<u>Viewing the Contemporary Within the Contemporary:</u>

Fan Internalization of the Hikikomori Phenomena in Western Fans

By

Kathryn Lebda

May 2013

Thesis Presented to the Higher Degree Committee

of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Asia Pacific Studies: Contemporary Japanese Society

<u>Declaration of Originality</u>

I, Kathryn Lebda, hereby declare that the thesis that follows is my own original work that has not been used in conjunction with any other institution of higher education.

All points of information taken from published or unpublished sources has been sited and correctly acknowledged as not my own original work.

Abstract

This study explores how the hikikomori phenomena has been interpreted and further globalized through the Japanese popular culture product of manga to Western fans and aims to showcase how Western fans are internalizing the concept. As the hikikomori phenomena has been understood to be almost exclusively a Japanese cultural byproduct, Western audiences who learn about it are either exposed to the idea in a classroom or at school through cultural products that have been globalized outside of Japan. By giving manga or other globalized cultural products the classification of a possible learning tool, allows fans to not only see and understand them as entertainment, but to acknowledge its potential as a learning tool outside of the classroom. A narrative analysis of four manga titles in this study concludes that there are five main overlapping themes that are consistently portrayed that also connect back to what academic and psychological researchers have established in Japan. Expanding on the findings of the narrative analysis, this study examines internet fan activities and comments that further expressed their internalization of the hikikomori concept. The analysis discovers comments and pieces of fan activity that Western fans are learning about the hikikomori phenomena through manga, creating fan made lists of other manga works that feature hikikomori characters, and even applying the term to Western made media and characters. Based on these examinations, it can be argued that fan internalization has led to a further Western interpretation of the hikikomori phenomena as well as further critical analysis of other media products that originated in the West through their application of the understood concept of hikikomori.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

I would like to personally thank Professor Kaori Yoshida for all her time and patience leading me through the thesis process. She has been invaluable with the amount of time she set aside to make sure this thesis was a success.

I would also like to thank the entire Western fan community who expressed their opinions and spent their time creating lists, charts, and asked questions that further creates the internet fan community.

Table of Content

<u>List of Tables</u>

1. Introduction

Within the last 10 years, the hikikomori phenomenon in Japan has received a lot of attention from not only scholars but the government, psychologists, sociologists, and doctors. This phenomena has been defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as, "in Japan: abnormal avoidance of social contact; acute social withdrawal; (also) a person, typically an adolescent male engaging in this, a recluse, a shut-in" (Horiguchi 2012 ,122). Numerous agencies and activists have been searching for the answers to questions like; Why have these young people isolated themselves from the rest of the world? Or what can we do to rehabilitate these individuals back into society? Throughout history and in all countries, there have been people who have felt disenfranchised from society and have pulled themselves away and lived lives on the fringes of their communities. These individuals have been labeled deviants or the "other" by their own culture because they are not completely integrated with their peers or the mainstream society in which they live in. Of course there are always questions about how much hype the media and government instigated when the first major reports came back stating that there could be over 1 million hikikomori in Japanese society (Horiguchi 2012, 122), which others will report a smaller number (Hairston 2010). In recent years scholars have come back to claim that number is over inflated, yet this phenomena continues to raise more questions for Japanese policy makers. Of course, modern Japanese society has more than just the hikikomori a phenomenon is connected with the recently increasing youth problems. *Kikokushijo* or returnees, NEETS, *enjokōsai* or compensated dating, and bullying have been dominating the list of social problems for the last 10 to 20 years, with the hikikomori phenomena being one of the most high profile on an international level. The government and social groups have been struggling to change how Japanese youth are interacting with society and the

growing generational gap.

Horiguchi (2012) explains the history of the phenomena. The word for 'hikikomori' first started entering the public sphere in Japan the early 1990's and the hikikomori phenomena has achieved significant attention with the publication of Michael Zielenziger's (2006) English language book *Shutting Out The Sun.* Zielenziger's book may have been the point where hikikomori received the highest exposure in Western scholarship of Japanese studies and sociology, yet the online communities and forums of the English speaking Japanese popular culture fandoms were spreading the word and characterization through translations of Japanese manga and anime.

Similar to the increase awareness of Autism in the United States, the hikikomori phenomena has been integrated more and more into Japanese popular culture products that are consumed not only by Japanese youth, but by millions of people around the globe. One of the main arguments that scholars (Iwabuchi 2010) have about studying anime and manga fans in the West (the United States in particular but also Europe and Australia) is that while consumers are learning about certain parts of Japanese culture, they are not learning or consuming anything that is of true cultural value. Those Western consumers are not learning about any of the social problems or serious issues that are facing the Japanese today because the nature and subject matter of the anime or manga they are consuming is only intended for light entertainment. While, light that entertainment might be, I would argue against the established Frankfurt School and with the opinion that Western consumers are learning more than scholars might think they do through consumption of popular culture.

To automatically say they are not receiving any kind of cultural value is to automatically cut the teaching potential from the process of reading manga. Depending on the genre and target age range, there are dozens of manga and anime that are globalizing

and exposing Western readers to some of the more serious social issues facing Japan at this time. Particularly with the fansub and scanlation communities on the internet that are waiting to translate and distribute the latest anime and manga to consumers, more and more people are learning about social issues and problems through popular culture. Since most scanlators and translators for manga and anime are more apt to explain concepts and traditions that are unfamiliar to their foreign audience in the form of translator notes (TN), fans of Japanese pop culture are being exposed to and learning about these issues outside of the pedagogical landscape of the classroom. Of course, there can be a danger in giving popular culture such pedagogic power over consumers, but as other media scholars have argued the Disney Corporation and its power that it holds over children's culture is an example of how scholars need to look more into what is unknowingly expressed to the consumer or audience. While the Disney movie *Aladdin* may be showing a story set in the Middle East, the characterization of Jasmine actually shows her to be an American teenager (Staninger 2003).

This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to study on what pieces of information on the hikikomori phenomena are expresses in Japanese manga and how Western readers of these manga internalize the concept of hikikomori, specifically English speaking, consumers of Japanese popular culture. With the growing view that the hikikomori phenomena has been continually connected to the otaku subculture in Japan, this study aims to analyze at how the *manga* community and *mangaka,* manga artist, are portraying the phenomena through main or side characters. By focusing not only on media studies, but individual reposes to the phenomena, a lot can be learned about how this marginalized group has been showcased and represented to, not only Japanese youth, but exported and globalized to manga and anime fans on the international level .

It has be stressed that the purpose of this research is not to look at the psychological understandings of the hikikomori phenomena or to assert an opinion of whether the

Viewing the Contemporary Within the Contemporary

Japanese government has done enough or should help rehabilitate these individuals into working and economically viable citizens. Instead, this research intends to analyze and understand how *hikikomori* are represented and showcased in Japanese popular culture, specifically manga. By looking at how these characters are represented, this study aims to discuss both descriptively and theoretically on how Western, specifically English speaking, consumers of Japanese popular culture are or are not using manga to learn and engage in critical knowledge of the hikikomori phenomena. Moreover, by looking at fan responses to specific manga and through discussion threads found in online forums, the study has further looked into how fan culture and fan communities are internalizing and spreading information on some of the issues facing contemporary Japanese society.

2. Literature Review

This study will be focusing on two main themes during the Literature Review; 1) hikikomori; who they are and how they have been conceived in Japan and popular culture theory. By using these three disciplines, this chapter blends together the basis of researching to appropriately direct the study to find how Western fans are learning and then internalizing the hikikomori phenomena. As this studys focuses on how non-Japanese literate English speaking readers would be able to interpret information on the hikikomori phenomena, all points in the hikikomori review are all published in English. The reason for this decision is to further work with the materials and publications that would be available to non-Japanese literate English speakers who are interested in expanding their knowledge on the hikikomori phenomena.

2.1 Hikikomori: Who are they and the Cultural History of the Phenomena

This section will introduce cultural and psychological scholarship on the hikikomori phenomena. When any group of people are represented and portrayed through the media, we have to look into how those people can be received by the audience.

To begin this chapter, who and what hikikomori are have to be established and reviewed. Before looking at how hikikomori are represented, we have to establish who and what they are. In February 2010, the Japanese Cabinet Office conducted a survey and currently estimates that there are around 700,000 hikikomori currently withdrawn in their homes for longer than six months (Saitō 1998, 2013). These numbers can be misrepresentative in fact, and some scholars (Zielenziger, 2006; Saitō 1998, 2013) wager that the number is really around 1 million or higher.

Japanese doctors and scholars have been discussing and publishing on the

hikikomori phenomena for over 20 years, and they have been influential and pioneers in the understanding and rehabilitating of hikikomori. Michael Zielenziger is the first Western scholar to write about the hikikomori phenomena in English and has given the first major view point for Western scholars and the international community into this problem (Horiguchi 2012 122). His book introduces three major Japanese advocates.

Prior to Zielenziger's book *Shutting Out the Sun* (2006), the first prominent Japanese expert, Saitō Tamaki, on the issue of what he called *hikikomori seinen*, or withdrawn young man in his ground breaking book *Shakaiteki hikikomori : Owaranai shishunki* (trans. Jeffery Angles, 2013, 1998). In the introduction of this book, Saitō asks the readers if one of the following statements reflects what they think about people who stay within their homes:

- It's a disgrace for an adult not to have a job and just to hand around doing nothing. Why on earth do some people let adults get away with that?
- Those obsessive *otaku* types are the ones who're the real problem. They're too quiet. Someone ought to check them into a mental hospital straight away.
- If a person doesn't work, he doesn't deserve to eat. If he doesn't feel like working, he ought to go to a boarding school or something and get some sense beaten into him.
- It's the parent's fault. They must have raised their kid wrong. But I suppose if parents want to take care of their kids for their entire life, there's nothing anyone else can do about it.
- In the end, it's our tax money that ends up taking care of apathetic, weak-kneed kids like that. We ought to be thinking about how to treat this like the social problem it is. (1998, 2013 9-10).

These opening points clarifies and establishes the already prevalent negative opinions regarding hikikomori, which have had been created and spread through Japan. Saitō Tamaki is a psychiatrist who put forth the data he accumulated from over 200 cases of patients with withdrawal (1998, 2003; 11). Saitō translated the English 'social withdrawal' into Japanese with the phrase *shakaiteki hikikomori* (18), shortened to just 'hikikomori' for this study.

Saitō uses the words more as a descriptive phrasing than as a label imposed on those who are withdrawn (Angles; xi). Through his study, Saitō states that while there are female patients that he has dealt with, the majority of his cases involve males, usually oldest sons, who have middle-class parents. The father often works hard and has little to do with his children and an overbearing mother (1998, 2013; 22). Saitō's (1998, 2013) defines of *shakaiteki hikikomori* is as follows:

> A state that has become a problem by the late twenties, that involves cooping oneself up in one's own home and not participating in society for six months or longer, but that does not seem to have another psychological problem as its principal source (Translated by Angles; 24).

Saitō's work is primarily a psychological study of 'social withdrawal' and the continuing changes in not only the definition, but also the ways in which psychologist's and psychiatrics' can and should change how they approach treatment for these individuals. His book is divided into two parts: what exactly this 'social withdrawal' is and on psychiatric treatment with a trusted doctor, getting the hikikomori out of the house into trusted environments like youth clubs or even internet communities. He also strongly advocates that the other family members stay involved in the process to rehabilitate or deal with the problem (Saitō 1998, 2013).

Following Saitō, there are other doctors and activists who have furthered the study and understanding of what the hikikomori phenomena is and how to go about treating it. The following are all prominent figures that Zielenziger (2006) interviewed and explored their opinions. He interviewed prominent doctors, psychologists, activists, and hikikomori individuals as well as their families. Zielenziger primarily establishes his views of hikikomori as being a major social breakdown as created these individuals through rigidity and inability to change. While researching and publishing his book *Shutting Out the Sun*,

Zielenziger (2006) connects the hikikomori phenomena to the other numerous social and youth problems that contemporary Japanese society is facing through his interviews.

The first that Zielenziger showcases is Nobuyuki Minami, who gave up a career as an advertising copywriter to help troubled youth in Japan. Minami is creating what he calls a "free space" for these youths to come to escape from their homes and be around others who are like them. The "free space" is really more of a youth center where these kids can come and play with others who suffer from the same issues that they do. What Minami wants these children to take away from his shelter is choice and responsibility. While talking with Zielenziger, Minami expresses, "If they can learn to make choices for themselves and take responsibility for those choices, then really, what else can I teach them?" (Zielenziger 2006 p.78). Minami puts a lot of the blame on the school system and its lack of providing for what these children are seeking, "When you look carefully at the kids in this school, what they are seeking is community with others; they are seeking friends" (Zielenziger 2006 p.81).

The second of the three advocates is Hisako Watanabe, a child psychiatrist at Keio University Medical Center in Tokyo, who holds a very different idea who or what has pulled hikikomori away from their lives; their mothers. She explains "roots of this disorder can be traced to intergenerational tension, and to adults who own childhoods were traumatically jarred by the national experience of Japan's finally having embraced defeat in 1945," and she spends as much time counseling the parents as well as with her patients (Zielenziger 2006 p.82). Watanabe later explains that soldiers, after being traumatized by their own experiences during the war, "...grew determined never to be traumatized again and so created meticulous, fuzzy households, often neurotic environments, in which their children were expected to be scrupulous and always vigilant." Watanabe further explains that, "[t]his process created very good, maybe 'perfect' children, but at the cost of their own

individuality" (Zielenziger 2006 p.84). On her final view on *hikikomori*, Watanabe states, "I feel it's because people in this nation are not happy, not happy as individuals. They try to be happy as a group, at the cost of the individual, which is the contradiction. You have to be happy first as an individual. You have to be honest toward yourself" (Zielenziger 2006 p.88). Watanabe's view on the fact that hikikomori stems from a breakdown on the family scale is a very powerful one. She stresses that without any kind of emotional support from parents, children are likely to just continue to push feelings and emotions inside of them till they break emotionally or lash out violently and emotionally at those around them.

The third person making strides in the treatment and rehabilitation of hikikomori is on the other side of the scale; Sadatsugu Kudo feels that work is the only way to get hikikomori out of their rooms and back into Japanese society. Kudo states, "in our society, people have to develop the skills to survive on their own and make a living. So I first want the young adult to feel at ease. Then I want him to acquire the skills he needs in order to make his way in the world. He has to adjust to the strains and demands the outside world imposes" (Zielenziger 2006 p.88). Kudo runs a different kind of *juku*, or like a type of Japanese cram school. This *juku* is open to anyone with problems, and charges only what the family can afford to pay, as Kudo never wants his center to become a "typical" *juku*. He works with what he calls "two wall *hikikomori*". He feels that most hikikomori can't communicate with society, but can have personal connections and friends. These hikikomori only have one wall to break through, but "two wall *hikikomori*" are the ones who cannot step out of their houses (Zielenziger 2006 p.89). With the door open, Kudo takes the *hikikomori* to his *juku* where they learn to socialize with others, do chores, and learn a skill (Zielenziger 2006 p.90-91). It is after the shift into the *juku* that Kudo is able to really work and connect with them. Kudo believes that within the *juku* hikikomori are able to develop trust and comfort while learning in a new environment. After six weeks the

patients meet with a counselor to decide on activities to help them relearn communication and socialization skills. They then move onto learning a skill and getting them understand that to earn money you have to work (Zielenziger 2006 p.91).

Kudo's thoughts on what and who hikikomori are deeply connected to Japanese society, as most people are left to deal with their problems alone and not show them to others. This causes those who become hikikomori to withdrawal as they do not want to be overly assertive toward others with their problems (Zielenziger, 2006; 92). Kudo's style is more of rehabilitation than medical treatment. He does not use any medications and does not provide counseling for those who end up at his center (Zielenziger 2006; 91). Out of the three, Kudos' approach is much more practical and can be seen as more of a rehabilitation effort than treatment. He is not exactly treating the causes that have made these kids and men hikikomori, instead he is getting them to move past closing themselves off and teaching them how to function in Japanese society once again.

