FROM FAILED SONS TO WORKING MEN: REHABILITATING HIKIKOMORI

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INTRODUCTION

Hikikomori is a label, coined by Tokyo Psychologist Saito Tamaki (Saito 1998), which describes an increasing trend of acute social withdrawal amongst youths in Japanese society. Hikikomori emerged into public awareness as a social problem in Japan between the years 1999 and 2000, when a spree of shocking youth crimes were linked to the hikikomori phenomenon by the media (Lyons, 2001; Ogino, 2004, p.120; BBC, 2000b): "(s)ome of those accused in the crime spree--including the bus hijacker and a man who kidnapped a girl and held her captive for 10 years--have been identified as hikikomori." (Larimer, 2000). Hikikomori were characterized as Japanese youth, primarily male, who shut out contact with society by hiding within their parents' homes for months or even years at a time. In the process, hikikomori become truants, failing out of school and work through their long absences from the outside world (Lyons, 2001; Ogino, 2004, p.120). Japanese families who can afford to support hikikomori children in the home for months or years at a time are those with middle-class resources (Kudo, 2001). Further, once a hikikomori youth has dropped out of the mainstream education track due to long absences, the preparation necessary to study and pass the college entrance exams becomes a difficult and stressful hurdle. For this hikikomori youth, there are few second chances in the mainstream Japanese system for a middle-class career (Rohlen, 1992).

In response to the hikikomori issue, "(t)he Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare organized a research group in June 2000 immediately after a murder case" (Ogino, 2004, p.121). This governmental group established an operational definition for hikikomori that is still used in the identification and treatment of hikikomori youth. This definition has four criteria: (1) individual circumstances for the cause of withdrawal are disregarded, (2) it focuses on the "state in which people are retreating into their living spaces and withdrawing from social activities, for example school or work", (3) hikikomori do not have a mental illness or mental retardation- 'hikikomori' is not a name for a disease but a label for the act of acute social withdrawal and, (4) "the period of withdrawal is six months or more". The research group surveyed Japanese health centers throughout the country in 2003 and yielded 14,069 cases that fit their operational framework for 'hikikomori'. Of the respondents, 76.4% were males, their

average age was 26.7 years old, and 50% had been suffering as hikikomori for over five years (Ogino, 2004, p.121).

My research examined one hikikomori rehabilitation institution, given the pseudonym *Takeyama Gakkô*, which is located in the Tokyo region of Japan. Over the two to three year span of Takeyama's rehabilitation program, a normalization process was employed in order to re-socialize middle-class youth who had displayed hikikomori behaviors. That is, the construction of social rehabilitation based on an idealized norm of conduct through group participation, as well as routinization and repetition until desired behaviors were internalized and taken for granted (Foucault, 1995). In Takeyama's normalization process, right conduct was rewarded with greater self-determination and status, while improper conduct was discouraged. After several years of rehabilitation at the center, a reclusive middle-class hikikomori, aged 15 to 29, was transformed into a normalized working adult. I argue in this paper is that Takeyama's rehabilitation process is gender socialization, namely the adoption of working class masculinities by male 'graduates' of the rehabilitation center. My central research question for this paper examines how the process of hikikomori rehabilitation observed at my research site was also a process of masculinization for male students at Takeyama.

Director of Takeyama, Kazuo Ishida, Mr. Ishida, has three decades of experience with hikikomori. He estimated that the Takeyama facility has admitted over 1500 hikikomori youths over the years into its program, with 65% of these being boys (Kazuo Ishida, interview, 4 May, 2004). His wife, Mrs. Ishida, has overseen the daily operations of Takeyama for many years. In this job capacity, Mrs. Ishida explained that Japanese families with male children are more likely to seek outside intervention, thus accounting for Takeyama's gender distribution (Mizuho Ishida, interview, 1 May, 2004). As I explored staff members' perspectives on the gender imbalance at the center, I began to perceive gender socialization as central to Takeyama's rehabilitation process, from entry to matriculation. Male re-socialization at Takeyama manifests in numerous ways, from the daily activities of physical labor, within the stages of rehabilitation as defined by Takeyama, to male staff-to-student role modeling. Staff mentors provided daily normalization cues, encouragement, and reinforcement of masculine behaviors.

