

STOCKHOLMS UNIVERSITET  
Institutionen för orientaliska språk

Hikikomori in Contemporary Japan:  
A Perspective of Amae

Bachelor Thesis in Japanese Studies

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Jens Forsberg

Advisor: Akihiro Ogawa

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

In autumn 2007 I started studying the Japanese language, and did so for a period of 4 years. I have during that period not only studied the Japanese language, but also Japanese society and culture. This led to a one-year exchange-student program in Kanagawa, Japan, where I got to study Japanese more, but also got a chance to take a closer look at the Japanese society and the Japanese people. During this 4 years long period of Japanese studies, numerous times I have encountered and read about one of the biggest problems that Japan is facing right now. That is, the declining birth rates, which in itself is a problem, and which is also leading to an aging society and a decreasing population. A society where birth rates are declining, results in excess amounts of elder people, who needs medical treatment. Since the amount of young people is decreasing, Japan is slowly heading towards a problem where there won't be enough people to take care of their seniors. Furthermore, the medical care expenses for the elder will keep increasing, which is causing a major social problem. So why is the Japanese population decreasing, and why aren't young people creating families and making children? The answer to this question is very deep-rooted in the Japanese society.

During my stay in Japan, I heard a lot of stories about youth that had been bullied in school, which lead to suicide attempts, and people getting heavily bullied at work by their seniors. While reading or talking about Japan, one hears from time to time about depression and Japan's high suicide rate. I also encountered the Japanese word *hikikomori* (ひきこもり), which is a phenomenon that has been existing at least since the 1970s in Japan<sup>1</sup>, but has been gaining a lot of attention during the last 15-20 years. Hikikomori is a term describing people who shut themselves off from society, and live a solitary lifestyle, often for several years. However, doctors and psychologists don't define them as depressed. Hikikomori stop going to school, cut of the contact with other people and society and then spend their lives inside their house, seldom going outdoors. Many of them don't even leave their own room and communicates with their parents through the door, refusing eye contact. The hikikomori are able to maintain this lifestyle for a long period of time, often with the help of their supporting parents (mostly the mothers. I will explain why in the "Amae and Japanese

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Furlong, *The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people*, The Sociological Review, 56:2 2008, Blackwell Publishing Inc., Oxford Uk p. 110 Accessed: 2011-05-05.

Families” chapter) who provide food for their child and doesn’t force their child out of his/her room. When I told friends in Sweden about this phenomenon, a common response was “How could the parents let this happen?” and “Why don’t the parents persuade their child to go back to school?”. These questions, which I myself too had occasionally thought about, made me want to research more about this phenomenon and what the possible causes for it might be.

## 1.2. Research Question and Objectives

A lot of articles, theses and books have been written about the phenomenon of hikikomori, and the focus on hikikomori has become very widespread in media in the last 20 years. It has been discussed what the possible causes for hikikomori could be, and if it should be considered as an individual problem or if the root is within the Japanese society in its entirety. Among many of the theories concerning hikikomori, the theory that a behavior peculiar to the Japanese called *amae* (甘え) has had a big influence on the hikikomori condition and its longevity has been getting a lot of attention.<sup>2</sup> I will in this thesis try to find out how strong the relation between hikikomori and the behavior called *amae* really is, and discuss what the pros and cons of "blaming" *amae* for being one of the main causes for hikikomori could be. Since Japan has been in somewhat of a recession due to the burst of the economic bubble in the late 1980s<sup>3</sup> and demographic challenges, it is quite significant that youth problems like hikikomori get proper treatment for the sake of the future of Japan. I hope that by shedding light on this problem my thesis will be somehow valuable to the discourse on hikikomori and how it will branch out from here on.

In my thesis I will study and analyze several questions regarding the hikikomori phenomenon, and the questions that I will apply most focus to are the following:

1. How and in what way is the *amae* behavior related to the hikikomori phenomenon?
2. How can the *amae* behavior possibly contribute to the lengthening and the longevity of the hikikomori state?
3. How big of a role does *amae* play within the relationship between a parent and its hikikomori infant?

In addition to these main questions I will also discuss and try to answer questions concerning if one

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2 Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

3 Eric Johnston, *Japan’s Bubble Economy, Lessons from when the bubble burst*, The Japan Times, Published: 2009-01-06 <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20090106i1.html> Accessed: 2012-05-10.

should adopt a strict or more passive approach upon trying to solve the hikikomori problem (on a micro-level concerning families, not what measures for instance the government should take), and what consequences these respective approaches might lead to. Moreover, I will discuss some of the presumable reasons for Japanese youth secluding themselves and what is required for hikikomori to be able to get "well" again.

### 1.3. Theory

Tamaki Saito is one of the leading psychiatrists on hikikomori in Japan. He has gained a lot of fame due to his books on hikikomori<sup>4</sup> and several appearances on television shows and discussions on hikikomori.<sup>5</sup> It has been said by Saito and others that amae behavior has had a big influence on hikikomori<sup>6</sup> and some claim that the hikikomori state wouldn't be able to be so long lasting if it wouldn't have been for the mothers supporting behavior (which is based on amae). Amae is a Japanese word referring to a co-dependent relationship, which is common in the Japanese society, not least between mothers and their children.<sup>7</sup> In this thesis I have had the objective of analyzing the theory of amae and study its importance and relation to the hikikomori phenomenon. I will discuss the structure of amae and in what way it can possibly add to the longevity of the hikikomori state. Since Doi Takeo has in his book "The Anatomy of Dependence (amae no kozo)" made a very thorough analysis of the structure of amae and all the different behaviors that's connected to it, I will use his theories concerning amae and the Japanese mentality. Most of the theories that I discuss in the "Amae" chapter and the "Japanese Behavior and Mentality" chapter are addressed in Doi's book on amae. Supposedly, amae is in many aspects peculiar to the Japanese, and it is therefore fruitful to apply it to studies of Japanese unique phenomenon like hikikomori.

### 1.4. Method

Hikikomori is a phenomenon that has to do with people and their feelings. It is also connected to aspects such as culture, personal relations and interaction between people. To research about this phenomenon, one has to take these aspects into thought and analyze them. That is something, which

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4 Tamaki Saito has written several books about hikikomori, and his first book on hikikomori *Shakaiteki hikikomori: owaranai shishunki* was published in 1998 and gained a lot of attention.

5 Zielenziger, Michael, *Shutting Out The Sun: How Japan Created It's Own Lost Generation*, 2006, p. 60

6 Cf. Phil Rees, *Japan: The Missing Million*, BBC News, Published: 2002-10-20

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/2334893.stm> Accessed: 2011-04-23.

Cf. Zielenziger, p. 61

7 Doi, Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 1973, pp. 28, 78

at least in this case, can't be done through looking at countless statistics and numbers. Hence this I have decided to use a qualitative method for my research.

While doing an extensive literature review on hikikomori, I have done a cross-sectional survey, where I have interviewed a Japanese mother of two hikikomori children, and inquired her about her feelings towards amae, why she acted the way she did when her children were withdrawing, what the reasons were for her children's withdrawal and how they managed to recover. I refer to this mother as "Yoko" (pseudonym) for convenience. She has one daughter and one son, both of them have been hikikomori and both have been able to recover from their withdrawal. I got in contact with this mother by searching through several Internet blogs made by parents of hikikomori. I sent e-mails to numerous blog-owners and hikikomori support organizations, asking for their cooperation. Finally, I established a good research contact with Yoko. I consider the information that I have acquired from her very valuable since it is a direct source and I hitherto haven't come across any texts on hikikomori where the voice of a hikikomori mother has been let heard. I have taken into consideration that one single mother can't be representative for all hikikomori mothers and what she says can obviously not be generalized. Thus I have studied already available articles, theses and books on hikikomori. I will generate my conclusions on the material that I have studied and I hope that the answers to my survey will help to add credibility to my arguments.

### **1.5. Definition of Hikikomori**

Hikikomori are young people, mostly males, that totally cut themselves off from society, and sometimes even cut the connections with family members, and stay in their rooms for at least 6 months.<sup>8</sup> Depending on their parents, usually the mother, they stay in their room all by themselves, not even facing or talking to their parents. In the typical hikikomori situation, the mother of course dislikes her child's gloomy behavior, but keep leaving food outside her child's door to keep her hikikomori child alive, which in a way, can be seen as a way of supporting this reclusive lifestyle. Some people literally stay alone in their room for 3 to 4 years straight (or more), without meeting or facing other persons.

The hikikomori stay in their room or house spending time alone, afraid of contact with the "real" world. Some engage in Internet activities and some read books and *manga* (Japanese comics).

