

“Down the Rabbit Hole: An Exploration of Japanese Lolita  
Fashion”

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## **Abstract**

An ethnographic work about Japanese women who wear Lolita fashion, based primarily upon anthropological field research that was conducted in Tokyo between May and August 2014. The main purpose of this study is to investigate how and why women wear Lolita fashion despite the contradictions surrounding it. An additional purpose is to provide a new perspective about Lolita fashion through using interview data. Fieldwork was conducted through participant observation, surveying, and multiple semi-structured interviews with eleven women over a three-month period. It was concluded that women wear Lolita fashion for a sense of freedom from the constraints that they encounter, such as expectations placed upon them as housewives, students or mothers. The thesis provides a historical chapter, a chapter about fantasy with ethnographic data, and a chapter about how Lolita fashion relates to other fashions as well as the Cool Japan campaign.

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While I cannot mention their names directly, for sake of anonymity, I am extremely thankful towards the wonderful individuals who honoured me with their time and knowledge to participate within my study. It is my hopes that my thesis acts as an accurate portrayal of the knowledge that they granted me with.

Finally, I would like to thank those who offered their never-ending support throughout the entire process of my thesis, particularly my parents Beverley and Scott Atkinson. Finally, I would like to express my thankfulness towards my dear friends who at varying times offered me their support throughout my master's degree including Takamasa Ohkawachi, Yoko Shigeta, Yarzar Tun, and Kazuki Uchino.

## **A Note Concerning Names, Images, and Translations**

I use pseudonyms to refer to my informants, unless they requested otherwise, in the means of protecting both their anonymity and confidentiality. Even still, the names that I use to refer to brand names, companies, and places are real. Moreover, when referring to my informants I use the Japanese politeness suffix '*san*', which works as an equivalent to the English Miss., Mr. or Mrs. When using full Japanese names, I place the order from last name to first name, as names are written in Japan.

With the exception of images that have been marked otherwise, such as maps, I have taken all of the photographic images included within this thesis. Any appearing photographs that include people have been both taken, and reproduced with the permission of the individuals within them.

All Japanese translations included within this thesis, unless stated otherwise, are my own.

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## Introduction

社会への反発心が私の場合根底にあります。また、ファッションだけではなく、精神的にも重点を置くべきだと私は思っています。

In my case, my root interest lies in a revolt against society within my heart. Lolita isn't just a fashion; the emphasis should be to have a spirit.  
(Azami-san, Harajuku, July 2014)

Until the 1990s, Japan was often referred to as an “economic miracle” for bringing itself from the ruins of the Second World War, to a leading economic force in the 1980s (Allison 2012:351). The miracle’s mirage quickly vanished however, as the nation plunged into financial upheaval when its economic bubble burst in 1989, bringing with it a mass of social and economic changes (Allison 2012). The primary victims of this financial downturn were Japan’s youth, who came of age within the first of a series of so-called ‘lost decades’, with an increased flexible workforce and a series of youth related moral panics (Brinton 2011:xiv; Mirza 2008; Slater 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Upon their graduation of high school or post-secondary education, many youth of the 1990s began to shift between part-time jobs, contract work and positions from temp agencies, as opposed to finding full-time employment (Kelly and White 2006). This inability to find full-time positions often directly impacted young people’s capacity to begin aspects of their adult lives, due to not having the economic security necessary for either marriage or child rearing. As stated by youth activist Karin Amamiya regarding flexible workers in the 1990s, “Even if you work, you can’t live. You can’t eat. For

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<sup>1</sup> The category “youth” is often in flux, while previously it often only included individuals in their late teens to early twenties, the label has been recently expanded to refer to individuals up until their early thirties (Toivonen and Imoto 2013). The usage of “youth” in this thesis refers to young people from their late teens to early thirties.

irregular employees unemployment is always a presupposition: there is no guarantee that one day you won't suddenly lose your job.” (Karin 2010:254). As flexible employment increased, moral panics arose to explain the behavior of youth, for example those youth who were shifting between jobs became labeled as “*furi-ta*”<sup>2</sup>, youth who continued to live at home became “parasite singles”<sup>3</sup> and youth who were unable to find any form of employment, education or training at all became *NEET*.<sup>4</sup>

Even still, despite the development of economic and social problems during the 1990s, consumerism, which had been nurtured since the post-war period, continued to flourish (Bardsley and Hirakawa 2005). At this time, a number of youth centered fashions and groups emerged that helped to provide a space for many young people at a time of uncertainty (Narumi 2010). The groups, however, like those individual youth facing economic instability, were often criticized for not falling within the ranges of societal acceptability. For example, young women who participated within *gyaru*, an often-sexualized fashion and group, were frequently criticized for engaging in deviant behaviours like compensated dating (*enjo kōsai*) (Kinsella 2014; Miller 2004).<sup>5</sup>

Lolita (*rori-ta*), like *gyaru*, is another fashion and group that purportedly emerged between the early to mid 1990s (Steele 2010). An elaborate feminine fashion with an

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<sup>2</sup> A neologism that combines the English word ‘free’ and the German word ‘*arbeiter*’ which translates into part-time worker. It refers to individuals who shift between part-time positions.

<sup>3</sup> *Parasaito shinguru* (parasite singles) is a neologism coined by sociologist Yamada Masahiro that refers to individuals who continue to live in their parental homes, into their late twenties and mid-thirties, spending the income that they procure upon luxury consumption (Genda 2003; Toivonen and Imoto 2013; Yamada 2000; Yoda 2000).

<sup>4</sup> NEET (*ni-to*) is a neologism originating in the United Kingdom that refers to those individuals who are Not in Employment Education or Training. In 2003 it was adapted by Japanese labour scholars and afterwards published in governmental white papers (Toivonen 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Compensated dating or ‘*enjo kōsai*’ refers to “young women who agree to meet strange men for dates, sometimes involving sex, in exchange for money or gifts” (Miller 2004: 239). This phenomenon became a moral panic in the 1990s, as not only were schoolgirls the main participants within it, but moreover they supposedly felt “no shame or remorse at all” for partaking in the activities (Miller 2004:239).

emphasis on making its wearers appear as Victorian dolls or princesses, the fashion has gradually become commercialized through its incorporation into popular culture. Despite the fashion being commercialized, however, the women who wear Lolita fashion, and the fashion itself often face stigmatization. Furthermore, while the Japanese government accepts aspects of Lolita fashion, Lolita has been simultaneously intertwined with moral panics, particularly as it has been associated and misunderstood with other groups (Miller 2011).

## **Research Problem**

Toivonen and Imoto's 2013 paper explores how the recent boom of Japanese youth studies has been surrounding youth-related moral panics and their associated labels such as *parasaito shinguru* (parasite singles) and *ni-to* (NEET) (Genda 2003; Yoda 2000). They, and others, claim that despite the frequent studies on youth within these categories, many researchers have yet to be overly critical upon both the origins of youth related labels and the validity of them (Toivonen and Imoto 2013; Mirza 2008). Nor have researchers adequately studied the changes that these labels meet over time. As such, Toivonen and Imoto suggest that four mechanisms particularly "govern Japanese youth problems": a) the industries that benefit around youth problems, b) the individual actors that direct problems, c) the middle-class bias of youth problems, and d) the muted voice of youth surrounding these larger problems (2013:75).

For instance, in examining mechanism one, Toivonen and Imoto suggest that writers, critics, politicians, commercial establishments, and artists have benefited from youth social problems (2013:76). They give the example of the moral panic surrounding grade school bullying (*ijime*) in the 1990s, where the Japanese Ministry of Education had

the opportunity to expand “school counseling as a profession” (2013:76). Moreover, Toivonen and Imoto follow private youth organizations that have transformed as moral panics have shifted, for example 1980s *hikikomori* rehabilitation centres that have changed into “NEET support” institutions by the mid-2000s (2013:76).<sup>6</sup> Toivonen and Imoto thereby argue that both social institutions and individuals have benefited through the maintenance of youth related moral panics.

Furthermore, in their fourth mechanism, the authors suggest that a major issue with current portrayals of Japanese youth within the media is that they hardly contain bases from youth themselves. Rather, as opposed to perceptions regarding Japanese youth problems coming from young people, Toivonen and Imoto suggest that viewpoints towards them often stem from powerful figures within society such as politicians, academics and journalists.

Like other youth groups or fashions, throughout its existence, the outside understanding of Lolita fashion, and the women who wear it, has undergone consistent transformations, vacillating between being criticized, being partially promoted by the government, and being misunderstood as belonging to other groups or fashions. Within these swirling gyres, it becomes difficult to understand what Lolita fashion is, and further what the fashion does for the individual women who wear it. As such, standing from the fourth mechanism of Toivonen and Imoto’s research, while aspects of Lolita fashion are continually being popularized or interpreted by outsiders, the individual experience of wearing it is lost, as well as the perspective that details the felt-experiences of wearing Lolita fashion, and what participating within it brings to the individual. In a sense, it

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<sup>6</sup> *Hikikomori*, a Japanese neologism, refers to young people who have withdrawn from social interaction for a prolonged period of time, sometimes over a period of years (Furlong 2008).

could be said that the fashion, and the women who wear it, are consistently being placed within a contradictory existence. As Lolita fashion is being criticized, and the women who wear it are being stigmatized, it and they are simultaneously being commodified and promoted. Furthermore, despite the risk of stigmatization that women can and do procure from wearing Lolita fashion they continue to wear it both inside and outside of societal acceptability.

In alignment, Lolita fashion can only be seen as societally acceptable if it exists within a particular context that is confined to a specified time, form, and space. If, however, an individual chooses to wear Lolita fashion outside of acceptable times, forms or spaces, they risk becoming socially ostracized or stigmatized. Given that Lolita fashion seemingly exists within a doubled-contradiction, between being stigmatized and promoted, and between being stigmatized and continually worn, I question, “*Why do Japanese women choose to wear Lolita fashion despite its simultaneous stigmatization and increasing commodification within Japanese society?*”

In this thesis I will argue that despite Lolita fashion being doubly bound as both a stigmatized and commodified object, dressing in the clothing is a means that provides the individual women who wear it with a temporary sense of autonomy from the constraints that they encounter in their everyday lives. Through this autonomy, individual women are able to work to transform aspects of their everyday lives, for example, Lolita fashion can provide women with the confidence to pursue their own alternative careers as independent fashion designers.

When Lolita fashion is stigmatized or associated with other groups, however, the autonomy that its wearers gain can be threatened. Therefore, individual women who wear

Lolita fashion often seek to protect the autonomy they obtain, through defining Lolita as distinct from other fashions, and further still through maintaining unwritten rules.

The objectives of this research project are to provide knowledge regarding the felt-experiences of individual women, particularly within the context of Japan. Moreover, through listening to the viewpoints of women who dress in Lolita fashion, this project aims to contribute their individual experiences to the outside understandings of their fashion.

## **Abridged Literature Review**

### **What is Lolita fashion? A Brief Contextualization**

Lolita fashion is a multi-faceted style of clothing that initially came into existence in the late 1980s, and became solidified in the early 1990s (Suzuki 2007). Its beginnings are two-folded, starting from both the ‘gothic’ subset of Lolita fashion, and the ‘sweet’ subset of Lolita fashion. Gothic Lolita, one of the primary genres of the fashion initially began as a result of the work by innovative designers in the Kansai region of Japan (a western area on the main island of Japan, Honshū), who were creating Victorian inspired clothing at the time (Suzuki 2007).<sup>7</sup> Various *visual-kei* bands, such as notable band Malice-Mizer, soon after adopted the clothing that those designers created, and later in a form of admiration, *visual-kei* fans began to wear imitated versions of band members’ clothing (Keet 2007).<sup>8</sup> It has since been argued that those fans’ adoption of *visual-kei* band members’ clothing gradually led to the birth of the gothic branch of Lolita fashion

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<sup>7</sup> In the 1970s, Victorian-era books such as ‘Alice in Wonderland’ gained in popularity, influencing both girls’ magazines and comic books, which may have spurred an interest in the creation of Victorian influenced clothing (Suzuki 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Visual-kei* is a Japanese music genre that began from a myriad of influences including glam rock, new romantic music, gothic music, and Japanese kabuki theatre in the 1980s. It is characterized not only by its music but also by its aesthetics in which outfits are elaborate and band members often appear androgynous (McLeod 2013, Keet 2007).

(Kelly 2004; Suzuki 2007).

Conversely, sweet Lolita fashion purportedly began with the creation of brand name ‘Baby the Stars Shine Bright’ in 1988 by designer Isobe Akinori. Isobe previously worked for popular Harajuku-based fashion designer Onishi Atsuki and was inspired by “romantic Victorian-meets-Little-House-on-the-Prairie” fashion (Suzuki 2007:142). It has been claimed that Onishi’s emphasis upon ribbons, bows, and more brightly coloured Victorian clothing later led to the “sweet” branch of Lolita fashion.

More generally, however, Lolita fashion in Japan can be understood as a fashion where the objective of its wearers is often to appear as Western-European porcelain dolls, or fairy-tale princesses (Gagné 2013; Hardy-Bernal 2011; Kotani and Lamarre, 2007; Steele 2010). The clothing is often seen as pseudo-Victorian and can be characterized by its excessive use of frills, ribbons, lace, and bell-shaped petticoats. Its accessories feature “ribbons, headdresses, bonnets, or mini top hats, and Vivienne Westwood platform shoes known as ‘Rocking Horse Ballerinas’” (Mackie 2010:188-189). The fashion, itself features a variety of subsets with the most typical division being between the previously mentioned ‘sweet’ Lolita (*amarori*) and ‘gothic’ Lolita (*gosurori*).<sup>9</sup> Sweet Lolita can be characterized by its incorporation of colours such as pinks, whites, and blues, as well as by its usage of ‘cute’ patterns including images such as teddy bears, desserts, and fruits. Conversely, gothic Lolita can be characterized by its usage of heavy blacks, incorporation

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<sup>9</sup> *Amarori* and *gosurori* are examples of some of the neologisms used specifically within Lolita fashion. *Ama* is a shortened version of the word ‘*amai*’ translating to ‘sweet’, while ‘*gosu*’ is a shortened version of the word ‘*goshikku*’ translating to ‘gothic’. *Rori* is a shorted version of “*rori-ta*” or Lolita. Combining *ama* and *rori* refers to ‘sweet Lolita’ whereas combining *gosu* and *rori* refers to ‘gothic Lolita’.

of Christian motifs such as crosses, and direct influence from Victorian mourning attire (Steele 2008).<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 1.** Sachi-san wearing sweet Lolita fashion in Harajuku. Photo by Leia Atkinson and reproduced with permission of Sachi-san.

The fashion, having a span of approximately twenty-five years, has seen a great deal of transformations, and while earlier literature emphasized the dichotomy of gothic and sweet Lolita fashions, in my own research I have found the gothic element of the fashion to be minimum (Winge 2008; Keet 2007). Moreover, within my own research, while some of my participants dressed in gothic Lolita in the past, I have found an emphasis upon both ‘sweet’, and ‘classic’ Lolita, or a more mature variation of the fashion that features subdued colours, and direct influence from late 19<sup>th</sup> century Western-European clothing.

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<sup>10</sup> After the death of her husband, Queen Victoria continued to wear mourning ‘black’ clothing for the remainder of her life (Steele 2008)



**Figure 2.** Midori-san wearing gothic Lolita fashion in Shinjuku. Photo by Leia Atkinson and reproduced with permission from Midori-san.

While Lolita fashion has a variety of genres, it also contains complex ties to a diverse range of elements of Japanese society. One of Lolita's strongest influences is the historical girls' culture, and social construct, '*shōjo*'.<sup>11</sup> Lolita fashion also draws influence from varied popular cultural elements such as the prewar Takarazuka Revue<sup>12</sup>, Lewis Carroll's '*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*' (Monden 2014), *visual-kei* (Winge 2008) and girls' *manga* (McKnight 2010).

Lolita fashion has been previously studied academically through various lenses

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<sup>11</sup> *Shōjo* is a social construct stemming from the Meiji period that refers to the period of life for a young woman after childhood and before marriage. The term typically referred to high school girls in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan, and the subsequent magazines, novels, and writing that they produced, but has since expanded to refer to a myriad of popular cultural products including anime, manga, and clothing (Czarnecki 2005; Prough 2011; Robertson 1991, 1998; Shamoan 2007, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Takarazuka Revue is all-girl theatrical troupe that began in Hyogo prefecture in 1913 (Robertson 1998). It continues to exist today, but has gradually changed and adapted. Lolita fashion's influence from Takarazuka Revue primarily draws from the prewar theatrical company.

including globalization studies (Mackie 2009, Monden 2008), historical influences (McKnight 2010), creation of female empowerment (Lunning 2011), and association with the sexualized male gaze (Kinsella 2006).<sup>13</sup> There have also been ethnographic studies on Lolitas within Japan. For example, anthropologist Isaac Gagné conducted fieldwork with Lolitas between 2003 and 2007 (2013) and Teresa Younker conducted fieldwork with Kyoto-based Lolitas in 2010 (2011).

During their field research, both Gagné and Younker brought to light societal difficulties that Lolitas faced with regards to their age and relationships. For example, both researchers concluded that many Lolitas felt that they needed to ‘graduate’ from the fashion at around age twenty-five, for fear of no-longer looking “cute” (2013, 2011).<sup>14</sup> This, however, contrasted with my findings where my informants sought to continue to incorporate the fashion into their lives as they became older.

Recently, the media has worked to both commodify and modify aspects of Lolita fashion. For example, in a 2011 article, Miller examines the invention of the three “cute” ambassadors of Japan (*kawaii taishi*), a position created by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009. One of the ambassadors is a Lolita model, and former nurse, Aoki Misako. As part of her appointed position, she was recently made the president of

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<sup>13</sup> Another necessary distinction to be made is the chaste nature of Lolita fashion, at odds with its provocative name. To the minds of many, the name “Lolita” evokes the image of Nabokov’s 1955 novel featuring a middle age man’s love of a prepubescent girl. This book also led to the creation of the term ‘Lolita complex’, or *rori-kon* in Japanese, which similarly refers to an older man’s, usually, sexual interest in young girls (Kinsella 2006).

<sup>14</sup> ‘To graduate’ is a neologism often used by those individuals who participate within alternative fashions in Japan including gyaru, maids, and Lolitas. It signifies a rite of passage when individuals determine to move onto a different stage of their life, leaving the fashion, or job, behind (Galbraith 2013; Kawamura 2012). Lolitas, who often wear their fashion individually, graduate through selling their Lolita clothing whereas gyaru and maids have organized events to signify their leaving of the community, job, and/or fashion (Gagné 2013; Galbraith 2013; Kawamura 2012).

the Japan Lolita Association, and is responsible for spreading the fashion worldwide (The Japan Times, May 31, 2013). Miller examines how Aoki is continually dressed in sweet Lolita clothing, one of the more societally acceptable derivatives of the community. She also illustrates how Lolita and other fashions have been gradually appropriated and reconstructed by the Japanese government in the aims of commoditizing them for global consumption. Miller's work thereby helps to shed some light upon how Lolita is being gradually commodified by outside entities.

Overall, Japanese Lolita fashion developed in the midst of economic changes in the mid-1990s and continues to transform into the present day. As it has developed it has been examined through a multitude of lenses. Even still, while previous research has been conducted upon it, little research has explored the individual experiences of women who wear Lolita fashion, and why they continue to wear the fashion despite its simultaneous commodification and stigmatization. Further still, while previous research suggests that women can use Lolita fashion as a method to somewhat escape from societal pressures, an in-depth analysis upon this has yet to be published in English. Finally, while Gagné's research discovered that many women abandon Lolita fashion as they become older, published research has not yet explored what happens to those women who continue to wear the fashion as they enter into their late thirties and early forties. Published research has also not yet explored what happens when individuals wear the fashion outside of other areas of societal acceptability such as within unacceptable physical, spatial, and temporal spaces.

Through obtaining a diverse sample, with women of various educational backgrounds, occupations, marital statuses, and ages, this research will work on greater

expanding the knowledge upon how individual women experience Lolita fashion, despite the ongoing constraints that exist around them. Moreover, it will work to demonstrate how wearing Lolita fashion provides a temporary autonomous space for individuals where they can be active in transforming or maintaining constraints around them.

