Hikikomori **(Social Withdrawal) in Japan:**

Discourses of Media and Scholars; Multicausal Explanations of the Phenomenon

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Hikikomori, a phenomenon which exists to date mostly in Japan, are people who seclude themselves in their bedrooms for an extended period of time and reject most forms of contact with the outside world. These are usually males and young people in their twenties who may comprise nearly a million Japanese citizens.[1] They are recluses who tend to switch day with night, falling asleep in the morning after hours of watching TV, then reading books, and playing computer games or online-chatting at night. If *hikikomori* go outside, they usually shop at a convenience store, limiting their interaction with other people. Some of them still talk to their families but others don't talk to their parents for a few years before they finally decide to withdraw. According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the largest numbers of *hikikomori* are found in the prefectures which are home to cities included in the top ten most densely populated areas in Japan: Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Saitama, Kanagawa and Hokkaidō as well as two metropolitan areas: Tokyo and Osaka (Appendix B).

In my thesis I address two questions. The first one asks whether explanations of the *hikikomori* problem provided by different authors conflict with each other. The phenomenon of social withdrawal has been described by the media as well as by both Japanese and foreign

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[1] Goldsmith, M., (2000, May 13); McNeill, D., (2004, December 6); Reuters, (2001, May 10); Shimoyachi, N., (2003, April 22); Watts, J., (2002, November 17). More detailed information on the estimate numbers of *hikikomori* is included in section 1.2.

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scholars. However, these sources of information express different opinions on the most significant causes of the problem. Nevertheless, only a superficial analysis would conclude that since the opinions are different, they have to contradict one another. In my thesis, I will show that these explanations are not actually in conflict but rather complement each other. To demonstrate it, I will analyze discourses of media and scholars and show linkeages between the opinions. At the same time, my thesis becomes not only a summary of what has been published on *hikikomori* so far, but also the first study that shows associations between potential causes of social withdrawal that have their origins in three distinct categories: Society, School and Parents. However, it is important to point out that my aim is not to investigate the onsets of *hikikomori per se*, but rather the polemics surrounding it.

The second issue I address is *hikikomori* as form of a resistance against pressure for conformity in Japan. To investigate it, I refer to previous research on forms of anger management and conflict resolution in Japanese society. My study shows that *hikikomori* is not necessarily an extreme form of behavioral deviation as such, but rather that it could be perceived as a radical manifestation of resistance in the society of Japan.

It is necessary to mention that this thesis has two major limitations, which I describe in more details in Chapter 3: restricted contact of *hikikomori* sufferers with the environment and the time frame of my research project. These two factors confined me to collecting data available only in the U.S. and so my study does not include interviews with socially withdrawn. It incorporates materials, limited in their amount, found on websites and in electronic databases of Japan and the United States.

Despite these limitations, the research and investigation described in this thesis will certainly bring closer a phenomenon about which we still do not know and understand much, and

therefore, that this thesis will make a unique contribution to English literature. My work also points to the need for greater care in searching for causes of *hikikomori*, as well as to the need for being aware of our sources of information.

Several details should be mentioned before beginning this thesis. First, I use Western order of names for Americans, Europeans and Japanese. Therefore, given name precedes family name, although the traditional arrangement of names in Japan is opposite. Also, I placed all publication texts in the data set analyzed in my study in Appendix A to distinguish them. In addition, they are also listed in the Bibliography section for easy reference. All publications in Japanese (those which titles are in Japanese) were translated by me.

In the continuation of this chapter, I offer an overview of *hikikomori* including its definition and available statistics which describe the extent of the phenomenon.

1.1   DEFINITION OF *HIKIKOMORI*

As a phenomenon of recent origin that has been scarcely researched, it is not surprising to find that there is some divergence in how people define the term *hikikomori*. Below I will introduce definitions of *hikikomori* presented by seven sources representing both scholars and institutions. They are only somewhat similar in explaining what *hikikomori* is, but they fully agree on what *hikikomori* is *not*, namely that, *hikikomori* is neither a mental disease, nor its syndrome.

According to Ushio Isobe, a Japanese psychiatrist, *hikikomori* is a state where people "seclude themselves for more than six months at home, limit the number of things which they

need or they think they need".[2] Contrary to what one might think, it is not true that recluses do not do anything. While secluding themselves, they do feel discomfort and they want to escape this condition but do not know the right way to do it or simply do not know what to do. *Hikikomori* itself is not one of the symptoms accompanying a mental disease.[3] Isobe also points out that there is no such word as *hikikomori* in Japanese dictionaries but there is a word *hikikomoru* which means "withdraw," "resign" and "shut in," "lock oneself up" (*shirizoite tojikomoru*). Isobe suggests that the word *hikikomori* "simply gained approval of society and freely walks by itself".[4] He also explains that the name of the problem used in the psychiatric world is "Social Withdrawal" (*Shakaiteki Hikikomori*) or "Withdrawal without a Psychiatric Illness" (*Hiseishinbyōsei Hikikomori*).[5]

Tamaki Saitō, another Japanese psychiatrist and an expert on the *hikikomori* problem, defines it in the following way: "[…] *hikikomori* is a condition of seclusion where there is no social participation and it lasts at least six months (social participation is defined as attending school, going to work or sustaining close relationships with people from outside of the person's family). There is rather no possibility that a mental disease is the major reason of the problem".[6]

Tatsushi Ogino defines *hikikomori* as "people who typically withdraw from most social activities and retreat into their living spaces or rooms for a long time, though their family cannot

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[2] Isobe, U., (2004), p. 27. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

[3] Isobe, U., (2004), p. 27.

[4] Isobe, U., (2004), p. 20.

[5] Isobe, U., (2004), p. 20.

[6] Saitō T., (2002), p. 22-23. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

understand the reasons".[7] The Japanese term is usually translated into English as "social withdrawal" although based on Hanaoka's and Kondō's work, Ogino argues that since "*Hikikomori* in Japan is defined as a state that is not caused by some mental illness […], it should be distinguished from 'social withdrawal,' which usually indicates a state caused by schizophrenia in English".[8] Therefore, he calls the phenomenon – *hikikomori* and people experiencing it – *hikikomorians*.[9]

Naoki Ogi, chief of the privately run Centre for Clinical Research on School Development, defines *hikikomori* as a "situation in which people age 15 or older withdraw to their parents' homes for periods of more than six months due to reasons other than mental disorders, and are unable to participate in social activities".[10] Tadashi Yamazoe also points out that the state applies to youth more than 15 years old who graduated from junior high school, and therefore accomplished the mandatory nine years of schooling. He explains that otherwise this problem would be called school refusal (*futōkō*).[11]

A group of psychiatrists which I will refer to as Suwa's group,[12] and who conducted research on the influence of family factors on the social withdrawal, points out that "social withdrawal

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[7] Ogino, T., (2004), p. 120.

[8] Ogino, T., (2004), p. 120.

[9] Since the English term for *hikikomori* - social withdrawal - is very widespread and any other interpretation of this word is its ironic reflection ["family hermits" – Lewis, L., (2004, November 11), "bedroom hermits" – Ryall, J., (2003, August 3)], I have decided to use it in this work.

[10] Clifford, T., (2002, June 10).

[11] Yamazoe, T., (1999), p. 60. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

[12] Mami Suwa, Kunifumi Suzuki, Koichi Nara, Hisashi Watanabe and Toshihiko Takahashi comprise the research group.

[…] is not a name of a disease but rather a term to indicate a condition involving problem behaviors." They argue that *hikikomori* may cover a spectrum of various psychiatric diseases and include aspects of, for example, schizophrenia, affective disorder, obsessive-compulsive neurosis, anxiety neurosis, eating disorders, pervasive developmental disorders and personality disorders.[13]

The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in its guidelines on *hikikomori* support written in 2003 defines socially withdrawn as people who seclude themselves in houses, can not or do not want to interact with society through attending school or working, and is a condition that lasts more than six months. According to the Ministry, these characteristics exclude schizophrenic patients or others who have a disease from the mental illness sphere as well as those who are in condition more severe than a moderate mental disability.[14]

The Ministry, as well as Isobe and Saitō, indicate that seclusion which lasts at least six months is one of the decisive factors used to categorize someone as *hikikomori*. However, only Saitō gives an explanation of why this time period is a necessary condition. He explains, based on the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - Fourth Edition (DSM IV), that six months of observation is a minimum to avoid diagnosing a problem as a mental problem and in order to not apply any methods of treatment earlier than is necessary. Another reason why Saitō sets the minimum of six months as one of the criteria is to let parents observe their offspring, prevent them from reaching untimely conclusions and, as a result, overreacting.[15]

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[13] Suwa, M. et al., (2003), p. 586.

[14] Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. (2003), p. 115-116. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

[15] Saitō T., (2002), p. 23-24.

Based on the commonalities found in the definitions above, for this study I will define as *hikikomori* those who seclude themselves in houses for at least six months, refuse to sustain any forms of contact with the outside world (they do not attend school or work and at the same time have no relationships with people from outside of the closest family) and who are not diagnosed with any psychiatric disorder. Therefore, I will not include in my discussion those cases of *hikikomori* which are caused by or associated with a diagnosed mental disease. In contrast to other authors who placed age limitations on the phenomenon, I will classify as *hikikomori* people of any age.[16]

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[16] Unlike Yamazoe, who considers school refusal to be *a form* of *hikikomori* of people younger than 15 years old, I think that school refusal may be *one of the characteristics* of *hikikomori*. A definition of school refusal introduced by the Japanese Ministry of Education explains this stand. It suggests that the only aspect of *futōkō* children's lives that is absent is school attendance (see the definition below*). The Ministry does not define school refusal as non-attendance combined with breaking all forms of contact with any people from outside of school or even people from school. Therefore, in the case of *futōkō* children, the condition of "no relationships with non-family members" may be not met and so these children cannot be considered *hikikomori* simply based on the fact that they do not attend school.

*The Ministry defines children who refuse to go to school as those who do not attend school or cannot attend school even if they want to, for a period of time longer than 30 days. This situation may have a psychological, psychiatric or physical background. The definition excludes those children who do not attend school due to sickness or economic conditions. This definition has been in place since 1998.

Source: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/public/2003/03041108.htm and https://sslvpn.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/auth/common.cgi,DanaInfo=na.jkn21.com+?CONFFILENAME=common.conf.jkc_user&TEMPLATE=wood_gendai.html&ExternalFlag=1&Search_Ext_Type=DicX&Search_From=0&Key=0000441006020016

1.2   DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

In this section, I will provide a review of the available demographic data in order to present the state of the phenomenon in Japan today. Since *hikikomori* is an underreported phenomenon, current estimates of the number of people involved are unreliable. Further complicating the problem, parents or family members of the sufferers do not know how to search for help and who to turn to, or only sporadically turn to mental health centers, counseling centers or similar institutions. Sometimes, parents ignore the problem as well. They hope that their child will grow out of it or do not want to attract neighbors' attention by creating any form of commotion around their family. This may be related to the social stigma attached to shame in the Japanese society.

In a report of the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare published in 2000[17] Isobe points out that the number of cases reported to health centers was more than 6,000.[18] In another study conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2002, there were only 3,293 cases reported in 61 mental health welfare centers and 582 health centers.[19] The Ministry

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[17] Isobe, U., (2004), p. 106.

[18] The gap between the value of 6,000 and the estimate of one million mentioned earlier is very large. The latter, however, is usually given in newspaper articles in which the authors do not mention their source of information. Scholars point to it only in an attempt to measure the degree of underreporting shown further in this section. Therefore, the reason behind the discrepancy is not clear. It is possible, however, that the difference exists because media base the number on scholarly suppositions. At the same time, the Ministry's research is the only attempt to count *hikikomori* on the national scale.

[19] The Ministry published the results of this research in 2003 as *Guidelines on Regional Mental Health Activities Regarding Socially Withdrawn, with Special Attention to Teenagers and Twenty-Year-Olds. How to Care and Help in Municipalities' Mental Health Welfare Centers and Health Care Centers?*

did not explain the decrease in the number of socially withdrawn. Authors of articles on *hikikomori* did not speculate about the explanation of the decline either, so the reasons behind it are not clear. In the latter report of the Ministry, males comprised 76.9% of all cases, and the average age was 26.7 years old. The age group of 25-29 year olds comprised 23.1% of *hikikomori*, and so those who are between 19 and 29 years old comprised 52.1% of all sufferers.[20]

Research conducted in Oita prefecture between 2002 and 2004 by Hiroko Okuma at the Oita Mental Health Welfare Center which included 211 people identified as *hikikomori* found similar results. Males comprised 69% (145) and females 31% (66). The average age of *hikikomori* was 26.2 years old. Most of them (37%) were in their twenties and 31% were over 30 years old. 50% of these 211 people had been withdrawn for less than 5 years, 29% for 5-9 years, 12% for 10-14 years, 4% for 15-19 years and 4% for more than 20 years.[21]

A large study conducted by Takahashi Takahata in Saitama prefecture in 2001 included 450 institutions such as counselling centers, mental hospitals and clinics. It also showed similar proportions to the studies mentioned above. Males comprised 79.5% of all *hikikomori*, females only 20.5%. The average age was 22 years old. From these studies it is clear that there are two tendencies among *hikikomori*: they are predominantly in their twenties and male. The sufferers secluded themselves on average for 4.8 years; 20.5% of cases secluded themselves for 1 year, more than half of cases for 3 years and 14.2% of cases for more than 10 years.[22]

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[20] Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, (2003), p. 135.

[21] Okuma H., (2005), p.196-198. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

[22] Takahata T., (2003), p. 300. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

It is important to explain why the numbers of male *hikikomori* are higher than female. The interpretation by Tamaki Saitō, which I will provide below, is the most detailed in the literature I found. Other sources give similar but simplified statements such as the one in Ryall's article, where the author writes that the reason is a pressure put specifically on men in Japan - pressure to be wise, work hard and earn money.[23] This reasoning, however, does not explain the specifics of Japanese culture which are described by Saitō.[24] He writes that since Japanese society still has not eradicated male chauvinism, it is prone to exerting more pressure on men, rather than women in terms of social participation, especially through expectations toward men's education and job. However, the author notices that there is also a great pressure put on women, such as entering their husband's family as a housewife, when it does not even matter whether it is what the females want. Saitō introduces an interesting question when he wonders if, given the circumstances, there should not be more women among *hikikomori*. However, he also explains that the higher number of men among the socially withdrawn comes from a significant fear of failure on the field of social participation, that is succeeding academically and obtaining a good job. The mechanism is understandable – the higher the expectations concerning social participation toward a boy/man, the stronger the fear of failure becomes. On the other hand, the pressure related to social participation is relatively low in the case of women. The presumption of society is that they work at home and so the expectations for social participation differ greatly. Saitō elaborates on this idea providing an example of *rōnin* – high school graduates preparing for another chance to enter a university after failing entrance exams.[25] The family of a male expects

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[23] Ryall, J., (2004, May 31).

[24] Saitō, T., (2002), p. 31-33.

[25] The original meaning of the word *rōnin* is a samurai without a master

him to continue his efforts until he is admitted to the university that he (sometimes his family) has dreamt of, even though he would have to take entrance exams repeatedly.[26] The male is encouraged to not give up despite what it may cost him to be a *rōnin*. However, this is not the case when a woman attempts to enter a university. If she fails the entrance exams once, her family will not allow her a few years of being a *rōnin* and it is advantageous for her to return to "her place," that is either go to a technical college or practice in the family profession while helping at home. The reasoning behind it is that a female without any disturbances in her past is more desirable than a female with good education. Only a "clean record" would make her a better candidate for wife. Saitō writes that there are only two choices as long as females are concerned: "undisturbed record of social participation or social withdrawal as a pet daughter".[27] Thus, the alternatives for women are limited but at the same time less is forgiven of them. On the other hand, a family and society is ready to forgive more to a male but this comes at a price of high expectations toward him. According to Saitō, this situation causes stress among males and make them prone to withdrawal which, in turn, contributes to the fact that there are more men than women among *hikikomori*.

Saitō's explanation concerning the proportions of males and females among socially withdrawn as well as data provided by scholars mentioned earlier that pointed to numbers of *hikikomori* were based on reported cases. To investigate the reliability of this data, Ogi and Kaneyoshi have attempted to measure the degree of underreporting. In a public survey on *hikikomori* in 2001, Naoki Ogi surveyed 2,934 people and found out that 3% had had a case of

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[26] Entering the best university is important since it influences the job and social status one will have after the graduation. I will describe this relationship in details later in my work.