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<sup>8</sup> Saito, Tamaki, *Shakaiteki Hikikomori: Owaranai Shishunki*, 1998, p. 25

According to the psychiatrist Tamaki Saito, the phenomenon of social withdrawal started in Japan in 1970, and has been gaining increasing attention since then.<sup>9</sup>

As people sometimes tend to do when a group of people act problematically in the same way, a view on hikikomori as a homogenous group where everyone are the same and experience the same thing, has been generated, and that they should all be treated in the same medical way.<sup>10</sup> Andy Furlong has categorized hikikomori into 5 different categories; 1. The Psychologically Impaired; young people that require psychiatric intervention, 2. Otaku (おたく); which is the Japanese word for "geek", e.g. someone who spends a lot of time reading manga and playing videogames, 3. Alternative Scene; people searching alternatives and refuse to conform, 4. The Isolated; young lonely people who often seek social relationships and 5. The Anxious Travelers; young people dealing with difficult transitions, e.g. the transition from education to occupation.<sup>11</sup> Though it may be true that a majority of hikikomori can be categorized in these five categories, needless to say there are probably a lot of different kinds of hikikomori, who won't fit into these categories. Hikikomori are young isolated adults, with fear of society, and many of them are very talented and intelligent, who instead of engaging in society feels that they have to stay in their rooms to protect themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Hikikomori started getting attention in Japanese media in the second half of the nineties.<sup>13</sup> Since then it has gained more and more attention, also in media outside of Japan. It was also recently that the behavior in question was titled as hikikomori by Saito and got the definition of someone that has been secluding for a minimum of 6 months. However, this kind of withdrawal behavior has undoubtedly existed since the 70-80s, since there are hikikomori that are now reaching the age of 50.<sup>14</sup> Since the hikikomori stay inside their rooms and their family members are reluctant to expose this matter, it is most difficult to investigate the true age range of hikikomori.

In Japan, there are three types of similar unusual behavior that have been categorized and attached specific definitions. There are the so-called *freeters* (フリーター), the *NEET* (ニート) and the hikikomori. The freeters are mostly young people that make ends meet by doing part-time jobs, and

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9 Cf. Andy Furlong, *The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people*, *The Sociological Review*, 56:2 2008, Blackwell Publishing Inc., Oxford Uk p. 315 Accessed: 2011-05-05.

10 Ibid., p. 310

11 Ibid., p. 321

12 Zielenziger, p. 11

13 Hattori, Yuichi, *Hikikomori to Kazoku Torama*, 2005, p. 109

14 *Kozoku no kuni dai ichi bu otokotachi: 9) hikikomori, nuketakute*

(孤族の国 第1部 男たち: 9) ひきこもり、抜けたくて) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-01-05

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

in many cases frequently change their place of work. This kind of lifestyle is abnormal in contrast to the standard Japanese way where one starts working full-time directly after graduating from university, and in many cases keep working in the same company for the majority of one's life.<sup>15</sup> The expression NEET is a word used to describe youth who are not in education, employment or training. The definition was created in the United Kingdom, referring to school graduates, but is now a well-known expression in Japanese media.<sup>16</sup> The NEETs are youth who neither study nor work. According to the Japanese Cabinet Office there are in Japan one million hikikomori, more than 417 000 freeters and 850 000 NEETs throughout Japan. Since these people might be categorized in more than one category, the numbers might fluctuate slightly.<sup>17</sup>

According to a research done by the parent established organization "Oya no kai (親の会)"<sup>18</sup>, the average hikikomori has passed the age of 30<sup>19</sup>, and a research made by the Japanese Cabinet shows that 60% of hikikomori are men and 40% became seclusive in their twenties.<sup>20</sup>

The expression hikikomori and its usages require some explanation. This noun derives from the verb *hikikomoru*, which is a compound of the verbs *hiku* (引く) meaning "pull", "draw" and the verb *komoru* (こもる) which means something like "hide", "seclude". Therefore hikikomori forms as a word meaning to pull back and withdraw. It is used as a definition for the youth that withdraws from society, and also to define the phenomenon as a whole. For instance, it can be used when referring to an individual as "he has become a hikikomori", and "the hikikomori problem has to be dealt with", when referring to the phenomenon as a whole.

Even though hikikomori has become a widely used expression defining the secluding youth of Japan, one has to take some caution and keep some things in mind when using the term. First of all, the phenomenon of seclusive youth did not just pop up out of the blue, though it might seem so due to a hype in media and amongst scholars in recent years, both on a national and international level.

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15 Keiji Hirano, 'Freeters': Free by name, nature, Exploitative corporate culture breeds nomadic workers, The Japan Times, Published: 2005-01-29 <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20050129f1.html> Accessed: 2012-04-21.

16 Yuji Genda, *Jobless Youths in Japan*, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, 2006-11 <http://project.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/hope/result/dp061119.pdf> Accessed: 2011-04-28.

17 Hattori, p. 122

18 Japan's biggest parent based organization for dealing with hikikomori, founded by the late Masahisa Okuyama. See <http://www.khj-h.com/> Accessed: 2011-03-22

19 *Kozoku no kuni dai ichi bu otokotachi: 9) hikikomori, nuketakute*

(孤族の国 第1部 男たち: 9) ひきこもり、抜けたくて) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-01-05 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

20 (*Wakamono wa ima: 6) hikikomori kara shokuba he shuurou taiken ya chuutai boushi de michisuji*

(若者は今: 6) ひきこもりから職場へ 就労体験や中退防止で道筋) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2010-11-30 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

Before the birth of the definition hikikomori, there were in Japan several other problems concerning "deviant" youth, each with its respective definition. Before hikikomori, there were the *futoko* (不登校), referring to children who didn't go to school, a definition with a history going back as far as to the 1950s. There were also the *moratorium ningen* (モラトリアム人間) in the 1970s, referring to moratorium beings; youth that stopped in activity and didn't advance career wise, and the *otaku* in the 1980s, "nerds" who was said to be violent and didn't have any social skills.<sup>21</sup> In recent years the problems in focus have been the above-mentioned freeters, NEETs and the hikikomori. Since these categories have resembling characteristics, a lot of youth that are "deviant" and in one way or another goes against what's considered normal in Japanese society, are transcending several of these categories. It is most likely that many of the people that are now defined as hikikomori, are simply people that used to be categorized as school refusers, otaku and such.<sup>22</sup> The hikikomori is in this perspective not really a new problem, but a merge of already existing problems of deviant behavior.

There lie also some problems in the definition hikikomori, due to its vagueness. Except for Tamaki Saito's condition that a minimum of 6 months in seclusion is required for someone to be defined as hikikomori, there is little said about the prerequisites about hikikomori. There is no defined age range and there are no detailed descriptions about what exact behavior that is attached to the hikikomori term. For instance, Yuichi Hattori, a Japanese therapist and specialist in multiple personality disorder has said that 90% of the Japanese population (even though they are normal and fully participate in society) has the hikikomori tendency embedded in their personality.<sup>23</sup> The vagueness of the hikikomori term and the possibility of its usage in various situations have probably added to the media fuss about hikikomori in recent years. Due to the above mentioned factors concerning the hikikomori term, even though a lot of light has been shined upon the hikikomori in the last 15 years, it doesn't necessarily mean that the amount of people withdrawing from society has actually increased in recent years.<sup>24</sup> However, even though there is indeed some vagueness attached to it, I will in this thesis use the hikikomori term as a way of referring to the seclusives of Japan that does by fact exist and isn't merely a media fuss.

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21 Goodman, Imoto, and Toivonen, *A Sociology of Japanese Youth: from returnees to Neets*, 2012, p. 125

22 Ibid., p. 21

23 Yuichi Hattori mentions this in a video interview that can be found through Harvest Internet TV <http://www.arkvillage.com/harvestinternettv/wax/1081.wax> Accessed: 2012-02-21.

24 Goodman, Imoto and Toivonen, pp. 126, 132

## 2. Background Causes for Hikikomori

### 2.1. The Pressure

Living in the Japanese society, you need to deal with a lot of pressure coming from various directions, and this is something which is almost impossible, if not impossible, to escape. There is a strict pressure from parents that push their child to study and work hard, to be able to succeed in society. There is pressure coming from classmates, relatives and neighbors, who all act like constantly watching eyes. If you make a mistake at the workplace or at school, it is something that won't easily be forgotten.<sup>25</sup>

A child that gets bullied in school for being somehow different, and drops out of school for a longer period, can have a very hard time getting back on track again. Even if one tries to solve the problem, e.g. by changing schools, the kids and teachers in the new school will ask and wonder why the child suddenly appears at their school, and they will start asking and snoop for reasons. Dropping out of school, and then not being able to get back into the system again, will naturally cause more problems for the child's future. Adapting to the transition from studying to finding a job to be able to survive on your own feet can be very weary, and as a hikikomori wisely put it in Michael Zielenzigers book "Shutting Out The Sun" "...in Japan, once you drop out, you can't drop back in."<sup>26</sup> This way of dropping out of the system and not following the norm of going from high school to university, directly from university to working at a company, can indeed be devastating and one hikikomori states this as the cause for his withdrawal:

"That's why I'm in this trouble. I missed the chance. I was in graduate school while most people were getting jobs. If I'd gone to work it would have been good".<sup>27</sup>

Apparently there isn't much space for a break, and a sabbatical year after graduating from university can have a very negative effect on ones resume. In fact, any kind of failure during ones career (e.g. quitting ones job in the first couple of months or changing jobs frequently during a short

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Lloyd Perry, *One million recluses are threatening the foundations of society - from their bedrooms*, Times Online, Published: 2004-01-31 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/newspaper/0,,2716-983567,00.html>  
Accessed: 2011-04-23.

