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'Otaku' men become popular

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Shukan Asahi (June 15) reports on an event at a café in Nihonbashi where nine men and nine women are chatting. It looks like a “*konkatsu* party,” a party for people looking for a marriage partner.

This one’s a little different though. First, they are chatting excitedly without many awkward silences that we often have at *konkatsu* events. Secondly, there are many strange expressions. What’s “BL”? Or “*fujoshi*”?

BL means “Boys Love” and “*fujoshi*” are women who like manga and anime with BL themes. This is a marriage-hunting event for *otaku*. *Otaku* usually avoid the physical, three-dimensional, living, breathing, world and instead spend their time on *manga*, *anime* and computer games.

Otaku now are almost mainstream. The word is understood worldwide. Abroad they are seen as “cool Japan”. But at home, not everyone likes them. They may be cool, but women looking for husbands have tended to look elsewhere. *Otaku* men were usually uncomfortable with women.

Shukan Asahi says that this is changing. Suddenly *otaku* men are popular with women. Organizers of the Nihonbashi café event report 30 applicants for every place available. Within two hours, five couples have formed and gone off on their own. That’s more than half, and a much better rate than typical non-*otaku konkatsu* events.

Why are women recently attracted to *otaku*? Shukan Asahi says that women’s aspirations have changed. Before, they wanted a man with “the three highs”: high academic background, high income, and high height – a tall husband was better than a short one. Now, they want “the three *heis*.” The character “*hei*” means average, mediocre, ordinary. The three *heis* are ordinary appearance, average income, and mediocre lifestyle.

The bursting of the economic bubble in the mid-1990s deflated the three highs, and the 2008 Lehman Shock inflated the three *heis*. The Lehman Shock brought Japan to the edge of

economic collapse. It was a difficult experience. High living suddenly seemed very dangerous and irresponsible. Many women decided that they should lower their target. A man with a modest salary is less likely to waste his money. A plain appearance means other women will leave him alone. A modest lifestyle keeps a man content with the humdrum but satisfying pleasures of home.

Otaku men may have the three *heis* but does their immersion in virtual and cartoon worlds leave them time and energy for marriage and fatherhood? It's a difficult question. Hardcore *otaku* might not be right. "*Otaku* light" is what they hope for.

Questions

1. Did you already know the expressions "BL" and *fujoshi*? Do you know any other *otaku* expressions?
2. Have you ever attended a *konkatsu* event? What kind was it? How was it? Do you think these kinds of events are good ways to meet future spouses?
3. What other kinds of *konkatsu* events do you know about? Do you have any good ideas for such events?
4. Are you an *otaku*? Do you know any?
5. Would you be interested in marrying an *otaku*? Why? Why not?
6. Do you agree that women's expectations have shifted from the "three highs" to "three *heis*"? Why? Why not? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
7. Women – if you could choose one "high" for your spouse, which would it be? Why?
Men – if you could choose to have one "high", which would it be? Why?
8. Do you think *otaku* can be good husbands and fathers? Why? Why not?

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