



## **In Love with the Interface: otome Game Engagement and the Psychosocial Development of Young Adult Cisgender Filipinas**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examined the relationship between otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas. Guided by Parasocial Interaction Theory, Identity Development Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study employed a quantitative correlational design to assess whether usage frequency, emotional investment (parasocial processing), and financial investment (in-game content purchase motivation) were associated with identity development, psychological well-being, real-life social interaction, and real-life romantic expectations. A total of 118 young adult cisgender Filipinas (aged 18 to 25) who were active otome game players were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling from online otome gaming communities and university networks. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire incorporating validated and researcher-developed scales, and analyzed using Spearman's rho correlation and multiple linear regression. Results indicated that usage frequency, parasocial processing, and in-game content purchase motivation were significantly and positively associated with real-life social interaction and romantic expectations, and that parasocial processing and in-game purchase motivation significantly predicted identity development. However, none of the engagement variables significantly predicted psychological well-being. These findings suggest that otome game engagement, particularly emotional and financial investment, is meaningfully linked to identity exploration, social experience, and romantic perception among young adult Filipinas, while exerting limited measurable influence on general psychological well-being.

**KEYWORDS:** otome games, parasocial interaction, psychosocial development, identity development, Filipina young adults, digital romance media

### **INTRODUCTION**

The proliferation of digital technology has reshaped how young adults experience intimacy, construct identity, and navigate emotional development. Digital media, spanning social platforms, online gaming, and interactive entertainment, has become deeply embedded in the daily routines of contemporary youth worldwide. Among the digital technologies that have gained particular traction among young women is the otome game, a genre of interactive narrative games that simulate romantic relationships between the player and virtual characters. Otome games afford cisgender female players a space in which to explore emotionally intimate, yet fictional, relationships from a first-person perspective. Because these games are interactive rather than passively consumed, they may cultivate levels of emotional engagement and perceived relational intimacy that more closely resemble real relationships than traditional romance media such as film or literature do.

This engagement is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications framework, which holds that media users are active agents who select and interact with media to satisfy specific psychological and emotional motivations rather than passive recipients of media content. Within the context of otome games, this framework helps explain why cisgender female young adults are drawn to sustained engagement with romantic narrative

simulations: such games may fulfill needs for companionship, emotional release, and escapism that are otherwise unmet in daily life.

Young adulthood, operationalized in this study as ages 18 to 25, represents a developmental period marked by identity exploration, emotional growth, and increasing independence. Young adults across Southeast Asia, and Filipino cisgender women in particular, are among the most digitally active populations globally, spending substantial portions of their day engaged with online platforms. The growing accessibility of smartphones, localized gaming content, and social media has correspondingly increased the availability and popularity of romance-centered games such as otome titles within this demographic.

Although the effects of gaming addiction, online relationships, and parasocial interaction have been extensively discussed in the literature, comparatively little empirical work has examined the relationship between otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of cisgender female young adults, particularly within the Philippine context. Existing research indicates that parasocial attachment to fictional characters in otome games can meaningfully shape players' emotional experiences, identity processes, and perceptions of relational intimacy, especially when such engagement is deeply embedded

within players' daily routines. These parasocial bonds have been found to extend beyond entertainment value, informing players' emotional support systems, identity construction, and understanding of intimacy in ways that may carry over into real-world relational frameworks.

A substantial body of prior work, however, has concentrated primarily on gameplay behavior, parasocial actions, and player motivations, rather than on the broader psychosocial outcomes of such engagement, including identity development, emotional well-being, social functioning, and real-world romantic expectations. Moreover, the cultural specificity of otome game effects remains underexplored, as the majority of existing studies have been conducted in East Asian contexts such as China, where collectivist values and romantic norms may differ meaningfully from those in the Philippines. Filipino culture is characterized by strong family orientation, interpersonal connectedness, and collectivist tendencies that may shape how young adult cisgender Filipinas interpret parasocial relationships and romantic narratives encountered in digital gaming environments.

This gap between the demonstrated influence of romantic simulation games on affective experience and the limited empirical evidence linking otome game engagement to the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas within culturally situated structures motivated the present study. As digital environments increasingly mediate romantic ideation and emotional experience among Filipino youth, it becomes necessary to determine whether sustained engagement with otome games contributes positively, negatively, or neutrally to psychosocial development in this population.

### Statement of the Problem

This study sought to investigate the relationship between otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas.

Specifically, it addressed the following questions:

1. What is the level of engagement of young adult cisgender Filipinas in otome games, in terms of (a) usage frequency, (b) emotional investment, and (c) financial investment?
2. What is the psychosocial development profile of young adult cisgender Filipinas in terms of (a) identity development, (b) emotional well-being, (c) social interaction, and (d) real-life romantic expectations?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between young adult cisgender Filipinas' otome game engagement and psychosocial development?
4. Does young adult cisgender Filipinas' level of engagement with otome games predict variations in psychosocial outcomes?

### Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by four objectives: (a) to measure the level of otome game engagement among young adult cisgender Filipinas; (b) to assess the psychosocial development status of the respondents; (c) to analyze the relationship between otome game engagement and psychosocial development; and (d) to

identify whether engagement variables significantly predict psychosocial outcomes.

### Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are intended to benefit several stakeholders. For female young adults, the study offers a framework for understanding how their own gaming engagement may shape emotional responses, financial habits, and self-identity. For game developers, the findings may inform more conscious design practices that account for the emotional and psychological impact of interactive narrative games. For educators and mental health practitioners, the study provides an empirical basis for guiding young adult cisgender females toward healthier media habits by illustrating how virtual interactions may shape identity and emotional well-being. For researchers, the study offers a foundation for future inquiry into digital intimacy, parasocialism, gaming behavior, and the psychosocial effects of digital media.

### Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on the relationship between otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas aged 18 to 25 who actively play otome games. Respondents were recruited from selected Philippine universities and online otome gaming communities. The study specifically examined usage frequency, emotional investment, and financial investment as dimensions of otome game engagement, and identity development, emotional well-being, social interaction, and romantic expectations as dimensions of psychosocial development. The study did not aim to establish causal relationships between otome gaming and mental health, nor did it seek to diagnose psychological conditions; rather, it focused solely on exploring potential associations. Findings are restricted to the qualified respondents of this study and should not be generalized to the broader population of young adult cisgender Filipina otome game players, given the use of non-probability sampling and self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias and subjective interpretation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Otome Games and Digital Romance Media*

Otome games are a genre of narrative-driven video games that simulate romantic relationships between a player-controlled protagonist and fictional characters. The term \*otome\* (乙女) is Japanese for “maiden,” reflecting the genre's origins as media developed primarily for female audiences. Otome games are generally characterized by romance-centered narratives in which players interact with and pursue relationships with virtual male characters, often through choices that influence the progression and outcome of the story (Wu et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2025). These games have expanded substantially through mobile gaming platforms, particularly in Asian markets, where female-oriented romantic games have attracted growing numbers of young women (Gong & Huang, 2023).

Recent scholarship has highlighted the growing cultural significance of otome games as a form of digital romance media. Research suggests that the genre provides female players with immersive spaces in which they can engage with fictional romantic characters and explore forms of intimacy that extend beyond conventional passive media consumption (Gao et al., 2025; Zhang, 2025). The design of male love-interest characters, together with mechanisms of character identification, self-presence, and character attachment, may shape how players interpret romantic relationships and partner characteristics. In contrast to traditional romance media such as film or literature, otome games allow players to participate actively in the development of romantic narratives through dialogue, interaction, and decision-making, thereby creating a greater sense of personal involvement in the fictional relationship (Gong & Huang, 2023; Gao et al., 2025). Emerging evidence indicates that character identification and attachment may also be associated with players' mate-selection criteria, suggesting that interactive romantic media can potentially influence perceptions of desirable relationship characteristics (Chen et al., 2025). Despite this expanding body of work, however, much of the empirical literature on otome games has focused on Chinese and other East Asian populations, limiting the direct applicability of existing findings to the cultural experiences of young adult cisgender Filipinas.

#### ***Parasocial Relationships in Digital Games***

Parasocial relationships refer to one-sided emotional connections formed between individuals and media figures or fictional characters. Within digital games, these relationships may become particularly immersive because players do not merely observe characters but actively interact with them and participate in narratives involving them. Recent research specifically examining otome games found that female players can develop parasocial romantic relationships with game characters through repeated interaction, emotional engagement, and narrative immersion (Gao et al., 2025). These relationships may become integrated into players' everyday lives and may influence how they understand or reconstruct perceptions of real-life intimate relationships (Gao et al., 2025).

However, the psychosocial consequences of parasocial attachment are not uniformly positive. Research on parasocial relationships more broadly suggests that intense attachment to media figures may be associated with emotional dependency, idealized perceptions, and difficulties in maintaining realistic expectations about interpersonal relationships, although these effects vary according to the nature and intensity of the attachment (Hoffner, 2022). In the context of romantic video games, research has further demonstrated that parasocial romantic involvement can become an important psychological mechanism through which players experience emotional engagement and continued involvement with game characters (Gong & Huang, 2023). At the same time, parasocial relationships should not necessarily be understood as inherently maladaptive. Research on mediated relationships indicates that

such attachments can also provide companionship, emotional comfort, and perceived social support under some circumstances. In gaming environments, the relationship between parasocial engagement and well-being appears to depend partly on the broader social context in which gaming occurs, with tangible social connections remaining particularly important to psychological well-being (Wolff & Shen, 2022). Collectively, these findings position parasocial relationships as a potentially important mechanism through which players emotionally experience and interpret narrative-driven digital games.

#### ***Financial Spending Behavior in Otome and Gacha Games***

Many mobile otome games employ monetization systems that include in-game purchases, premium narrative content, limited-time events, and gacha mechanics. These systems can connect emotional engagement with characters and narratives to players' willingness to spend money within the game. Empirical research involving female otome game players found that parasocial romantic relationships and continued playing intention were positively associated with in-game purchase intention, suggesting that emotional attachment to virtual characters can have behavioral and economic consequences (Gong & Huang, 2023). More recent research similarly indicates that audiovisual quality, narrative quality, technical quality, usability, and additional content can positively influence consumers' willingness to spend, with immersion functioning as an important mediating mechanism (Miao, 2025).

The Philippine context is particularly relevant because the country has a highly active digital and mobile environment, although claims regarding Filipino players' specific willingness to spend on otome games should be supported by Philippine-specific empirical data rather than inferred solely from general internet or gaming penetration statistics (Kemp, 2025). Regional evidence nevertheless demonstrates the increasing commercial significance of mobile romance and otome games across Asia, with successful titles attracting substantial financial investment from predominantly female audiences (Gong & Huang, 2023; Gao et al., 2025). Related research therefore suggests that parasocial romantic interaction can indirectly contribute to purchase intention by strengthening emotional attachment, continued engagement, and investment in virtual characters (Gong & Huang, 2023). Nonetheless, existing research has concentrated more heavily on purchase intention and gaming behavior than on the longer-term psychosocial implications of financial investment in otome games, leaving an important area for further investigation.

#### ***Otome Games and Identity Development***

Identity development constitutes an important task of young adulthood, encompassing the exploration of beliefs, relationships, values, and one's sense of self. Emerging research on otome game players suggests that engagement with these games may provide opportunities for women to explore aspects of self-perception, gender roles, emotional preferences, and

relationship expectations. For example, research among Chinese women found associations between otome game engagement and dimensions of self-awareness, confidence, and perceptions of gender roles, although the findings should be interpreted cautiously because the evidence remains geographically and methodologically limited (Lin, 2024; Zhang, 2025). Similarly, research on game-character identification found positive relationships among character identification, self-presence, character attachment, and mate-selection criteria among women. Digital games can exert both positive and negative effects on players' emotional well-being, depending on the type of game, the player's motivations, and the intensity and context of engagement. Narrative-driven and relationship-oriented games may provide opportunities for escapism, emotional engagement, companionship, and mood regulation. Research on otome games indicates that female players may perceive emotional support and intimacy through interactions with fictional characters, particularly when these relationships become integrated into everyday routines (Gao et al., 2025). More broadly, research on mediated and gaming-related relationships suggests that parasocial engagement may coexist with positive experiences of social connection and psychological well-being, although these outcomes are not universal and should not be assumed to result from parasocial attachment alone (Wolff & Shen, 2022).