Prior to the coining of the word 'hikikomori' by Saitō Tamaki in his ground breaking work, it is understood that the hikikomori phenomena predates Saitō's publication. Horiguchi Sachiko (2012) establishes two key periods of the history of the understanding of the hikikomori concept: the 1990's and the early 2000's. Horiguchi further explains what she calls the 'hikikomori predecessors' in the 1990's period: *futōkō, kateinai bōryoku, moratorium ningen,* and *otaku*. Horiguchi establishes these predecessors as having contributed to the 'anatomy of the hikikomori discourse' (2012 124). The 1990s was the furthering of the hikikomori definition and included three main actors who were very prominent in chronicalling the hikikomori phenomena: Saitō Tamaki (for the publishing of his book), Tomita Fujiya (a leader of the support group 'Friend Space'), and journalist Shiokura Yutaka who he wrote for the *Asashi Shimbun* on hikikomori (Horiguchi 2012; 125-126). Horiguchi establishes that hikikomori started becoming a true social problem, or

moral manic, with the beginning at the three major media instances in the early 2000s. These three major events include, a young man entered an elementary school playground and stabbed a young boy in December 1999, a young woman who had been missing for nine years was found in the bed room of a 37 year-old unemployed male in Niigata Prefecture in January 2000, and a 17 year-old boy hijacked a bus in Kyoto and stabbed a man to death in May 2000. All three of these young men were later reported by the media to be hikikomori (Horigchi 2012, 127). From here, Horiguchi identifies a kind of moral panic and the phenomena was continually linked to violence (2012, 128). Along with this increased public access and discourse, many in Japan started using and applying the term to a wide variety of social and mental disorders, to the point where Horiguchi (2012) states:

> In fact nearly anyone living in Japan at present could attest to personally knowing a hikikomori or his/her family, but this is not necessarily proof of the continuing spread of a withdrawal 'epidemic' but rather an indication of the popularity of the term and its application to highly diverse situations (132).

Horiguchi introduces to the discussion the fact that the term and understanding of hikikomori has been evolving since the early 1990s. Her study indicates that while the moral panic of the early 2000s brought the issue into the forefront of domestic politics and social fear, the term has not reached a level of ubiquity. While some are misusing the label and applying it to people who do not deserve the label, others have spread and created their own understandings of the label.

2.2 Audience and Reception Study

By acknowledging the amount of information is available to audiences, this section

looks into the theories on how audiences receive and incorporate what they interpret through media texts; as well as how much power the media has over their thoughts and philosophy.

Kevin Williams has stated that focus on the issue of how media effects on audiences in media studies has shifted to how audiences do with the media they are consuming (2003, 168). Starting with the direct effect theories, such as the hypodermic needle theory that scholars such as Lasswell and Hovland cultivated, focuses on the passive reception of the media audience (Williams 2003, 171). This early theory no longer holds as much power as it did previously, as it does not take into account the different influences and attitudes that the audiences holds or does not allow the fact that audiences interpret and and engage with media from different personal outlooks and philosophies (Williams 2003, 172).

From these early theories, media theory has moved its focus onto the ideas of cultural effects theories, particularly the cultivation analysis. Williams cites that George Gerbner argues that television, "cultivates a particular view of the world in the minds of the viewers" (2003, 179). The theory emphasizes how the viewer is exposed to television over longer periods of time instead of just looking at certain shows or films. This theory is not without its critics, particularly with the fact that it relies on homogeneity in how people watch television, similar to the direct affects theories. Particularly Baker in his argument of how heavy viewers are more likely to engage critically with media over a more casual viewer (Williams 2003, 180).

Unlike these previous approaches, contemporary media theory focuses and looks closely at how audiences interpret media; as audiences are seen as more individual and create their own habits. That is, audiences are now identified based on particular products and media and scholars have move away from the concept that audiences are a 'mass' consumer that accepts all influences unquestioningly. Scholars are now more interested in

how the audiences react in particular contexts and then interact with the media texts that they consume (Williams 2003, 190-193). Scholars such as John Fiske (1991) stresses the audience's meaning-making process over the actual media in studying media and popular culture (Williams 2003, 201).

3. Methodology

This study combines a narrative analysis and active audience to deeply look at what foreign audiences are understanding and learning about the hikikomori phenomena through Japanese popular culture texts. The popular culture texts that were used were limited to four titles of Japanese manga. Due to the heavy relationship focus of *shojō* manga, there were not many titles that could be used for this research. Because of this, there are more *shōnen* titles that are represented and used in the analysis of the text. As of the time of writing, the following titles have been read and analyzed regarding their hikikomori characters: *NHK ni Yokōso!, Sprite, Rozen Maiden*, and *Bakuman*. Each of these titles are fully serialized plots that span numerous volumes. This study wished to fully represent the different manga genres in the analysis and in identifying commonalities between the genres and hiikomoro characters. These commonalities within the genre are the further reinforcement of possible stereotypes and also in the reoccurrence of similar points of view. By drawing out these similarities, be they words or depictions, scholars can further speculate what it takes to create and strengthen a stereotype as well as the amount of true teaching potential that Japanese manga has in certain instances.

3.1 Point of View and Interpretive Narrative

Close reading of texts was the main concept used during the analysis of the four manga chosen for this study.Hayden White (1980) argues that no representation of reality can be seen as complete without imparting moral understanding and creating a narrative. While White deals particularly with historical texts, his views of narrativity as a necessary element of representations of reality can be applied to fictional texts, such as the manga

works studied in this thesis. The hikikomori manga texts studied in the following chapter are all based on social constructions of the phenomena that connect it back to Whites' use of narrativity. By understanding that real events can be attributed to not only historical events, but representations of other pieces of reality, the way that morality comes into the narrative must be taken into consideration. While White (1980) describes the significance of the social systems' ambiguous connection to history states;

> And this suggests that narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify if with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine (pg. 18).

This suggests that any narrative can and will come with an imparting of morality. Thus, we must then conduct a closer reading look at how and what is being "said" or passed to the reader.

While analyzing these manga, this study focuses on narrative, characters, and dialogue showcased in each. As manga is a visual medium, the dialogue and drawings are the main focus of what the consumer sees and interprets. As White (1980) states, "[I]f we view narration or narrativity as the instruments by which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in a discourse, we begin to comprehend both the appeal of narrative and the grounds for refusing it" (8-9), what has to be analyzed and looked at is the actual narrative dialogue that consumers of Japanese manga read over the images in which are depicted. As images can represent and create numerous interpretations to different people, analyzing the narrative dialogue of manga allows for a straight forward closer reading.

Following this concept, dialogue is picked out based on whether it involves description, particular political view point, or criticism of either the hikikomori character or hikikomori phenomena in general. The examination of dialogues highlights view points on the hikikomori phenomena that is likely to be passed on to readers. Interpretations are based onto the reader as narrative, "[d]oes not imply record events; it constitutes and interprets them as meaningful parts of meaningful wholes, whether the latter are situations, practices, persons, or societies" (Prince 2000, 129).

For this reason, a particular focus is placed on the point of view of the characters that surround and interact with the hikikomori as well as the hikikomori characters themselves. It has to be noted that manga does not have a narrator, the reader is the direct observer to the world and narrative as it unfolds before them. This focus allows the reader to be receptive to many different types of, what Seymour Chatman (2000) calls, "slant" between the differing characters point of view. Since the reader is often sitting on the shoulder of the main characters, they can act as a "filter" to the characters and the author's writing style of enhancing the narrative (98).

Following White's view of narrativity in which views and concepts are mediated between reality and imagination; this study sorted the dialogue of the manga texts to catalogue what positive or negative views were being imparted to the reader about hikikomori. While other scholars refer to point of view as the overall narration of the narrative, this study uses them as the direct viewpoints of the different characters. These viewpoints were then grouped and then analyzed in comparison with the other manga and organized. Through categories of Positive point of view (here after PPOV) and the Negative point of view (here after NPOV) this study describes how Western readers are being imparted information on the hikikomori phenomena through the manga that they consume. Thus, this analysis should end to answering the following questions; Are they

similar to NPO groups or prominent psychologists that have studied and published papers on the phenomena? What type of information on this understood Japanese phenomena is being imparted to readers and then culturally globalized? By organizing these POVs and pulling out any similarities between the different manga and mangaka, a clear pattern of political views can be identified.

3.2 Active Audience and Fan Reception

What is missing from the previous scholarship is a true look at what points of Japanese culture have been filtered and globalized to the rest of the world. In his book *Recentering Globalization,* Koichi Iwabuchi (2002) states that the main reason for Japanese cultural goods to have been accepted in the West is because their "odorless"-ness, indicating that they are *mukokuseiki,* or having no obvious origin. Using examples like the Japanese production of the walkman and other mechanical innovations that are heavily purchased by families in the West, Japan has a stake in global culture. Iwabuchi further looks into the assimilation of Japanese popular culture into the Asian market through numerous interviews with Japanese drama fans and how they have shaped their views of Asia through them. Iwabuchi further states that Japanese anime and manga characters are also odorless' in that they are often Caucasianified for the benefit of wider popularity (28-29). While Iwabuchi is discussing that the cultural product itself is being globalized without much knowledge that it is Japanese, he fails to recognize the fact that the concepts within popular culture products such as manga and anime are being globalized as well. These concepts and pieces of Japanese culture are what is being interpreted and internalized by the fan communities abroad.

Marco Pellitteri (2011), an Italian scholar, has taken the opposite viewpoint when looking at how Japanese soft power has expanded into the West. In his essay *Cultural Politics of J-Culture and "Soft Power": Tentative Remarks from a European Perspective*, Pellitteri argues that when looking at objects like the walkman or a Kawasaki motorcycle, the concept of *mukokuseiki* can be exemplified, but not with manga or anime. He states:

> One might think that according to Iwabuchi, manga and anime characters are defined by Western traits (but this would not make them universal), and as such are desirable for foreign markets. Yet the fact remains that most characters in manga and anime are not based on Western types and, beyond that are definitely not odorless. Japanese myths, idioms, customs, backgrounds, geography, scenography, buildings, and rites are present in manga and anime, both for cinema and for television (219).

Pellitteri makes the strong connection to the cultural background or the characters that he viewed as being missed by other Japanese scholars. Through the essay, Pellitteri makes the case that while Japanese scholars seem to view the physical looks of the characters in manga and anime as caucasianized and can therefore be included in the concept of *mukokuseiki*, he would argue that it is not just the physical aspects of the characters that should be looked at what makes up the character's personalities. The personalities and cultural background also adds to the amount of cultural knowledge that is being internalized and imparted to the reader and then further interpreted to others in fan communities.

This fan centered approach can further explore and understand how the Western, specifically English speaking, online communities of Japanese popular culture are compiling and distributing information to other fans. By looking further into these communities, there is more information that can be found in audience reception of media products, specifically how certain communities outside the intended and assumed audience, in this case the large and growing communities of Western fans of Japanese manga and

anime, can learn and process plots portraying what has been seen as something very insular; which is in study is hikikomori. In an article dealing with fan cultures and involvement, Koichi Iwabuchi (2010) states that scholars have to question more about what fans abroad are learning about Japanese culture through their pop culture products even as they rejoiced in the superficial observation of the rise of Japanese cool culture. He argues that:

> [q]uestions about whether and how the consumption of Japanese media culture enhances a deeper understanding of the complexity of Japanese society and culture; whether and how it reproduces one-dimensional, stereotypical views of "Japan" as an organic national-cultural entity.....(89).

Iwabuchi's concept must be further explored. This statement seems to assume that *manga is* not tackling issues that would allow for this 'deeper understanding of the complexity' within their plots as well as assuming that Western readers would be unable to understand the issue if they happened to read a *manga* that dealt with them. As Marco Pellitteri (1999, 2011) has been seen to argue, even with the Westernization and localization of certain Japanese cultural products, young Western audiences can usually distinguish the differences. The other aspect of Iwabuchi's thoughts is the conclusion which stresses that Japanese manga and anime are not producing the types of plots and content that would offer deeper understanding and insights of Japanese contemporary culture to readers. In an article dealing with the hikikomori culture and how the phenomena, or "social disease" as it has been called, has developed and been connected to the group mentality, Kenneth Allen Adams (2013) speculated that:

> For the psychohistorian, popular culture can function as barometer for gauging the reaction to maternal poison injection. By examining Japanese *manga* and the celebration of protest anality, it is easy to observe the group-fantasy reaction to *amae* childrearing and the rage against the group-other that it inculcates.

While Adams main purpose for this article was to argue and look more deeply into the *amae*, or reliance point, of Japanese culture in helping to create hikikomori, his ideas of examining Japanese manga and other popular culture products for indicators of other scholastic importance. They can function as a tool for measuring changes in the social landscape. The assertion that Japanese manga, or other popular culture texts, can be used to observe social changes and shifting is to also assert that Japanese manga cannot be oderless and therefore cannot be labeled as *mukokuseiki*. Adams arguments affiliates him with Pellitteri and scholars who continually assert that manga and anime can act as a tool for readers to find a deeper cultural understanding of contemporary Japanese society. His observations that popular culture could function as a measuring empliment to social issues is a step in the direction of how is can be used scientifically to connect to other humanities disciplines.

In part, we can see that while Iwabuchi successfully connects the idea that Asian audiences are connecting and consuming Japanese popular television dramas and music to form an image of a modern Asia, he seems to underestimate Western audiences, as well as the very pop cultural products that he researches. It can be said that not all popular culture is created in a sense that they can only indicate surface or superficial reflections of Japanese society. And that there are many manga and anime titles that are, as Iwabuchi argues, not opening Western audiences to learn about contemporary Japanese issues, the opposite is also true. There are more titles that do allow a non-Japanese reader to cultivate a understanding of Japanese culture and society. Based on this observation, this study looks specifically at hikikomori characters that are found in Japanese manga. This section of culture has continued to blend into the mainstream and has been embraced by the Western fan communities that can be found online.

Audiences reception has become a major point in the recent study of media. John Fiske (1992) has been a leading figure in the study of fans and their fan behavior of pop culture material. Fiske defines a fandom as a, "heightened form of popular culture in industrialized societies and that the fan is an 'excessive reader' who differs from the 'ordinary' one in degree rather than kind" (46). These fans also seek to receive some kind of power from their habits. Fiske's idea of "shadow cultural economy" posits that the information and knowledge provided by one fan to achieve personal confidence and social status amongst other fans (1992, 30-31). This exchanging and sharing of information is not only the core of fan culture, but also helps create physical centers or pieces of information for not just fans of the moment, as well as future fans. Creating these centers continues to fuel the fan behavior as there will always be new fans that will repeat the cycle of fan activities.

As the age of the internet and continued online presence in social lives, most fan behaviors can now be found as collected online communities. These communities connect fans through forums and threads where fans can engage in question and answer sessions and the spreading of new knowledge and information. What this brings is a further connection between various media products and the fans that are consuming media. Henry Jenkins (1992) researched and wrote about television fan communities in his book *Textual Poachers*. He establishes that there are five distinct aspects to this type of "media fandom." These aspects are: "relationship to a particular mode of reception; its role in encouraging viewer activism; its function as an interpretive community; its particular traditions of cultural production; its status as an alternative social community" (1-2). Jenkins further posits that, "the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons" (1992, 18).

Between Fiske and Jenkins, the understanding of fans has been pushed forward to

acknowledge that they hold a type of producer or consumer function in culture. Iwabuchi (2010) labels this duel function as "imaginative prosumer (producer-consumer) and approreader (appropriator-reader) who does not just passively consume media texts but actively and creatively participates in their cultural signification process" (87). Particularly the concept of the approreader, Iwabuchi acknowledges that fans hold the power and ability to further create and distribute meaning from media texts. This study aims to further expand and exemplify that understanding by connecting it back to how Western audiences are learning and internalizing the hikikomori phenomena through Japanese cultural products, specifically through manga.

Using the concept of Active Audiences and internet fan movements, internet searches were conducted to find any manga that include the word hikikomori within its description. This study focuses on the English website call Baka-Updates, which is a large database collection of detailed information on different *mangaka* and their works. Bibliographical information is provided as well as fan activity updates in the form of if the title was been picked up to be scanlated or published in English. This site also has a forum feature that includes reader reviews, ratings, and general questions for readers looking for similar *manga* to read as well as community building. Fans are allowed and encouraged to leave reviews or their own thoughts on a specific manga for others within the community. Along with all these features, there is a 'keyword' section that will tag a certain *manga* with specific concepts, characterizations and themes found within that *manga*. The website has been designed to allow users to quickly and easily search the database for desired characteristics. This method is used to see how many manga have been classified with the hikikomori tag as well as to understand what type of manga was returned in the search. The returned titles are filtered to make sure that they actually showcased a hikikomori character, either as the main protagonist or a side character. This means that some titles could be

included because of their connection to the categorization of otaku and not hikikomori.