<sup>26</sup> Zielenziger, p. 32

<sup>27</sup> Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

period of time) will stick to you for the rest of your career since your resume will be carefully examined by the employer, "Today's society (in Japan), where a vacuum in your resume won't be pardoned, is very suffocating".<sup>28</sup>

When you are around 24-25 years old and unemployed, the neighbors will notice that you are at home in the middle of the day, and quickly draw conclusions about unemployment and such. "Then she was worried about people in the neighborhood seeing her, and that's when it started. I think she hates to be out because she doesn't want to be compared to the neighbors" says a father of a hikikomori.<sup>29</sup> Another hikikomori doesn't have a positive outlook concerning his future and says that "It might be too late for me", quite chocking, due to him being only 23 years old at the time.<sup>30</sup> Someone who can't withstand this pressure and shuts themselves into their rooms, will start a vicious circle, because the longer someone stays in their room, the harder it will be to face the "evils" of the outside world, e.g. the shameful parents, the spying neighbors and old classmates who have already gotten good jobs at big companies. Furthermore, adding to this imminent pressure is the strength of shame among Japanese, which intensifies the feelings of failure when not being able to keep up with the expectations of one's surroundings. Presumably, the Japanese sense of shame plays an important role in the process leading people to seclude themselves, since the feeling of being supervised results in blaming oneself for being the root of whatever deviant behavior one might possess. Doi Takeo touches this subject: "...the sense of shame originates in awareness of the eyes of the outside world and is directed toward the self".<sup>31</sup> I will explain the relation of this type of shame, Japanese behavior and hikikomori more thoroughly later on.

## 2.2. The Cold Road to Hikikomori

Psychologists and journalists, Japanese and non-Japanese, have discussed the reasons for people turning into hikikomori, and there are various opinions about this, but there are a couple of views that appear more often than others. Several people that have shut themselves into their rooms have been bullied from an early age in school.<sup>32</sup> The bullying is so severe that it causes mental wounds.

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28 (*Shin, kazoku no katachi yuragu shakai no mukou ni: 5) hikikomori, 「iki」 ni nayamu* (新、家族のカタチ 揺らぐ社会の向こうに : 5) ひきこもり、「生」に悩む) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2007-01-06  
Accessed: 2012-03-28.

29 Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

30 Ibid.

31 Doi p. 53

32 Richard Lloyd Perry, *One million recluses are threatening the foundations of society - from their bedrooms*, Times

Furthermore, Japanese schools are strict environments with no extra space for pupils that aren't "going with the flow" and act differently.<sup>33</sup> When trying to find help from teachers and parents, they instead get scolded because they can't fit in with the "group" (I will explain more about group behavior in the "Group Behavior" chapter) and act like other people. According to some parents, the problem is not the classmates bullying, it's the bullied child himself who did something wrong, and this has to be "fixed". Eventually, not being able to keep up with the pressure from parents, teachers and bullying classmates in school, the bullied child drops out of school, and starts to isolate himself. The son of Yoko, my informant, lost trust in human beings because he was bantered at school and became scared of people. Her daughter withdrew since relations with her friends was bad and she distrusted her teachers and thus became very anxious. Though a large percentage of the hikikomori are people that have been bullied at school or work, not all hikikomori have this background.

Hikikomori is a phenomenon seen almost solely in Japan; however, bullying is something that occurs all over the world. Why is the hikikomori problem so restricted to Japan? The answer to this question is complex, and there are a lot of reasons behind this social problem, but the fact that the Japanese type of bullying is very remarkable plays a big role in this problem.<sup>34</sup> "As the Japanese people share racial, clan, and cultural ties, their national dogma suggests that everyone is the same and shares identical thoughts and values. This ideology makes it easier to rationalize punishing the deviant".<sup>35</sup>

Usually, when one faces difficulties and hardships in life, talking to a friend or relative about ones problems can relieve some stress and pain. But in Japan, where instead of taking measures against problems and difficulties, there seems to be a liability to hide problems, and act like they never existed. There is even a Japanese expression that goes "くさい物に蓋をする (kusai mono ni futa wo suru)", which by a rough translation means "put the lid on stinking things". This means that instead of dealing with something "stinky", you should put on a lid and hide the problem. A parliament member in Japan that has been involved in the treatment of hikikomori, says that her parliament colleagues have showed a lack of interest in solving the problem.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, there is

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Online, Published: 2004-01-31 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/newspaper/0,,2716-983567,00.html>  
Accessed: 2011-04-23.

33 Andy Furlong, *The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people*, The Sociological Review, 56:2 2008, Blackwell Publishing Inc., Oxford Uk p. 315 Accessed: 2011-05-05.

34 Goodman, Imoto, and Toivonen, pp. 9-12

35 Zielenziger, p. 52

36 Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

another proverb in the Japanese language that goes: "出るくいは打たれる (deru kui wa utareru)", which literally is translated as "the nail that sticks out will get beaten back", and has the same meaning as the English proverb "a tall tree catches much wind". Understandably, this proverb refers to the phenomenon where deviant behavior that don't go along with the norms of the group and/or society, will be normalized to prevent any kind of disturbance to the harmony of the group. These kinds of proverbs describe cleverly a big part of Japanese behavior, and can be seen in actual behavior such as bullying and the forming of groups (I will discuss these matters in the coming chapters).

Japanese people normally refrain from talking about subjects like hikikomori, depression and suicide. Because of this mentality, where people try to avoid topics that are problematic and don't prefer to talk about hardships like diseases, disorders and so on, it's troublesome to get to the core of a problem and thoroughly comprehend it. Yuichi Hattori points out that this deep-rooted liability prevents people from finding the root of a problem. Hattori also mentions that when a problem occurs, Japanese people often tend to look for a scapegoat, someone to blame the fault for, instead of looking for the cause of the problem. Regarding the hikikomori problem, this kind of behavior leads to blindness for background causes like trauma, communication difficulties, emotional disorders and underlying factors of society that puts pressure on the population.<sup>37</sup> Zielenziger says that the Japanese describes their society as "...a duck pond, whose tranquil mirror-smooth surface hides the leg churning furiously below the waterline to keep their places in the flock".<sup>38</sup> There seems to be a shortage of dialogue about emotional and mental problems amongst Japanese people, which contributes to the behavior patterns of reserving and isolating oneself instead of trying to create relationships and communicate with others.

In 2010, the prefecture of Nagasaki conducted a research where the object were 5500 male and females between the ages 15-39, living within the prefecture. They obtained answers from 2435 people. Out of these there were 35 people who had some kind of hikikomori-like behavior. Out of these 35 people 40% answered that they were between 15-19, and 22.9% were 20-24 years old when they started to seclude themselves. Responding to the question "what do you think was the trigger that sparked your current state?" 31.4% answered that their job searching activities didn't go favorably, 17.1% answered that their human relations didn't go well, and 14.3% said that it was

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37 Hattori, p. 103

38 Zielenziger, p. 13

caused by disease/injury.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.3. Lack of Love

A large amount of Japanese mothers are not kissing, or even hugging their children, and if a wife tells her husband that she loves him, he will probably give her a strange look and think that she is crazy. In general, Japanese parents don't kiss and cuddle in front of their children, and there seems to be a fundamental lack of love and affection in many Japanese homes. Yuichi Hattori says that hikikomori who hasn't experienced much affection neither from friends nor parents, turn into "emotionless zombies" shutting off any kind of feelings and emotions.<sup>40</sup>

Jun, one hikikomori who is featured in Michael Zielenzigers book, talks about his family situation and the lack of emotions and expression; "They (Jun's parents) were so terribly uptight. I really never got along with my parents. My family was very cruel and my parents could never express themselves to each other-or to me." and "They were living together and eating together, but they barely talked".<sup>41</sup> Another family that pushed their child to perform well in education finally ended up with a hikikomori child. Even though their child was very smart they didn't show much affection towards him and didn't reward him for his achievements, which led to the worsening of their relationship to their child.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.4. Hikikomori – Disease or not?

A big part of the hikikomori discourse has been about the question if hikikomori is a disease or not. Yuichi Hattori writes plainly that Japanese people only sees hikikomori as lazy youth, who avoids hardships as soon as they encounter some, and stay at home because they are spoiled. The Americans on the other hand, immediately recognizes hikikomori as a disease when being told about the phenomenon. Hattori also writes that Americans focuses on the malicious behaviors that often accompanies hikikomori, like sleeplessness, emotional numbness, anthropobia and suicidal

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39 *Futoukou ya shuukatsu shippai ga kikkake, ni-to hikikomori ni kenchousa*

(不登校や就活失敗がきっかけ、ニート、ひきこもりに 県調査) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-09-15  
Accessed: 2012-03-28.