[27] Saitō T., (2002), p. 33.

hikikomori in their family. According to Ogi, estimate number of the sufferers was 800,000-1,400,000, much greater than in other studies which only included reported cases.[28] Furthermore, in Kiyoshi Kaneyoshi's research in Mie prefecture, 16 out of 1,420 persons admitted that their children had experienced *hikikomori*. Extrapolating from this sample, Kaneyoshi estimates around 1,000,000 *hikikomori* in Japan.[29] Both of these studies underscore the need to view *hikikomori* as a widespread phenomenon which may be underappreciated. In the next section I will show that the phenomenon may even extend to other countries and cultures.

1.3   THE INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON OF *HIKIKOMORI*

Although some newspaper accounts often point out that social withdrawal is "peculiarly Japanese,"[30] others dispute this claim. Indeed the problem seems to exist also in Taiwan, South Korea[31] and Hong Kong.[32] For example, *South China Morning Post* describes some cases of people between ages 15-17 who are unable to cope with the outside world. According to the HKG Christian Service, an organization helping *hikikomori* in Hong Kong, withdrawal seems to be precipitated by failure at school, in the job market, or a fear of failures. Some of the sufferers

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[28] Saitō T., (2002), p. 57. A detailed explanation on the method of calculation is not stated.

[29] Saitō T., (2002), p. 57. Similarly, a detailed explanation on the method of calculation is not stated.

[30] Parry, R. L., (2004, January 31).

[31] Jones, M., (2006, January 15). I also found information on two Japanese scholarly publications on Korean cases of *hikikomori*. However, their content was not available to me.

[32] *South China Morning Post* (2005, October 5), "Teen Hermits Are a Growing Concern for Hong Kong Parents."

had been bullied at school or had no support for their interests and career plans from their parents. According to this report, there are about 6,000 socially withdrawn people in Hong Kong, out of a population of over 7,000,000 people.

Sakamoto's case study from Oman in the Middle East suggests that the social environment present in Oman also reinforces behavior leading to *hikikomori*. In collectivist societies like Japan and Oman, individuals are pressured to conform and in this environment "individuals submerge their own wishes and may detach from their authentic selves".[33] Authors of the study on Oman also argue that language complexity may be another cause of the problem since it may bring "a fear of being misunderstood during social discourse".[34] They refer to studies which showed a linkeage of "languages having a tendency for ambiguity and a preoccupation with shame and fear" which may cause withdrawal.[35] The study by Sakamoto, however, does not elaborate on the connection between languages and social behavior. Since I have not found any works which could confirm this relationship, here I simply point out that there are scholarly voices which have been concerned with this issue. Nonetheless, I will not discuss it in my thesis due to the lack of sufficient evidence.

The *hikikomori* problem has also been observed in the United Kingdom. Its presence came to light after the BBC broadcast a documentary on Japanese *hikikomori*. Many comments appeared on the television website of this program. One third of the comments (13 out of 39)[36] were posted by British parents whose children had a condition seemingly similar to the one of

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[33] Sakamoto N., et al., (2005), p. 194.

[34] Sakamoto N., et al., (2005), p. 196.

[35] Sakamoto N., et al., (2005), p. 196.

[36] BBC, (2002, October 20).

Japanese *hikikomori*. The parents' descriptions disclosed the following parallels: seclusion in a room for an extended period of time, watching TV or playing video games, having no friends, sometimes no contact with the family, no job, not attending school.[37]

The above examples show that the phenomenon of *hikikomori* is likely an international one and not limited only to Japan.

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[37] BBC, (2002, October 20).

2.0   RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

This thesis attempts to answer two questions. The first one asks: are causal explanations of the *hikikomori* problem, especially those involving multiple causes, contradictory to each other? I argue that different explanations provided by public media and institutional scholars are not actually in conflict. Although these accounts sometimes seem to be contradictory, they are not mutually exclusive due to interconnections between them. Answering this question helps understand why there are so many explanations of the *hikikomori* phenomenon and how they may be interconnected.

The second question I address asks: is *hikikomori* a form of resistance against the social order in Japan? I argue that such behavior, as extreme as it is, may be a passive form of opposition originating from within Japanese culture. This argument will help understand why *hikikomori* do not decide to choose an active form of resistance. To the best of my knowledge, the two abovementioned questions have not been previously raised and so there is limited relevant literature to draw on for my discussion.

There are three types of literature that are relevant to making sense of the *hikikomori* phenomenon, and the diversity of accounts about them. Firstly, I will discuss the literature on surveillance developed by Foucault, Holden and Komiya. Secondly, I will refer to studies on resistance and conflict management in society, developed by Lock, Eisenstadt, Lebra and Long.

Finally, I will discuss the limited literature on discourses of social problems in Japan by Yoneyama, Hashimoto and Honda, et al.

Michel Foucault's writings develop the concept of discourse which is a "juncture, a point at which knowledge and power meet".[38] Power and knowledge, in turn, offer the substance to Foucault's works. His thinking, which he refers to in his *Discipline and Punish. Birth of the Prison*, is based on the idea that knowledge gives power and this notion is present throughout the philosopher's studies. This concept is important to my study not only because the author uses the abovementioned form of discourse but also because he calls attention to an 18th century concept of Jeremy Bentham - Panopticon. Panopticon was designed by Bentham as a prison shaped as a perimeter building in the form of a ring with a tower in the center and with windows on both sides. This way, an overseer placed in the tower could watch all prisoners thanks to the daylight passing through the glass of cells placed on two opposite walls. By the same token, all prisoners could have been watched at any time without even knowing it.

Foucault elaborates on the idea of Panopticon in his discussion with Barou and Perrot, introducing the concept of an "overseeing gaze." He analyzes it as a source of power given to those who survey and who evaluate one's actions. Thus, the agents of surveillance and assessment become the agents of the gaze. Their presence in a society may be noticeable in at least two forms: media and society itself. I will explain this notion using the example of Japan and the phenomenon of *hikikomori*. However, it is important to note that media and society of any country can be interpreted as advocates of surveillance.

The Japanese media participate, to a great degree, in polemics surrounding the causes of *hikikomori*. They may easily survey people's minds, shape their opinion on the phenomenon and,

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[38] Lemert, C.C., (1982), p.62.

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having such power, become agents of the gaze. Media can achieve this goal through their sensationalizing, generalizing and simplifying approach to introducing the problem, which I will discuss later in my work. Therefore, the power of media lies in reaching a wide audience and introducing superficial explanations. Their communication of cursory facts on social withdrawal makes understanding them easier than facts offered by scholarly publications, and so media can influence people's minds without difficulty. This happens also because information presented by media is more easily accessible than academic articles and the audience is more willing to reach for it than for intellectual volumes. Having these tools, media may stigmatize people and problems, such as *hikikomori*. Therefore, they become an instrument for problematizing "deviant" youth, such as the socially withdrawn; they become the gaze's agent in the form of an institution.

In contrast, the power of the other agent, society, comes from, as Foucault puts it, transparency.[39] This idea applies where informal social control induces conformity, which is relevant to my discussion on compliance in the Japanese society. In Japan, power is exercised by society and is exerted through society's own "universal visibility" and "collective, anonymous and overseeing gaze".[40] Foucault points out that under the weight of the inspecting gaze each individual will become "his own overseer […] exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself".[41] Both Bentham's idea, as well as Foucault's interpretation of social control based on it, resemble the concept George Orwell used in his novel *1984*: members of an authoritarian society living not only under the eye of the Big Brother but also being carefully watched by

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[39] Foucault, M., (1980), p. 154.

[40] Foucault, M., (1980), p. 152, 154.

[41] Foucault, M., (1980), p. 155.

everyone around. This system of surveillance was designed to prevent even the possibility of wrong-doing. As Foucault indicates, it was designed to work by "immersing people in a field of total visibility where the opinion, observation and discourse of others would restrain them from harmful acts".[42] Therefore, the omnipresent observation would repress any "wrong-doing."

The concepts of overseeing gaze and power through transparency which I presented above are related to compliance in the Japanese society. Thus, I will use in my study the idea of Panopticon and Foucault's discourse of the "eye of power," as a ground for the discourse of conformity being a cause of the *hikikomori* problem. However, applying the Western philosophy of Foucault or the Orwellian vision of a totalitarian society to Japan may not seem very convincing by itself. Therefore, it is important to introduce studies of surveillance done on Japan, such as the works by Holden and Komiya. Holden, in his article "Surveillance: Japan's Sustaining Principle," writes: "Surveillance exerts a powerful hold on Japanese society. It emerges from a village consciousness, an atmosphere in which prying into the inner world of all group participants is tolerated, even encouraged[43]." The author based his study on interviews and popular literature, among others. He interviewed Japanese young people who came to the United States to study. They asserted that "America was a refuge from preying eyes," an escape from scrutiny and a feeling of being constantly observed.[44] These records of individuals are an important evidence showing that surveillance is a feature of Japanese society.

In his analysis of literature in Japan, Holden also points to the "village" or "group consciousness" and shows that scrutiny is present among Japanese, at least in the perception of

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[42] Foucault, M., (1980), p. 153 and 154.

[43] Holden, T. J. M., (1994), p. 206.

[44] Holden, T. J. M., (1994), p. 193.

the authors of the prose. For example, in one of the works that Holden discusses, "Obasute" by Inoue, a family is introduced in which every member attempts to isolate him/herself from the rest of society.[45] The value they seek is independence from the group, the others, the "gazing eye." Holden also mentions authors such as Kobo Abe and Edogawa Rampo whose characters attempt to "experience, cultivate and defend the hidden regions that service the individual".[46] Holden confirms this trend in Japanese literature by referring to Reischauer's comments: "[…] since the turn of the century Japanese fiction has been marked by a search for self-identity. […] one can read these texts as declarations of the individual confronted by surveillance".[47] Next, Holden points out that the trend to manifest one's own identity became present not only in the literature, but also in daily life and gives as an example young people trying to express themselves through their hairstyle or clothing – elements commonly seen as overt tools of self-expression in Western countries but renewed in Japan only recently[48].

Holden also stresses the tribal or collective character of Japanese society citing Reischauer, Christopher, Hofheinz and Calder. Then, he writes that Japanese contextualize their activities in the framework of the group culture because this is how their acts achieve meaning. To support this statement, the author quotes Kyogoku, who speaks of:

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[45] Inoue, Y., "Obasute," in *The Izu Dancer and Other Stories*. Charles E. Tuttle Co. Tokyo (1965)

[46] Holden, T. J. M., (1994), p. 205. Abe, K., *The Box Man*. Charles E. Tuttle Co. Tokyo (1974); Abe, K. "Friends," in *Contemporary Japanese Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Film and Other Writing Since 1945*. Ed. Howard Hibbett. E. Tuttle Co. Tokyo (1978); Abe, K., *The Ruined Map*. E. Tuttle Co. Tokyo. (1970); Rampo, E., *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. E. Tuttle Co. Tokyo (1956).

[47] Holden, T. J. M., (1994), p. 205.

[48] The elements of hairstyle and clothing as characteristics of one's identity manifestation also existed in Edo period (1600-1868) in merchant and craftsmen culture.

" 'pressure to uniformity,' which produces people who see things alike, who strive to be 'common and mediocre,' who follow the rule of remaining socially inconspicuous, who keep in mind at all times how their acts will articulate with the goals and the stability of the collective".[49]

This stability can be achieved, according to Holden, through surveillance. Self-monitoring becomes the other important tool for harmony maintenance because "developing a sensitivity of others is essential in a compacted, conflict-aversive culture".[50] Surveillance and self-consciousness which originates from the former, serve a higher goal, that is collective stability and therefore, as Holden puts it, "surveillance can be said to serve as one of the society's sustaining principles".[51]

The work of Holden complements Foucault's theory, as the former discusses aspects of Japanese society specifically. However, one potential criticism of Holden's work is that he provides an outside perspective as a non-Japanese scholar. Therefore, introducing a study by Komiya, a former Research Officer of the Ministry of Justice of Japan is helpful in presenting the perspective of a native scholar. The author argues that the existence of locality-based groups in Japan may restrain individuals from committing a crime. I will use his study to provide evidence for the presence of surveillance in Japan.

In his article, Komiya focuses on cultural aspects of the explanation of Japan's low crime rate and starts with defining such terms as *uchi* and *yoso*:

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[49] Holden, T. J. M., (1994), p. 200.

[50] Holden, T., J., M., (1994), p. 203. I will explain the aspect of "aversion to conflict" later in my work, while introducing the issue of conflict management as it relates to resistance in Japan.

[51] Holden, T., J., M., (1994), p. 206.

"*Uchi* is related to the Japanese perception of the social environment, which can be depicted as two concentric circles. The inner circle can be termed as *uchi* (home) and the outer circle can be termed as *yoso* (elsewhere). […] In one's *uchi* world (inner circle), human relationships are so intimate that one can presume that there is no opposition between people and that they can therefore count on one another. […] *uchi* relationships are not regulated by universalistic standards, legally binding rights and duties, which are considered a prerequisite for modern nations in the West".[52]

In the *uchi* world there are no clearly stated standards but there have to be instruments, just like in any other heterogeneous group, by which stability of the group could be maintained. Holden would say that the "stability of collective" has to be maintained.

Komiya characterizes *uchi* groups as having a vertical, hierarchical order and therefore, as being not under the "rule of law," but under the "rule of seniors." The rules serve as an element enforcing this same vertical order, unlike in the West, where rules are used to maintain the horizontal order.[53] This difference, according to the author, is reflected in the quality of social control and could explain the low crime rate in Japan. Social control, in turn, is closely related to self-control, where one must submit oneself to seniors. This type of conformity is supported by collective interference and surveillance.[54] Group members monitor the reactions of others around them and the former tolerate this informal social control because in return they are cared for by their group. Self-discipline is, therefore, considered the strongest weapon for

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[52] Komiya, N., (1999), p. 379.

[53] Komiya, N., (1999), p. 380.

[54] Komiya, N., (1999), p. 381. Komiya points out that the *uchi* type group often includes people who interfere with other's matters and tell non-conformists how to behave. The group members often participate in activities which assure the group's conformity (assemblies at schools and in companies, where seniors remind the rest of the rules of that particular group).

survival in the *uchi* world. As Komiya writes, the process of learning its value is a phase of socialization, where family, school and company are the phase's main agencies.[55]

The concern for and importance of being cared about by others prevents crime because those who commit it will be exiled from their group and therefore, there will be no one to take care of them in their *uchi* world. On the other hand, the *uchi* world can also prevent crime because it is "small enough to tighten up informal social control and collective surveillance".[56]

Komiya's work shows that locality-based group formation causes a sense of security, and repressive rules (informal social control) binding people from these groups produce high self-control in Japan and may restrain individuals from committing a crime. Thus, the study provides an elaborate example of the way in which surveillance exerts influence in Japanese society's everyday life. Although Komiya's article recognizes some positive consequences of the gaze in Japan, such as low crime rate, the texts in my data set show that surveillance may also bring negative results. Therefore, the perspective of authors, whose publications I use, on social control in Japan is closer to Foucault and Holden's works. Taken together, however, the writings of Foucault, Holden and Komiya provide a background for my arguments on the relationship between conformity and *hikikomori.*

In addition to the literature regarding surveillance and laying ground for the discourse of conformity being a cause of the *hikikomori* problem, there is a second type of publications concerning resistance and conflict management which will also become a basis for my discussion. In the thesis, I argue that social withdrawal is a form of resistance against society and its norms. This concept of opposition is closely related to Foucault's ideas. In his discourse, he

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[55] Komiya, N., (1999), p. 381-382.

[56] Komiya, N., (1999), p. 385.

points out that Bentham's notion of Panopticon is utopian since there is no power that would be constantly victorious and would not have to face some form of opposition.[57]

In my work, I also contend that *hikikomori* as a form of resistance may be a manifestation of conflict management in Japan. I will begin with Margaret Lock's characterization of resistance in Japan who argues that Japanese forms of resistance aim at letting the hostile parties know that they abused their power. The protesting party resists by performing quiet but persistent acts that are designed to make the difference. If the acts are not noticed, the hurt party becomes frustrated with being both abused and ignored. This may result in an explosion of anger and may be followed by withdrawal or suicide.[58] Lock discusses the main types of resistance distinguished by Kazuko Tsurumi: "ritualism" and "retreatism".[59] Within ritualism Lock determines two types of resistance:

"orderly conflict which is acting out resistance in a predictable manner often implicitly expected and accepted by the opponent (national unions threatening to go on strike every spring); and a dramatic-self sacrifice which is a demonstration of the sincerity of purpose and the purity of motives even though an individual's goals are unattainable (a suicide)".[60]

Ritualism is defined by Lock as external conformism combined with internal non-conformism, while retreatism is voluntary separation from community.