### **Cute Culture and Shōjo**

A number of works have been written exploring the social construct of *shōjo*, a concept that is intertwined with contemporary Lolita fashion, in both how it contributes to individual women's lives, and how it has been gradually commodified. *Shōjo* has been previously explored as both a historical concept, where it has referred to a socially constructed period in young women's lives, and also as a consumptive product. Primarily, Czarnecki (2005), Prough (2011), Robertson (1991;1998), and Shamoan (2007; 2012), take a historical approach to understanding *shōjo*, exploring in varying ways its development as a concept, and the entities that emerged in relation to it such as *manga*, and the Takarazuka Revue between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Bergstrom (2011), Gagné (2008; 2013), McKnight (2010), and Monden (2008; 2014), more specifically explore *shōjo* in relation to consumption (as *manga*, novels, etc.) and to Lolita fashion. Kinsella (2006) explores how the 'Lolita complex', which refers to older men's sexualized interest in young girls, is connected to the concept of *shōjo*. Whereas Treat (1993) explores *shōjo* through analyzing contemporary novelist Yoshimoto Banana's writing and the idea of *shōjo* as related to 'nostalgia'. Through reading these diverse approaches to understanding the social construct of *shōjo*, as well as how young women, and material consumption enact the construct of *shōjo*, I was able to gain a greater understanding of it.

‘Cute culture’ (*kawaii bunka*), and particularly the consumption of products related to cuteness goes hand-in-hand with the understanding of *shōjo*, in addition to the understanding of how Lolita fashion is both commercialized and portrayed in media. Ivy (2010), McGray (2002), Miller (2011), Monden (2014), Kinsella (1995), and Yano (2009) explore the gradual commercialization of cuteness within Japanese media and consumptive goods, in addition to the development of the word ‘*kawaii*’. For example, Ivy’s article ‘The Art of Little Cute Things’ explores the concept of ‘*kawaii*’ in relation to the art made by visual artist Nara Yoshitomo and the superflat movement (Ivy 2010).<sup>15</sup> Overall, each of their works provides a differing perspective towards the understanding of the concept ‘*kawaii*’, its relation to consumption, to *shōjo* and to Lolita fashion.

In seeking to understand the dual contradictions of why women decide to wear Lolita fashion despite it being stigmatized, and further why they continue to wear Lolita fashion despite it being simultaneously stigmatized and commodified, examining the development of both *shōjo* and cute culture is useful. Investigating cuteness and *shōjo*’s development as a consumptive product, allows for a greater understanding of how and why Lolita fashion is being commodified. Similarly, through understanding the historic construct of *shōjo*, and how it allowed for many young women to experience new levels of freedom through actions like writing novels, and obtaining high school education, allows for a greater understanding of why contemporary women can obtain a sense of autonomy through wearing Lolita fashion.

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Superflat’ is an art movement created by artist Murakami Takashi that seeks to ‘flatten’ the differences between fine art, commercial art, contemporary art, and historical art through bringing them together (Darling 2001). Superflat encompasses the works of a variety of artists such as Murakami and Nara, and is unique in its embrace of both ‘flatness’ and ‘depthlessness’ (Li 2012:203).

## **Otaku, Maids, Cosplayers, Gyaru**

Lolita fashion exists as one of a variety of youth fashions and groups that currently exist within Japan. As Lolita fashion often becomes misunderstood with other groups, however, it is important to comprehend the differences and similarities between various existing youth related fashions and groups in order to understand what Lolita fashion is itself. I have thereby studied groups often seen as related to Lolita fashion including *otaku*, maids, *cosplayers*, and *gyaru*.

Primarily, with regards to ‘*otaku*’, a classification that emerged in the 1980s that refers to individuals with a profound interest in something in particular (though most often anime and manga), there have been studies such as those conducted by Galbraith (2009, 2013), Kam (2013), Lamarre, Azuma, Furuhashi and Steinberg (2007), Miyadai, Kono, and Lamarre (2011), and Yoda (2000). These studies have followed a variety of aspects of *otaku* including its stigmatization, its development and its relatedness to other groups such as maids.

Conversely, there have been studies upon ‘*gyaru*’, a girls’ fashion that emerged in the 1980s, including those by Kinsella (2014), Miller (2004), Suzuki and Best (2003), and Steele (2010). These studies have shown aspects of the fashion including its commodification, the moral panics surrounding it, and its development as a fashion through the 1980s into the 2000s. There have further been studies upon both *cosplayers* and maids. Studies regarding *cosplay* include those by researchers such as Kotani and Lamarre (2007), Truong (2013), and Winge (2006). These studies have explored elements of *cosplay* including its stigmatization, development, and transformative aspects. Finally, researchers such as Cambridge (2011), Gagné (2013), and Galbraith

(2014) have studied maids and their accompanying cafés. Their studies have included the purpose of maid cafés, the uniforms that maids wear, as well as the relationships between maids and other groups such as Lolitas and otaku.

Overall, Lolita fashion connects to a wide variety of elements within Japanese society, including Japanese women's history, cute culture, economics, and development of alternative youth fashions.

## **Methodology**

Between May and August 2014, I conducted thirteen-weeks of ethnographic fieldwork with women who wear Lolita fashion in Tokyo. Through interviewing and spending time with Lolitas, I was able to gain a greater understanding of why women dress in Lolita fashion despite the contradictions surrounding it. Moreover, I was able to discover how wearing Lolita fashion provides them with a temporary space where they are able to transform the constraints they encounter in their day-to-day lives such as through finding employment opportunities.

Primarily, when I arrived in Tokyo, I used my pre-established contacts and knowledge of current Lolita trends to locate participants through the snowball sampling method. I found this method to be effective because women who wear Lolita fashion are not necessarily a measurable population, as the frequency of wearing Lolita fashion differs by individual, and it is not uncommon for women to use pseudonyms or other identity concealing devices while wearing the fashion.

My fieldwork gradually developed as my informants took me to their preferred areas, stores, and restaurants, and informed me about varying Lolita fashion related events. I found that through letting my informants guide where I conducted my field

research, I was able to better understand why they wore Lolita fashion. As we explored various areas such as specialty doll shops, corset shops, and themed cafés, my informants gradually told me about their experiences with the fashion as it related to their individual lives.

In total, I interviewed eleven women who dress in Lolita fashion, many of whom I met on multiple occasions. My informants differed greatly in occupation, background, duration of wearing Lolita fashion, and age. My youngest informant, Moriko-san, was 21 years old and my oldest informants were in their mid-forties. Moriko-san was involved in both cosplay and Lolita fashion, hobbies that were supported by her part time job at a manga shop in Akihabara. She had initially discovered Lolita fashion as a result of her interests in *anime* and *cosplay*. I also had three older informants participating in my study whose ages were within their mid-forties, though they were hesitant to specify an exact year. Each informants' initial start to Lolita fashion varied, for example, Umiko-san, one of my older informants, initially bought other alternative cute Japanese fashions such as Milk and Pink House in the early 1990s, and later became interested in Lolita brand-name 'Baby the Stars Shine Bright' as it gained in popularity in the mid-1990s. Another older informant, Sachi-san, began wearing Lolita fashion as a result of being a fan of 1990s *visual-kei* music, whereas, Junko-san, my third older informant, became interested in the fashion as a result of her older sister wearing the clothing.

Likewise, the occupations of my informants held a wide array of variation ranging from jobs such as being a part-time worker at an Alice in Wonderland Café, to a housewife, to an economic journalist for a prominent newspaper. My informants' time participating within Lolita fashion also greatly diverged, from the minimum being a mere

year, to the maximum being nearly twenty years. My informants all completed their high school education, however, their amount of post-secondary education was greatly varied. For example, Moriko-san attended a technical college where she studied specialty dog and cat grooming, and afterwards has consistently spent her time working within various part-time jobs. Conversely, another informant, Ai-san went to a top ranking university and now also spends her time working at various part-time jobs, while pursuing her dream of becoming a Lolita spokesperson internationally.

Apart from interviews, I also distributed surveys to twelve women, where I was able to obtain a different type of data. My surveys were generally sent via e-mail, and thus gave my informants time to consider the questions I was asking and afterwards provide me with rich, detailed answers. Overall, within the diversity of my informants I was able to find commonalities and general themes from the data I collected through interviews, informal conversations, and activities.

Semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and surveys were some of my primary methodological tools during my field research. My semi-formal interviews varied in length, ranging from a half hour to three hours. Apart from interviews I was able to gather data from participating within Lolita fashion related activities with my informants including going shopping, going to tea parties, eating crepes and going to photo booths. My interviews were conducted in various settings depending upon my informants' preferences, but were most often in cafés and restaurants. Through engaging with the same individuals multiple times over the period of three months, and afterwards maintaining good relationships with them, I have been able to fill the gaps of information that I found within my initial interviews, and thus have been able to supplement my data.

My interview questions ranged from topics such as reactions by the public to Lolita fashion, my informants' impressions of other groups such as maids, what they valued in Lolita fashion, and how the clothing made them feel. Through asking my informants about their opinions I was able to better understand their individual experiences within the fashion.

In addition to interviews, I also used participant observation. More specifically, through wearing the fashion, I became better equipped to understanding the information they supplied to me. I also found that my informants were often more comfortable speaking with me when I was dressed in Lolita fashion rather than in casual clothing. I believe that this may have assisted in the quality of data that I was able to receive during my fieldwork. When I was unable to meet with participants, I engaged in periods of observation through frequenting Lolita shops and other areas around Harajuku, often with myself dressed in the fashion.

### **Use of Photography**

I used photography in order to further enhance my research both methodologically, and ethnographically, as it is an important aspect of wearing Lolita fashion. Methodologically, looking at my photographs during the writing process has allowed for me to recall things such as the importance of context while wearing Lolita fashion. In alignment, Pink suggests that methods such as photography are useful for researchers in that through using photography one is able to more accurately recall events while writing (2009). I also have included some photography within this thesis to allow for readers to better comprehend Lolita fashion and Tokyo if they have never seen Lolita nor been to Tokyo. It should also be noted that all of the photos within this thesis have

only been taken and used with the consent of my informants.

My second reason for using photography is because it is an important aspect of Lolita fashion, as many of the activities that individual women engage within while wearing the clothing involve photography. These activities include monthly fashion shoots for local magazines, going to photo booths, and being photographed in the street. Thereby, as photography is an important aspect of wearing Lolita fashion, I felt that through taking photos I would be able to better understand why individual women determined to wear Lolita fashion.

### **Locating The Field**

In my research question, I initially sought to understand why individual women wear Lolita fashion, despite the contradictions that surround it. Throughout my field research I discovered that a primary reason that women wear Lolita fashion is that it provides them with a temporary sense of autonomy, and moreover with a space in which they can be active in transforming the constraints around them. In order to understand Lolita fashion, and what it brings to individuals, however, it is fundamental to understand the context in which the fashion and the individual women who wear it exist. Lolita fashion is typically contextualized to the urbanized space of Tokyo, and more particularly to the district of Harajuku, a space that is generally acknowledged for its presence of alternative fashions.

Harajuku is a district within Tokyo, the designated capital city of Japan since 1868 when the capital relocated from Kyoto (Gordon 2009). Tokyo itself has the largest population in any of the forty-seven prefectures of Japan with an estimate of 13.216 million residents in 2012 (Tokyo Metro Government 2015). From within the sprawling

city space, and the dizzying coloured lines of the Tokyo subway map, its major districts can be found upon the circular track of the Yamanote line. Through exploring different regions upon the Yamanote line, such as Harajuku, one can be struck by the both the complexity and uniqueness that each district of Tokyo provides within it. In this sense, depending upon what an individual is searching for, one is more than likely able to find a district suited to his or her needs. For example, the area Jinbōchō is famous for second hand books, whereas the area Kichijōji is a popular space for musicians seeking recording studios. The knowledge of the specialties that each area provides, allow for a sense of predictability and order within them. In this sense, particular areas additionally grant both expectancy and an allowance for certain behaviors, such as the idea that one is likely to encounter musicians in Kichijōji.

While each area of Tokyo contains within it particularities, an additional layer can be added to them through the consideration of their historical complexity. Tokyo being a city with a prolonged history allows for it to possess within it the simultaneous existence of both the past and the present, though one may not take notice of the past when they stumble upon it. As described by Bestor when outlaying the Tokyo-based residential neighbourhood “Miyamoto-cho”,

“Miyamoto-cho today is a totally urbanized cityscape. Little of the past is preserved beyond a few barely visible traces. Concrete and constant flow of traffic all but obliterate the twists and turns of the old road and the gentle curve of the now subterranean river. The buildings, grounds, and monuments of Tenso Jinja, the temple, and the roadside Jizo pavilion stand almost totally ignored in the daily comings-and-goings of Miyamoto-cho’s residents.” (Bestor 1989:20)

As noted by Bestor, despite the simultaneous existence of the past and the present within the same urbanized space, they do not come into conflict with one another. Rather, they exist as a simultaneous overlapping layered space that is characterized by the multitude

of actors that interact within it for varying purposes, including shopkeepers, business workers, and students.

To clarify what I mean by the simultaneous existence of layers within each region of Tokyo, I will examine Harajuku, one particular urban space that I conducted my field research within. In brief, I will work to examine how an urban space can function as an area built upon a historic foundation, that is used and manipulated by varying social actors, and is further recognized for containing specified behaviours.

## **Harajuku**

Contemporary Harajuku is one of Tokyo's prime youth fashion districts, however, historically it was a residential area for soldiers during the American six-year occupation of Japan (1945-1952) (Godoy 2007). As a result of the Occupation, foreign products began an influx into the area, quickly becoming popular for many Japanese youth. As the official Occupation came to an end and the Americans gradually left, however, Harajuku retained its allure for Japanese youth seeking alternative fashions. Young designers, often without formalized training, began to rent buildings within the area, and distinctive fashions, including Lolita, began to emerge there (Kawamura 2012).

Geographically, Harajuku is confined to a sort of T-shaped area, which can be divided into two main parts, the area surrounding the pedestrian street Takeshita Dōri, and the backstreets of Harajuku entitled '*ura-hara*'.<sup>16</sup> The top portion of the T-shape begins on the outside of Harajuku station, which is located on the western side of the Yamanote line and consists of two main exits, the Omotesando exit and the Takeshita exit. Opposite of the Takeshita exit is Takeshita Dōri a long congested pedestrian street

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<sup>16</sup> *Ura-hara* is a neologism, with '*ura*' referring to 'back' and '*hara*' stemming from 'Harajuku'. It refers to the back streets of Harajuku.

lined with clothing stores, photobooths, and crepe shops. Upon reaching the end of Takeshita Dōri, one is faced with an additional intersection at Meiji Dōri, the street that acts as a crossroad between Takeshita Dōri, *ura-hara*, and the nearby fashion district ‘Omotesando’. The immediate block between these three areas marks Meiji Dōri as significant for Lolita fashion, and for other youths wearing alternative fashions in Harajuku, particularly because of the presence of mall “LaForet”.<sup>17</sup>

Opposite of LaForet exists a sidewalk railing that is usually occupied by scouts holding cameras, and youth dressed in elaborate outfits. The scouts work for a variety of reasons including for recruiting models, and further for uncovering information about upcoming trends for companies. Scouts frequently line the street of Meiji Dōri, seeking distinctive individuals that fit their specifications. At times scouts follow particular youths for various purposes, including for asking for their permission to partake within a ‘street snap’ for websites or magazines. A street snap consists of a photograph or series of photographs of an individual within an urban area, that provides the individual’s name (or pseudonym), the brands that that individual is wearing, their life dreams, and other information.

Apart from the interactions between scouts and people passing by, within Harajuku there exist a multitude of other actors that help to define the space, including tourists, businessmen, shopkeepers, students, and models. Youth dressed within Harajuku fashion act as an intermediary between these different actors and are active in determining what happens within Harajuku over time. In alignment, Kawamura

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<sup>17</sup> Established in 1979, LaForet Shopping Mall houses many of the major alternative fashion brands for gothic-Lolita, *visual-kei*, and punk fashions (Sekikawa 2007:77). Some popular Lolita brand names found within LaForet include Angelic Pretty, Alice and the Pirates, and Atelier Pierrot.

conducted an interactionist study exploring the production of alternative fashions in both Harajuku and Shibuya. Through her research, she discovered how young men and women work and interact within these alternative fashion districts to develop careers. She suggests,

“Fashion today cannot solely be dictated by professional designers. The junior and high school students who represent Japanese street culture and fashion have the power to influence other teens. They not only produce and diffuse fashion but also market and guide the industry professionals about coming trends... The teen consumers I have studied, who are at the same time the producers, have a substantial impact on the production and dissemination of fashion. This means that there is a complementary relationship between the consumption and production of fashion.” (Kawamura 2006:799-800)

As explored by Kawamura, while many of the primary consumers in Harajuku are students, they are active in shaping the area’s market, through methods such as selective consumption, as well as through obtaining jobs as shopkeepers where they can act as an intermediary between customers and store managers. Through interacting with customers, salespeople can learn about upcoming trends, influence customers who shop in their stores, and can further provide insights to managers about potential upcoming collections (Kawamura 2006). Through this method, between interactions with scouts, shopkeepers, and other youths, youth are able to enter into Harajuku’s fashion industry.

The interactions between the scouts, shopkeepers, workers, tourists, and youth dressing in Harajuku fashion, characterize Harajuku as a specified space where individuals are able to obtain desired outcomes through varied means. For example, scouts are able to discover models that fit the dimensions of their company, and youth are able to obtain jobs as salespeople. Harajuku, moreover, like other areas within Tokyo exists as a multilayered space, containing locations such as LaForet, and shinto shrines, but also maintaining a reputation for alternative street fashion. Overall, within each area

of Tokyo, particular behavior, such as wearing Lolita fashion, is deemed as acceptable and in some way is confined to those areas. Through understanding the context in which Lolita fashion is normally confined and gradually developed, it will become easier to understand how the fashion is able to provide temporary autonomy for the women who wear it away from the constraints they encounter in their day-to-day lives.

## **Theoretical Overview**

### **The Construction of Gender and the Sexualized Gaze**

Gender as proposed by Judith Butler, is a historically conditioned, and contextualized, social construct that individuals are inextricably enmeshed within (1988). The idea of gender, for example of one being a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’, and likewise ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, are ideas that an individual gradually internalizes. A person is conditioned to fall within a particular gender through the continued performance of specified actions, and “stylization[s] of the body” over time (1988:519). These acts and this performance of gender, however, are one that in its entirety lacks a precise root, and rather can be thought of as “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis” (1988:522). In other words, the genders that one finds within a particular society can be thought of as historically conditioned copies of copies without necessarily a firm ‘essence’ underneath them (1988:522). Likewise, being both historically and societally conditioned, considering that an individual does perform a particular gender, while they may display their production of gender differently, in Butler’s view, shows that an individual is enmeshed within a particular society.

Butler continues on to say that those individuals that do not fall within the societally and historically bound ideas of gender can in a sense, pursue alternatives if their vision of gender is recognized by others as an ‘act’. This ‘act’, for instance, of being

a transgendered person, can be seen as societally acceptable within particular areas, but if one is to exceed those acceptable boundaries, such as through entering a public bus, the act can become dangerous. Lolita fashion, which is also often seen as an act, albeit a hyperfeminine one, can be seen as socially acceptable if it likewise falls within prescribed social and spatial boundaries such as the wearer being under twenty-five and only wearing the clothing in Harajuku. However, when one supersedes those boundaries they risk facing difficulties such as through being criticized by others for wearing the fashion.

One way that Lolitas are criticized, more specifically within Anglo-American scholarship, is through wearing childlike feminine clothing. Within Anglo-American society, childlike clothing is often associated with the sexualized male gaze and the Lolita complex. ‘The Lolita Complex’ is a term that stems originally from the 1955 novel by Vladimir Nabokov, which examines the relationship between a middle-aged man named Humbert Humbert, and an adolescent girl named Dolores whose nickname happens to be ‘Lolita’ (Nabokov 1955). Since the novel’s publication, the idea of older men having a sexualized interest in young girls has been labeled as ‘The Lolita Complex’. Within Japan, the complex is often demarcated by the word ‘*rorikon*’, referring to both an older person who expresses sexual interest in young girls, and the general concept of sexualizing young girls (Gagné 2007).

Even still, Lolita fashion itself is in no way related to the Lolita complex, and Lolitas themselves attempt to safeguard their fashion through distinguishing the spelling of the word. For example, within media and journalistic depictions of Lolita, *rorikon* may be spelled like “ロリーコン” (*rori-kon*) and Lolita may be spelled like “ロリータ” (*rori-ta*). However, in some cases Lolitas themselves choose to either replace the

elongated sound of the word with the character “ㄊ” (i) (Gagné 2007). In other cases Lolitas borrow the antiquated classical Japanese character of ㄊ(i) to replace the elongated sound, which also holds the same pronunciation (Gagné 2007). In this way, Lolitas can strive to somehow differentiate themselves from the Lolita complex, and moreover can avoid being associated with the sexualized male gaze.