Continuing with this method of internet searches, this study includes different searches that lead to further expansion of fan activity with hikikomori characters. Sites included for analysis are based on forum activity as well as internet wiki sites made by fans, showing how fans are imparting knowledge to other fans, continuing the fan cycle of consumption and sharing.

From these sites this study takes a small number of titles to analyze; four in total. Looking at the phenomena of hikikomori, we can see that most people tend to classify as hikikomori are young men, as we can see from the definition and description given by Saitō. To reflect this, this study attempted to include both *shōnen* and *shōjo* in the titles for analysis, yet due to space, the *shōjo* titles could not be included. This study found more *shōnen* titles than *shojō* titles used hikikomori characters as main or leading characters. Based on these searches, the following titles are analyzed for this study; *NHK ni Yokōso!* (hereafter called *NHK*), *Sprite*, *Bakuman*, and *Rozen Maiden*.

Within the last 20 years, scholarship of Japanese contemporary popular culture, specifically anime and manga, has grown in acceptance and in the different aspects that are being studied. There are four major subjects that have been continually studied; 1) yaoi, 2) shojō, 3) manga theory, and 4) the content analysis of different titles and mangaka. There has been a shift to look into the representations of certain character types and looking deeper into how Japanese read manga. By understanding how and why people read, a clearer image is made of how and what they are consuming plays a role in their everyday lives.

When looking at Western scholarship of Japanese popular culture, there has been very distinctive parts of study that have flourished with the continued opening on scholarship on American popular culture and television, and then certain aspects have been

missing. In general, there have been four main groups of manga and anime scholarship in the West: 1) Historical perspective, 2) single author works, 3) M/M yaoi manga, and 4) fan reception. The 'God of manga' is Tezuka Osamu, he wrote some 700 different manga titles before his death and can be seen as the root for almost all genres of manga (Benzon 2011, Brophy 2010, Palmer 2011, Power 2009, Schodt 2007). The effects of his work can be felt through the start of on the largest subgenres in manga; shōjo (Napier 2001). Looking at manga scholarship, we can also see the importance of the history of manga can how this rather contemporary media was or was not founded in traditional Japanese culture or from the influence of Disney and American comic books after World War II (Bouissou 2010, Kinsella 2000). Sharon Kinsella's (2000) Adult Manga is the most detailed study of the manga industry, from the historical start of manga to how modern manga publishing houses treat and control the mangaka that work for them.

4. Discussion and Analysis

From here, this study will start the individual analysis of each of the titles chosen for this study. The specific titles will be dealt with individually and then further discussed in relation to each other by common narrative points, depictions, and opinions expressed through dialogue between characters. These points will be expanded on in relation to how the *mangaka* for each title depicts how hikikomori think about their surroundings and also in how the depiction of the hikikomori character differ if the character is not the main protagonist, but a side character to the plot. Since not all of the hikikomori characters found in Japanese manga are the main protagonists of the manga they are found in, this study has made sure to include side characters in the analysis. By seeing how these threads converge and divert, we can start to identify stereotypes that are imparted to readers not just within Japan, but abroad where Japanese manga has grown exponentially in popularity within the last twenty years. Finally, this study will look at how foreign, specifically English speaking; readers are starting to search for this particular subgenre and further audience analysis. Through these internet threads and conversations, this study has identified that there are numerous searches as well as surprising internalization and shifts in understanding of, as well as similarities between how Japanese and foreigners understand the hikikomori phenomena.

4.1 *NHK ni Youkoso!*

The first manga that will be discussed is *NHK ni youkoso!* (or Welcome to NHK! in English) here by referred as *NHK*. Adapted from the original same titled novel by Takimoto Tatsuhiro and drawn by Ōiwa Kenji, this manga is highly regarded by foreign manga readers. Takimoto has been open with the public and fans that he was working on the novel;

he put parts of his own life as a semi-hikikomori into the character of Satō, the protagonist. *NHK* was completely translated and published in English by TokyoPop in eight volumes in the United States. On the site Baka-Updates, a website database on both manga and anime, the brief plot description from TokyoPop reads:

> Satō Tatsuhiro is a drug-addled "hikikomori" (a Japanese shut-in) who thinks a sinister organization, NHK (Nihon Hikikomori Kyoukai), is the cause of all his problems! He falls in love with a girl, Misaki, who he thinks is trying to assassinate him, but doesn't know how to talk to her or if he can trust her. The more he stays in his house watching anime porn, reading manga, and doing drugs, the harder it is for him to leave. Only Misaki can keep him from rotting away in his own apartment. (*NHK ni Youkoso!* Baka-Updates)

A description of any piece of reading, be it narrative or non-fiction, is a quick way to impart information to the reader as well as be an access point for the reader into the world that will be shown to them within the work. From this description, we have the first imparting of information for what and who the hikikomori is in this manga, though it is just a quick understanding that the term hikikomori means ' a Japanese shut-in', but the side information is what creates a move complex and multi-dimensional picture of this Japanese term that has no direct translation in the English language. Satō Tatsuhiro is the main protagonist who, as we are told, is a paranoid young man, who is in love with a girl and sits around his house watching anime porn, reading manga, and doing drugs. From this brief description, we can see the creation the image of a troubled young man, but we are not given any information that would lead to a deeper understanding of how or why he has become this way.

To a reader who has never heard of the term hikikomori before, the image creates a negative first impression of the phenomena without giving any sort of societal connection. These seemingly mental issues of paranoia, drugs, and the watching and reading of porn

and manga are all individual activities and personal problems. The most dramatic part would be the, ' Only Misaki can keep him from rotting away in his own apartment', passing on an overt romantic plot to the reader. The use of 'rotting' is the most important image passed to the audience. 'Rotting' automatically brings up a very negative image of things dying or being left to die from becoming obsolete in nature. We can also see more connection between the otaku and hikikomori throughout the series is from Satō's best friend and junior in school, who is shown as a stereotypical otaku character (Hairston 2010).

4.1.1 Narrative Analysis

Character Chart 1.1 *NHK*

Character	Relationship to Protagonist	Brief Description
Takimoto Tatsuhiro	***NHK* mangaka**	
Satō Tatsuhiro	Main Protagonist	22-year old hikikomori trying to come back to society
Yamazaki	Satō's best friend and otaku neighbor	A year younger than Satō, Yamazaki is an otaku who wants to create the next big erotic video game
Misaki	Love interest and Satō's counselor	A young high school girl *futako* who is trying to counsel Satō
Shiro	Another hikikomori	Brother of Satō high school class representative, he has been in his room for over 6 years
Class Representative	Former Classmate	Satō's high school class representative

Looking at the narrative, or text, of *NHK* leads to a very strong and critical look at not only hikikomori and who they are, but also the society that has made them and developed many other problems and disconnection between generations. The main protagonist, Satō Tatsuhiro, a 22 years old who has been away from society for four years, has decided that he is going to, "…..become a productive member of society!! I shall work!!

And nobody will ever call me a hikikomori again!!" (Vol.1, Ch1, Pg10, M. T.). In the next breath he introduces himself as, "Satō Tatsuhiro (22) and everything that is wrong with society" (Vol.1, Ch1, Pg10, M.T.). The first chapter of this series sets up many different ways of describing and informing the reader of whom and how Japanese society looks at and understands the phenomena. For example, Satō receives a visit from two women, one of whom is Misaki, and is introduced as the love interest in the description. She passes him a pamphlet titled "The Terrible 'hikikomori' that is destroying our youth. Are you at risk?" Satō reaction to the title of handout is to this by getting angry, embarrassed and frustrated. His reaction expresses a much deeper as well as universally understood reaction to being somehow emotionally attacked. He starts running down these points to himself after receiving the pamphlet:

> 1. That I haven't even communicated with another human for close to a year.
> 2. That I dropped out of college with no job to be a hikikomori.
> 3. If I could just pray away my hikikomori, I wouldn't be as frustrated, now would I!!
> 4. You people think you know me?! I don't even know me..So there is no way you can understand! (Vol.1, Ch1, pg16, M.T.)

Satō's responses here lead us to a clear cut teaching of not only definitions of who is a hikikomori but also the understanding of the frustration with society further involving themselves in their lives. Indeed, this frustration can be connected back to Takimoto's, the mangaka for *NHK*, own paranoia and frustration in how he constantly felt that others would be laughing at his writing of this type of novel, as Hairston reported in his article about the *NHK* anime (2010). Satō further reflects that when he states, "..if I go outside the other kids will call me names and look down on me..." (Vol.1, Ch1 ,pg22, M.T.). The title of the pamphlet indicates to the reader the largely negative response that Japanese society

has had toward the hikikomori issue. The aggressive language of the title using the word "destroying our youth" shows how many parents and policy makers have responded to the issue (Zielenziger 2006, Horiguchi 2012).

At the beginning of the second chapter, Satō meets up with Misaki in a park at night where she states that she will 'cure' him of his hikikomori lifestyle. Satō responds by stating, "I definitely live like a hikikomori but..I'm different from the average hikikomori" (Vol.1Ch2,pg8, M. T.). This is not surprising since Satō feels the need to separate himself from other 'hikikomori' and is trying to justify himself not only to Misaki, but also to himself. The use of 'average' here poses some interesting ideas, as we have learned that there are different levels and concepts that have created and made of the understanding and meaning of hikikomori phenomena in the world and that Japanese society has understood the idea, if not been central on a term for it (Horiguchi 2012). After Satō has become engrossed in an erotic game that Yamazaki, his best friend and otaku neighbor, has lent to him, Satō states to himself, "I'm turning into a hikikomori with a lolita complex...that's the worst of all!" (Vol.1Ch2, pg21 M.T.). Yamazaki comes to the same conclusion and explains that Satō has secluded himself for a week and collected over 30GB of material, which he states is dangerous. This exchange also shows how the Japanese, or hikikomori themselves, establish a hierarchy between the levels of the hikikomori phenomena between individual hikikomori. This goes back to how Hattori was able to classify differences between the patients he interviewed. What we have here is a continuously accentuated connection and understanding made between hikikomori and the otaku culture that has had a negative connotation, since this would be a reminder of the murder of four young girls in Miyazaki Prefecture 1988 and 1989 by a young man who was also a fan of manga and anime. Of course, there is only a slight true overlap between them (Hairston 2010).

From Chapter 3 of Vol. 1 onwards, we have a much more defined and clearer

connection between Satō's high school life and his hikikomori state when he encounters his high school sempai, who is not surprised that he ended up a hikikomori. As Satō and this female sempai are reconnecting, she shares a memory of them in high school, where Satō would talk about friends coming to visit him in a club room, but she observes that no one ever came to see him (Vol.1Ch3, pg28). This connects with the next chapter where Satō enrolls in an animation school, which is very unlikely for how closed off he has been shown to be in previous chapters. Yet here we see a second indicator that follows Dr. Hattori's assertions of past trauma and isolation when a girl sitting next to him starts to laugh at something he said. Satō goes through and connects this moment to how he felt four years ago; how he would hear others comment about him or laugh at him. Since then he felt the need to, "[e]scape from the heat of those words" (Vol.1, Ch3, pg21 M. T.). While Satō falls back onto his delusion that a corrupt group NHK is the source of his problems, the reader is given the connection to his past trauma and fear of society's comments that has pushed Satō into his withdrawal four years ago. Particularly, this revelation and moment leads to Satō isolating himself back in his apartment again for a month.

At this point, the character of Yamazaki, Satō's junior from school and his friend that lives in the same apartment building, is further explored. His characteristics that are first explored is his otaku fan habits of playing erotic video games and his dream of creating a majorly successful erotic game. His apartment walls are covered with posters of anime characters and his love of the 'moe' character style is made apparent. He accepts and understands Satō's hikikomori life and does not push him to leave his apartment, but tries to help him pursue his own wishes in impressing Misaki further. Yet, there are flashes of where his character and his circumstances lead the reader toward identifying him partly as a hikikomori. Aside from his large otaku personality and hobbies, we find out that he was bullied as a child and had been humiliated by the girl he loved when he was younger,

connecting him to at least two of the indicators that Hattori identifies in his work. There is further understanding that Yamazaki cannot really connect to anything past his own otaku interests with his love of 20 porn games and anime characters.

As the narrative continues, Satō becomes more and more open to understanding how and why he has made himself into a hikikomori. For example, he states in Chapter 8, "So I'm withdrawing from society...What's wrong with that? I've been doing it all along...for a long time...Because I'm afraid of being hurt" (Vol.2, Ch8, Pg9, M. T.). From this quote specifically, the reader can identify a very common fear that matches with the point made previously about Satō being afraid of what others are saying about him. There is further reinforcement of the concept of fear that hikikomori have for other members of society being given to the reader. This reinforcement also evokes that the hikikomori is searching for a place that they feel comfortable and accepted. Hikikomori cannot find this place of acceptance and understanding; which often leads to solitary lives with only the internet to connect them to others. The *mangaka* Takimoto brings this point across with a small monologue by Satō's sempai where she explains, "People are forever searching for their own ideal, one which does not and cannot exist. No matter how much it hurts them, they cannot stop searching for it. Though they understand that it doesn't exist, yet they still wish to know the answer" (Vol.2, Ch8, Pg12 M. T.). This common understanding between the characters that the ideal they are searching for in the world outside cannot be found is what leads to their abandoned hopes of finding what they are looking for. Satō has become obsessed with an online role playing game and meets another player who becomes his friend. He shouts in the middle of game play, saying that, "In the real world they always talk about love and friendships, but in fact it is merely a filthy world formed of mutual self-interests and illusions! However, in this world, adventure and true friendship is at hand!" (Vol.3, Ch11, Pg19, M. T.). While Satō has been obsessed with this online video game,

Misaki and Yamazaki have become concerned and ready to bring his out of his current obsession. It is in the chapter following, after Misaki and Yamazaki bring Satō out of his game obsession that they confront him with the image of him having to move back in with his parents (Vol.3, Ch20). The scene is of his mother quietly knocking on his door to tell him his dinner is ready, a scene that is frequently used in the other manga that this study has researched. What comes from this scene is not only a sense of foreshadowing, but also of a detailed look into the differing levels of the hikikomori phenomena. In this foreshadowing, Satō has been reduced to playing video games, yelling derogative words to his mother. As the scene evolves, the reader sees Satō surrounded by filled garbage bags that cover the floor of his room. The floor is completely lost in this image, which is a direct contrast to how Takimoto has displayed Satō's apartment. Previously, the depictions of Satō's Tokyo apartment has not brought in the same amount of collected trash, yet this foreshadowing leads to an image of further deterioration and withdrawal. As Satō overhears his parents talk about his situation, he complains, "Really, all they do is criticize me" (Vol.3, Ch12, pg21, M. T.), adding to the more derogative tone of the foreshadowing. This foreshadowing can be easily seen in the interviews that Zielenziger discussed in his book when interviewing the families of hikikomori.

It is from here that Takimoto brings in another hikikomori character into the narrative. After bring unknowingly pulled into a pyramid scheme, Satō meets his old female high school class representative. At the beginning of their reaquaintince, she gives Satō a much more sympathetic and what the reader later finds out is a fake point of view. She states, "Your unemployment and withdrawal from society is a result of the demands of society! It's because society needs people who can be safely looked down on" (Vol.3, Ch14, pg32 M. T.). This view point harkens back to when Satō started to realize why he pulled himself away and his fear of how others would look at him, remembering that

embarrassment and shame of paranoia that others were judging him. While the representative turns this into a statement about modern day Japanese capitalism, her comment is the first time that society is directly accused of being the true source of the hikikomori phenomena. After this first apparently sympathetic view point of the representative, it is revealed she is actually the sister of a hikikomori and then uses her to gives the reader the main unsympathetic view of the phenomena. It is through her that a much more critical and unsympathetic view of hikikomori is shown to the reader. In Chapter 15 she comes out to say:

> Since we are siblings, I worked hard to support him. But he never works and only causes people trouble. He hasn't left his room in 6 years. Earning money for someone like that has left me feeling empty.....So I came to really, really, really hate useless people like him. That's why I was selling jewelry in Akihabara, I work at squeezing money from trash to feed trash. I must be acting like some villain from a tragedy, but you'll soon understand it too. What the life of truly useless people means." (Pg 17-18 M. T.).