Eisenstadt cites Koschmann, who expresses a similar opinion on resistance in Japan: "[…] authority usually [has] been resisted either by separating oneself from the community,

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[57] Foucault, M., (1980), p. 162 and 163.

[58] Lock, M., (1993), p. 242.

[59] Lock, M., (1993), p. 240.

[60] Lock, M., (1993), p. 242.

'retreatism', or by private dissent but outward obedience, 'ritualistic conformity' ".[61] Eisenstadt mentions these aspects of resistance, while discussing patterns of conflict and conflict resolution in Japan. He writes about harmony and group consensus in the context of conflict. Again, citing Koschmann, Eisenstadt points out that "conflict came to be denied in the name of group unity, and conciliation was the preferred means of conflict resolution".[62] Therefore, conflict denial became the way of conflict resolution.

This way of settling a dispute needs to be explained in the context of modes of control in Japan. Eisenstadt suggests that the Japanese methods of control involve group commitment, harmony and group or network obligations. They are important, since they are linked to cohesion within and among groups and these characteristics "enabled the leaders of these groups to enforce their self-made laws and impose sanctions on transgressive members".[63] Finally, Eisenstadt points out that harmony and consensus, which he connects to the ways of control in Japan, may become effective in a process of conflict resolution.[64]

Eisenstadt, however, is only one of the scholars who indicate the importance of harmony in interpersonal relations. Another one is Takie Lebra who writes: "It is not that Japanese never risk confrontations but that, as long as harmony, or the appearance of harmony, is to be maintained, nonconfrontational modes must be exhausted first".[65] She also distinguishes several types of conflict management, and "negative communication" is one of them. Negative

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[61] Eisenstadt, S.N. and Ben-Ari, E. (1990), p. 15.

[62] Eisenstadt, S.N. and Ben-Ari, E. (1990), p. 15.

[63] Eisenstadt, S.N. and Ben-Ari, E. (1990), p. 24-25.

[64] Eisenstadt, S.N. and Ben-Ari, E. (1990), p. 31.

[65] Lebra, T., (1984), p. 42.

communication of an offended person is, a "non-communication," that is, avoiding the "offender," whether by not seeing him/her or, once confronted, by not responding. According to Lebra, this way of acting is a form of conveying the other party one's own hurt feelings.[66] Therefore, as the author indicates, conflict management does not have to be equal to a resolution of conflict.[67] It seems, then, that in Japan, conflict avoidance may be an equivalent of conflict management which two parties cope with by negative communication.

Long points to a similar reasoning. Examples which she uses suggest that it is not necessary to solve a problem, as long as sides of the conflict can avoid it in a harmonious way. The author discusses the concept of conflict avoidance in the context of nurturing in Japan, and points out that anger and confrontation are "[…] antithetical to good caregiving".[68] She writes about a woman taking care of her grand-mother by herself, without any help from her husband or daughter, which was making her exhausted:

> "This woman saw her role as family caregiver, meeting the needs of her daughter for quiet study time, her husband for rest at home, and her mother-in-law for supervision. Performing her role maintained the peace of the household. Despite her own exhaustion, this woman would not confront any of them with her own problems or consider asking them to compromise their needs to help her".[69]

Long stresses consensus as a priority in human relationships and indicates that anger, which comes from a conflict, may be viewed as disruptive to them. Thus, a non-confrontational way of dealing with a problem is a tool to maintain harmony.

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[66] Lebra, T., (1984), p. 42.

[67] Lebra, T., (1984), p. 56.

[68] Long, S. O., (1996), p. 162.

[69] Long, S. O., (1996), p. 162.

Although resistance in Japan was not limited to these two factors, the concepts of conflict avoidance and retreatism as a form of it will, therefore, lay ground to my discussion on whether *hikikomori* is a form of resistance.

At another level, there has been literature on discourses of social problems in Japan. A work by Shoko Yoneyama on discourses of school refusal (*futōkō* or *tōkōkyohi*) in Japan is the first study I will introduce. It examines four types of adult discourses: the psychiatric (*futōkō* as mental illness), the behavioral (*futōkō* as laziness), citizens' (*futōkō* as resistance to school), the socio-medical (*futōkō* as psychical and psychological burnout), and the student discourse based on their own accounts. Yoneyama argues that school refusal is a process in which students try to empower themselves in their search for their true personality. The author claims that secondary schools, in particular, socialize children and tame their individuality, applying all-encompassing mechanisms of social control, which silence them and result in an extremely high level of conformity.[70] Yoneyama points to sociological surveys on secondary schools[71], where the largest numbers of *futōkō* children are, which suggest that 70% of junior high school students indicate they are "fed up with school" but "force themselves to go to school".[72]

In the first of the adult discourses (*futōkō* as mental illness), Yoneyama notes that school refusal is perceived as an individual's maladjustment to society. Since it is the young person who is expected to adjust, the school environment is excluded from the analysis. Similarly, the second discourse (*futōkō* as laziness) indicates that the individual is at fault, but here scholars do not

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[70] Yoneyama, S. (2000), p. 80.

[71] Yoneyama, S. (2000), p. 79. The author cites the following surveys: Inamura, H., (1994), Morita, Y., (1991), Okuchi, K. (1992), Yokoyu, S., (1992).

[72] Yoneyama, S. (2000), p. 79.

regard school refusal as a mental illness, but rather as a deviant behavior. The discourse of *futōkō* as resistance does not consider school refusal to be a mental illness either but it does not point to individuals as elements holding responsibility for the condition. Representatives of this discourse assign the blame to the schooling system and indicate a necessity to change it, rather than making students adjust to it. The fourth discourse (*futōkō* as physical and psychological burnout) agrees that the cause of school refusal lies in the structure of education, not in any quality of students. However, this discourse favors an opinion that students suffer from a physical disorder originating in the "school society." Finally, the student discourse speaks of school refusal as a process, which involves physical changes and perceptions of the self and school. According to Yoneyama, school non-attendance becomes to students an opportunity to reconstruct their identity, which is often different from the identity prepared by society. The process of reconstruction usually ends with a discovery of selfhood and a sense of empowerment, not with the students' ability to fulfill their expected social role.

On the other hand, Akiko Hashimoto discusses disempowerment of youth in a discourse of filial piety, and social problems of youth in Japan (*hikikomori* being one of them) as a reaction to it. She describes filial piety as an "ongoing practice of surveillance and control that unlashes considerable disciplinary power,"[73] resulting in obedient children. The author identifies three accounts that sanction disempowerment: the sacrificial mother, the hard-working father, and the gazing ancestor. The narratives concern a concept of debt for the sacrifice the mother made in taking care of the house and family; the sacrifice of the father for striving to provide for his dependent family, and the sacrifice of ancestors for the gift of the successors' existence. Hashimoto argues that these narratives reproduce conformist children. She suggests that social

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[73] Hashimoto, A. (2004), p. 182.

problems of youth originate in concepts of filial piety and are a form of resistance against discipline and subordination. Filial piety reduces the power of youth, as the author points out, and leads to a parental abuse of power. Therefore, the discourse of filial piety shifts attention from explaining social problems in Japan by discussing technology development and educational system only, to parent-child relationships as well.

The last work which is relevant to my thesis in the context of discourses of social problems in Japan is a work of Yuki Honda, Asao Naitō and Kazutomo Gotō *Don't Call Me 'NEET'!*[74] Although their object of the study is not directly pertinent to mine, it touches upon the discourses of discrepancies in the image of NEET youth in media, scholarly sources and empirical reality.

The literature on discourses provides an introduction to my thesis by illustrating that social problems in Japan, especially these related to youth, have become an issue of concern for scholars. Scholars often point out that young people should not always be blamed for their non-compliance, which Japanese society perceives as deviant behavior, but rather that various elements of the society in which adolescents live are also at fault. Therefore, the discourse literature, together with writings on the social gaze, resistance and conflict management, become an explanatory ground for my further discussion on the phenomenon of *hikikomori*.

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[74] NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training; *Niito-tte Iu-na!* (2006). Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

3.0   DATA AND METHODS

In order to examine the research questions I have outlined in Section 2, I have collected a dataset of 52 articles and books on *hikikomori.* Below I will describe the data, method of collection, and method of analysis.

3.1   DATA

The publications comprising my dataset are drawn from the fields of Asian affairs, psychology, psychiatry, education and sociology as well as the media. Internet websites were also a supplementary source of data. I scanned websites of ministries, non-governmental organizations, Japanese national television as well as an internet chat room dedicated to *hikikomori* sufferers.

In my search, all publications matching the keyword *hikikomori* were considered. In total, I located approximately 70 newspaper articles on *hikikomori* (both in English and Japanese); 35 scholarly articles (mostly from the psychology field and in Japanese), and about 40 books which describe *hikikomori* (all in Japanese). Not all of these sources were available for review in Pittsburgh. Also, I selected for my study only these publications which mention possible causes of the phenomenon. As a result, my sample of texts analyzed for this study consisted of 52 articles: 16 press articles, 9 scholarly publications (from outside of Japan); 8 press articles, 19 scholarly publications (from Japan) (Table 1).

Table 1: Data of the study by types of publications

Media articles published outside of Japan	Media articles published in Japan	Scholarly publications from outside of Japan	Scholarly publications from Japan	**TOTAL**
16	8	9	19	**52**

Press articles were published between May 2000 and December 2004 in some of the biggest global newspapers (*The Independent, The Scotsman, The Times, The Australian, The Zeit, The Observer, The Japan Times, The Daily Yomiuri, The Asahi Shinbun*), high-circulation magazines (*Time, Newsweek, The Nikkei Weekly*), on television websites (BBC, English Aljazeera), and on news agency websites (Kyōdō News). The origins of these articles are very diverse. They come from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Qatar, Japan and Australia. Therefore, this choice of publications makes it possible to have a better idea about what has been written on *hikikomori* throughout the world. The data set includes full-length and brief articles where the author's name is not always given. Some of them tend to describe the phenomenon in general terms pointing to potential causes of the problem or citing opinions of specialists and those who help the socially withdrawn. Other articles concentrate on describing cases of several individuals and institutions helping them.

Scholarly publications consist of books and articles published between 1999 and 2006. Articles written by scholars appeared in press (*The New York Times, The Gazette*) as well as in multiple Japanese and foreign academic journals. Some of the scholarly publications are concerned with problems among Japanese children or youth and discuss *hikikomori* as one of them. Other publications focus on case studies (mostly from the psychiatry field) of social withdrawal, explanations of the causes or methods of helping the sufferers. The length of articles

varies from one paragraph (case studies) to multiple pages. For a complete list of publications in the data set see Appendix A.

I obtained some sources directly from Japan by mail; however, most of the sources, and information about them, were obtained from online databases at the University of Pittsburgh. I gathered the data between September 2005 and February 2006 by searching both English and Japanese databases. The latter turned out to give different results depending on whether I typed the keyword in the Japanese or English interface of the databases. To obtain the largest possible set of data I entered the word "*hikikomori*" or "social withdrawal [and] Japan" using the English alphabet in English language sites. Next, in Japanese language sites, I typed the word "*hikikomori*" or "*shakaiteki hikikomori*" in Japanese. I did not limit the search to any time frame. I also looked for the data on the websites of two Japanese ministries (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as well as the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare) using both their Japanese and English interfaces and applying the search method explained above. I also searched the websites of major American (i.e. *The New York Times*) and Japanese (i.e. *The Asahi Shinbun*) newspapers. Once the articles were selected, I printed them in a text format or as a PDF file of the actual article.

3.2   METHODS

I classified the data set by four outlets of publication: press articles, scholarly, Japanese and foreign publications. Press articles include those published only by journalists in the press, as opposed to scholarly articles which include those published by scholars in both newspapers and academic journals. Scholarly publications also contain books written by scholars. Foreign

publications contain articles published outside of Japan, some of which were written by Japanese. On the other hand, Japanese publications include books and articles issued in Japan, and these include media articles that appeared in English language newspapers (i.e. *The Daily Yomiuri, The Japan Times, The Nikkei Weekly*) or news services (The Asahi News Service, The Kyōdo News Service), and thus were originally in English. In this group, however, all books and most scholarly articles were written in Japanese.

In each outlet of publication I derived causes of the *hikikomori* problem. I found their indicators in media among authors' assumptions and quotations of scholarly, ministerial and non-governmental organizations' opinions. Other indicators were present in scholarly publications (mostly as direct observations) as well as the Ministry and non-governmental organizations' reports. Then, I classified the 22 causes I had found into four categories: A – Society, B – School, C – Parents and D – Individual (Table 2). This way, having categories on a more general level and causes giving more detailed information on the onsets of *hikikomori*, I could later conduct a two-level analysis.

Table 2: Analytic classification of data

	CATEGORY OF CAUSES	CAUSES	number of causes
A	Society	Communication/weakness in relationships, insecurity, employment, conformity, shame, pressure, affluence/lack of motivation, general	8
B	School	Bullying (*ijime*), pressure, exam failure, school refusal (*futōkō*), general	5
C	Parents	Gender pressure, education pressure, interdependence, communication, absent father, child rearing/verbal abuse, education mama (*kyōiku mama)*, general	8
D	Individual	Psychological problem/disease	1
		TOTAL	22

Even though some of the terms I used among categories and causes are easy to understand, others may not be as clear. Therefore, I will provide a detailed explanation of each category below.

I assigned Category A – Society, to all factors related to the Japanese society to which authors pointed. This category consists of eight causes: communication/weakness in relationships, insecurities, employment, conformity, shame, pressure, affluence/lack of motivation, and general.

Bad communication/weakness in relationships, the first causal element in the category of Society, was presented as an element that is disintegrating Japan. The authors described these two flaws of contemporary societies as having particularly destructive impact on young people since they often result from advanced technology: computer games, cellular phones, etc. The technology, developed in Japan on the highest level, makes young people lose traditional social skills because it limits them to a "machine environment." According to some authors, the loss of communication skills may lead to social withdrawal.

Insecurity, as the next cause in Category A, is usually related to the economic crisis. It is most often mentioned as a potential cause of *hikikomori* without any further explanation.

Employment is the third cause classified as belonging to the Society Category. The authors mentioning employment as a cause of *hikikomori* point to the hardships of losing a job and difficulties of finding one due to economic stagnation or the changing system of future employees' evaluation, where attention is paid not to the university one graduated from (as it has been before), but to the actual skills of a person. Former graduates educated in the old system could count on a good job offer, regardless of what they specialized in and what skills they had,

as long as they graduated from one of the top universities in Japan. According to some authors, a change in this situation may push some of these graduates to resignation and seclusion.

Conformity, pressure and shame, which are also a part of the Category A, often appear almost next to each other and the authors seem to point to close relationships between them. Many journalists show the connection in the following way: a person who is not able to endure the pressure to comply, or does not want to comply with the rules of society, will lose face and bring shame on themselves and often also their own family. The shame may trigger withdrawal from society.

Scholars and journalists pointing to affluence/lack of motivation, the next cause of the phenomenon classified as an element of the A Category, suggested that material comfort may deprive people, especially young people, of their will to motivate themselves to constructive actions. The prosperity, therefore, makes youth lose any goals in their lives, which, in turn, takes away from them any incentive to even leave home, and so they become *hikikomori*.

The cause which I called "general," and which also belongs to the category of Society, refers to statements in publications which directly pointed to the Japanese society as a cause of the problem, but did not provide any further explanation.

Category B – School, consists of five causes related to the educational system in Japan: bullying (*ijime*), pressure, exam failure, school refusal (*futōkō*) and general. Bullying, as the first cause, relates to violence among peers at elementary or middle school level. According to some authors, it is usually used against those students who are different – weak, smart, etc., and who withdraw as a result of an intense and long lasting bullying.

Educational pressure, as the second cause of seclusion in the Category B, is described as a fault of the structure of schooling. High competition being a part of the entrance exams and

intense studying to prepare for them are very stressful factors. According to some authors, those who cannot or do not want to face this pressure become *hikikomori.*

Exam failure, the third cause belonging to the School category, may force those who fail to withdraw, even if they are ready to face the system of schooling. The authors indicate that exam failure as a cause of social withdrawal is a problem of those who tried to confront the educational system but were not successful and thus not accepted to the school or university they chose.

