲームがあります。そんなシステムに独自性が見られるゲームをこの POV に登録してください。
132	ゲームの本編とは別の、例えばクリア後のおまけやマニュアル等の商品付属物、さらにはファンディスク、アンソロジー本、小説、ドラマＣＤ、サントラ、アニメ作品等々の関連作品があるゲームの登録をお願いします。

	ＡＢＣ評価はおまかせしますが、その充実度や面白さが基準になるかなぁと思います。　ＰＯＶの内容が内容ですので、コメントで何が良かったか詳しく書いて頂けるとありがたいです。
133	登場するヒロインの全員あるいは大多数が巨乳・爆乳ヒロイン尽くしな作品を登録してください。 ヒロインのバストがリアリティがなくたってそれも浪漫、巨乳好きでない人にはそれがわからんのです。 とにかくヒロインの乳いっぱいの世界さえ全開ならば条件は問いません。 ABC 基準は巨乳要素満載の点での魅力度・お勧め度で投票お願いします。
134	皆さんのお気に入りのヒロインとその理由を教えてください！
135	埋もれている名作、あまり世間に知られてないけどこれはもっと評価されるべきだ！！と思うゲームを教えてください！
137	シナリオが良い作品、楽しめた作品のその影でひっそりと存在するどうしても気に入らない登場キャラクター。性格、言動、考え方など内容は問いませんのでどうにも受け容れられないキャラクターがいるなら投票とコメントをお願いします。 ABC 基準はその嫌いなキャラクターが作品を楽しむ点でダメージを与える印象度でつけてください。
139	聞いた瞬間に食べているものを噴き出してしまいそうなタイトル、店で予約するときに 口に出すのが躊躇われるようなぶっ飛んだタイトルの作品。
143	ヒロインの「焼きもち」。可愛いですよね。 そこでヒロインの焼きもちが印象的な作品を登録してください。 ABC 基準はそのヒロインの焼きもちの焼きっぷりが萌え転がるほどインパクトある度合いで投票をお願いします。
144	季節感溢れるゲームはその季節にプレイしたいもの。春を舞台にしたゲームを登録してください。 基準は Ａ：春という要素をシナリオ、演出に非常に効果的に取り入れている。春でなければこの作品は成立しない。 Ｂ：春という要素をシナリオ、演出にそこそこ効果的に取り入れている。春という要素を抜くと作品の魅力もやや減る。 Ｃ：季節が春であるだけ。 （「夏ゲー」の基準を使わせてもらいました）
145	季節感溢れるゲームはその季節にプレイしたいもの。秋を舞台にしたゲームを登録してください。 基準は Ａ：秋という要素をシナリオ、演出に非常に効果的に取り入れている。秋でなければこの作品は成立しない。 Ｂ：秋という要素をシナリオ、演出にそこそこ効果的に取り入れている。秋という要素を抜くと作品の魅力もやや減る。 Ｃ：季節が秋であるだけ。 （「夏ゲー」の基準を使わせてもらいました）
146	季節感溢れるゲームはその季節にプレイしたいもの。冬を舞台にしたゲームを登録してください。 基準は Ａ：冬という要素をシナリオ、演出に非常に効果的に取り入れている。冬でなければこの作品は成立しない。 Ｂ：冬という要素をシナリオ、演出にそこそこ効果的に取り入れている。冬という要素を抜くと作品の魅力もやや減る。 Ｃ：季節が冬であるだけ。 （「夏ゲー」の基準を使わせてもらいました）
148	制服、私服、コスプレ、ミミシッポ、巫女服、メイド服‥‥‥ とにかくＨシーンの場面にて着衣Ｈ（半脱ぎＨ）の点で一見の価値ありという作品を教えてください。 Ｈシーンの内容・衣装についての熱いコメントは熱烈歓迎です。
150	名目上、「未来」だと行っているのに、携帯もなければインターネットも出てこない・・・ せいぜいキャラとしてロボットが出てくるぐらい・・ んなの未来じゃねぇ！パラレルワールドだ！ この POV は「今に連続した

	未来」を書いている作品に捧げられる物であります。 基本的にＡしかあり得ないと思うのですが、 「未来を銘打ってるのに、なんか違うぞ？」って言う作品にはＣをあげてください。
151	畦道を歩いて学校に通い、生徒はみんな顔見知り。秋には村で唯一の神社でお祭りがあり、言い伝えや風習も残っている。日本人の原風景、田舎を舞台にしたゲーム。
152	何から何まで揚げ足をとるつもりじゃないけれど、何かと甘々な設定でともすればご都合主義と感じたくなる作品の設定、展開やシチュエーション。 多少のご都合主義はお約束ということで目をつぶるにしても、でも正直これはどうしても納得できない、むしろシナリオの質を落としている、作品ぶち壊しと感じさせるほど目に余るご都合主義が横行しているのもまた確か。 ここではそんな「あまりにも目に余る」ご都合主義でどうしようもないくらいうんざりした、呆れたなどネガティブな印象がするくらい、ご都合主義に感じた作品を登録してください ABC 基準はご都合主義ぶりが作品を大きく台無しにしていると感じる度合いで登録お願いします。
155	ゲームのプレイがほとんど終わらせる為の作業と化しているような、やっていて苦痛に感じるゲームをこの POV に登録してください。
156	ゲームにはほとんどといっていいほど悪役が存在します。 「こいつ、やばいよ・・・」と思わせてくれるような冷徹非情な悪役が出てくるゲームの登録をお願いします。
157	おおよそのエロゲーは日常の様々な舞台の中で印象的なシーンを多いですが、中には現代日本ではまず存在しない「戦い」の世界ならではで、その「戦い」の場面で様々なシーンが印象に残る作品もあるかと思います。 時代・次元・戦う相手や仲間同士のフィクション性は問いません。 とにかく「戦いの世界」やそのシーンを通じて感銘を与えてくれた作品をあげてください。
163	エロゲー中定番ジャンルの中では欠かせない学園もの 昔懐かしい甘酸っぱい恋愛ものから、青春描写満載のものなど、学園生活ならではのイベントやドタバタなエピソードの描写が良い作品をあげてください。 舞台となる学園のフィクション性は問わずに、ＡＢＣ基準は学園ものとして愉しめた度合いで判定してください
167	同じ時間を繰り返す、未来から戻れない、平行世界、人格の転移、現実と幻覚。 などなど不思議世界の設定は色々あります。 しかし、それに最初から馴染んでいるというのは不自然。「これは面白い、ワーイ」ではなく「何でこんなことに、どうなってるんだ」という世界観から始まるものがいいです。 不思議世界にさまようことになったキャラの、心理描写におけるリアリティを特に重視します。
169	変わった喋り方や口癖、決り文句を持つキャラクターがいるゲームの登録をお願いします。
172	前作をやってからプレイしないと話の内容がまったく掴めない、というようなゲームは余りありませんが、それでも前作をやっていれば世界観がより理解できるとか思わずニヤリとしてしまうようなネタが散りばめられている、というようなことはあるかと思います。 このゲームをプレイする前に前作をプレイすればより楽しめる、そんなゲームをこの POV に登録してください
174	複数の季節が表現されているゲームを登録してください。 季節感がうまく表現されていると思うものはＡでお願いします。 下記は、参考程度でお願いします。 ・夏服・冬服など、季節に合わせた服装がある。 ・正月・海・クリスマスなどのイベントがある。 ・梅雨、台風、雪などの季節特有の天気がある。 ・暑い時期と寒い時期がある。 ・１年以上の戦略・経営シミュレーション（季節感あり） ・１年近くの学園生活
176	買ったことを激しく後悔する内容のゲーム。あからさまなトラップから巧妙に偽装しているものも含めて。核地雷を A、対人地雷を B、不発弾を C でお願いします。

177	この空間での皆さんの評価はグッド、或いはトゥルーエンドの影響が大きいのではないかと密かに邪推します。しかし、グッドやトゥルーエンドを超えるバッドエンド、などもありますよね。 というわけで、味わい深いバッドエンドのあるゲームの登録をお願いします。 Ａ：True(Good)エンドを越える Ｂ：True(Good)エンド並 Ｃ：True(Good)エンドに及ばないが、一見の価値有り 以降追加 ・・・ここに登録する際は「バッドエンド」限定で、「ノーマルエンド」や「トゥルーエンド」については言及しないで下さい。ネタバレを避ける意味合いを込めています。
180	個別ルートに入るまでの共通シーンが多く、繰り返しプレイをしても変化する部分がほとんど無いゲームを登録してください
182	単純に絶対数が少ないゲームから 同人ゲーム、プレゼント用の非売品、通販専用などの 流通経路が特殊で普通の店では買えないゲーム 中古店で高額な値段がついてしまい 簡単には購入に踏み切れないようなゲーム やってみたくても簡単には入手できないゲームを登録してください。 入手が困難なものほど高いランクにお願いします。 入手方法や特性(同人、非売品、高額ソフト、限定品など)もコメントしてもらえれば幸いです。
185	おしっこのことです（笑。ＰＯＶになかったので、作ってみました。いろんなバリエーションがあるので、どんなプレイか分かると便利です。登録お願いします。
190	既に POV「ＣＤ無くてもＯＫなゲーム」がありますが、この POV が登録されていない場合、CD が必要なのか、単に登録されていないだけなのかが分かりません。 また、インストールオプションがある場合、どれが最善かわからない場合があります。（特にノート PC で仮想 CD を使っている場合等） そこで、起動ディスクが必須のゲームについて、下記の分類でお願いします。 Ａ：フルインストールしても起動ディスクが必要なもの。（詳細を失念された場合は、これにして下さい） Ｂ：インストールオプションで、ディスクからデータを読ませる代わりにインストール容量を減らせるもの。 Ｃ：フルインストールが出来ないもの。（必ずディスクからデータを読むもの）
192	魅力的なのに攻略ができないキャラクターがいるゲームの登録をお願います。
193	主人公が、殴り合い。喧嘩。生死を賭けた戦い。殺し合い。などに強いゲーム！精神的に強いとかは却下で、肉体的、本能的に強いってのを評価する方向でお願いします。
194	伏線・背景設定に深みのある作品 説明文を「良いシナリオ作品に必要な要素はいろいろありますが、その中でシナリオに張り巡らされた様々な伏線に唸らされたり、じっくり練りこまれた背景設定に深みのある作品はじっくりとシナリオを味わえるたのしむみがあると思います。ここではそんな伏線や背景設定の練りこみがシナリオのよさを磨き上げている作品をあげてみてください。」に変更します。
198	物語の舞台そのものが昔の時代の作品、あるいは過去の回想シーン・過去パートなどがストーリーそのものに大きな影響を与えている作品など過去の時代の描写が行われている作品の登録をお願いします。
200	ゲーム中に 3P・それ以上のプレイがあれば登録お願いします。 よろしければコメントに簡単なシチュエーションを記入願います 例：姉妹丼・親子丼・親友丼・・・等
205	設定もイベントも、全て H シーンに持っていくためだけにあるようなゲームがあります。そんな、H シーンを抜いたら何も残らなくなってしまうような、ひたすら H シーンだけが続くゲームを登録してください

