

**Title:**

A Brief Glimpse Into "Welcome To The NHK!"

**Word Count:**

571

**Summary:**

In the grand tradition of the media using social and political problems as a concept for their work comes the Japanese anime "Welcome to the NHK." As a show that delves into the life of a person suffering from such social anxiety that he needs to shut himself off from as much contact as possible, the show presents the problem in both dramatic and comedic ways.

**Keywords:**

social anxiety

**Article Body:**

The willingness to deal with even unpleasant aspects of one's culture in a humorous-yet-serious manner is something that has been ever-present in the media. Social issues, along with the occasional political issue, can suddenly be the focal discussion point of episodes of popular shows, with some more prominent ones becoming the focus of entire series. The Japanese hikikomori problem, along with the standard social anxiety and hints of schizophrenia that being a hikikomori entails, has become the premise of a fairly recent franchise consisting of an anime, comic, and novel series known simply as "Welcome to the NHK."

The show focuses on the lives, trials, and tribulations of Sato Tatsuhiro, who is essentially a hikikomori. This means he exhibits extreme moments of social anxiety, going so far as to avoid his parents (whom he's living with) as much as he can. Besides being a social shut-in, he is also frequently seen to exhibit another Japanese sub-culture-turned-problem: that of being an obsessive anime otaku. For the unfamiliar, the Japanese see the otaku sub-culture as a potential social problem, mainly because most of these people have a slightly compromised grip on reality, preferring to focus their time, effort, and attention on various forms of entertainment. Usually, the obsessive nature targets a single media form, such as music or anime, and focuses exclusively on that. The sub-culture exhibits signs that are interpreted as social anxiety, though they sometimes appear to have somewhat normal social interactions on the rare occasions where large numbers of otaku gather.

Sato firmly believes that his status as both hikikomori and otaku, along with

the social anxiety, poor people skills, and general paranoia, are all caused by a massive conspiracy. This conspiracy, known as the Nihon Hikikomori Kyokai (the Japanese Hikikomori Association), is the source of the "NHK" in the title, rather than the real-life Japanese television network NHK. His belief in this theory has developed into an elaborate delusion, which includes NHK agents in the form of cute, attractive young girls being sent to prospective targets to allow the conspiracy to more directly influence their targets. It is notable that while Sato initially believes the female lead, Misaki Nakahara, to be one of these agents, he never actually takes the time to detail what the NHK hopes to achieve by turning the entire male population of Japan into socially-inept shut-ins.

Together with a variety of other characters, some of which seem to be representatives of other socially-challenged Japanese sub-cultures, Misaki and Sato come together in the most unusual ways. Part of the interaction between the two leads stems from Misaki's contract with Sato, which states that once every evening, she is to lecture him on how to overcome his social anxiety and become a normal, functioning member of society again. Of course, to provide entertainment value, not everything goes as planned, with Sato experiencing everything from panic attacks due to being outside his apartment, to having Misaki pretend to be his girlfriend to fool his visiting mother.

Aside from the aforementioned subcultures, the show also briefly touches upon other aspects of Japanese culture. This includes the thriving independent gaming circuit, the "Internet suicide pacts" problem, and other Japanese social idiosyncrasies. It should be noted that, despite the title of the show, the network NHK never actually aired "Welcome to the NHK." Thus, unlike the novels, the show does not explicitly link the NHK conspiracy to the NHK television network.