She continues to explain to Misaki what it is truly like to live and take care of a hikikomori. She explains that the PET bottles that litter her brothers floor are not for drinks, but so that he can urinate in them. She is imparting a warning to Misaki that she should not try and save Satō from hikikomori because she will end up just like her and brother. In the scene where the representative shows Misaki what is behind her brothers' door, two pages of cockroaches covering the page to showcase how filthy her brother's room is. After this major unsympathetic and blunt depiction of the hikikomori lifestyle, Takimoto inserts a piece of comedy by having the representative turn around be able to sell Misaki food supplements and that the cause of hikikomori is really bad dietary habits. By looking past the mix of comedy that Takimoto added into the story, the reader is given a clear and decisive understanding into the phenomena. It is here that the reader is finally given a

definitively negative and very powerful view of the hikikomori problem that faces Japan. Through the representative's blunt and unflinching description of what the day to day life is with a hikikomori family member, Takimoto further inserts a small point of ambiguity into the reader's perception of hikikomori. While the class representatives POV is a strongly negative view of how the family of a hikikomori must live their lives with shame and anger, the blunt depiction of the brothers living space is left to the readers imagination. While the scene of the room is connected with the representative's negative POV, the imagining of the bedroom is left to the reader's imagination in severity. At the same time, it allows the reader to compare this hikikomori living space to Satō's apartment, which has been discussed as being neater and connected to the severity of the personal level of hikikomori. The reader sees more the family burden and financial repercussions of supporting a hikikomori family member.

After this half way point in the series, Satō is shown how far he has come from the hikikomori that was first introduced. Instead of only leaving his apartment to buy food at convenience stores, he is able to actually leave his house and have some interaction with those outside of immediate circle of Yamazaki and Misaki. Yet he still has many problems. In an attempt to take his own life, Satō shares with Misaki his gratitude for helping him, but in reaction to the, what is found to be lies, hardships that Misaki has shared with him, he feels that he does not deserve to live. While he is standing on the cliff, he says to her, "I was a *hikki* that could only think of himself and couldn't go outside! Thanks to you, I've been able to go outside, but in the end I was afraid of getting hurt. Relationships, jobs that test my personality, I was running away from it all!" (Vol.4, Ch20, Pg20 M. T.). Satō has put all the blame on himself for his own situation because he has been conditioned to believe that he is not strong enough to survive in contemporary Japanese society. Throughout the series, Misaki has been "helping" Satō leave his home, when in reality the

reader has been in on the fact that she is just using him to make her feel better about herself. She has been constantly manipulating him and making his feel guilty for his lifestyle. In the end, Misaki is the one who ends up feeling guilty after Satō ends up in the hospital. His parents are called and the doctor tells them that, "The one thing a weak young individual like him needs is support from his family "(Vol.5 ,Ch21, Pg28, M. T.). It is after this that Satō ends up moving out of his apartment and moving in with his parents again. Indeed, when he goes home, Satō sees the many manuals and help books for families with hikikomori members.

The class representative's hikikomori brother is brought back into the narrative following Satō's return to his home town. At first he is seen as another online player in the online game Satō uses to escape from his own home, where he has almost become a hikikomori all over again. These conversations are filled with talk of bonds with other people and the questioning of their own existence as hikikomori. It also helps make Shiro has been a slight foil to Satō on the view of how self-deprecating he is to his own shut in situation. After Misaki decides to use Shiro as a replacement for Satō, Shiro makes a miraculous recovery and starts studying to be a lawyer. In a moment where Satō has accidentally stumbled upon Shiro and Misaki together that Shiro shouts to Misaki, "I am a worthless NEET who has continued to be fed by his sister and play online games all the time" (Vol.6,Ch30,Pg36) My Translation. Even though the comedic aspects of the surrounding scene that Satō and Shiro have similar feelings for how their worthless infected personalities will somehow infect the people surrounding them. They both hold the idea that the hikikomori phenomena is like a disease or illness that someone can contract and pass onto others. Their conversations can be looked at as how those who have pulled themselves away have lost all faith in the bonds that they could make with the outside world. They particularly question the sincerity of the relationships that they have

made with others. These fears are connected to Satō 's original fear of being hurt and keeping himself back from others to protect himself.

4.1.2 Discussion of View Point Analysis

The first part of the series is where the most influential information to the reader comes when we look at the ratio of both PPOV and NPOV as mentioned in Chapter 3. Organizing these pieces of conversation into these two groups leads to understood subjective nature to this study and showcases Whites' (1980) imparting of morality on the narrative, but it leads to a much clearer organization. Predominantly, the quotes heavily leaned toward the NPOV, here understood as any viewpoint that expresses negative feelings toward the hikikomori phenomena; side is either explaining the situation or the characters' own personal feelings about what was happening around them. On a whole, the PPOV's show a clear blaming of society for creating hikikomori; while NPOV's clearly identified the individual for not only their own problems, but the problems the family encountered because of the hikikomori's apparent decision to seclude themselves Looking at the self-deprecation of the main protagonist Satō, the information that is passed to the reader is that the hikikomori phenomena is one of the leading cultural issues facing contemporary Japanese society, that hikikomori are people who sequester themselves in their rooms or apartments for months and years at a time who refuse to interact with other humans, and that it is an individual problem. There are specific indications that Japanese culture and society are parts of the problem, but those points are not heavily imparted to the reader. There is further indication of the connection between bullying and a past trauma that leads to these individuals pulling themselves into their rooms that follows with what scholars and doctors have been documented to say (Hattori 2001). There are also more connections between the otaku culture and hikikomori through the use of online games and

Yamazaki's quest to create the next huge erotic game. This reflects the way that Japanese look at hikikomori by showcasing the further deepening fear of the otaku subculture in Japan and connecting them for readers outside of Japan.

When we look at both Satō and Shiro as two different hikikomori, we can see that Satō and his story is not only about who a hikikomori is and how he became that way, but also about how they can be rehabilitated and brought back into working society. While both characters are in some way rehabilitated by Misaki, the reader sees that she is only using them to make herself feel better and only helping them for her own selfish reasons. They should be seen as two sides of the problem when we first encounter them. Satō is the side that is struggling to move on with his life, while Shiro and his sister are what would be considered closer to the reality that has been researched and described by Saitō Tamaki and other doctor's work. That they are struggling to make ends meet, the sister leaves food outside her brothers door, and that Shiro urinates into empty PET bottles so he does not have to leave his room.

NHK makes a very strong message of the issues that Japanese society is facing at the moment. Not only does the manga deal almost exclusively with the hikikomori phenomena, it also looks into issues like drug abuse, suicide, and the true problems that Japanese is facing with students refusing to go to school, the reader later finds out Misaki is one of them, and the pressure students feel to get jobs and become a working contributor to modern Japan. When we look at the negative images and viewpoints the manga puts forth to readers and what English speaking readers would learn about the issue from the manga, we can see that the already established and feared Japanese connection between otaku and hikikomori is shown and passed onto them. For example, Satō is seen heavily involved in the creation of an erotic game with his openly otaku best friend, Yamazaki. Shiro and Satō are often seen communicating through online games and discuss how they feel more

connected to the digital game and not the real world. At the beginning of the series, Satō states that he becomes a hikikomori with a lolita complex, a further connection to the large amount of anime and manga that already have a large amount of material depicting males being attracted to small and young characters.

It can be argued that *NHK* leads itself into more of psychological view and understanding of the phenomena. Takimoto further explains and reinforces scientifically proven and understood concepts as well as more philosophical theories through the conversations Shiro and Satō have on whether they actually exist as hikikomori and the need for relationships and connections with the outside world. Satō and Shiro are alive, but with their almost complete detachment to the Japanese society that they live in. In the end, Takimoto is imparting his own sympathetic views of ideas toward the hikikomori phenomena. Having been open about his own life as a semi-hikikomori, Takimoto uses the characters of Satō and Shiro to remind the reader that the reasons why people turn into hikikomori are not straight-forward and easily identified. The further one thinks about the phenomena and why it is happening, the further one must think about the repercussions and on an emotional and physical level as well.

4.2 *Sprite*

The next manga this study will be looking at the not yet finished *Sprite*. A science-fiction *seinen* manga that was written and drawn by Ishikawa Yugo from 2009 in *Big Comic Superior*, published by Shogakukan. The two hikikomori characters in this manga are not the main protagonists in the narrative, but are connected to the main heroine through either familiar or friendship connections. The main plot follows Yoshiko, a young high school girl, and a group of people that are thrown through space and Time after an

earthquake occurs. Along with a handful of other people, Yoshiko, her Uncle and friends, and other survivors must survive with monsters and humans who all physically look like children. The main description from Baka-Updates is as follows:

> Yoshiko is a hardworking high-school student whose free time is almost entirely taken up by attempts to help out a hikikomori childhood friend and an odd, reclusive uncle.
> While on a visit to her uncle's penthouse with two of her friends, Yoshiko notices a black substance that resembles snow beginning to fall from the sky -- but her friends see nothing. Soon afterwards, a massive earthquake shakes the city, and Yoshiko, her friends, her uncle and his dog, all find themselves trapped in a strange world they do not recognize...with an assortment of weird people to keep them company. (Baka-Updates accessed on 15 April 2013)

From the description we can see that the main focus of this manga is survival in a futuristic world, but one of the main factors for this study is the connection between the main protagonist of Yoshiko and how she and others of the surviving group interact and speak of the two hikikomori characters. Since her relationships with the hikikomori characters was added to the main description of the manga, this aspect of Yoshiko's life and personality is understood to be a major point of her characterization. Though the interesting point here is that the friend and the uncle have been separated as a hikikomori and a recluse respectively. This distinction between the two characters; which would both labeled as hikikomori by the main protagonist herself, harkens back to Horiguchi's (2012) article.

4.2.1 POVAnalysis

Character Chart 1.2 *Sprite*

Character	Relationship to Main Protagonist	Brief Information
Ishigawa Yugo	*Sprite* **mangaka**	
Yoshiko	Main protagonist	A young high school girl who helps her reclusive Uncle and hikikomori childhood friend.
Kiriko	Yoshiko's high school friend	Very stern and strict young

		women who has very negative opinions of hikikomori.
Uncle (Bront)	Yoshiko's reclusive Uncle	A reclusive man in his 40's who has not left his apartment in 10 years.
Tetsu	Yoshiko's childhood friend	A young high school boy, Tetsu is a hikikomori.

Sprite starts out with Yoshiko and her two friends from high school as they are preparing to visit Yoshiko's Uncle. As they are on the train, Yoshiko's friend expresses her concern for her lack of sleep and the fact that she works hard to take notes for her childhood friend, who is a hikikomori. As they are on the train, this friend states:

> And that childhood friend of yours, you pay really close attention in class and takes notes for him, right? That's such a waste of your time! I'm telling you, a hikikomori like him, who stays locked up inside is never going to step outside in his whole life. …...It's all because his family spoils him too much. If they left him alone, he would have to come out, or he'd starve. (Vol.1,Ch1,Pg10 My Translation).

This comment on how Yoshiko's desire to help her childhood friend is a strong NPOV spoken by a teenage girl, named Kiriko, with a strong level of annoyance or anger toward how hikikomori families are the ones that are letting the hikikomori family member live off of them, almost like a parasite. Kiriko later expresses the same view point once more later in the same chapter when Yoshiko takes her up to her Uncle's apartment after buying him food from the supermarket on the first floor of his building. As introduced in Ch. 2, Hisako Watanabe's focus on the continuing fracturing of Japanese families has led her to maintain that she does not only rehabilitate the hikikomori in her hospital ward, but also the parents and the family. While Dr. Watanabe is more concerned with how the parents had contributed to their child turning hikikomori, her views on how the Japanese family dynamic is possibly enabling these hikikomori to pull away is reflected here in Kiriko's

opinion. The other point to consider is that Kiriko is a young Japanese girl. Kiriko being so young shows that the continued views of older and more conservative Japanese are still being passed to the new generation, even with the large generation gap that is continuing to grow between postwar Japanese families and society. Kiriko is later shown to be rather judgmental when she scolds a young child on the train for moving around and kicking his feet in his seat, further linking her to being much more concerned with etiquette and social protocol. Her belief and reliance on a strict behavioral code can also indicate that she is regurgitating the opinions she has heard others expressing around her.

From here, Yoshiko and Kiriko express differing opinions of the hikikomori phenomena and what responsibility the rest of the world and the family has for those who have closed themselves off. Yoshiko confides that her Uncle's own family has abandoned him in this penthouse apartment and then states, "If I don't take care of him, then who will?". This is returned by Kiriko who states, "He's past 40 and unemployed, and plays video games all day, living a life like that, he's just belittling the world" (Vol.1, Ch1, Pg18-19 M. T.). Kiriko's response, in contrast, gives the reader not only an indication of her own unsympathetic opinion on hikikomori, her response also shows three of the major fears of Japanese society. The Uncle is past the age to be fully working as an office worker, he is not contributing to Japanese society through work, and he spends his whole day playing video games; which is a direct link to the already established view point of the connection between hikikomori and the *otaku* culture.

Indeed, the first time that the reader sees Yoshiko's Uncle, he is saying goodbye to a group of online players that he was been fighting with after ending an online battle campaign that has lasted for 10 years. He later laments the fact that he will lose all the online weapons he has gathered during their campaign (Vol.1, Ch1, Pg22 M. T.). Harkening back to Kiriko's opening opinion of how spoiled hikikomori are and that their lives will

mean nothing, Yoshiko's Uncle appears pitiful to the other characters. He openly cries at the end of an online game campaign and is continually shrouded in darkness. After this, the reader follows the Uncle around his penthouse, a two level apartment that is covered in trash. He openly passes gas as he opens a refrigerator that is full of nothing by cans of beer. Through this entire process, his surroundings are completely black, further imparting a very negative image and connection to the reader. To this extent, the Uncle is almost like a monster that is hidden away from the world and is surrounded by his trash. This dark element is compounded further when the Uncle contemplates committing suicide:

> Should I just commit suicide? Then again, if I had that kind of courage, I wouldn't be living this kind of meaningless life right now. (Vol.1, Ch1, Pg31 M. T.)

We also come back to the question of whether a hikikomori life is "meaningless". The term establishes that something is not needed or holds no real value. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term 'meaningless' as, "[w]ithout meaning or signification; devoid of expression; without purpose; (*Philos.*) not amenable to interpretation or logical processing" http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115470?redirectedFrom=meaningless#eid (accessed 20 May 2013). With the modern and technological lives that contemporary societies find themselves active in, it is unsurprising that people would accuse or understand the hikikomori life-style as meaningless. These people sit in a room all day and are understood or depicted to just play online video games, read manga and watch anime, or watch pornography. They do not contribute to the Japanese economy and they are not getting married and producing the next generation of workers. Considering that the Japanese birthrate has been dropping for the last several decades in reality, the Japanese themselves have been struggling with the notion of having to open up further to foreign workers just to keep their economy from further shrinking.