211	エロゲ業界は主に純愛、鬼畜の２大勢力になり、数が減ってしまいましたが、主にプレーヤーの嫉妬心をかきたてるゲームです。 ・ヒロインが浮気をする。 ・スワップ。 ・純粋にライバルや別の女の子に取られる等、女性キャラが主人公以外とＨする内容のある濃い～ゲーム。 ＡＢＣ評価は個々の興奮度でお願いします。
214	妹やメイドさんや魔女っ子もいいけどやっぱりコレでしょ。 ずばり幼馴染！！ 幼い頃からずっと健気に付いてきてくれる彼女の何と素晴しいこと！ そんな幼馴染の魅力に溢れたキャラがいる作品の登録をお願いします。 気の強い委員長タイプから健気で一途な感じもＧＯＯＤですね！
216	アナルＳＥＸが頻繁にあるゲームをＡ 少しはあるゲームをＢでおねがいします。
219	主人公とヒロインが付き合い始めてから人目をはばからずに呆れるほどのバカップルっぷりを発揮して、何だか見ている側が恥ずかしくなってくる。そんなゲームを登録してください。
225	ヒロインが自慰しているシーンのあるゲーム。 自発的なのか、主人公の強要によるのかについて、そのあとどうなったのかについて教えてください。
226	巫女やメイドもいいけどエロゲにおいて結構多いのがこの看護婦という役職。すばらしき「献身」の世界へと誘ってくれるゲームを登録して下さい。なんか、鬼畜が多い気がしますが…気のせい？
229	文字通りヒロインとしてプリンセス、お姫様やそれに近い女王様の登場する作品を登録してください。 あくまでもお姫様としてのプリンセスですから舞台や時代は問いませんが、単にあだ名や通り名が「姫」「プリンセス」というだけのヒロインの登録は回避お願いします。 ABC 基準はそのヒロインの印象好感度の度合いで投票をお願いします。
235	エロゲ一世界に跋扈する奇人変人達。そういう愛すべき人々を見かけたら迷わずここに放り込みましょう。A は面白くてまさに愛すべき奇人変人。C は意外と存在感は強くない程度。B はその中間。主人公でも OK。面白いデータが集まると思うんで、皆さんどしどし笑えるやつをお願いします。
236	既婚者の女性との H シーンがあるゲーム。未亡人可。 背徳感や、その他シチュエーションによって A～C で登録お願いします。
238	SM のあるゲームの登録をお願いします。
240	とかくロリヒロインやツンデレヒロインの代表的な髪型と言われるツインテールですが、 ヒロインの性格・キャラクターをいっさい問わずに文字通り魅力的なツインテール・ヒロインの登場する作品を登録してください。 とにかくツインテールがそのヒロインにマッチしていれば条件は問いません。 ABC 基準はそのヒロインの印象好感度の度合いで投票をお願いします。
244	眼鏡っ娘が登場する作品の登録をお願いします。(本 POV では眼鏡を掛けているシーンが一つでも在れば、一応眼鏡っ娘という事にします) 評価基準は眼鏡っ娘の魅力の度合いにて。詳しい基準をお望みの方には、眼鏡はは意外に好みが分かれる属性という事を考慮しまして、 A:優 (例)眼鏡がキャラの魅力として効果的に機能している，可愛いヒロイン B:良 (例)眼鏡をかけているだけで、特にこだわりのシチュエーションもない，並のヒロイン C:劣 (例)眼鏡キャラがウザい，眼鏡が逆効果，かけてない方がまだマシと思える というような指針でお願いします。
245	宇宙もの、時間旅行もの、未来世界の描写などなど、サイエンス・フィクション風のネタを織り込んだゲームの登録をお願いします。内容の SF っぽさで点は付けてください。

250	POV を見ていたところ、陵辱ゲーがなかったので付けました。鬼畜と陵辱は違うとします。(鬼畜は女性で遊ぶような行為、陵辱はレイプ)愛のある H なんて興味ない、相手の承諾に関係なく動物的に快楽を求める。現実でやると警察にお世話になるようなゲーム。また、メインではなくともそういうシチュエーションのあるゲームも大歓迎です。エロゲーの華と言える陵辱ゲーをよろしくお願いいたします。
253	「好き」な思いを抱えているのに強がって素直に思いを表せないヒロインって微笑ましく感じませんか？ ぽっと顔を紅くして強がったり、バレバレなのに素っ気無い素振りや、自分に素直になれなくて意地っ張りや高飛車な態度をとるあの娘 そんな強気っ娘が身も心も総てを開いてくれると、それまでとまたひとつ違う魅力を見せてくれるのがまた嬉しいところで‥‥ そういった「素直じゃない」「強がり・意地っ張り」「タカビー」「ツンデレ」などなど強気で魅力的ながらも、どこか恋愛不器用なヒロインが登場活躍する作品を教えてください。
254	美少女ゲーをトコトン楽しむには攻略順にも気を使いたいところですよね。 てなわけであなたのオススメ攻略順を教えてください。 ＡＢＣは推奨順序のこだわり度合いでお願いします。 コメントは POV の性質上、準必須でお願いいたします。 ちなみに、登録される方の主観オンリーで結構ですので気軽にどうぞ。 ＊＊＊極力ネタバレしないようにご注意下さい＊＊＊ (特に紹介に無い重要キャラ等は伏字にしたほうが良いかもしれません)
258	マンガ、ゲーム、アニメ、時事ネタなどのネタを引用しているゲームを登録してください。 ABC 基準は登録者にまかせっきりなので、出来ればコメントを添えてくれると嬉しいです。
261	エロゲーをプレイして「まさかこんな知識が得られるとは」という経験はありませんか？　うんちくネタくらいしかならない豆知識、学問性や高尚さインテリ性を感じないレベルでのバカバカしい知識ネタや業界ネタなど、そんなムダ知識が披露されている作品の登録をお願いします。
262	ＡＤＶ全盛のエロゲーでは、「選択肢」はゲーム性を生み出す演出として、必要不可欠だと思います。また、その「選択肢」を評価する事は、その作品のＡＤＶとしてのゲームバランスや、シナリオ構成力を知るのに役立つかもしれません。しかしその割りには評価されにくい「選択肢」をあえて評価してみようというＰＯＶです。　登録対象は、選択肢に対して良くも悪くも、何らかの印象があった作品ならば何でも有りです。(これだけでは分かり難いと思いますので、具体例としていくつかＰＯＶ及びコメントを登録しました。宜しければご参照下さい)　評価基準はできれば「優・良・劣」でお願いします。
263	双子ヒロインが登場する作品の登録をお願い致します。　評価基準はその魅力の度合いにて。細かい基準をお望みの方には、 Ａ:優　(例)双子ならではのシナリオがある，双子丼、双子エンドがある，　Ｂ:良　(例)とりあえず双子ヒロインがいる，双子エンドは無いが両方とも攻略はできる　Ｃ:可　(例)片方しかＨ、エンドがない，サブキャラとして登場，似てなくて双子っぽくない　というような指針でお願いします。(あくまで指針ですので少しぐらいズレてもＯＫです)　(申し訳ないですが、男女の双子や、二重人格等のネタバレしてしまう恐れのある作品の登録はご遠慮下さいませ)
270	Windows の時計の日付や時間によって画面が変化した 画面をクリックしてみたら思わぬ反応があった キャラクターの名前のに一定のしばりがあった 媒体内のファイルに隠しシナリオや旧作の CG が埋め込まれていたなど 演出、システムとかまではいかない(または、それらに該当しない)、 ほんのちょつとした工夫のあるゲームを登録してください。

276	パソコンの画面からホワホワとハートがあふれてきそうな純愛物語から、凛として大人の雰囲気漂う純愛物語まで、理屈抜きでこれぞ純愛ですよというものを登録して下さい。
279	ＨＣＧに差分があればたいていの場合射精後のＣＧがあります。私としてはＨシーンで最も使える瞬間は射精直後だと思うので精液描写についてのＰＯＶがあってもいいと思い作ってみました。登録お願いします。
287	複数の男女間の複雑な人間関係に入り組んだ恋愛感情・葛藤、いわゆる「三角関係」の描写が印象的な作品を示してください。ＡＢＣ基準は「三角関係」の描写がシリアス・ヘビーな印象度が高い作品を基準として登録願います。
298	エロゲの、本編以外のもう１つの魅力。購入特典！これでそのゲームに対しての評価も大きく変わることもあります。なお、対象となるものはパッケージに含まれているものに限ります。初回限定でもかまいません。 封入特典とは別の、店頭手渡しでのテレカなどは対象外です。 Ａ：特典を目当てで買ってもいいくらい素晴らしい！ Ｂ：なんか得した感じになるくらいの特典。 Ｃ：一応いいかどうかは別として特典がついてる。
309	フタナリ、乃ち両性具有者の登場するゲームの登録お願いします。 先天、後天は問いません。 ＡＢＣについてはＨシーンの出来でお願いします。
310	二人以上の姉妹キャラが登場し、各々にＨシーンのあるゲームを登録願います。 義理姉妹やご近所の姉妹、年の上下等、主人公との関係は問いません。 主人公をめぐる姉妹の機微、煩悶や、姉妹どんぶり、３Ｐ等、姉妹ならではのバリエーションがあれば、尚結構です。 但し、「姉妹」として、シナリオやＨ等の絡みがある事を必須とします。 ＡＢＣは「姉妹モノ」部分の出来如何で評価願います。 ※「姉妹モノ」＝設定、シナリオ、絵柄、姉妹の魅力、Ｈシーン等
311	実の姉弟・義理の姉弟であるかのように強く意識させるキャラの光るゲームを登録してください。所謂となりの姉さん的キャラは不可です。 主人公を「弟としての家族」と感じさせてくれるよう描かれているなら従姉等でも OK です。 ABC は面白さよりも姉要素の印象でつけてください。
314	武器や魔法、格闘技、特殊能力等を用いて、敵(あるいは主人公)と戦うヒロインがいる作品の登録をお願い致します。 ＰＯＶ的に登録作品が幅広くなりますので、出来ましたらヒロインの具体的な魅力や性恪、気質、職種等をコメントで書いて頂けると嬉しいです。
317	ケモノっ娘に萌える人は権威向上を目指してどんどん該当作品を登録していきましょう。。 コメントには種族や萌えポイント等を書き込んでいただけるとありがたいです。 Ａ：ケモノっ娘の特性を十分に活かしたＨがある物。 Ｂ：多少は特性が現れている物（語尾に「にゃん」とか）。 Ｃ：明らかに耳シッポがついているだけ。 【注意点】剥いた時に一目でそれと分かるものに限定（ケモノの血をひくとか異能力がある等潜在的な物は除外）
318	シナリオ重視の作品で、シナリオの内容が理解しやすい作品の登録をお願いします。 シナリオ重視であることを前提としますから、ヤリゲーのようにシナリオを読み解く必要のない作品はもとより、意味不明・説明不足・曲解されやすい不可解さが感じ取れる作品は登録対象外とします。 ＡＢＣ基準はシナリオの理解しやすさを基に登録お願いします。
343	イった後でも攻め続けられて何度も連続で絶頂に・・・ そういうイキまくるシーンのある作品の登録をお願いします。 ABC はＨシーンの印象度でお願いします。