School refusal (*futōkō*), the fourth cause, is described mostly by journalists as an effect of either bullying or educational pressure.

The last cause called "general" refers to, as in the case of the Society category, statements which simply point out that the system of schooling is the causal factor in the *hikikomori* problem.

Category C – Parents, refers to eight causes of *hikikomori*: gender pressure, education pressure, interdependence, communication, absent father, child rearing/verbal abuse, education mama (*kyōiku mama)* and general.

Gender pressure is a cause of social withdrawal which authors refer to as the stress parents put on especially young men. Parents expect them, the oldest sons in particular, to be breadwinners of their own families but at the same time to stay with and take care of aging parents, which is a tradition in Asian countries. Boys are also expected to obtain a good education which would guarantee them a good job and respect. Therefore, gender pressure is somewhat related to education pressure, the second cause belonging to the Parents category. Education pressure is the one parents put on their children so that they succeed in a highly

competitive education system where entrance exams and ranking of school decide about one's future status and career.

Journalists and scholars mention interdependence, the third cause in the Parents category, as a factor coming from *amae* – indulgent dependency. *Amae* is an element of the parent-child relationship common in Japan, where living together is more important than leaving home. It can be observed in the relationship between mothers and children in particular.

Communication is another cause in the Parents category. Authors suggest its influence on the *hikikomori* problem, while explaining changes that took place in Japan and in the world in the last couple of decades. They suggest that technology development, changing social conditions etc. have an undeniable impact on people's lives. In particular, the authors point to egocentrism, constant lack of time, exaggerated dedication to work which originate in the higher pace of life, and affect emotional situation in families. These features of contemporary life weaken interpersonal relations and eventually break communication within families, especially between parents and children. Therefore, the cause of communication between parents and children is often mentioned next to the cause of absent father, which belongs to the same category. The authors write about working overtime fathers, who do not find enough quality time to spend with families.

Journalists and scholars refer to child rearing, another cause of social withdrawal in this category, while criticizing parental overprotection of children and ignoring children's problems.

Authors point to overprotectiveness also as an attribute of another cause, that is, the education mama (*kyōiku mama*). This term describes mothers who usually do not work (or work part-time), do most house chores for their children so that their children can concentrate on studying and succeed at school. The implied criticism is that children fail to develop normal

social skills and outside interests because of the narrow focus on academics. As a result, facing such relentless psychological pressure, they may withdraw.

The last cause called "general" refers to general statements in publications pointing to parents as a potential cause of the *hikikomori* problem.

Category D – Individual, includes only one cause, psychological problem/disease and it refers to such mental illness as depression, narcissism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, agoraphobia, or statements assigning the cause of social withdrawal to a psychiatric disease in general. According to my definition of social withdrawal, *hikikomori* is not caused by a psychological problem, so I excluded such cases from my discussion. However, I decided to include the category of Individual in my findings to check whether authors whose works I examined attribute any importance to individuals/psychological disorders as a cause of *hikikomori*.

Collecting detailed information required organizing the data into a grid which became a foundation of my analysis. The grid contained causes and outlets of publication to see how they depend on each other. In other words, I needed to see which authors write about which types of causes most often in order to find whether and what differences there are between scholars and journalists, as well as between what is being published in Japan and abroad on the causes of social withdrawal. Therefore, wherever there was a mention in a publication of at least one cause of *hikikomori*, I put a "yes" in the grid under the appropriate category. I measured the frequency of causes' appearance according to the publication outlet by assigning the value "1" to each "yes." I assessed the rate of occurrence by adding all values for each cause. Since some articles mentioned only one cause and others more, the assigned values varied from one to nine depending on the article.

Next, in order to answer the question about differences between press and scholars, I compared publication outlets of my analysis by juxtaposing all media articles with all scholarly publications.[75] To further assess this matter, I contrasted media articles with scholarly publications from Japan, and media articles with scholarly publications from abroad separately.

Then, to find out whether there are differences in opinions published in and outside of Japan, I contrasted all publications from Japan with all publications from abroad. Again, to further asses this matter, I contrasted foreign with Japanese media articles and foreign with Japanese scholarly publications separately.

Comparing information outlets on multiple levels enabled me to analyze my data thoroughly. This method minimized the risk of any incidental results to appear, and helped me answer the question of what are the opinion differences between media and scholars, Japan and abroad. Also, scrutinizing all *hikikomori* causes, which cover almost all aspects of life, let me obtain a broader picture of where the polemics on the phenomenon are the strongest. Finally, collecting information from any available source – Japan and other countries, scholarly publications and media - allowed me to cover a wide spectrum of opinions on social withdrawal. This, in turn, helped me see that there are many discourses of causes of *hikikomori*.

Although I obtained my data from sources of information used most often, such as media and academics, I realize that I should search for data coming directly from socially withdrawn, which would allow me to compare their opinions with the media and scholars' point of view. However, conducting interviews with *hikikomori* would have been impossible, because, by definition, they do not want any form of face to face contact with anyone, sometimes even with

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[75] As I mentioned at the beginning of section 3.2, scholarly publications include articles published by academics in both newspapers and academic journals as well as books written by scholars.

members of their own family. To overcome this problem to some extent, I considered talking to *hikikomori* in chat rooms designed especially for them. This method of data collection, however, raised an ethical problem. I had to face the following dilemma: should I reveal my identity to those who are chatting or not? If I didn't do that, I would be deceiving them and that would not be ethical, and I could also endanger my trustworthiness. On the other hand, if I did tell the truth to the chat room members, their behavior and responses might change. I decided to choose the second option, risking to be deceived rather than deceiving. In the end, I chose to talk to *hikikomori* and also to watch their conversations in chat rooms. I believe that this reduced the risk of them trying to pretend being someone else. Data collected from a chat room using any method, however, may be unreliable since participants may not necessarily be *hikikomori* themselves. Therefore, I decided to conduct my analysis based on data coming from media and scholars only.

Collecting this type of data, however, was a complex task, not only because of a time frame constraint but also because access to data on *hikikomori* is very limited in the United States. Therefore, in my thesis, I used all articles and books to which I could gain access and that would point to any causes of social withdrawal.

Obtaining media articles published in Japan which at the same would be in the Japanese language was impossible since I did not have any means of entry to Japanese newspapers' archives to search them. I did not find such articles published currently, either. Thus, in the group of media articles published in Japan there are only articles in the English language that were issued in Japan, which I explained earlier in details. On the other hand, finding academic publications issued outside of Japan was difficult because it seems that not many foreign scholars have attempted to study this phenomenon. Locating scholarly publications in Japanese was not

an easy task either and required searching Japanese universities' electronic databases of which many were not available from outside of the campuses. Once an article was found, however, it would usually appear that an interlibrary loan was impossible. Therefore, obtaining the article was possible only through my friends currently studying in Japan whose help I greatly appreciate. For all of the above reasons, my thesis is based on a higher number of media articles published outside of Japan and scholarly articles issued in Japan, than on media articles published in Japan and scholarly articles issued outside of Japan. I also utilized, as part of foreign media sources, the only television footage I could find; that is a documentary by a BBC reporter who interviewed a few of the *hikikomori* sufferers or their parents.

I believe that my own translations of all sources which I found in Japanese, especially those from the field of psychology, are reliable and will not negatively influence my findings.

4.0   FINDINGS

In this section, I will present the results of my discourse analysis by categories of causes, by types of publication, and by nationality of publication. My findings show major discrepancies among the publication outlets on what are considered to be the main causes of the *hikikomori* problem. I will then proceed to an analysis by specific causes in the second half of this section.

4.1   MONO- AND MULTICAUSALITY IN ALL PUBLICATIONS

Measuring the frequency of the appearance of causes according to the publication outlet showed that the total of assigned values varied from one to nine. A majority (69.24%) of publications describe *hikikomori* as a phenomenon that can be explained by multiple causes (publications with the total value of more than one), although authors often do not point to a relationship between the causes and show them as independent factors. 30.76% of publications point to only one cause of the problem (publications with the total value of one). This suggests that more authors tend to search for or see complex explanations for social withdrawal, instead of attributing the cause of it to one single factor.

Table 3: Mono- and multicausality in publication outlets

Number of causes indicated in publications	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Number of publications indicating the above number of causes	13	6	7	8	4	2	4	0	2	**TOTAL 52**
%	30.76%	69.24%								

4.2 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: CATEGORY OF CAUSES BY TYPE OF PUBLICATION

Comparing the category of causes of *hikikomori* by types of publication indicates differences between media's and scholarly opinions showing the following trends (Table 4). The media concentrate on Society as a major factor in social withdrawal. On the other hand, Society looses its importance as a source of the problem in the opinions of scholars, dropping to second position, with Parents most often cited as the primary cause. In the media ranking, the second position is taken by School. Parents, in turn, are ranked number 3 by media, a position given to School by scholars. Both types of publication rank the category of Individual last, attributing to it a similar 10% importance. Even though in the media's opinion Society is ranked number 1 and School number 2, these two categories are parted by little more than 1 percentage point. This indicates that media consider Society and School almost equally important as causes of *hikikomori*. The difference between these causes and those ranked number 3 and 4 is larger (16

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to 20 percentage points). Unlike the media, scholarly opinions are divided more evenly, because differences between all categories reach about 10 percentage points.

Table 4: Rank ordered category of causes by type of publication

Rank Order	Instances of causes in all media articles	Instances of causes in all scholarly articles
1	Society 37.1% (29)	Parents 39.2% (33)
2	School 35.8% (28)	Society 29.7% (25)
3	Parents 16.6% (13)	School 21.4% (18)
4	Individual 10.2% (8)	Individual 9.5% (8)
TOTAL	100% (78)	100% (84)

My supplemental analysis also indicates discrepancies in the opinions of press and scholars. A comparison of media articles with scholarly publications from outside Japan shows that the former ones tend to evaluate Society as the key causal factor of social withdrawal, while scholars rank Society as number 2 (Table 5). In contrast, Parents are considered to be the main cause of the *hikikomori* problem by scholars, but they are ranked number 3 by media. The same third position is given to School by scholars, unlike media, which rank School number 2. Both Scholars and media attribute the least importance to the category of Individual, ranking it number 4.

Table 5: Rank ordered category of causes by types of publication outside Japan

Rank Order	Instances of cause mention in media articles published outside Japan	Instances of cause mention in scholarly articles published outside Japan
1	Society 40.3% (23)	Parents 46.6% (14)
2	School 36.8% (21)	Society 40% (12)
3	Parents 14% (8)	School 10% (3)
4	Individual 8.7% (5)	Individual 3.3% (1)
TOTAL	100% (57)	100% (30)

Comparing scholarly and press articles published in Japan also points to a divergence of opinion. According to the media, School becomes the most salient cause of *hikikomori,* as opposed to scholarly articles which mention Parents most often as a cause (Table 6). On the other hand, Parents are not as important as a cause of *hikikomori* to media in Japan, which rank them number 3. Media rank Society number 2 while scholars consider the Society less important ranking it number 3. Scholars rank School number 2 and both media and scholars consider Individual to be the least important category.

Table 6: Rank ordered category of causes by type of publication in Japan

Rank Order	Instances of cause mention in media articles published in Japan	Instances of cause mention in scholarly articles published in Japan
1	School 33.3% (7)	Parents 35.1% (19)
2	Society 28.5% (6)	School 27.7% (15)
3	Parents 23.8% (5)	Society 24% (13)
4	Individual 14.2% (3)	Individual 2.9% (7)
TOTAL	100% (21)	100% (54)

4.3 CATEGORY LEVEL ANALYSIS – PRESS AND SCHOLALRY ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN JAPAN VS. PRESS AND SCHOLALRY ARTICLES PUBLISHED OUTSIDE JAPAN

My discourse analysis brings together media and scholarly articles published in Japan with these same types of articles published outside of Japan. Here we also find discrepancies in attribution of causes. In foreign articles, Society becomes the dominating category for causes of *hikikomori*. In contrast, publications from Japan focus to a greater extent on Parents (Table 7). Both types of publications rank School as number 2, followed by Parents (number 3) in foreign opinions, and by Society (number 3) in publications from Japan. Both foreign and Japanese publications rank last the category of Individual; however, publications from Japan seem to attribute causation to individual factors almost twice as often as do foreign publications. In the opinions from outside of Japan, School and Parents are cited similarly often, since the percentage point difference is only about 2%. In the foreign publications, however, Society appears much more significant then School, and Parents much more significant than Individual. Japanese opinions, on the other hand, show a certain degree of closeness, since the first three most important categories are each separated by only 3-4 percentage points. The only major difference is between Society and Individual (the last two).

Table 7: Rank ordered category of causes by nationality of publication

Rank Order	Instance of cause mention in all publications from outside of Japan	Instance of cause mention in all publications from Japan
1	Society 40.2% (35)	Parents 32% (24)
2	School 27.5% (24)	School 29.3% (22)
3	Parents 25.2% (22)	Society 25.3% (19)
4	Individual 6.8% (6)	Individual 13.3% (10)
TOTAL	100% (87)	100% (75)

My supplemental analysis also indicates discrepancies in the opinions published outside and in Japan. A comparison of media articles published both outside of and in Japan indicates that, in Japan, media consider School to be the major causal factor, ranking it just above Society (Table 8). Media articles published outside of Japan rank these two categories in the opposite way. They diminish the role of School and tend to put the responsibility on Society. Both types of media articles rank Parents number 3 and Individual number 4.

Table 8: Rank ordered category of causes in media articles by nationality of publication

Rank Order	Instance of cause mention in media articles published outside of Japan	Instance of cause mention in media articles published in Japan
1	Society 40.3% (23)	School 33.3% (7)
2	School 36.8% (21)	Society 28.5% (6)
3	Parents 14% (8)	Parents 23.8% (5)
4	Individual 8.7% (5)	Individual 14.2% (3)
TOTAL	100% (57)	100% (21)

Interestingly, a comparison of scholarly opinions published in and outside of Japan is notable in that both groups of scholars point to Parents as the key cause of social withdrawal

(Table 9). In the opinion of scholars publishing outside Japan categories of Society (number 2) and School (number 3) follow Parents with Society cited much more often then School (40% versus 10%). Scholars publishing in Japan, however, rank them in the opposite way ranking School number 2 and Society number 3, where the difference of percentage points is very small (27.7% versus 24%). Again, individual factors as a cause of *hikikomori* are cited the least number of times by both groups.

Table 9: Rank ordered category of causes in scholarly articles by nationality of publication

Rank Order	Instances of cause mention in scholarly publications from outside Japan	Instance of cause mention in scholarly publications from Japan
1	Parents 46.6% (14)	Parents 35.1% (19)
2	Society 40% (12)	School 27.7% (15)
3	School 10% (3)	Society 24% (13)
4	Individual 3.3% (1)	Individual 12.9% (7)
TOTAL	100% (30)	100% (54)

4.4   DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC CAUSES

In this section of my thesis, I will go deeper into the analysis of causes of *hikikomori* by focusing on the findings among the discourses of specific causes mentioned by authors in their texts. I will concentrate only on the causes which were considered to be the most salient for *hikikomori* within each of the categories: Society, School, Parents and Individuals.

4.4.1 Society: Conformity, Communication and Weakness in Relationships

My analysis indicates that, in the comparison by type of publication, media consider social conformity, a cause from the Society category, as the major cause of *hikikomori*. The same is true for all foreign articles in the comparison by nationality of publication. By contrast, scholars and authors publishing in Japan consider communication and weakness in relationships in the Japanese society as the major cause.

Conformity is described as the cause of *hikikomori* by mostly foreign journalists. They often point to it as if it was the only bonding force in Japanese society. They also tend to depict conformity as if it were some "unique" power that comes from within the Japanese culture, and which imposes social order by punishing those who are simply different. For example, a *Newsweek* article quotes Takemi Matsuda, publisher of a magazine for societal dropouts, as saying that the "efficiency first value system" promotes conformity and "students, who stick out in any way – fat kids, smart kids, slow kids – are often punished violently".[76] In the opinion of some journalists, compliance in Japanese society is so powerful that those who cannot face up to it give up and withdraw. This is visible in Tim Larimer's article which quotes Sadatsugu Kudo[77]: "When you are different, you take the logical step for self-preservation. You disappear".[78]

Additionally, these journalists tend to claim that conformity is omnipresent. Lewis and Perry both point out that young Japanese men are expected to conform to "norms in school, at

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[76] Wehrfritz, G., et al., (2001, August 20).

[77] Sadatsugu Kudo is a director of a non profit center for *hikikomori* in the Tokyo suburbs.