At the end of the first chapter, black snow starts falling from the sky and an earthquake strikes, which leaves Yoshiko and her uncle and friends stranded in his apartment. It is from here on that the characters are forced to compensate and learn to interact with Yoshiko's hikikomori uncle. At first he is petrified, huddled under a blanket and telling his niece, "Do not go outside...No one will come to save us... You absolutely cannot go outside!" (Vol.1,Ch2,Pg20 M. T.). To the reader, this is understood as a continuation of his fear as a hikikomori is what is the pain reason for his refusal to leave the apartment. It is further into the narrative that the Uncle, who goes by the internet name "Bront", is shown to be fully unable to understand and connect with the outside world unless he can mentally connect it to his video game. He starts dreaming about this situation he has found himself in as being a part of the video game he just completed. His apartment building is now his new fortress and he and one other member, Momo-tan, are going fighting the level. Yoshiko wakes him up and after seeing him cower under blankets questions him by shouting:

> So that's all you are in the end, at your age, playing video games all day.
> You might be the greatest here inside the game, but in reality you're just a
> useless slob! Bront-san! (Vol.1,Ch5,Pg8 My Translation)

He has been so long removed from society and real people that he can no longer connect to them unless it is through the language spoken in online video games. Yoshiko herself refers to her Uncle by his internet name, further emphasizing that his mental strength will not help him get through not only the upcoming fantastical challenges, but how he could not handle the normal everyday life before it. Even the Uncle continuing to exercise this behavior when he goes with Yoshiko and her friend to talk to the neighbor twins who have stolen their food. As he stands with the girls to take back food, he imagines Momo-tan, a

mage character in the online video game, fighting a giant monster in game play and says, "What's the point of letting the white mage Momo-tan go in? I have to do it, me, the leader of the team". Yoshiko's Uncle has equates her as the character Momo-tan and tries to mentally place himself back into the mindset of a team leader in a virtual world. Yet in the end, he runs away and Yoshiko calls him "useless" (Vol.1, Ch5, Pg12-13 M. T.). From this last statement, which is meant to be a comedic step back from the continuing involved plot, we see that Yoshiko herself has reinforced Kiriko's only negative points of view that Ishikawa has displayed for her.

Another aspect of the negative viewpoints of this manga is to understand that there is a difference between the words "meaningless" and "useless". Out of the two words, "meaningless" holds a much higher degree of negative reinforcement, whereas stating that a person is "useless" indications, "Of persons: performing no worthwhile role or service; of inadequate or insufficient ability; incompetent, inefficient" (Oxford English Dictionary http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/220643?redirectedFrom=useless#eid accessed 20 May 2013). Between these two words, there is a strong correlation between the definition of "useless" and the major fears that of the Japanese public's predominantly negative view of hikikomori.

It is at the end of Chapter 5 of Vol. 1 that the story takes on more of the science-fiction elements when we learn that the black water surrounding the apartment building is actually Time, which is something that normal people cannot see, though Yoshiko's Uncle can. In Chapter 6, the Uncle explains in detail what is going on and how he spent the last 10 years studying and running away from time (Vol.1, Ch6, Pg16). Here we can see the reason for why Uncle to puledl himself away in the first place, this experience with Time caused him to mentally break down. By equating Hattori's (2001) observation that a kind of past trauma leads to the hikikomori to pull away, Ishikawa further brings the hikikomori

phenomena away from what doctors have researched and proven and evolved in into a much large traumatic and fantastical characterization. By evolving the story and the reason for this withdrawal on something that cannot be held accountable to either societal or cultural standards, Ishikawa places responsibility of the hikikomori's decision to pull away solely on the mental capacity of the individual. This also pushes the reader to understand that there are separate degrees of past trauma that can cause a person to shut themselves away.

The Uncle is not the only hikikomori that is depicted in *Sprite*. There is one other young man Tetsu, the childhood friend Yoshiko diligently takes notes for in class that is explained in the description and in the beginnings of Chapter 1. During a flashback scene, Tetsu, Yoshiko and her uncle are all sitting in a Ferris wheel car when they first saw the black snow and then the black tsunami of Time swallows Yoshiko's younger brother. This scene becomes the root of trauma for both Tetsu and Yoshiko's Uncle, it is only Yoshiko that forgets this event and moves on with the rest of her life. After seeing the mental and psychological effects this instance had on both her uncle and Tetsu, Yoshiko seems to have purposefully forgotten the incident. Here is veiled statement on the mental strength of those who do pull themselves away, as two out of three people who experienced the same occurrence were unable to mentally recover from it. Out of the three people who saw the black snow and time in the Ferris wheel, only Yoshiko is able to mentally push it aside and return to an understood "normal" life. Tetsu and the Uncle are understood as having less mental fortitude or strength to move past traumatic events and return to the same normality. This information is further reinforced to the reader through a flashback of how Yoshiko came and helped a painfully shy Tetsu during self-introductions at school. The reader sees how on two occasions Yoshiko is able to react and conduct herself in a confident manner, whereas Tetsu and the Uncle are mentally unprepared to move past it.

Having two different hikikomori characters in the manga allows for a more diverse and plural understanding of the phenomena and how those who are either assumed to be hikikomori or actually are named hikikomori are seen in society. In Chapter 25, after leaving the apartment and helping to save another survivor, Yoshiko's Uncle tells her that after the first incident of seeing a little boy swallowed by Time, he could not leave his home. The doctors he visited told him he was experiencing panic attacks. Yoshiko replies with such surprise, because she had always assumed that he was a hikikomori (Vol.4,Ch25,Pg22). Yoshiko's assumption reflects not only that there is an ambiguity in how hikikomori is socially defined and understood, but she is also expressing not just her own surprise, but the readers as well. By introducing this piece of information, the reader finally gets the sense that the hikikomori phenomena is something much less solidly defined and that the levels in which peoples' behavior can be understood as being a hikikomori as opposed to actually having been diagnosed as being hikikomori are very different things. Horiguchi supports and details this ambiguity of the social and cultural definition of hikikomori in the article that chronicles the historical conception of how the hikikomori phenomena has changed from a fuzzy concept with no specific name into a more defined, but still ambiguous, concept by the 1990's (2012).

Further looking at how Tetsu and the Uncle can been seen as different sides of the phenomena is when the reader sees Tetsu's painful and slow progress out of his family apartment to find his missing friend. In a montage that spans a couple pages, Tetsu sends daily messages to Yoshiko's cellphone that catalogues his slow process into the world again. He tells her how his legs gave out before he reached his families front door, how he suffered a panic attack when he made it to the apartment complexes main doors, and how he slowly, "...little by little, I'll get outside" (Vol.4,Ch26,Pg8 My Translation). As he walks, the reader gets the understanding of how real rehabilitation of a hikikomori is a much

slower and thoughtful process that what was seen with the Uncle being able to leave the building in an earlier chapter. Tetsu pants from the exertion of just walking along with a bike, he is so out of shape. Yet, Yoshiko's Uncle starts being able to leave his apartment and his building during the narrative. He joins Yoshiko and her friends while exploring and trying to understand the world that is around them later on and even seems to enjoy it. This character development leads the reader to understand that if something is important enough, that a hikikomori can actually leave their house or rooms.

There is also the meeting of the group of children who have been running away from Time for decades that are found on the roof of the apartment building to take into consideration. Yoshiko's Uncle, Tetsu, and the children are all running from something, in this cause it is Time and the swift changes that it brings to their lives, but the same image of running away from something. In this understanding, the children can been seen as hikikomori in similarity, if not in name alone as they have been running away from Time for decades. First time they are seen they are surrounded by toys, bottles of water, and food and living their lives on the roof, away from society and the demands of the world. This image of being surrounded by bottles and toys is almost a copy of the first depictions of Yoshiko's Uncle. By drawing the first meeting with the children in parallel with how the reader was introduced to Yoshiko's Uncle, Ishikawa equates the band of children as a kind of hikikomori. They are pulled away and above Japanese society and separated from Japanese society by choice. Instead of being a part of just Japanese society, they are pulled away from history, space and even the concept of "normality". This is proven true when the group of survivors are attacked by a group of children who have contracted an aging disease and one of them connects that the reason why they are running away from time is because they do not want to grow up to become adults (Vol.5,Ch38). By arguing that the children are running away from adulthood, the argument can be made about the implication

that hikikomori are also running away from the pressures of adulthood in contemporary Japanese society.

4.2.2 Discussion of Analysis

With *Sprite*, there has been a much larger shift in showing NPOVs of characters toward the hikikomori characters that are portrayed in the manga. Kiriko's viewpoints bring the connection between family and hikikomori to the forefront, as she accuses the families that are allowing this kind of reclusive behavior. In her opinion, the family is the crutch and is complicit in the problem is the real cause of the issue to a certain extent. Her opinions are kept to the beginning of the plot as to develop the character Yoshiko's Uncle as a point of conflict and to establish how much of a challenge he is to understand and interact with. This is because of the fact that the hikikomori characters are not the main narrative focus, but are instead side characters that function and move within the overarching science-fiction plot that Ishikawa is creating. Tetsu and the Uncle are given two different narrative functions, but they also show the plurality of how Japanese society can understand and then individually identify a character as a hikikomori. The Uncle, in particular, is a challenge to be overcome by the other survivors at the beginning of the plot and then later on has a development arc where he becomes further relatable and active with the survivor group. By making Yoshiko's Uncle an obstacle, Ishikawa makes him a problem to be overcome and not a kind of character to be understood and worked with. This forces Yoshiko's Uncle to change instead of the group to reevaluate and change.

By using two different hikikomori characters, Ishikawa manages to portray and depict the levels in the societal and cultural construction of hikikomori. Yoshiko's Uncle and Tetsu's roles in the manga are two-folded and often impart a plurality in who and how

hikikomori act and are culturally constructed.

4.3 *Bakuman*

The next manga that this study will look at is *Bakuman*, written and drawn by Ōba and Obata. This series started serialization in Shueisha's number one manga magazine, Weekly Shōnen Jump in 2008, spans 20 volumes, and was aired as a three season anime. The main narrative follows two young men who strive and succeed as mangaka in the manga's Weekly Shōnen Jump. The reason that this study has included this manga is because there are two side hikikomori characters, one not overtly connected to the main narrative and one strongly connecting to the main protagonists. At first, this study will look at the hikikomori that is not overtly connected to the main protagonists. From there this study will look at the hikikomori with connections to one of the main protagonists while comparing between what is said about the first hikikomori and what is left unsaid about the other.

4.3.1 Narrative Analysis

Character Chart 1.3 *Bakuman*

Character	Relationship to Main Protagonist	Brief Information
Ōba and Obata	**mangaka**	
Ryuu	Not connected to main narrative, but side plot.	A hikikomori young man who wants to become a mangaka.
The editor (Yamahisa)	One of the editors at JUMP.	Ryuu's editor who tries to get Ryuu out of his hikikomori ways.
The acquaintance	A high school classmate of the main protagonists.	Wanted to become a mangaka, but later became an unlabeled hikikomori.

The character of Ryuu is introduced 12 chapters before the reader is able to

physically see him through one of the Shueisha's manga editors. Ryuu is chatting with one of the editors at Weekly Shōnen Jump through an instant message system after he has met him a handful of times. When the editor first speaks about Ryuu to another editor, he says, "He's a reticent shut-in whose room is full of video games. I can't stand being in the same room as him for more than 5 minutes. He's the real deal" (Ch58, Pg12 M. T.). This quote shows the clear unease of the editor being unable to handle or comprehend how to deal with a hikikomori. The first point of information that the reader gets of Ryuu is that his room is full of video games and that he is a shut-in. It is not until 12 chapters later that the reader is given a physical image of him to connect to the name plate and chat windows previously seen. The reader's first view of Ryuu is of a young man who is rather stylish and well kept, surrounded by manga on his bookshelves and playing video games. This image is completely opposite the images of hikikomori that have been previously discussed in this study. This chapter opens with the editor and Ryuu playing video games together, though throughout the coming conversations, Ryuu never speaks. When the Editor starts bring up the fact that Ryuu have been a hikikomori since his second year of junior high school, Ryuu walks away and sits at his computer. The editor makes the realization that Ryuu has probably been told he was worthless by a lot of people, changes tactics and compliments mangaka to get Ryuu back to the video game. From here, the editor starts to figure out how to interact with Ryuu and how to get Ryuu to open up and be a better mangaka. He particularly starts changing his mind about hikikomori during this chapter when he says, "Things like being beaten down by society, like being a recluse because of bullying, that sort of thing shows up in his work". From here, the editor vows to take things slowly and gradually have Ryuu gain confidence (Ch71Pg18-19 M. T.). This point starts the personal rehabilitation plan between Ryuu and the editor.

Three chapters later, Ryuu speaks for the first time with his editor when he asks him

if he can make it as a mangaka. The editor, understanding that Ryuu needs more confidence and change in attitude, answers him by saying no; that the manga business is not one where a hikikomori can just draw something and expect it to get serialized. He then pressures Ryuu by saying, "If you don't want to face reality, than you should just stay in up here forever" (Ch74,Pg18 M. T.). What the reader sees here is a slight scolding as well as pushing Ryuu to accept that if he wants to change, he has to make the steps. This slow move toward rehabilitating Ryuu by the editor is the first of the manga this study has looked that fully develops the rehabilitation aspect of a hikikomori. There is the slow gaining of trust between the editor and Ryuu and how the editor understands how Ryuu needs to learn and work on his communication. Indeed, when the editor goes to Ryuu's room to further work with him, he sees a manga idea, called a name, on Ryuu's desk. Instead of going straight to it, he remembers that Ryuu has to be able to communicate with others. The editor instead ignores the manga and goes to sit with Ryuu; forcing Ryuu to communicate with him instead of relying on his editor to always bend to him.

Through the rest of the manga, Ryuu and the editor side story becomes the only intricate depiction of the rehabilitation of a hikikomori. This slow movement that the editor makes with Ryuu builds his confidence and slowly makes Ryuu change to work with the world he wants to be a part of. From here, a conversation between Ryuu's mother and his editor gives another look at not only the undue pressure that parents put on their children, but also connects part of what Kiriko in *Sprite* argues about families of hikikomori. In a conversation that spans a whole page in Chapter 78, Yamahisa, Ryuu's editor, receives a call from Ryuu's mother. The mother is complaining that her son is talking about moving out, something that surprises Yamahisa, but is ultimately something he sees a step in the right direction of getting Ryuu out of his room, interacting with society again and moving forward with both professional and personal points. Ryuu's mother disagrees, as she thinks

this is not good for her son, and calls Yamahisa irresponsible for putting these kinds of ideas into her sons head. Right here, we can see that in certain ways, the mother has been enabling Ryuu from leaving his own house by thinking that he was not competent enough to leave and therefore not trying to make him get better. Yamahisa confronts her way of thinking when he states:

> He had no friends, no one to confide in yet he sat in his room and drew manga and submitted it for an award. Have you thought about how he felt? He's been doing everything he can to get himself out of that situation" (Ch78, Pg6-7 M. T.).

What the reader is getting out of this exchange is connected to Dr. Watanabe's belief that both the parents and hikikomori themselves have to be counseled and rehabilitated. This also exemplifies what Allen (2013) was discussing at the end of his article as a representation of the continued *amae* between Japanese parents and children who have turned hikikomori. Ryuu's mother has no confidence in her own son's ability to live alone that she has been unknowingly enabling him from leaving their house. This manga become the second of this study to bring the reader the point that the family of the hikikomori themselves are enabling the hikikomori instead of trying to get them the help that they need.

Ryuu's storyline follows him as Yamahisa starts getting him to come to the office to turn in his manuscripts as well as slowly getting him to interact and communicate with others. Through Ryuu, the reader gets the understanding that the road to rehabilitation of a hikikomori is an involved and delicate process. Yamahisa is also the first true kind of counselor that this study has found among any of the manga that has been analyzed. He reacts with a small movement and slow progression of reintegrating Ryuu into Japanese society. One of the more interesting aspects of Yamahisa is that he brings a challenge to the

already understood Japanese stereotype that hikikomori are all a part of the otaku culture. Instead of having a hikikomori be able to fully understand and function within the world of making manga, he is shown to be unable to meet the demands.

The second hikikomori that was found in *Bakuman* was a very small character that was first seen as a high school acquaintance of the main protagonists and then is seen toward the end of the narrative as having become a hikikomori. When we see this old classmate of the two main protagonists, he is surrounded by models and posters for the same anime character. He stands as a foil to Ryuu in this regard because while both characters are connected to the otaku culture, this old classmate is the one that is depicted as the stereotypical otaku. He is also given a rather malevolent, as well as lecherous, personality and heavily involved in the online fandom of voice actors in the anime and video game. He is argumentative and rude toward his mother. On his door, he has posted a sign that reads, "Keep out Hag" and he further expends his energy trying to destroy the chance for one of the main protagonist's girlfriend in getting a coveted voice acting role. He is seen posting on message boards and campaigning in getting other fans to not support her. This character is never actually called a hikikomori or even a recluse, but it is easily understood by the reader that he is one by the use of previously seen depictions of hikikomori in other manga. He surrounded by trash in his bedroom and framed in the light of his computer while his mother leaves his meals outside of his bedroom. These images have been used in both *NHK* and *Sprite.*

Not only does this past acquaintance act as a foil to Ryuu in regards to the level of otaku involvement and personality, he also shows the reader that there is a small pocket of hikikomori who turn violent and abusive toward their family. Dr. Hattori found in his original research that at least 20% of his patients felt anger and showed violent behavior toward their parents. The old classmate is the first of the hikikomori characters analyzed

that continually showed this aspect of the hikikomori phenomena during his movement within the main narrative.