346	お店が舞台だと思うゲームを登録してください。　　ABC はその作品内でお店が占めている割合や重要度でお願いします。　また、お店の特徴などのコメントがあればありがたいです。
350	ヒロインとお風呂に入りたいんじゃー！！ 評価は、皆さん本人の満足度でお願いします。 その際参考にしたいので、簡単なシーンの紹介も書いていただけると嬉しいです。 それでは、お願いします！！
356	物語が単一の主人公の視点から描かれるのではなく、複数の登場人物の視点を用いることによって 事件の真相解明を行ったり、キャラクターの心情をより深く描写出来ている作品を登録して下さい。 A～C は複数視点をどれだけ有効に活用出来ているかでお願いします。
359	反社会的でモラルのない行動をとる悪のイメージが似合う主人公を登録してください。 例えば、他人の不幸が自分の幸福な鬼畜、触るもの皆傷つける不良、女を見れば見境無いエロ大魔王、警察に追われる犯罪者など。 ABC（基準）は主人公の「悪」が映えるアンチヒーロー度でお願いします。 主人公がアンチヒーローでも、カッコいいと感じる場合、「主人公が素敵」にも登録して頂けると助かります。
362	意図的な行動ではなく、あくまで無意識でとった行動や言動が世間とずれてる。 自分では普通の事だと思っても人と異なっており、或いはよかれと思って取った行動も迷惑であったり笑われたり。 または何も無い所で転んだり、何をやっても失敗ばかり、しかしなぜか彼女がいるだけで場が和む…等々。 こういった天然系のキャラやドジっ娘を集める POV です。 ＊心身に関わらず、病キャラは対象外です。
363	果てしなく甘々でぬるま湯な世界を届けてくれるヒロイン、愛情や奉仕とかをはるかに超えて、精神的にただただ際限なく甘やかしているだけのヒロイン・・・。 ひとことで言えば『ダダ甘』な世界を与えてくれるヒロインが登場するゲームを登録してください。 ＡＢＣ評価は、ヒロインの甘やかせっぷりの度合いでお願いします。
367	バイオレンス・スプラッター描写のあるゲームを登録願います。 シーン数や、イベント絵の有無、メインテーマの重要性等は問いません。 １シーンでもゲームとして印象に残る作品が対象です。
369	ゲーム内に女装ネタが存在するゲーム。 ランクの考え方としては下記の通りです。 A：女装ネタが有り、そのイベント等のシチュエーションがすごく楽しく面白い。 B：女装ネタが有り、それなりに面白く出来ている。 C：女装ネタは有るが、有るだけという程度。
377	髪型、時間経過による成長、男装、眼鏡等の様々な要因によりヒロインの外見が変化する作品の登録をお願いします。（あくまで外見のみ、ツンデレ等の内面の変化はご遠慮下さい） (プロローグから・エピローグにても含みます) ＡＢＣ基準は一応、初回登場時とのギャップの大きさや、その印象度にて。 またＰＯＶの性質上、ネタバレの可能性がありますので、ご注意下さい。
379	主人公が一般的水準のエロゲより明らかにモテモテだと思う作品を登録して下さい 最低条件は主人公に好意を持っているヒロインが同時に複数存在する事です 告白されて(して)いなくても構いませんが、好きである事が見え見えのレベルのみが対象になります 従って密かに想われている程度では不可、逆にそれ以上の関係(恋人関係等)にある場合は当然ＯＫです Ａ～Ｃは以下の基準に従って最も近いものを登録して下さい Ａ…ヒロインが主人公に惹かれる過程が描かれていて、少なくともある程度は理解出来る Ｂ…初期設定で既にモテモテ、あるいはそれに近い状態にあるが納得出来る理由は説明されている Ｃ…何故モテるのか全く説明されていない・理解出来ない等で上記に当てはまらない

399	同好の士しか食指が動かないＰＯＶだと思いますので説明は省きます、ＡＢ判定は足を使ったプレイの印象度で、足コキは勿論のこと、舐める、嗅ぐ、踏まれる等濃いシチュも大歓迎です。 Ｃには直接的では無いものの熱い要素がある物を登録してください、単純にキャラのスタイル（脚）が良いから、行為中等に絡められる脚の些細な動作等に燃える、ルーソが熱い、ニーソが熱い、パンストが、いやいやガーター付きが･･･等視点は自由に判断してください。
402	主人公にとって他人でもなければ家族でもない。主人公との距離が近いような遠いような、そんな微妙な関係の従姉妹が登場するゲームの登録をお願いします。 A～C は従姉妹キャラの魅力度でお願いします。
412	「主人公が居候する事になって～～」や「女の子が押し掛けて来て～～」等に代表される「ある日突然女の子との生活が始まって」的シチュがある作品の登録をお願い致します。 本ＰＯＶでは、ヒロインとの日常的な生活（性活？）描写を楽しめるかどうかが最重要ポイントになります。 なのでゲーム開始前から既に相手(特に肉親関係)と同居・同棲していて新鮮味が無い作品や、ワンシーン・エンディングのみの描写しかないもの、及び監禁・調教のような明らかにカラーが異なる作品の登録はご遠慮頂けると有難いです。
415	表情が乏しい女性キャラ（寡黙な人形風キャラ、冷淡な支配者キャラなど）が出てくるゲーム。 「終始変化しない氷の横顔キャラは痺れる！」や「無表情な外見と過激な性格のギャップに萌え！」などの目安として。コメント欄にはキャラ名と萌えポイントなどをどうぞ。
416	自分のことを「僕」「ぼく」「ボク」と言う女の子がヒロイン（メイン・サブにはこだわりません）のゲーム。 ＡＢＣはキャラの魅力や 僕っぷり、コメントでは該当ヒロインの名前や魅力、性格、容姿、その他萌えポイント等を熱く語って下さい。 Ａ：ブラボー！ Ｂ：まぁまぁ好みかな。 Ｃ：うん、普通に僕っ娘だね。 を目安によろしくお願いします。
420	マルチシナリオ形式の作品において全て(あるいは特定)のルートを見た事によって それまでには知り得なかった作品の根幹・背景を理解出来る様になり それによって作品全体に対する見解・評価が完全に変わってしまう様な作品を挙げて下さい 隠蔽機能対象ですがネタバレは極力控える方向性で Ａ～Ｃはどの程度そう思ったのかでお願いします
424	「目立っちゃいけないはずなのに、纏うは可憐な（ちょっと恥ずかしい）コスチューム」そんな愛でずには居られない魔女っ娘が活躍するゲームを登録してください。 舞台が地球では無く、魔法の国での魔女っ娘を描いた作品も大歓迎ですし、普通の生活を送っていたけれどいきなりデビューという所謂魔法少女なノリもＯＫです。 ※便宜上魔法の国としていますが、魔界でも異世界でも限りなく地球に似た星でも表現は何でもかまいません。
426	ゲーム内に登場する部活動が印象的な作品を登録して下さい。対象は、部活動を代表とし、倶楽部、サークルなど、活動場所は問わず、学生が一団となって活動したイベントなどでも構いません。 Ａ～Ｃはその部活動の印象に残った度合いで評価をして下さい。
441	電車やバスの中等での痴漢行為があるゲームを登録してください。疑似・リアルは不問です。 全編痴漢だと嬉しいですが、凌辱、調教などのＨシーンの中に痴漢プレイが含まれているというタイプの物も登録お願いします。 A～C は痴漢シーンの多さや濃さを含めたお薦め度でお願いします。
459	あなたが「これは電波ソングだ！」と感じた面白い歌のあるゲームを登録してください。 卑語飛び交いまくりのエロソング、これは元々こういう曲なのか？な音痴ソングなどなど Ａ～Ｃのランクは曲の電波度にてお願いします。

465	女教師【女教職員限定です】が登場する作品を登録してください。 （女教師メインの作品はもちろん、ヒロインの一人として登場する場合もＯＫです。） ＡＢＣは「女教師」という職業がシナリオに生きてるかどうかの出来の良さで登録お願いします。
468	キャラクター達が集う場所があり、それが皆にとっての特別な場所、一番の思い入れのある場所だった作品を登録してください。 感想はなるべくネタバレのないように評価し、Ａ～Ｃはその場所が、どれだけその作品の中で印象に残ったかでお願いします。
470	露出・羞恥プレイのあるゲームを登録して下さい。陵辱・調教モノでは結構な数になるのではないかと思います。ですが、これをメインに置くゲームは少ないと思いますので、単一のプレイであっても勿論構いません。 ABC は度合いでお願いします。判断基準として、描写の濃さ、ヒロインの反応、ギャラリーの有無等々があります。
476	お互い親しい同性と接しているような間柄に慣れきっていて、そしてその関係が永遠に続くと思っていた（思い込んでいた）のに、いつの間にか愛情が芽生えて・・・ そんなシナリオが楽しめるゲームを教えて下さい。 Ａ～Ｃの基準は、そのシナリオがどれだけプレイヤーの情感を震わせたかで考えていただき、且つコメントでヒロインへの熱情を語っていただけると幸いです。
486	「男」ではなく「男の子」、「格好良い」というより「可愛い」、そんな表現が似合う、いわゆる「ショタ」系キャラが登場する作品の登録をお願い致します。 ＡＢＣの分類はそのキャラのショタ度や、作品内での存在感等でお決め下さい。 ショタ度の判断につきましては基本的にお任せ致しますが、例としましては ・見た目(童顔、低身長) ・言動(一人称が僕、女声) ・その他特性(実質小中学生、童貞、主人公かどうか、H シーンの多少) 辺りが基準になるかもしれません。
493	単純にシナリオが良い、とまでは言えないが読み深めることで評価が変わりそうなものや、そういったものを回避したい、シナリオは直球であって欲しいといった人へはお薦めできないものへの POV です。 シナリオの中に暗喩的にテーマや答えが内在していたりするために、余り考えずに流し読みするだけでは駄作などとして評価されてしまう危険性の高いもの、若しくは何度も読み深めることで更にその評価を高められるようなものに対しての登録をお願いします。 また、未完などと呼ばれるものの中には明確にはその結末を示さないこと、それ自体が意図して行われたことであり、プレイヤー側に想像させ得る材料などは十分に揃っている場合も多く見られると思われるので、そういったものも登録して頂いて結構です。 ABC はその度合いについて主観で判断してください。
501	バグという訳じゃないんだけどシステム・仕様に不満を感じるゲームを登録してください。 同時期発売のゲームには付いてる機能がなかったり、メディア・セーブデータの扱いが面倒だったりするゲーム用です。 単純にセーブデータ枠数が少ないとか声がないとかでもかまいません。 コメント推奨。 不満度をＡＢＣで。
502	■デッサン及びパースの取り方に不自然な CG がある。 ・顔と体の位置がおかしく、バランスが狂っている。 ・関節の動きがおかしく、実際には起こりえない位置に四肢が描かれている。 ・パース（遠近法）の取り方がおかしく、アングルによって、キャラクターの体の造形が崩れている。 ■パッケージやオフィシャルホームページに掲載されている CG と、製品版での CG の差が激しい。 ■立ち絵と 1 枚絵の差で、同一人物にも関わらず、かなり違った人に見えてしまう。統一性に欠ける。 ■塗りに雑さが見られる。原画師の絵柄とマッチしていない。 ■背景絵に雑さが見られる。SF（非現実）世界、現実世界に近いなどという場面を問わず、雑で