At the same time, excessive emotional reliance on virtual relationships may create concerns regarding dependency, unrealistic expectations, or the displacement of real-world interpersonal relationships. Research on otome games has found that players' parasocial romantic relationships can influence their understandings of real-life intimacy, demonstrating that the boundary between fictional romantic engagement and perceptions of actual relationships may be psychologically meaningful (Gao et al., 2025). Similarly, research on female otome game players has linked romantic parasocial relationships with continued engagement and purchase intentions, illustrating how emotional attachment can extend beyond the immediate gaming experience (Gong & Huang, 2023).

Although existing studies increasingly demonstrate that otome games can facilitate parasocial attachment, emotional engagement, and potentially influence perceptions of romantic relationships, much of the empirical literature remains concentrated in East Asian contexts, particularly China. Existing research has also tended to emphasize character attachment,

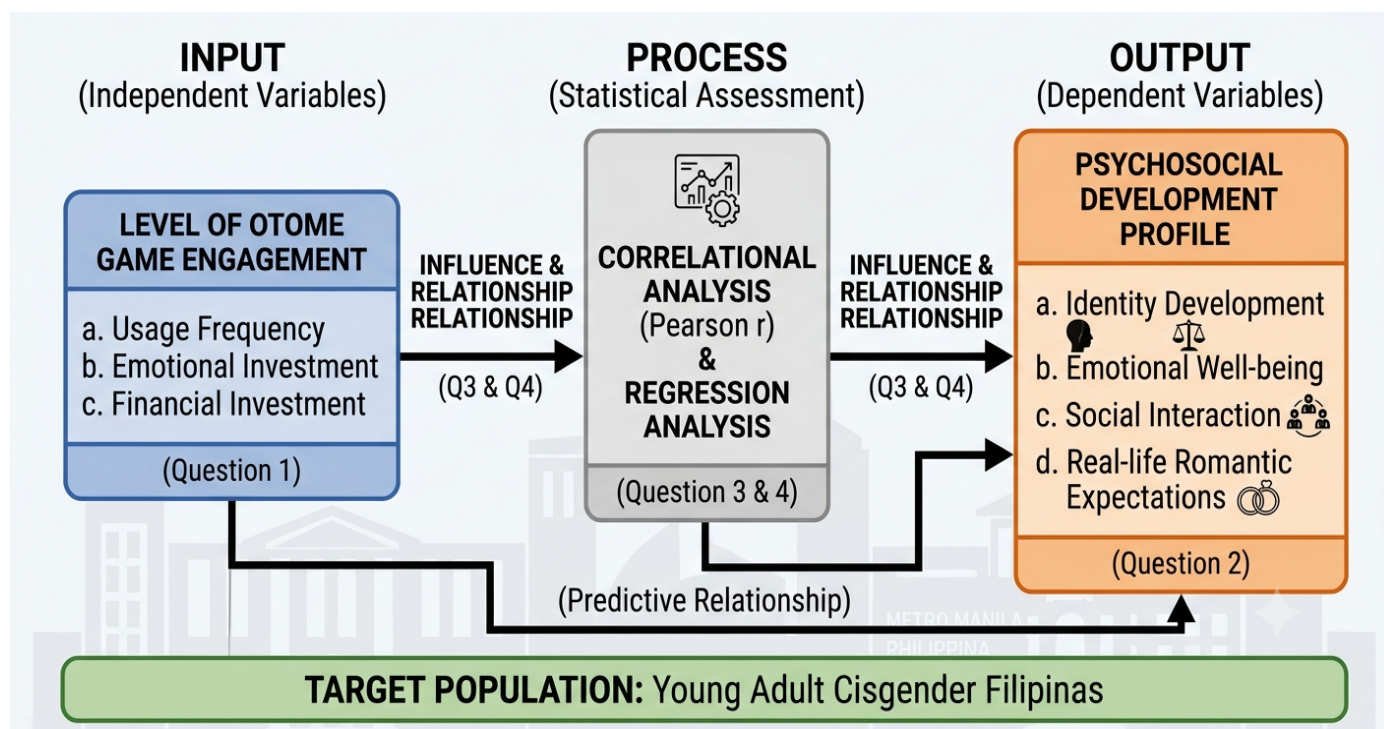
who play otome games (Chen et al., 2025). These findings suggest that identification with fictional characters may extend beyond entertainment and become relevant to how some players conceptualize romantic preferences and desirable partner characteristics. Taken together, interactive romance games may therefore function as spaces for identity exploration, relational reflection, and experimentation with imagined forms of intimacy among young adult players.

### ***Emotional Well-Being and Digital Gaming***

parasocial interaction, continued gameplay, and purchase intention rather than examining the broader intersection of identity development, emotional well-being, social functioning, and real-world romantic expectations. The present study addresses this gap by examining these dynamics among young adult cisgender Filipinas, a culturally distinct population, across multiple dimensions of psychosocial development.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Structured around the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model and contextualized within the target demographic of Young Adult Cisgender Filipinas, this conceptual framework integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Theory, and Identity Development Theory to evaluate the influence of otome game engagement on psychosocial development. At the Input stage (Research Question 1), grounded in UGT, the independent variables capture levels of game engagement across three operational dimensions: usage frequency, emotional investment, and financial investment. Bridging the Input and Process stages, PSI Theory explains how emotional investment develops through one-sided, affective connections with digital characters. The Process stage outlines the quantitative methods used to address Research Questions 3 and 4, utilizing Pearson's  $r$  correlational analysis to determine significant relationships between engagement and psychosocial dimensions, alongside linear regression to test whether game engagement predicts variations in developmental outcomes. Grounded in Erikson's Identity Development Theory—which views young adulthood as a critical period for identity formation and emotional exploration—the Output stage (Research Question 2) measures the dependent variable across four dimensions of the Psychosocial Development Profile: identity development, emotional well-being, social interaction, and real-life romantic expectations.