4.3.2 Discussion of Analysis

From the two hikikomori characters that are depicted in *Bakuman*, the reader is given two sides of the same phenomena. First of these characters is completely removed from the main plot of the manga. Indeed, this character never interacts with the main protagonists and stays a side plot of the manga till the very end. In Ryuu this study discovered that his character has had the most logical and natural rehabilitation sequence of all other hikikomori characters so far. Through slow and gentle reintroduction to social norms and behaviors, the editor Yamahisa slowly reteaches Ryuu how to interact with the other side characters. The only character that has so far been showed in this slower rehabilitation was Tetsu in *Sprite*, yet this study takes into consideration the fact that Tetsu's plot like, while much more grounded in normality than the character of the Uncle, his main reason for change and development is the fact that his childhood friend has gone missing. Unlike the manga that this study has already looked at, the character of Ryuu stays away from all comedic breaks after a dramatic event that was found in *NHK,* and was also without the fantasy and science-fiction subplots that forced the hikikomori characters into a situation of adapt or die.

On the other hand, *Bakuman* has another character that seems to be a foil to Ryuu in the former classmate of the main protagonists. While Ryuu was a part of the side plot, this former classmate was seen first at the beginning of the plot and then later seen again a couple times after longer breaks in time. His character development is the opposite of Ryuu's. While Ryuu develops into a semi-functioning citizen, this prior classmate devolves

into a hikikomori through petty jealousy. While Ryuu displays the drive and want to get better and move into the manga world, the former classmate devolves into a hikikomori. He is never actually labeled a hikikomori by other characters or to refer to himself, but the depictions of his surroundings and his behavior can only label him as one. All readers would be able to identify him as a hikikomori based on other hikikomori characters that they have interacted with through other manga such as *NHK* and *Sprite*.

One of the different aspects that this study has seen through *Bakuman* is the showcasing of the manga publishing world as connected to the hikikomori phenomena. This study has already shown the prevalence of the otaku-hikikomori connection in the other manga analyzed and through other scholarly articles and books, yet this is the first time that a manga fully incorporates that connecting into a tangible point. Instead of the hikikomori being shown to constantly consume anime, manga, or video games, *Bakuman* shows through both Ryuu and the former classmate that there would be a real disconnect between them. Being a mangaka editor in the manga publishing world is categorized as office work and as deeply connected in the Japanese working culture. Kinsella explained and expressed this connection through her book *Adult Manga* (2000). Instead of being entrenched in otaku culture through manga and anime conventions and cosplay culture, which this study and others have shown, *Bakuman* focuses on the business aspect of that world. Editors and mangaka have to survive there as well as in any other business, which is shown through Yamahisa trying to reeducate and reintroduce Ryuu into a working environment. Both Ryuu and the former classmate are shown as being ill-equipped in dealing with and living in that world at first. While one strives to break out of the box he has found his way into, the other finds himself pulled into the very same box through bitterness and anger; which he then unleashes verbally on his mother. This same image was shown to the reader during a fantasy scene in *NHK* where Satō is shown yelling at his

mother through his bedroom door after he has sat playing video games in his room after many years.

4.4 *Rozen Maiden*

Originally published in Japanese by Gentosha and spanning eight volumes, this PEACH-PIT manga was serialized in Gentosha's *Comic Birz* magazine in 2002. There was also an anime series launched before it was published by TokyoPop for the Western market in 2006. The description that TokyoPop gives to this manga is as follows:

> After a traumatic incident, Jun Sakurada refuses to interact with the outside world and return to school--he even shuts out his sister, his closest friend. Jun spends most of his time online buying spiritual items that are obvious rip-offs. One day he finds a website that curiously enough asks him to put his order in his desk drawer. Thinking it's a joke, Jun plays along. The following day a suitcase arrives containing a doll named Shinku... that comes to life before his very eyes! Welcome to the world of Rozen Maiden, where Jun must enter an all-new reality to protect and serve a living doll... (Baka-Updates Accessed 23 April 2013)

TokyoPop began publishing *Rozen Maiden* in English in May, 2006 and finished the eight volume series in August 2008. Translated by Yuko Fukami, the series follows a hikikomori young man as he unknowingly becomes involved in a battle involving dolls. This study will be using the English translations of *Rozen Maiden* for the analysis. From the description, we can see that the use of the word 'hikikomori' was not used by the English publisher in the description, yet it is used within the translation. Indeed, each volume was opened by a reintroduction to the main characters and each time Jun is introduced, he is called a hikikomori, but the term is defined as "a student who never leaves his room" .

4.4.1 Narrative Analysis

Character Chart 1.4 *Rozen Maiden*

Character	Relationship to Protagonist	Brief Introduction
PEACH-PIT	**mangaka**	
Older Sister	Older sister to main protagonist	A college student who lives and takes care of Jun while their parents are away.
Sakurada Jun	Main Protagonist	A high school hikikomori boy.
Suiseiseki	One of the dolls	A doll that is a part of the main narrative battle.

At the very beginning of the narrative, Jun is seen as confrontation and angry through his interactions with his older sister, who he is living with while their parents are out on business. He spends his days in his room while ordering different things on the internet. When his older sister complains about this he says, "I'm not gonna go to school and I won't stop buying things. I won't take orders from anyone. You should leave me alone, too. Like those worthless parents" (V01, Ch000.2, Pg18 Fukami). Throughout the manga, the reader sees the slow evolution of his movement and how willing he is to leave his own house. At one point in Chapter 3, Jun is seen floating through a kind of thought vortex where he hears his own thoughts memories. After the thought of "Sakurada Jun. He probably won't come out" crosses the page, the reader is given the first glimpse to the trauma that lead to his hikikomori state by the sound of giggling.

Throughout the manga, PEACH-PIT has a slow development and evolution of the story behind Jun's reclusive life and also how the dolls that he later becomes more involved with understand the concept. To the dolls, the idea that a human would purposefully stay confined in a space is rather incomprehensible. If you are a human, that you have the autonomy to leave your house and have a full life. Whereas the dolls are forced to stay indoors and be confined by their strangeness. Here the manga pulls these ideas together to teach Jun that he should take advantage of his life and really live it. This is seen in Volume 2 Chapter 7 when one of the dolls questions Jun as to why he does not go to school. She

then makes a connection between them by explaining that he is always in the same place every day like she is. For Jun, that place is seen in front of the computer buying what he wants and looking at forums. It is from this point that the reader sees Jun leaving his house more and more to go shopping.

By Volume 4, it is brought to the reader's attention that Jun really dislikes being called a hikikomori by others. In Chapter 20, he is taking a couple of the dolls to another older gentlemen's house where one of them complains about how long it is taking him to walk there. One doll says, "The little human is a hikikomori, so he's out of shape". Jun objects to his being labeled as a hikikomori by explaining that, "I just don't go out unless I have a reason to" (Vol.4,Ch20,Pg3 Fukami). This is the first time that this study has seen a hikikomori character object to being labeled a hikikomori, as though it is something to be ashamed about.

In Chapter 23, Jun is seen starting to change his mind about wanting to go back to school. Yet there are strong moments of the notion of running away. When Jun is confronting his own thoughts and talking with one of the dolls, he says, "You fight to live, but all I can do is run and hide. I know that as long as I stay in this room, I won't get hurt anymore" (Vol.5,Ch23,Pg14 Fukami). From here on, Jun starts thinking about going back to school. He is seen holding his school uniform, even dreams about wearing it and then is seen asking his sister to fix his indoor school shoes one morning at breakfast. Indeed, throughout *Rozen Maiden*, Jun is seen gradually losing the anger that he was lashing at his older sister at the beginning of the manga. His rehabilitation is a slow process, but Jun has the constant comparison of how the dolls he is involved with can never have the chance at the kind of life that Jun does. It is right after these developments that the reader is shown the trauma that lead to Jun's hikikomori state.

The arrival of Jun's school teacher leads to the revelation of the trauma that Jun

experienced at school. Even at the beginning of the meeting, Jun is scared and dreading the meeting with his teacher. When he receives letters of encouragement from his classmates, Jun becomes physically ill and leaves the room. It is revealed that Jun was talented in designing doll clothes for his sister and the information found its way into the ears of a couple bullies in his class. Jun, already embarrassed by this information, tries to keep it quiet and denies the claim. Later, he sketches a costume for a contest while working on his homework. He had no plans to turn it in, but his teacher, the same one who visited him, sees it and posts it in front of the whole school and then names Jun directly at a school assembly. Jun overhears being calling him 'gross' and questioning how strange he is. He becomes to physically ill that he throws up right there in the assembly (Vol.5,Ch27). Jun's reaction to the teacher and this flashback is an indication of how much the past trauma still affects him and hinders him in the rehabilitation process. His fear and hyper awareness of how others might be judging him is a further reinforcement on the reader that the hikikomori phenomena is deeply rooted in the conventions of the social system as well as the lack of mental strength of the person how cannot accept them and move forward.

Following the visit from the teacher and the reader learning about the past trauma, Jun starts to realize that he has to move on. In the final volume of the series, Jun starts going back to the library with his old classmate. He is seen nervous and constantly looking around for students that he knows, but ultimately shows that he is the one who has to change. He says to his friend, "I guess I have to get used to things...like people" (Vol.8,Ch41,Pg11 Fukami). The reader also sees how that decision to return to school affects the dolls that surround him. One doll, Suiseiseki, expresses her own mixed feelings of him leaving the house. She understands that it is better for him and his life, but the fact that he is leaving her is unsettling. Suiseiseki also represents the idea of being afraid of, and also a little jealous, of Jun's move into reclaiming his old life outside of his home, for

she can never be completely free to do as she pleases.

4.5 Overlapping Themes: Lack of Societal Recognition

Through these four manga, this section has gone through and done a narrative analysis of each individual manga and the inner quotations and POV's that have been pasted onto the reader. These opinions and concepts have been collected and clear patterns and similarities have been found between all four of the manga found. The similarities that have been found all focus mainly on the individual hikikomori and not on the scholarly understood connection between the hikikomori phenomena and Japanese contemporary society.

4.5.1 Past Trauma

All four manga used during the main analysis use the scholarly recognized theme of past trauma being a main purpose to the hikikomori characters pulling themselves away from society. Yet, the use of past trauma is used differently between them. Three out of four use the high school embarrassment or some kind of large embarrassing moment, while one uses a type of science-fiction trauma that caused the two hikikomori characters to seclude themselves in their rooms.

In *NHK*, Satō is rooted in what Hattori and other Japanese scholars and doctors have published about the phenomena. He is afraid for what others are saying about him and the social pressure that he felt by being so disconnected with the people that surrounded him. This was particularly felt in the small arc where Satō entered animation school and has a flashback to passing a group of gossiping ladies on the street. He is automatically sent there by the laughter that surrounds him in the classroom he is sitting in.

Ishikawa, the mangaka for *Sprite*, on the other hand, takes the level of trauma needed and pushes it past society and further into that of someone who is agoraphobic, or

afraid of what might happen to them in large open spaces. What Tetsu and Yoshiko's Uncle are afraid of is the idea that this large black tsunami will come and take them like it took Yoshiko's younger brother. Their trauma has nothing to do with society or any kind of bullying or embarrassing moment in their past; just a traumatic moment of learning that Time could sweep them away. This separation further equates hikikomori with what a Western reader would understand is a shut-in; thus connecting it back to the previously discussed definition of the term "hikikomori" in the Oxford English Dictionary.

The reader is never given a clear reason for why the character of Ryuu in *Bakuman* became a hikikomori. What is said about it is through Yamahisa, his editor, who thinks about how his past with bullying and social pressures is reflected in his work as a mangaka. Ryuu is then connected to some kind of past trauma, in his case bullying, to have lead him to leave society and interacting with other people.

Jun, from *Rozen Maiden* has the double embarrassment of being equated with a pervert by his peers who find his talent for designing clothes, which is then compounded by his own teacher presenting a design he has randomly drawn on his homework in front of his whole grade. He feels the pressure of not fitting in and being secluded from them, this causes him to be physically sick and therefore further move his embarrassment past the point of no return. This connection between social humiliation as the trauma that leads Jun to walk away from school resonates with what Satō and Ryuu went through in their own narratives. These three young men show the reader that what causes hikikomori to pull away from society is their own failings in not being able to socially connect or interact with others.

4.5.2 Running Away

There is a strong and reoccurring point of the hikikomori characters are running away from some part of society or their own fears. The hikikomori themselves bring up

this point when they admit to themselves that they are running away from being hurt. Indeed, when looking at all of the manga used in this study, each character either expresses this fear and shame at running away from something or it can be inferred that they have.

Satō states this himself in one of the quotes used in a previous section of this analysis. While Jun is a character that is moving in a fantastical narrative about living dolls fighting each other, this study has found that Jun is a very open and well versed hikikomori character. Jun is not the first hikikomori character of this study to claim that he is a coward and only knows how to run away from the thought of being hurt. Satō and the Uncle from *NHK* and *Sprite* both express their feelings about their reclusive lives through similar thoughts. Even the former classmate in *Bakuman* can be said to be running away from something, even though the reason why he became an unlabeled hikikomori are never discussed in the narrative.

What this also formulates is that the hikikomori themselves are the ones that cannot deal with the pressure of functioning and dealing with other people. It also creates a type of cowardice within the hikikomori characters, which was also expressed through the hikikomori characters themselves during the analysis. This puts up the idea that the hikikomori themselves are the problem and not any kind of societal recognition or blame for the phenomena.

4.5.3 Family Connections

One major point of convergence between the manga analyzed and scholarly publications is the point of how interconnected the family relationship is to a member becoming a hikikomori. Psychologist Hattori found that most of his hikikomori patients reported feeling unable to connect and express themselves with their parental figures. Dr. Watanabe also focused on this generational gap in her belief that not only does the hikikomori patient need counseling, but also their parents. Out of all the manga discussed,

most of them touched on this concept to certain degrees of importance and emphasis.

Where Ishikawa does touch on this subject with Kiriko's numerous insistences that Yoshiko and her family is spoiling and enabling her Uncle in his reclusive life style, her opinions are not touching on the fact that the parents of hikikomori are a major part of the original problem. In *NHK*, this is slightly touched upon when Satō moves back in with his parents, but they are never indicated in the original flashback sequences where Satō explains that he himself was scared of being hurt and admitting to his own inability to connect with those around him. *Sprite* links Tetsu and Yoshiko's Uncle's past trauma with the science-fiction plot of running away and being fearful of time itself. Both families in this instance are questioned by Kiriko as enabling the family member to continue to live in their rooms and not being part of the original cause.

Furthermore, *Sprite* also brought further attention to the concept of how the family of the hikikomori affects the rehabilitation of that person. Kiriko's numerous instances of projecting the idea that the family was facilitating the hikikomori's lifestyle were echoed by both Ryuu's mother and, to a smaller degree, Jun and the dolls that surround him. Where there is a large jump in this instance between the manga this study previously looked at and *Rozen Maiden*, this study finds that this familiar connection is still found in this manga. These instances further connect the texts to the thoughts and views of Dr. Watanabe and her belief that the family is the true cause of hikikomori and that the parents are also in need of help.

This same concept echoes what happened between Ryuu's mother and Yamahisa in *Bakuman.* The mother was unwilling to let her son leave the house and blamed Yamahisa for filling his head with ideas, as she felt that Ryuu couldn't handle living alone. While Suiseiseki's, one of the dolls in *Rozen Maiden*, questioning why Jun would want to leave their insulated and comfortable group dynamic, is not going to the extreme opinion that

Ryuu's mother did, we can still see that they are reacting in a way that indicates the same fear on different levels. While Ryuu's mother is the extreme unease and disapproval of her son leaving home and feeling that he would never make it without her.