[78] Larimier, T., (2000, August 21).

work and in society,"[79] and that *hikikomori* is a "reaction to the strictness of *many* Japanese social norms".[80] Besides, according to Larimier, compliance is inseparable with "instilling a group culture" which "has been a historic priority".[81] Therefore, he argues that social conformity is a historically inherited condition. Larimer also writes about this feature citing Kudo: "you can't pinpoint the reasons [of *hikikomori*] but you can pinpoint the context: it's Japan. Here, you have to be like other people, and if you aren't, you have a sense of loss, of shame. So you withdraw".[82]

Such foreign media articles are plentiful in statements on conformity as a source of seclusion. Japanese media did not shun making similar comments, although authors of publications from Japan as a whole pointed most often to communication as a major cause of *hikikomori*, which I will discuss later. The remarks concerning conformity in the Japanese press can be found in the article "Ancient Pilgrimage Brings Recluses Out of Their Shells," author of which points out that the socially withdrawn are "victims of social disease in this highly conformist country," calling them "Japan's lost generation".[83] This is an example of how much blame the author assigns to the necessity to obey social rules.

Foreign articles written by scholars do not differ much from foreign articles written by journalists. According to Zielenziger, "Japanese are taught to follow Confucian doctrines and it's

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[79] Parry, R. L., (2004, January 31).

[80] Lewis, L., (2004, November 27). Emphasis added.

[81] Larimier, T., (2000, August 21).

[82] Larimier, T., (2000, August 21).

[83] Kyōdo News Service, (2004, October 20).

dangerous to stray".[84] Therefore, any deviation from socially accepted norms originating in Confucianism deprives the deviated individuals of protection; they lose their guarantee of safety. The same author points out that "many would rather sit in their rooms […] than expose themselves to ostracism for being 'out of the ordinary' ".[85] Here, again, the unusual power of conformity is argued, one that makes individuals give up without being even reprimanded. Paul J. Fink indicates a relationship between social withdrawal and conformity in Japan by describing the nation as "prizing communal commitment over individualism".[86] Fink suggests that being group-oriented as a society leads to paying excessive attention to obeying rules accepted by this society which, in the case of Japan, brings about the problem of *hikikomori*.

By contrast, Japanese scholars predominantly attribute the cause of *hikikomori* to problems of communication in the society. They attempt to search for the reasons of social withdrawal deeper than just on the surface of the society. Compared to journalists, they do not assign the blame to one feature of the culture, such as conformity. They do not present *hikikomori* as those who passively give up control to some social power but they point out the flaws of the recluses themselves.

Tatsushi Ogino, for example, says that many of *hikikomori* have strong feelings of inferiority complex, guilt and despair which make them socially disabled. Sufferers cannot establish any relationships; they "cannot experience and conduct anything social".[87] Naoji Kondō agrees with Ogino in his research. According to Kondō, some of the socially withdrawn

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[84] Zielenziger, M., (2004, May 6).

[85] Zielenziger, M., (2004, May 6).

[86] Fink, P., J., (2002), p. 1.

[87] Ogino, T., (2004), p. 130.

"don't know how to built friendships," they feel that people around them are "their enemy".[88] On the other hand, Isobe indicates that *hikikomori* "simply need but don't find people who could understand them" so "it is not that they withdraw doing it willingly" but "they don't know […] why they [seclude themselves], and they are confused".[89] Isobe also says that weakness in relationships may be related to weak or inadequate communication skills: "In the times of rapid communication industry development, a decrease of communication skills among youth is observed and a direct form of contact among people loses its value".[90] Isobe's words cited above sum up his view of communication within society as a potential causal factor of the *hikikomori* problem.

The discourse analysis of specific causes within the Society category shows that media articles as a whole, tend to point to conformity as the major cause of social withdrawal. Journalists suggest that there is a limited participation of individuals in the blame since their only option is to comply or give up. In the eyes of the researchers, not only the society but also the individuals are at fault, as they lack adequate interpersonal interactions.

4.4.2 School: Bullying, School Refusal and Educational Pressure

My analysis of the School category of causes in the comparison by type of publication shows that journalists in general consider educational pressure and bullying to be predominant causes of *hikikomori* belonging to this category. Scholars in general differ on this issue and point to school

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[88] Kondō, N., (2003), p. 236. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

[89] Isobe, U.,(2002), p. 97.

[90] Isobe, U.,(2002), p. 105.

refusal (*futōkō*) as the cause of the problem. The analysis of comparison by nationality of publication shows that within the School category foreign publications in general tend to point to educational pressure and bullying as the most salient causes of social withdrawal. Publications from Japan, however, indicate school refusal and bullying as main causes of the phenomenon.

Journalists tend to suggest that if young Japanese reject or are not able to cope with educational pressure, they may experience a crisis: "Japanese school children also face heavy pressure to succeed [academically]. Those who don't succeed sometimes feel such shame that they are unable to deal with their peers".[91]

Notably, the media are inclined to make statements which are not based in fact that was confirmed earlier by research. McNeill writes: "Most *hikikomori* problems develop in the mid-teens, when the pressure from Japan's exam-driven education system begins to ratchet up".[92] This statement suggests that the highest numbers of socially withdrawn would be among teenagers. However, at least three of the scholarly projects I found point out that the average age of *hikikomori* is around 22-27 years old. Therefore, McNeill's statement does not seem to have any academic support.

My other finding is that most foreign journalists also tend to make sweeping generalizations about the causes of the problem, while introducing information often without even naming sources: "Pressure of schoolwork is said to have driven many Japanese children into self-inflicted social exclusion"[93] or "The intense pressure to achieve academically […] is

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[91] Barr, C., (2000, August 16).

[92] McNeill, D., (2004, December 6).

[93] McNeill, D., (2004, December 6).

cited as explanation".[94] The attribution is vague at best. Similarly, Leo Lewis' article claims: "The most widely held view is that it represents a reaction to the strictness of many Japanese social norms, and particularly the school system".[95] Again, he makes no reference to specific data and the statement is very general. Even when information is cited, we may still question its trustworthiness and reliability. Ryall cites Shigemitsu Matsumoto, a coordinator with the New Start organization that helps socially withdrawn: "[*hikikomori*] is the result of our education system and social pressures. Most young people are under huge amounts of pressure from […] their schools".[96] In this case we don't know the background of Matsumoto and therefore, we do not know whether the information he gives us is dependable. Specific cases of individuals mentioned in the press, such as the one described in the article "Lost in the Matrix," are innumerable: "Dai Hasebe dropped out of junior high school after his parents enrolled him in a *juku* designed to help him pass the competitive high school entrance exams".[97]

Press articles published both in and outside of Japan that cite bullying as the cause of *hikikomori* show similar tendencies to the articles which touch upon educational pressure. The authors generalize the issues they describe and do not cite the source of information they use. Parry, for example, writes about bullying as a *typical* issue which triggers social withdrawal: "The problem *typically* begins with bullying at school or betrayal or abandonment by a close friend".[98] We do not know, however, on what basis he makes this claim. These are

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[94] Parry, R. L., (2004, January 31).

[95] Lewis, L., (2004, November 11).

[96] Ryall, J., (2004, May 31).

[97] Garvin, G., Zielenziger, M., (2002, June).

[98] Parry, R. L., (2004, January 31). Emphasis added.

overstatements which make us think that bullying is the only cause of the problem. Lewis writes that "Bullying is another cause *regularly* cited for withdrawal".[99] Rees' article, in turn, states: "The trigger is *usually* an event at school, such as bullying, an exam failure or a broken romance".[100] Journalists publishing in Japan are only slightly more qualified in saying: "[*hikikomori*] is *often* triggered by bullying at school or failed exams".[101]

Scholars publishing outside of Japan may also take to a style of writing similar to journalists when writing for a newspaper. They make very general statements: "*Hikikomori often* suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress after enduring harassment and hostility from co-workers, classmates".[102] Some do not cite their source of information: "They were bullied for being too fat or too shy or even for being better than everyone else at sports or music".[103] However, Jones at least points out that bullying is not simply an issue in and of itself but it is related directly to conformity. An individual is being bullied for being different from the rest, for standing out. She also notes that it is not easy to single out one reason for social withdrawal, because this problem is a more complicated one, caused by multiple factors.

Toshiaki Hara, a scholar publishing in Japan, discusses bullying in the same manner as Jones. He suggests it is an undeniable element of a bullying/educational pressure pair. He indicates that people decide to withdraw because they feel they can get easily hurt in an

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[99] Lewis, L., (2004, November 11). Emphasis added.

[100] Rees, P., (2002, October 20). Emphasis added.

[101] Kyōdo News Service, (2003, October 19). Emphasis added.

[102] Zielenziger, M., (2004, May 6). Emphasis added.

[103] Jones, M., (2006, January 15).

environment where they experience bullying. They are also vulnerable to harm from the pressure of the education system.[104]

Other Japanese scholars often point to school refusal as a cause of *hikikomori*. For example, Masayuki Shimizu cites a report by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare published in 2001, which found that 40.7% of the sufferers experienced school refusal at an earlier stage of their lives.[105] The important link between social withdrawal and school refusal is also emphasized by Tamaki Saitō. In his research based on 80 cases of *hikikomori,* Saitō found that 86% of them had refused to go to school for more than three months at some point earlier in their lives. In addition, 50% of them experienced a decreased adaptability[106] which, according to Shimizu, may have ultimately led a person to become a reclusive.[107] Hiroko Okuma describes that 45% (94 people) of the socially withdrawn she studied experienced school refusal.[108] Takahashi Takahata also points out this linkeage. According to his study, many sufferers experienced withdrawal during school years, some as early as junior high school. Ushio Isobe indicates that 30% of those who refused to go to school became socially withdrawn.[109]

The discourse analysis of specific causes within the School category indicates two important issues. First, there are discrepancies and similarities among media and scholars both Japanese and foreign in attributing specific causes. Secondly, there is a significant difference

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[104] Hara, T., et al., (2003), p. 291. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

[105] Shimizu, M., (2003), p. 231. Translated by Dorota Krysinska.

[106] Saitō, T., (2002), p. 78.

[107] Shimizu, M., (2003), p. 231.

[108] Okuma, H., (205), p. 197.

[109] Isobe, U., (2004), p. 67.

between the media and scholarly approach to analyzing the causes and writing about them. Media seem to generalize more by omitting evidence already proven by academic research. The two issues I pointed to should make us more sensitive to the fact that press articles are not always trustworthy, especially when they indicate problems not confirmed by scholarly research.

4.4.3   Parents: Communication and Parent-Child Interdependence

Media, in general, consider problems of communication with parents the major cause of *hikikomori* within the Parents category. Many scholars also point to the same cause as one of the most important factors contributing to social withdrawal. Overall, however, problems of parent-child communication are considered among scholars to be as problematic as parent-child interdependence. Authors publishing outside Japan point to these two causes as most salient; however, authors in Japan suggest that parent-child communication is the most significant cause. In other words, parent-child interdependence and communication are considered the two major factors in the Parents category contributing to the *hikikomori* problem in media and scholarly articles inside and outside Japan.

Some press articles published outside Japan have characterized a lack of parental reaction to their children who withdraw as a result of deficient communication. BBC cites the words of Dr. Grubb, an American psychologist: "If my child was inside that door and I didn't see him, I'd knock the door down and walk in. Simple. But in Japan, everybody says give it time, it's a phase or he'll grow out of it".[110] This parental reaction is also noted in Goldsmith's article "Locked Inside," where he introduces the opinion of Dr. Machizawa. This Japanese psychiatrist says that

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[110] Rees, P., (2002, October 20).

before parents decide to put their reticence aside and seek help, some young people have already spent four years in seclusion.[111] The passive reaction to the *hikikomori* problem suggests the problematic quality of parent-child relationships.

Journalists publishing in Japan try to describe why such an important bond of family life is missing using the concept of generation gap.[112] However, this explanation is commonly applied to throw light on miscommunication between parents and children and so generation gap is not specific to Japanese culture only. Thus, it seems that these journalists insinuate that any young person who has a problem with communication with parents could experience the problem of social withdrawal. Why, then, the phenomenon is not widespread throughout the world but we can only learn about cases similar to Japanese *hikikomori* in a few countries only?

Another example of parent-child miscommunication is provided by a scholar who published her article outside of Japan - Maggie Jones. In *The New York Times* she describes a case of *hikikomori* where the father admitted he didn't help his son after he and his wife found out their son had experienced bullying: "We told him to handle it himself. We thought he was stronger than he was".[113] The parents left the problem to their child without offering any advice or asking if he needed help. According to Jones, this may be considered a sign of deficient communication.[114] In the same article, the author quotes Mariko Fujiwara, a director of research

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[111] Goldsmith, M., (2000, May 13).

[112] Shimoyachi, N., (2003, April 22).

[113] Jones, M., (2006, January 15).

[114] I will address the issue of deficient communication later in my discussion, since it seems that a Western interpretation of what its sources are varies from the Japanese one. The difference may be related to the distinction between the Western and the Japanese way of rearing children.

at the Hakuhobo Institute of Life and Living in Tokyo, who says that it is unlikely that the boy could take care of the problem himself: "urban Japanese parents lead increasingly isolated lives – removed from the extended family and tight-knit communities of previous generation and simply don't know how to teach their children to communicate and negotiate relationships with peers".[115] The study by Suwa's group, which I mentioned earlier, also supports the idea that social withdrawal is not merely a problem of the withdrawn persons as individuals, but problems of family relationships as a whole. These researchers defined social withdrawal as "primary social withdrawal" and distinguished it from "other social withdrawal groups." The latter includes people with personality disorders, developmental disorders and neurotic syndromes.[116] The primary social withdrawal group was significantly different from others: they could not enjoy going out with their father or mother, and they could not be together with their father for meals. The primary social withdrawal group had little emotional contact in their relationships with their parents. The Suwa's group pointed out that parents and children were concerned about each other, but did not use any verbal expressions. One father showed his consideration for his withdrawn child by "gassing up the child's car when the tank was empty but did not speak to him".[117]

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[115] Jones, M., (2006, January 15). Based on this statement, we could deduce that a majority of *hikikomori* is found in urban areas. If we refer to the Introduction chapter and Appendix A, we will notice that the problem occurs typically in the largest cities of the most densely populated prefectures and two metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka. Therefore, we could conclude that social withdrawal is a primarily urban phenomenon.

[116] Suwa, M. et al., (2003), p. 587.

[117] Suwa, M. et al., (2003), p. 591.

Scholars publishing in Japan tend to express similar views: the communication between parents and children fails because of parents' incommunicability. Kōsuke Yamazaki, for example, points out that parents "interfere too much when children are still small," that there is a "continuous miscommunication" between them, and "when a problem appears, while children gain their own strength growing-up, parents suddenly remove themselves out of the way".[118] Yamazaki also writes that when children seclude themselves, parents go to see a specialist since "they are worried, but they don't even tell their children they sought for advice".[119]

Foreign journalists and all scholars (not often Japanese media) consider the interdependence of parents and children to be the second factor causing the *hikikomori* problem in the category of Parents. Paradoxically, this characteristic of Japanese families seems to refer to the closeness of family members rather than distance and lack of communication. Barr, a foreign journalist, mentions this intimacy: "much is written and said in Japan about the intense closeness that develops between mothers and children, particularly sons. Sometimes […] mothers spoil their children and later on, these families support grown-ups with no conditions".[120] BBC explains this situation a bit more, citing Dr. Saitō who claims that "mothers and sons often have a symbiotic, co-dependent relationship. Mothers will care for their sons until they become 30 or 40 years old".[121] For him, this symbiosis is a sign of interdependence discussed also in Saitō's book *Discussion on the Culture of Hikikomori*[122] as *amae* – indulgent dependency, introduced

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[118] Hara, T., et al., (2003), p. 283.

[119] Hara, T., et al., (2003), p. 284.

[120] Barr, C. W., (2000, August 16) .

[121] Rees, P., (2002, October 20).