40 Zielenziger, p. 73

41 *Ibid.*, p.26

42 Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15

[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

thoughts, something that Japanese people don't.<sup>43</sup> This is possibly a way of oversimplifying the matter. First and foremost, Japan already has several clinics and organizations for treating hikikomori as "patients" and providing them with counseling partners, and there are also Americans like Dr. Grubb, a psychologist from the University of Maryland, that seems to neglect the background factors of hikikomori and states that the best way of dealing with a child locked up in their room is to knock down the door; "If my child was inside that door and I didn't see him, I'd knock the door down and walk in. Simple. But in Japan, everybody says give it time, it's a phase or he'll grow out of it."<sup>44</sup> But isn't Hattori's way of saying that one nation as a whole thinks and acts in one way and another nation acts in their way a quite reckless thing to do? Well, when trying to prove a point it could be rather helpful, but it also brings a risk of arousing distorted opinions. Instead of arguing about what nation thinks that hikikomori is a disease and what nation doesn't, it can be rather fruitful to think about the fundamental question if hikikomori should be classified as a disease or not. When juveniles in western countries encounter problems that they feel that they cannot do anything about, they too become frustrated and revolt against whatever it is that they feel pressure them, whether it be the education system, their parents or the police etc. Throughout the history discontent over structures and the state of society has led to numerous violent demonstrations, to name a few; the student revolt in London, England in 2011 and the demonstrations in Gothenburg, Sweden in 2001. During these demonstrations, people smash windows, act violently and destroy property, presumably out of dissatisfaction and discontent with society. But what would happen in western countries if these gatherings weren't possible and if this way of letting out your frustration wasn't an option? Couldn't it then be possible that the hikikomori phenomenon would be widespread in the west too? If there is no place to ventilate your frustrations and dissatisfaction, couldn't locking yourself into your safe room where you don't need to face the troubles of society be a way of thinking that western youth also would be able to adapt? It is also worth thinking about at what point a rebellious behavior becomes a disease. No one ever talks about the British students as patients that need treatment or counseling. In short, when studying the hikikomori behavior it might be fruitful not to only see it as a unique Japanese phenomenon, but instead have in mind that there is a possibility that this behavior is just the only possible way of showing dissatisfaction with the environment unwillingly forced upon you. As mentioned above, needless to say, student revolts are not something solely existing in Japan and is not unprecedented in western cultures.

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43 Hattori, p. 109

44 Phil Rees, *Japan: The Missing Million*, BBC News, Published: 2002-10-20

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/2334893.stm> Accessed: 2011-04-23.

There are newspaper articles that have covered the case of whether hikikomori is a disease or not, and some categorize hikikomori into two different groups; one group that consists of hikikomori that suffer from mental diseases and one that doesn't. The hikikomori that doesn't suffer from mental illness are said to have other hardships troubling them, e.g. a lack of energy resulting in them only wanting to do the things that they are fond of, and many are said to be dependent on the Internet.<sup>45</sup> There seems to be several fractions of groups that have been created from different opinions upon how to deal with hikikomori, what the primary cause for this behavior is and who or what is responsible for this phenomenon. Some scholars, like Yuichi Hattori, have made conclusions about that it is strict pressure from one's surroundings and the lack of freedom within the Japanese society<sup>46</sup> that presses the youth into secluding themselves, and some claim that it is more of an individual matter where the primary factor lies within the person who is secluding himself. However, it is hard to believe that one million people deciding to seclude themselves in a special period of time in history, is caused by merely an individual problem or a personal disorder. Especially since this is a phenomenon which is more or less confined to the nation of Japan.<sup>47</sup> If hikikomori is a matter of individual and personal disorder, with the presumption that it is a phenomenon confined to Japan, then the only way of explaining this "disorder" is that it must be caused solely by some unique Japanese mentality, which is rather unlikely. Though, one shouldn't assume that the Japanese mentality has no connection to hikikomori and that it is solely a matter of a malicious society. It is rather a mix of these two factors (the Japanese mentality and Japanese strict society) that have created this phenomenon. This being said, the reality always changes depending on what kind of looking glass one is studying an object with. A sociologist for instance, might say that society is not self-driven and doesn't exist as an independent entity, but that it is something reproduced constantly by the actors. In other words, it is the people and their actions that form the structure of their society. Therefore, with this perspective, one can claim that it is due to the Japanese way of thinking that the Japanese society is the way it is, and that the root is within the Japanese mentality. Howsoever, the objective of this paper is not to discuss sociological views, nor is it about defining the Japanese mentality, so I will not dig deeper concerning this matter. Now, concerning the sternness of the Japanese society, one hikikomori has made a valuable comment in the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shinbun. He asks "Isn't society, who is supposed to support problems

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45 *Seishin shikkan nashi 4 wari unazuki jiritsu juku* 「hikikomori chousa」 (精神疾患なし4わり 宇奈月自立塾「ひきこもり調査」) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2013-03-01 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

46 Hattori, p. 111

47 However, there have indeed been cases of withdrawal amongst youth in Taiwan and South Korea, but hikikomori hasn't become as widespread and gained as much attention in these countries as it has in Japan. See Maggie Jones, *Shutting Themselves In* [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1)

like hikikomori, putting too much pressure on the hikikomori and their families by advocating their 'self reliance' (自己責任論) argument concerning hikikomori?"<sup>48</sup>

### 3. Post World War II Mentality Change

Yuichi Hattori has proposed a theory about some of the mental changes that the Japanese have undergone since the end of World War II, which I would like to include here since I believe that it is significant to the subject of this thesis.

After the end of the war, many Japanese were living in poverty, so the nation united and set their mind to thoroughly build up Japan economically. Thanks to the unity of the people and the will and endurance to make this goal reality, Japan was very successful and went from being a demolished country (not least by the two atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki) to becoming the world's second largest economy. During this build-up of the nation, the goal was clear; being able to provide food and shelter for you and your family, and due to this clear goal it was possible to motivate people to work excessively and constantly. It wasn't all positive though, during this period (mostly during the bubble economy in the 1980s) a lot of people literally died from overwork<sup>49</sup>, which is proof to how hard the Japanese was pushing themselves. Now, in post-modern Japan where the long anticipated goal has been reached, the mind state of the Japanese youth has changed. The youth observe their diligently working parents, and since there are no clear reasons for working so hard, they don't see why they too have to live a life which is almost fully occupied by work. They have grown up in an environment where they have everything they need material-wise, thus they are searching for spiritual richness instead of material richness. And this sought spiritual richness cannot be found within a life consisting of doing nothing else but working.<sup>50</sup> Hattori writes that nowadays it's hard to find youth with dreams like wanting a house with big rooms or to be able to eat until they are full. Since they have grown up in an environment where these demands have been taken for granted, what is seen as valuable has changed in the age of information. The youth of today's Japan instead pursues good bonds with other people and to live a life of their own, which according to Hattori is difficult within Japanese society.<sup>51</sup> In relation to this, Yoko that responded to

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48 *Datsu hikikomori, bando de ippou mitane machi ni taizaichuu no wakamono sannin, asu raibu* (脱ひきこもり、バンドで一步 三種町に滞在中の若者3人、あすライブ) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2009-10-16 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

49 *What is Karoshi?* Innovateus, Innovation and information for sustainable living <http://www.innovateus.net/innopedia/what-karoshi> Accessed: 2012-05-05.

50 Nao Shimoyachi, *Societal Balance at Stake, Group seeks care for socially withdrawn*, The Japan Times, Published: 2003-04-22 <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20030422b4.html> Accessed: 2012-05-03.

51 Hattori, pp. 113-117

my survey mentions that the fact that youth actually have a place to escape (i.e. the wealthy homes of their parents) adds to the possibility of being a hikikomori, and that this can be seen as a negative consequence of Japan being such a wealthy country.

## 4. Amae

### 4.1. Amae Semantics

The word *amae* is a noun that is connected to a group of many verbs that are related to its meaning, like *amaeru* (甘える), *amayakasu* (甘やかす), *amanzuru* (甘んずる), and the adjective *amai* (甘い). If you look up *amae* in a Japanese English dictionary, you get the translation "emotional dependence". In a Japanese Japanese dictionary, the explanation can be roughly translated as "to expect a partners good will and understanding of oneself, and to totally cling on to and rely on that person". When a child does this (demanding attention, being self-indulgent and acting somewhat spoiled) towards for example their mother, the verb *amaeru* is used. On the other side, it is called *amayakasu* when a mother spoils and indulges their child. There is also another noun that has derived from *amae*; *amaenbou* (甘えん坊). As *bou* (坊) means boy or kid, *amaenbou* is the definition of a spoiled and pampered kid. Similarly, there is a whole set of words connected to *amae* and they all have some kind of relation to the *amae* behavior, which is indeed difficult to translate into English with merely one word.