### ***Parasocial Interaction Theory***

Parasocial Interaction Theory, originally introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956, describes the formation of one-sided emotional relationships between audiences and media figures. The theory explains how individuals can develop emotional bonds with figures they do not know personally, a phenomenon extended to interactive digital media such as video games, where repeated exposure and narrative immersion can foster emotional bonds between players and fictional characters. Within otome games specifically, parasocial relationships have been found to foster strong emotional engagement between players and fictional characters, with female players reporting companionship, emotional support, and romantic attachment through gameplay interaction. These parasocial bonds may, in turn, influence players' perceptions of intimacy and emotional fulfillment beyond the digital environment, as players actively acknowledge and respond to virtual romantic partners in ways that mirror real social relationships. Parasocial interaction with in-game characters has further been shown to shape players' gaming motivations and emotional investment, influencing their broader engagement with the digital environment.

### ***Identity Development Theory***

Erikson's psychosocial development theory positions young adulthood as a critical stage for identity exploration, particularly in relation to forming relationships, self-concept, and personal values, with social relationships central to shaping an individual's sense of self. Contemporary developmental psychology continues to recognize ages 18 to 25 as constituting emerging adulthood, a distinct developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, instability, and evolving interpersonal relationships. Digital media environments provide

young adults with alternative spaces in which to experiment with identity and emotional expression; within otome or other narrative-driven games set in alternative fictional universes, players may explore self-perception, confidence, and gender identity through the vast array of narrative and character-interaction options available. Through such interactive storytelling, players may explore alternative identities, relationship expectations, and emotional experiences that collectively contribute to identity development.

### ***Uses and Gratifications Theory***

Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that individuals actively select specific media to satisfy particular psychological and social needs, including entertainment, emotional release, escapism, and social interaction. Rather than focusing on the content of media itself, this theory centers on the individual consumer as an active, self-aware agent. Within otome games, this framework helps explain how immersive romantic narratives and character interaction fulfill players' needs for companionship, emotional comfort, and escapism, and how these needs influence continued gameplay motivation and financial investment. Synthesizing across these three theories yields a multi-lens framework in which Parasocial Interaction Theory accounts for emotional bonding with fictional characters, Identity Development Theory situates this bonding within the broader developmental tasks of young adulthood, and Uses and Gratifications Theory explains why young adult cisgender Filipinas actively choose otome games over other forms of digital media.

### ***Synthesis and Research Gap***

Collectively, the reviewed literature demonstrates that otome game engagement, mediated through parasocial attachment, is

associated with meaningful emotional, financial, and identity-related outcomes among players. However, the existing evidence base is concentrated in East Asian cultural contexts and has emphasized gameplay behavior and spending motivation over broader psychosocial development outcomes such as identity formation, emotional well-being, social functioning, and real-life romantic expectations. Given that Filipino culture is characterized by distinct collectivist values, strong family orientation, and specific romantic norms, the applicability of findings derived from East Asian samples to young adult cisgender Filipinas remains uncertain. This study addressed this empirical gap by examining the relationship between otome game engagement and multiple dimensions of psychosocial development within a culturally situated Filipino sample.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas. A correlational design was deemed appropriate given the study's aim of investigating the degree and direction of relationships among variables without experimental manipulation. Although the study was primarily correlational, multiple linear regression analysis was additionally employed to evaluate whether engagement variables significantly predicted psychosocial outcomes, consistent with recommendations that regression analysis may appropriately be incorporated into correlational research when the objective includes examining predictive relationships among variables.

### Participants

Participants consisted of young adult cisgender Filipinas aged 18 to 25 who were active players of otome games. Respondents were recruited through online otome gaming communities and research groups affiliated with various Philippine universities. Inclusion criteria required that respondents be young adult cisgender Filipinas, aged 18 to 25, and active players of otome games. Respondents were excluded if they were below 18 or above 25 years of age, if they were not cisgender Filipinas, or if they were not active players of, or had no familiarity with, otome games.

### Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A minimum sample size of 100 respondents was initially targeted and later increased to 120 at the discretion of the research adviser. This sample size was considered adequate based on G\*Power analysis, which indicated sufficiency for detecting a medium effect size ( $r = .30$ ) at an alpha level of .05 and a statistical power of .80. The study employed purposive sampling in combination with snowball sampling to reach eligible respondents. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to concentrate on the specific subgroup relevant to the study's

hypotheses, while snowball sampling facilitated access to the otherwise hard-to-reach population of otome game players through referral chains within online gaming communities. Both techniques are recognized as appropriate for quantitative correlational research, although snowball sampling in particular may introduce sampling bias and constrain the generalizability of findings, given participants' tendency to recruit others from within similar social networks.

### Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms and shared through otome gaming community groups on Facebook, Twitter/X, TikTok, and Instagram. The questionnaire incorporated the following scales.

#### *Parasocial Processing Short Scale (PP-SS)*

Emotional investment was assessed using the Parasocial Processing Short Scale, a nine-item, five-point Likert-scale instrument adapted from the longer Parasocial Interaction-Process (PSI-Process) Scale. The short-form version was developed to address the length and complexity limitations of the original 112-item, 12-dimension scale while retaining strong reliability and validity as evidenced by its correlations with relevant criterion variables.

#### *In-Game Content Purchase Motivation (IGCPM) Scale*

Financial investment was measured using the 30-item In-Game Content Purchase Motivation Scale, developed under Self-Determination Theory to capture autonomy, competence, and relatedness motives underlying players' game-related purchases, including subscales such as creativity, choice, and achievement.

#### *Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS), Short Form*

Identity development was assessed using a 14-item, five-factor short form of the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale, adapted from the original 25-item instrument measuring commitment, exploration, and ruminative exploration. This short form is well validated for use with late adolescents and young adults aged 18 to 25 and explicitly includes ruminative exploration, aligning with literature on parasocial coping among players.

#### *WHO-5 Well-Being Index*

Psychological well-being was measured using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, a five-item, six-point Likert-scale self-report instrument assessing the frequency of positive well-being experiences over the preceding two weeks. Raw scores are multiplied by four to yield a percentage score ranging from 0 to 100, with scores of 50 or below commonly interpreted as indicating reduced psychological well-being and possible risk for depression.