	ある。投影がおかしく歪である。 等々このような状態が存在する作品であれば、付けてください。 ABC 基準は不満度やその乱れの度合いによって付けてください。
503	控え目だったり、おとなしかったりするヒロインが登場するゲームを登録してください。 好きな人の前では赤面して俯いてしまったり、何も言えなくなったり、どもったりしてしまうヒロインって思わず応援してあげたくなりますよね。 コメント欄には、そんなヒロイン名を記入して下されば参考になります。
504	甘々な萌ゲーもいいけれど、サスペンスストーリーの緊張感は忘れられない印象がありますよね。 サスペンスといってもミステリーだけでなく、ＳＦ・ファンタジー・ホラー・サイコなど、ジャンルは問いません。 とにかく読み進めるのに緊張感がある物語で、選択肢でハラハラさせられたり、クリックを押すのにもドキドキする、そんなスリリングな展開が繰り広げられる作品を登録してください。
505	精神的に「病んでいる」ヒロインの異常な言動が魅力的なゲームを登録してください。 主人公に異常に執着するいわゆるヤンデレに限らず、重度のトラウマ持ちや精神崩壊なども含みます。 体が病弱なだけ、腹黒なだけ、依存が強いだけなどは対象外です。 病みかたの「魅力」の大小によって ABC をつけてください。
506	歌うヒロインが魅力的なゲームを登録してください。 歌手として華々しく活躍するヒロインだけでなく ヘンテコな即興歌を歌って楽しませてくれるヒロイン、 ストリートライブやカラオケ、演劇舞台 etc で頑張って歌うヒロインまで含みます。 歌によってキャラが立っている、歌うシーンのあるヒロインが対象です。
507	一人病院で静かに入院しているヒロイン、身体的にハンデを抱えたヒロインなど 儚げさ、健気さなどピュアな印象が強い病弱・身障者のヒロインが登場する作品の登録をお願いします。 心を病んでいる場合は【精神を病んでるヒロインが魅力的】への登録をお願いします。 それとネタバレ回避のために、オフィシャルサイトでそのヒロインの病弱設定が公表されていない場合は名前を伏せるよう心がけてください。
508	不幸な境遇に負けず懸命に生きている、 苦労が報われてない感じがする、諦めて逃げちゃってもいいのにと思える、 そんな思わず手を差し伸べたくなるような、不幸なヒロインを登録してください。 ABC は「支えてあげたい／守ってあげたい」と思った度合いでお願いします。
509	娼婦、遊女、援交娘、悪人に売られたかわいそうな娘、財産目当ての悪女など、経済的利益を目的として H をする・させられるヒロインを登録してください。 キャバ嬢、ホステス、芸者などお水系のヒロインや既に引退している元職でも構いません。 ABC は、ヒロインのお気に入り度でつけてください。 ヒロインを紹介する具体的コメントは大歓迎です。 例：店の業種、ヒロインの性格、職業意識など。
510	面倒見がよく、周囲を引っ張っていく、気っ風の良いヒロインを登録して下さい。 登録するヒロインは、主人公より年上でも年下でもかまいません。 ABC の基準は、ヒロインの姉御っぷりに、惚れ込んだ度合いでお願いします。
511	登場人物たちにおいて主従の絆が感じられるゲームを登録してください。 ABC のランク付けは、主と従の心のつながり（絆）の魅力の度合いでお願いします。
512	『ボーカルの有無は問いません！』 骨太なバンドサウンドによるロックやパンク、ギュンギュン系のメタル、心も体も動き出すハードコアテクノ、逝っちゃいそうなトランスなどなど…『ジャンルは問いません！』 熱ければ、演歌だってかまいませんよ！ とにかく、『これは熱いッ！』と思わせる、ゲームミュージックを登録してください。

513	『ボーカルの有無は問いません』 自然を表現した曲に望郷心をくすぐられるニューエイジ、 異国の音楽でありながら郷愁を覚える民族音楽、 夕陽が似合う哀愁を帯びたアコースティックギターサウンド、 クラシックなら物憂げで優しいピアノ曲などなど…『ジャンルは問いません』 あなたが、『郷愁／ノスタルジー』を感じるゲームミュージックを登録してください。
514	Ｈシーン後に全裸のままシーツに包まった優しげな眼差しのヒロインっていいですよね。 基本の「Ｈシーン後にくつろぐ二人の語らい（ピロートーク）」に限りません。 「傍らで眠るヒロインの髪を梳きながら意味深な台詞をつぶやく主人公(逆でも可)」等、 描写が印象的で深い愛情を感じさせるシーンのあるゲームを登録してください。 Ａ:専用 CG がありシーンも優秀 Ｂ:専用 CG がある Ｃ:CG はないがシーンとして印象的
515	ゲーム内に男装したヒロインが出てくるゲームを登録してください。 女性であることを隠す本格的男装から演劇イベントでの男装などまで含みます。 男装ヒロインの魅力や男装によるインパクトを評価してください。
516	よく目にする SM や調教でのハードな緊縛・拘束のみならず、陵辱時や拷問時の拘束や、罠にかかったり敵に敗北した際の捕縛やはりつけ、あるいは恋人同士のソフトな緊縛プレイまで。 内容のソフト・ハードに拘らず、幅広い範囲での、緊縛・拘束のあるゲームを登録してください。
517	バイブやローター、電マ、アナルパール、果てはオナホやクスコなど、 エロティカルな道具を使ったプレイのあるゲームを登録してください。 ※オナホやクスコのような、珍しい道具があるものはコメント推奨。
518	突然の雨や水遊び水垢離その他が原因でヒロインがずぶ濡れ(びしょ濡れ)になったり、さらには下着や乳首が透けて見えたり浮き出ている立ち絵や一枚絵 CG があるゲームを登録お願いします。
519	外見が褐色なヒロインが登場するタイトルを対象にしたＰＯＶです。 外国人、日焼け娘、人間以外の種族等は問いません。 外見が褐色であることが条件です。 褐色肌女の子の認知度向上を目指して、どんどんタイトルを登録してください。 ＡＢＣはヒロインが印象的であったかどうか。 出来ましたら具体的な魅力や性格、気質、職種等をコメントで書き込んで下さい。
520	手のひらサイズの小さな妖精や亜人種、縮小された女の子に萌える人のための POV です。 サイズは「手に収まるサイズ～両手に乗るくらいのサイズ」を想定しています。 コメントには、ヒロイン名や種族、サイズ、萌えポイント等を書き込んでください。 ABC 基準は出てくる頻度、重要度、体格差を活かしたエロシーンの有無などで分けてください。
521	ナイスな”パイズリ”シーンがあるゲームを登録してください。 バストサイズは無関係です。貧乳キャラの健気なパイズリも登録推奨。 ABC はパイズリしてくれるヒロインの数、回数、満足度などでつけてください。 コメントにはパイズリしてくれるヒロイン名、バストサイズなどをどうぞ。
522	ヒロインを強制的に操るエロシーンがメインのゲームを登録してください。 超能力・魔法・妖術・薬物・機械・催眠・洗脳など方法は問いません。 コメントに操る手段やヒロインの反応を書いてくれると助かります。
523	気に入ったお嬢様を登録する POV です。 凛々しい、おしとやか、ミステリアス、小悪魔っぽい… どんなタイプのお嬢様でもかまいません。 お嬢様らしい魅力によって ABC をつけてください。 コメントには推したいヒロイン名、お嬢様のタイプをどうぞ。 タカビーさが前面に出たお嬢様はタカビーお嬢 POV に登録してください。
524	ヒロインの水着姿にこだわりのあるゲームや、水着フェチを対象にしたゲームを登録する POV です。 水着姿が出てくる頻度や、ヒロインがイベントで披露する水着姿のインパクトによって ABC をつけてください。

525	アンドロイド、ロボッ娘、ホムンクルス、人形・ドールなど、人造人間であったり、機械らしさ人造物らしさのあるヒロインが魅力的なゲームを登録してください。 ・人造少女ならではのキャラクター性に萌えた作品 ・人造少女が人と触れ合うことでの変化が良い作品 ・人造少女と人との葛藤の描写が優れた作品 など. . . コメントにはヒロイン名、属性（ロボとかオートマタなど）を明記してもらえれば参考になります。 ただし、実は人工生命であったというようなヒロインの秘密が、ネタバレとなる場合もありますのでコメントには注意してください。
526	優等生タイプ、柔和温和タイプ、天然タイプ等いろんな委員長がいると思いますがヒロイン・サブは問いません！お気に入り度合いに応じてＡ～Ｃ投票願います。 （委員長とはクラス委員長や各委員長、副委員長など） コメントにはキャラクター名とタイプを記載して下さい。
527	魅力的な黒髪ロングヒロインが登場する作品を登録してください。 テンプレイメージなんて無関係、些細な飾りや微妙な色の違いは許容範囲です。 ABC 基準はそのヒロインへの好感度でどうぞ。
528	面白い見所もあるのに個別ルートがダメという残念なゲームを登録してください。 個別がダメだったヒロイン名やどう問題だったかも記載してくださるとうれしいです。 【登録される例】 ○特定の個別ルートがやっていて苦痛。期待はずれ ○多くの個別ルートがやっていて退屈。作業に感じる ○個別に入って共通ルートでの面白さがなくなってしまった ○共通と比べて個別が短く物足りない
529	セリフ中におま○こやおち○ぽなどの卑語が多い場合に登録してください。 また、できましたら音声修正についてコメントしてください。 ABC 基準は以下の通りです。 A：H シーンの随所に卑語がある B：随所とは言わないが、それなりにある C：ゲームの一部に卑語が多めの H シーンがある 【注意】声優さんによる音声のないゲームは対象外です。
530	規律正しく生真面目から、厳格な堅物ヒロインなど登録してください。 規律を重んじたり、規則を守る意識の高さがあるヒロインで、 そんな真面目なのにナゼか主人公には甘かったり、 主人公との恋愛には初心(ウブ)だったりするのがポイントです。 コメントにはヒロイン名だけでなく役職や職業なども書いていただければ参考になります。 （軍人、騎士、武士から風紀委員など）
531	気持ち悪いキャラ(オタク・オヤジ・デブ・浮浪者など)のＨシーンがあるゲームを登録してください。 「寝取られ」や「陵辱」等と他の POV との組み合わせで様々な嗜好ニーズにも対応できます。 キモさが表現されていれば和姦・強姦を問いませんが、触手・化物・禽獣の類は「ゲテモノ」POV へお願いします。 A:外見だけでなく歪んだ内面まで描かれており、際立ったキモさを誇る。 B:外見的な特徴は十分だが、内面描写は薄い。 C:ちょい役程度であまり印象に残らない。
532	ヒロインがストーリーの途中で、悪側に堕ちるシチュエーションを登録してください。 代表的なシチュエーションは、以下の通りです。 ・悪の主人公が、調教などで正義のヒロインを屈服させる。 ・魔法少女や変身ヒロイン物で、仲間が洗脳されて敵になる。 ランク A:悪堕ちがしっかり描かれており、ヒロインの変貌ぶりの印象が強い B:悪堕ちがあって印象に残る C:悪堕ちがあるがあまり印象に残らない
533	年齢的ギャップの大きいヒロインを登録して下さい。 年上ロリやロリババアの他、幼児退行ヒロイン・ロリ化(大人化)したヒロインなども対象です。 具体的に知りたい方は、ロリ・年上・女教師・人外・催眠などの POV と併用して下さい。 ランク分けは、該当キャラやシチュへの印象の強さや分量の多さでお願いします。

534	２Ｄ３Ｄを問わず、Ｈシーンの動画がよくできているゲームを登録してください。 ランク分けは絵の綺麗さ、動きの滑らかさ、動きや視点の豊富さ等でお願いします。 わかる方はセルアニメ・After Effects アニメ・３Ｄ等もコメントしてください。 【注意】非Ｈシーンを評価する場合は「ムービーが良い！(エロ動画除く)」に登録してください。
559	主人公が他人の女性を寝取ることができる作品を登録してください。 例えば他人の女性を心まで落として自分の物にするゲームです。 ABC の基準は主人公のヒロインに対する執着心の度合いでお願いします。
618	幼児体型・ペドでは無い貧乳ヒロインがいるゲームを登録願います。

A1.4. Table of translated evaluation descriptions

ID	POV Description (Translated)
1	Porn, just porn. What we'd do without it (*nukigē*)?
2	Use this to register works that not only did not end well, but also left you with a bad aftertaste, a sense of regret. Maybe those games aren't that bad, right?
3	It's a porn game, but playing it makes you forget about time. You can play it for a long time and never get tired of it, it can withstand repeat playthroughs.
4	A good game but it seems to never end. Not good for people with a job which do not have a lot of time. If possible, it would be helpful if you could include in the comments the specific time it took you to complete the game or the time it took you to complete the whole game.
6	The background music in this game is great! Vocal songs are excluded, those should be rated under "Good Songs"
7	Catalogs games with intellectual themes such as philosophy, psychology, folklore, science. For trivia and hobbyist knowledge use the 'miscellaneous' POV. Use the miscellaneous field to register the kind of knowledge that may be gained and how it is delivered to you.
9	'Bishōjo games' are not exclusively comprised of moe games and crying games! Sometimes there are hard-boiled works with cool & hard characters which might be good every once in a while. Use the POV to record these hard-boiled works filled to the brim of hard-boiled elements that give them their sharp edge.
10	Laughter is one of the basic ingredients that make up a scenario (I suppose). Use this to record games with funny gags, exquisite *bokke/tsukkomi* routines, or that are just plain funny. It would also be good if you can write in the comments whenever the scenario is good because of its comedic elements. A: Lots of laughter through the entire game. B: More quality funnies than quantity and not necessarily through the game, but they are funny. C: Your mileage may vary, depends on the person.
12	Games that start nicely but are over in a flash. This game's just small. Even people with a job with not a lot of free time to play it may not be satisfied with it. Sorry, just copying from the original. If you can, it would be great if you register the specific time it took you to reach full completion
13	Games which are cool even from a man's point of view
14	Fantasy works go under this. Sort A-C according to how many fantasy elements are present.
16	I thought someone would make it but it doesn't seem so ^ ^. Register games you like where you can have sex with a character who calls you 'big brother' [*oniisan*] or similar terms.
17	Vital information – check the game's version, please. A: patched files required due to issues (unstable operation, not clearable, etc.) B: Patched files are between required and recommended (system improvement, etc.) C: Patched files are recommended (typos and other minor things that do not interfere with play). If multiple items apply, priority is given to the highest priority.