### 4.2. The Structure of Amae

The basic structure of *amae* is the structure of the behavior of an infant clinging on to its mother and the indulging of the infant directed towards its mother. The mother will respond to the needs and demands of her infant and is expected to understand the infants mind. Via this structure of *amae*, a sense of unity is developed between the mother and the child, and they can act as one. Now, even though the structure of *amae* is based on the mother-child relationship, it doesn't mean that it is limited to this kind of relationship. The mentality of *amae* can be very present even after one reaches adulthood, and a person living in "the world of *amae*" will try to find a person/people who they can be dependent on and someone who will accept their indulgence.<sup>52</sup>

Within the *amae* mentality and everything that is related to it, the importance of the maternal role seems very significant. Regarding this matter I would like to include a quote by Daisetsu Suzuki that is featured in Doi's book on *amae*. This quote should be of some importance when studying Japanese behavior and the differences between east and west in general:

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52 Doi, p. 75

"At the basis of the ways of thinking and feeling of the westerner there is the father" It is the mother that lies at the bottom of the Oriental nature. "The mother" he says "enfolds everything in an unconditional love. There is no question of right or wrong. Everything is accepted without difficulties or questioning"<sup>53</sup>

With the premise that this is true, it is reasonable to consider the connection between this "unconditional love" and the ways of a Japanese mother supporting her secluded child with food and shelter. However, as there have been cases of mothers who more or less unconditionally support their hikikomori child, one must not haste to conclusions and generalize this behavior. As a way of refuting this argument, one can glance at the cases of hikikomori that have been violent towards their parents, and have set up a series of demands where the mother will be punished in some way or another if she doesn't respond to these demands. In these kinds of violent cases, the mother could most likely have been impelled to assume a supportive attitude, since no other choice was possible. Yoko, my informant that in her case it wasn't to the extent where her son was violent, but when he became irritated he started hitting things. Even though he wasn't violent towards his family members, Yoko was always anxious that his behavior would escalate into domestic violence. Because of this anxiety Yoko always dealt with her son with the utmost caution and carefulness.

### **4.3. Amae and Hikikomori**

When talking to a Swedish acquaintance about the phenomenon of hikikomori, he instinctively replied "How could the parents let something like that happen and let it go on for years? Why don't they interfere or force their child out of his/her room?". Needless to say, this kind of reaction is very normal in western countries, where the idea that young adults are supposed to learn how to become independent and stand on their own feet is very deep rooted. In Japan, due to amae, the mother is supposed to support her child in any decision, and help her child without questioning. If she fails to keep up this kind of dependency, the child might turn against her and become even more isolated.<sup>54</sup> It has also been said that the child also fears her mother turning against her, and therefore is reluctant to expose her true feelings. Even if the child is unsatisfied with something, she hesitates to complain to her mother since it might cause her losing her mother's good will. Consequently, the

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53 Ibid., p. 77

54 Zielenziger, p. 62

child makes him/herself emotionally numb to be able to maintain the relationship with the mother.<sup>55</sup>

Yoko actually confirms that *amae* was very present during the period when her children were hikikomori. She also mentions that there was a co-dependence between her and her children. If school is too severe, she thought that allowing her children to go to a correspondence school and offering similar "relieving" choices would reduce her children's mental burden.

Andy Furlong discusses that Japanese families have a propensity to spoil and indulge their child, and since there is a lack of support from the government, the parents are supposed to support their children until they become independent.<sup>56</sup> Although it might be true that Japanese parents have a tendency to spoil their child and somehow support their withdrawing child, the opinion that these parents aren't strict enough and should be more severe with their "slacking" child, is also existing. One organization in Nagoya (one of Japan's major cities) run by Yuriko Osada, an author and criticizer of the Japanese education system, used a method of breaking into the hikikomori's room, and abducted the child against their will (with the parents' permission) and took the child to an institution where they were locked up and had to talk about their problem. As a result of the death of a child locked up in this institution, the organization was severely criticized for its methods by the public, but was also supported by a group of people who argued that hikikomori parents aren't strict enough with their children.<sup>57</sup> This Yuriko Osada has also written an explanatory book with a guideline on how she thinks that parents should deal with their school-refusing children. She has a very strict approach and tells parents that "Even if your child falls down, you can't help him get back up. Real love is to encourage the child to be able to recover with its own strength."<sup>58</sup> She also states concerning *amae* that "Children that have been excessively protected and indulged (*amayakasu*) by their parents won't be able to do anything as soon as their parents aren't by their side. As soon as they face some hardships they will hide inside their house and become school-refusers."<sup>59</sup> There are also terrible videos of Osada where she encourages parents of a hikikomori to scold their child and she also aggressively pushes the hikikomori child into a wall, as a means of

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55 Yuichi Hattori, *Understanding Hikikomori*, Family Forum Japan, Published: 2010-03-03  
[http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=336291613574](http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=336291613574) Accessed: 2011-04-15.

56 Andy Furlong, *The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people*, *The Sociological Review*, 56:2 2008, Blackwell Publishing Inc., Oxford UK p. 314

57 *Ibid.*, p. 317

58 Osada Yuriko, *Imeji, futoukou, hikikomori to oya ha dou mukiau ka – kodomo mondai wo kaiketsu suru osada juu no chie*, 2003, p. 40

59 *Ibid.*, p. 42

“correcting” the child’s deviant behavior.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4.4. Amae and Japanese Families

As we have seen, in Japan the parent-child relationship is associated with great importance and differs a lot from other relationships (of course these differences between relationships can be found in any culture, however the Japanese one is quite unique) and it is of some significance to explain some of the characteristics of this relationship, in order to understand the amae mentality. There is a Japanese word called *tanin* (他人), which means something like unrelated person, stranger, or a person without blood relationship to oneself. A couple can be *tanin* and one can be *tanin* in relation to ones siblings, but the relation that is furthest away from a ”*tanin*” relationship is the one between a parent and a child. In a "none-*tanin*" relationship there exists almost no constraint, and one is able to be both emotionally and physically dependent on someone (*amae*). This is considered as idealistic and is used as a standard criterion for measuring the virtue of a relationship. A relationship that is far away from the parent-child relationship is considered to be shallow and not desirable.<sup>61</sup>

There is still not an established system in Japan that supports mothers to keep working after giving birth to a child. The Swedish structure of maternity/paternity leave, where one of the parents obtains a paid vacation while staying at home taking care of their child and then has the natural option to continue working in one's old workplace, isn't existing in Japan. Due to aspects like this and others, e.g. very high kindergarten expenses, it has for many Japanese mothers been inevitable to quit their jobs when giving birth and then spend the rest of their lives taking care of the house and their children.<sup>62</sup> The fathers on the other hand are expected to work hard and support the family economically. Since Japanese companies have a custom of letting their employees work overtime, the time when the father comes home from work is usually very late in the evening. There is also a widespread custom in Japanese companies called *nomikai* (飲み会), which is a drinking get together for the employees. If a senior has invited you as an employee to a *nomikai*, it's often considered impolite to turn down the offer. These *nomikai* will keep the fathers of a family out of the house until very late, often during weekdays too. Moreover, due to early working hours, the father has to leave the house very early in the morning. The result of these customs is that the time a

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60 *6 nenkan hikikomori datta ningen no matsuro (tensai)* (6年間ひきこもりだった人間の末路 (転載) )

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcZjMGZbo8Y> Accessed: 2012-05-03.

61 Doi, p. 36

62 Goodman, Imoto and Toivonen, p. 23

child can spend with their fathers is very limited, and in some cases limited only to weekends. Some children don't even see their fathers during the weekdays since they already went to sleep when the father comes home and wake up after the father has left for work the following day. Consequently, the bottom line is that the mother is by default entrusted to take care of the house and the child, and this leaves all the shut-in hikikomori alone with their mothers, and it is most assumable that this inevitably created situation plays an important role to the hikikomori condition. Tamaki Saito mentions the importance of fulfilling ones role as a parent and how seeking help from institutions is seldom seen as something positive:

"You have to understand the relationship between parent and child in Japan, it is so unique. Most parents feel that hikikomori is a failure of their child rearing. And consulting someone about it is getting rid of your responsibility as a parent; it's like getting rid of your child"<sup>63</sup>

It has also been written that it is because of the remarkable expectations that parents are supposed to support their children even after they become adults, that hikikomori has become such a big problem in Japan.<sup>64</sup>

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63 Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

64 Richard Lloyd Perry, *One million recluses are threatening the foundations of society - from their bedrooms*, Times Online, Published: 2004-01-31 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/newspaper/0,,2716-983567,00.html>  
Accessed: 2011-04-23.

