

Session Abstract: The field of Game Studies has matured and expanded to consider the impact of digital games on diverse audiences. The minority Other is studied in terms of representation inside the gameworld, and in terms of gameplay in the real world, with games being modified in different ways for player accessibility and self-expression. Recent research into disability in Japan has also examined player accessibility and media representations of disabled persons, including the effects of these representations on the audience. This panel examines the representation of disability in Japanese videogames, exploring how autism, social anxiety, *hikikomori* syndrome and blindness have been represented in popular titles from major studios.

The first two papers examine vicarious experiences of disability, through role-playing as a disabled main character. Kathryn Hemmann analyzes the well-known silence of Link in *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo, 2017), while Ben Whaley examines *hikikomori* narratives in *The World Ends With You* (Square, 2007). Both show how in-game representations are complicated by real-world fan interpretations and player interactions, providing self-reflection, self-expression and healing through play. Mimi Okabe next analyzes autism in digital depictions of Sherlock Holmes, specifically in the *Meitantei Conan* franchise (Bandai Namco, 1996-2014). Lastly, Rachael Hutchinson examines blindness in *Final Fantasy XV* (Square Enix, 2016), and how an initially sensitive and realistic treatment of the disability gives way to the fantasy of a happy denouement. These two papers explore the boundary between the 'strange' and the 'norm,' and how these boundaries are ultimately more solid than permeable.