22	It is immoral, but it's ok because it's fiction (a game). Do not imitate (incest goes here as well).
23	Register games you think are exceptional. This POV is to grade works based on the impact they had on you. Hopefully, you'll also pick works which are less complete and cannot be highly rated, but you nevertheless think are better than highly acclaimed works. This POV is based on the idea that a high-scoring work and a work capable of impact people are two different things. Don't go overboard with A-ranks, however.
24	Games giving high expectations after looking at packages, magazine ratings, OHP and hearing impressions from the streets, but then become a disappointment after buying. Also includes video games whose selling point was not fully demonstrated within the game. Use A to C depending on how much it disappointed you.
27	The purpose of this POV is to record mysteries in the broad sense of the word, not just the focus on catching a culprit or solving a puzzle. For mysteries remaining unsolved at the end of the game, please use the 'horror' or 'fantasy' POVs.
28	Please record your recommendations as veteran gamers. The point is not to just list the best or highly rated works, but to make a list of games for newcomers. Reasons may range from being an origin work, a work that cannot not be discussed when talking about the era, the beginning of a creator's good streak, a work you were happy to play (I wish you did) when you were a beginner and so on.
29	Erotic games with good voice performances by well casted voice actors
30	Record works which leave a lasting impression of the character growing and developing through the story, or games which leave a lasting impression by depicting the anguish and conflict of reaching adulthood. Use the ABC criteria including the degree of pleasant impression left by the coming of age.
33	Is this a 'moe game' because it has many heroines with moe elements, or is it one because scenarios and traits are everywhere? Without privileging one criterion over the other, record games which are 'true moe games' and would recommend as such.
34	Record games that make you want to immerse within their world instead of only wondering where the story is going. Describe the world around the characters, the background and the setting in the comments.
35	Games that deal mainly with human experimentation involving drugs, drug addiction, destruction of personality, hypnosis, insanity, etc.
36	Record games where the scene where the sleepy/goofy protagonist is waken up gently by the heroine. Depending on the work, waking up might not be so gently, but we'll accept that as an expression of affection.
38	If it only was good in that aspect, this game would be a masterpiece! Record games that you personally rate as a good work or close to being one, but could have been rated higher if one part had been better. If possible, register the flawed portion or your personal recommendation in the comments.

39	Bugs are the worst. As it stands, the game doesn't work, or does not function appropriately even if patched. Games that clearly shows the negligence of the manufacturer.
40	A game with great vocal performances (opening theme, ending theme, and insert songs).
42	A game that makes you think about life through a story oscillating between life and death. Memento mori.
43	A game that makes full use of screen effects and sound effects, and is full of sense in its presentation.
44	Summer. Summer means ghost stories. Record games with thriller and occult themes/plots. (This POV was created in the summer.)
45	Games with supporting characters such as friends and family of the main character, non-capturable sub-characters, etc.
46	Games with cool titles, or games which make you think that 'there can be no other title' after completion.
47	Record games with well made movies of non-erotic scenes, such as OP trailers, ADV segments, battle scenes etc. Evaluate games based on the overall quality of the game, following criteria such as 'quality of animation', 'quality of direction', 'tempo of music' etc. Note: Erotic scenes should be evaluated with the 'Good Erotic Cutscenes' POV. If it's only animation that impresses you, record the game under 'Good animation (non-H)'.
48	Foreshadowing is perfectly resolved at the game's end. You'll be convinced by the resolution.
50	We hoped someone would bring this up eventually, but no one did. C'mon guys, let's be honest about our desires (lol). Regarding ranks: A is a main loli character. B. Loli main character but worse than A. C. No loli main character but there's this something worth seeing. It's up to you to decide how loli the character is.
51	Record games whose setting/worldview makes us want a sequel, games that makes us want to play the full version, and games that makes us want the remake of an old work. Regardless of whenever sequels or expansion packs are actually there, record games that you'd like to play. Award A to C on the basis of how much you want to play such a game.
52	Games with voices that ruin a scenario or the whole game. Examples include voices that make you wince at first listen, voice actors with no acting skills or laughable insert songs.
54	Being spoiled by a cute older sister, wanting to be lead gently, wanting to be toyed with by an adult's sex appeal, etc. A game with a lovely and naughty older sister.
55	Record games that do not spare expenses in areas outside the main story and possess a full range of quality-of-life functions for your erotic game experience. Examples include full environment settings (e.g., speed setting in auto mode, speed of skipping, etc.), complete recollection mode, a functional but nice text box, some interesting bit during installation, startup and shut down, etc.

56	Good games with nice blowjob scenes (because it's the default these days) A: I can't think of this game without the blowjob scenes. B: Plenty of erotic and nice blowjob scenes!! C: There are blowjob scenes with potential, worth taking a look at.
57	Record games with cool scenarios!
59	Record porn games with BL elements, A for full porn CG, B for ED only, and C for atmosphere only.
60	Record games with heroines which are not human according to the game's setting.
61	Games with great scenes and dialogues, Worth seeing, regardless of the game's quality.
62	Record games where you can see a heroine change through erotic training. It involves well defined processes of disgust, embarrassment, shame before a final confession of being actually a whore, slut, slave, and a collapse of her personality. The process is very important. If the change is sudden, or there is a contradiction in the process, such as the heroine being disgusted at times and lewd at other times, it will be marked as X. The heroine's psychological change and the consistency of it are important.
63	Record games with attractive heroines who are foreigners. Half/Quarter are also acceptable if they come off as foreign. Use ABC criteria on the basis of how likeable the heroine is.
64	Record games which come off as gross, or popular only with one group of people. These games are too difficult.
65	Games that soothe the heart in terms of story, world view, characters, etc.
66	Recently, I thought suddenly about who might be the maid character that is stealing everyone's popularity? Rank games by how wonderful the maids are. Please comment which character if possible. A. Best! I fell in love! B. Recommended. C. ...some people might like it.
67	Record games that moved you or made you cry (*nukigē*).
68	Minako Saito's novel, *Ninshin shōsetsu* [A novel of pregnancy] inspired me. While porn games are based on having sex, some might consider the pregnancy afterwards. Love live babymaking!
70	While it's hard for lay people to evaluate how advanced technology might be, record games that you feel are highly advanced. Don't compare them with generalist games though (^ ^;.
72	A game with good heroines and scenario, but the protagonist character is bad enough to lower the game's rating. Examples include characters who might be too arrogant or too timid, or a personality that does not fit in the story.
75	Record games with niche, trash situations such as outdoor play with bugs, bestiality, and tentacles.
78	Record games with excellent written prose. Prose, not the scenario. Works with excellent prose.
80	Please register the works that have a lot of heroines with H-scenes without worrying about the possibility of winning them over or their scenarios. ABC criteria marks the number of girls who appear in the game and how much they leave an impression.
81	Record games with beautiful CG. It doesn't matter if it's the character illustrations or the background, but it's helpful if you could write whenever it's one or another in the comments. Also, in the past many

	games had a resolution of 640x480, but recently this has risen to 800x600, and it should also be included. Even if you haven't played the full game, rate the trial version if you think the CG is beautiful.
83	Record games featuring kimono fetishes, in which kimonos, miko costumes, or hakama are the main items
84	Record games where heroines are played around with. Rate on the basis of eroticism or how disgusting it is.
86	This is a POV to rate the game balance of RPG-like games and games where you can raise and lower parameters. If you give a ‘C’ rating and write whenever the game is too easy or too difficult you’ll make a lot of people happy.
88	As the name suggests, record games that make you feel depressed during or after playing. Depression can be simply a feeling of sadness or loneliness, don't take it too seriously (*utsugē*).
89	Moe in a heartwarming is good, but we also look for games featuring an ‘hot-blooded’ worldview, scenarios and scenes showing ‘hot’ blood and spirit. Examples include burning battles with rivals and unbreakable determination to carry out justice. Some might feature hot-blooded battles, but those should be recorded as "impressive battle descriptions (scenes)". Record works that are "hot-blooded" in terms of scenario, scenes, characters, etc. ABC is for that passion!
91	Record games with scatological depictions.
96	Record games with well-done animated sequences that are not H-scenes. Full animation is rare in porn games, and even OP movies and small cut-ins are valuable. Evaluate games based on picture quality, smoothness of movement etc. We are mainly interested in 2D animations. Note: If you would like to rate H scenes, please register under ‘Good Erotic Cutscenes’! If the movie is comprehensively excellent as a movie, please register it in "Good Movies (except porn scenes)’ if the video is great overall.
97	A game whose ‘twist’ and ‘conclusion’ do not serve their purpose. They are either too hasty, puzzle solving is shoddy, and it is, in general, an unconvincing substation for the missing parts. A game that fails to impress, not what I expected
98	Record games where you cannot feel originality in the scenario or its development, or games which are derivative or patchworks. In this case, a comment on the original story is helpful. Rate the game with an A if you think the game is very similar to other games, and C if it is somewhat similar to other games.
99	Record games with diskless booting. Works with some restrictions are also acceptable but the ABC are meaningless if you cannot play the game satisfactorily. The ABC criteria are as follows: A: No effect on music, voice, etc. B: Some functions such as music, voice, etc. are missing, but the game is playable (CD-DA, etc.) C: Other limitations that detract significantly from the game’s enjoyment.

	The game should meet the recommended specs from the manufacturer, be fully installed and require no special operations. If patches are needed, please state it in the comments. (By the way, I think the information will be more reliable when used in conjunction with the attribute "diskless bootable").
100	A domineering mistress, you got me. It fires me up! (It's not moe). It's that feeling of splashing someone with your paint, if you know what I mean. It's the pleasure and sense of accomplishment when you win her over. (It's also cute when she becomes strangely obedient after). Tell me which games have these characters
103	Although sex scenes are a common feature in 18-restricted games, these games do not seem to require them. In fact, the presence of sex scenes seems unnatural. These are games that could have been developed for the general public.
105	While stories full of young adults are good, it is also nice to enjoy stories depicting characters acting and thinking like mature adults. Record games with many mature characters or games where their deep knowledge and insight adds depth to the overall scenario in a positive sense.
106	Ideally, scenarios should immerse the reader and possess a good narrative tempo. Unfortunately there are games that may lose this tempo due to monotonous, repetitive, or redundant descriptions, or due to broken development, dull patterns, or inadequate game systems or design. These may make us feel negatively about such works. Use this POV to record games that you could not get through in terms of reading the scenario, or were rather painful due to the sluggishness of the game. Rate them using ABC criteria based on the negative impression that poor narrative tempo extends to the whole work.
108	I'd like to see situations where heroines sucks milk coming out of her breast. This might come from pregnancy, medicine, magic, etc. BISHOP's pseudo milk is a way to make the screen flashy and is not treated as milk, so it's not ok. High school girls and adult women are ok, but if there are elementary school girls lactating or getting pregnant that's…ultra-okay. I'd like to drink some good milk from a healthy girl.
109	Please record any characters whose actions or words or the world of the story make seem crazy or mentally ruined, or themes dealing with insanity. Record games only when the author clearly wants to express insanity.
110	I believe that scenario and eroticism are essential for porn games. This POV stems from the idea that, while it is good to focus on either of those, it is only when both are present that a game can be considered a 'porn game'. Record games with good eroticism and a good scenario. I'd like to see games featuring both a pure love and a humiliation story path.
112	If I have to play a gal game, I'd like to be able to communicate with the girls. One heroine might be beautiful, but if she's like a cardboard cutout it's just not worth it, so I'd like to know if she acts like a human being. This POV evaluates character sprites. Evaluate games with good visual models and originality. Register what you notice about the variations of the standing pictures, their quality, and if they are consistent with the prose.