### **Use of Nostalgia**

Ivy explores nostalgia through the lens of the ‘vanishing’, which she refers to as something that is currently both disappearing and lost between “presence and absence” (Ivy 1995:20). As something begins to vanish, Ivy claims that it can become nostalgic, and furthermore can become objectified, with the individual desiring to be reunited with his or her lost object (Ivy 1995). However, if the individual were to be reunited with a desired object in its actuality, the object would cease having the desire for it that existed in its ideal, distanced form. In other words, a longed for, vanishing, or already vanished object, can only remain desirable for as long as it is unavailable and exists within the realm of fantasy where it can be molded to suit a subject’s desires.

The nostalgias that my informants objectified included nostalgias for past eras, for their own girlhoods, or for prefabricated fantasy worlds. In Ivy’s theory, she suggests that subjects are unable to reunite with desired objects in their ideal form, however, through employing fantasy Lolitas are able to, somewhat interact with the objects of their desire temporarily. For example, while wearing Lolita fashion and using fantasy, a middle-aged woman can temporarily feel like she has returned to her youth.

### **A Sense of Autonomy**

Autonomy refers to the ability, or freedom of individuals to be able to perform

desired tasks. As referred to by Ortner, while individuals are never fully autonomous and are “always involved in, and can never act outside of, the multiplicity of social relations in which they are enmeshed” (2006:130), they are still capable of pursuing “intentions, purposes, and desires” (2006:144). Within the space in which individuals are capable of pursuing particular desires, they can be capable of finding a sense of freedom from the constraints that they encounter in their everyday lives. Likewise, Lolitas are never entirely free of the constraints that surround them, however through pursuing their desires while wearing Lolita fashion, such as the desire to become a princess in a fantasy world, they are capable of having a temporary sense of freedom from the constraints that they encounter in their everyday lives.

### **Commodification**

As described by Dinitto, media commodification refers to the process “whereby the media recuperates those elements of subculture within the dominant ideologies of society, therefore reinforcing the structure of domination in the social imaginary” (2011:461). Or more simply, media commodification refers to the process where deviant behavior is relabeled or redefined by the media to fit into the boundaries of mainstream society. While Lolita is a fashion, and thereby a commodity, through participation within the Lolita community via activities such as contributing to Lolita fashion magazines, the women who wear Lolita fashion feel a sense of ownership over it. As stated by Adorno and Horkheimer, the public “insist[s] on the very ideology which enslaves them” (1944). Despite Lolitas buying into a commodity, they become deceived into thinking that Lolita fashion is something that is commonly owned by them.

As Lolita fashion however, is being redefined by the ‘Cool Japan’ campaign and

promoted internationally, many Tokyo Lolitas feel that the sense of ownership that they felt with Lolita fashion before is dissipating. In a sense, despite Lolita fashion being a commodity, it is further being gradually commodified and redefined by the Japanese government and their ‘Cool Japan’ campaign. When I refer to the commodification of Lolita fashion, I am referring to the loss of sense of ownership that Lolitas feel through participating within Tokyo Lolita fashion while it is being redefined by the Japanese government’s ‘Cool Japan’ campaign.

### **Outline of The Thesis**

What follows is primarily broken into three chapters, “(Re)Framing Girlishness”, “Fantastical Imaginings”, and “Lolitas vs. the World”, followed by a conclusion. *(Re)framing Girlishness* provides a historical contextualization of Lolita fashion, the wider Japanese girls’ culture (*shōjo*), as well as a contextualization of the varied position(s) of Japanese women within contemporary society. It also works to show how through interacting with *shōjo* culture and wearing Lolita fashion can allow for women to obtain temporary autonomy, and simultaneously how both *shōjo* and Lolita fashion have been gradually commodified over time. *Fantastical Imaginings* outlines how individual women are able to obtain autonomy through wearing Lolita fashion, and furthermore, how within that autonomous space, they are able to somewhat transform constraints that they encounter in their everyday lives. It does this through exploring the use of both nostalgia and fantasy in finding autonomy while wearing Lolita fashion, and further through exploring how women are active within that space. More specifically, ‘Fantastical Imaginings’ explores how wearing Lolita fashion allows for women to obtain

autonomy from perceived flaws within themselves, from pressures that they encounter in their day-to-day lives, and from gendered expectations.

Finally, *Lolitas vs. the World* explores threats to the autonomy that Lolita fashion provides women with, which are created through stigmatization and commodification. It primarily does this through exploring other fashions that are often perceived as being related to Lolita fashion, and the stigmatizations that they receive. It further explores how those fashions are related and not related to Lolita fashion. The chapter continues into examining threats to the autonomy that women who wear Lolita fashion receive through its gradual commodification, as well as the growing divide within the fashion that is developing as a result of its commodification. Finally, it explores how women seek to protect the autonomy that they receive from Lolita fashion through the use and maintenance of unwritten rules. All three chapters lead to a summary that ultimately finds that despite the contradictions surrounding it, wearing Lolita fashion allows for individual women to build a temporary autonomous space where they are able to somewhat transform constraints, such as flaws they see within themselves, and pressures they receive from societal expectations of them, that exist around them in their everyday lives.

## **PART I: Contextualization**

# Chapter I

## (Re)framing Girlishness

“What made me [wear] Lolita was because I like elegant, classical, gorgeous style. Wearing Lolita is like showing my own style of beauty. So, by wearing Lolita I’m trying to express my definition of beauty.” (Midori-san, Akihabara, June 2014)

Contemporary Lolita fashion, and the women who wear it, are bound within a doubled contradiction, while the fashion and the individuals who wear it are stigmatized, they continue to wear it, and furthermore while it is being stigmatized, it is at once being commodified. Moreover, the individual women who wear Lolita fashion are bound by constraints in their everyday lives simply through being women living in the context of twenty-first century Japan. The contemporary positions of Japanese women, and the existence of Lolita itself, are historically constituted, and have been particularly molded since the forced opening of the Japanese borders in the late nineteenth century, which could be said to be the beginnings of Japanese modernity.

This chapter will work upon situating the contemporary and historical positions of Japanese women that have emerged since Japan’s paradigmatic shift from being a closed-country (*sakoku*) to opening its borders, in the late nineteenth century. Through situating past and contemporary Japanese women, as well as the development of consumerism and ‘cute culture’, the contemporary manifestation of Lolita fashion can be made clearer. The chapter will afterwards summarize through tying Lolita fashion to past similar social phenomenon, as well as to the contemporary malaise in which many Japanese women find themselves situated today.

## Modern Femininity, Shōjo and the Situating of Japanese Women

### **Meiji (1868-1912), Taisho (1912-1926) and Pre-Showa (1926-1945) Japan<sup>18</sup>**

The late Meiji Period up until the start of the Second World War marked both an age of substantial social change, and the beginnings of modernity for Japan, stemming from the country's forced opening in 1853 (Gordon 2009:3).<sup>19</sup> Upon the opening of the Japanese borders, came a period of rapid change where the government sought to both swiftly adopt Western technologies into Japan, and afterwards localize them, underneath a campaign entitled *wakon yōsai* (Western technology, Japanese spirit) (Koizumi 2002). It was believed that if Japan rapidly industrialized, it would be able to construct an image of 'modernity' to foreign countries, and thereafter overcome its risk of being colonized (Sakamoto 2008).

Part of the Meiji Government's plan to create a renewed image of Japan consisted of the cultivation of an image of young women who came from mid-to-upper class backgrounds. This image of the modern Japanese woman, was based upon the slogan "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*), and as such in 1899 in the means of creating future 'wise mothers', the Girls' Higher School Order allowed for young women to begin to pursue high school education (Czarnecki 2005:51). Thereafter new high school institutions were created in urban areas with the aim of producing an image of young Japanese women that could be admired from foreign countries, a young woman who was chaste, feminine, educated, and sensible who would thereafter be labeled as '*shōjo*' (young lady) (Czarnecki 2005).

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<sup>18</sup> Japanese time periods are usually indicated by the reign of an emperor, the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa periods thereby indicate varying imperial rules (Gordon 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Japan underwent a period of self-induced isolation between the early seventeenth century and the mid-nineteenth century when the nation was placed under military rule (Gordon 2009). This period was ended around the time of the arrival of American Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853.

The establishment of girl high schools allowed for the creation of a new addition to the life course, where young women were allowed to enter into a period of relative freedom, away from either the supervision of their parents or of their future husbands (Czarnecki 2005; Monden 2014; Shamoan 2012). Even still, while allowing for a sense of perceived freedom, ‘*shōjo*’ was primarily a male model aimed at molding girls into an ideal form of young ladies, which was based upon “affection (*aijō*), chastity (*junketsu*) and aesthetics (*biteki*)” (Monden 2014:83).

With regards to ideal characteristics of *shōjo*, of particular interest is the emphasis upon chastity. Chastity being idealized was in relation to an 1871 family law against adultery that was created by the government in the means of ensuring a family’s eldest son’s lawfully receiving of his inheritance (Czarnecki 2005). Around that time it was believed that a woman could retain the blood she obtained from previous sexual encounters, and thus risked potentially producing children that were not biologically related to her husband. Through abstaining from intercourse until marriage, ideally the government would be able to ensure that women produced direct biological heirs for their husbands (Czarnecki 2005). Thus, the ideal-type of the ‘*shōjo*’ was originally created for a multitude of reasons including the promotion of a modern image of Japanese women, the insurance of the legitimacy of family lines, and the production of strong soldiers for the Japanese state into the future. The conception of *shōjo* also however allowed for the creation of an autonomous space for young Japanese women and for the advent of spiritual love in Japan.

Over time, many of the young women attending girls’ high schools became socialized into *shōjo*, particularly through the use of girls’ magazines that were

disseminated throughout the schools, as well as through the creation of the all-girl theatrical troupe 'Takarazuka Revue'. Both worked to demonstrate to women ideal ways in which to act, language to use, and clothing to wear, in addition to providing young women with their own space seemingly separated from societal pressures such as marriage.

Particular to the prewar *shōjo* magazines was the promotion of a new type of love, in the means of enforcing chastity, entitled 'spiritual love'. This conception of love derived from Christianity and can be somewhat compared to romantic love, which had not widely existed in Japan prior to its use in the formation of *shōjo bunka* (young lady's culture) (Shamoon 2012). As described by Shamoon, before the Meiji period the terms that were considered the closest to the Western conception of love were "*nin jyō*" (human emotion) and "*iro*" (lust) which lacked the "spiritual dimension associated with love in European literature" (2012:17). In alignment, nineteenth century Japanese literature that described women acting upon emotions, often ended with their execution, and love stories were usually held within the pleasure quarters with prostitutes or sex workers (Shamoon 2012). Previous conceptions of love were thus heavily intertwined with Buddhist ideas of 'sinfulness' and 'carnal lust' rather than the spiritual aspects that one could find within Western literature (Shamoon 2012:17).

### **The Development of Spiritual Love, and Takarazuka Revue**

Spiritual love, a type of love based upon intellect rather than upon pure physical attraction thereby came with the importation of Western ideologies, and in an attempt to safeguard chastity, [s-]relationships between girls were often encouraged within high

schools (Bergstrom 2011; Shamoon 2007, 2012).<sup>20</sup> These relationships cannot be, however, thought of as within the same space as contemporary homosexual relationships. As described by Shamoon, these relationships, based upon loving someone similar to one's self, were considered to be a spiritual love of one's self rather than a sexual love of another.

“It was a coupling not merely with someone of the same sex but with one who exhibited the same modes of dress, speech, and behaviour. The girls' uniforms, usually some variation on the sailor suit with a blue pleated skirt, contributed to this ideal of sameness in that they promoted a similar appearance among schoolgirls. The *dōseirei* [same love] relationship celebrated in girls' magazines was between two girls who were not only feminine but dressed exactly alike. The ideal of *dōseirei*, encouraged sameness, loving the one who looks just like the self. Moreover, it was seen as a transitory relationship that teenage girls would eventually outgrow” (Shamoon 2007:5)

It was believed that spiritual love based relationships between young women would socialize girls into caring for their future families, thereby making the concept useful in the ‘good-wife, wise mother’ typology. The idea of spiritual love, also led to a conception of *shōjo* being conceived as a ‘third gender’ within Japanese society. As described by John Treat, the *shōjo* can be thought of as sexless and genderless, she is neither male nor female and yet both at the same time, as such she is not involved within acts that include sexual reproduction (1993:364). She moreover exists within a space that is after childhood and before adulthood, and only engages within ‘spiritual’ homosocial relationships that do not result in sexual activity.

The existence of the *shōjo* moreover coincides with the Japanese term ‘*chūsei*’, a term comprising of the character for ‘middle’ and the character for ‘gender’. *Chūsei* refers to gender neutrality, allowing for an individual to exist outside of the confines of

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<sup>20</sup> In the Taisho period, same-sex relationships between girls were referred to as “s” relationships “with the S standing for ‘sister,’ ‘shojo,’ ‘sex,’ or all three combined.” According to Robertson, “s” or “class s” relationships “conjure[s] up the image of two schoolgirls, often a junior senior pair, each with a crush on the other” (Robertson 1998:68).

the dichotomized terms of male and female, most particularly in areas such as “speech patterns, gestures, movements... and so on” (Robertson 1998:47). The idea of *chūsei* is demonstrated in the all-girl theatrical company *Takarazuka Revue* (Robertson 1998). Within Takarazuka, the distinction between ‘male’ and ‘female’ roles is somewhat undefined, as male-roles (*otokoyaku*) and ‘daughter’ roles (*musumeyaku*) are both depicted with overall ‘feminine’ appearances, thereby containing a sort of *chūsei* appearance (Robertson 1998). Through containing a *chūsei* appearance and moreover through displaying spiritual love based relationships in productions Takarazuka Revue was able to help solidify the concept of *shōjo* and promote chastity. The company was also able to provide women with a space in which they could interact with actresses and pursue careers.

### **Prewar Shōjo Magazines**

Another primary force in developing a localized girls’ space in Taisho Japan were the *shōjo* magazines that were distributed throughout girl high schools. Two prominent *shōjo* magazines emerged in the Meiji Period, reaching their peak in the 1930s and falling in the 1940s during the Second World War. One of the magazines was entitled ‘*shōjo club*’ and closely followed the educational guidelines promoted by the Japanese government under the ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideology (Shamoon 2012). The more popular literary magazine amongst the girls themselves, however, was ‘*shōjo no tomo*’ translating to ‘young lady’s friend’. The editor of *shōjo no tomo* promoted active participation by readers within the magazines through means such as letter writing, stories, poetry, and drawings (Shamoon 2012).

As magazines such as *shōjo no tomo* allowed for young women to have a space

where they were able to actively contribute, magazines also helped to foster particular visual and writing aesthetics that combined Western and Japanese aesthetics, as well as fine art with commercial art (Shamoon 2012:59). Combining these aesthetics fit with both the concept of *shōjo*, and the context in which it was created, as early twentieth century Japan was characterized by an influx of Western technologies, ideologies and materials that were being gradually localized into Japan (Czarnecki 2005; Koizumi 2002; Shamoon 2012).

The magazine additionally organized meetings where girls were able to meet its contributors. These meetings subsequently often acted as a launch pad for young women to begin careers from and additionally provided them with a greater sense of community. Through participation within the *shōjo* community, girls were given access to a space seemingly apart from social pressures such as marriage, and moreover some girls became able to transform aspects of their lives through methods such as career building. The development of girls' magazines thereby spurred the creation of a perceived autonomous space for young women as well as a community for them where they were able to somewhat transform constraints that they encountered in their everyday lives.

### **Visual and Written Aesthetics of Prewar Shōjo Magazines**

The aesthetics of the prewar magazines often featured drawings of young women either alone or in pairs, and varied dependent upon both the artist and the time period. The drawings of young women used in the prewar *shōjo* magazines transformed over time, for example Yumeji Takehisa, the first *shōjo* illustrator, created images of girls “who looked wispy, ephemeral, and nearly disembodied, reflecting the aesthetic of *chūsei*, the imaginary gender neutral idealized in girls' culture” (Shamoon 2012:61).

Through the use of visual aesthetics within magazines, ideal attributes such as *chūsei*, or rather an emphasis upon chastity could be internalized by their readership. Of particular influence to both prewar and postwar *shōjo* materials, is artist Nakahara Jun'ichi, who often contributed to *shōjo no tomo*, and whose unique art style helped to define *shōjo* aesthetics (Shamoon 2012). Nakahara's art, like Yumeji's, worked to reflect aspects of girls' culture including "innocence, purity, longing, and the beauty of s-relationships" (Shamoon 2012:68). The girls featured in his works looked in some way similar sharing particular features such as small lips, exaggerated eyes, and slender bodies. Usually alone, the girls wore elegant western style clothing or kimono, with their eyes always directed towards the side. Through developing a particular visual aesthetic that reflected attributes of the ideal *shōjo*, young women who read *shōjo* magazines could more quickly become socialized into the construct. Moreover, the distinctiveness of *shōjo* could be made apparent, through the development of a unique visual aesthetic separated from, but at once combining, other art forms like *nihonga* (Japanese paintings) and *yōga* (western paintings) (Shamoon 2012).

Complimenting the visual aesthetic within the prewar *shōjo* magazines is their literary aesthetic, which could be discovered within magazines' short stories, fan letters and other literary components. The writing found within magazines, like the visuals, worked to compliment the ideal attributes of the *shōjo* construct such as elegance, politeness, chastity and demureness. Moreover, the writing found within magazines contributed to development of a unique imagined world for young women that was often indecipherable for those outside of it. One writer, Nobuko Yoshiya was particularly influential in the development of a distinctive language, writing, and aesthetic for

schoolgirls through her contributions to girls' magazines.

Her works often featured high school aged girls in spiritual love relationships who used schoolgirl's language (*jōgakusei kotoba*), a language developed by high school students themselves, where young women could better distinguish between their own world and the world outside of *shōjo*. This language, which gradually developed throughout the twentieth century, was made recognizable through its use of overly flowery and polite language, as well as through its creation of new grammatical particles including *no*, *wa*, and *te*. As described by Shamoan, these particles, which are still used by contemporary Japanese women and girls today “do not add lexical meaning but express mood and reflect the personality, status and gender of the speaker” (Shamoan 2012:70). Schoolgirl's language was used within magazines, letters, as well as within daily conversations and helped to provide the sense of a closed world for schoolgirls separated from pressures in their everyday lives.

### **The Two-Faced Dimensionality of Shōjo**

As young women began to alter the constraints that existed around them through actively transforming girl's magazines, the *shōjo* construct itself began to exhibit a two-faced dimensionality, with one face created by the girls themselves, and the other face representing the idealized young woman who was constructed by men. The *shōjo* had taken on a role of her own outside of the doctrine that she was created within, becoming “innocent but also dangerously seductive, threatening to disrupt the patriarchal control of the family” (Shamoan 2012:10). The girl magazines, while originally controlled by men, thereby had inadvertently allowed for a space where girls were able to create their own language, as well as generate their own content in the forms of materials such as letters

and comics.

Girls were also able to resist pressures and previous societal expectations placed upon young women through becoming *shōjo*. *Shōjo* being a *chūsei* (gender neutral) construct was initially based upon abstinence, and thereby placed girls within an autonomous space, where previously, constraints could have been placed upon them through both their husbands and families. Girls also began to use actions in the space granted to them as *shōjo* to gain their own autonomy. Within that confined space, girls were able to slowly change the construct of *shōjo* into something of their own, through creating their own language, their own stories, and through participating within community events.

Even still in the midst of *shōjo*'s transformations, came the beginning of the Second World War, alongside which it became apparent that the *shōjo* construct could no longer fit within the confines of Japanese society. The initial construction of '*shōjo*' was created in the context of a newly opened Japan, with the means of ensuring young women's chastity before marriage, as well as with efforts to cultivate a desired type of young women to promote to other countries. The *shōjo* initially created at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, was non-productive when wartime Japan needed all of its citizens to be in a way active (Shamoon 2012). In alignment, during the war, magazines such as *shōjo no tomo* became progressively censored and increasingly criticized for promoting an undesirable subset of *shōjo* separated from the idealized chaste and innocent girl that the government had previously envisioned. Moreover, in the wartime era, magazines began to be monopolized by government interest, thereafter ceasing to publish information that concerned girl readers, such as spiritual love based

relationships, and eventually lost popularity (Shamoon 2012).