#### *Real-Life Social Interaction (RLSI) Scale*

The Real-Life Social Interaction Scale, developed by the researcher, measured the perceived influence of otome games on

respondents' social interaction and interpersonal connections. This four-item scale used a four-point Likert format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with items addressing whether otome games helped respondents connect with others, encouraged them to initiate social interactions, reduced feelings of loneliness, and improved real-life social interactions.

#### ***Real-Life Romantic Expectations (RLRE) Scale***

The Real-Life Romantic Expectations Scale, also developed by the researcher, assessed the perceived influence of otome games on respondents' expectations and perceptions regarding real-life romantic relationships. This four-item scale similarly used a four-point Likert format, with items addressing whether otome games influenced respondents' expectations of real-life relationships, prompted comparisons between real people and in-game characters, shaped their idea of an ideal partner, and led them to expect real relationships to resemble those depicted in otome games.

#### ***Reliability of Researcher-Developed Scales***

The two researcher-developed scales (RLSI and RLRE), comprising eight items in total, underwent preliminary reliability testing with the assistance of licensed statisticians to ensure clarity and internal consistency. The combined instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .779, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

#### **Data Collection**

All data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms and shared through social media platforms and online otome gaming communities. An online survey format was selected for its convenience, low cost, and ease of tracking responses.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study in accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Ethics Review Board and the research adviser, as the study was conducted for academic clearance purposes. Participation was strictly voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All collected

data were used strictly for academic purposes, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed.

#### **Statistical Treatment of Data**

Data were analyzed using the following statistical procedures. Mean and standard deviation were used to determine respondents' levels of otome game engagement and psychosocial development. Spearman's rho correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between otome game engagement and psychosocial development variables; this nonparametric measure of association was selected because the study used ordinal Likert-scale data, and several variables did not meet the normality assumptions required for Pearson correlation. Prior to regression analysis, preliminary assumption checks, including assessments of multicollinearity, normality, and homoscedasticity, indicated that the assumptions for multiple linear regression were reasonably met. Multiple linear regression analysis was subsequently used to determine whether engagement variables (usage frequency, parasocial processing, and in-game content purchase motivation) significantly predicted psychosocial outcomes (identity development, psychological well-being, real-life social interaction, and real-life romantic expectations). All statistical tests were conducted at the .05 level of significance.

#### **RESULTS**

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data gathered regarding otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas. Of the 127 respondents initially recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, 118 met the inclusion criteria following data cleaning and were retained as the study's effective sample. Results are organized into three sections: (a) profile of the respondents, (b) correlation analysis between otome game engagement and psychosocial development, and (c) regression analysis.

#### **Profile of the Respondents**

All demographic and gameplay variables (age, preferred otome game, gameplay frequency, and time spent playing) obtained a complete set of 118 valid responses with no missing data, indicating that the dataset was suitable for statistical analysis.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Age**

| Age | f  | %    | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|-----|----|------|---------|--------------|
| 18  | 8  | 6.8  | 6.8     | 6.8          |
| 19  | 9  | 7.6  | 7.6     | 14.4         |
| 20  | 21 | 17.8 | 17.8    | 32.2         |
| 21  | 14 | 11.9 | 11.9    | 44.1         |
| 22  | 17 | 14.4 | 14.4    | 58.5         |
| 23  | 18 | 15.3 | 15.3    | 73.7         |

| Age   | f   | %     | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|-------|-----|-------|---------|--------------|
| 24    | 14  | 11.9  | 11.9    | 85.6         |
| 25    | 17  | 14.4  | 14.4    | 100.0        |
| Total | 118 | 100.0 | 100.0   |              |

**Note.** N = 118.

As shown in Table 1, respondents' ages were broadly distributed across the 18-to-25 range, with the largest proportion aged 20 years (17.8%), followed by those aged 23 years (15.3%). Respondents aged 22 and 25 each represented 14.4% of the

sample. These results indicate that the study successfully sampled across the target age range of young adult cisgender Filipinas.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Preferred Otome Game**

| Otome Game         | f   | %     | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|--------------------|-----|-------|---------|--------------|
| Love and Deepspace | 69  | 58.5  | 58.5    | 58.5         |
| Mystic Messenger   | 11  | 9.3   | 9.3     | 67.8         |
| Obey Me!           | 5   | 4.2   | 4.2     | 72.0         |
| Tears of Themis    | 27  | 22.9  | 22.9    | 94.9         |
| Others             | 6   | 5.1   | 5.1     | 100.0        |
| Total              | 118 | 100.0 | 100.0   |              |

**Note.** N = 118.

Table 2 shows that Love and Deep space was the most actively played otome game among respondents (58.5%), followed by Tears of Themis (22.9%) and Mystic Messenger (9.3%). These

results suggest that Love and Deep space currently holds the strongest popularity among young adult cisgender Filipinas within the sample.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to Gameplay Frequency**

| Frequency of Play   | f   | %     | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|---------------------|-----|-------|---------|--------------|
| Rarely              | 16  | 13.6  | 13.6    | 13.6         |
| 1 to 2 times a week | 19  | 16.1  | 16.1    | 29.7         |
| 3 to 5 times a week | 14  | 11.9  | 11.9    | 41.5         |
| Daily               | 69  | 58.5  | 58.5    | 100.0        |
| Total               | 118 | 100.0 | 100.0   |              |

**Note.** N = 118.

As indicated in Table 3, the majority of respondents (58.5%) reported playing otome games daily, followed by those who played one to two times per week (16.1%) and those who played

rarely (13.6%). These findings show that most respondents were highly and regularly engaged with otome games.