[122] Hikikomori *Bunkaron* (2003).

earlier in my study. Ogino also discusses indulgence as a potential cause of social withdrawal. He says that there may be "conditions causing *hikikomori* that relate to global trends, for example, the extension of adolescence and [there also may be] conditions specific to Japan. The latter may connect the culture of *amae*, tolerance of dependency".[123]

When discussing interdependence, however, some scholars publishing outside Japan refer negatively to the large degree of interference by mothers in their children's lives.[124] Some even consider the relationship between parents and children a dysfunctional one, where parents are afraid that their offspring will not survive without them.[125] This suggests a possible problem of overprotectiveness. On the other hand, there is a study by Takafumi Yoshida who found a connection between family factors, including parental overprotectiveness, on mental diseases such as youth depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder.[126] Although *hikikomori* is not a mental disease or its symptom, psychiatrists point out that social withdrawal may be confused with many psychiatric illnesses. Therefore, due to the similarity between social withdrawal and mental problems, it is possible that overprotectiveness, as a characteristic of family relationship, may be a precondition for seclusion as it is for mental diseases. Nevertheless, since neither definitions of *hikikomori* cited in the introduction, nor my own determine *hikikomori* as a mental

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[123] Ogino, T., (2004), p. 132.

[124] Kawanishi, Y., (2004), p. 30. It seems though, that not only in Japan with its specific children practices and communication styles, but also in other cultures (where children are highly managed in general or where such are cases of only single families), the degree of parental interference into children lives taken to an extreme may bring about problems and children's resistance.

[125] Jones, M., (2006, January 15).

[126] Takafumi Yoshida, Chiaki Taga, Yoshitake Matsumoto and Kenji Fukui: "Paternal Overprotection in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Depression with Obsessive Traits."

problem or being caused by a psychiatric illness, it is extraneous to present details of Yoshida's study here.

4.4.4   Individual: Psychiatric Illness

Psychiatric illness is the only cause of *hikikomori* belonging to the Individual category. My analysis of this category shows that, although individual factors are the least commonly mentioned cause of *hikikomori*, the attribution of cause to mental disease is noticeable among all outlets of publications.

The degree to which journalists attribute the cause to psychiatric disease, however, differs. Some journalists skeptically refer to mental problems as causes of social withdrawal. For example, McNicol writes: "While some patients may show serious symptoms of mental illness, even psychosis, maybe half are victims of a social condition, rather than an illness".[127] Other journalists, who comprise the majority, claim that psychiatric disorders may be a cause of *hikikomori* even though the government denies it: "The government insists that *hikikomori* is a social phenomenon rather than a disease. But sufferers also often show symptoms of agoraphobia, persecution complexes, insomnia, obsessive-compulsive disorders and regressive behavior".[128] *The Japan Times* cites experts who say that "withdrawal could be triggered by mental disorders".[129] *The Australian* also writes that "one of the chief factors may be depression

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[127] McNicol, T., (2003, December 16).

[128] Watts, J., (2002, November 17).

[129] The Japan Times, (2002, April 18).

that starts during school years".[130] The third group of media articles which cite mental problems as the primary cause of social withdrawal is even more categorical: "many of its [*hikikomori*] victims suffer from mental depression and obsessive compulsive disorder".[131]

Scholarly opinions may be characterized as more contradictory than the ones expressed by media. Next to the stances of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Saitō, Ogi and the Suwa's group which I introduced earlier, and which suggest no relationship between social withdrawal and psychiatric disease, there are scholarly views, such as the one of Jones, indicating that mental illness may be a cause of the *hikikomori* problem: "in some cases these psychological problems [depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder] lead to *hikikomori*".[132] Besides, there are scholars who point to a relationship between narcissism, in particular, and social withdrawal: "There have not been any established theories about the causes that many clinicians accept. However, there is a relatively distinguished argument about *Hikikomori*ans' personality; that is to say, it is a kind of narcissism".[133] Naoji Kondo agrees with this opinion in his article "On the Background and Prolongation of Social Withdrawal in Adolescence".[134]

There are two reasons why I will not discuss the category of Individual in the next section of my thesis. Firstly, my definition of social withdrawal does not include cases diagnosed as a mental disease, which is the only cause in this category. Secondly, the Individual category was always ranked last, scoring much less than other categories and, therefore, it did not seem to be

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[130] The Australian, (2001, May 10).

[131] Shimoyachi, N., (2004, October 14).

[132] Jones, M., (2006, January 15).

[133] Ogino, T., (2004), p. 122.

[134] Kondo, N., (2003), p. 238.

significant to the overall discourses on causes of *hikikomori*. It is important, however, to expound on why all publication outlets ranked it number 4. One possible explanation for this finding is that the Individual category consists of only one cause, the "psychological problem." The other three categories of Society, School and Parents contain from five to eight potential causes each, and so they have a greater chance of being mentioned in publications and scoring higher in the category ranking.

Another possible explanation is that *hikikomori* is generally seen as a problem that is not caused by individuals themselves. The reason behind this is that there is only one cause of social withdrawal included in the Individual category which, additionally, is not mentioned in publications very often. There could be, of course, other causes of the phenomenon not mentioned in the publications I used in this work that could be included in the Individual category. However, in my data set I have not found information which would point to any alternative cause.

In summary, my findings show that discourses on the causes of *hikikomori* diverge widely. A major part of my main analysis points to differences between discourses in press and scholarly articles as well as between what is being published in and outside Japan. This is important since readers tend to read what is easily accessible, that is, media information in one's own language. Therefore, different people's perceptions of the *hikikomori* problem vary, and sometimes may be contradictory to each other, depending on the environment they come from and depending on their source of information.

5.0   DISCUSSION: DISCOURSES OF SOCIAL CONFORMITY, EDUCATIONAL PRESSURE AND PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION

In this section, I will first discuss how three causes of social withdrawal are interrelated. I will use this model to show that even though different authors point to various "sets" of causes, it does not mean that their explanations are in conflict. This way, I will prove that causal explanations, especially the ones that involve multiple causes, do not have to contradict each other. Secondly, I will answer the question asking whether *hikikomori* is a form of resistance.

As my findings show, there are three factors that are considered to be the primary causes of *hikikomori*: conformity to Japanese society, the pressure of the educational system, and a problem of communication between parents and children. These factors represent the three distinct categories of my analysis – Society, School and Parents. Both press and scholars mention these causes of social withdrawal very often but no publication points to any linkage between them, although some publications suggest relationships between causes within categories. Therefore, my work is the first study that explains how causes of *hikikomori* originating from different spheres of social life are related. Finding the connection, in turn, shows that what seems to be a significant number of non-related factors, in fact, may be a cohesive collection of causes that depend on one another. Also, linking them will show that the causes and multicausal explanations do not have to exclude or contradict each other. Therefore, the picture of *hikikomori* will become clearer and more understandable.

I will conduct my discussion on multicausal explanations by conceptualizing linkages between the discourses of conformity, pressure of educational system, and the communication between parents and children. My argument will develop around the scheme depicted in Figure 1.

Social Conformity → Educational Pressure → Parent-Child Communication
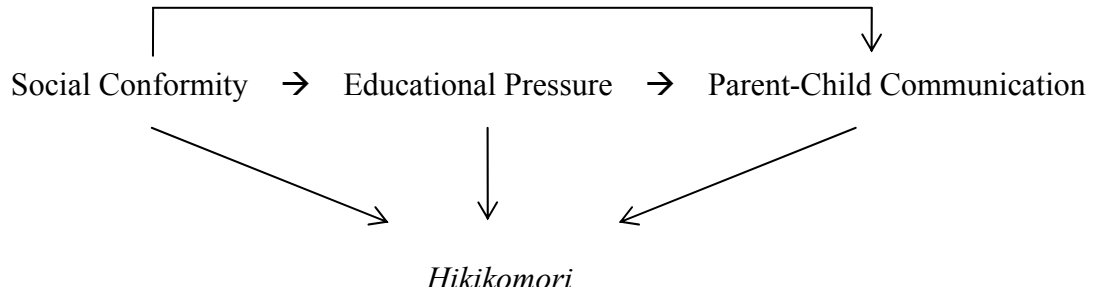
Hikikomori

Figure 1: Social conformity, educational pressure and communication with parents as causes of *hikikomori* **and relationships between them**

As shown on the scheme, social withdrawal may be a consequence of each cause on its own, but also the result of the interactions between social conformity, educational pressure and youth communication with parents on each other. I propose that the three forces not only cause social withdrawal in isolation from one another but are also interrelated. Pressure to conform affects educational pressure, but at the same time influences communication within a family. Thus, the impact of pressure to conform on family relationships may be direct (social conformity → communication) or indirect, through educational pressure (social conformity → educational pressure → communication). Therefore, showing how the discourses of the three causes are intertwined will be the core of my discussion.

5.1 DISCOURSES OF SOCIAL CONFORMITY AS A CAUSE OF *HIKIKOMORI* AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION

In this section, I will first concentrate on the polemics of social conformity and its effect on social withdrawal. Next, I will explain this relation in the context of parent-child communication.

It is important to begin with an elucidation of social conformity and its role in the Japanese society. Pressure to conform is an element of the informal, covert social control which is exercised by a society. The society's hidden norms become an invisible apparatus of control. They constitute, what Foucault calls, an "overseeing gaze".[135] It exists in Japan under the name of *seken* – society's gaze, and is defined by many people differently. Some perceive it as being concerned with what people think about you and what you think about yourself. Others associate it with being pressured to get married.[136] As many press articles pointed out, the society's gaze will shoot down those willing to stand out from the crowd, prove to be original, smart, unusually quiet or simply different in any way. The concern about *seken* prevents young people from developing their personality or expressing themselves. The gaze may make it difficult to fulfill one's dreams by forcing one to choose an average-paid or part time job where they cannot broaden their horizons. Society's gaze has an invisible power of which many are afraid, at least according to the media.

Press articles indicate that the result of society's gaze is that many young people retreat into the self as a way to avoid the pressures of being constantly surveyed. The same may be true for the recluses' parents. To avoid being easily stigmatized for their secluded child being

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[135] Foucault, M., (1980), p. 152.

[136] McVeigh, B. J., (2002), p. 103.

"different," some families say that their son moved out to another part of the city. Parents are very careful about not letting their neighbors know what is going on within their family. Parental fear of making their neighbors think something abnormal is happening in the house is depicted in a transcript from Phil Rees's BBC documentary about *hikikomori*:

> Phil Rees
> Yasuo [a former *hikikomori* who now helps other reclusive youth return to the outside world] then said that my cameraman and I shouldn't try to come along. He believed our presence outside the family's house would attract attention.

> Mai translating Yasuo
> It's because of the neighbors; the family doesn't want the neighbors to know that someone is visiting the house. It's very important to keep it secret from the neighbors.

> Phil Rees
> Yasuo asked us to park some distance from the house. We then had to improvise.[137]

In this case foreigners were a good enough reason to make the neighbors think of the documentary family as suspicious. The family did not want to be seen as standing out because Japanese society stresses conformity. Afraid of rejection as a consequence of the neighbors noticing problems within a family, parents hide the "inconvenient issues." They know that the society's reaction will not be friendly to their "uncommon" trouble and experience. As Clifford writes, the gaze impedes parental intervention since allowing a child to remain in hiding would draw less attention than actually doing something about it.[138] Such parental behavior is often true also for other societies, among people ostracized for being a homosexual or having HIV. However, in Japanese society this conduct results first of all from an attempt to maintain

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[137] Rees, P., (2002, October 20), Transcript.

[138] Clifford, T., (2002, June 10).

harmony within proximate groups (neighbors, co-workers, etc.) through conformity. A fear of being stigmatized comes second, unlike in Western societies where this factor seems to play the most important role.

The parental unwillingness or fear to react to their children's problem shows that pressure for conformity also influences parental communication with children. The pressure increases the significance of the gaze, and diminishes the importance of children. It may seem to the parents that it is better to deal with the problem "quietly" even though it may mean not solving it, rather than to cause some commotion around their house. This way of problem resolution resembles the idea of conflict management introduced earlier in my thesis: nonconfrontational methods which are meant to maintain harmony.

The pressure to conform, therefore, undermines the relationship between parents and children. If the bond does not have a solid foundation, the trust of the offspring becomes endangered. Thus, if young people face a problem, they may feel as if there was no one they could turn to for advice. Facing this situation, they may need to protest against it. As Yoder writes, aggressive rebellion by using violence against parents or by involvement in delinquent activities is one option. Passive resistance (as Lock described it), such as the one by withdrawal, is another.

The discourses of social conformity as a cause of *hikikomori* may raise the following question: why do only some people experience social withdrawal while others living in the same environment do not? None of the authors suggesting compliance as one of the causes of *hikikomori* attempted to answer this question. Despite the complexity of the phenomenon, one of the possible replies could be simple: a decreased immunity to psychological impulses and relatively more difficulty in overcoming obstacles on the part of an individual. A mechanism of

becoming a reclusive could be similar to "defense" mechanisms which trigger health, mental problems or certain behaviors. If an individual is less resistant and more sensitive to external conditions, he or she will become "ill." This includes people who undergo an emotional breakdown or sickness. The way the mechanism works also encompasses those who experience problems and who, at the same time, do not have a strong personality, and can be easily influenced by others – some of these people become drug addicts, alcoholics, etc. Similarly, youth experiencing pressure for conformity may be divided into three groups: those who do not question social control and comply; those who question social control but still comply; and those who question social control and do not want to comply, *hikikomori* being some of them[139]. The last group comprises of individuals who did not have enough strength to live in the surrounding environment and who withdrew from society.

The above explanation could clarify why only a few people experience social withdrawal out of many under the same circumstances, only if we consider the condition of *hikikomori* as a sign of resignation. On the other hand, one more possible answer to this same question could be as follows: only a few people experiencing some conflict with the world they live in had enough courage to protest against it. The form of their resistance was not active, as is common in the Western culture, but passive. I will elaborate on this idea further in my discussion.

In summary, regardless of how we explain the fact that not all individuals living under the pressure to conform decide to seclude themselves, the discourses introduced in this subsection point out to the following: pressure for compliance put on children may directly lead them to social withdrawal. It is also possible that a child experiences *hikikomori* or other

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[139] There could be a fourth, potential group: those who do not question social control but do not want to comply. However, this simply would be irrational.

problems because he or she did not want to conform to social norms and did not meet with parental understanding. In this case, it happened, since parents avoided a confrontation with the problem as shown above. The child realizes he/she cannot count on parents and the family communication is disrupted or, if it was not good earlier, it deteriorates. With no one to turn to, the child becomes a reclusive or his/her condition of withdrawal becomes more serious. Given the above explanation, the connection between social conformity, parent-child communication and *hikikomori* becomes evident. At the same time, the pressure to conform appears to be an indirect cause of seclusion, while the communication becomes a direct one. I will discuss this direct relationship of parent-child communication with the phenomenon of *hikikomori* in the next section.

5.2   DISCOURSES OF PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION AS A CAUSE OF *HIKIKOMORI* AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH EDUCATIONAL PRESSURE

I will dedicate this section to the discussion on the problem of parent-child communication and its connection to social withdrawal. Next, I will discuss this relation in the context of educational pressure.

The pressure to conform put on parents which disturbs parent-child communication does not seem to be the only reason why this deficient communication causes *hikikomori*. Parents are not able to prevent the problem also because of the way they approach the phenomenon itself. As my findings show, both press and scholars pointed out this issue. Some parents seem to think they should not get involved because the child will grow out of the problem, and that it will be solved by itself. Instead of discussing the problem with the child, parents seem to conclude that

they should not intervene. According to the publications I analyzed, the weak quality of the communication is also evident in a fact that parents do not seem to tell their withdrawn children to seek professional advice. Moreover, they may see a psychologist themselves, instead sending their offspring to one.

Authors of foreign media and scholarly articles, as well as those publishing in Japan raised the question of deficient communication as a cause of *hikikomori*. It seems, though, that foreign and Japanese writers may have a different understanding of what the source of deficient communication really is. In the Western perception, such communication may have roots in simple negligence of the child resulting from lack of time, attaching lower priority to the child's needs or things alike. In the Japanese understanding, the deficient communication may have origins in the way of rearing children and the pattern of early socialization. In their study of discrepancies between the practices of Japanese and American parents, Kobayashi-Winata and Power as well as Conroy et al. show that "early socialization in Japan relies on close personal/interpersonal ties and a climate of affection and interdependence leading to identification with the goals and values of the group".[140] As Conroy notes, in certain situations Japanese mothers favor referring to their child internalized social norms, without making direct suggestions as to the child's behavior. Thus, the child is expected to recognize mother's preferences, what could please her. He or she is not specifically told what to do but mothers count on their "inner response to guide future behavior" and the "affective ties".[141] Kobayashi-Winata and Power stress the group-oriented character of Japanese society mentioned earlier. According to these authors, this feature allows an individual to see his/her own needs as group

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[140] Conroy, M., et al., (1980), p. 165.