Takeyama's rehabilitation process defines three stages of recovery for their students as they progress through the program. In my observations, I noticed that each stage had a discernable masculinization phase attached to the process. Stage one students still exhibited the passivity and avoidance behaviors learned in the family home as hikikomori. As youth are normalized at Takeyama into behaviors considered acceptable for youth their age, they were also modeling the masculinities of staff mentors and more senior students in the program. By stage two, they were young men re-socialized into a functional male identity. Stage three students exhibited the self-reliant masculine identities of working adults, but were still attached to the Takeyama center in their daily responsibilities. At each stage through the Takeyama process, young Japanese males are exchanging one form of masculine identity for another, each with an increasing level of expected performance within accepted gender norms.

My emergent research question is to examine these two features of the rehabilitation process for hikikomori at the Takeyama facility: the normalization of a male youth into an adult masculine identity that also involves the construction of a working class life.

METHODS

The Setting

The Takeyama rehabilitation center in Tokyo is a two-story building. Indoor décor in the public areas is simple and functional. Both floors of Takeyama had dozens of uniform doors that led to rooms that were the assigned sleeping quarters of the students. A lounge that spanned about half of the length of the first floor acted as the primary setting for staff/student mentoring activities as well as the three daily meals served by the center. Most of the day, the lounge functioned as a gathering place for students and staff between duties. Situated in the center of the lounge were two low dining tables designed for users to sit on the carpeted floor. Despite the limited seating in the lounge, the two-hour window for each meal period was a generous time frame, so that the lounge was never over-crowded.

During my research, Takeyama Gakkô had sixty-two youth in rehabilitation who were supervised

by eighteen staff. Only twenty students lived at any one time in the main Takeyama buildings, and about 70% of those were male. Youth that lived in the main Takeyama buildings were the newest arrivals and were still socially withdrawn hikikomori.

Data Gathering

I collected qualitative data in the form of field notes and semi-structured interviews at the Takeyama rehabilitation center for hikikomori youth. This was done during seven discrete one-week stays over a span of ten months, from September 2003 to May 2004, which totaled into a combined observational period of nearly two months. I directly observed young people being treated for acute social withdrawal, the facility's staff, and the organizational structure and methodology used to rehabilitate youths in the program.

I regularly recorded field notes each day after the scheduled breakfast, lunchtime, and dinner meals offered at the Takeyama facility. The richest interactions and densest number of events occurred in the time leading up to, during, and after each daily meal. Gathering in the center's common lounge/dining room for meals three times a day was an activity that everyone enrolled and employed at the hikikomori rehabilitation center was expected to attend without fail. On most days, attendance in the lounge for meal times numbered around sixty people, spread out over the span of the two hours scheduled for each meal period.

I also conducted sixteen semi-structured qualitative interviews with permanent and volunteer staff at Takeyama. The purpose of this Takeyama interview instrument was to balance my own field observations of *hikikomori* behaviors with observations of the experienced Takeyama Gakkô staff. Interviews were conducted at the research site in the interview subject's native language of Japanese.

DRAWING IN FAILED SONS: STAFF EXPLAIN MALE BIAS

Admittance to Takeyama as a stage one student is a gendered filtering process. This involves the arc of withdrawal into a hikikomori lifestyle interacting with the middle-class family expectations for

sons and daughters to behave within accepted gender norms. In the case of boys, the behaviors of hikikomori males run contrary to parental expectations for sons, that of the middle-class masculine ideal of the hard working white-collar salaryman (Roberson and Suzuki, 2003, p. 4). In post-war Japan, a successful middle-class lifestyle for an adult male has been the corporate salaryman who has "lifetime employment, the seniority system of company promotion and company unionism" (Roberson and Suzuki, 2003, p. 9). However, within the social isolation of a hikikomori, the boy fails to internalize the established social norms for young men. In this sense, Takeyama's hikikomori are "failed middle-class sons". When a family finally acknowledges that their child is a hikikomori, they seek outside intervention. At this point, Takeyama draws a family's failed son into the rehabilitation program as a stage one student.