## 5. Japanese Behavior and Mentality

### 5.1. Group Behavior

The concept of inner and outer circles, which is permeating Japanese society, is one of the major characteristics of Japanese behavior, thus some explanation is needed. This concept of inner and outer circles is more easily comprehensible if referred to as 'group behavior'. The Japanese often creates and place themselves in two groups; the so-called *uchi* (内)(inside, inner) and *soto* (外)(outside, outer).<sup>65</sup> The 'inside' consists of the circle of people to which one belongs, i.e. close friends and family. The 'outside' consists of the rest of the people, those that aren't in one's inner circle. It is said that Japanese people change their behavior depending on if they are together with people of their inner or their outer circle.<sup>66</sup> The significance of belonging to groups, whether it is your school class, teammates or colleagues, has been given much importance to and is fundamental to the Japanese society and to the Japanese. In Chie Nakane's book "Japanese Society" about human relations in Japanese society, she writes concerning this matter as follows:

"With group-consciousness so highly developed there is almost no social life outside the particular group on which an individual's major economic life depends. The individual's every problem must be solved within this frame."<sup>67</sup>

Doi states that the fundamental difference between Western and Japanese group behavior is that the westerner can transcend and change groups more freely as he pleases, and he can also cease participation with a group whenever he wants to. The Japanese on the other hand are more or less automatically placed into groups and they can't change groups as freely. They are also apt to follow their group and turn their sails by the wind.<sup>68</sup>

This group behavior has a long history within Japan, and due to this, the western way of individuality and freedom of the individual has not developed in Japan in the same way.<sup>69</sup> The group which one belongs to, in a way defines a person's personality and his group is essential to

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65 Nakane, Chie, *Japanese Society*, 1970, pp. 3-5

66 Needless to say, people in western countries also tends to act differently towards people that they know well and people that they don't, but it is supposedly more striking within the Japanese society.

67 Nakane, p.11

68 Doi, pp. 174-175

69 Ibid., p. 43

him. It is therefore presumable that one must become very puzzled and at loss when being ejected from the group that one is supposed to belong to, e.g. by being bullied in school by one's group of classmates. Another trait of the Japanese is the importance of consensus whenever a decision at for instance a meeting, has to be made. The unwillingness of stating one's personal opinion (when this opinion might possibly be contrary to what the rest of the group thinks) and the reluctance to cause any kind of dispute over opinions that oppose each other, will lead to a lengthening of the process of concluding something.<sup>70</sup> This can at a first glance seem to be of great disadvantage due to the ineffectiveness upon decision-making, but it can also be seen as something positive since it helps to maintain a harmony within the group and it will prevent any kind of excessive conflict.

I would like to refer to a first-hand experience of mine, related to this group-like behavior that took place at a film festival in Japan where I was volunteering. One particular morning during this festival, a meeting was going to be held for all the volunteers at 11 a.m. in a cottage rather close to the hotel where we (the volunteers) were staying. A shuttle-bus was supposed to leave at 9 a.m., taking the volunteers to the meeting. Since the bus was quite crowded and the cottage was located at a walking distance from the hotel, I told the other volunteers (all Japanese) that they shouldn't wait for me, since I could walk by myself to the cottage later on, instead of taking the bus. Upon saying this, I was met with quite unsatisfied looks and my Japanese companions didn't seem to be happy at all with this decision. For me it was more than natural to walk alone instead of taking the bus with the others, not least because there was a two-hour time gap from the time of the bus departure to the commencement of the meeting. Reluctantly they left and I met them later on where the meeting was held. I was humbly explained to later on that the reason for the commotion upon my decision to walk instead of taking the bus, was that Japanese like to act in groups and that one should stick to whatever plan that has been prearranged. I could at that time sense that within this explanation there was an implication that it was desirable if I too would from there on stick to the plan and follow the rest of the group. I am by mentioning this episode not in the least trying to criticize this behavior, but just attempting to point out the differences between my "western" way of acting and the Japanese way of acting. I would also like to indicate with this example that the group-behavior is not merely something that has been written about by scholars in books, but indeed is a reality that can be experienced quite often when associating with Japanese people.

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70 Ibid., p. 136

## 5.2. Shame

The problem of shame amongst Japanese and the inclination to avoid addressing and discussing 'difficult' subjects like depression (which I have mentioned earlier), which presumably has added to the complexity of dealing with the hikikomori problem, also has a relation to the grouping of inner and outer circles. The shame that has been aroused by feelings of failure and not being able to keep up with your peers is connected to a sense of guilt of not being able to meet the expectations laid upon you by the members of your group. Doi Takeo explains this connection as follows:

"what is characteristic about the Japanese sense of guilt, though, is that it shows itself most sharply when the individual suspects that his action will result in betraying the group to which he belongs"<sup>71</sup>

"... one experiences shame most of all, just as in the case of guilt, in the relation to the group which one belongs; just as betrayal of the group creates guilt, so to be ostracized by the group is the greatest shame and dishonor"<sup>72</sup>

What might be called for as an explanation of the strong sense of guilt and shame, and the quick outburst of harsh bullying, is the fact that when one person of a group somehow fails in whatever "goal" the group strives for, it is seen as a failure of the entire group. If one person in the group is responsible for some failure, the rest of the group will by default also become responsible for this failure. If children feel that one person in their group is impeding their actions and putting spanner in the works, they will automatically try to "correct" this behavior and point out that any deviant behavior is unacceptable. This kind of mentality can also be seen in Japanese companies where if one person's failure has brought shame upon his company and his colleagues, it can lead to the resignation of several people within the company, even though they weren't responsible for the failure, directly or indirectly. Doi writes regarding this matter as follows:

"...where some circumstances or other makes it impossible to comply with this custom (to resign from one's post due to shame), the individual is tormented indefinitely by his failure"<sup>73</sup>

If this kind of shame is also present in the mind of a seclusive youth, it could act as a possible cause

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71 Doi, p. 49

72 Ibid., p. 53

73 Ibid., p. 56

for the longevity, and the difficulty of overcoming one's seclusiveness. If employees resign from their post as a way of getting rid of or escaping their shame, how are the hikikomori supposed to deal with their shame? How does one, so to speak, resign from life?

Yoko that responded to my survey, also thinks that the concept of shame within Japanese culture has been accelerating the extent of hikikomori.

Doi also discuss that there has been a change in the sense of shame among Japanese since the end of World War II and onwards. Before, the Japanese were focusing more on the spirit of human beings and spiritual thoughts were more widespread. Shame was during that time of spirituality not at all always considered as something negative, and people were considerate regarding each other's sense of shame. Though with the influence of western thinking and the "westernization" of Japan, the importance of spirituality has been lost to some extent. Thus, shame has become to be seen as a disadvantage, and a person possessing a sense of shame turns his agony inwards and feels insecure since he doubts that his peers will accept his shame. This change of shame has presumably added to a loss of self-esteem amongst youth, leading to nervous behavior where they become reluctant to everyday matters, e.g. making eye contact with other people. Doi explains this as "a change from "a sense of shame towards one's surroundings" to "a sense of fear towards one's surroundings"". <sup>74</sup>

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74 Ibid., pp. 108-109

## 6. How to deal with Hikikomori and Recovering from Hikikomori

### 6.1. Dealing with Hikikomori – Passive or Active Approach?

Psychiatrist Tamaki Saito says that when a child retreats and refuses to go to school, the parent's way of dealing with this situation is very determining for the child's future. If the parents scold their child and try to persuade them to go back to school, it could lead to an adverse reaction where the child's state becomes worse and turns into a full-scale hikikomori. Saito stresses that when a child first starts to seclude himself, the parents should as a first measure let their child rest and secure the child's recuperation period. As a second step, the parents should not make a fuss about the child returning to school. If parents follow this plan, the child will eventually out of their own accord, start thinking about going back to school again.<sup>75</sup> But what's the guarantee that the youth will really "heal" by themselves? What proof is there that a child that's not being pushed to leave his/her room won't stay secluded for years to come? It is most difficult to decide if intervening and trying to persuade a child is going to act as a boost for the child, motivating them to start participating in society again, or if it will lead to a setback where the child's psychological state aggravates.

A 48-year-old man from the Chubuu district of Japan became a hikikomori 30 years ago. He became a hikikomori for various reasons; the death of his mother, being exposed to bullying in school and difficulties with educational and career choices. The father of this man, who was focusing most of his attention to his job, had entrusted his wife to take care of the children. When the mother died the father started reproving his son by shouting things like "your mother was spoiling you (amayakasu (甘やかす))" and "graduate and get a job". This led the son into a frenzy and sometimes he became aggressive. The son claimed that him being a hikikomori was a way of showing retaliation towards his father.<sup>76</sup>

Teruo Miyanishi is a professor from Wakayama University who, instead of waiting for the hikikomori to go out and seek counseling support (which might never happen), makes frequent visits to the house where the hikikomori lives, and urges them to end their seclusive behavior.

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75 *Sotsugyousei no 45%, ni-to yobigun [futoukou no ukesara] tsuushin seido koukou no genjitsu* (卒業生の45%、ニート予備軍「不登校の受け皿」通信制度高校の現実) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-09-26 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

76 *Kozoku no kuni dai ichi bu otokotachi: 9) hikikomori, nuketakute* (孤族の国 第1部 男たち: 9) ひきこもり、抜けたくて) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-01-05 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

”When the parents of a hikikomori has reached a deadlock, it is important for a third party to meddle in and create a place where the hikikomori can ventilate his/her problems”, says professor Miyanishi. ”When a child is urged by their parents to go outside, they feel that they are troubling their parents and embrace a feeling of guilt”.<sup>77</sup>

Another hikikomori who expresses his concerns in a letter to Asahi Shinbun, writes that his parents was worrying about him and several times tried to drag him out of his room. Due to this, he felt that there was no place where he could fit in, and gradually became depressed. He recommends that parents of hikikomori should tell their child that ”it's totally ok for you to be here (あなたはここにいていいの)”, otherwise they will feel that they are a bother to their parents which will only make things worse.<sup>78</sup> Yoko, my informant, says that it was very clear that her forcible behavior towards her son only made his condition worse. In the beginning she thought that if she forced her son to go to school, the problem would calm down, but that had the opposite effect and the situation aggravated. She then realized that already at the point of time when her son stopped going to school, he was suffering mentally. By her forcible behavior the situation went so far that her son even stopped coming down to the living room and only stayed in his room. Since she was afraid that her son’s behavior would escalate into domestic violence, she said that she treated him with great caution, and brought food to his room when he refused to come down to the living room. Even though he was "dictating" in their house, he had a very friendly disposition and was very communicative, but when the subject of going to school came up, he transformed into a tyrant.