113	Record games that are difficult to complete without the help of strategy guides, such as games with strict conditions to enable choices and script triggers.
114	Record games that require a certain level of specs to run. A somewhat old personal computer is not enough. Required installation space might be huge, or the requirements for CPU power and memory are high.
116	Record games whose scenario, characters, setting, and humor are so silly that you can't resist laughing (in more ways than one).
117	Feeble protagonists are rife nowadays. Please record games featuring characters who are manly men, and it has been clearly stated to the audience. All kinds of characters are eligible, including protagonists, sub-characters, and even minor roles. Record real men: cool dudes with smarts, sweltering hot-blooded bastards, and those fathers oozing adult charm.
120	There are quite a few good works where the main theme or setting is the 'family', where their amicableness and the strength of their bonds enhance the scenario. Record games with impressive family ties. Patterns may vary and range from living to together due to actual in-laws or complicated circumstances. As long as the impression of family is strong, I don't care about what shape it takes.
121	Who needs men? Anything is possible as long as there's lesbian play. That's what I'm talking about. Rate A and B as you see fit. Use C if the girls do not get too involved with each other.
122	Record games that depict slave training, that kind of games. To that effect, SSD is the ultimate slave training game. The essential part is the process, and must be depicted in painstaking fashion. A game where you rape a girl and then just play with her a little bit and she submits is not enough. Drugs are boring because there is no tension. The prey must be defiant, she must cry and not wanting to play along. If she gives in easily there's no fun. The steeper the path is, the more difficult it is, the more satisfying the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when you reach the end is. Yeah, that's right. Also, I think that the believability of it is one of the most important point, slave training is peculiar, and almost impossible for it happen in real life. The process is enjoyed differently when the process is believable or not. Of course it's much more fun and rewarding when it's believable. If the partner is positive about the training from the beginning, you can use whether the situation is intriguing or not as a criterion for evaluation. Aaalso, there's the other way around, of being trained rather than train, yes.
124	Record games in which you may enjoy female-led H. Examples include cute older women hunting for cherry boys, a dominatrix training her underling, and younger men forced to ejaculate.
126	Dazzling sunlight, cicadas chirping, lush green landscapes, wind chimes, going to the seaside, watermelons, fireworks… Record games set in summer which stir the Japanese's sense of nostalgia. Criteria are as follows. A: The game features summer skillfully in both scenario and direction. The game would not be possible in any other setting B: The game features summer into the scenario and direction to some extent. Without summer, the game's appeal is somewhat diminished. C: it's set in summer and that's it.

127	This POV records games based on the idea that erotic games allow to depict forms of love that generalist games do not allow. ABC criteria are up to those who record but giving a C for a game that is highly erotic or features succubae is against the spirit of this POV, use another POV for that.
128	Multiple scenarios have full of drawbacks like being cumbersome to play multiple times and the lack of overall coherence. This POV record games that have only one final goal. Rating criteria are: A: Games with only one ending. B: Games with one basic plot, albeit with minor branches. C: multiple endings but one True End. Up to you!
131	All games use similar systems (like with ADV), however there are games which use a different system. Record games with unique systems here.
132	Record games with connected works not part of the main title such as post-completion extras, manuals, fan disks, anthology books, novels, drama CDs, soundtrack, animation etc. ABC evaluation is up to you, but it should be based on how interesting they are and much they complete the game. Please elaborate what you've liked in the comments section.
133	Record games in which all or most heroines have big breast/tis. Even if they are not realistic, it's still romantic and people who don't like big titties don't understand that. The conditions don't matter as long as there is a world full of busty heroines. ABC criteria rate how much big breast are attractive and how much you recommend it.
134	Record your favorite heroines and why!
135	Record games that you think are buried masterpieces, games not well know to the public but which should be appreciated more!
137	Record games with a good scenario or which you've enjoyed with a character that you just don't like. We don't care about the character's personality, behavior, or thoughts, so if there is a character that you just can't accept, please rate and comment. ABC criteria are related to how much that character is damaging your enjoyment of the game.
139	Record games whose title makes you spew what you are eating the moment you hear it. The title is so outlandish that you hesitate to mention it when making you are making a restaurant reservation.
143	An heroine just steams with jealousy – cute, isn't it?. Record games with an impressive heroine which burns with jealousy. ABC criteria relate to how much the heroine's jealously make you feel moe.
144	Record games with a seasonal feel, which should be played during that season. Record games set in spring. The criteria are A: The game features spring skillfully in both scenario and direction. The game would not be possible in any other setting B: The game features spring into the scenario and direction to some extent. Without spring, the game's appeal is somewhat diminished. C: it's set in spring and that's it. (It's the same as summer games).
145	Record games with a seasonal feel, which should be played during that season. Record games set in autumn. The criteria are A: The game features autumn skillfully in both scenario and direction. The game would not be possible in any other setting B: The game features autumn into the scenario and

	direction to some extent. Without spring, the game's appeal is somewhat diminished. C: it's set in autumn and that's it. (It's the same as summer games).
146	Record games with a seasonal feel, which should be played during that season. Record games set in winter. The criteria are A: The game features winter skillfully in both scenario and direction. The game would not be possible in any other setting B: The game features winter into the scenario and direction to some extent. Without spring, the game's appeal is somewhat diminished. C: it's set in winter and that's it. (It's the same as summer games).
148	Uniforms, plain clothes, cosplay, mimic tails, miko uniforms, maid uniforms... Anyway, record games that it's worth looking at due to clothed (semi-undressed) sex-scenes. Passionate comments on content and costumes in H-scenes are enthusiastically welcome.
150	Although they say it's the future there's no cellphones, no internet, at best there might be a robot. This is not the future, is a parallel world. This POVs records games dealing with future connected to the present. There should be only A ratings, but if you say that's the future setting feels wrong, give them a C.
151	Students walk to school through footpaths between their homes and everyone knows each other. There are festival in the fall at the village's only shrine, and legends and local customs are still there. Record games set in the countryside, the original place of the Japanese people.
152	Not to be overly critical, but settings, development and situations in this work are so convenient that it feels wrong. Some is ok, but honestly, it's not that good, and too much of this degrades the quality of the scenario, running the whole game. Record games which are so conveniently set that you end up feeling disgusted, dismayed, or negatively affected by it.
155	Record games that you feel painful to play, as if playing it is almost a chore.
156	Porn games almost always feature villains. Record games with villains that are cold-hearted and ruthless, the ones that make us think 'this one's a real bad guy'.
157	There are many porn games with plenty of impressive battle scenes set in everyday settings, but some of them are set in an unique world of were fighting is common instead of the rare thing that it is in modern Japan. I think there are some games that have memorable scenes in those setting. Era, size and the fictional nature of combatants are all acceptable. Anyway, record games which impressed you for their 'world of battles' and its scenes.
163	Porn games set in school are foundational to the porn game genre. Please record works with good descriptions of school events and slapstick episodes which can only take place at school, from nostalgic sweet and sour romances to those full of adolescence. (It doesn't matter if the school is fictional or not, the ABC criteria are about how much the story was enjoyable as a story set in school).
167	Time loops, incapable of returning to one's timeline, parallel worlds, shifting personalities, reality and hallucination. The are many facets to the 'mysterious world' setting. However, you're not supposed to be familiar with it from the beginning. Better to start with a setting that says "Why is this happening, and

	what's going on? We place particular emphasis on the reality of the psychological descriptions of the characters who have wandered into the mysterious world.
169	Record games featuring characters with unusual way of speaking, habits or cliches.
172	There are few games which requiring playing the previous titles in the series to fully understand the story, but there are some where you can get a better understanding of the world if you have played the previous game or give you some laughs. If playing previous titles make these games more enjoyable, record them with this POV!
174	Record games spanning multiple seasons. Rate them with an A if you think those are well represented. Use this as a general reference: - seasonal clothes such as summer and winter clothes are featured. - There are events such as New Year's, the beach, Christmas etc. - There are seasonal weather conditions such as rainy season, typhoon, snow, etc. - There are hot and cold seasons. - Simulation of strategy and management for more than one year (seasonal) - School life for almost one year.
176	A game that makes you intensively regret buying it. Include everything from blatant traps to cleverly camouflaged one. Give an A rating with nuclear mines, a B for anti-personnel mines and C for unexploded ordnance.
177	My secret suspicion is that ratings within this POVs are heavily influenced by good or true endings. However that are bad endings that are better than good and true endings. Record games that have tasteful bad endings. A：Exceeds True(Good) End B：Like True(Good) End C：Not as good as True(Good) End, but still worth a look. Do not spoil the true or normal endings.
180	Record games with extensive common routes before one can enter a character's route and that have few segments that change after repeated play.
182	Games that cannot be purchased at ordinary stores due to special distribution channels, such as dōjinshi games, games distributed as gifts, and games sold exclusively through mail order. The harder the game is to obtain, the higher the rank should be. Comments on how to get the game and its nature (doujinshi, not for sale, expensive software, limited edition, etc.) are welcome.
185	This is about pissing (LOL…couldn't find it in my POVs so I made one). There are many variants, so it's useful to know what kind of play is. Record those games here.
190	While there's a POV for games that are ok without CD, if this is not recorded, we do not know if the CD is required or if it's simply checked for. Also, there might be installation options and we would not know which is best (especially when using an ISO on a laptop). So, use the following criteria for games requiring a disk to boot. A: games requiring a disc even after full install (if you forgot the general details, use this rating). B: Games with an installation option that install the whole game instead of reading from the disk. C: Games where full installation is not possible (must read data from disk).

192	Record games with characters that are attractive but cannot be won over.
193	The protagonist fistfights! Fights, to the death. Fighting to kill. Games where the protagonist is good at this! Do not record games where the protagonist is mentally strong, rate games where the protagonist is strong in physique and instinct.
194	Games with deep foreshadowing and lore. Record games in which such foreshadowing and well-developed worldbuilding enhance the quality of the scenario.
198	Record games that depict a past era, such as works in which the story itself takes place in the past, or works in which past remembrances or sequences in the past have a significant impact on the story itself.
200	Record games with threesomes (or more). If you do, write a brief description of the situation, as in 'Two sisters', 'mother and daughter', 'best friends' etc.
205	Games where the setting and events are all just for the purpose of getting to the sex. Record games that have only H-scenes, and have nothing left once the H-scenes are removed.
211	Record games that arouse jealousy in the players, although the porn game industry has become split in games about pure love and games about deviant love, and the number of other games has decreased. The heroine may be unfaithful or swaps partners. The games are very intense, with female characters having sex with people other than the protagonist, such as a rival or a different girl. Rate games using the ABC criteria depending on how much they turn you on.
214	Little sisters, maids, and witches are fine, but this is the one. A childhood friend! ! How wonderful of her to follow me since I was little! Record games that have characters exuding that childhood friend charm. Heroines ranging from the strong-willed class chairperson type to those who have only single-minded feelings for you, all are GOOD!
216	Record games with anal sex. A. lots of anal sex. B. A little bit of anal sex.
219	Record games where protagonist and the heroine start dating and then become a couple that is so ridiculously stupid in public that they are embarrassing to watch.
225	Games with scenes where the heroine masturbates. Write whenever it was spontaneous, by the protagonist's coercion, and what happened after that.
226	Maidens and maids are good, but in porn games there are a lot of characters who are nurses. Record games that take us into the wonderful world of 'devotion'. Plenty of deviant love around there, or is it just my imagination?
229	Record works where the heroine is a princess or a queen (literally). Do not record games where 'princess' is a mere nickname for one of the heroines. ABC criteria are based on how much heroines impress you and how much they are likeable.
235	Those eccentric misfits populating the world of porn games. Record games where you can see such lovable guys, don't hesitate. An A is interesting and truly lovable eccentric, a C is one who is not that good, and B is somewhere in between. Send us your funny stories, I'm sure we'll get some interesting data.