According to the Takeyama staff, many hikikomori live in their rooms within the family home for months or years at a time. To avoid any interpersonal contact, hikikomori sleep during the day and venture out in the late hours of the night, when the risk of face-to-face contact is low. During late hours, a hikikomori may go into the kitchen for food or even go outside to vending machines near his house. Parents may be forced to talk through the youth's door to a hikikomori child within who refuses face-to-face contact. In this context, a hikikomori may be perceived in what can be described as a "failed son" in the eyes of his family. Mizuho Ishida acted as primary administrator for the Tokyo facility's daily responsibilities. As Mrs. Ishida noted:

> In Japan, boys go outside, girls stay in the house. Therefore, boys who don't go outside are seen as a problem. Because girls who stay inside the home eventually come outside for the purpose of marriage, parents don't see hikikomori girls as a problem. So, a girl becomes a little withdrawn, a hikikomori, but the parents don't yet understand this. "Ah, you are staying in the home, that's fine", they think.

 (Mizuho Ishida, interview, 1 May, 2004)

Besides Mrs. Ishida, conversations with other Takeyama staff also supported this notion that families seek Takeyama's outside intervention for hikikomori males who have failed to become socialized into expected male adult roles. Takeyama draws these failed sons into their program for rehabilitation, which by the staff's rationale explained the higher ratio of male students at Takeyama's facility.

Expectations for Sons and Daughters

The crux of the problem for hikikomori, according to the staff, is that recognition of social withdrawal among young men and women in Japan appears to center around the different gender expectations for their sons and daughters. Interviews and conversations with the Takeyama staff revealed a worldview that the reason more males were brought to Takeyama for rehabilitation is that the role of men is outside of the home earning a living to support the household, while the role of women is in the home. This conforms to the concepts of inside sphere or domestic sphere for the expected roles of females, and outside or public sphere for males in Japanese society (Brinton, 1992, p.79-107).

Mari Ozawa was a part-timer who had worked for over a year at Takeyama. Because her own child was a *hikikomori*, she possessed knowledge both as a parent and as a trained member of the Takeyama rehabilitation staff. Ozawa acknowledged the disparity of female students:

> In the case of female hikikomori, families have the attitude that it's okay if females don't work, so acute social withdrawal in females is better hidden from parents. Young males, because it's unacceptable for them to refuse to work if they don't go to school, those parents quickly feel a sense of impending crisis with their male child and rush him to the hospital.
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> For that reason, on the surface, there are only a small number of females recognized as hikikomori, though there is no practical difference in the number of young males and females who are actually hikikomori. The fact that only fifteen percent of Takeyama Gakkô students are female is attributable to the sense of impending emergency parents feel with male children they don't feel with their young girls.

(Mari Ozawa, interview, 1 May, 2004)

The reclusive and passive behaviors of male hikikomori are a contrast to the expected behaviors of most male children their age who are in the process of transitioning into adult social roles. Adult social roles and adult identity are influenced by gender socialization. "Gender…is the activity of managing situated conduct in the light of normative conceptions of attitudes appropriate for one's sex category". Further, gender is rooted in social learning as "what is involved in doing gender as an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction" (West and Zimmerman, 2002 p. 5). Masculinity is thus a learned process, one that is imprinted into a normalization process that also contains the valuation of expected adult roles in society.

In terms of young girls, passivity or shyness can be seen as a feminine trait in Japan, and a girl who hides in her room and refuses to leave the house is not necessarily acting too far outside of the expected social norms. However, shyness can go to extremes, as Mrs. Ishida elaborates:

> **Michael**: At Takeyama there are students who are female. So, why did the parents of those girls bring their children to this place for help?
>
> **Ishida***: Although they are girls* [Emphasis mine], their parents felt there was a problem so they brought them here to Takeyama. The girls wouldn't take even one step to go outside, they couldn't make friends; *it wasn't that they weren't obedient/docile girls; the girls were far too docile and quiet*. [Emphasis mine], The parents for those seven female students who are here at Takeyama didn't think that the girls should have to work at a job like young males. What's more, though they are girls, the parents wanted their daughters to become energetic and healthy.
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> (Mizuho Ishida, interview, 1 May, 2004)