While Satō from *NHK* is not a true example of this connection, Shiro and his sister, the Class Representative, clearly show this connection and opening discusses it. When Misaki is shown what it is like to have to financially support and live with a hikikomori, the reader is given a clear example of how the family can become a part of the problem. The only time that Satō becomes a part of this exploration of the family dynamic is when he has a small nightmare about how he could further deteriorate.

4.5.4 Rehabilitation

The nature of all these narratives is to introduce and then rehabilitate the hikikomori character. While some of them are rehabilitated by their circumstances, all but two are the subject of a straight forward rehabilitation plot line.

To start, the entire manga of *NHK* is for Satō to leave his apartment and to become a full working member of Japanese society. He believes that Misaki can help him get him to that point and follows her rather unscientific and sometimes made up advice on how to get better. The story follows him and those he becomes connected to throughout the main objective of his rehabilitation.

When comparing this rehabilitation arc to the whole of the overtly comedic disingenuous rehabilitation of Satō in *NHK*, Ōta and Obata are giving the reading a genuine look at the process of getting a hikikomori back into society. While Misaki was using Shiro and Satō in *NHK* to make herself feel better about her own issues, Yamahisa genuinely helps and understands that what Ryuu needs is slow involvement in the outside world. Indeed, compared to Shiro and Satō, Shiro's rehabilitation is one of complete fantasy, whereas Ryuu, as the reader is never given his inner monologues or point of view

throughout the *Bakuman* manga are reliant on Yamahisa to give him any kind of inner thoughts.

Differing from Satō and Ryuu, Jun's rehabilitation is the product of his circumstances in the manga, but his character development is clearly designed to be rehabilitation from the start. In this situation, his rehabilitation is similar to Ryuu's in *Bakuman*. While Jun does not have a Yamahisa like character that is slowly socially explaining how he needs to change, he is pulled further and further toward moving and interacting with the outside world that he actually has a full rehabilitation arc and plot.

Yet *Sprite*, while having the hikikomori characters go through a kind of rehabilitation, their characters are not looking to be changed. Tetsu and Yoshiko's Uncle are both almost forced to recover because of what has happened to them. Yoshiko's Uncle is forced to either adapt to his new surroundings and become an active member of the surviving group and Tetsu forces himself to leave his home to search for Yoshiko. The parts that connect the manga to others analyzed in this study is the pace of that rehabilitation. The rehabilitation and slow movement of Tetsu from *Sprite* and Ryuu show that this study has so far had one half of the hikikomori characters shown through a realistic rehabilitation arc.

Three out of four of the manga have the hikikomori character connected to somebody who wishes to rehabilitate them. Satō has Misaki in *NHK*, Ryuu has Yamahisa in *Bakuman*, and Jun has the dolls he is working with. Out of these three manga, only Yamahisa is shown to have a full plan of slowly making Ryuu interact with others and to sometimes force him to remember that he has to work in order to get somewhere in life. Misaki pretends that she has a plan for Satō, but she really just wants to remind herself that there are others that are more emotionally scarred than her. Jun's continued interactions and cooperation with the dolls own narrative has made him leave his home, the dolls

themselves have never set out to help him in anyway. They acknowledge that he, as a human, must continue to grow and move on in his life, but they are also struggling with the idea of him leaving them.

4.5.5 Connection to Otaku Culture

On unavoidable connection that this study was able to identify was this continued connection between hikikomori and the otaku subculture. The Japanese have been connecting the hikikomori phenomena to otaku since before the term 'hikikomori' was coined by Satiō in 1998 (Horiguchi 2012), and through manga, this connection has been passed on to Western fans who have also been connecting it through comments and questions left on internet forums. This will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

When contrasting Tetsu and Yoshiko's Uncle to Satō from *NHK*, this study found that Satō and the Uncle are similarly depicted through their connection to otaku culture and their emphasis is connecting to the world outside of their apartments through video games. While the Uncle could only connect and engage the real world through mentally picturing it as a video, Satō would use it to connect to Shiro, the other hikikomori character in *NHK*. When Tetsu is brought into the manga, he is never depicted as playing video games, though he is often only shown in the dark, exactly the same way that both the Uncle and Satō are when they are first brought into the narrative. Where Tetsu differs in depiction is that he is only shown in small intervals and slowly moving forward, a much more realistic depiction when contrasted with Satō, who gave the impression that he could move around freely for long spans of the *NHK* manga.

This connection was further emphasized by both Ryuu and the Former Classmate in *Bakuman*. While the Former Classmate was surrounded by numerous models and posters from the same animation character, he also frequented and was heavily involved in an online fan forum for voice actors. He is only really brought into the narrative through a

type of otaku fan poll to choose who will be the voice actress for a favorite manga character; further cementing his association with the otaku culture. Ryuu, on the other hand, is seen as an otaku who plays video games all day and surrounds himself with manga, but he is never further connected to the culture other than that. He is never seen as being overly active in any fandom except in the financial sense. While he is trying to become a mangaka, he is never depicted as being obsessive or overly identifying with pop cultural icons.

Out of all the hikikomori that have been shown in this study, there is not a single one of them that imparts the idea that the hikikomori phenomena derives from Japanese society at large. These characters further impart the idea that the hikikomori themselves are not mentally strong enough to survive in Japanese society. These notions contradict what scientists like Hattori, Saitou, and Watanabe have been publishing and helping their patients with. While there has been a small amount shown on how the family has helped enable the hikikomori to live a reclusive lifestyle, there has not been further exploration on the overarching social issue that has arisen.

5. Fan's Search for Hikikomori

The movement of Western fans, when it comes to the consumption and further integration and interaction with Japanese popular culture, has expanded and created large fan based enterprises on the internet. The continued production of fan based projects like fansubbing, where fans translate and sub digital copies of Japanese television shows and movies, and scanlations, where fans translate and edit chapters from manga, for distribution are clear examples of that consumption and integration. The numerous sites generated in a Google search when typing in the name of a manga could lead any fan to the website of a group translating that title. These titles do not have to be popular titles at all, as long as there is a translator and an editor; any manga title can be introduced to fans outside of Japan. Further globalizing the manga product to countries that may not have an official translation available for consumers. Indeed, all but one of the manga discussed in this study can be found in English translation through either free scanlation or professionally published and translated manga found in bookstores.

There is more to the fan culture and consumption than just fansubbing and scanlation groups. Just the act of reading a manga, no matter if it is through legal or illegal translation means, facilitates the reader to learn something about Japanese culture. There are the superficial pieces of information, like students change shoes when coming to school, sports clubs are a major part of school life for some students, or that the art of confessing ones love to another comes before a couple is made. These pieces of information are imparted to the reader, but it is not just the superficial that is showcased in

manga. More profound depictions of issues in contemporary Japanese society or historically detailed plots and characters hold a significant amount of cultural knowledge that is being consumed by audiences around the globe.

There are bordering on two types of views on popular culture and it's reception; 1) critics who take into the thoughts of the Frankfurt School, which regards audiences as passive consumers of the information that producers and executives present them and 2) those who view audiences as active receivers who process and reinterpret what they choose to consume. The remarkable amount of consumption and active fan activities in the Western , this study advocates the view that fans are actively producing their own meanings and relating themselves to the content of the anime or manga that they consume.

This study has argued that there are numerous instances that certain manga titles can be full of access points to learning about who, what, and how hikikomori are seen in Japanese society. Since the phenomena of the hikikomori has been studied in Japan and South Korea, English speaking and foreign readers would be actively articulating the concepts of this phenomena through consuming of anime or manga, without having to go through a lecture class at an educational institution. This section will look at what kind of internet fan response hikikomori manga has received from Western, particularly English speaking and reading, manga fans.

5.1 Fan Response to *NHK*

Out of all the manga analyzed for this study, only one showcased a large fan response to their connection to and understanding of the hikikomori phenomena; which was *NHK*. This overwhelming fan response is most likely due to fact that the manga deals with, not only the hikikomori phenomena, but other societal and cultural issues that contemporary Japan is facing. As pointed out later in this section, *NHK* has become a part

of the Western readers canon of manga as many fans of the manga used it as an example to open conversation as well as search for other manga that have hikikomori characters.

This study has looked at the narrative POVs and the images and concepts that have been imparted to the reader, it shall move forward into looking at some of the fan comments and information that they have publicly indicated on the Baka-Updates site. As mentioned before, Baka-Updates is a website that is geared to reviewing and sharing information about both anime and manga. This study has uses Baka-Updates for its encyclopedic information and to understand how most English speaking fans are using the site as a way to pass information onto other fans. For these reasons, this study has looked at and analyzed what fans are stating in the comments section of the main page.

From the description stated prior, the manga is given a rather humorous overtone, and the six pages of fan ratings and comments reflect appreciation for the comedy, but many of them also state that they thought the beginning was funny and then the strange tone shift into more of a dark and what many commentators describe as "depressing" tone of the last two volumes was hard for them to follow. For example, a commentator, going by the name "Alkanaro", titled their post as 'Funny or Depressing?' and left this comment:

> That was really good, but I'm not sure how I feel about the shift in tone. The first 3-4 volumes were consistently hilarious. It was going to be the first manga for me to give a 10 to for comedy value - but as it went, it became more and more serious. Depressing, even. There's no change in the subject matter, just how it's presented. I think I would have preferred it to stay as it was - normally I'm all for misery, but in this case not so much (Baka-Updates Sept. 10, 2012).

When looking at this comment, we can see that the main point of entry into the manga and therefore an understanding of hikikomori are through humor. Like many critics on culture and popular culture, showing humor to the subject seems to lessen the impact and the harshness of the reality of the main issues. It is not until later that the drama of the manga

connects with and projects the seriousness of this phenomenon among the other many social and youth problems. Another commenter "Zoro" added to this kind of cultural critic by saying:

> The story itself is so intriguing. Part time through you're hoping the author finally gives him a job, but it never comes. It was, as others have said, a brilliant read. You can interpret it whichever way you want really. Trying to understand the internal meaning to the whole thing isn't gonna help you understand it in the long run, it could've been something the author had had experienced at some point (I doubt it), but you feel yourself more in tune with the main character as it progresses. You can literally feel his sadness. More than once I've thought of this while laying on my bed (Baka-Updates Jan. 5, 2010).

This commentator went on to explain that he wouldn't recommend it to other readers and the next comment follows that same thought process. Though later, when expressing surprise at some of the lower rating scores given, another commentator, with the handle simpleeyelid, expressed almost identification with hikikomori by stating, "No offense, I admit I have the potential to become an Hikikomori" and then later seemed to try and reason why the hikikomori phenomena has continued to be an issue by expressing:

> Now that I think of it, the reason why there are many Hikikomori in Japan might be that there are so many these kinds of mangas which give them "hopes", however, they are knocked down into the deeper abyss of despair by the crude reality. I am sad. No idea why. This is a nice subject if it can be seriously helpful, but I am afraid it is just for the sake of entertaining. (Baka-Updates April 30, 2010).

We can see an almost lawn chair type of sociology and understanding of the hikikomori phenomena here with this last comment. This commentator brings up a critical connection between hikikomori and manga is an interesting one. They connect the readership of manga and the messages imparted to them as the major reason for the continued problem.

The fantasy elements of everyday life are pushing against the reality that they live in and therefore causing disillusioned readers to continue living in that fantasy world they've read in manga. Whereas an "Anonomous" commentator took this same approach by looking more at the psychological connections between the narrative and the hikikomori phenomena when they stated:

> At the same time is a serious, hard and depressing series about a group of young guys so repressed by their society that, in their attempts to take themselves off the hole, they only get in it deeper and deeper.
> Some people have criticized that this series has a strange mix of comedy and drama, but I really believe that's the point of it all. A very direct and loud critic to the very complicated and self-destroying hikkikomori problem, but in a very ironic, cynical and funny way. (Baka-Updates March 18, 2006)

This was the only commentator that connected with scholars and psychologists who stress that the hikikomori phenomena is truly a societal problem and that looking at it from the individual psychosis and mental state of the main characters. What we find in these last two comments specifically, is the creation of the further understanding of issues confronting contemporary society today. While these two comments are not among the majority of themes left by the other 69 comments in the section, this study has found that *NHK* has become an access point and has facilitated further cultural review and understanding among readers. One commentator, "Deva", stated that they started reading this manga because they had an interest in hikikomori and wanted to see what they manga would show or say about the phenomena (Baka-Updates February 1, 2008). Further showing that to English speaking audiences, this manga has gained and been showcased of its pedagogic value on hikikomori.

From here there was a turn toward self-identification with the idea of hikikomori

and how readers were able to identify with the main character of Sato and Misaki. Out of the 69 comments left on the Baka-Updates page for *NHK*, 10 of them expressed either being able to identify or sympathize with Sato. One of the comments already mention has the line of having the potential to be a hikikomori, already showcasing an internalization and some kind of understanding for what the phenomena is and how people define those who have pulled away. A further show of internalization of the hikikomori definition was from a commentator with the name llbloodll who left this comment on the boards:

> I agree with how this manga is a very surreal reflection of reality, but also truthful in that manner. In addition I am surprised to see how many elements of NHK can still be related to a western-lifestyle where terms like "hikki" aren't coined with as much disgust. (Baka-Updates April 8, 2007).

This last comment shows how interested the reader was in having a level of realism as well as showing critical thought of how open minded the West is while Japan is cast in the close-minded role for not accepting and understanding of the hikikomori. There is also the indication of surprise at how parts of contemporary Japan would actually be applicable and identifiable to a Western reader. The idea of the 'term 'hikki' that llbloodll uses in here also reflects that either the word or the idea of a hikikomori has already been brought into the vocabulary for a part of the Western population well before the 2010 definition in Webster's Dictionary.

From these comments, this study has shown that there has been a significant use of *NHK* as a learning tool for English speaking readers into learning about the hikikomori phenomena and also for those readers to start creating and imparting their own theories in a public forum. When looking further into the 69 comments that were left at the time of writing, this study found that commentators were self-identifying with the main characters

as well as internalizing the concept of hikikomori and connecting it back with Western society. This further emphasizes the idea of cultural globalization. While Iwabuchi would argue that the characters in anime and manga are not truly Japanese, this study has found indication that the content of certain manga is globalizing the concept and also the understanding of the hikikomori phenomena and helping Western readers connect with what has previously been seen as a purely Japanese problem (Horiguchi 2012). What can also be seen that at the time some of these comments were posted, in 2007 and 2006, there was already a community of Western fans that were using and fully engaging and interpreting the term 'hikikomori' before it was defined in the English language (Horiguchi 2012).

5.2 Audience Reception of the Hikikomori Concept

This study has already demonstrated what readers can learn about the phenomena of hikikomori from manga that either builds their narratives around them or uses them as side characters and plots within a bigger narrative. For instance, while *NHK* goes into a much deeper and more developed discussion and expression of the phenomena through the eyes of Satō, different manga express pluralities in circumstance and viewpoints in how hikikomori are perceived by those less sympathetic to their issues. In the act of adding and developing hikikomori characters within their manga, mangaka have already expressed a level of sympathy for those who have made the decision to never leave their houses or interact with Japanese society. By inviting the reader to sympathize and learn about not only their reasons for turning hikikomori, but also their difficulties in returning to society. What is introduced to the reader, be they Japanese or Western readers, are the prejudices and misunderstandings that have surrounded this phenomena since the term 'hikikomori' was coined and the resulting public panic.

As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Three, this study analyzed what kinds of prejudices and opinions are expressed in the popular manga *NHK (ni Yōkoso).* It also looks into the fan response to the manga through the comments left on the Baka-Updates website. This study will further expand the field in how English fans have responded to and understand the hikikomori phenomena. In place of interviews, this study will continue to focus on internet forums and the comments left on them. First, this study looks at if there is any desire on the part of English speaking readers into learning more about the hikikomori phenomena. A simple Google search provided over 64,000 hits when prompted with the search "hikikomori characters in manga". The first main hits are sites of My Anime List (myanimelist.com) and Yahoo! Answers UK; which are simple question and answer sites. These forums sites all started with a fan looking for more hikikomori anime or manga like *NHK* to read. They were also combining the hikikomori character with a search for otaku characters as well. From the onset, these questions are a way for fans to communicate and share knowledge, but there is also a more important piece of information found here. All of these questions either stated that they were searching for more anime or manga with a hikikomori character, and all three were looking for one that was like Satō from *NHK*. This tells us is that Western readers are holding Satō and *NHK* as a primary example of the hikikomori phenomena; which means that fans are using both character and manga series as a bases of their learning and understanding of hikikomori on a whole. The amount of fan response that was found on Baka-Updates further validates this information when some commentators posted how they were more interested in the hikikomori phenomena and read *NHK* to further expand their own knowledge.