236	Record games where there are sex scenes with married women. Widows also acceptable. Rate games from A to C depending on how much those situations are immoral and other things.
238	Record games featuring sadomasochism.
240	Twintail hairstyle is typical of Lolita and tsundere characters, but here you record games where you have attractive characters with twintails regardless of personality or archetypes. As long as it matches the character, any condition is ok. ABC criteria rate how much of impression the heroines make and how much they are likeable.
244	Record games where there are girl with glasses (if there's even just one scene where she wears glasses, she's considered to be a girl with glasses). For more detailed criteri, I recommend the following: A: Superior (e.g., glasses function effectively as a character's charm, cute heroine) B: Good (e.g., Just wearing glasses, no particular situation, average heroine). C: Poor (e.g.) The character with glasses is annoying, the glasses are counterproductive, and it would be better if the character did not wear glasses.
245	Record games featuring science fiction-like material, such as space fiction, time travel, depictions of future worlds, etc. Please rate the game based on the sci-fi feel of the content.
250	I added this because we had no POVs on games featuring molestation. This is different than rape or savagery (savagery is about playing around with the character, rape is violence). No love or consent, just animalistic pleasure-seeking regardless of the other's consent. A game that would land you in jail if you did that stuff in real life. Games with such situations, even if it's not the main focus, are also very welcome. Enjoy them, they have been said to be the flower of porn games.
253	Isn't it funny when a heroine loves someone but she's so strong that she cannot express them honestly? When such a girl opens her body and heart, we delight in her showing us a different side. Record games that feature heroines who are very stubbord, 'tsundere' etc., attractive but a little clumsy in their love lives.
254	Enjoying bishōjo games to the fullest require attention to the order of game completion. So, let us know the recommended order of play. ABC mark recommended play orders. Comments are semi-mandatory due to the nature of this POV. Feel free to write in the first person when recording, but be careful to keep spoilers to a minimum.
258	Record games that reference material from manga, games, anime, current events, etc. ABC criteria are left to users, so comments are very appreciated.
261	Ever played a porn game and found yourself saying 'I never thought I could learn that?' Record games which feature information such as trivia good only for shitty stories, or silly anecdotes or tales from the industry that do not make feel like an academic or a lofty intellectual.
262	In porn games, especially in ADVs, choices are an indispensable element creating a sense of interaction. On top of that, evaluating the 'choices' might be useful to know if the game is balanced and the scenario's composition as an ADV game. This POVs dares to evaluate how games present their choices,

	something that is not often done. Record games which left you an impression, good or bad, of the choices (I think it is difficult to understand only this, so I have registered some POVs and comments as concrete examples. If possible, please use "excellent, good, or poor" as criteria.
263	Record games featuring twin heroines. Evaluation criteria are based on how much the two are attractive. For those wanting more detailed standards, choose as follows: A:Superior (e.g.) There are scenarios unique to twins, threesomes, twin endings, B:Good (e.g.) There are twin heroines for the time being, there are no twin endings, but both can be won over, C:Possible (e.g.) Only one of the twin heroines has an H ending, the other appears as a secondary character, they do not look alike or are not actual twins (Sorry, but please refrain from submitting twins of both genders, double personalities, etc., which may spoil the story.
270	The screen changes depending on the date and time of the system clock, there was an unexpected effect when I clicked on the screen. Record games with these little ingenuities, which do not go as far as making the whole system around them.
276	Record games featuring pure love stories, those that seem to flood the screen with hearts, or those with a dignified, mature atmosphere, or anything in between.
279	If there are variations in erotic illustrations, there is usually a post-ejaculation image. I am of the idea that the most useful moment in a porn scene is right after ejaculation, so I made a POV to record games which depict sperm.
287	Record games featuring impressive love triangles, defined as complicated relationships between multiple men and women. ABC criteria is for games that are serious and heavy in their portrayal of love triangles.
298	Something else than the main story is attractive, a purchase bonus which may change your evaluation of the game. Please include only items part of the original package, limited editions are fine to. Telecards and other items that are not included in the package and that are handed in at the store are not eligible. A: It’s so great that I’m buying it for the feelies alone B: The feelies are good enough to make you feel like you're getting something for it. C: its feelies might be useful for one reason or the other.
309	Record games featuring futanari, or hermaphrodites, whenever they are congenital or acquired. As for the ABC criteria, rate them based on how good the sex scenes are.
310	Record games with two or more sister characters, each of whom has her sex scene. Sisters-in-law, neighborhood ‘sisters’, older or younger, etc., are all acceptable. All subtleties unique to sisters such as the subtleties of their relationship with the protagonist, their anguish and jealousies, threesomes, and so on. However, these all must be a ‘sisters’ scenario or some kind of sexual interaction with sisters. ABC will be evaluated based on the quality of the character being a ‘sister’. (Sisters" = setting, scenario, design, attractiveness of the sisters, sex scenes, etc.)
311	Record games featuring characters that give a strong impression of them being real siblings or stepsiblings. ‘Neighborhood sisters’ are no acceptable. Cousins are ok, as long as they make the

	protagonist feel like their younger brother. ABCs should rate the older sister element rather than the fun factor.
314	Record games featuring heroines fighting against the enemy (or the protagonist) using weapons, magic, martial arts, special abilities, etc. Since we're going to have a lot of entries, descriptions of the heroine's specific charms, sexuality, temperament, occupation, etc. are greatly appreciated.
317	If you like kemono musume, record more and more games to improve authoritativeness. Descriptions of race, moe attributes etc. are appreciated. A: Characters with sex scenes that fully utilize the characteristics of the kemonomusume. B: characters with some of the characteristics (such as "nyan" at the end of a word). C: Obviously, it only has ear tails (potential characteristics such as having animal blood or other unusual abilities are excluded.)
318	Record works which are very focused on the scenario and are easy to understand. With that assumption, works which do not require reading or understanding the scenario, such as yarigē, as well as works that are unintelligible, poorly explained, or easily misunderstood are not eligible for registration. The ABC criteria are based on how easy it is to understand the scenario.
343	Record works which depicts continuous orgasms, one after the other. ABC criteria are related to your impression of the sex scene.
346	Record games set in stores. ABC should be based on how important the store is to the game's plot. Also, comments on the store's characteristics are greatly appreciated.
350	Bathing with the heroine! Rate games based on how much they satisfy you. It is highly appreciated If you can also write a brief introduction to the scene, so please, do it.
356	Record works where the story is depicted not only from the protagonist's point of view, but from the perspective of multiple characters, maybe to clarify the case or to more deeply describe a character's emotion. Rate A to C based on how effectively these multiple points of view are employed within the game.
359	Record games featuring a protagonist which can be described as an evil person devoid of moral and acting anti-socially. For example, a demon who draws pleasure in the misfortune of others, a delinquent hurting everyone they meet, a perverted demon king with no regard for women, a criminal pursued by police etc. ABC criteria should be how much of an anti-hero doing 'evil' the character is. If you feel that the protagonist is cool even if they are an anti-hero, also record that the protagonist is beautiful.
362	Their actions, words, unconscious, unintentional deeds are out of touch with the world. Or what they do at the best of their intentions are annoying or laughable. Or they fall down in the middle of nowhere or make mistakes in everything they do, but they bring ease with their presence…and so on. This POV records these characters. Do not record characters who are sick in mind or body.
363	Heroines who just pour endless sweetness and soothing comfort upon the world, those who go far beyond affection and just pamper you without limits. Record games with heroines which bring you into a super-sweet world. Use ABC criteria based on how much they pamper you.

367	Record games featuring violence and splatter descriptions. Number of scenes, presence or absence of event illustrations and whenever they are important to the story's main themes are not important. We are looking for games that leave a mark, even if it's only once scene.
369	Record games featuring cross-dressing. Criteria are as follows. A: Games with cross-dressing and interesting situations and/or events. B: The game has a cross-dressing story and is interesting in its own way. C: There is a cross-dressing story, but it's like there isn't one.
377	Record games where the heroine's appearance changes – changes in hairstyle, growing older, wearing men's clothes, glasses, etc. (Please refrain from internal changes, such as tsundere, etc.) (Including from the prologue and epilogue.). ABC are based on how much she changes. Note that due to the nature of this POV, there might be spoilers.
379	Record games in which the protagonist is clearly more popular with the ladies than average. Minimum requirements is having more than one heroine liking the protagonist at the same time. If the relationship goes beyond that (lovers) then it's OK. A. How the heroines fall in love is described and at least somewhat understandable. B. The heroine has fallen in love already or close to it at the beginning, but her reasons are explained in a convincing manner. C. The reasons for the protagonist being popular are not explained at all or are incomprehensible.
399	This POV is really only for those who are really into foot fetishes. The AB criteria based on how foot play, foot jobs, licking, sniffing, stepping on are all welcome. Record elements which are not directly related but are hot nevertheless in C, such as the character's style (legs) is good, the slightest movement of the legs during the act, etc. is hot, the luso is hot, the knee-socks are hot, pantyhose are hot, garter is hot... etc. write them freely.
402	Neither strangers nor family to the protagonist. Record games featuring cousins who have a delicate relationship with the protagonist, which seems both close and distant. Rate A to C based on how much the cousin is attractive.
412	Record works featuring a situation where there is a sudden start of a life with a girl, as in 'protagonist is suddenly a housemate' or 'A girl comes to live in the house'. The most important criterion is whenever you enjoyed depictions of the heroine's daily (sexual) life. Don't register games where the heroine is already living together with her partner (especially in the immediate family) before the game starts, works that only describe one scene or the ending, or clearly different stuff such as imprisonment and sexual training.
415	Record games featuring female characters with limited facial expressions (taciturn doll-like characters, cold-hearted dominant characters, etc.). 'Ice queen characters who never changes through the game is numbing' and 'The gap between her expressionless appearance and her radical personality is *moe*! and so on as a guide' are good references. Write the character's name and *moe* attributes in the comment box.