On the other hand, if a hikikomori girl is not 'shy' and retiring but is loud, aggressive and abusive by shouting at family members, the Takeyama staff believe that parents of such hikikomori daughters become alarmed and seek outside intervention. The staff reports that this aggression is a common stage of the hikikomori experience for both genders with the building frustration at their predicament after a long period of seclusion. The Takeyama staff believe that some of their female students were brought to them in this phase of aggressive frustration and acting out by hikikomori. These aggressive behaviors flag a female youth as hikikomori by their parents, for she is a daughter not acting within expected feminine norms. The social expectations by Japanese parents with girls appears to be in accordance with lingering traditional values of Confucian and ie social hierarchy as they relate to the role of females in Japanese society (Lebra 1984; Hendry 1987; Rosenburger 2001).

ADMITTING BROKEN BOYS: INITIAL EXPERIENCES AT THE CENTER

When a young boy drops out of school, refuses to work, sleeps during the day or remains hidden in his room, some alarmed parents eventually identify their child as a hikikomori and seek outside intervention for their child (Kudo, 2001). These young males might be considered broken boys in the sense that the shrink from normal male behaviors- such as being active, going outdoors, rough-housing with other boys, playing competitive games, and doing sports. Hidden in their rooms, they fail to mature into normal male adolescents. Hikikomori are at risk of becoming severely damaged men later in life as

single, economically dependent, and reclusive misfits. The Takeyama staff believe that parents with hikikomori in their homes become locked into a negative parent-son dynamic that further reinforces hikikomori behaviors. Eventually, parents realize they need outside intervention to help their failed son. Takeyama provides this outside third-party intervention by admitting the hikikomori male into their rehabilitation program.

Through video documentation as well as staff conversations, I was informed of Takeyama's admittance process once concerned parents contact the center. At this point, Takeyama Director, Mr. Kazuo Ishida, travels to the domestic setting of the family home to meet the *hikikomori*. Initially, Mr. Ishida may talk to the *hikikomori* boy through the door of their room, asking them questions, trying to get them to realize their situation, and to open the youth up. After numerous house calls, spanning months to a year or more, the *hikikomori* youth finally agrees to accompany Mr. Ishida to Takeyama's facility where a room has been reserved. The Takeyama staff reports that, for an incoming *hikikomori* youth, the transition from the family home to the shared living environment of Takeyama's main facility is often the hardest adjustment of the entire rehabilitation. In this sense, a family's passive and broken boy is admitted into the public rehabilitation environment of Takeyama's rehab center, one that thrusts the youth into daily routines and interactions designed to socialize youth into an acceptable and functional masculinity (Rohlen, 1989; Roberson & Suzuki, 2003).

New arrivals to Takeyama, these "broken boys", are considered students in stage one of their rehabilitation, a phase that usually lasts from three to six months. Fresh from the family home, stage one students are still withdrawn and are therefore kept under very close supervision, with boys living in the main Takeyama building and girls in the girls' dormitory next door. The first recovery phase involves the staff working closely with a new student to break older reclusive habits. This is done in part by involving new arrivals in activities with more senior Takeyama students—*hikikomori* youth in the advanced stages of rehabilitation. Takeyama's supervised activities are designed to build a sense of belonging to the group.

A new arrival's first step into a normal identity is provided with a strong positive male role model found in Mr. Ishida, who has coaxed most of the student body at Takeyama out of their family homes to a life at Takeyama. I observed firsthand Mr. Ishida's charisma and fatherly conduct towards the students- an indication of the role he plays in the recovering hikikomori's lives. In his late fifties, he is quick to smile, has a disarming demeanor, and often laughs jovially. An example of his fatherly behaviors were his interactions with Takeyama students during an outdoor barbeque—his friendly banter garnered smiles and laughs from even the most withdrawn Stage One Takeyama students. The net effect of Mr. Ishida's circulation among the students at the barbeque was to give the impression that the students were a part of his extended family, a part of Takeyama. As a result of Mr. Ishida's efforts, a strong bond has formed between Mr. Ishida and the Takeyama students, even if he cannot be present at Takeyama on a daily basis.