**Table 4: Distribution of Respondents According to Time Spent Playing**

| Time Spent Playing | f  | %    | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|--------------------|----|------|---------|--------------|
| Less than 1 hour   | 38 | 32.2 | 32.2    | 32.2         |
| 1 to 3 hours       | 66 | 55.9 | 55.9    | 88.1         |
| 4 to 6 hours       | 8  | 6.8  | 6.8     | 94.9         |

| Time Spent Playing | f   | %     | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|--------------------|-----|-------|---------|--------------|
| More than 6 hours  | 6   | 5.1   | 5.1     | 100.0        |
| Total              | 118 | 100.0 | 100.0   |              |

**Note.** N = 118.

Table 4 indicates that most respondents (55.9%) spent between one and three hours playing otome games, while 32.2% reported playing for less than one hour. These findings suggest that most respondents engaged moderately with otome games on a daily basis.

### Correlation Analysis Between Otome Game Engagement and Psychosocial Development

To determine the relationship between otome game engagement and psychosocial development among young adult cisgender Filipinas, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted. Table 5 presents the variable coding scheme used in the correlation matrix, and Table 6 presents the resulting correlation coefficients.

**Table 5: Variable Coding Scheme**

| Variable                                 | Code  |
|------------------------------------------|-------|
| Usage frequency                          | FREQ  |
| Parasocial Processing Short Scale        | PPSS  |
| In-game Content Purchase Motivation      | IGCPM |
| Dimensions of Identity Development Scale | DIDS  |
| WHO-5 Well-Being Index                   | WHO5  |
| Real-Life Social Interaction             | RLSI  |
| Real-Life Romantic Expectations          | RLRE  |

**Table 6: Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix of Otome Game Engagement and Psychosocial Development Variables**

| Variable | FREQ             | PPSS             | IGCPM            | DIDS             | WHO5             | RLSI             | RLRE             |
|----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| FREQ     | —                | .306**<br>(.001) | .334**<br>(.000) | -.034<br>(.716)  | .019<br>(.836)   | .191*<br>(.038)  | .275**<br>(.003) |
| PPSS     | .306**<br>(.001) | —                | .542**<br>(.000) | .309**<br>(.001) | .119<br>(.200)   | .366**<br>(.000) | .560**<br>(.000) |
| IGCPM    | .334**<br>(.000) | .542**<br>(.000) | —                | .311**<br>(.001) | .043<br>(.645)   | .442**<br>(.000) | .524**<br>(.000) |
| DIDS     | -.034<br>(.716)  | .309**<br>(.001) | .311**<br>(.001) | —                | .348**<br>(.000) | .443**<br>(.000) | .231*<br>(.012)  |
| WHO5     | .019<br>(.836)   | .119<br>(.200)   | .043<br>(.645)   | .348**<br>(.000) | —                | .330**<br>(.000) | .024<br>(.795)   |
| RLSI     | .191*<br>(.038)  | .366**<br>(.000) | .442**<br>(.000) | .443**<br>(.000) | .330**<br>(.000) | —                | .396**<br>(.000) |
| RLRE     | .275**<br>(.003) | .560**<br>(.000) | .524**<br>(.000) | .231*<br>(.012)  | .024<br>(.795)   | .396**<br>(.000) | —                |

**Note.** Values outside parentheses are Spearman's rho correlation coefficients; values in parentheses are p values (two-tailed). FREQ = usage frequency; PPSS = Parasocial Processing Short Scale (emotional investment); IGCPM = In-game Content Purchase Motivation (financial investment); DIDS = Dimensions of Identity Development Scale; WHO5 = WHO-5 Well-Being Index; RLSI = Real-Life Social Interaction; RLRE = Real-Life Romantic Expectations. N = 118. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

As shown in Table 6, usage frequency demonstrated significant positive relationships with parasocial processing ( $r = .306, p < .01$ ), in-game content purchase motivation ( $r = .334, p < .01$ ), real-life social interaction ( $r = .191, p < .05$ ), and real-life romantic expectations ( $r = .275, p < .01$ ), but was not significantly related to identity development ( $r = -.034, p = .716$ ) or psychological well-being ( $r = .019, p = .836$ ). These results indicate that respondents who played otome games more frequently tended to exhibit stronger emotional attachment to fictional characters, greater in-game spending, and higher real-life romantic expectations, but did not differ meaningfully in identity development or psychological well-being.

Parasocial processing exhibited some of the strongest relationships among the variables examined, correlating significantly and positively with in-game content purchase motivation ( $r = .542, p < .01$ ), identity development ( $r = .309, p < .01$ ), real-life social interaction ( $r = .366, p < .01$ ), and romantic expectations ( $r = .560, p < .01$ ). These findings indicate that respondents who formed stronger emotional bonds with fictional characters also tended to report stronger psychosocial involvement, particularly regarding social experience and romantic perspective, consistent with Parasocial Interaction Theory.

In-game content purchase motivation similarly showed significant positive relationships with identity development ( $r = .311, p < .01$ ), real-life social interaction ( $r = .442, p < .01$ ), and

romantic expectations ( $r = .524, p < .01$ ), suggesting that respondents who were more willing to invest financially in otome games also reported deeper emotional and social engagement with the games.

Psychological well-being, as measured by the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, was not significantly related to usage frequency, parasocial processing, or in-game content purchase motivation, though it was significantly and positively related to identity development ( $r = .348, p < .01$ ). This pattern indicates that although otome game engagement may shape emotional and social experience, it does not appear to exert a comparable influence on respondents' overall psychological well-being. Identity development was additionally found to be significantly and positively related to real-life social interaction ( $r = .443, p < .01$ ) and romantic expectations ( $r = .231, p < .05$ ), suggesting that stronger identity development among respondents may be associated with healthier social functioning and more developed interpersonal perspectives.

### Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether usage frequency, parasocial processing, and in-game content purchase motivation significantly predicted the psychosocial development variables of identity development, psychological well-being, real-life social interaction, and romantic expectations. Results are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Otome Game Engagement Variables Predicting Psychosocial Development**

| Dependent Variable / Predictor                                            | B      | SE B  | $\beta$ | t      | p    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|------|
| <b>Identity Development (DIDS)</b>                                        |        |       |         |        |      |
| Usage frequency                                                           | -1.091 | 0.472 | -.215   | -2.309 | .023 |
| Parasocial processing (PPSS)                                              | 0.192  | 0.097 | .203    | 1.970  | .051 |
| In-game purchase motivation (IGCPM)                                       | 0.080  | 0.028 | .299    | 2.919  | .004 |
| <i>Model fit: <math>R^2 = .167, F(3, 114) = 7.632, p &lt; .001</math></i> |        |       |         |        |      |
| <b>Psychological Well-Being (WHO-5)</b>                                   |        |       |         |        |      |
| Usage frequency                                                           | -0.236 | 0.459 | -.052   | -0.514 | .608 |
| Parasocial processing (PPSS)                                              | 0.071  | 0.095 | .084    | 0.749  | .455 |
| In-game purchase motivation (IGCPM)                                       | 0.015  | 0.027 | .064    | 0.576  | .566 |
| <i>Model fit: <math>R^2 = .014, F(3, 114) = 0.551, p = .649</math></i>    |        |       |         |        |      |
| <b>Real-Life Social Interaction (RLSI)</b>                                |        |       |         |        |      |
| Usage frequency                                                           | 0.101  | 0.249 | .035    | 0.404  | .687 |

| Dependent Variable / Predictor      | B     | SE B  | $\beta$ | t     | p    |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|------|
| Parasocial processing (PPSS)        | 0.161 | 0.051 | .302    | 3.133 | .002 |
| In-game purchase motivation (IGCPM) | 0.042 | 0.015 | .279    | 2.912 | .004 |

Model fit:  $R^2 = .273$ ,  $F(3, 114) = 14.257$ ,  $p < .001$

#### Real-Life Romantic Expectations (RLRE)

|                                     |       |       |      |       |        |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|-------|--------|
| Usage frequency                     | 0.251 | 0.250 | .079 | 1.003 | .318   |
| Parasocial processing (PPSS)        | 0.262 | 0.052 | .444 | 5.087 | < .001 |
| In-game purchase motivation (IGCPM) | 0.039 | 0.015 | .235 | 2.710 | .008   |

Model fit:  $R^2 = .405$ ,  $F(3, 114) = 25.850$ ,  $p < .001$

Note. PPSS = Parasocial Processing Short Scale; IGCPM = In-game Content Purchase Motivation. N = 118.

As shown in Table 7, usage frequency negatively predicted identity development ( $\beta = -.215$ ,  $p = .023$ ), while in-game content purchase motivation positively predicted identity development ( $\beta = .299$ ,  $p = .004$ ); parasocial processing approached but did not reach conventional significance ( $\beta = .203$ ,  $p = .051$ ). This model explained 16.7% of the variance in identity development,  $R^2 = .167$ ,  $F(3, 114) = 7.632$ ,  $p < .001$ . None of the engagement variables significantly predicted psychological well-being, and the overall model explained only 1.4% of the variance in this outcome,  $R^2 = .014$ ,  $F(3, 114) = 0.551$ ,  $p = .649$ , indicating a weak predictive relationship. For

real-life social interaction, parasocial processing ( $\beta = .302$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and in-game content purchase motivation ( $\beta = .279$ ,  $p = .004$ ) emerged as significant positive predictors, with the model explaining 27.3% of the variance,  $R^2 = .273$ ,  $F(3, 114) = 14.257$ ,  $p < .001$ . For real-life romantic expectations, parasocial processing ( $\beta = .444$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and in-game content purchase motivation ( $\beta = .235$ ,  $p = .008$ ) were both significant positive predictors, with parasocial processing emerging as the strongest predictor overall; this model explained 40.5% of the variance in romantic expectations,  $R^2 = .405$ ,  $F(3, 114) = 25.850$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating a relatively strong predictive relationship.

#### Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 8: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis                                                                                                                        | Decision           | Basis                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| H01: No significant relationship between usage frequency and psychosocial development.                                            | Partially rejected | Usage frequency was significantly related to parasocial processing, in-game content purchase motivation, real-life social interaction, and romantic expectations, but not to identity development or psychological well-being. |
| H02: No significant relationship between emotional investment (parasocial processing) and psychosocial development.               | Partially rejected | Parasocial processing was significantly related to identity development, real-life social interaction, and romantic expectations, but not to psychological well-being.                                                         |
| H03: No significant relationship between financial investment (in-game content purchase motivation) and psychosocial development. | Partially rejected | In-game content purchase motivation was significantly related to identity development, real-life social interaction, and romantic expectations, but not to psychological well-being.                                           |

Note. Ho1–Ho3 correspond to usage frequency, emotional investment, and financial investment, respectively.

Overall, the null hypotheses were partially rejected. Several otome game engagement variables demonstrated significant relationships with, and predictive effects on, selected psychosocial development dimensions, particularly identity development, real-life social interaction, and romantic expectations. Psychological well-being, however, did not exhibit significant relationships or predictive effects with most otome game engagement variables.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas across three engagement dimensions (usage frequency, parasocial processing, and in-game content purchase motivation) and four psychosocial dimensions (identity development, psychological well-being, real-life social interaction, and real-life romantic expectations). The findings offer a nuanced picture in which otome game engagement is meaningfully associated with several, but not all, dimensions of psychosocial development.

### Parasocial Processing as a Central Mechanism

Consistent with Parasocial Interaction Theory, parasocial processing emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent correlates and predictors across psychosocial outcomes, showing significant positive associations with identity development, real-life social interaction, and romantic expectations, and standing as the strongest predictor of romantic expectations in the regression model. This pattern aligns with prior findings that parasocial romantic relationships formed in otome games contribute to emotional attachment and perceptions of intimacy among female players, and that identification with otome game characters can shape players' mate-selection criteria and romantic expectations. The present findings extend this line of evidence to a Filipino cultural context, suggesting that the psychological mechanisms underlying parasocial attachment in otome games may operate similarly across East Asian and Southeast Asian populations, even amid differing collectivist norms surrounding romance and family.

### Financial Investment and Psychosocial Engagement

In-game content purchase motivation was likewise significantly associated with identity development, real-life social interaction, and romantic expectations, both in correlation and regression analyses. This finding is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications framework, which holds that individuals actively choose media to satisfy emotional and psychological needs; the willingness to spend money on in-game content may reflect deeper emotional immersion and attachment to game narratives and characters, echoing prior findings that emotional attachment to characters motivates continued gameplay and financial investment in online romantic games. Notably, in-game content purchase motivation, rather than usage frequency, was the more

consistent positive predictor of identity development, suggesting that the depth of engagement, as reflected in willingness to invest financially, may matter more for identity-related outcomes than the sheer frequency of play.