Even still, the impact of the early twentieth century manifestation of *shōjo*, alongside the actions of the young women labeled as *shōjo*, had a prolonged impact upon Japan. For example, as women became greater educated, new employment opportunities for them emerged such as becoming actresses, waitresses, nurses, typists, secretaries, and teachers. Amongst the proliferation of education, the First World War caused for Japan to have a growing concern with industrialization, and urbanism, but also caused for it to have a stagnant economy. With a stagnant economy, many middle-class families required extra income, and thereby allowed for educated young women to enter into the workforce for the first time. The Japanese government further encouraged young women to pursue temporary professions prior to marriage, so that they would be able to learn more about the world, and be better prepared for becoming the modern housewives that the Japanese government desired (Tipton 2013). These new modern housewives would ideally fall into the ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideology, through being both educated and knowledgeable about the outside world. New employment and education opportunities thereby allowed for women to become more active in determining their everyday lives. Moreover, both *shōjo* and the ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideology inadvertently provided women with freedom, and further gave them the opportunity to be active in gradually changing the constraints surrounding them.

In summation, the time frame between the opening of the Japanese borders and the start of the Second World War was a period of major social change for Japan. In efforts to withstand threats from other countries, Japan worked to quickly import both technologies and ideologies afterwards localizing them to fit Japan. Amongst its efforts to

strengthen its global image, Japan created girls' high schools, and furthermore promoted a new specialized construct for young women entitled '*shōjo*'. While initially promoted by men, the creation of *shōjo* in the early twentieth century allowed for young women to have their own space where they were able to be active in constructing careers, seemingly apart from forthcoming pressures such as marriage. Moreover, within *shōjo* a distinctive visual and written aesthetic taste began to emerge that has continued into the twenty-first century. Finally, as a result of increased education after the First World War, more women began to enter into the workforce. Overall, while inadvertent, the creation of higher education and *shōjo* gave women an autonomous space within which they were able to be active in gradually transforming their own lives as well as parts of the society that existed around them.

### **Post-War Japan, the new ideal Japanese family, and the beginnings of Japanese 'cute' (1945-1980s)**

The time span between the beginning of the Meiji Period and the Second World War was a transformative age for Japan, made notable by the country's rapid industrialization and urbanization in efforts to avoid being colonized by foreign countries. Conversely, the following period between the 1950s and the 1980s was emblematic for its unprecedented economic growth, rampant consumption, development of alternative fashions, and continued restructuring of the image of the 'modern' Japanese family (Kelly and White 2006). Moreover, where the post-war period afforded more educational and employment opportunities to women, it simultaneously trapped them within varying conflicting expectations including between being good consumers, falling into prewar values, and living up to work expectations.

The post-war period began with the Occupation (1945-1952), where the

Americans began a series of major reforms within Japan such as “civil rights granted under the constitution as well as in land reform, labour reform, and legal changes for women” (Gordon 2009:240). More specifically, one of the aims of the American Occupation was to break down the highly structured prewar Confucian family (White 2002). In place of the Confucian family, a newly desired familial model was constructed based upon the values of “equality and individual rights” (White 2002:56). This new family was headed by the breadwinning ‘*salaryman*’, a white collared businessman, and his wife the ‘*kyōiku mama*’ (education mother) or the mother who strove to assist her child’s climbing up the social ladder through education (White 2002). The new ideal father spent much of his time devoted to the company, while the mother devoted her time to the education of her children, and the children spent their times studying for entrance examinations that would later determine their futures (White 2002).

The advent of the *kyōiku mama* placed heavy expectations upon mothers, as it was believed that if children were not successful it was a reflection of their upbringing. The *kyōiku mama* acted as an extension to the prewar ‘*ryōsai kenbō*’ (good wife wise mother), with the construct’s emphasis placed upon the education of children. Even still, while not every individual was able to obtain the idealized nuclear family, it became a desired social-type in the post-war period where boys “strove to become *salaryman*” and girls strove to marry them, in efforts to obtain desired economic security (Imamura 1996:2).

As each member of the newly invented nuclear family was encouraged to play his or her role, they were at once encouraged to purchase material goods, as domestic consumption was beginning to play a pivotal role in propelling the Japanese economy forward (White 2002). Accordingly, in the lieu of promoting the mass consumption of

domestic products, particular merchandise was advertised as ‘must-have’ items. For example, beginning in the late 1950s the “three sacred regalia” that marked the modern Japanese family were the black and white television, the washing machine, and the refrigerator (Gordon 2009:264). Possessing these three items was believed to equip families with the possibility of pursuing their dreams, and in alignment, by the mid 1960s over ninety percent of the Japanese population possessed all three. Continuing in the pursuit of stimulating economic growth, depending upon the time period, different items were promoted as must haves, for example following the ‘three sacred regalia’ came the “Three C’s” in the mid 1960s, “the car, cooler (air conditioner), and color TV” (Gordon 2009:264). The invention of the *salaryman* and the *kyōiku mama*, thereby allowed for the development of a strong and educated workforce within Japan. Moreover, this powerful workforce, and their accompanying families, was increasingly encouraged to not only work hard for the company, but also to consume, thereby allowing for the Japanese economy to undergo a swift recovery following the end of the Second World War.

### **The Beginnings of Japanese ‘Cute’**

Entering into the 1970s, corporations began marketing specified products to each demographic, with one of the outcomes being the proliferation of an array of new youth centered fashion lines, the beginnings of Japanese *kawaii* (cute) culture, and the resurgence of *shōjo* in the form of manga. Central to 1970s youth marketing was the term ‘*kawaii*’, a word referring to a broad range of aesthetic tastes that fall within the boundaries of the concept ‘cute’ (Kinsella 1995: 222). The result of a mix of both Western and Japanese elements, the contemporary Japanese ‘*kawaii*’ can be most easily symbolized by the highly commodified Sanrio character ‘Hello Kitty’ who originated in

1974 (Yano 2009:681). A sort of umbrella term containing within it a multitude of variation, *kawaii* can be thought of as “an aesthetic that celebrates sweet, adorable, simple, infantile, delicate and pretty visual, physical or behavioural qualities” (Monden 2014:79). In this regard, any fashion that is connected to *kawaii* aesthetics can be seen as making its wearer both more “childlike and demure” (Monden 2014:79).

As *kawaii* aesthetics became popularized, beginning in the 1970s, Japanese brands such as ‘Milk’ began to produce *kawaii* clothing containing materials such as lace, ribbons, and bows (Hirakawa 2007:37). As described by Hirakawa, “Milk clothes were – and continue to be – girly, romantic, feminine, but not sexual. All these elements would later become *kawaii* culture”. Moreover, Milk’s designer, Okawa Hitomi, was significant in the development of Japanese *kawaii* aesthetics in that she worked to unite fashions that previously would have seemed at odds, for example through making punk fashion ‘cute’. Her designs were also notably influenced by prewar *shōjo* magazine artist Nakahara Jun’ichi, who was notable for his mixing of both Japanese and Western aesthetics (Monden 2015; Shamooin 2012). Like Nakahara, through mixing disparate elements and materials, Milk and Okawa were able to help expand the definition of the term ‘*kawaii*’ to incorporate items that previously would not have been conceived as necessarily cute.

### **The Continuance of Shōjo Culture**

Where *kawaii* aesthetics combined a variety of genres, they simultaneously drew significant influences from both prewar *shōjo* aesthetics, and Victorian era literature such as ‘Anne of Green Gables’ (1908), ‘Heidi’ (1880), and ‘Alice’s Adventure’s in Wonderland’ (1865) (McKnight 2010; Monden 2014). These influences can be made clearer through examining the resurgence of the prewar *shōjo* in postwar girls’ magazines

in aspects such as spiritual love relationships, *chūsei*, and the use of demure aesthetics. Moreover, the postwar magazines like their predecessors promoted active participation by their readership through methods such as “prizes, contests and surveys to stimulate sales and locate new talent” (Shamoon 2012:103). The 1970s magazines however were made distinct from former magazines through their incorporation of psychologically complex narratives, politics, and sexuality (Shamoon 2012).

A prime example of both the continuity and differences between the prewar and postwar period magazines can be seen within famed manga “Rose of Versailles” (*berusaiyu no bara*). A highly popular serialized manga existing between 1972 and 1973, the series had a long lasting impact “sparking a craze amongst teenage girls in the 1970s for anything related to the manga, or indeed for anything French” (Shamoon 2012:119). While originally beginning within the context of Rococo Period France, the story features strong influence from prewar *shōjo* aesthetics including demure fashions, dreamy visions of stars, and large eyes (Shamoon 2012).

It follows the lives of the French Queen Marie Antoinette and fictional character Oscar Francois de Jarjayes, a woman who dresses as a man and becomes the captain of the Queen’s royal guard (McKnight 2010; Shamoon 2012). The series is able to act as a bridge between prewar and postwar *shōjo* cultures through Oscar who forms various spiritual relationships with characters that feature *chūsei* characteristics including large eyes, long hair, and slender tall bodies. Overall, The Rose of Versailles is significant in that it allowed for the mass revival of the prewar girls’ culture and *shōjo* through the use of aesthetics, spiritual love relationships, and language. However, it is further significant in that it contributed new aspects to *shōjo* such as the use of sexuality, strong female

protagonists, politics, and psychological complexity.

The *Rose of Versailles* and other *manga* like it that emerged within 1970s magazines actively contributed to the revival of prewar *shōjo* and allowed for girls to once again have the sense of a closed community. Moreover, like the prewar magazines, postwar magazines provided young women with a seemingly autonomous space in which they were able to transform aspects of their lives, such as through actively contributing to magazines. Finally, the rise in consumerism allowed for young Japanese women to dress in a similar aesthetic as the characters that they read about through *kawaii* merchandizing and the invention of Japanese brands such as Milk.

Following the 1970s, consumption was continually encouraged into the 1980s when Japan reached its economic peak and the second highest GDP globally (Yoda 2000). Alongside Japan reaching its pinnacle economically, however, women began to encounter conflicting expectations from the society around them. For example, while they were gaining greater employment opportunities and being encouraged to consume, they were simultaneously being criticized for not pertaining to prewar values such as frugality (Kelly and White 2006). Moreover, as women began to gain more freedom to pursue careers, they also began to delay both marriage and child bearing, often instead spending their money on luxury brand goods such as Louis Vuitton (Bardsley and Hirakawa 2005). These conflicting expectations began to place women within awkward positions between what was expected of women before them and ongoing changes in the society around them.

The post-war period until the 1990s thereby marked a time of mass economic and social changes, such as employment opportunities for women, increased consumption,

and new idealized family types. The era additionally saw the rebirth of the prewar *shōjo* in the form of *manga*-based magazines, and in the beginnings of alternative *kawaii* fashions. The Rose of Versailles allowed for young women to discuss topics like sexuality, psychological problems, and the promulgation of strong female characters. Even still, like the young women who existed in the prewar *shōjo* construct, women of the postwar period still existed within often-contradictory constraints that determined the amount of autonomy that they were able to obtain. For example, at once they were placed between being stigmatized, such as being called unpatriotic for buying international brands, and being expected to increasingly consume products (Bardsley and Hirakawa 2005). Amongst this rise of consumption and seeming economic gains, however, risky investment into both the stock and real estate markets were gradually forming an economic bubble that would lead Japan into a decades-spanning recession (Yoda 2000).

### **The Bubble Burst and tie-ins to Lolita Fashion (1990s-)**

Commencing with the burst of the economic bubble, the 1990s brought with it a series of moral panics and financial instabilities, in addition to a variety of alternative youth fashions. One of the fashions that emerged during that time was Lolita, which acted as the latest incarnation of the prewar girls' construct *shōjo*. The start of the 1990s also however carried with it a renewed emphasis upon youth related products as a viable soft power for the Japanese economy.

While the after effects of the bubble burst were not immediately apparent, one of the demographics most heavily hit by the bubble's burst were youth, many of who became thereafter unable to locate stable employment positions (Brinton 2011; Karin and Beck 2010; Yoda 2000). The postwar period's employment system, which had until then

provided an anchor in many young Japanese lives, offered neither the same amount of jobs nor security in the 1990s. For instance, while previous to the bubble burst, technical colleges were able to consistently arrange post-graduate employment for their students, in the post-bubble period a decrease in job availability reduced the amount of matches that could be made between corporations and prospective employees (Brinton 2011).

Further, while some university graduates consciously chose unstable jobs in fields such as media production, after the bubble burst, even those graduates who sought steady employment often had to settle for “insecure jobs” (Roberts 2011:574). With a lack of job stability, many youth began to drift between part-time jobs (*furita/freeter*), remained unmarried while living at home (*parasite singles*), became shut-ins (*hikikomori*), or became uninvolved with any form of employment, education, or training (*ni-to*) at all (Allison 2009). Further, within this period, often due to the lack of availability of employment opportunities, the duration of youth became prolonged for many, as marriage and childbearing were increasingly postponed (Hashimoto and Kondo 2012). Even still, despite youth existing within positions of instability as a result of wider neoliberal and economic issues, they were often simultaneously blamed for the positions in which they were situated. As expressed by activist Karin Amamiya,

“At a time when we were feeling so much instability within our own hearts, the idea of ‘working normally and making a living’ itself was becoming unstable in this country. It was a warped picture: poorly paid freeter or regular full-time employees fated to die from overwork. Yet people say that this predicament is a matter of “personal responsibility” and freeters have continued to experience bashing. In the meantime, homelessness among freeters of my generation is becoming more visible. All at once the freeter issue has changed from a matter of working on your own terms to one of having the right to survive.” (Karin and Beck 2010:254)

Youth behaviour in the 1990s, while often structured by wider economic issues, led to the appearance of a variety of neologisms often coined by either the media or academics.

Labels, such as the above mentioned ‘freeter’ (*furita*), worked to greater place youth within precarious situations through methods of stigmatization such as “bashing”. Those youth who came to age in the 1990s later became known as the ‘lost generation’ existing within the first of a series of ‘lost decades’ (*ushinawareta jūnen*) lacking the economic opportunities of their parents’ generation (Allison 2009; DiNitto 2011). Even still, despite the pressing economic and social problems that youth faced, during the 1990s, a variety of new youth alternative fashions and groups either emerged or became greater popularized including *gyaru*, *otaku*, *visual-kei*, and Lolita.

Lolita in particular initially began through the innovative work of designers in the Kansai region of Japan (Suzuki 2007). Like 1970s brand Milk, Lolita’s fashion designers took heavy influence from both *shōjo* manga, and European literature in the creation of their clothing. However, while Milk’s clothing was influenced by *shōjo* manga, Lolita’s princess-like outfits featuring aspects such as petticoats, bonnets and corsets, acted as a means through which young women could, in a sense, actually embody the characters that they read about.

Ultimately, the creation of Lolita fashion offered a space where girls could live out the fantasized image of the ‘*shōjo*’ that had been cultivated since the beginning of the twentieth century. By the mid-1990s, the Meiji era *shōjo* had already been rendered as impossible, having come into existence at a time of economic prosperity, and differing values. During the 1910s and 20s young women from aristocratic families had a space where they were able to engage within a community of girls and thereafter temporarily forget about forthcoming pressures such as marriage. In opposition to the Taisho period, 1990s Japan was a context of economic uncertainty after a heightened period of

prosperity. Thereafter, young people felt that the opportunities that had been previously available to their parents' generation including employment prospects, and the possibilities of starting a family, had become increasingly restricted.

Through wearing Lolita fashion, however, women could indulge in the fantasy worlds that they saw open to them in *manga*, *anime*, novels and *visual-kei* music. Like the prewar *shōjo* construct, the new Lolita construct was proliferated through the creation of girls' magazines such as the Gothic Lolita Bible (GLB), which began in 2001. Magazines such as GLB, featured fan contributions like the *shōjo* magazines before them, in addition to etiquette advice, *manga*, essays, make-up tutorials, street snaps, and previews of upcoming Lolita clothing. Moreover, contemporary Lolita magazines, like GLB, are connected to the magazines before them through the use of specified girls' language.

Contemporary Lolita magazines often draw directly from this prewar girls' language through the use of both honorifics and particular feminine words. For example, through using outdated phrases such as '*sayō de gozaimasu no*' (Is that so?), Lolitas can better reflect prewar ideals of being 'ladylike' and further can connect themselves to the prewar *shōjo* (Gagné 2007).

Apart from similar aesthetics and language use to prewar *shōjo*, contemporary Lolita fashion contains within it allusions to *s-relationships*, or spiritual love based homosocial relationships, as can be seen within cult novel and film *Kamikaze Girls* (*shimotsuma monogatari*). *Kamikaze Girls* explores the unlikely friendship between a Lolita girl named Momoko and a female motorcycle gang member (*bōsōzoku*) named Ichigo. Momoko, the protagonist, is a schoolgirl who is raised by a single father who sells

counterfeit brand name goods in the countryside (McKnight 2010; Monden 2015; Nakashima 2004). Despite her real life circumstances, she idealizes the leisure-based lifestyle of Rococo Period France. Through wearing Lolita fashion Momoko feels that she can in a way live an idealized lifestyle of being a part of the Rococo nobility, despite living in rural twenty-first century Japan (McKnight 2010; Monden 2015; Nakashima 2004). She soon encounters Ichigo, a female motorcycle gang member who becomes interested in buying Momoko's father's counterfeit goods (McKnight 2010; Monden 2015; Nakashima 2004). Despite the girls' vast differences, as the story continues they are able to develop a close relationship.

Kamikaze Girls worked to popularize Lolita fashion in the early 2000s, and furthermore formed connections between the prewar, postwar, and 1990s manifestations of *shōjo*. The connection between Momoko and Ichigo reflects the idealized relationships of the prewar and postwar *shōjo* constructs. Further, Momoko seeks to reflect the idealized prewar *shōjo* through her appearance, behavior and mannerisms such as through walking with a parasol in the countryside. The film further reflects the postwar *shōjo* construct through providing strong female protagonists, as well as a contrast between the masculine Ichigo and the ultra feminine Momoko that reflects the contrast between Marie-Antoinette and Oscar in the 1970s phenomenon '*Rose of Versailles*'. The film ultimately reproduces the idealization of the French Rococo Period that began in the 1970s through Momoko's idealization of the period that is interspersed throughout the story. Therefore, despite the vast differences between the context of prewar, postwar, and contemporary Japan, through the use of mechanisms such as language, fantasy, and spiritual love based relationships, continuity between the varying periods of *shōjo* were

maintained.

As alternative fashions such as Lolita were being established during the growing economic difficulties of the 1990s, the government foresaw financial gain through the growing cute and youth culture that had been rising in popularity in Japan since the 1970s. Through the creation of massive franchises such as Pokémon, 1990s and later millennial Japan became a cultural “soft power”, a nation capable of using “nontraditional ways” to influence “another country’s wants” and desires (McGray 2002:53).

The 1990s also brought with it the beginnings of Lolita fashion and thereby a continuity of the *shōjo* construct. It moreover allowed for a community of Lolitas to proliferate through the use of magazines such as ‘*The Gothic and Lolita Bible*’. Through wearing Lolita fashion and reading its related magazines, women were able to transform aspects of their lives such as through gaining confidence, or beginning careers. Lolita fashion, however, differs from prewar and postwar *shōjo* through the context in which it developed, as well as through its elaborate outfits that allow for its wearers to reproduce the characters they read about.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has worked to lay a contextualization for the development of Lolita fashion, *shōjo*, consumerism, and social roles for women in twentieth century Japan. The contemporary Lolita fashion can be traced back to the ‘good wife, wise mother’ (*ryōsai kenbo*) and *shōjo* constructs that were promoted by the Meiji Government in the late 1800s. While initially created with the aims of promoting a new idealized woman, the maintenance of chastity, and a future educated workforce, *shōjo* inadvertently created a

space where young women could pretend to be whoever they desired, allowing them to escape from pressures, such as those to marry, and moreover finding a space to construct aspects of their lives, such as through beginning careers as magazine contributors. More specifically Meiji-era schoolgirls were able to take the freedom that *shōjo* provided them with and develop a distinctive girls' community containing its own language, aesthetics, and conceptions of love. When Japan began to enter into the Second World War, *shōjo* magazines, which acted as a staple to the schoolgirls' community, began to be increasingly censored and directed towards government interest, causing for schoolgirls to lose interest in them. Even still, the Meiji *shōjo* construct is significant because besides from creating a space for schoolgirls, it has continued to influence popular culture directed towards young women, throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, in aspects such as aesthetics and language use.

In the postwar period, Japan's economy was able to rapidly recover through the development of new constructs such as *salaryman*, as well as through the development of mass consumerism. At that time, *shōjo* too became intertwined with consumerism as well as with the beginnings of Japanese *kawaii* (cute) culture, yet it continued to allow for young women to have their own space away from constraints in their everyday lives. Furthermore, in the 1970s, young female writers contributed to the revival of *shōjo* magazines through adding to them strong female protagonists, comics, and complex psychological themes. The promulgation of a new community again allowed for young women to develop desired careers, such as becoming *manga* artists, and also allowed for them to live their lives as they desired.