Despite Mr. Ishida's moderating effect on hikikomori isolation, several weeks to several months are required before Takeyama's daily routines and responsibility-taking behaviors take hold in a student's behavior patterns. Like their hikikomori existence at home, new stage one students retain their social habits and sleep during the day and roam the Takeyama building at night, which allows the avoidance of as much interaction as possible.

Starting at 11:30 P.M., the Takeyama night-shift staffer makes the rounds of the Takeyama facility, shutting down the main lights, locking up the doors, and finally returning to the office to record events in the logbook. It is well after 1 A.M., when the halls are quiet and most people in Takeyama are asleep, that the new students to Takeyama venture out of their bedrooms. While the new students were not loud in their activities, the thin walls of the Takeyama center made it easy to hear them as they shuffled around the hallways late at night.

Kamen, The Masked Hikikomori

One youth, who I'll call "Kamen", was a good example of a typical stage one student. Kamen, like other new arrivals, retained hikikomori behaviors learned in the home. These behaviors included avoidance of face-to-face social interactions, and preference for physical spaces as barriers to social interaction.

Coming out of his Takeyama bedroom only after he thought everyone else had gone to bed was a very thin boy aged 18 or 19, Kamen. Dressed in a threadbare navy blue tracksuit with white stripes down the side, Kamen had long black disheveled hair. Kamen also always wore a white filter mask that covered his entire face below his nose. Over my first four months of visits to Takeyama, Kamen always wore the mask.

I first encountered Kamen when I went for a glass of water at 2 A.M. in the dish storage room connected to the Takeyama lounge. Seeing him, I smiled and inclined my head. Startled see me, Kamen retreated to the sink at the far end of the room. Without a word, he turned his back to me. The boy turned on the water faucet and darted his hand in and out of the water stream. He repeated this behavior for about five minutes, and never turned around. He only stopped when he thought I had left the room, he then resumed making a late night meal from leftovers in the refrigerator. The next night at 2 A.M., I encountered Kamen again in the same place. His back was to me as he stood in front of the large sink basin. He wore the same blue tracksuit and white cotton facemask. This time, he continually washed the same dish for twenty minutes.

During my first few encounters with Kamen, his late forays for dinner leftovers became a common pattern. Even if I only briefly walked by in the hallway of the Takeyama building, Kamen turned on the faucet and "acted busy" to avoid face-to-face interaction. If I turned, Kamen would be washing one or two dishes, or his own hands. He washed these items under the water stream repeatedly for long periods, sometimes twenty to thirty minutes. On occasion, I said 'hello' to him, in either English or Japanese, as I walked into the dish room- so as not to startle him with my arrival. After a half dozen

such greetings, he started to nod his head in acknowledgement, though he remained with his back to me.

Kamen's nightly excursions typified the behaviors of new arrivals to Takeyama, but with his own unique manifestation of hikikomori introversion and social avoidance patterns. There were other new arrivals that I encountered at Takeyama who had different eccentric reactions to potential social encounters, such as hiding behind doors or facing the wall as I walked by, but the avoidance of face-to-face interaction was common. While the energy expended by a former male hikikomori to avoid interaction had an obvious willful intent, the overall effect of these encounters with stage one students was the impression of passivity and shyness, behaviors that the Takeyama staff believe are allowed to develop in the family home. Ultimately, parents view themselves as having failed in raising their "failed son", to the point of seeking outside intervention at Takeyama.

CRAFTING MALE ADULT IDENTITY

As a new arrival to the rehabilitation facility, Kamen practiced avoidance behaviors and passivity learned in the family home as a hikikomori. At Takeyama, the routinization of daily center activities gradually normalized Japanese adult patterns of behavior into hikikomori youth. Thomas P. Rohlen's research points out an interesting facet of socialization in the Japanese context: "If we look closely at the developmental cycle, we find every stage from nursery school to early employment the same basic routines reiterated and the same social lessons repeated again" (Rohlen, 1989, p 27). This process focuses on "standardizing the basic practices and on understanding their moral implications" as set within the framework of 'group life', or *shudan seikatsu* (Rohlen, 1989, p 27). Routine activities around Takeyama included working at the recycling center, remedial education, and group participation in meals. In order to steer a hikikomori youth towards normal adult functioning, Takeyama staff mentors paired normalization through routine with purposeful social interactions. Nested within both the daily routines and mentoring behaviors were a gender-specific process. Thus, male-on-male role modeling was a part of the treatment process at Takeyama.