[141] Conroy, M., et al., (1980), p. 169.

needs which are achieved through "cooperation and dependence on others".[142] Thus, a child should consider preferences of others in the first place, before taking action.

In summary, children are expected to make others' needs his/her priority and to recognize these needs themselves, without receiving any direct signal or suggestion from the parents on what action to take. Therefore, some children feel their parents are not helpful, that they have to face all dilemmas themselves without receiving any advice. On the other hand, parents feel they raised their children in the spirit of making the right choices themselves, without any intervention from the parents' side. In a situation where children experience a problem, do not know a solution to it, and at the same time parents count on them as being "independent," consequences may be disastrous, similar to the cases of *hikikomori*. It is possible then, that Japanese scholars in particular, blame the deficient communication between parents and children as having roots in the socialization process in Japan.

As we have seen, a communication problem between parents and children is present in both scholarly and press articles. The former, however, attempt to search deeper into relationships within a family. Tamaki Saitō points out that filial piety no longer seems to be an important feature of familial bonds in Japan which means that the idea of respect for parents and ancestors is weakening. Also, due to the increasing pace of life, family ties become more and more loose in the contemporary Japanese nuclear family. This means, as also Satoshi Kotani writes, that the communication becomes hollow due to daily routines that most Japanese families follow: husbands and fathers are expected to dedicate their lives to a company in exchange for job security, which causes their absence at home. They work and commute long hours, while mothers are often busy with house chores or working part-time to earn money for their children's

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[142] Kobayashi-Winata, H. and Power, T., G., (1989), p. 351.

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education. Even if family members are at home, everybody can be absorbed with their own problems; parents do not often recognize the loneliness of their children. This brings in, as the Suwa's group calls it, a lack of emotional exchange between family members. In these conditions parents notice changes in the children's behavior when it is too late. Parents believe they fulfill their parental responsibilities as long as they spend money on their offspring and this is also a proof of their love. Both parties hardly ever express their feelings for each other and, as Kotani puts it, they "perform the roles of 'understanding parent' and 'lovely obedient child'."[143] It seems that material parental obligations take precedence over emotional ties, which leads to dysfunction in family life. Lock cites a school administrator, who says that children are poor at expressing themselves because of "an overprotective and bossy mother and the absence of a strong father figure".[144]

On the other hand, according to Kawanishi, an author who wrote an article entitled "Japanese Youth: The Other Half of The Crisis?", parental overprotectiveness may be so substantial that it influences their reasonable thinking. Ironically then, overprotectiveness may also bring about miscommunication in parent-child relationships in Japanese families. To explain this, I need to refer back to the concept of *amae* – indulgent dependency - rooted in the mother-child bond,[145] and mentioned earlier. As Smith and Nomi notice, according to Vogel, *amae* is experienced by the child as a "feeling of dependency or a desire to be loved," while the mother vicariously experiences satisfaction and fulfillment through overindulgence and overprotectiveness of her child's immaturity: "This can be inferred from Vogel's observation that

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[143] Kotani, S., (2004), p. 41.

[144] Lock, M. (1993), p. 114.

[145] Smith, H. W., and Nomi, T., (2000).

a large number of Japanese mothers blame themselves for not being loving or giving enough when their children refuse to attend school. Essentially, Japanese mothers report feeling guilty if they are not all-giving to their children".[146] Therefore, after giving up their jobs when they get married or give birth to a child, mothers devote their whole life to their offspring. Dr. Satoru Saito points out that the mother-child bond is one of the most serious factors contributing to the psychopathology of children.[147] Since mothers feel lonely, they forge a symbiotic, co-dependent relationship. For the same reason they don't want to see their children grow into independent adults, because the children living with them are their reason for existing. Japanese parents, especially mothers, are "addicted" to their offspring and, as Satoshi Kotani describes it, "they have lived by such maxims as *ko-wa kasugai* (the child is the clamp that binds together husband and wife)".[148] Without parental roles, parents may not have anything to communicate about. As a result, children grow overprotected and tend to get hurt easily. They become adults, who cannot defend themselves, and who are not ready to face the world with all its flaws. Scholars argue, then, that parental overprotectiveness incapacitates children in a sense that they become powerless and unable to live an adult life. Combating obstacles becomes an issue they cannot deal with by themselves. According to scholars, what causes the children to feel lost, without anyone to turn to with their concerns, are two characteristics of Japanese families: poor communication originating from the traditional, authoritarian model of family, and loosening of family ties in contemporary times.

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[146] Smith, H. W., and Nomi, T., (2000).

[147] Kawanishi, Y., (2004), p. 29.

[148] Kotani, S., (2004), p. 35.

The discourse of parent-child relationship as a cause of the *hikikomori* problem resembles Western debates on the problematic or lacking communication between parents and children. Undoubtedly, there are elements which the discussions on Japanese and Western matters have in common. They include the fast pace of modern life which influences relationships between family members, or the importance of children to parents, mothers in particular, resulting in overprotectiveness that incapacitates children. We could even say that young people in both types of societies resist pressures their parents put on them. In Japan the pressure may come from the parental expectations in the area of educational achievement, in the West it may come from the urge to fulfill parental dreams through their own children, such as choosing a certain career, learning skills that parents were never given a chance to obtain, etc. However, here is where the differences start and why *hikikomori* should be distinguished from other forms of opposition in the West. People in the West usually express their resistance actively, through violence, crime, running away from home. On the other hand, Japanese people prefer its passive form, as I wrote in the literature of the subject section and will discuss later. What also distinguishes Japan from the West, is the concept of *amae* and the early socialization in Japan mentioned earlier, which rely on affection and interdependence. This may make mothers more overprotective and children less immune to the flaws of life. These factors likely contribute to a higher number of Japanese *hikikomori* cases than there are in other cultures, if we consider cases mentioned in the introduction to be of the same type as in Japan. Once again though, the question I asked while introducing the discourse of conformity as a cause of social withdrawal returns: why don't all people experiencing the same problem (parent-child communication) in Japan decide to withdraw? And again, the answer could be similar to the one I gave previously: some individuals

are not strong enough to raise and face the problematic situation. Another answer could also be similar: they passively protest against it, which I have just mentioned in this paragraph.

In addition to the discourse of parent-child communication as a cause of seclusion, it is important to mention Rees' interview with a *hikikomori* presented in the BBC documentary. It not only indicates that a deficit of emotional exchange may cause social withdrawal, but also points to the relationship between the parent-child communication, withdrawal and educational pressure.[149] The sufferer suggests that the reason behind his seclusion was the lack of communication originating from academic pressure exerted on him by his parents. He said that they had excessively emphasized his achievement in the educational field. The journalist also interviewed parents of the *hikikomori* who, as they looked at it in hindsight, agreed they had stressed their son's educational performance too much. Rees writes that this kind of weight put on a young person had cost the family a communication breakdown. It seems, then, that other issues, such as harmony and healthy relationships in a family, became less important. This case shows that the problem of communication between parents and children may be linked to educational pressure. Parents valued the child's academic attainment over family bonds, and the load became a factor worsening the parents-child communication which, in turn, caused *hikikomori*. Therefore, educational pressure indirectly triggered social withdrawal. As I will discuss in the next section, educational pressure may also be a direct cause of *hikikomori*.

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[149] Rees, P., (2002, October 20), Transcript.

5.3 DISCOURSES OF EDUCATIONAL PRESSURE AS A CAUSE OF *HIKIKOMORI* AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL CONFORMITY

At the beginning of the discussion I suggested that all the discourses of the potential causes of *hikikomori* are interrelated. The remaining link that needs to be discussed is that between educational pressure and *hikikomori*, and how these two are connected to the pressure for conformity.

As I suggested in the previous section of my thesis, educational pressure may directly cause *hikikomori*. In order to explain this connection, I first need to introduce two terms related to the education system in Japan which are common both in the press and among scholars: the escalator system and examination hell. These two expressions may seem to be a bit outdated but it is important to remember that some of *hikikomori* sufferers have been secluded for many years, sometimes ten to twenty, which means that some of them could have withdrawn because of these issues.

The first term, escalator system, describes the arrangement of overlapping requirements for subsequent schools which start with a desire to obtain a good job. Within this system to obtain the best jobs one needs to graduate from one of the top universities.[150] Henshall and Hendry indicate that entering such institutions requires graduating from the top high school, and earlier from the best junior high school, elementary school and sometimes even kindergarten.[151] Thus, educational competition begins at an early age and continues to be present at multiple levels.

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[150] Hendry, J. (2003), p. 87.

[151] Henshall, K.G, (1999), p. 111, and Hendry, J. (2003), p. 89.

However, admittance to all universities and high schools is conditioned by passing their entrance exams. This brings about the problem of examination hell where, as Frost suggests, students are put under enormous pressure to do well on these crucial exams. The Japanese system of assessment also requires continuous studying without a possibility to concentrate on or even beginning to develop one's own interests, pleasures, and without a chance to relax.

The escalator system and examination hell are only two of the factors which contribute to the educational pressure. It also has roots in the environment in which most of Japanese children from middle class families[152] grow up. Young people usually have strong support from their parents, especially mothers, in learning throughout the school years. Mothers help their children with homework, prepare food, provide snacks and are always involved in the offspring's school life. As mentioned earlier, Hashimoto writes about the sacrifice of education mamas, industrious fathers, filial piety, and a sense of debt that children are expected to have towards their parents. Therefore, the sacrifice and support of mothers and fathers seem to be conditional, although most parents would not admit it. They take care of their children but have high expectations towards them to succeed academically. Yuko Kawanishi calls parents of these youth the *hensachi* – "deviation value" generation. They grew up in a time when one's academic performance and success in entering the university were prioritized. Therefore, they need their children to achieve success in academic performance in order to be satisfied.[153]

Around this "culture of learning",[154] as Foljanty-Jost calls it, evolved an industry of *juku* – cram schools, and *yobikō* – preparatory schools. Continuous studying, combined with

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[152] Middle class families comprise a great majority of the Japanese society.

[153] Kawanishi, Y., (2004), p.28.

[154] Foljanty-Jost, G., (2004), p. 92.

competition in the educational race, may make some young people withdraw. As an example, a press journalist, Tim Larimer, describes a case of a young boy who led a normal life until he enrolled in *juku.* The courses were difficult and this was just too much for him mentally and emotionally, so he withdrew.[155]Also, according to Hidehiko Kuramoto of the Mental Health Center for Young People in Tokyo, intense competition and educational pressure are to be blamed for the increase in social withdrawal.[156] As Goldsmith writes, failure, such as failing school entrance exams, in some cases - multiple times - can trigger the onset of seclusion. Inability to cope with failure in the Japan's highly competitive society is the "self-locking door to *hikikomori*".[157] It seems, then, that the incapacity to face the pressure is a significant factor in causing social withdrawal. Some of the children, like the 14-year old Kanako described by McNeill were overworked to the point that she simply had enough of school before she withdrew.[158] The process of becoming *hikikomori* may be therefore gradual. At first, young people like T.H. (his name was not given) would skip school once, then stop attending school altogether, and finally seclude themselves.[159] As my findings show, *futōkō* (also known as *tōkōkyohi*) - school refusal - is considered to be one of the symptoms that precede *hikikomori*.[160]

Since in this section I examine not only the ways in which educational pressure causes social withdrawal, but also the relationship between social conformity and educational pressure, I

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[155] Larimier, T., (2000, August, 21).

[156] Goldsmith, M., (2000, May 13).

[157] Goldsmith, M., (2000, May 13).

[158] McNeill, D., (2004, December 6).

[159] Larimier, T., (2000, August 28).

[160] Parry, R., L., (2004, January 31).

will use the abovementioned school refusal problem as one of the examples to discuss the latter connection.

As I showed in the literature of the subject section, Yoneyama introduces a students' discourse of school refusal in Japan as one of five discourses of this phenomenon. She describes it as a four-stage process when students become aware of their identity. This discourse is also an opposition to the adult discourses of *futōkō* children, which attempt to ascribe different identities to young people who refuse to go to school. In the student discourse, some children admit they were "unable to be themselves,"[161] when they had to meet school and parental expectations of a "good student." They had to sacrifice their identity to conform. However, once they refused to go to school, they had time to think of who they are, and what they want. In the final stages of *futōkō,* they could accept themselves as persons who do not want to go to school, who can liberate themselves from the stigma and "position themselves in the social environment in a new light".[162] By the same token, they could liberate themselves from the pressure of conformity. Opposing this pressure empowered them. After this transformation some students decided to go back to school. The motivation, however, changed completely, because the stimulus changed from "I have to," to "I want to" go to school. It happened, because the individual stopped perceiving school attendance as fulfilling the role prescribed by society:

> Despite her criticism [of school], she intends to go back to school; not to conform, but to use it to actualize her dreams for the future. It is a completely different mindset from the one expected in the 'cured' state of *tōkōkyohi* as defined in the psychiatric and behavioral discourses.[163]

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[161] Yoneyama, S., (2000), p. 88.

[162] Yoneyama, S., (2000), p. 90.

[163] Yoneyama, S., (2000), p. 91.

The study by Yoneyama is evidence of the relationship between the pressure to conform and educational pressure. However, the author is concerned only with middle school students since they comprise the majority of children who refuse to go to school, as I mentioned earlier. Benjamin and other authors do discuss the relationship between the two types of pressure on the elementary school and university level, which I will study below.

Benjamin writes about conformity in the education system by describing elementary schools. She points out that many Japanese children learn how to live in a group and comply from the earliest years of their childhood. On the other hand, White writes that the entire system of schooling became extremely standardized and overwhelmed by multiple regulations. The uniformity is present in the daily life of junior and senior high school students among other things. Henshall adds that most of the day is spent at school or school related activities such as cram school studying. This means that the students are constantly in a group. Therefore, they do not often get to decide issues as individuals; do not experience life outside the well organized school life. As Hendry and White write, uniformity enters even the area of appearance, imposed mostly by school regulations (prohibition of dyed hair). They contain orders on how to behave outside school, such as not to stay overnight at friend's house, and how to greet teachers and schoolmates.[164] The conformity is also present in the fact that many students are afraid to be at odds with the rest of their classmates, whether it means being weak or clever.

McVeigh explains the concept of compliance at the university level in the context of peer relationships at school. He writes that the time spent at the university is not free of surveillance and necessity to conform. Many young people are afraid to stand out as good students. They know that proving to be smart, think fast or be different from the rest of the group will lead them

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[164] White, M., (1994), p. 223-225, Hendry, J. (2003), p. 94.

to be ostracized by their peers, to become an object of *ijime* – bullying. Although the potential exclusion could be simply a result of envy or jealousy, McVeigh notes that it could originate in non-conformity, because all individuals are expected by other students to comply to the class: "Once deeply internalized beyond conscious awareness, *seken* – society's gaze - is transmuted into a horizontal gaze (i.e., among peers)".[165] Therefore, a pressure coming from peers to conform discourages others from speaking their mind. Those, whose personality is less immune to the gaze cannot handle the excessive surveillance. For example, news reported by the Kyōdo News Service describes a young man who decided to withdraw from society not because he failed university entrance exams but despite the fact that he was accepted.[166] Although the agency does not give any further details on this case, there is a possibility that he withdrew because he was ostracized in the classroom. As I pointed out earlier, according to many journalists, in Japan being different is dangerous because of the gaze. It makes some people give up on their own self. This is shown in one of the *hikikomoris'* statement: "To survive in Japan's economic society, I'd have to kill my insides, my own original voice".[167]

As my discussion shows, educational pressure has an impact on the appearance of social withdrawal, and at the same time, pressure to conform may strongly influence this relationship. Since I also discussed the connection between educational pressure and parent-child communication, it seems natural that social conformity, educational pressure and parent-child communication create a chain. Pressure to conform influences educational pressure, which in turn disturbs communication between parents and children. Thus, according to the publications I

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[165] McVeigh, B. J., (2002), p. 197.

[166] Kyōdo News Service, (2003, September 19).

[167] Zielenziger, M., (2004, May 6).

analyzed, young people's fear of the gaze and not meeting social expectations pushes them to achieve academic success. The social and educational pressure are combined also with parental expectations that lead to a breakdown in family communication.

The "triple" connection can be also noticed, if we look at it from the perspective involving parents. We may say that parents being afraid of the social gaze – *seken*, keep pushing their children to choose the path of education which is socially acknowledged and therefore, the only path which is satisfactory to parents. Mothers and fathers want their offspring to do what is socially acceptable and what fits in the "traditionally" Japanese course of life. The purpose is that the children do not stand out from the society. Those whose child is a poor student, fails the entrance exams, is not able to or willing to find a job, is alienated and derided by the outside world. To avoid this situation parents put pressure on their children to achieve a high academic and social status. This, as mentioned earlier, may lead to deteriorating familial communication.