### The Null Relationship With Psychological Well-Being

A notable finding was the absence of any significant relationship between otome game engagement variables and psychological well-being, as measured by the WHO-5 Well-Being Index. None of usage frequency, parasocial processing, or in-game content purchase motivation significantly predicted well-being, and the regression model explained only 1.4% of the variance in this outcome. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that digital gaming does not always directly affect overall psychological well-being, and with observations that although parasocial relationships in otome games may provide emotional attachment and comfort for female players, these experiences do not necessarily translate into broader psychological well-being outcomes. This pattern suggests that while otome games may offer temporary emotional comfort and escapism, broader psychological well-being may be more strongly shaped by external social, academic, familial, and personal factors that were not captured within the scope of this study. Notably, psychological well-being was significantly related to identity development, suggesting that identity-related processes, rather than gaming engagement per se, may be more proximally linked to respondents' overall well-being.

### Usage Frequency and Its Limited Role in Identity Development

Usage frequency demonstrated a significant negative relationship with identity development in the regression analysis, even though its zero-order correlation with identity development was non-significant. This suggests that once emotional and financial investment were accounted for, more frequent gameplay unaccompanied by deeper emotional or financial engagement may be modestly associated with lower identity development scores. This finding tentatively aligns with cautionary observations in the literature that excessive emotional reliance on virtual relationships may blur the boundaries between fictional and real-life intimacy, potentially affecting interpersonal and identity-related functioning, although the modest effect size and cross-sectional design of the present study warrant caution in over-interpreting this result.

### Cultural Considerations

The present findings extend a literature base historically concentrated in East Asian contexts to a Filipino sample characterized by strong family orientation, interpersonal connectedness, and collectivist tendencies. The observed associations between parasocial processing, financial investment, and romantic expectations suggest that the emotional mechanisms of otome game engagement identified in East Asian populations may generalize, at least in pattern, to young adult cisgender Filipinas. However, given the collectivist

cultural backdrop in which family expectations and social approval continue to shape interpersonal decision-making among Filipino emerging adults, the specific ways in which parasocial romantic engagement is interpreted and integrated into real-world relational frameworks may still differ in degree or expression from patterns observed in East Asian samples. This underscores the value of the present study's culturally situated approach, while also indicating that direct cross-cultural comparison was beyond the scope of the current design.

## LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the correlational and cross-sectional design precludes causal inference regarding the direction of relationships between otome game engagement and psychosocial development. Second, the use of purposive and snowball sampling, while practical for reaching a niche population, may have introduced sampling bias and limits the generalizability of findings to the broader population of young adult cisgender Filipina otome game players. Third, reliance on self-reported survey data introduces the possibility of response bias and subjective interpretation. Fourth, the researcher-developed Real-Life Social Interaction and Real-Life Romantic Expectations scales, while demonstrating acceptable combined internal consistency ( $\alpha = .779$ ), have not undergone the extensive psychometric validation associated with the study's other, previously validated instruments. Finally, the study's scope was limited to three engagement variables and four psychosocial outcomes, leaving other potentially relevant constructs, such as emotional dependency, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms, unexamined.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between otome game engagement and the psychosocial development of young adult cisgender Filipinas using a quantitative correlational design. Findings indicate that young adult cisgender Filipinas generally exhibit high engagement with otome games, reflected in frequent gameplay and strong emotional attachment to fictional characters. Usage frequency was significantly associated with parasocial attachment, in-game purchase motivation, social interaction, and romantic expectations, while parasocial processing demonstrated the strongest and most consistent relationships with identity development, social interaction, and romantic expectations. In-game content purchase motivation was similarly linked to stronger emotional and social involvement in otome games. However, none of the engagement variables meaningfully predicted psychological well-being, indicating that otome game engagement in this sample was more closely tied to identity development, romantic expectations, and social interaction than to general psychological well-being. Among the engagement variables, parasocial processing emerged as the strongest predictor of romantic expectations,

suggesting that emotional attachment to fictional characters may meaningfully shape how young adult cisgender Filipinas perceive romance in real life.

These findings contribute to the literature by extending the study of otome game engagement and parasocial attachment beyond the East Asian contexts in which it has predominantly been examined, offering empirical evidence from a culturally distinct, collectivist Filipino population. By examining multiple dimensions of psychosocial development, rather than gameplay behavior alone, this study also addresses a gap in prior research that has tended to focus narrowly on behavioral and motivational outcomes. The findings suggest that otome games function as a psychologically significant medium through which young adult cisgender Filipinas navigate identity exploration, social experience, and romantic ideation, while exerting comparatively limited measurable influence on broader psychological well-being.

## Implications and Recommendations

### *For Future Researchers*

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies to determine the long-term effects of otome game engagement on psychosocial development. Future studies may also include respondents from different gender identities, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as broader age groups or cultural backgrounds, to extend the generalizability of findings. Additional psychosocial variables, such as emotional dependency, self-esteem, coping mechanisms, and interpersonal relationships, warrant further exploration, as does comparison across different game genres to determine whether similar psychosocial effects are present. Future researchers may also examine the influence of Filipino cultural variables, including religiosity, collectivist identity, family expectations, and societal perceptions of gaming, on otome game engagement and psychosocial development outcomes.

### *For Gamers and Players*

Individuals who play otome games are encouraged to maintain a healthy balance in their gaming habits and to set clear emotional boundaries between fictional and real-life relationships, remaining mindful of excessive emotional attachment to fictional characters while prioritizing real-life social relationships and responsibilities.

### *For Game Developers*

Game developers are encouraged to promote healthy emotional engagement among players and to incorporate features that encourage positive social interaction and support emotional well-being.

### *For Mental Health and Social Researchers*

Mental health and social researchers may further investigate the effects of parasocial relationships and digital romance-based media on young adults, including how emotional attachment to

fictional characters affects real-life romantic expectations and social functioning.

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