Finally, in the post-bubble period Lolita fashion emerged alongside the

proliferation of consumerism, acting as the latest form of *shōjo*, where women were in a sense able to reenact characters that they read about. This new fashion allowed for women to have a space that they could contribute within, but also where they could in a sense be free from increasing economic and societal pressures such as pressures to find stable full-time employment or to marry, particularly through the use of fantasy.

## PART II

## Chapter II

### Fantastical Imaginings

高校生の頃、周りの人と同じような服を着ることに疑問を感じました。その時地下鉄の駅で黒いドレスを着て一人で歩いている人を見かけました。とてもかっこいいと感じました。そしてロリータファッションが自身のポリシーや自分の世界に基づいていること、その事にも大きな魅力を感じたからです。

When I was a high school student, I didn't want to wear the same clothes as other people around me. At that time, I saw a woman wearing a black dress walking alone at the subway station. I thought it was really cool. I also feel that Lolita fashion is based upon its own rules and has its own world. Because of this I feel a great charm from Lolita fashion. (Interview with Azami-san, Harajuku, June 2014)

As an isolated high school student, when Azami-san first saw the woman wearing gothic Lolita fashion at the subway station, she discovered a means through which she would be able to temporarily enter into a world guided by her own rules. Azami-san, now a 28-year-old illustrator, had always felt isolated within the society in which she existed, and had longed to find a path through which she could live her life the way that she desired, away from the pressures that she ordinarily felt around her. Now wearing Lolita fashion for nearly ten years, and furthermore making a living through creating illustrations of a Lolita inspired fantasy world, wearing the clothing has provided her with the means to live her life by own terms.

Where the previous chapter worked to construct a historical contextualization of both Lolita fashion and contemporary Japanese women, the following chapter will describe how Lolita fashion is able to provide its wearers with a sense of freedom, where they can do as they desire, particularly through the use of nostalgia and fantasy. While wearing Lolita fashion, or in some way interacting with Lolita fashion through mediums such as dolls, this chapter will argue that women are able to define aspects of

their lives separated from ordinarily encountered constraints such as societal expectations of them.

### **How Imagined Nostalgia and Fantastical Play Leads to Imagined Autonomy**

Nostalgia, as described by John Treat, refers to the “idealization of something gone” (Treat 1993:381). Conversely, the ‘vanishing’, as used by anthropologist Marilyn Ivy, refers to those things that are in the process of disappearing. According to Ivy, the vanishing can be thought of as “the movement of something passing away, gone but not quite, suspended between presence and absence” (Ivy 1995:20). A vanishing thing can too become an object of nostalgia, however, as it falls into the “sphere of the repetition of the past and its objectification” (Ivy 1995:244). As something vanishing becomes objectified, it carries with it the “ambivalent longing to erase the temporal difference between subject and object of desire, shot through with not only the impossibility but also the ultimate unwillingness to reinstate what was lost” (Ivy 1995:10). More simply, as something falls into nostalgia, or verges upon disappearance, the subject that longs for it, or their visualization of it, wishes to be able to reconnect with the lost object. Even still, if the desired object were to be recreated, as it had actually existed, it would risk losing the subject’s desire for it that was created in its absence. The subject’s desire for something thereby lies in its absence, and further in its gradual idealization. If an object were to be reunited with a subject in its actual form, however, the gap between its idealization and its reality would render it as no longer desirable.

This chapter will refer to multiple forms of both ‘the vanishing’ and the already vanished, those desired things that the subject wishes to reconnect with but at once does not want to face in reality. A longed for object that exists within the past, only retains its

desirability for as long as it is unobtainable, and thereby for as long as it remains within the realm of fantasy. Within the realm of fantasy an object gains the possibility of being molded to suit a subjects' desires, more particularly if the subject is not only nostalgic for something from their past, but for something from a past that they have never in fact experienced. The nostalgia that my informants, and other Lolitas objectify is multiple, including such nostalgia as the nostalgia for a past era, the nostalgia for one's girlhood (*shōjo jidai*), or the nostalgia for a fantastical world that never in reality existed.

While ordinarily, subjects are unable to reunite with their desired objects, through fantastical play, that is through playing with fantasy, women who wear Lolita fashion are able to, in a sense, directly interact with the object of their desire within a temporary autonomous space. Within that temporary space, a woman can become free of her ordinarily encountered problems, within the workplace, or flaws that she finds within herself, such as having a bad temper. She can moreover take the freedom that she gains through wearing the fashion and apply it to gradually transforming aspects of her everyday life, such as by gaining confidence in herself.

The constraints or problems that women face within contemporary Japan are often intertwined with social expectations of roles and ways they are expected to behave within those roles, such as the roles of the mother, the wife, the worker, and the student. For example, the Japanese mother is expected to support the education of her children, and also often expected to quit her job upon the birth of her first child whether or not she wishes to continue working (Sasagawa 2004:189). Additionally, Japan can be thought of as a 'uniformed society' where social roles are depicted by dress. As stated by Cambridge, in Japan "a substantial number of people would seem to be conscious of their respective

positions in a range of social structures and dress accordingly” (Cambridge 2011:183).

As dress and roles are frequently inextricably tied within Japan, wearing Lolita is seen as societally unacceptable as it relates to the roles of mothers, wives and office workers, while it can somewhat be seen as more acceptable while one remains a student. In this sense, as many of my informants wore Lolita fashion they were consciously defying the expectations of social roles and thereafter faced pressures, both direct and indirect, from their friends, family, and people surrounding them.

### **Nostalgia for Girlhood or a Return to Youth**

One space that many Lolitas wish to return to is their girlhood, or a glorified version of it that may have never existed in reality. Accordingly, Treat’s examination of *shōjo* author Yoshimoto Banana’s work between the late 1980s and early 1990s, explores her idealization of girlhood (1993). In the early 1990s, Yoshimoto was still in her late-twenties and her writing often featured young women who frequently made their girlhoods into nostalgic spaces despite having only recently transitioned from them. The young female characters of Yoshimoto’s books fell into the *shōjo* construct, whose 1980s purpose, as described by Treat, had become primarily for consuming the array of merchandise surrounding them. Like her prewar predecessor, the *shōjo* of the 1980s was also seemingly non-productive, as she neither produced financially nor reproductively. This empty existence, created not only by the pressure to consume, but also through the uncertainty that marked the lives of young people in post-bubble Japan, drove Yoshimoto and others to long for a place in their childhoods that never actually existed. As described by Treat,

“Banana’s contemporary nostalgia lacks any determined past to validate it. An experiment of the ‘present’ without a real-life referent one that makes sense only as the much-vaunted ‘empty signifier’ associated with postmodernity” (1993:377).

The nostalgia that her characters feel, for a childhood that never actually existed, but only exists within their minds, allows for them to feel a sense of longing apart from the uncertainty that they feel in their lives.

Like Yoshimoto's characters, three of my older informants too desired to return to an idealized version of their girlhoods, and in a sense were able to through a combination of wearing Lolita fashion and using fantasy. As women in their forties, all married with children, they were unable to, in actuality, return to the space of being young women, and simultaneously were they reunited with their girlhoods, they may have found that their actual youth was not what they had thought it to have been. My older informants additionally felt pressures to conform to expectations given to wives, mothers, and female workers in Japan. As previously mentioned, the creation of the Taisho period *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideology and the post-war *kyōiku mama* (education mother) placed women in varying expectations as role-models responsible for the education and upbringing of their children.

Even still, through wearing Lolita fashion while using fantasy and nostalgia, my informants were able to, in a sense, return to their girlhoods. The girlhood that each woman returned to however, was one of her own construction with her own rules, guidelines, and freedom that she may have not in reality possessed. Within that space, she became able to temporarily rid herself of perceived personal flaws and pressures placed upon her in her day-to-day life, such as the pressures that she received to abide by societal expectations of her from her families or workspace.

I first met Junko-san, a 44-year-old housewife, by chance in Harajuku when she was advertising her then soon to open pop-up Lolita store. Junko-san, having worn Lolita

fashion intermittently for around twenty years against her friends and family's wishes, desired to give older women the opportunity to return to the liminal space of being *shōjo*. Her desire to provide women with this opportunity stemmed from a self-realization that as she became older, she lacked opportunities to wear Lolita fashion and yet simultaneously was not ready to fully graduate from it. She explained to me the concept of her soon to open pop-up shop where for a set fee she would dress others in her Lolita clothing and allow for them to walk around areas, such as Harajuku, for the day. This idea had initially come to her while on a trip to Kyoto, where she had the opportunity to dress as a geisha's apprentice (*maiko*) and walk the streets.<sup>21</sup> As she wore *maiko* clothing, she felt like she had returned to her girlhood, as stated by Junko-san,

“The shop attendant changed me completely into a *maiko*. I was so excited! I looked like *maiko*! But I thought it was a rare case. So when I went to the shop I was worried about being a 43 year old. But the shop attendant said, ‘That is no problem, the range of age is from 20 to 70’. Yes! Many people want to change. They are longing to be admired someday. Life is one time. If they want to try, just try, I think [they] should. So it doesn't matter. Whether it suits someone or not.” (Junko-san, Kagurazaka, July 2014)

Junko-san was initially hesitant to wear the *maiko* clothing, which was designed for young women, yet as she wore the clothing she was able to have the metamorphic feeling of being youthful again. As she had experienced a sense of transformation in the hours that she became a *maiko* in Kyoto, Junko-san believed that dressing in Lolita fashion would allow for older women to temporarily reenter the nostalgic space of being young women again. Junko-san expressed,

“I want to make middle aged women dress in it more... and to come back to Harajuku. Because if anyone has a palpitation... deep inside, everybody is like a girl. Longing to be a princess, bride, fairy. So that's why. They are living as a mother, living as an OL so

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<sup>21</sup> The term *geisha* refers to women who “study classical Japanese music and dance, perform music and dance for parties in order to pay for their art lessons and elaborate public stage performances” (Foreman 2005:34). Geisha primarily spend their time devoted to studying traditional Japanese dance and musical instruments. *Maiko* are young women between ages sixteen and twenty-two who are considered to be geisha's apprentices (Dalby 1983).

they are... they sometimes give up to be in this costume because they think 'I'm no longer... but it's very pretty and I want to put it on! But... it's not good for me.' I don't think so, they are a very very good age to put make up on... and to put on wig and any decorative dress and ornaments. So that's why I want to give people who have never tried it... that have already become a little bit older... I want to give them the opportunity." (Junko-san, Kagurazaka, July 2014)

As Junko-san wished to inspire older women to wear Lolita fashion, Junko-san herself had gradually become aware of her own aging, to the extent of wearing a surgical mask with her outfits, with the purpose of concealing the wrinkles upon her face that she felt were gradually becoming apparent. She moreover found herself embedded within a multitude of constraints, for at once she felt pressures from her workplace, stigmatization from her family, and self-conscious of her own gradual aging. She found that she was only able to wear Lolita fashion once or twice a year, and every time that she wore the fashion she felt pressures from her family and friends. Junko-san says,

"My family and friends don't say real... Give me compliment. Oh, pretty pretty good good nice nice! But I don't think so... they are thinking. This dress is pretty but it's not good for you. And my family is very don't tell a white lie, they say what they mean, the truth: 'It doesn't suit you!'" (Junko-san, Kagurazaka, July 2014)

Junko-san felt that her family did not approve of her wearing Lolita fashion, a fashion that she felt pressure to no longer wear because of her age and roles as a mother and wife, but yet was not ready to completely graduate from the fashion. As she claimed, "like a fox", a folkloric Japanese shape shifter, she and the other older women who wore Lolita fashion, were able to, for a moment, return to their girlhoods, free from both the constraints and problems that they encountered in their everyday lives (Junko-san, Kagurazaka, July 2014).<sup>22</sup> In the space of wearing Lolita fashion, Junko-san became

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<sup>22</sup> A reoccurring character in Japanese folklore, foxes are able to shape shift between multiple worlds and forms such as between "animal, spirit, and human, from the marvelous world of texts to the prosaic world of their authors" (Bathgate 2004:7). Thus, when Junko-san refers to herself, and other older women who wear Lolita fashion as foxes, she is implying that older women are being deceptive in tricking other people into believing that they are something that they are not.

capable of being who she wanted to be and further capable of opening her own Lolita fashion store. She hoped that through her pop-up store, and further through the more permanent location that she was working on constructing, she would be able to form a community of older Lolitas, and further be able to feasibly find a way to continue incorporating Lolita fashion into her life.

Yoshimoto's novel "Tsugumi", tells the story of Maria, a young woman who has recently passed the stage of being *shōjo*, and yet already longs for its return (Treat 1993). In the novel, the protagonist tells the story of her girlhood in a seaside town, a space that has become idealized through temporal distancing where "the perfect *shōjo* ... [who] will never grow up" can exist (Treat 1993:376). A space, such as the space of the *shōjo*, can become fetishized as it falls into the realm of fantasy, a place that can be desired for, and moreover a space that one can only return to, within fantasy. While Junko-san is becoming more aware of her aging, for her and my other informants, when she wears Lolita fashion she is able to return to an idealized version of her girlhood through the combined use of nostalgia and fantasy. Within that space, she can become whatever she desires, away from the pressures that she feels in her day-to-day life and can further pursue the goals that she seeks. For example, despite ordinarily being a housewife, mother, and office-lady (OL)<sup>23</sup>, in the world that Lolita provides her with, she is able to

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She further contends that older women can be seen as "poisonous cakes" hiding perceived personal flaws such as smoking or aging through the cute visage of being a Lolita.

<sup>23</sup> Office lady (OL) is a Japanese neologism that basically refers to women who work in offices in Japanese corporations. OLs are typically hired straight from high school, two-year colleges, or university and are involved with such tasks as "operating copiers and facsimile machines, performing elementary accounting and doing word processing" (Ogasawara 1998:12). They are also tasked with doing company errands, serving tea to male colleagues, and receiving telephone calls.

start her own company (whether or not it will ultimately be successful) and is further able to work upon creating her own community of older women who wear Lolita fashion.

### **Nostalgia for a Past Never Experienced, or Longing for a Fantasy World**

The nostalgia that one can feel when wearing Lolita fashion can be multiple, between wanting to return to one's youth, wanting to live in a time where one never in actuality existed, or wanting to go to a place of fantasy. Lolitas however, are not interested in reconstructing past eras, such as the Rococo Period as they actually existed, but rather are interested in the longing for those periods that is created in their absence. As Junko-san wished to return to an idealized version of her childhood, many other women who wear Lolita fashion wish to venture to versions of historical spaces that are premised upon their own imaginings. Within Lolita fashion, while individual women often construct their own spaces, some specific historical spaces, such as the French Rococo Period, have been gradually romanticized as a result of the twentieth century *shōjo*. Moreover, pop culture in twentieth century Japan constructed various imaginaries around fantasy worlds stemming from nineteenth century literature such as 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. Where wearing Lolita fashion granted Junko-san with the ability to become a young woman again, through the use of fantasy, other women are able to become their envisioned nineteenth century storybook characters, Rococo era nobles or princesses in an imagined world, while wearing Lolita fashion. Within the autonomous space that wearing Lolita fashion grants for many, As Junko-san became capable of creating her own Lolita pop-up shop, other women are too able to partially transform their lives such as through relieving the stress that they encounter in the workplace.

As explored in Chapter 1, the 1970s marked the beginnings of *kawaii* culture and the intensification of youth directed marketing campaigns. Through the development of *kawaii* fashion brands in Japan, there soon after began an idealization of historical spaces such as Victorian England, and Rococo France. More specifically, between the 1970s and 1990s, as designers began to draw influence from historical periods in creating clothing an altered image of the past began to be created.

More specifically, the creation of Ikeda's widely popular '*Rose of Versailles*' triggered a glorification of France's Rococo Period, as well as a boom of interest in historical French culture. *The Rose of Versailles*, as mentioned in Chapter 1, was a widespread serialized *shōjo manga* released between 1974 and 1975. Its popularity amongst high school girls at the time was to the extent that supposedly entire classes were cancelled when main character, Oscar, died in the series (Shamoon 2012:119). The *Rose of Versailles*, however, worked to skew the image of the Rococo Period through incorporating into it fictional characters as well as aspects of *shōjo* including spiritual love based relationships, and demure aesthetics.

The compounded altered images of both historical France and England, made possible through *shōjo*'s idealization of them in magazines, were thereafter placed upon Lolita fashion and further proliferated, particularly through the popularization of cult Lolita film '*Kamikaze Girls*'. In *Kamikaze Girls*, Lolita character Momoko, describes her vision of the nobility of the Rococo period, who she idealizes as living a life that is entirely leisure and pleasure based. Thereby, works such as '*Kamikaze Girls*' in combination with '*The Rose of Versailles*' worked to gradually idealize the Rococo Period for many Japanese women. Through the gradual idealization of historical periods

throughout the late twentieth and into the early twentieth-first century, they have become gradually simplified, blurred, and coloured by fantasy. The prewar *shōjo* herself too has become idealized contemporarily, as her upper class, non-productive lifestyle, can hardly exist within postmodern Japanese society. Even still, the temporal distancing between subjects and their desired spaces allows for longing, but also allows for their idealization and transcendence into existing as fantastical spaces.

As historical periods become wonderlands that women can engage with through Lolita fashion, while wearing the clothing, individual women can enter into an autonomous space of their own construction. For example, through consuming *shōjo manga* or magazines, speaking with historicized vocabulary, and moreover through idealizing the past, as *Kamikaze Girls*' Momoko has, an individual can create the illusion that they are immersed within a fantastical space.



**Figure 3.** Photo of Sachi-san and Mickey in Paris' Disneyland. Photo reproduced with permission of Sachi-san.

As stated by Ivy, subjects are only interested in desired objects for as long as there exists a temporal space between them. Within that temporal space, such as within the spacing between various periods in one's life or the spacing between a desired era and the era in which one lives, a desired object or time can be gradually idealized thereafter falling into the realm of the fantastical. The longing or nostalgia that Lolitas engage with, that provides them with a sense of freedom is often multilayered and intersectional. A woman can be nostalgic for a past era such as the Rococo Period, but can simultaneously desire a return to an idealized version of her girlhood. Thereby, through engaging with assorted longed-for things, such as one's girlhood, at once while wearing Lolita fashion, a woman can work to actively create her own world that encapsulates the multiple realities that she both envisions and longs for. Despite the ongoing contradictions surrounding the fashion, within the seemingly autonomous space that that an individual woman creates, she can thereby become somewhat able to transform the constraints that she encounters including expectations placed on women as being mothers and wives.

The longing that Lolitas have, however, does not only pertain to existing periods but can also be related to either prefabricated fantastical spaces or to fantastical periods of one's own imaginings. These imaginary spaces are multilayered, drawing from multiple desires and thereby can exist as, for example a world where one is a princess ruling over her own imaginary kingdom, that is tinged with Rococo architecture and images from her childhood. In the case of these imagined worlds, the subject is wholly creative in their own invention, to a degree that she is unable to access in her day-to-day life. The space that one creates from her own imagination is defined by her own rules, her own expectations, and within it she has the sense of being able to do as she pleases. As

expressed by Hatsu-san when describing the world she envisions while wearing Lolita fashion, “Lolita is for me, there is no anime character. It’s an imaginary world, my imagination, alone” (Hatsu-san, Shimokitazawa, May 2014). Through wearing Lolita fashion, women are able to combine multiple imaginaries and realities to construct the existence of a temporary imaginary world of their own.

In alignment, a frequent encounter in my fieldwork was with the Victorian *shōjo* Alice, of Carroll’s series ‘*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*’. Alice’s world has been popularized in Japan since 1899 when it was serialized in boys’ magazine “*shōnen sekai*” (youth’s world) (Monden 2015:86). Since their initial translation in 1899, Alice’s books have been translated into Japanese nearly two hundred times. Moreover, ‘*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*’ has inspired multiple fashion brands and magazines including having a twenty-two page spread in high fashion magazine *So-en* in 2007 (Monden 2015). Monden suggests that Japan’s appeal to Alice is related to her resemblance to the ideal *shōjo*, an image that was built throughout twentieth century Japan. As Monden suggests, “if we consider the typical concept of *shōjo* as sweet and innocent on the outside, and considerably autonomous on the inside, the imagery of Alice displays similar characteristics” (2015:274). Like Alice, *shōjo* and indeed Lolitas too, despite their soft appearances, are active in influencing the constraints around them in their everyday lives for example through defying social expectations by dressing as a princess despite being a housewife.

