

# In the Eyes of Others: Self, Sociality and Suicide in Japan

(他人の目：日本人にとっての自分、社会生活、そして自殺)

Chikako Ozawa-de Silva

Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology,  
Emory University

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Yotsuya Campus, Sophia University

Existing models for understanding suicide fail to account for the distinctiveness of internet group suicide, a recent phenomenon in Japan. Drawing from an ethnography of internet suicide websites, two social commentaries in Japanese popular culture, and the work of developmental psychologist Philippe Rochat, I argue that participation in internet suicide forums and even the act of internet group suicide result from both a need for social connectedness and the fear of social rejection and isolation that this need engenders. These needs and fears are especially strong in the case of Japan, where selfhood is very intimately tied with the social self that is the object of perception and experience by others. I show how such an understanding of internet group suicide helps us to understand some of its basic characteristics, which are otherwise difficult to explain and which have puzzled the Japanese media and popular accounts: the “ordinariness” of internet group suicide, the wish for an easy or comfortable death, the wish to die with others, and the wish to “vanish.” Internet group suicide sheds light on questions of Japanese selfhood in modernity and expands our understanding of suicide in Japan in general.

Dr. Ozawa-de Silva is an Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Emory University. She received her D. Phil. in social and cultural anthropology from Oxford University in 2001. Following that, she was a Visiting Research Fellow at Harvard's Department of Social Medicine, and a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Chicago. Her academic vision is to contribute to cross-cultural understandings of health and illness, especially mental illness, and make a contribution to the field of medical anthropology by bringing Western and Asian (particularly Japanese and Tibetan) perspectives on the mind-body, religion, medicine, therapy, and health and illness into fruitful dialogue.

Lecture in English / No prior registration necessary

Institute of Comparative Culture office

Tel: 03-3238-4082 / Fax: 03-3238-4081 / Email: [diricc\(at\)sophia.ac.jp](mailto:diricc(at)sophia.ac.jp)

Web: <http://www.fl.sophia.ac.jp/icc/index2.htm>