With the disproportionate number of male students at Takeyama, as well as the observed tendency to divide into groups down gender lines (Takeya Field Notes, 2004), male staff mentors primarily interacted with male students at Takeyama. Male students at differing stages of rehabilitation also formed social groups along male-to-male gender lines. These factors combined to make group activities in public spaces, such as the Takeyama lounge, a forum for the reinforcement of male-gendered behavior patterns.

Male-on-Male Role Modeling

During the time of my research, I observed that most hikikomori in stage two and stage three of recovery at Takeyama Gakkô exhibited patterns of behavior that emulated those adults around them. Among these adult behaviors were habits that were usually associated with male adults in Japan. Observed "male behaviors" included a gambling pool on the Akebono K1 wrestling match, smoking, reading horse racing results in the newspaper, watching television sports, playing mahjong, and discussing sports in conversation. Takeyama staffers utilized hobbies or activities they enjoyed and brought them into the Takeyama environment. In the case of male staffers, competitive games such as mahjong, or sports like soccer, became leisure activities organized as a break from daily routines at Takeyama.

The key factor in many of these male-based behaviors was the competitive aspect to the activities. Mahjong is commonly played by young college-aged men in Japan, and like poker, small wagers are made in each game with the winner leaving the game with a small pot of money. The regular mahjong games I observed at Takeyama were performed by male students and staff mentors. Mahjong became a medium of male bonding and interaction between the young male students. At the same time, it provided a medium for male-to-male role modeling among Takeyama students.

Cigarette Smoking

In Japan, both males and females smoke tobacco. However, there is an interesting distinction in smoking behaviors between the sexes. The public performance of smoking is common among Japanese

males (Fukada et. al., 2005; Ohida et. al., 2001), while female smoking patterns tend to be more private in nature (Tsuboi et. al, 2002). Further, males in positions of responsibility and stature, such as white-collar salaryman and blue-collar working class men, can be observed to smoke in public spaces due to the long established socially acceptable climate for smoking in present day Japan.

Smoking at Takeyama presented an intriguing male-patterned behavior among staff and students. During meal times and in the evening, the Takeyama lounge was full of a thick haze of tobacco smoke. The primary creators of this smoke cloud in the lounge were usually two or three male staff as well as six to eight male Takeyama students. Most of the habitual smokers I observed were male students at Takeyama in stage two or stage three of rehabilitation. I don't recall ever seeing a female student or staffer in Takeyama smoking in the public space of the lounge.

In the context of Takeyama's mentoring, several tobacco-smoking behaviors acted as pretexts for positive socialization activities amongst groups of smokers gathered around ashtrays in Takeyama's lounge. In Japan, when a group of smokers are in a room with ashtrays, they tend to puff on cigarettes while standing or sitting next to an available ashtray. This ashtray in turn becomes a social hub and in such close proximity, most smokers strike up a conversation to pass the time. In Takeyama, a mentor smoking a cigarette sat near an ashtray along with Takeyama students who also smoked, forming clusters of social groupings.

Also, the habit of smoking further reinforced the social conceptualizations of masculinity and adulthood for a recovering hikikomori. An incoming student, a newly recovering hikikomori, looked up to the stage two or three students and staff mentors for guidance and inspiration. At the point the student had recovered over the several years of rehabilitation at Takeyama and was ready to interact again with the outside world, the Takeyama graduate was more than physically addicted to the nicotine in the cigarettes. Although smoking is an unhealthy habit, over the course of his rehabilitation, the social performance of smoking became a part of the Takeyama's graduate's crafted adult persona.