416	Record games in which the heroine which refers to themselves in masculine fashion (boku), regardless of whether she is the main or sub heroine. Describe the heroine's name, charm, personality, appearance, and other moe attributes in the comment section. Use the following as a guideline: A: Bravo! B: Well, I guess I like her somewhat. C: She's a normal bokko (meek girl).
420	Record games where viewing all or specific story paths allows you to understand the core and the background of the plot, something that you didn't know before, and this completely changes how you view the game and its evaluation.
424	Record games featuring witches wearing a dainty (and slightly embarrassing) costume that should not be conspicuous, but you cannot help but love. Games which also depict witches in a magical land. For convenience's sake, the term is used to refer to a magical world, a different world, a planet that is infinitely similar to Earth, or whatever else you wish to describe it.
426	Please record games featuring impressive after school club activities. Any club or circle or activity is ok, or even an event on which students are working together. Rate the game A to C based on how much of a lasting impression this activity left you with.
441	Record games featuring molestations on public transportation (train, buses etc.) Realistic depiction not required. It's ok if all the game is about molestation, but also include games that may include molestations within sex scenes such as rape, humiliation, and training. Rate A to C based on how much you recommend certain scenes and how intense they are.
459	Record games with interesting songs that make you say "this is *denpa* [annoying earworm] (Erotic songs full of profanity, tone-deaf songs that are originally like this, etc.)! Rank A to C based on how much annoying they are.
465	Record games featuring female teachers (as in female faculty members). Games featuring a female teacher as the main character, or even as one of the heroines, are acceptable. Rate ABC based on how well the character is integrated within the scenario.
468	Record games featuring a special place where characters gather, a place special for everyone, dear to their hearts. Please give your impressions as spoiler-free as possible and rate A to C based on how memorable the place was in the story.
470	Record game with exposure/humiliation play. I think there are a quite few games like that around. ABC mark the degree of exposure/shame. Criteria include the intensity of the description, the heroine's reaction, the presence or absence of an image gallery, etc.
476	They're used to be in close contact all the time, and they thought this would last forever, but before they knew it, we fell in love. Please record games where there are such scenarios. Criteria for A to C are based on how much the scenario moves player emotionally. Descriptions of your passion for the heroines is appreciated.

486	Record games featuring characters who are boys rather than men, cute rather than handsome, the so called ‘shota’ characters. Classify characters with ABC criteria based on how much the shota element is pronounced. We’ll leave it up to you to determine what that means, but some criteria may include: - appearance (childish face, short stature) - speech and behavior (use of ‘boku’, female voice) - other characteristics (attends elementary or middle school, virginity, whether the character is the main character or not, and whether or not there are any sex scenes).
493	This POV is for games whose scenario which are initially not good but whose impression may change down the line, or for those who want to steer clear of such stuff and prefer a more straightforward scenario. Record games that are at high risk of being evaluated as bad if read without attention, or where repeated reading changes the initial impression. There are also many cases in which a game might be called unfinished but it is done intentionally, with enough material for players to imagine upon. ABC criteria are left to the user’s judgement, and should be based on how much the feature is not a bug.
501	Record games that dissatisfy you due to systems or specifications, although not necessarily because of bugs. This is for games that lack features available in other games released around the same time or have issues handling media and save data. It doesn’t matter if the game doesn’t have enough save slots or does not feature voices. Comments are welcome. ABC mark your level of dissatisfaction.
502	The CGs are unnaturally drawn and have unnatural perspective. Position of faces and bodies are not correct, image balance is not correct. Joints do not move correctly, and limbs are drawn in unnatural positions. The cover image and those on the official website differ greatly from what’s in the game. Sprites and CGs are too different even though they are the same person. Lack of coherence. Painting is too crude. Original drawings do not match the style. Backgrounds are cluttered, regardless of setting. Projections are strange and distorted. If the game has these kinds of issues, use ABC to rate them depending on how much you are dissatisfied or how crude the images are.
503	Record games featuring heroines who are quite and/or reserved. A heroine who blushes and turns her head down in front of the person she loves, is unable to speak, or stammers, this makes us want to root for her. Registering the character’s name in the comments is appreciated.
504	Sweet moe games are great, but a thriller leaves an unforgettable mark. Suspense is not only mystery, but also means science fiction, fantasy, horror, psycho, or any other genre. Record games with a story that makes you tense up as you read it, one that keeps you on the edge of your seat with the choices you must make, and that makes the click of the button a thrilling development.
505	Record games with a mentally ‘ill’ heroine with appealing abnormal words and conduct. This is not limited to ‘yandere’ characters obsessed with the protagonist. It also includes severely traumatized or mentally disordered heroines. Those who are only physically sick, evil or co-dependent should not be registered here. Use ABC to rate how ‘appealing’ is the sickness.

506	Record games featuring attractive heroines singing. Include not only heroines who are actually singers, but also characters who sing entertaining impromptu songs, as well as those who sing in hard in street live, karaoke, theatrical performances, etc. Heroines distinguishing themselves through singing and who have singing scenes are also included.
507	Heroines who are hospitalized, heroines with physical handicaps etc. Record games featuring such heroines giving an impression of purity through fragility and bad health. If it's a mental condition, register her under [Attractive heroines who are mentally ill]. If the condition is not disclosed on the site, avoid spoilers.
508	Record heroines who try hard to live in spite of misfortune, unrewarded hardships, and who could have given up and run away. Register the degree to which you feel like protecting/support her.
509	Record heroines who have or are forced to do H for economic gain, prostitutes or forced into prostitution, poor girl sold by evil men, evil women after property etc. Women in the sex industry, cabaret girls, hostesses, geisha, etc., and those who once were so are also acceptable. ABC are based on how much you favor the girl. Comments introducing the heroine - the type of business of the store, the heroine's personality, professional awareness, etc.- are welcome.
510	Record heroines who are caring, leads others, and has a good spirit. They can be younger or older than the protagonist. ABC criteria ranks how much you have fallen in love with her demeanor.
511	Record games featuring characters in a master-servant relationship. Rate ABCs based on how strong is the connection between the two characters.
512	No need for vocals! Rock, punk, metal, hardcore techno, trance, etc... all genres are fine. As long as it's hot, it can even be enka! Record game with music that makes you go 'this is cool!'
513	Ethnic music that makes you go nostalgic, acoustic guitar evoking a melancholia in tune with the sunset, classical music with gentle piano tunes etc. Any genre is welcome, record games with music that make you go nostalgic.
514	Seeing a heroine completely naked, a kind look in her eyes while wrapped in sheets after a sex scene is nice. This is not limited to 'pillow talk' scenes. Record games that feature scenes with impressive descriptions, deep affection, like the protagonist combing the heroine's hair while she sleeps beside him and whispering meaningful words in her ear (or vice versa). A: Excellent scene with exclusive CG B: Exclusive CG C: No CG but impressive scene
515	Record games featuring a heroine wearing male clothes in the game. Everything from full-fledged cross-dressing to male costumes used for performance pieces. Rate her based on the male clothing and how much they leave an impression on you.
516	Record not only hard bondages and the restraints often seen in SM and training, but also those used in humiliation play and torture, captivity and crucifixion when trapped or defeated, and even soft bondage play between lovers. Record games with plenty of restraint and bondage play, regardless of the content being soft or hard.

517	Record games featuring tools such as vibrators, rotors, electric motors, anal pearls, and even masturbators and cuspidors. *Comments are encouraged for games with unusual tools.
518	Record games with sprites or illustrations where heroines get soaking wet due to sudden rain, playing with water, water stains, etc., showing her underwear or nipples through her wet clothes.
519	This POV is for games featuring heroines with brown skin. It doesn't matter if she's a foreigner, tanned or non-human, the skin must be brown. Record more and more games to increase awareness of brown-skinned girls. ABC marks whenever the girl left an impression or not. If possible, please write in the comments specific charms, sexuality, temperament, occupation, etc.
520	This POV is for those fans of small fairies, subraces and palmtop-sized girls. The size is meant to be like 'something that fits into your hand to something that can fit in both hands'. Write the heroine's name, race, size, moe elements etc. ABC criteria should rate frequency of appear In the comments, please write the heroine's name, race, size, moe points, etc. ABC criteria should be divided by frequency of appearance, importance, and whether there are erotic scenes that make use of the difference in body size.
521	Record games with nice tittyfuck scenes. Bust size is irrelevant. Do not forget to record games with characters giving poor tittyfuck because of small brest sizes. ABC marks the number of heroines giving tittyfucks, the number of times they do it, and how satisfying it is. Write the name of heroines who do tittyfucks, their bust size etc.
522	Record games featuring pornographic scenes where the heroine is forcibly manipulated. Any method is acceptable – psychic powers, magic, sorcery, drugs, machines, hypnosis, brainwashing etc. Including the means of manipulation and how the heroine reacts in the comments is appreciated.
523	This POVs records your favorite mistress. Dignified, demure, mysterious, devilish, all are ok. ABC criteria mark the charm that comes with these ladies. State the name of the heroine and the mistress type in the comments. If they are domineering, use the 'domineering mistress' POVs.
524	Record games that are particular about featuring the heroine's in a swimsuit, or games that target swimsuit fetishists. Assign ABCs according to how much swimsuits appear and how much swimsuits are relevant in events.
525	Record games featuring attractive heroines who are androids, robot girls, homunculus, dolls, dolls, etc., or heroines with machine-like or man-made characteristics. - Games that feature moe in relation to android girls. - Games focused on artificial girls coming in contact with people - Games featuring excellent depictions of conflicts between artificial girl and people, etc. Specification regarding the heroine's name and her attributes (robot, automata, etc.) in comments are appreciated. However, remember that the heroine's identity as an artificial being might be a spoiler, so plan accordingly.

526	There are many flavors of committee chairpersons, including the honor student types, the mid-mannered ones, the natural ones, etc. all apply! Rank from A to C based on your preferences (Committee chairpersons include class chairpersons, committee chairpersons, vice chairpersons, etc.). Please include the character's name and type in the comments.
527	Record games featuring an attractive heroine with long black hair. Her model sheet is irrelevant, and minor ornaments and subtle color differences are all acceptable. ABC criteria is based on how much you like the heroine.
528	Record games featuring interesting moments which however are not expanded upon within individual routes. Listing the name of the heroine and why it’s a problem is appreciated. ○ The actual individual route is boring. Disappointing ○ Doing many individual routes would be boring ○ The interest developed within the common route has vanished ○ The individual route is short and unsatisfying compared to the common route
529	Record games featuring lots of expletives such as ‘manko’ [pussy] or ‘chinpō’ [pussy] in dialogues. If possible, note if there is voice censoring. ABC criteria are as follows: A: There are profanities throughout all sex scenes. B: There are profanities in some, but not all, sex scenes. C: There are sex scenes with many profanities in some parts of the game.
530	Record heroines who is strict, disciplined and rigid, etc. The point is that she has a high sense of discipline and observance of rules but, despite her seriousness, is somehow sweet towards the protagonist, or is clueless when it comes to romance with him. Listing the heroine’s name and her position and occupation (soldiers, knights, warriors, to public morals commissioners, etc.) in the comments is appreciated.
531	Record games featuring sex scenes involving creepy characters (otaku, gay guy, fat guy, hobo, etc.). Combine this POV with ‘cuckold’, ‘humiliation’ to necessity. All kinds of rape or consensual sex, as long as it’s gross, is acceptable, but please file tentacles, monsters and other fowl under the ‘Trash/ghetto’ POV. A: the game features outstanding gross characters, not only outwardly but also with a deviant inner life. B: external features are sufficient, but his interiority is lackluster C: Creepy is in a minor role and not very memorable.
532	Record games featuring heroines falling to the side of evil during the story. Typical situations include the evil hero subdues the righteous heroine through training or other means and the heroine's friends are brainwashed to become her enemies in magical girl or transforming heroine stories. Rank A: the heroine's shift is impressive because of her depravity is exquisitely depicted.
533	Record heroines with large age gaps. In addition to older loli and lolibabas, heroines who have been regressed to their child form and loliized (adultized) heroines also apply. If you want to provide more

	information, use this POV together with Loli, Elderly, Female Teacher, Non-human, Hypnosis, etc. Rate them based on the impression the heroine leaves you with.
534	Record games with well crafted animation in sex scenes, regardless of them being done in 2D or 3D. Rate them by cleanness of picture, animation fluidity and amount of movement and perspectives. If you are able to, note whenever it is cel animation, animation done in after effects 3D etc. Note: when rating non-H scenes, use 'Good cutescenes (except porn cutscenes)'.
559	Record games where the protagonist can sleep with women already in a relationship. For example, games where you can make a girl your own by winning her heart over. ABC criteria rank how much the protagonist is obsessed with the heroine.
618	Record games featuring heroines with small breasts which are neither prepubescent looking nor infants.

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