Adding to these question and answer forum conversations are the websites that had created lists of hikikomori characters for other fans. TvTropes, Anime-Planet, and Anime Vice were found by the previous Google search where lists were made that included the

manga found in, brief character biographies, and pictures to match a hikikomori character. The website TvTropes (tvtropes.org) went one step further by explaining the phenomena in depth and further categorizing the hikikomori as also being NEETs. The list from TvTropes is not only contained to Japanese pop cultural products. TvTropes further expanded on the media choices with: Anime&Manga, film, literature, Live Action TV, Music, theater, video games, web comics, web original, and Western animation. Websites such as the My Anime List and the question and answer forums were limited only to the Japanese cultural products of anime and manga. Indeed, not just TvTropes, but one other site found that Western fans were taking their understandings of hikikomori and were applying that label, not just to Western characters, but to different types of media as well.

This seeking out and soliciting of more information falls well into the established fan behavior that John Fiske (1991) description of the concept of cultural economy and cultural capital. The fans are furthering this creation of capital by creating this large and detailed lists that help connect fans, and also showcase their own cultural capital. Iwabuchi's major point of scholarship was on the idea of cultural globalization of Japanese pop cultural products, yet the concept of hikikomori; which is not a physical product but a concept, has been globalized through manga and anime. Fans have accumulated the concept of hikikomori and turned it into their own cultural capital by compiling and sharing these lists to further connect and expand their knowledge of hikikomori.

Another site that also showcased this further expansion of the conceptual cultural capital was the site HikiCulture (hikiculture.net), which describes itself as a forum for reclusive people to get together and communicate with other reclusive. The site is entirely run and written in English, with sub-forums found in Spanish, French, Japanese, Scandinavian Languages, and one last forum for "Other languages". The site has a total number of 2,292 members at the time of writing and 194,071 posts that had been made

since the site launched. The title of the site itself is a strong showing of how the word "hikikomori" has further expanded into the English language. In this forum, there is a post here that asks, "Any Hikikomori characters you know?". The comment follows:

> Are there any hikikomori characters in anime, TV, or movies that you know of? They don't necessarily have to be labeled a hikikomori. Just someone who is like a hikikomori that you've seen on TV. For me the only two one's I've come across are Satou Tatsuhiro from Welcome to the NHK and Kiri Komori from Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei. (HikiCulture 01 February 2012.)

The commentator who posed the question, with the handle of "Enigmatic Affection", states that they have only come across two: Satō from *NHK* and Kiri from *Sayonara Zetsubō Sensei*. On the onset, we can see that the word 'hikikomori' is never actually defined by the commentator. As the website itself takes its name from the Japanese word, it can be inferred that the term has reached the level of ubiquity to Western fans that any following commentator would know and understand what the original commentator is looking for. While starting like the previously seen question and answer threads that were found on My Anime List and Yahoo UK Answers, this thread moves away from Japanese anime and manga characters. Commentators started by giving examples from Japanese manga and anime, but then evolved the thread by bringing in Western Animation into the discussion. There was even some overlap with the lists created by TvTropes with Gimpy from the show Undergrads. From this comment on, there are a few Western characters that are brought in as well, but the most interesting of the answers is that Sheldon Cooper. The show that the character of Sheldon appears on, *The Big Bang Theory,* follows a group of what Westerns would label as "nerds". The show follows a group of friends who work in the research sciences and are heavily involved in comic book culture, go to conventions, as well as hold debates about the characters and plot points in the original *Star Trek* TV show. Commentator "Dunpealhunter" commented:

> If Sheldon Cooper (from the *Big Bang Theory*) wasn't living together with Leonard Hofstadter and his (Originally Leonard's friends) friends didn't come over to do stuff than he would definitely be considered a hikikomori.
>
> In the tv show he was a hikikomori for a brief period of time when he was afraid of the world outside and build a robot that would act in his place. A little bit like in the movie Surrogates (BTW: a movie where almost everyone on a the planet can be considered a hikikomori) only much more funnier. (HikiCulture 05 April, 2012)

At least one other commentator agreed and stated that they planned on giving the same answer to the original question about hikikomori characters (JaneDoe 25 May 2012). With the answers of Sheldon and also the answer of the character Boo Radley from the famous American novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. The fact that many commentators apply the term 'hikikomori' to analyze various characters form programs beyond Japanese cultural products demonstrates internalization of the 'hikikomori' concept. This suggests that the Western fans view the term 'hikikomori' as more powerful or fitting that just saying a "shut-in" or "recluse", demonstrating an understanding that the term has a stronger connotation and meaning. This assertion that Sheldon, as played by actor Jim Parsons, is a hikikomori was very surprising. Not only has are the characters of Sheldon and his friends from the *The Band Theory* also connected to the American nerd cultural, the character of Sheldon has been connected to the discourse over the raising awareness of autism (Murry 2013).

6. Conclusions

This study has aimed to further the study of fan and audience reception by conducting a case study on what Western fans are able to learn about the hikikomori phenomena through the Japanese popular culture product of manga. Within the last two decades, Japanese popular culture has become more and more popular in the West through the popularity of anime and manga. Koichi Iwabuchi (2010) stated that while Western fans of Japanese popular culture are consuming these products, he was unsure if those consumers were learning anything about the issues that face contemporary Japan. The hikikomori phenomena has been understood to be found predominantly in Japan, yet within Japanese anime and manga, there have been more and more inclusion of hikikomori characters that have been exposing Western fans to the phenomena outside of the classroom. So the question that must be asked and looked at is what do the hikikomori characters in Japanese manga teach Western consumers about who and what hikikomori are.

6.1 Narrative Analysis Results

Narrative analysis conducted on four different manga titles resulted in five overlapping themes that were found in all four titles: 1) Past trauma, 2) Family Connections, 3) Connection to Otaku Culture, 4) Rehabilitation, and 5) Running Away. Looking at these five overlapping themes, it was found that there was not any real indication that the problem was created by Japanese contemporary society itself. As

scholars and psychologists found, there is a connection between Japanese contemporary society and the hikikomori phenomena. The reason why the hikikomori character ended up leaving society is because they are not mentally strong enough to survive in Japanese society. Yet, there were some connections to what scholars and psychologists have researched. Some of these themes also reflected psychological and cultural scholarship conducted by doctors and scholars. Particularly the connection between the family dynamic and the hikikomori that is further documented by Dr. Watanabe and Allen (2013). In all four of the manga analyzed, the hikikomori character is usually lead through a rehabilitation arc, while the people who surround them are not asked to change. The hikikomori changes while the rest of society stays the same. Society is never asked to change or learn how to work with or around the hikikomori character. This creates a clear imbalance between understanding the reasons that youths are choosing not to deal with society.

Another aspect of the analysis can be further connected to Horiguchi's (2012) study on the evolution of the hikikomori term. *Rozen Maiden* was the first of the four manga titles analyzed to be published, placing it right in the middle of the early moral panic in Japan, followed by *NHK* in 2004, *Bakuman* in 2008, and the newest published manga of *Sprite* in 2009. Particularly *Rozen Maiden* and *NHK*, these two manga were published during the height of the moral panic and reflect more psychological exploration of the characters as well as the hikikomori phenomena. Indeed, *NHK* has turned into the leading example of hikikomori to Western fans.

Due to lack of space, this study was unable to include any manga that depicted the hikikomori character as a female. While the hikikomori phenomena has been found mostly in young men, who are usually the oldest son, doctors have found that a small proportion of women are turning hikikomori (Saitō 1998). This would be an excellent chance for further

study to be conducted on how gender can be included into the discussion of hikikomori depiction.

6.2 Fan Response Results

As this study aimed to focus on how Western fans and consumers can understand the hikikomori phenomena through Japanese manga, this study also looked at internet fan communities and activity. Through online communities and fan made wiki entries, this study found that Western fans are not only reading about these characters, but they are also making lists of manga and anime to share with other fans. These lists found at sites like TvTropes and HikiCulture showcased two main points: 1) That Satō and the manga *NHK* have become the primary example and reference point for Western fans interested in hikikomori and 2) That fans are further interpreting and internalizing their understanding of the hikikomori phenomena and applying the label to Western made characters and media texts. One of the most surprising examples of this fan reapplying of labels is that a character from a popular American sitcom, Shelton, was labeled as almost being hikikomori, yet this character has also be linked to being a representation of autism in American pop culture. More study would have to be conducted to further uncover the implications of the hikikomori phenomena and autism being connected to nerd culture, this study is unequipped to make pronunciations on it.

This study has set out and showcased that Western consumers of Japanese pop culture products are learning and further internalizing and interpreting the hikikomori phenomena. Through narrative analysis the study has shown the major points of overlapped themes as well as the fan activity that has further showcased understanding and critical thinking of the hikikomori phenomena. While pop cultural products have the ability to become a learning tool for further exploration and facilitation of contemporary Japanese

society, there are different levels in how much is imparted to Western fans and consumers. As Japanese popular culture becomes more and more globalized, fans are interpreting and internalizing the cultural information that they consume.

Bibliography

Adams, K. (2013). The Poison System of Japan. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 40(3), 174-186.

Angles, J. (2013). Translator's Introduction. In T. Saitō's *Hikikomori. Adolescence without End* (vii-xix). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Anime-Planet. (n.d). Retrieved 20 April 2013 from Hikikomori Characters: http://www.anime-planet.com/characters/tags/hikikomori.

Anime Vice. (n.d.). Retrieved 20 April 2013 from List of Hikikomori Characters: http://www.animevice.com/hikikomori/22-50/characters/.

Annoymous. (2006, Mar. 18). Wawawa... I'm all alone and sad.... Posted to User Comments (pg. 6) http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?

page=6&id=188&method=time_added#   comments.

Alkanaro. (2012, Sept. 10). Funny or Depressing? Posted to User Comments http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?id=188.

Benzon, W. (2011). Dr. Tezuka's Ontology Lab and the Discovery of Japan. In T. Perper

and   M. Cornog (Eds), *Mangatopia: Essays on Manga and Anime in the Modern World*. (pg. 37-52). Santa Barbra, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Bouissou, J-M. (2010). Manga: A Historical Overview. In T. Johnson-Woods (Ed) *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pg. 17-14) New York and London: Continuum.

Brophy, P. (2010). Osamu Tezuka's Gekiga: Behind the Mask of Manga. In T. Johnson-Woods (Ed) *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (pg.128-136). New York and London: Continuum.

Chatman, S. (2000). Point of View. In M. MacQuillan (Ed.) *The Narrative Reader* 96-98. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Deva.   (2008,   Feb.   1).   Well......Posted   in   User   Comments   (pg.   3).

http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?page=1&id=188&method=time_added#comments.

Dunpealhunter. (2012, Apr. 05). Re. Any Hikikomori Characters you know? Posted to Any Hikikomori characters you know? http://hikiculture.net/topic3793.html.

Enigmatic Affection (2012, Feb. 01). Any Hikikomori Characters you know? Posted to Any Hikikomori characters you know? http://hikiculture.net/topic3793.html.

Fiske, J. (1992). The Cultural Economy of Fandom. In L. Lewis's (Ed). *The Adoring Audience. Fan Culture and Popular Media* (30-49). London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Hairston, M. (2010). A cocoon with a View: Hikikomori, Otaku, and Welcome to the NHK. In F. Lunning (Ed.) *Mechademia 5 Fanthropologies* (311-323). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Hattori, Y. (2005). Social Withdrawal in Japanese Youth: A Case Study of Thirty-Five Hikikomori Clients. *Journal Of Trauma Practice*, *4*(3/4), 181-201.

HikiCulture. (n.d.) Retrieved 20 April 2013 from http://hikiculture.net/.

Horiguchi, S. (2012). Hikikomori: How Private Isolation Caught the Public Eye. In R. Goodman, Y. Imoto, and T. Toivonen (Eds). *Sociology of Japanese Youth. From returnees to NEETs.* (122- 138). London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Ishikawa, Y. (2009). *Sprite*. Vol. 1-10. Tokyo: Shogakukan.

Iwabuchi, K. (2002). *Recentering. Globalization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

-------------- (2010). Undoing Inter-national Fandom in the Age of Brand Nationalism. In F. Lunning (Ed). *Mechademia 5, Fanthropologies.* (87-96) Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

JaneDoe. (2012, May, 25). Re. Any Hikikomori characters you know? Posted to Any hikikomori characters you know? http://hikiculture.net/topic3793.html.

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers. Television Fans a Participatory Culture*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Kinsella, S. (2000). *Adult Manga*. Richmon, Surrey: Curzon Press.

Llbloodll. (2007, Apr. 18). Amazing. Posted to User Comments (pg.4).http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?page=4&id=188&method=time_added#comments

Meaningless. (n.d.) In *Oxford English Dictionary online.* Retrieved from http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115470?redirectedFrom=meaningless#eid.

Murry, N. (2013, Jan. 16). The changing face of "nerds" (and autism) in popular culture. In the AV Club. http://www.avclub.com/articles/the-changing-face-of-nerds-and-autism-in-popular-c,91151/

My Anime List. (n.d.) Retrieved 20 April 2013 from Manga with a main character that's an hikikomori: http://myanimelist.net/forum/?topicid=483581.

NHK ni Yōkoso/Baka-Udpates. (n.d.) Accessed 20 April 2013. From the site Baka-Updates http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?id=188.

Napier, S. (2001). *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: Plagrave MacMillan.

Ōba, T. and Obata, T. (2008). *Bakuman*. Vol. 1-20. Tokyo: Shueisha.

Palmer, A. (2011). All Life is Genocide: The Philosophical Pessimism of Osamu Tezuka. In T. Perper and M. Cornog (Eds.) *Mangatopia. Essays on Manga and Anime in the Modern World* (173-190). Santa Barbara, CA; Denver, CO; Oxford, England: Libraries Unlimited.

PEACH-PIT. (2002). *Rozen Maiden*. Vol. 1-8. Translated in English by Fukami (Vol. 1-8). Los Angeles, CA: TokyoPop.

Pellitteri, M. (2011). Cultural Politics of J-Culture and "Soft Power": Tentative Remarks from a   European Perspective. In T. Perper and M. Cornog (Eds). *Mangatopia: Essays on Manga and Anime in the Modern World*. (pg. 209-236). Santa Barbra, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Power, N. (2009). *God of Comics: Osamu Tezuka and the Creation of Post-World War II Manga.* Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Prince, G. (2000). On Narratology (Past, Preset, Future). In M. McQuillan (Ed). *The Narrative Reader* 129. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Saitō, T. (2013). *Hikikomori. Adolescence without End.* (With J. Angles, Trans.) Minneapolis, MI and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Schodt, F. (2007). *The Astro Boy Essays*. *Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, Manga/Anime Revolution.* Berkley, CA: Stone Bridge Press.

Simpleeyelid. (2010, Apr. 30). 7.5. Posted to the User Comments http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?page=1&id=188&method=time_added#comments.

Sprite/Baka-Updates. (n.d.) Accessed 20 April 2013. From the site Baka-Updates http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?id=42898.

Takimoto, T. and Ōiwa, K. (2004). *NHK ni Yōkoso*. Vol. 1-8. Tokyo: Kasokawa Shoten
    Publishing

TvTropes. (n.d). Retrieved 20 April 2013 from the Tv Tropes wiki
    http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Hikikomori.

Useless. (n.d.) In *Oxford English Dictionary online* .Retrieved from
    http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/220643?redirectedFrom=useless#eid.

White, Hayden. (1980). The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality. In
Critical Inquiry. Pp 5-27. The Chicago University Press

Wiliams, Kevin. (2003). *Understanding Media Theory*. New York, NY: Hodder Arnold.

Zielenziger, M. (2006). *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created its Own Lost
Generation*. New York: Vintage Books

Zoro. (2010, Jan. 5). In the end it.......!?. Posted to User Comments
    http://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?id=188.