## 6.2. Recovering from Hikikomori

Yoko answered in my survey that at first, they tried to solve the problem of her hikikomori children within the family. But since that made little success, they started going to a counselor for mental therapy. With the help of a therapist that had a very good reputation, both her son and daughter were able to recover and are now working employees. This therapist helped her children to understand and reflect over why they had become hikikomori and why they were nervous when being with other people. By doing this, they could accept their present situation, which made them able to

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77 Ibid.

78 (Koe) hikikomori wo gokai shinaide( 声) ひきこもりを誤解しないで) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2010-05-24 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

recover. Moreover, when asked further about her children's recovery, she answered that her children was able to recognize their own problems, and could regain their self-confidence. By doing this, they could also recognize the value of their existence, which was a big part of their recovering. She mentions that solving the problem by themselves (i.e. within the family) would probably have been impossible. She also thinks that it is impossible to solve the problem solely by the support the government is providing for hikikomori. Not because the support that the government is providing is erroneous, but since it is very difficult to deal with the subtle "moves of the heart" that hikikomori involves.

A 39-year-old woman from the Wakayama prefecture managed to recover from her seclusive state after 20 years of being a hikikomori. Bad grades and bullying were some of the factors leading to her withdrawal. When she became 30 years old she had to nurse her weakening father who frequently had to be hospitalized. Also at the age of 30 she had felt a faint change within herself and thought that she couldn't go on like this (as a hikikomori). At the age of 34 she decided to pick up the evening newspaper, and dressed in her mother's clothes, opened the front door for the first time in 17 years. "Even if I'm seen by the neighbors, they will mistake me for my mother" she says. This proves once again how much the hikikomori care about their surroundings and how anxiety is aroused when leaving the house. Three months later, her strict father passed away, and she left the house for the first time since she became a hikikomori. "The death of my father made the walls around me melt" she says, and gradually recovered. After being able to leave her house she decided to start going to school again, where she met a 17 year old who had similar experiences. Due to this common feature they could share their experiences, and the 17 year old girl told her that thanks to her (the 39 year old), she could enjoy school life. Kohei Yamamoto, a professor from Ritsumeikan University, says that hikikomori recovering from a 20 years long period of seclusiveness is very rare. He thinks that due to the 39 year olds strict parents she couldn't "let her heart at rest" and her seclusiveness was prolonged. When she started taking care of her sick father she felt that she was supporting her family and recognized that her existence had some value.<sup>79</sup>

Another hikikomori that had spent 13 years watching television, surfing the Internet and creating model cars made a positive swift change in mood behavior when a counselor asked him to make a

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79 39 sai hikikomori ketsubetsu 20 nengoshi, koukou de saishuppatsu  
(39歳、ひきこもり決別 20年越し、高校再出発) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2008-05-05  
Accessed: 2012-03-28.

car for children at a day-care center. "It was as if he'd never been asked to do something for someone else before. He was sitting in his room all day where nothing was expected of him, and he did nothing to show his value".<sup>80</sup> Also in this case the hikikomori who had been apathetic for more than a decade seemed to make a very positive progress when proven to that his existence had some value to other. In several cases, it seems that the intervention of a third party or the opportunity to have a relationship with someone can be the key to recovering from hikikomori. "...If they can form a close relationship with one other person they are cured." says Sayaka Sasaki, a doctor running a day center for hikikomori.<sup>81</sup> In the research that was carried out within the prefecture of Nagasaki, more than half of the respondents that had the NEET/hikikomori liability answered that "having someone close to consult my problems with" is what is needed in order to live a more happy life.<sup>82</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

I have hitherto discussed some of the typical behaviors connected to amae, and these behaviors possible connection to the phenomenon of hikikomori. I have studied some of the underlying causes leading Japanese youth into a life of withdrawal, how parents could suitably deal with their seclusive child and how the adopted measures of the parents can affect their children's future. Several scholars and doctors who have studied hikikomori have claimed that the concept of amae, that is supposedly peculiar to the Japanese, has had a strong influence on the possibility of youth secluding themselves from long time periods within a range from six months<sup>83</sup> to extreme cases of up to and past a decade. There have been claims that due to behavior based on amae, the secluded child has simply been self-indulgent (amaeru) and that the mothers have been spoiling their child (amayakasu) by supporting their child with food and haven't resorted to drastic measures like forcing their child to open their door and make their child leave their room/house. These claims can be interpreted as a strict critique towards both the hikikomori person and towards its mother who has been too lenient. When looking closer at the background of hikikomori and the causes for it, straightforward critique like the ones of Dr. Grubb who stress that one should solve the problem by

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80 Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

81 Richard Lloyd Perry, *This man won't leave his room. And he's not alone*, The Independent, Published: 2000-12-05  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/this-man-wont-leave-his-room-and-hes-not-alone-627576.html>  
Accessed: 2011-04-18.

82 *Futoukou ya shuukatsu shippai ga kikkake, ni-to hikikomori ni kenchousa*  
(不登校や就活失敗がきっかけ、ニート、ひきこもりに 県調査) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-09-15  
Accessed: 2012-03-28.

83 Naturally there have been many cases of youth secluding themselves less than 6 months and then re-engaged activity with society. However, I have on this occasion used the measure of 6 months since it has been set as a minimum length for the definition of hikikomori.

simply knocking down the door to the child's room<sup>84</sup>, becomes quite inadequate. As we have seen, through drastic-like means like this, there have been actual cases where strict treatment towards the child has backfired and resulted in an even more intense withdrawal. This can be clearly seen in the case of the 48-year-old hikikomori who had been secluded for more than 20 years, and who said that his seclusiveness had been a way of showing retaliation towards his strict father.<sup>85</sup> As Yoko, my informant stated, *amae* was in fact very present between her and her children when they were hikikomori. *Amae* apparently seems to be quite related to hikikomori since it has a strong influence on the relationship between a mother and her child.

As I have mentioned earlier, due to the circumstances of Japanese society resulting in mothers staying at home with their child and due to the expectations on a mother to care for her child until the child has become an adult, an inevitable situation is created where the presence of *amae* is noticeable. However, *amae* is not the cause for the first step in the process of becoming a hikikomori, which is leaving school and deciding to withdraw. If one insists on trying to find a cause for the extent of hikikomori within the Japanese mentality, one should instead of blaming mothers for being too lenient or the youth for being self-indulgent, focus more on the remarkable group behavior that permeates all levels of Japanese society. Group behavior is related to negative consequences like bullying and exclusion.<sup>86</sup>

When someone's emotional or mental state is so bad that they decide to stop going to school, it is reasonable not to focus on what happens after the withdrawal, but what lead the person to make this decision. As the research done by the prefecture of Nagasaki shows, 17.1% of the respondents answered that poor human relations was the trigger for their withdrawal.<sup>87</sup> Also Yoko's children became hikikomori due to bullying and problems with human relations. *Amae* is just one part of the hikikomori mechanism and it shouldn't be viewed as one of the prime causes for hikikomori. On

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84 Phil Rees, *Japan: The Missing Million*, BBC News, Published: 2002-10-20

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/2334893.stm> Accessed: 2011-04-23.

85 *Kozoku no kuni dai ichi bu otokotachi: 9) hikikomori, nuketakute*

(孤族の国 第1部男たち: 9) ひきこもり、抜けたくて) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-01-05

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

86 It is though stated in Takeo Doi's book on *amae* that *amae* is intertwined with all of the behaviors that are peculiar to the Japanese. In this sense, if one strictly follows Doi's theory on *amae*, one can conclude that group behavior is something that has developed from *amae*. However, one must not forget that this is a theory, and theories aren't always applicable in practice.

87 *Futoukou ya shuukatsu shippai ga kikkake, ni-to hikikomori ni kenchousa*

(不登校や就活失敗がきっかけ、ニート、ひきこもりに 県調査) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-09-15

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

the contrary, as several of the hikikomori cases in the “Recovering from hikikomori” section has shown, doing the opposite of amayakasu (indulging), i.e. adapting strict measures by reproofing and forcing ones child out of the house can be counterproductive leading to worse results. In Yoko’s case, her trying to persuade her son led to him going from secluding in the house to staying only in his room and refusing to come down to the living room.

