

Poster

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Poster 18

[P-18-06] Otaku, Weebs, and Social Wellbeing: Does Immersion in Niche Communities Help or Harm?

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Keywords : Child and Adolescent, Internet Gaming Disorder, Cultural Psychiatry, Internet Addiction, Social Media

Background: Weeaboo or weeb is defined as “a mostly derogatory slang term for a Western person...obsessed with Japanese culture, especially anime, often regarding it as superior to all other cultures”. This subculture, a western analogue of the Japanese Otaku identity, which is often used to describe an intense interest in anime/manga, has reached critical mass and inspired academic inquiry. As mental health clinicians, it is imperative that we be aware of what cultural phenomena our patients engage with, and to understand potential implications of these “obsessions”.

Methods: Google Scholar and PubMed were searched using terms including variations of “weeaboo,” “weeb,” “otaku,” and “mental health”. Thirty-two studies were included from 813 search results.

Results: A Korean study of 71 college students found that otaku students had higher happiness levels compared to non-otaku. Another study of 1115 online participants found that otakus had higher pathological internet use and lower reported social support, while a German study of 4738 adults correlated interest in anime and manga with some adverse mental health/social outcomes, as well as greater subjective well-being, joy, and lower social isolation. Another study (n=300) revealed positive association between strong identity in anime/ACG (animation, comics, and games) with anxiety, aggression, depressive symptoms, and suicidal tendencies.

Conclusions: The heterogeneity of results illustrates the complexities of subcultures and the impacts of pop culture immersion. Differences across nationalities may reflect attitudes towards otaku and weeb communities, as the terms themselves have decidedly different and discourse-dependent connotations. With a dearth of information on these communities, further research is needed to better understand these nuances. In an increasingly culturally and socially globalized world, it is imperative that mental health professionals remain knowledgeable of relevant subcultural trends to provide patient-centered care.