Revisiting Kamen: Unmasked

During my final months at Takeyama in the spring of 2004, Kamen no longer wore a cotton mask. Kamen had passed from stage one of the rehabilitation into stage two. His outward appearance and hygiene had changed: he now wore contemporary clothes for a young man his age, stonewashed jeans and a button-up shirt. He also had a haircut and tidier appearance. And, as with many of the males at Takeyama, Kamen was in the habit of frequent cigarette smoking breaks in the lounge. The change in Kamen's behavior and demeanor was also noticeable. Kamen was much more active during the daylight hours. In conversations with the ever-present mentor staff in the Takeyama lounge, he smiled and actively engaged in conversation, though his responses tended to be terse. The socialization processes at Takeyama had brought Kamen "out of his shell" into a more outgoing and active participant role within the Takeyama community.

BUILDING A WORKING CLASS FUTURE

Many aspects of Takeyama's routinization and personal accountability in its rehabilitation program were heavily laden with masculine working class ideals of adulthood. For a young Japanese adult to become accepted by society at large as a productive contributor involves performance within expected adult gender roles. For Japanese males, this role involves a masculinity patterned on the white-collar Japanese Salaryman or its blue-collar variant (Roberson & Suzuki, 2003): that of a man able to head a household, provide for his family, and establish job security. Takeyama's three-stage rehabilitation process cannot provide a middle class future for its graduates. However, Takeyama can provide a working class future through a high school diploma, an established manual labor work history, and job apprenticeships.

One aspect of rehabilitation at Takeyama is a regimen of remedial academic classes administered through an accredited correspondence school that has a working relationship with Takeyama Gakkô. The Tsuji correspondence school gave students at Takeyama an opportunity to take the junior high school and high school classes they had missed while in seclusion as hikikomori. Takeyama's ultimate goal with

Tsuji's correspondence courses and its resulting degree was to offer Takeyama students more viable choices in terms of regular employment and integration into the local community. On a personal level, the process of daily lessons was intended to rehabilitate the youth as it built a confident self-image as well as legitimacy as an adult member of society.

While the Tsuji education helped a Takeyama graduate secure a better quality of life and maintain a stable working adult identity post-graduation, the Tsuji diploma would never recover the opportunities at a middle class education that Takeyama youth had lost in their months or years in acute social withdrawal. The Takeyama staff reported that many of their students came from middle class families. For hikikomori youth who has dropped out of society, school truancy and blank periods of work history deny access to middle-class lives. For individuals outside of the mainstream school-to-work system established in post-war Japan, there are few avenues leading to second chances (Brinton, 1992; Rohlen, 1992). If a youth has missed more than a few months of school, such as the case with hikikomori, it becomes very difficult to catch up with classmates. Further, if a youth has not maintained grades and has scored low on placement tests into high school and college, unskilled or vocational labor becomes the only option for most people (Rohlen, 1992). So while it should be acknowledged that the job opportunities for Takeyama students with Tsuji degrees are limited to working class prospects, it is a great improvement over a possible lifetime living in the family home, as a dependent.

Besides Tsuji's correspondence degree, Takeyama's other important endeavor was crafting a work history for post-graduation employment. The various activities the students performed at Takeyama during their stay crafted a work history and built a resume for manual labor jobs. For a stage three student at Takeyama, utilizing both the Tsuji degree and Takeyama work history becomes important post-graduation, as the staff works to integrate them into permanent employment with Takeyama's job matching services. Mr. Ishida's son, Katsuya Ishida, ran a job placement agency to ensure that recovered hikikomori are able to stay recovered through placement of Takeyama graduates in jobs. The placement service allowed male graduates to re-enter society while keeping their hikikomori past relatively obscured

to their future employers and the community. Job placement served as a bridge, a transition from the safe environs of Takeyama into the realities of the working adult.

For example, Takeyama's Community Uncle Apprentice Training Program pairs a rehabilitated hikikomori like Kamen as an apprentice to a small local business, such as a tomato farmer. This arrangement is a continuation of the mentor-student dynamic developed at Takeyama in stage one and two of the rehabilitation process. With only a Tsuji correspondence degree, Kamen's job prospects are limited to manual labor, contract and temporary work, or service industry jobs in restaurants and convenience stores. Further, the master-apprentice connection with his new employer can develop into a long term stabilizing influence in the life of Kamen that may help him resist relapse into seclusionary behaviors. After three to six months, when apprentice Kamen has shown himself to be a reliable and productive worker to a community uncle, the Takeyama graduate begins earning a living wage and begins a possible career as a working class man.