Isn’t there a need for a fundamental structural change to a society where a large number of youth resort to a life of withdrawal? Scolding these youth for their behavior and forcing them to cease their withdrawal is not going to solve the problem, since the problem is much deeper than that. A Japanese author named Ryoko Ishikawa has written a book titled *hikikomori no go-ru* (ひきこもりのゴーリ)(Goals for hikikomori). In this book, she points out that many of the hikikomori support groups stress superficial goals such as how to succeed in job-searching and how to acquire personal relations. But when youth who haven’t yet been able to solve their inner problems are commanded to “work!” they will be exposed to even more difficulties. Ishikawa also points out that scolding the parents for not understanding their children’s problems, isn’t either going to solve the problem, since the parents are also being tormented by not being able to understand their children’s feelings.<sup>88</sup>

Lastly, based on my arguments I would like to propose three methods that presumably could solve hikikomori. These are:

1. The intervention of a third party, especially in the cases where the parents have reached a deadlock with their child.<sup>89</sup>
2. The possibility for a hikikomori to have someone to talk to and ventilate his/her problems with.<sup>90</sup>
3. The hikikomori being proven to that his/her existence is valuable, e.g. by being asked to do something for someone or having someone to rely on them which makes it clear that they are needed.<sup>91</sup>

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88 (*Shohyōu hikikomori no go-ru, Ishikawa Ryouko cho hikikomori wa naze naoru no ka? Saitou Tamaki cho* ( (書評) ひきこもりのゴール、石川良子著 ひきこもりはなぜ治るのか? 斎藤環著) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2007-11-25 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

89 *Kozoku no kuni dai ichi bu otokotachi: 9) hikikomori, nuketakute* (孤族の国 第1部 男たち: 9) ひきこもり、抜けたくて) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-01-05 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

90 (*Shin, kazoku no katachi yuragu shakai no mukou ni: 5) hikikomori, 「iki」 ni nayamu* ( (新、家族のカタチ 揺らぐ社会の向こうに: 5) ひきこもり、「生」に悩む) Asahi Shinbun, 2007-01-06 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

91 Maggie Jones, *Shutting themselves in*, The New York Times, Published: 2006-01-15 [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html?_r=1) Accessed: 2011-04-05.

39 sai hikikomori *ketsubetsu 20 nengoshi, koukou de saishuppatsu* (39歳、ひきこもり決別

Talking about problems and not associating it with shame and guilt is presumably very fruitful and can most possibly be the key for recovering from hikikomori. Perhaps, instead of ‘putting the lid on stinky things’ the Japanese should ‘take the lid of stinky things’ and let it out into the air, so to speak.

If one looks at the phenomenon of hikikomori at a more macro-level and focuses on some of the major difficulties that Japanese society is dealing with right now (declining birth rate, aging society), it becomes quite obvious that it is very crucial for the future of Japan that widespread problems like hikikomori has to be dealt with in a very appropriate way. There is also a lack of time upon dealing with problems like hikikomori; not only concerning the aspect of the unstable future of Japanese society, but also in consideration of the hardships and suffering of the already withdrawing hikikomori and of the ones that will possibly resort to withdrawal from here on. Problems such as a declining birth rate and an aging society are leading to tremendous demographical problems in the near future of Japan.<sup>92</sup> Obviously, the extent of hikikomori is not going to facilitate the declining birth rate problem, since someone who has totally disengaged participation with society and has no human relations is very unlikely to meet a partner and even less have children. In present time, the youth is one of Japans most valuable resources, that has to become the pillar supporting Japan in the future.<sup>93</sup> It is of the utmost importance that youth is capable of smoothly making the transition from education to entering society as an adult, and one can say that what is happening these days with the withdrawal of youth is the total opposite of what Japanese society needs. There indeed seems to be a need for some fundamental change to a society that is so competitive. "A society that abandons the weak, and only values the strong - that's no society at all" says Tamaki Saito.<sup>94</sup> The late Masahisa Okuyama, founder of the parent based organization "Oya no Kai" is also concerned with the consequences that the extent of hikikomori will have for Japans future "The nation is wasting human resources. It's a disease that can bring the nation to collapse."<sup>95</sup>

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20年越し、高校再出発) Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2008-05-05 Accessed: 2012-03-28.

92 Richard Lloyd Perry, *One million recluses are threatening the foundations of society - from their bedrooms*, Times Online, Published: 2004-01-31 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/newspaper/0,,2716-983567,00.html> Accessed: 2011-04-23.

93 Goodman, Imoto and Toivonen, p. 164

94 Richard Lloyd Perry, *One million recluses are threatening the foundations of society - from their bedrooms*, Times Online, Published: 2004-01-31 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/newspaper/0,,2716-983567,00.html> Accessed: 2011-04-23.

95 Nao Shimoyachi, *Societal Balance at Stake, Group seeks care for socially withdrawn*, The Japan Times, Published: 2003-04-22 <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20030422b4.html> Accessed: 2012-05-03.

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*6 nenkan hikikomori datta ningen no matsuro (tensai)*

(6年間ひきこもりだった人間の末路 (転載) )

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcZjMGZbo8Y>

Accessed: 2012-05-03.

*Seishin shikkan nashi 4 wari unazuki jiritsu juku 『hikikomori chousa』*

(精神疾患なし4わり 宇奈月自立塾「ひきこもり調査」)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2013-03-01

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*Sotsugyousei no 45%, ni-to yobigun 『futoukou no ukesara』 tsuushin seido koukou no genjitsu*

(卒業生の45%、ニート予備軍「不登校の受け皿」通信制度高校の現実)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-09-26

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*Futoukou ya shuukatsu shippai ga kikkake, ni-to hikikomori ni kenchousa*

(不登校や就活失敗がきっかけ、ニート、ひきこもりに 県調査)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-09-15

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*Kozoku no kuni dai ichi bu otokotachi: 9) hikikomori, nuketakute*

(孤族の国 第1部 男たち: 9) ひきこもり、抜けたくて)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2011-01-05

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*(Wakamono wa ima: 6) hikikomori kara shokuba he shuurou taiken ya chuutai boushi de michisuji*

( (若者は今: 6) ひきこもりから職場へ 就労体験や中退防止で道筋)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2010-11-30

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*(Koe) hikikomori wo gokai shinaide*

( (声) ひきこもりを誤解しないで)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2010-05-24

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*Datsu hikikomori, bando de ippou mitane machi ni taizaichuu no wakamono sannin, asu raibu*  
(脱ひきこもり、バンドで一步 三種町に滞在中の若者3人、あすライブ)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2009-10-16

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*39 sai hikikomori ketsubetsu 20 nengoshi, koukou de saishuppatsu*

(39歳、ひきこもり決別 20年越し、高校再出発)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2008-05-05

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*(Shin, kazoku no katachi yuragu shakai no mukou ni: 5) hikikomori, 「iki」 ni nayamu*

( (新、家族のカタチ 揺らぐ社会の向こうに: 5) ひきこもり、「生」に悩む)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2007-01-06

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

*(Shohyou) hikikomori no go-ru, Ishikawa Ryouko cho hikikomori wa naze naoru no ka? Saitou Tamaki cho*

( (書評) ひきこもりのゴール、石川良子著 ひきこもりはなぜ治るのか? 斎藤環著)

Asahi Shinbun, Published: 2007-11-25

<http://database.asahi.com/resources.asiaportal.info/library2e/main/start.php>

Accessed: 2012-03-28.

## 10. Survey questions (in Japanese)

1. 貴方のお子様の年齢と性別を教えてください。

2. お子様はひきこもり始めたのは何歳からですか？

3. お子様はひきこもられた原因は何だったと思われますか？

4. お子様はひきこもり始めた時に貴方はどのように反応しましたか？説得したり、強引にお子様を社会や学校に戻そうとしたりしていませんか？それとも優しい態度をとり、そのまま休ませたりお子様のしたいように自由にさせたりしていませんか？それは何故ですか？

5. お子様はひきこもられている間、食事を用意するといった支えをされていませんか？もしそうされていたなら、どうしてそのような行動をとられたのでしょうか？もしそうしなかったら、どうなったかと思われますか？

6. お子様を部屋または家から出すのを妨げるような外的要因はありましたか？例えば、お子様の暴力など。

7. ひきこもりを解決するために、臨床カウンセリングなどのような外部施設からの助けを求めたりされましたか？それとも家族内だけで解決しようとしていましたか？

8. 行政などで提供される支援は、十分だと思われますか？外部からの支援で何か不満に思われることはありましたか？

9. 西洋では人々はひきこもりについて聞かされると「どうして親達は好き嫌いにかかわらず子供を部屋から出さないのか」という質問がよく聞かれます。これに対してどう思われますか。経験者として、これはひきこもり解決にのいて効果的な方法だと思われますか？

10. 親と子供の間の「甘え」や「共依存」が長期のひきこもり状態を可能にする原因の一つだ、とする人がいますが、これに対してどう思われますか？

11. 貴方のお子様はひきこもりからすでに脱出できているとしたら、それが可能となった原因は何だったと思われますか？

12. ひきこもりは個人的な問題だと思われますか？それとも日本社会の有様や、日本の文化などの外的要因とつながっていると思われますか？