The worlds that my informants longed for often were not worlds that actually existed, but rather were worlds based upon fantasy, whether that fantasy was of their childhoods, of historical spaces, or of a combination of both. Often though, in opposed to

wanting to unite with strictly historical spaces, my informants were inspired from pop culture fantasy worlds that they encountered in their childhoods such as within *The World of Oz* from *the Wizard of Oz*, in *Alice in Wonderland* or in the varied universes featured in Disney films. These pop culture imaginaries, existing as entire worlds with endless possibilities allowed for a space of creative interpretation and open-endedness, giving Lolitas the room to construct their own stories within the prefabricated fantasy worlds that they encountered. As commented by Umiko-san, a housewife in her forties who wears Lolita fashion daily,

“Lolitas are longing after Alice’s and Disney’s worlds, actually my wedding also felt like a world out of Disney. I’m always longing for a marvelous world, a world just for me, so at my wedding I wore a Baby the Stars Shine Bright dress” (Umiko-san, Harajuku, June 2014).

As described by Umiko-san, many women who wear Lolita fashion desire to be united with a fantastical world that they envision, and through Lolita fashion they are able to, in a sense temporarily interact with a world that they create for themselves.



**Figure 4.** Photo of Kyoko-san and her mother at an independent Lolita fashion fair. Photo taken by Leia Atkinson and reproduced with permission of Kyoko-san.

Kyoko-san, another informant with whom I met on multiple occasions too indulged in the creation of an alternate world of her own. I initially met Kyoko-san, through another informant when we shared a day going shopping for Lolita clothing, eating at an Alice in Wonderland themed café, and drinking tea at an independent designer's corset shop. Kyoko-san is a 23-year-old *furi-ta* who recently graduated from university and is currently balancing two part time jobs. Her primary job is at a call center where she works to comfort elderly people entering into old age homes, but the job that she is more passionate about is as a designer at her own independent Lolita fashion brand. Kyoko-san initially became interested in Lolita fashion as a high school student, but soon after discovered that her height made it difficult for her to buy brand name clothing. As a solution, she invented her own indie-Lolita fashion brand alongside her mother, with herself designing the clothing and her mother creating it. When I asked Kyoko-san about whether she had any historical inspiration for her clothing, she told me that her clothing could only be inspired from fantastical worlds, with a particular emphasis upon *the Wizard of Oz* and the good witch Glenda. While Kyoko-san faced struggles with her work, and uncertainty for her future, through wearing Lolita clothing she was able to become part of the worlds that she admired. Through creating and selling clothing that fit her imagined world and taller physical body type, Kyoko-san was able to provide both herself and others around her with an entrance to their own envisioned worlds. Like Junko-san, who felt like she was able to become young once again, or Momoko who felt a sense of belonging to the Rococo period, when Kyoko-san wore Lolita fashion, she could feel closer to the world that she envisioned through *the Wizard of Oz*.

Like Alice, or the *shōjo* that existed before them, while exhibiting a ‘*kawaii*’ appearance, women can gather strength or power in their everyday lives while wearing Lolita fashion. Through interacting with individual worlds of their own creation, Junko-san has pursued the creation of her own Lolita shop away from the pressures that she receives from her family, character Momoko was able to land her dream job at brand name Lolita company ‘Baby the Stars Shine Bright’, and Kyoko-san has been able to begin her own career as an independent fashion designer.

### **Autonomy from Perceived Problems within the Self**

「純粋さ、無邪気さ、可愛さの裏に隠れている、ちょっぴり残酷だったり毒のある少女」がテーマです。

My Lolita Fashion theme is “The girl who has a little poison or cruelty is hidden by purity, innocence, and cuteness.” (Survey from Azami-san, June 2014)

Where Lolita fashion allows for individuals to find a space where they are able to become who they wish to be, it also allows for individuals to temporarily cover flaws that they find within themselves. Moreover, Lolitas are able to temporarily adopt wanted attributes to themselves whether physically such as through wearing wigs, fake eyelashes or coloured contacts, or behaviourly such as through being polite or refraining from smoking cigarettes. My informants often claimed that when they wore Lolita fashion they were able to become their ideal selves, the people that they wanted to be, but felt separated from in their day-to-day lives. While the ideal self that individual women strove to become while wearing Lolita fashion, was not necessarily a porcelain doll or a princess, their ideal self often acted, and spoke differently than the person that they felt

they were in their everyday lives. As described by Truong when exploring the transformative powers of *cosplay*<sup>24</sup>,

“When asked to explain why they started to do *cosplay*, participants often began with general statements such as it was a fun past-time, but quickly moved to a more specific desire to become the characters they liked and a ‘desire to change’ (*henshin ganbo*). Characters taken from anime, manga, and game narratives were said to be inspirational representations of transformation power, as the characters themselves often changed from regular people to extraordinary beings in their story lines. In these characters participants seemed to be able to find experiences they recognized, wanted to acquire or felt like they had lost.” (Truong 2013 n.p.)

While women who wear Lolita fashion often strive to become an idealized version of their self, in an imagined world through wearing Lolita fashion, and *cosplayers* seek to become an admired character in a video game, anime, or manga, individuals in both groups often desire the same thing. That is, they desire transformative abilities to acquire particular desired characteristics. Becoming the people that they want to be both while and while not wearing the fashion. Moreover, they are able to in some way transform the insecurities.

In June 2014, I met Midori-san, a 25-year-old security agent and avid doll collector wearing Lolita fashion, however, at our second meeting she was dressed in a business suit with a seemingly different personality. Eying me mischievously, she said,

“By the way, do you feel that I look different than Sunday? Like a different person? Maybe I can get a little shy or nervous when I wear Lolita. Sometimes I can be very aggressive, and I know about my personality. I’m a little bit of an aggressive person. Maybe its weird but being Lolita and being an aggressive person doesn’t work I think. Lolitas should be gentle, calm, polite.” (Midori-san, Akihabara, June 2014)

Midori-san and others like her possess an idealized version of what they feel women who wear Lolita fashion should act like. When wearing Lolita fashion, they desire to live up to their ideal depiction of it, and further still desire to attach particular attributes to their own

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<sup>24</sup> *Cosplay* is a neologism combining the English words ‘costume’ and ‘play’. It refers to the practice of an individual “dressing up as a favourite character from anime, manga, or video games” (Galbraith 2009:51)

personalities. In the case of Midori-san, she has worn Lolita fashion for about seven years, and initially began to wear the fashion because she had difficulty communicating with other people. Through wearing the fashion she found that she was able to temporarily become the person that she desired to be, but was also able to gain the confidence to become that person in her everyday life. Through the years, Lolita fashion has provided Midori-san with a space where she has been able to become who she wants to be, and further has been able to cleanse herself of unwanted attributes that she finds within herself, such as being ill-tempered or lacking communicative ability.

As Junko-san attempted to conceal her aging, Midori-san attempted to cover both her shyness and her temper through wearing Lolita fashion. Moreover, while it is not possible for Junko-san to stop time, through wearing Lolita fashion she was able to gain both the confidence and feelings of being young again. As stated by Truong,

“Though creative catalysts differ, this orientation to an ideal self is something practitioners share, whether they intend to search inside (intention of authenticity) or outside (intention of mimicry personal selves)” (Truong 2013 n.p.).

When *cosplayers* seek to perform an admired character, they too can become an idealized version of their selves through taking on aspects of the character that they perform as. Through taking on particular characteristics such as being charismatic while performing as a specific character, a *cosplayer* can work to adapt those characteristics into his or her everyday behaviour.

When a subject becomes or feels separated from a desired object, whether that object actually existed, or can only be found within fantasy, he or she can feel a sense of longing or nostalgia. Nostalgia for a seemingly distant object allows for it to contain within it a level of desirability, which may become lost were the subject to be reunited with the desired object in reality. In the case of Lolita fashion, however, through wearing

it subjects can be temporarily reunited with objects in their desired forms, as opposed to being reunited with them in the form in which they actually existed. For example, through wearing Lolita fashion, a woman can become capable of being united with her imagined girlhood, or her imagined vision of the Rococo Period. She can further be made capable of taking upon longed for behavioural traits such as having the ability to be more sociable. Overall, through wearing Lolita fashion, and moreover through using fantasy and nostalgia, individuals are able to locate a temporary space where they are able to be reunited or unite with desired objects. Through wearing Lolita fashion, individual women are thereby able to gain a reprieve from problems that they encounter in their day-to-day lives, such as pressures to find full-time employment.

Moreover, like the prewar *shōjo* construct before it, wearing Lolita fashion provided my informants with a space apart from gendered expectations surrounding them, such as the pressures to marry or to pursue romantic relationships. While my informants were diversified in their marital statuses, in addition to their interest in romantic relationships, each woman claimed that she wore Lolita fashion for herself rather than for anyone else. As stated by Ai-san,

“Well I guess the keyword in enjoying Lolita fashion is ‘myself’. They will do what they like, what they love, but they will never care about any opinion other than their own. Like I mean, about opinions from boys, and society, their friends or parents” (Ai-san, Harajuku, May 2014)

Through wearing Lolita fashion, and further through engaging with fantasy, my informants found an autonomous space where they were able to be who they wanted to be, in opposed to becoming what someone else expected of them. While my informants differed in their marital statuses, many expressed explicit disinterest in the pursuit of

romantic heterosexual relationships.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, two of my informants, Mariko-san and Ai-san, placed their romantic interest into fictional characters. Mariko-san expressed to me her love for a male anime character and proudly displayed to me her elaborately decorated Nintendo DS that featured a multitude of key chains of her beloved character.



**Figure 5.** Ai-san and “*funashi*” plushy, photo taken by Ai-san and reproduced with her permission.

Conversely, Ai-san, the former president of an alternative fashion club at her university, explained to me how many of her former club members were not interested in men, and how conversely men were also not interested in them. According to Ai-san, rather than

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<sup>25</sup> While some informants were involved in heterosexual relationships, many of my informants were interested in relationships with characters, or suggested that Lolitas were interested in homosexual relationships. As started by Midori-san “there’s more gay and lesbian people in gothic Lolita fashion. Some girls decided to dress in Lolita fashion because they really don’t want to attract men” (Midori-san, Akihabara, June 2014). In this sense, Lolita fashion additionally acts as an escape from stigmatizations received from having a different sexual orientation than the majority.

being interested in men, many of the women who wore Lolita fashion, were more interested in characters. To expand, she explained to me her love of a famed pear-shaped Japanese mascot (*yuru kyara*), named ‘*funashi*’.<sup>26</sup> As Ai-san demonstrated,

“I’m also not really interested in real boys because I can’t find them valuable. Like, I love *funashi* a lot, I really want to marry him. But I don’t want to marry with a real boy. It often happens in Lolita. *Funashi* is the best male, his appearance is perfect, his personality is perfect, and like I love his behaviour too. He’s just perfect. But I’m not interested in the person inside *funashi*. I love *funashi* himself, not the person inside.” (Ai-san, Harajuku, May 2014)

For Ai-san, like how many individual women choose to wear Lolita fashion in order to engage with a wonderland, *funashi* too became a part of her desired fantasy. She loved *funashi* because he was not real, and could not be real, and thereby she could construct her image of *funashi* as she pleased, in a way that she would not be able to, were she in a relationship with a “real boy”. Within the temporary autonomous space of Lolita fashion, in combination with an imagined relationship with a character, Ai-san found the ability to pursue her career goals of becoming a world representative for Lolita fashion, and previously was able to form her own alternative fashion club at university. In this way, through wearing Lolita fashion, and moreover through engaging with fantasy, Ai-san has been able to transform her life despite the contradictions surrounding the fashion including its simultaneous commodification and stigmatization.

As the prewar and postwar *shōjo* expressed interest in spiritual love based

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<sup>26</sup> “*Yuru kyara*” is a Japanese neologism that combines the word for quiver or shake, “*yuru*” with an abbreviated version of the English word “character”. Characters, or *kyara*, in Japan refer to a diverse range of, often cartoon, creatures that “occupy a space in the world of celebrity, have personalities, names, and often stories associated with them; they are typically viewed as representatives of specific social and cultural messages” (Occhi 2012:111). *Kyara* can refer to characters with as diverse a range as between Hello Kitty and the cartoon characters used on subway lines to promote safety. *Yuru kyara*, more specific than the general “*kyara*”, possess animal yet anthropomorphic features and work to “endorse actions related to capitalism, local identity and civil society” (Occhi 2012:111). *Funashi* more specifically acts as a symbolic representative to Funabashishi City in Chiba prefecture, northwest of Tokyo.

relationships in opposition to heterosexual relationships, seen within both magazines and Takarazuka Revue, many of the contemporary women who wear Lolita fashion too are interested in their own forms of love, or in defining their own romantic relationships. Conversely, Aki-san, who is currently in a romantic heterosexual relationship, claimed that she wore Lolita fashion for herself rather than for her boyfriend who was often embarrassed by the fashion. As Aki-san claimed regarding boys' interest in girls who wore Lolita fashion,

“Recently there’s been more boys who are interested in Lolitas, but many people feel that walking with a Lolita is similar to walking with a maid and thereby uncomfortable. Yeah, if [a boy] walks with a Lolita girl they will be embarrassed... My boyfriend also said this.” (Aki-san, Harajuku, May 2014)<sup>27</sup>

To find a compromise between the imagined world that she enjoys while wearing the fashion, and her boyfriend, the couple often set boundaries with regards to Lolita, such as through having Aki-san wear casual clothing during dates. Even still, despite having a relationship, Aki-san found her employment through wearing Lolita fashion in having a job as a salesgirl at brand name ‘*Baby the Stars Shine Bright*’, and further through writing articles about Lolita fashion for a Japanese travel magazine. In this way, Aki-san was able to define her relationship by her own terms, and further through wearing Lolita fashion, was able to construct her own career.

Despite the constraints that always exist and existed around them, temporarily my informants found that when they wore Lolita fashion they could become their ideal self, and, as their ideal selves they were able to make their own decisions. Wearing Lolita fashion further, however, can allow for individual women to have a space away from the

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<sup>27</sup> Maids (*meido*) are waitresses who work at maid cafés, a sort of recently popularized café where women dressed in maid outfits “serve food, pose for pictures, and play tabletop games with customers” (Galbraith 2013:104).

constraints that they ordinarily encounter in their day-to-day lives. For example, Hatsu-san, a 25-year-old journalist who works for a prominent Tokyo-based newspaper, encountered Lolita fashion by chance while watching television. While she had initially discovered the fashion months before, she did not become convinced to wear it until she began to feel stress from her workplace. Regarding the time that she began to wear Lolita fashion, Hatsu-san says,

“That spring, my work was very busy. It’s very hard for me, and sometimes I cry. On one very hard day... that time I remembered Lolita fashion. I thought, I want to wear it, and so I decided to wear the fashion” (Hatsu-san, Shimokitazawa, May 2014).

For Hatsu-san, wearing Lolita fashion provided her with a space where she could become “A person in a dream country, in my imagination... different from a normal girl. I don’t have any bad experiences” (Hatsu-san 2014). Wearing Lolita fashion provided Hatsu-san with a space where she could be who she wanted to be, in addition to a way to temporarily escape from the constraints that she felt in her everyday life including the pressures she that felt from her job as a journalist.

Overall, for Junko-san, Momoko, Midori-san, Ai-san, and Hatsu-san, Lolita provided them with a space where they could be united or reunited with desired objects, spaces, or characteristics in a temporary space. Moreover, even through only temporarily interacting with desired things, each woman was able to somehow change her life into a space that she desired. As stated by Truong,

“As individuals play make-believe and pretend that they are that which they have come to desire, they might indeed access, embody and experience forms of identity previously considered unavailable or impossible.” (Truong 2013 n.p.)

While Truong is referring to *cosplayers*, Lolita fashion too carries similar implications. Such as the flaws that they see within themselves, but can also refer to difficulties that they face in the workplace or stigmatization that they receive from their families.

Through wearing Lolita fashion, Junko-san was able to temporarily feel like a young woman again, despite the stigmatization that she received from her family members, and doubts that she felt within herself. Within the space of wearing Lolita fashion, she was able to open her own pop-up shop, and continues to work upon opening her own permanent Lolita store. Conversely, while wearing Lolita fashion Midori-san, who felt shy, angry, and unable to make friends, was able to become both more communicative and calmer. Through wearing Lolita fashion she was able to become her ideal self, and worked on applying the self she became while wearing Lolita fashion to her everyday personality. Furthermore, where Hatsu-san struggled from the difficulties and stress that she felt within her work life, through wearing Lolita fashion she was able to temporarily become what she referred to as a princess in a dream-like world. Through temporarily wearing Lolita fashion when she was able to, Hatsu-san became better able to deal with the difficulties that she faced in her day-to-day life.

### **Sotsugyō, or graduation**

While Lolita fashion can be considered somewhat acceptable for as long as it falls within societally acceptable ranges of femininity and age appropriateness, as many women continue to wear Lolita fashion they begin to feel pressures to graduate from it. While some of my informants continued to wear the fashion as they entered into their forties without the intent of stopping, other informants questioned how long they would be able to wear the fashion. For those women who questioned their future graduation out Lolita, some felt that as they reached a certain age they would have to stop wearing the clothing, while others searched for ways that they would be able to continue to keep the fashion in their lives.

Midori-san, now twenty-seven, questioned the viability of how long she would be able to wear Lolita. Working full time, she lacked the opportunity to wear the fashion as much as she desired, and so decided to create a Lolita group where every few months she would have the opportunity to wear it. As stated by Midori-san, “I’m becoming not so interested in Lolita very much because my lifestyle has changed. I have less time to search online about new dresses” (Midori-san, Akihabara, June 2014). As Midori-san began to lack the opportunities to wear her dresses, she began to sell them only keeping those that she valued most. As she became older, and began transitioning into graduating from Lolita, Midori-san began to fuel her interest into the dolls that she collected, through creating Lolita fashion inspired outfits for her dolls. Through making her dolls dress in Lolita fashion, she became able to transpose the transformative feelings that she obtained from wearing Lolita fashion herself, to her dolls, and thus became able to continue to receive the benefits that she received from wearing Lolita fashion by using fantasy.



**Figure 6.** Doll parts in Nakano Broadway shopping mall. Photo by Leia Atkinson.

Prior to formally interviewing Midori-san, she brought me to a doll shop that she often frequented. The dolls that women who wear Lolita fashion are interested in, are a play

upon Victorian era porcelain dolls, except more miniature, and customizable. Every part of the doll can be changed according to the preference of the buyer, including colours of the dolls' glass eyes, wigs, head shapes, etc. The dolls can also wear a variety of clothing, including Lolita fashion, and often times major Lolita brands have collaborative collections with doll companies releasing at once a new Lolita outfit and matching doll. In the case of Midori-san, when I went with her to pick up her order of customized glass eyes, she explained to me how she had been gradually collecting dolls in addition to designing Lolita style dresses for them. Midori-san had taken a course in clothing making so that she would be able to create custom Lolita dresses for herself, but as she was slowly transitioning from wearing Lolita fashion she began to create Lolita clothing for her dolls instead. For Midori-san, dolls were what initially spurred her interest in the fashion, and whenever Lolita brands collaborated with doll companies she tried her best to buy both the dolls and their matching Lolita dresses. As she gradually transitions into making clothing for dolls instead of wearing Lolita fashion, however, the dolls can act as an outlet for the feelings she felt while wearing Lolita fashion as she begins to graduate from it.

Like Midori-san, Junko-san too found herself graduating from Lolita fashion as she sought to open her pop-up shop and more permanent Lolita store. While she was not ready to sell her dresses, she recognized that she lacked the opportunities to wear the garments except when she was able to meet with her friend who wore Lolita fashion once or twice a year. Additionally, she had begun to feel mounting pressure from her friends, family, and from herself for wearing the fashion. If she were able to in some way find other women her age wearing the fashion, or to convince them to wear the fashion

through her rental shop, she too would feel justified to continue wearing the fashion.

Moreover, if her store were able to be successful, even if she was no longer wearing the fashion herself, she would still be able to experience it vicariously through others.

For my other informants, while many felt that they could continue to wear Lolita fashion into the near future, they questioned how long they would be able to wear it. For example, while Hatsu-san currently enjoys wearing Lolita fashion, she questions when she will begin to feel more pressure to graduate from it. Hatsu-san says, “Right now I’m still young so it’s okay but as I gradually getting older...I wonder how long I can wear Lolita fashion” (Hatsu-san 2014). While Hatsu-san enjoys wearing Lolita fashion, she and others fear that as they become older they will feel more pressure to conform to such gendered expectations that exist within the construct of being a mother, or being full-time female worker in Japan. Even still, through outlets such as making clothing for dolls, or renting Lolita clothing to people who want to wear it, women are able to continue to have the freedom that they gain from wearing Lolita fashion.