CONCLUSION

Takeyama's rehabilitation methods simultaneously function as the process of "doing gender" (Fenstermaker and West, 2002), as well as the manufacture of class identity. The result is the construction of a working class masculinity. Many Takeyama hikikomori appear to come from middle class families able to support a hikikomori in the home for months or years after the youth drops out of life (Ito, 2003; Lyons, 2001; Kudo 2001; Ogino, 2004). The social expectations placed upon a middle class male by his family are the social reproduction of class as well as the accompanying masculine roles (Roberson & Suzuki, 2003). Institutional education in Japan does not provide easy mainstreaming of a youth who misses large periods of school as hikikomori do (Lock, 1986; Rohlen, 1992; White, 2002). This makes attendance in a respected college and a middle class career difficult for hikikomori. Takeyama takes the failed middle class identity of a hikikomori and transforms it into a positive and productive working class identity.

According to Takeyama staff experiences, the act of social withdrawal into passive and

introverted seclusion alarms Japanese parents that their male child is a "failed son", a phenomenon in which youth behave in ways outside the accepted norms for young males of their age (Kudo, 2001; Kudo & Saito 2001; Roberson & Suzuki, 2003). This prompts the family to seek outside intervention to help their boy and helps to explain the higher number of hikikomori male students admitted into the Takeyama rehabilitation program. Once a male hikikomori is admitted into the Takeyama program, the "broken boy" is exposed to the structure of daily routines and responsibilities, staff mentoring and a growing sense of membership in the student peer group. As male students pass each of the three stages of rehabilitation, they are given more independence accompanied by increased adult responsibilities. In the course their rehabilitation, gendered role modeling is also taking place.

During re-socialization at Takeyama, staff mentors and students in later stages of rehabilitation become the primary role models for a new arrival, both as adults and gendered beings, filling a void created by social isolation as hikikomori. It is understandable then that, with the urging to take on adult-like responsibilities, Takeyama youth begin to model behaviors based upon male staff mentors and senior male students. Establishing 'male-ness' through male mentorship paves a pathway to adulthood. Observed "typically male" Japanese behaviors at Takeyama included public smoking, mahjong, sports and the like. The adoption of these common masculine activities became established within normal interactions and behaviors, which overwrote a student's former hikikomori identity.

Takeyama Gakkô provides a viable path out of permanent dependence upon parents as well as the promise of future employment. Though not as bright and promising a future as a middle class career after college, Takeyama's post-graduation job placement, such as the Community Uncle program, provides recovered hikikomori with practical life options in the form of prospects for a future career. The reason Takeyama graduates cooperate with this job placement may be due in part to lowered career expectations with a history as a hikikomori.

On one level, working class expectations could begin with the simple knowledge by Takeyama's students that they no longer have to deal with the high expectations and pressure to excel in school or pass

university entrance exams. It is possible that melancholy may later set in when the Takeyama graduate realizes the career and life chances they can never recover due to the one-chance nature of Japan's education system. However, at the time of graduation from Takeyama, youth are at least given options to reconnect with the society. The most realistic opportunities that Takeyama graduates can hope for is working class occupations in physical, menial and service occupations (Kingston, 2004, p. 272; Kosugi, 2006). This is due to the types of jobs that are available to those with a high school education, which Takeyama students earn through the correspondence classes at Takeyama.

The various aspects of Takeyama's 'rehabilitation' appear to socialize hikikomori youth into learning new coping strategies. Throughout the program, Takeyama gradually lowers a hikikomori's inculcated middle class expectations of social success and instills a more attainable working class social identity. Further, post-graduation separation from family ensures that family-based social strain and expectations do not undo Takeyama's re-socialization. This exchange of identities is a positive one which offers the Japanese youth a new chance at life with a different and yet valid role in society. This re-socialized role is acceptable to the community, has lowered family expectations for their son, and offers a successful alternative masculinity. Takeyama's rehabilitation process crafts a new internalized masculine identity for a former male hikikomori based upon self-reliance and responsibility. Through participation in the various activities and structure at Takeyama, the Takeyama graduate is reshaped from a failed middle class boy with acute social withdrawal into a functional working class man.

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