In this part of my discussion I introduced relationships between discourses of three causes of *hikikomori*. Since the discourses and, therefore, the causes, are interrelated, I showed that even though different authors may point to various "sets" or "combinations" of causes, their explanations do not have to be in opposition. In other words, connections between the causes are the evidence that multicausal explanations of the phenomenon do not have to contradict each other. Thus, my argument proved to be true. On the other hand, the discourses do not give us any ultimate explanation as for the *hikikomori* causes themselves. The discussions suggest potential answers but they do not really define any convincing solutions. What is interesting about the discourses though, is that they raise more questions concerning social withdrawal. I attempted to answer some of them in my discussion. As I wrote earlier, the phenomenon exists mostly in Japan and only some people experience seclusion. Why is this the case? I believe that there are

more possible answers than the ones I have provided: decreased psychological immunity of the sufferers combined with specific aspects of Japanese society, or courage that makes the individuals resist. I will now proceed to the next part of my discussion, where I examine in details the phenomenon of social withdrawal as a form of resistance.

5.4 *HIKIKOMORI* AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE

All the discourses I identified seem to indicate that *hikikomori* may be a form of resistance against the environment that young Japanese live in. Lock introduced its two forms which I pointed to in the literature section of my study: retreatism and ritualism. Eisenstadt suggested that these aspects of resistance required a referral to methods of conflict management. He, as well as Lebra and Long, indicated that aiming to maintain harmony is the reasoning behind ways of resolving conflicts in Japan, and so the methods become nonconfrontational. Lebra also pointed out that as long as the group unity is retained, solving a problem does not really matter. Therefore, in reality, the resistance of the hurt party turns into a mute opposition, because expressing anger and frustration may by disruptive.

I suggest that resistance observed among young people in Japan today is mute, and it takes on a form of retreatism. The evidence that support this point have increased in the last 10-15 years: parasite singles – *parasaito shinguru* who postpone their marriage while having a job and living off their parents;[168] freeters - *furitā* who refuse to or are unable to find full-time

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[168] Although not all young people who work and live with their parents can by classified as parasite singles, there were 10 million of such persons in 1995 and the number has been rising. In the year 2000 they comprised 12-

employment; NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training, Jap. *niito*) - youth who do not want to work and who do not study at the same time; school refusal – *futōkō* and finally *hikikomori*. Socially withdrawn discussed in this study may want to sacrifice their own future (missing years in their resume will not be kindly looked upon by a potential employer) to escape the reality they have to live in. Therefore, they choose retreatism as a form of resistance. Their mute resistance at home is similar to McVeigh's description of university students' behavior. He writes about diffident classroom discussions, expressionless faces of students showing no interest in the lecture, late arrivals to class, sleeping during the lecture and an overwhelming atmosphere of apathy. The passiveness of students is also apparent in, as McVeigh calls it, the "non-communicative verbalization with inaudible voice where sounds are emitted but nothing is said".[169] This suggests that students usually reply evasively to their professor's questions and speak out with a hardly audible voice. This conduct can be an indicative of lack of motivation to

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13% of the population with 60% of unmarried men and 80% of unmarried women. Nearly 90% of unmarried Japanese women in their 20s and 60% of single women in their 30s still live with their parents. A case of a 27 year old, well educated and working full time woman explains the logic of parasite singles: that is the only time she can enjoy freedom and use the money she earns on herself without obligations. If she gets married, she would have to choose between her carrier and a baby but today more women choose carriers. Smarter and better educated than any previous generation, they are unable to find companies that accept working mothers or husbands willing to embrace working wives. Therefore, they postpone their marriage. Young professional women who continue to live in their parents' homes can take shopping trips to New York or Paris, fill their closets with brand name clothes and accessories. They can easily afford most things and they are Japan's biggest brand-name goods' consumers. Average salaries are between 130.000 and 140.000 yen and average spending in the Tokyo Metropolitan area for men is 70.000 and women – 80.000 yen which is more than a half of their wages [Yamada, M., (2001, January-March) and (2000, June); Zielenziger, M., (2002, December 18)].

[169] McVeigh, B. J., (2002), p. 186.

learn, which is noticeable also at American colleges. However, the other way of interpreting the facts from Japan is that this behavior is a form of opposition. Young people express their resistance through their bodies, against years of discipline and observation. McVeigh calls it 'Regimented Bodies That Resist'.[170] Limitations of *hikikomori's* communication, however, have advanced to a level higher than that of university students as recluses decide to not talk at all, with a few exceptions of their family members.

In summary, I believe that the phenomenon of *hikikomori* represents a form of a mute resistance against the world of complicated interrelations. The connections, such as the ones between social conformity, educational pressure and communication between parents and children, make one feel incapacitated because of overwhelming pressure. People who are unable to face it may disappoint family or experience ostracism at school. A fear of any of these consequences, and an inability to find one's place in this intricate network of connections result in a wish to withdraw. Therefore, the seclusion of young people is a resistance against social conformity – the gaze, educational pressure, and deficient parental communication with children. At the same time, the discourses of *hikikomori* become a part of wider polemics on social problems among youth in contemporary Japan.

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[170] McVeigh, B. J., (2002), p. 186.

6.0   CONCLUSION

The goal of my study was to show whether causal explanations of the *hikikomori* problem, especially the ones involving multiple causes, contradict each other. Also, I explained that *hikikomori* is a form of a resistance against the pressure for conformity in Japan.

Findings based on my two-level discourse analysis indicate that media and scholars consider different causes to be the most salient. I discussed this in detail in section four. I also found that press articles, compared to scholarly publications, can be characterized as sensational, exaggerating and generalizing. The clearest indicators of press' sensationalism are the labels which journalists attach to socially withdrawn. "Bedroom hermits,"[171] "non-rising sons,"[172] and "the missing millions"[173] are only a few of them. Also, the press seems to either have very limited sources of data or is unwilling to verify or find more information. On the other hand, scholarly research complements one another. Even if it is not apparent in a single article, once readers distance themselves from the gained information, they may notice that researchers' evidence are logically correlated. Journalists are also being selective while aiming to sensationalize and to draw the readers' attention. Information in newspaper and magazine

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[171] Ryall, J., (2003, August 3).

[172] Price, S., (2002, October 20).

[173] Rees, P., (2002, October 20).

articles tend also to disagree with or even contradict scholarly research. Statements in the press may be superficial, vague, and lack scientific grounding. Exaggeration by press (articles published outside of Japan in particular) is noticeable especially regarding the cause of conformity. Journalists insist that compliance is a way to protect oneself from the punishment, such as exclusion from the society and by the society. Overgeneralization is salient especially when journalists point to one cause simplistically.

These findings are supported by an unpublished master's thesis by Levick who discussed biases in the cultural themes of articles published on Japan in the U.S. media. According to the author, media tend to distort the image of Japan by generalization and exaggeration which could lead to creating, as Levick puts it, a "harmful or destructive stereotype".[174] He showed that 44% of 106 articles he had included in the study revealed stereotypes in the journalists' writing about Japan.[175] Levick's observations on dominating themes disclose that over 15% of articles presented Japanese as a "'groupist' society where the individual is suppressed".[176] This confirms my findings concerning the image of uniformity and conformity present in foreign press.

On the other hand, the author notes that his work reaffirms other studies (Budner and Krauss) which showed evidence that media coverage can also be free of bias. Thus, although press articles certainly simplify and exaggerate, there may be a grain of truth in their coverage of

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[174] Levick, J., S., (April 2004), p. 62.

[175] Levick, J., S., (April 2004), p.34. According to Levick, the rest of analyzed articles (56%) were unbiased. However, the author points out that over 85% of the unbiased articles were "news" articles (i.e. "straight forward reportage of a single event," p. 58), which can be explained by the fact that news articles "leave little room for a journalist to interject bias" (p. 58).

[176] Levick, J., S., (April 2004), p.36.

groupism in Japan. The works of Komiya and Holden which I used in my thesis support this idea. Komiya as well as other scholars (Tanioka and Glaser, Bayley) show social control and conformity in Japan as an important characteristic since they contribute to a low crime rate, also among young people.

However, despite containing some accuracy, media tend to sensationalize and generalize. All this leads to misinformation and an incorrect representation of the *hikikomori* problem among the general public. But for the press, circulation matters greatly. Therefore, even scholars (Jones, Zielenziger) are sometimes found relaxing the academic style (possibly under the pressure of the newspaper editor) when writing in the mass-media.

The negative tendencies of press are closely related to the literature of the subject. I pointed to Foucault's concept of the gaze and its relationship with media and society as agents of surveillance. Although journalists are under pressure to publish quickly and edit severely due to space limitations, this does not justify their tactics. By generalizing, exaggerating and being sensationalist, media provide the audience with information which is easy to "absorb," and greatly influences people's minds. This way, media can diffuse surveillance, and appear its advocate at the same time. On the other hand, society emerges as an agent of the gaze, pressuring its members for conformity. I showed the importance of the influence of compliance in my discussion, when I pointed to its direct impact on *hikikomori,* educational pressure, and parent-child communication.

In my study I also examined whether causal explanations conflict with one another. In order to find the answer, I discussed relationships between three causes of *hikikomori* showing that they not only cause social withdrawal, but also that some of the causes influence others. I showed that social conformity and educational pressure influence parent-child communication,

and that conformity also has a direct impact on educational pressure. Given this conceptualization, I concluded that since there are relationships between discourses of various causes of the phenomenon, causal explanations do not have to contradict each other. The interrelations may even make the picture of what causes and why it causes *hikikomori* more complex.

Finally, I argued that social withdrawal is a form of mute resistance of young people against expectations imposed on them and social norms. The Japanese way of conflict management and resolution I discussed that *hikikomori* becomes an avoidance of confrontation and, therefore, a passive, mute opposition to experienced problems.

My findings and discussion point to the need for greater care in searching for causes of *hikikomori*. We should beware of our sources of information, regardless of whether these are press or scholarly articles, publications from or outside of Japan. A variety of interpretations and discourses on the phenomenon suggest that there is more than one explanation. Through a cross-category discussion, my study is one of the few to expound on interrelations of *hikikomori* causes originating from different areas of life, such as society, school and parents. The thesis elaborately explains the linkages between causes. In this matter, it is distinct from other authors' publications that point to causal relationships within categories without expanding on connections between causes. My study is also one of the few summaries of all potential factors mentioned by media and scholars that result in the problem of *hikikomori*, which will supply a better understanding of the phenomenon. Also, since only a small amount of data on social withdrawal has been published in English language, I hope that this thesis on *hikikomori* will make an important contribution to English literature on the subject.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF PUBLICATION TEXTS IN DATA SET ANALYZED IN THE STUDY

1. Asahi News Service, (2001, May 18). "Volunteer Groups Are Big Help for Those Suffering Withdrawal"

2. Barr, C., (2000, August 16). "Young Japanese Retreat to Life of Seclusion," in *Christian Science Monitor*

3. Clifford, T., (2002, June 10). "Home, All Alone" in *The Scotsman*.

4. Financial Times Information, (2002, December 21). "Out of Sight, Not Out of Mind," after *The Asahi Shinbun*

5. Fink, P., J., "Fink! Still at Large: *hikikomori* Syndrome and Social Withdrawal," in *Clinical Psychiatry News*. Vol. 30, Issue 9, p. 1

6. Goldsmith, M., (2000, May 13). "Locked Inside: Cases of *hikikomori*, or Social Withdrawal, on the Rise," in *The Daily Yomiuri*.

7. Garvin, G., and Zielenziger, M., (2002, June). "Lost in the Matrix," in *Investigate*

8. Hara, T., et al., "*Hikikomori*-to Seishin-iryō," in *Seishin Igaku*. Vol. 45, Issue 3, March 2003, p. 278-291

9. Hoshino, Y., et al., "Hon'nin-ga Rai'in Shinai Futōkō, *Hikikomori* Rei-ni Okeru Kazoku Shidō-no Kokoromi," in *Shinshin Igaku*. Vol. 42, No. 6, June 2002, p. 390

10. Isobe, U., *Hikikomori-ga Naoru Toki*. Kōsōsha. Tokyo (2004)

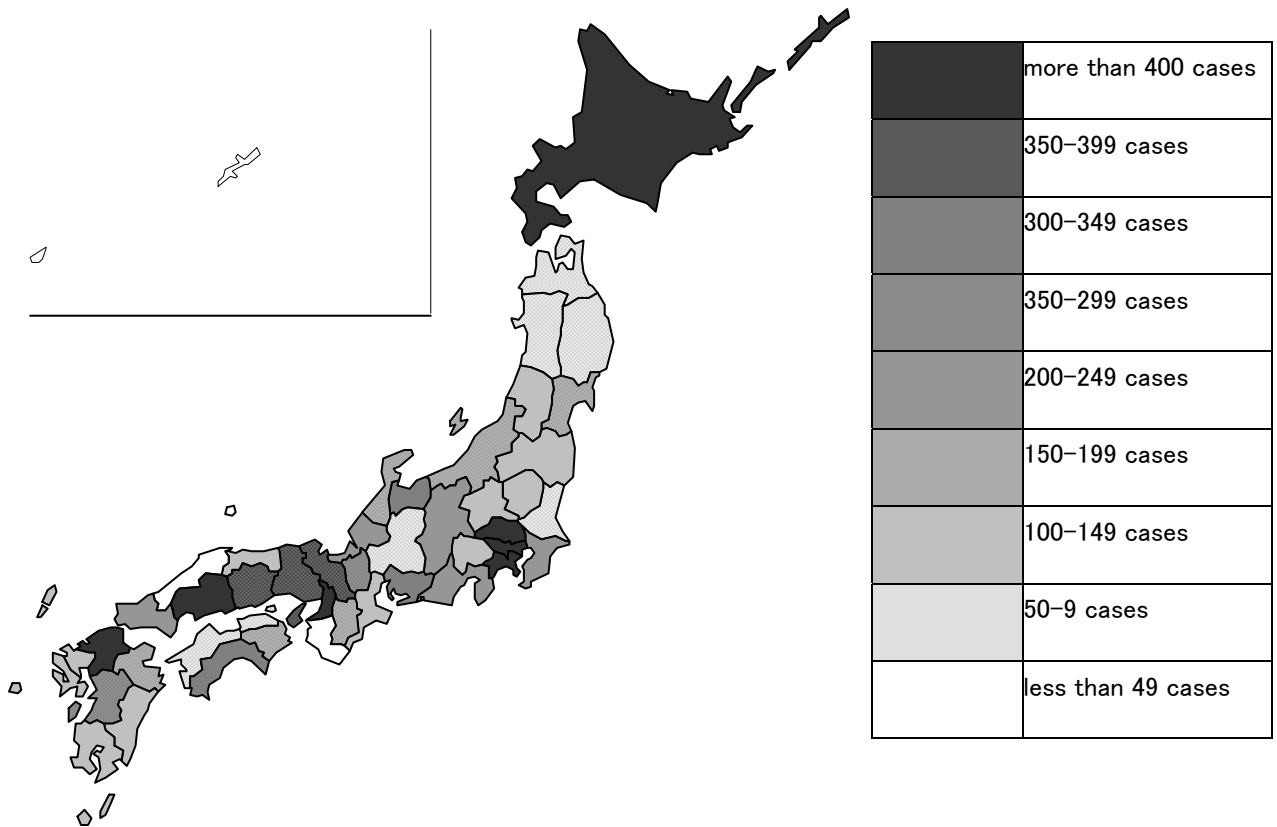11. *Japan Times, The* (2002, April 18). "Young Adults' Withdrawal from Society Vexes Parents." Retrieved from http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nfh&an=7EH1155516321

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14. Kondo, N., "Seinenki-ni Okeru *Hikikomori*-no Seiin-to Chōkika-ni Tsuite," in *Seishin Igaku.* Vol 45, No. 3, 2003, p. 235-240

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37. Shimoyachi, N., (2004, October 14). "Socially Withdrawn People Come Out of Hiding with Private Groups' Help," in *The Japan Times*

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MAP OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF *HIKIKOMORI* CASES IN ALL PREFECTURES

AND METROPOLITAN AREAS

	more than 400 cases
	350–399 cases
	300–349 cases
	350–299 cases
	200–249 cases
	150–199 cases
	100–149 cases
	50–9 cases
	less than 49 cases

Source: Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, (2003), p. 129.

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