## **Conclusion**

Ivy’s ‘vanishing’ refers to the romanticization, or longing for, of objects that are no longer physically obtainable or are on the verge of disappearance. As something begins to vanish or has already disappeared, it can become an object of nostalgia, something that is longed-for, but can risk losing its appeal if a subject can actually be reconnected with it. In the space of nostalgia, subjects have the ability to in a sense, mold the things that they long for into their own visions, as their absence allows for them to become objects of the fantastical. Lolita fashion is able to provide its wearers with a sense of freedom from the constraints that they encounter, such as stress within the

workplace, because it gives individuals the possibility of temporarily uniting with their vision of longed-for objects and spaces, through the use of fantasy, such as one's girlhood, desired personality traits, or fantasy worlds like *The Wizard of Oz*.

While Junko-san, Hatsu-san, and Midori-san all face different challenges, Lolita fashion has provided them with a fantasy space where they are able to actively transform aspects of their everyday lives. Junko-san faces the reality of her own gradual aging, as well as pressures from her social roles as a mother, an *office-lady*, and a wife. Yet, when she wears Lolita fashion she feels that she can temporarily return to the stage of being a young woman, free from the constraints that she now feels, and moreover has gained the confidence to pursue opening her own stores. As a young woman working in a high stress environment, Hatsu-san felt that she lacked control in her life, but Lolita fashion provided her with a space where she could, for a time, become a princess in her own imaginary world that she controlled. Lolita fashion made Hatsu-san more capable of facing the difficulties in her workplace and gave her the confidence to determine her life. Finally, while Midori-san felt insecure about her personality traits, such as having a strong temper, wearing Lolita fashion gave her the confidence to take on desired traits, such as being outgoing, which helped her to become more confident in her everyday life. While before Lolita Midori-san had difficulty making friends, wearing the fashion has given her the confidence to begin her own Lolita group where she can meet new people. Ultimately, while their desired objects differed, through wearing Lolita fashion each person temporarily united with the thing that she desired, be it her childhood, her fantasy world, or her ideal-self, and thereafter was able to make active changes in her life.

Lolita fashion was able to provide my informants with access to other desired

objects as well, such as desired relationships as seen through Ai-san and Moriko-san's affections towards characters. For them, but also for Aki-san, Lolita fashion allowed for them to have a space where they were able to define their own forms of love and relationships apart from normative gendered expectations. Lolita fashion also allowed for them to create changes in their lives through defining what they wanted their lives to be apart from societal expectations of them.

Even as some of my informants felt that they soon would graduate from wearing Lolita and thereafter would no longer be able to interact with desired objects, such as their envisioned girlhoods, they found other outlets through which they would be able to continue to experience Lolita. For example, Midori-san began making Lolita inspired dresses for her dolls, and Junko-san worked on creating a Lolita shop where interested people would be able try wearing the fashion. Through using fantasy Midori-san would be able to continue to feel the transformative aspects of Lolita fashion through interacting with her dolls, and Junko-san would be able to live vicariously through others every time that she dressed someone in her Lolita outfits. Ultimately, for my informants Lolita fashion provided them with a space where they were able to temporarily interact with longed for objects, spaces, and traits, and afterwards transform aspects of their everyday lives.

## Chapter III

### Lolitas vs. The World

ちょっと普通の服にも似通っているじゃないですか。着やすいし。でもロリィタはなんか。世界が違うんだと思います。おとぎの国になっちゃうから。その現実の世界を。

“But doesn’t *gyaru* fashion kind of resemble normal clothing? It’s easy to wear. But Lolita is... Well the worlds are different I think. Because [Lolita’s world] is a fairyland, [and *gyaru*’s] world is the real world.” (Aki-san, Harajuku, May 2014)

This chapter aims to explore how outsiders can impact the individual experience of wearing Lolita fashion, both through comparing the fashion to other groups, and through gradually commodifying it. Where Lolita fashion can provide a sense of freedom for its wearers, Aki-san and others seek to distinguish it from other groups such as maids, *cosplayers*, and *gyaru*, out of a fear that were Lolita fashion to be misunderstood that their individual freedom could be threatened. Through examining groups that emerged at a similar time to Lolita, who experience similar stigmatizations, and have similar and differing purposes to Lolita for the individuals who wear it, the contemporary manifestation of wearing Lolita fashion can become better understood.

The chapter will continue into exploring how my informants reacted to the gradual commodification of Lolita fashion, particularly through examining the split developing between those individuals interested in brand names, and those individuals interested in indie-brands. Finally, the chapter will explore the ways that individual women feel that they are able to, in a way, protect the freedom that they gain when wearing Lolita fashion, through the maintenance of unwritten rules.

## On Maids, Gyaru, and Cosplayers

メイドカフェにあるように、メイドと間違われるのが嫌です。「メイド」とか「コスプレ」とかって言われるのが一番ヤダ。

“...like the maid cafes. Lolitas are mistaken for maids. That’s the worst. When people say Lolita is like maids and cosplay, it’s the absolute worst.” (Azami-san, Harajuku 2014)

Within Tokyo, while there exists a multitude of alternative youth fashions and groups, Lolitas are usually compared with or misunderstood as maids and *cosplayers* due to the seeming similarity or somewhat costume-like appearance of their clothing. My informants usually resented comparisons to these groups, however, because they felt that they both negated their personal experience of wearing Lolita fashion, and furthermore downgraded the quality of their clothing. Another comparison that my informants noted was with *gyaru*, a hyper sexualized girls’ fashion that is by appearance the opposite of Lolita, yet contains a multitude of similarities to it. Where my informants felt that comparisons with maids and *cosplayers* caused for them to face greater difficulties in their own experiences of wearing Lolita fashion, they were generally more positive with regards to *gyaru* fashion. Through examining all three, the understanding of how Lolitas are compared alongside other groups as well as some of the difficulties that individual Japanese women face while wearing alternative fashions will become clearer.

### Lolitas vs. Kogyaru/Gyaru

The terms *gyaru* and *kogyaru* refer to separate branches of a group of young women who began to frequent the Shibuya district of Tokyo in the late 1980s (Kawamura 2012). Information regarding these women is often a mix of both youth invention, and journalistic fabrication, as written by Gagné “girls themselves are simultaneously both objects of media representations and subjects who actively respond to such mediatized images to manipulate or emulate such representations in return” (2013:157). Thereby

since information regarding groups such as *gyaru*, as well as Lolita, often stem from multiple conflicting sources, their history can become both convoluted and mixed. Even still, *gyaru* and *kogyaru* can be thought of as identifying terms that categorize a group of young women who gained notoriety for their both socially unacceptable and atypical behavior in the 1990s (Miller 2004). Both terms can be seen as broader categories, which much like Lolita, can be further subdivided into other groups.<sup>28</sup>

The term *kogyaru* typically refers to a branch of schoolgirls between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who can be typified by their altered uniforms, featuring skirts above the length of regulation and ‘loose socks’, similar to legwarmers of the 1980s (Suzuki and Best 2003). In opposition, *gyaru* can be understood as the more ‘adult-like’ version of *kogyaru*, which typically involves college students, often dressing in tightfitting clothing with both elaborate makeup and hairstyles (Suzuki and Best 2003).

In the 1990s, *kogyaru* and *gyaru* became notorious for behaviour that was contrary to what was expected of young Japanese women. For example, they purposively spoke in masculine variations of Japanese and engaged within perceived masculine behaviours such as crouching with their legs spread open (Kinsella 2014). Further, *kogyaru* created vulgar often-sexualized words such as the term *baibingu* referring to the use of a vibrator (Kinsella 2014:69). The activity that caused for them to gain particular notoriety in the press however was compensated dating (*enjō kōsai*), a form of dating that involved going out with older men with the purpose of receiving expensive gifts, money, and access to karaoke bars (Miller 2004; White 2002; Yoda 2000). While the percentage

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<sup>28</sup> *Gyaru* and *kogyaru* are both Japanese neologisms. *Gyaru* refers to university-aged young women within the group and derives from the English word “gals”. Conversely, *kogyaru* refers to high school aged girls within the group and adds to ‘*gyaru*’ the Japanese word “*ko*” that can be translated into child or baby.

of women actually engaging within this activity was small, in the 1990s, journalistic articles about compensated dating and other activities spurred a series of moral panics related to both *gyaru* and *kogyaru* (Suzuki and Best 2003).



**Figure 7.** Shibuya ‘gyaru’ in the mid 2000s. Photo taken by Arai Yusuke and reproduced with his permission.

Despite in reality, a slim percentage of *gyaru* engaging in said societally unacceptable activities, both media broadcasts and journalistic reports caused for *gyaru* to rapidly become stigmatized (Miller 2004). As suggested by Miller, *gyaru*’s stigmatization is a result of the wider society’s attempt to “deflect their efforts to attain autonomy and self-definition” often through going against what was deemed as societally acceptable for young Japanese women (Miller 2007:226).

My informants were insistent upon both distinguishing *gyaru* from Lolita but at once recognizing the similarities found between the two groups. Primarily, my informants consistently claimed that there was sharp distinction between Lolita and *gyaru* fashions within the realm of sexual appeal. Lolita clothing was viewed as demure, whereas *gyaru* clothing was viewed as both sexual and more aligned with mainstream fashion. As claimed by Aki-san,

“But doesn’t *gyaru* fashion kind of resemble normal clothing? It’s easy to wear. But Lolita is... well the worlds are different I think. Because [Lolita’s world] is a fairyland.” (Aki-san, Harajuku, May 2014)

For my informants, *gyaru* clothing and activities such as karaoke, texting, and shopping, made them a group of the ‘real world’ in opposed to the world of Lolita, which was often one built upon fantasy. Moreover, while some informants claimed that Lolita fashion was worn with the purpose of diverting the male-gaze, they conversely believed that *gyaru* clothing was designed with the means of attracting it. Through emphasizing these differences, my informants were able to better distinguish what Lolita fashion was for them, and simultaneously were more concretely able to create a separation between *gyaru* and Lolita fashions amongst themselves.

Even still, my informants recognized that the underlying purpose of why individuals dress in Lolita and *gyaru* fashions could be similar. As put forward Aki-san during a group interview,

“Maybe the common point between Lolitas and *gyaru* is that the fashion that they wear for themselves [Lolita and *gyaru*], and the fashion that attracts boys are different. Because Lolitas want to become princesses, they also want to become ‘cute’ this feeling is the same in both fashions. Maybe the spirit [of Lolita and *gyaru*] is the same, but depending upon the person, the place of wearing it is completely separate.” (Aki-san, Harajuku, May 2014)

As stated by Aki-san, women in both groups seek to live their lives the way in which they desire, without influence from those around them, while the directions in which they seek that autonomy differ. Thereby, my informants did not find that they experienced difficulties through being compared to *gyaru*, because visibly the groups were easily distinguished. Where *gyaru* could be associated with mainstream fashions and activities, Lolita existed as part of a fantasy world with princess like demure clothing. They did however find a similar point between the two fashions in that within both groups, women

seek to find a sense of freedom where they can in some way live their lives how they desire.

### **Lolitas vs. Maids**

While the impressions that women who wear Lolita fashion have with regards to *gyaru* are mixed, my informants consistently disassociated themselves with maids. Often misinterpreted as the same, particularly with regards to clothing, my informants feared that if women who dressed in Lolita fashion were misunderstood as being maids, it could affect their own individual experience of wearing Lolita fashion negatively. For example, where maids are often thought of as being sexualized objects for men, if Lolita fashion were to be associated with maids, Lolitas too could be thought of as sexual objects, thereafter making their fashion misunderstood. The following section will therefore explore both maids and maid cafés, how my informants perceive them, the stigmatization that my informants felt that an association with maids could bring to them, and moreover the similarities between Lolitas and maids.

### **Maids and their Cafés**

Maids (*meido*) and their accompanying cafés (*meido kissa*) are a phenomenon mainly found within Akihabara, the so-called nerd district of Tokyo, since the early 2000s (Galbraith 2013).<sup>29</sup> As described by Galbraith, maid cafés can be thought of as places where “waitresses costumed as maids serve food, pose for pictures and play tabletop games with customers” (2013:104). The cafés, while varied, typically feature

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<sup>29</sup> Despite the consistent development of new variants of maid cafés, the history of cafés in Japan can be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century. These cafés were seen as public spaces where young men and women could freely interact apart from the otherwise structured settings, such as those events organized with the purpose of arranging marriages (Tipton 2000). As explored by Tipton, however, the primary draw to cafés, rather than the consumptive products that one could receive was both the *kyōkyū* (café waitress) and the services that they provided.

young women dressed in Victorian-style maid outfits who treat customers as their masters, and mistresses. The customers of maid cafés are most typically thought of as belonging under the category '*otaku*', which refers to an individual who is a fan of something often to a level of near obsession (Galbraith 2009). While the term can encompass a broad range of fans including 'train' otaku, or individuals who are highly interested in trains, it most typically refers to fandoms within the realm of anime, video games, and manga (Kam 2013).

The most recent phenomenon of maid cafés in Japan stems from dating simulation games, where a player interacts with the character he or she is pursuing through a variety of dialogue options (Galbraith 2013). Depending upon the options that the player of the game chooses, the player is able to "manipulate the main character's actions to bring about his[her] desired result" (Taylor 2007:194). The games offer multiple endings, including good results such as marriage to their character of choice, or bad results such as the death of a desired character. Likewise, when customers enter into a contemporary maid café, interactions with maids reflect video games, such as the use of a consistent dialogue that provides familiarity to regular customers. Galbraith has described the maid café space as a 2.5 reality, that is a reality that is between the two dimensional framework of manga or video games, and the three dimensional framework of our everyday life (2013:106). Thereby, for the customers of maid cafés, and perchance for the maids themselves, like Lolita fashion, the cafés offer a temporary autonomous space where individuals can enter into a fantasy world somewhat of their own construction.

### **Lolita Perspectives Regarding Maids**

Through being associated with other fashions or groups, Lolitas are able to

inadvertently obtain other groups' stigmatizations such as being a sexualized object. If Lolitas obtain other groups' stigmatizations, it can risk affecting the temporary freedom that individuals can gain through wearing the fashion. Thereby, my informants worked to differentiate themselves from maids in three primary ways, in maids' use of sexuality, in maids' use of 'uniforms', and finally in maids' purpose as servers.

Primarily, where dating simulation games often heavily influence the construction of maid cafés, maids themselves usually have an implied sexuality, despite the fact that within maid cafés explicit sexual behavior is strictly forbidden. As described by Galbraith, "masturbation, or even visible erection, would be cause for expulsion from the café" (2013:111). Even still, despite a ban on explicit sexual acts within establishments, the uniforms of the young women who work at maid cafés tend to be short and somewhat sexualized. As stated by Sachi-san,

"But right now it's a little indecent isn't it. Maids clothing is really short right? Really short but Lolita clothing is rarely short. Maids are a little sexual. It's a little racy... but classy maid cafes are a little erotic. But if men look maybe [Lolita and maids] look the same..." (Sachi-san, Harajuku, June 2014)

My informants viewed maid uniforms in stark contrast to the clothing that they wore themselves, for where maid uniforms were sexualized, Lolita clothing was demure. Even still, despite the differences between Lolita fashion and maid uniforms both are modeled upon nineteenth century clothing and thereby can risk being misunderstood as the same by outside viewers (Lunning 2011). In that sense, Lolitas strive to differentiate the fashion from the sexual implications that they find apparent within the realm of maids. Were Lolitas to be mistakenly associated with maids, the autonomy and sense of purpose that my informants initially gained from wearing Lolita fashion could be threatened, and the clothing could be equated as simply worn for the purpose of attracting the opposite

sex, in oppose to being a device that women use to obtain a sense of freedom.

Apart from the differences in sexuality between Lolita fashion and maids, my informants contended upon their differences with regards to clothing. My informants were insistent upon the individuality of their fashion, as well as upon the freedom that wearing it relayed to them. However, my informants also felt that the individuality of each woman's wearing of Lolita fashion could be easily misinterpreted were it to be associated with the uniforms that women wear at maid cafés.



**Figure 8.** Scene in Akihabara with maid café advertisement. Photo by Leia Atkinson.

According to Cambridge, a uniform can be thought of as “designated styles of dress which mark wearers as affiliated with particular social units, embody hierarchical relationships within units and communicate information about individuals, units and their interrelationships both within the group and to outsider observers” (2011:172). In a sense, Lolitas do want their fashion to be identified as “Lolita”, they are an identifiable group, and through wearing the fashion they communicate particular information to the outside world. So in a conflicting sense, while they want to be recognized as Lolitas, they do not

want their fashion to be seen as a uniform like that of a maid. As stated by Junko-san when comparing Lolitas and maids:

“Yeah [Lolitas are]! Very individuals. They make everything themselves [but maids] they just follow the customer. So they are very obedient... they are not creative. Maids are the same costume, uniform, not original. They don't have originality. But Lolitas are everything... [they decide everything for themselves] only one in the world.” (Junko-san, 2014, Harajuku)

Junko-san expresses the individuality of Lolita fashion as opposed to the obedience and uniformity of maids, for her, this is a primary difference between the two. Thereby, one of the reasons that Junko-san and my other informants feared Lolita fashion being misinterpreted as being the same as maids was because it could threaten the individuality that Lolita fashion provided for them. Were people to associate the fashion with maids, they might assume that Lolita fashion too is a uniform that also requires that Lolitas ‘obey’ other people’s commands, an association that my informants, with an emphasis upon the individuality of their practice, highly resented.

Through my informants disassociating themselves with the sexuality and uniformity that they saw within maids, they conversely framed what they valued within their fashion. Primarily, it was important for my informants to emphasize their existence as autonomous. Their fashion was not something that they wore for the pleasure of others, but was something that they did for their own enjoyment. Further still, the importance of individuality in Lolita fashion to my informants was made clear as they expressed their repulsion to their clothing being relegated as an identifiable uniform. My informants desired for their practice to be seen as something that they did from their own desires, which gave them freedom to, in a sense, live their lives the way that they desired.

Finally, apart from both sexuality, and uniformity, my informants feared being associated with maids, because they felt that maids’ purpose was to serve others,

particularly men, whereas they believed that women who wore Lolita fashion should be served by others like princesses. As stated by my informant Aki-san,

“Otherwise, aprons, also maid’s clothing is designed to be popular with men. Men are called ‘master’, because it’s a ‘serving’ fashion, they’re totally different. I sometimes talk about this with my customers, Lolita and maids difference is that they have different positions, because Lolitas are nobility. So, I really don’t want to be seen as the same as them. It’s offensive.” (Aki-san, Harajuku, June 2014)

As previously mentioned, Aki-san works as a salesgirl for popular Lolita brand, ‘*Baby the Stars Shine Bright*’, and when her customers compared Lolita fashion to maids, she was quick to state the ‘class’ differences that she saw between them. Aki-san and others feared that Lolita fashion would be equated to servants’ clothing, as such, they worked to protect Lolita from being associated with maids through claiming the superiority of the material of their clothing, and as stated above, expressing the supposed difference in class between them, and the maids of cafés. This class difference, however, was fabricated in fantasy, as outside of the world of their fashion choice, the women wearing Lolita clothing, and the women wearing maid uniforms often fell within the same socio-economic bracket.

Inadvertently, through depicting what my informants were not, my informants demonstrated what they believed their fashion was. Their comparison to maids also better clarifies how Lolitas perceive of their own fashion, and the values of their fashion, that is one that is individualistically based, where one feels that one is able to make their own purposive actions and decisions. Moreover, through explaining what they are not, Lolitas are able to defensively protect what they feel they are, as well as attempt to safeguard the freedom that they obtain through wearing their fashion.

### **Lolitas vs. Cosplay**

As with maids, a common misinterpretation of Lolitas made by outsiders that my

informants consistently noted was with *cosplay*. Like maids, an outsider could easily mistake an individual wearing Lolita fashion, and an individual *cosplaying* as a Lolita character from an anime, as the same thing. Likewise, at times, my participants themselves noted the literacy and knowledge necessary to distinguish the varied clothing practices that one could discover within Tokyo. As stated by Umiko-san,

“The main character in Rozen Maiden [an anime] wears Lolita so maybe the people who cosplay her become Lolitas. Lolitas can tell that that is *cosplay*, but the general public can’t understand. It’s difficult but... We can understand; this is *cosplay*, that’s Lolita. But Lolita *cosplay* is like that. Lolita clothing’s look and effect is important. It’s fashion, but *cosplay* doesn’t use that.” (Umiko-san, Harajuku, June 2014)

As demonstrated above, the boundaries between cosplay and Lolita can easily become blurred for both insiders and outsiders. The following pages will thus seek to determine what *cosplay* is, how women who wear Lolita fashion differentiate themselves from *cosplayers*, and furthermore how in reality the two practices can become quickly convoluted, both from an outsider’s and an individual practitioner’s perspective.

