

DIJ Social Science Study Group



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‘Modern’ Labels and ‘Postmodern’ Roleplaying? Stereotyping the ‘otaku’ vs. learning from the stranger

Pathologized as psychopaths, described as middle-class “prosumers” of manga and games or heralded as postmodern subjects in a networked world, the ‘otaku’ have been envisioned as a single entity – usually outside “normal” society and ascribed with a uniform mentality. The continuing attempts to redefine ‘otaku’ in media and academia not seldom fail to recognize in-group differences and the necessity to locate ‘otaku’ research in this ongoing struggle over meaning.

Taking its cues from the discourses on ‘otaku’, globalization as well as second and post-modernity, my Ph.D. thesis employs an interactionist perspective. Locating ‘otaku’ labeling within the history of the modern practice of stereotyping and othering, my research investigates the meaning an ‘otaku’ label has for the daily lives and the self-images of individuals. Furthermore, my research concentrates on learning effects and ‘postmodern’ ways of learning via (non-digital) roleplaying games.

The paper presents first results from participant observations of a roleplaying community in Tokyo, combined with qualitative interviews in- and outside the Tokyo area, as well as with industry professionals. Preliminary findings show that face-to-face actualization is a decisive factor for the politics of in-group belonging/not-belonging and that individual experiences with the label, roleplaying and learning effects are extremely diverse.

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The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for young scholars and Ph.D. candidates in the field of Social Sciences organized by Maren Godzik and Barbara Holthus. All are welcome to attend, but registration (holthus@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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