*Cosplay* (*kosupure*) can be thought of as a social practice that can best be described as “the costume playing of characters taken from *anime*, *manga*, game, and movie narratives” (Truong 2013, n.p.). The term’s origin is as a hybrid English loan word comprising of the words ‘costume’ and ‘role-play’. While the origin of the practice remains unclear, it has been speculated that it began through the imitation of characters from sci-fi television show ‘Star Trek’ at American fan-conventions in the 1970s (Winge 2006). The word *cosplay* itself is supposedly of journalistic fabrication, and was coined in the 1980s when journalist Takahashi Nobuyuki reported upon costumes within conventions in the Southern United States (Galbraith 2009). It generally consists of both men and women who dress in costumes (*cosplayers*) related to characters typically within their favourite *anime* or *manga* (Winge 2006).

In the past, a true definition of *cosplay* has been difficult to determine, and by academics as well as by the general public, *cosplay* within Japan has been thought to comprise of a larger variety of social practices than it does in actuality. For example, in the past both Lolitas and maids have been mistakenly categorized as cosplayers.



**Figure 9.** Cosplayers wearing handmade outfits for characters (from left to right) Tieria Erde, Setsuna F. Seiei and Feldt Grace from the anime Gundam 00. Photo taken by Alexis Hieu Truong and reproduced with his permission.

Likewise, *cosplayers* are often thought of alongside the social category ‘*otaku*’, and sometimes are believed to be the same thing. The word *otaku*, stigmatized, complex, multifaceted, and undergoing consistent transformation, generally refers a group of people that emerged around the 1980s in Akihabara, Japan. Originally a word referring to ‘one’s house’, the term undertook a separate meaning upon a journalistic publication examining attendees of popular Japanese convention ‘Comic Market’ (Winge 2006). From that time, the word ‘*otaku*’ began to refer to those individuals who take an almost ‘obsessive’ interest in anime, videogames, and other elements of Japanese mass media (Galbraith 2009).

Individuals pertaining to the term *otaku* quickly became both ‘animalized’ and stigmatized, by the press in a sort of moral panic not dissimilar from that seen alongside other youth groups such as *gyaru* (Azuma, Furuhashi, Steinberg 2007). Within Japan, *otaku* have received considerable negative attention in the past thirty years, particularly in relation to two separate incidences of mass murder, as well as with regards to fetishisms relating to young women.

Primarily, between 1988 and 1989, Miyazaki Tsutomu abducted and murdered four girls between the ages of four and seven. When his apartment was inspected, multiple volumes of both anime and manga were discovered, and he was subsequently labeled as ‘*otaku*’ (Kam 2013). This incident instigated the marring of the image of 1990s *otaku*, only to be further damaged in 2008 when Katō Tomohiro drove into the then pedestrian friendly street, Chuo-Dōri, in Akihabara resulting in the deaths of seven people and the injuries of ten (Galbraith 2010). Like Miyazaki, when further investigated, Katō’s activity on cellphone message boards claiming his love for Akihabara and isolation from society also caused for him to be labeled as an *otaku* (Galbraith 2010). While *otaku* has been receiving more positive media attention recently because of the large amount of income that it produces both domestically and internationally from purchases, its overall image retains negative connotations.

*Cosplayers*, as fans of video games, *anime*, and *manga*, are often too labeled alongside the term *otaku*. Which, as Lolitas are sometimes labeled as maids, may cause for outsiders to misunderstand what *cosplay* is. Moreover, *cosplay* like Lolita allows for its participants to undergo a temporary transformation, where through interaction with fantastical play, *cosplayers* can temporarily become an idealized version of themselves.

Unlike Lolita though, *cosplay* allows for individuals to temporarily become a character whom they respect, or whom they desire to align themselves closer with.

As my informants disliked being misunderstood as being maids, they too disliked being misunderstood as *cosplayers*, as they felt that the association could potentially negatively impact their experience of wearing Lolita fashion. One reason for this may have been related to *cosplay*'s association with *otaku*, and inadvertent sexuality, an association that they also felt that they received when being misinterpreted as maids. The primary ways that they distinguished themselves from *cosplayers*, however, were through signifying Lolita clothing as a 'fashion', and further through establishing Lolita fashion as a device through which they were able to present their true selves to the world.

Primarily, my informants emphasized the idea that Lolita was a fashion above all, whereas *cosplaying* could be seen as a costume. Alongside the idea of their clothing being a fashion, when my informants were to lead to speak about what they valued within Lolita, the conversation often turned towards the clothing itself. My informants valued the material of the clothing that they bought or made, and were conscious of the differences between clothing brands. For example, when prompted within a survey to explain what she considered when obtaining a Lolita dress, Midori-san responded:

“For me, it is important to consider how the designer felt when he or she was making the clothing, the strength of the material, and whether or not the clothing is elegant. Of course when it comes to western clothing, the difference between brand name and non-brand name clothing is whether or not I have an attachment to the clothing.” (Survey with Midori-san 2014)

For Midori-san and other Lolitas, when purchasing Lolita fashion, the quality of materials was a prime-determining factor in whether or not she would buy the clothing. While it has been noted that *cosplayers* are sometimes also willing to pay high costs while either buying custom-made outfits, or hand-making their own clothing in ensuring the high

quality of their outfits, my informants' impression hinted at an perceived inferiority with regards to *cosplayers'* outfits (Winge 2006).

Where buyers of Lolita fashion perceived a difference between the quality of Lolita clothing and *cosplay* outfits, so too did Lolita designers. In alignment, Kyoko-san, expressed her thoughts upon *cosplay* from the viewpoint of being an independent Lolita fashion designer as well as from being a regular wearer of Lolita fashion. As previously discussed, Kyoko-san's initial entry into being a designer was a result of experiencing difficulties while buying brand-name clothing, due to both her height and the limited variation of sizes available within brand-name clothing. As such, as a university student, her mother and her began to create Lolita dresses for Kyoko-san's personal use, which later expanded into becoming her own indie Lolita brand. As someone who highly valued the experience that wearing Lolita fashion gave to her, Kyoko-san perceived that her worst experience while wearing Lolita fashion was when she was mislabeled as a *cosplayer*, she says:

“When walking around Tokyo Disneyland a junior high school came up to me and said ‘you can’t come here *cosplaying*’. I just thought he was ridiculous. I didn’t do anything wrong... I won’t care about it. Maybe the boy was too excited because he was on a school trip. Young boys and girls are sometimes ridiculous.” (Kyoko-san, Shinjuku, May 2014)

Kyoko-san perceived that there existed an inferiority of *cosplay* outfits as compared to her handmade Lolita clothing, and thus was insulted when a middle-school student assumed that she was a *cosplayer*. Moreover, she felt that from being assumed to be a *cosplayer* she thereafter obtained the stigmatizations associated with *cosplay*, and further felt that the autonomy that she ordinarily received when wearing Lolita fashion was affected. Due to the risk of receiving stigmatization through being associated with

*cosplay* while wearing Lolita fashion, my informants attempted to disassociate themselves from *cosplayers* as much as possible.

Even more than the quality of their clothing being called into question, however, my informants resented the perception of the transformative aspects of Lolita fashion being aligned across the same lines as *cosplayers*. As previously mentioned, many of my informants found that through the temporary autonomous space of wearing Lolita fashion they were able to become their ‘ideal selves’. The ideal self that they were able to become while wearing Lolita fashion, allowed for them to temporarily take on desired attributes, and moreover allowed for them to potentially adapt those attributes to their everyday personalities. Ultimately, Lolita fashion granted many of my informants with an autonomous space, where they were able to somewhat transform aspects of their everyday lives such as through taking on desired personality traits.



**Figure 10.** Hatsu-san wearing classical Lolita fashion. Photo by Leia Atkinson and reproduced with Hatsu-san’s permission.

My informants viewed *cosplay* as a social practice where one dresses as a desired character, and thereby is capable of temporarily transforming into someone else, in opposed to becoming one's ideal self. As expressed by Sachi-san "Cosplay is for anime characters, but Lolita is for me. Lolita is an imaginary world. There is no anime character. Lolita is an imaginary world, my imagination, alone." While my informants emphasized the perceived discrepancy that they saw between *cosplay* and Lolita, as previously explored the benefits that result from engaging within each social activity are similar, including the confidence, and temporary freedom that they provide to their participants.

Even still, as with maids, my informants worked to differentiate themselves from *cosplayers* in efforts to protect their fashion from being threatened and stigmatized. They particularly wanted to emphasize the quality of their clothing, and the differences between Lolita clothing as 'fashion' and *cosplayers'* clothing as costumes. Despite my informants' claims of the differences between Lolita and *cosplay* clothing, as explored by both Truong and Winge, some *cosplayers* do invest in elaborate outfits that are of high quality.

Furthermore, my informants disliked the prospect of the transformative aspects of Lolita fashion being aligned with *cosplay*. Many of my informants, like Junko-san and Midori-san felt that Lolita fashion acted as a mechanism through which they could become their ideal selves, whereas *cosplay* was viewed as a practice where individuals desired to become particular characters. Moreover, Lolitas felt that alignment with *cosplayers* could cause for them to potentially pick up stigmatizations such as sexualization and association with otaku that would also threaten how they experienced

Lolita fashion. Even still, despite my informants' claims, both Lolita fashion and *cosplay* sometimes contain similarities including through using high quality clothing, and moreover through having transformative aspects.

### **Lolitas vs. the World: Gyaruu, Maids, Cosplayers**

Since its popularization in the early 1990s, Lolita fashion has encountered misunderstandings, particularly through being compared with other groups. As it has been misunderstood, however, it has risked becoming negatively impacted such as through gaining a sexualized image. In order to protect the temporary freedom that my informants received from wearing Lolita fashion, they thereby often attempted to distance themselves from unwanted attributes within other groups.

Through distancing themselves from other groups, my informants were at once able to show what they valued within Lolita fashion such as individualism. For example, my informants valued *gyaruu*, despite the overt sexuality that they saw within it, because for them, while both fashions were easily demarcated visually, individuals within each group strove for similar sense of freedom from the constraints surrounding them. In opposition, my informants resented association with groups that were, for example, perceived as existing for the use of others or related to becoming different people, and thus strove to distinguish Lolita from groups that contained those characteristics.

Even still, despite the differences that my informants saw themselves between Lolita and other groups, misunderstandings by outsiders continue to be made. Whenever Lolita is mistaken with another group, such as with maids or *cosplayers*, my informants feared that their individual experience of wearing the fashion could be negatively impacted. Through protecting the image of their fashion, particularly through the use of

unwritten rules, my informants thereby hoped that they would be able to better distinguish their fashion from the others found within Japan.

The following section will examine the gradual commodification of Lolita fashion, as well as how Lolitas use unwritten rules as a way to distinguish their group, and safeguard their individual experience of wearing Lolita fashion. It will also briefly examine the growing divide between Lolitas that is between brand name Lolitas and indie brand Lolitas.

### **Lolitas vs. the World: On Commodification, Indie and Brand Name Lolitas**

Within my interviews, while the opinions given towards the use of unwritten rules lacked consistency, there was consensus amongst the idea that unwritten rules themselves existed. I would like to argue that, while more research is required, there is a general split between Japanese Lolita fashions. That is to say, there is a divide between those Lolitas who are strictly brand-loyal, and those Lolitas who are interested in indie Lolita brands in addition to a similar divide towards their opinions upon unwritten rules and Lolita's commodification.



**Figure 11.** Shoppers at indie brand Lolita fair “Princess Dream”. Photo by Leia Atkinson.

Brand name Lolitas are those Lolitas who are primarily interested in major brand names such as *Baby the Stars Shine Bright*, *Angelic Pretty*, and *Victorian Maiden*. I found that those women who fell within the brand name category, tended to be stricter about the enforcement of unwritten rules than those who were drawn towards indie brand labels. In fact, amongst my informants some brand name Lolitas were loyal to the extent of only choosing to wear one brand, such as Baby, and often refusing to mix their clothing coordinates with other brands.

By comparison, indie brand Lolitas use a combination of indie brand and brand name materials in their coordinates. Indie brands themselves are an emerging phenomenon that I discovered during my fieldwork, that are often only afforded promotion during biannual selling events such as “*Princess Dream*” and “*Alamode Market*”. These brands, however, suffer with regards to sales and promotion, and find it difficult to enter into more mainstream markets such as that within Harajuku. In alignment, during our interviews Kyoko-san often expressed the difficulties that she faced in selling her indie brand clothing because of a lack of opportunities. The women who were interested in indie Lolita brands valued them for their individuality, but women who were interested in primarily brand names feared both the level of quality and the price of indie brand Lolita merchandise.

What I mean by unwritten rules, are rules that are found throughout Lolita fashion, that are acknowledged by each individual, but are not actually specified as written within a sort of overarching handbook. These rules varied by person to person, and by level of severity, but were meant to protect the perceived freedom that women gained from wearing Lolita fashion. One of my informants, Ai-san, who fell under the indie brand

category, explained the strictness of unwritten rules that she found within the general population of women who wear Lolita fashion. She expressed how at major brand tea parties, events where designers display their latest fashion lines, it is often necessary for individual women to dress entirely within one brand's clothing. Ai-san also expressed how if women were to mix brands and enter into shopping centers such as LaForet, it would not be uncommon to hear other Lolitas speaking badly about them. Ai-san, and others who were interested in indie Lolita brands disliked this behavior, and wished for the abolition of unwritten rules within Lolita fashion. Rather than serving to protect an individual's experience of wearing Lolita fashion, Ai-san found that unwritten rules often served to damage it, and moreover threatened their autonomy. She further expressed that she believed that the recent development of unwritten rules within Lolita fashion could be accounted for as caused by the recent interest in Lolita fashion by the Japanese government, and their 'Cool Japan' campaign. More generally, Ai-san found that the recent developing problems that she perceived within Lolita fashion could be regarded as caused by its gradual commodification.

The previously mentioned 'Cool Japan' is a governmental campaign that was started by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in efforts to align Japanese businesses, embassies, and consulates with the means of promoting popular culture (Miller 2011). Its roots can be found within an article written by journalist Douglas McGray, who speculated that upon the falling of the Japanese economy as a manufacturer, the nation held economic promise within the realm of entertainment (2002). McGray initially followed the phenomenon of Pokémon in the mid-1990s, and entitled it and other entities emerging within Japan as Japan's 'Gross National Cool', a form of soft power

that the nation could easily invest within.

More recently, MoFa's Cool Japan campaign specifically aims to promote *anime*, *manga*, Japanese pop music and fashion as well as other entities that contain 'soft power' through organizations such as Japanese embassies and consulates. Likewise, upon the acknowledgement of the potential effectiveness of promoting Japanese fashion globally, in 2009, MoFA created three cute ambassadors (*kawaii taishi*) whose purpose is to act as representatives of Japanese cute fashion, including Aoki Misako for Lolita. As there exists a split between indie and brand name Lolitas with regards to rules, however, there also exists a split with regards to the 'Cool Japan' campaign, where indie brand Lolitas tended to dislike it and brand name Lolitas spoke fondly of it. For example, when discussing the 'Cool Japan' campaign, and rules within Lolita Ai-san explained:

“In my opinion, that can't happen within Lolita fashion. In terms of Lolita fashion the only person who can decide is 'myself'. There can't be anyone who 'rules it'. One thing that I really like about Lolita fashion is that there is no 'fashion leader'. There's no rules in Lolita fashion, there's no regulations. Every Lolita decides what to wear themselves. They can't rely on anyone else. That has lasted for a pretty long time. But now the emersion of Aoki is a really weird phenomenon, it belies Lolita fashion it's a big contradiction. Because each Lolita is free from any rules like dating boys, or society or parents or anything except from themselves. I wonder why.” (Ai-san, Shinjuku, May 2014)

Informants such as Ai-san, expressed their wishes to abolish the use of unwritten rules, due to the feelings of constraint that they felt were being placed upon Lolita fashion that were limiting their freedom. Conversely, brand name oriented Lolitas, felt that the use of unwritten rules, and the enforcement of them, would help to safeguard the image of their fashion and thereafter protect their freedom. As expressed by Umiko-san,

“Lolita's population is already small, for normal people we can be mixed with something else and stand out. So if we do anything weird or bad, they're going to talk about it right? They could write 'I saw a sweet Lolita today but somehow...' in an article or SNS. This could make people think that that's what all Lolitas are like. So we need to be careful of that. I set an example of Lolitas by giving up my seat for elderly people. I do anything I can. For example, I push the elevator button and wait when elderly people are coming.

It's because Lolitas stand out. If I do anything weird, all Lolitas will begin to feel embarrassed." (Umiko-san, Harajuku, June 2014)

As voiced by Umiko-san, many of my informants placed an emphasis upon the importance of particular 'unwritten rules' in the safeguarding of their fashion and moreover in the protection of their autonomy from everyday constraints. The unwritten rules that my informants remarked upon were varied, though most fell within the boundaries of etiquette including behaviours such as sitting with one's legs closed, not wearing petticoats within the train station, as well as not smoking or eating greasy foods. It was believed that were individual Lolitas to abide by unwritten rules they would be better equipped for safeguarding the image of their fashion.

While some of my informants were critical of the gradual commodification of Lolita fashion, and others supported it, both of their reasons were the same, as each group aimed to protect the freedom from everyday constraints that they experienced while wearing Lolita fashion. Indie-brand Lolitas particularly wanted to protect their individuality, and felt that unwritten rules that delegated what one should or should not do within Lolita threatened their own individuality. In opposition, brand name Lolitas feared the opinions of others, and felt that were Lolita fashion to be stigmatized their own individual autonomy could be threatened. For them, the commodification of Lolita fashion gave way to particular rules that would work to protect the fashion's image. Overall, despite the differences in their approaches, both groups aimed to protect the individual freedom from everyday constraints that they gained when wearing Lolita fashion.

### **Threats to Autonomy from Societal Expectations**

Within Japan there can exist a sort of bracketed period in one's life where it is seen as

societally acceptable to ‘play’ with alternative fashions. It is even more acceptable if those genres fall within the confines of acceptable behavior for one’s biological sex. For example, Lolita fashion, like the prewar *shōjo* construct before it, emphasizes femininity, girlishness, and demureness, which fall within the category of acceptable behavior for young women. In this way, while Lolitas are in some ways acting contrarily to societal expectations of them, such as through avoiding marriage and creating long lasting careers, in a sense they are reinforcing social expectations placed upon young Japanese women for as long as they fall within that bracketed space. For example, as stated earlier, where groups such as *kogyaru* actively defied positions of femininity by speaking in masculine Japanese, and sitting with their legs spread, my informants often insisted upon behaviours that reinforced wider conceptions of femininity such as sitting with one’s legs closed, and placing others concerns before oneself. However, these behaviours of wearing Lolita fashion can become societally unacceptable if they exceed the bracketed age or stage of acceptability such as past the age of twenty-five or after one becomes married.

For example, as expressed by Yuki-san, a Lolita who is already a housewife and mother,

“I feel that in today’s society negative impressions (of Lolita fashion) still outnumber good impressions (of Lolita fashion). A teenager playing with the fashion is one thing, and adults criticize these children however of course adults playing with the fashion are more often criticized. One of the frequent criticisms is that “(Lolitas) are living a dream, can’t see reality, and are mentally-ill.” Lolita clothing is going against what is expected of age, physical appearance, and social role. For example: “You’re already an adult and a mother so you shouldn’t want that appearance, what will you do if your child is bullied because of your appearance, and with that appearance can you do housework and childcare?”. I’ve never had these sorts of things said to me directly, however I can feel that oppression everyday.” (Survey with Yuki-san, July 2014)

As Yuki-san continued to wear Lolita passed the bracketed time of acceptability she began to encounter increasing pressures, and stigmatization from others for wearing the

fashion. Even still, through continuing to wear Lolita Yuki-san, as well as the previously mentioned Junko-san and others, work to effectively transform what it means to be an older woman, worker, or housewife in Japan. Thereby, while Lolitas may fall within the confines of acceptable behavior for young women, and work to reproduce some gendered expectations, such as through being feminine, if they continue to wear Lolita fashion after a certain age, they begin to effectively challenge and transform the constraints around them.

Lolitas engage within a struggle of power, between domination and resistance. They resist being mislabeled as another group and further resist falling into expectations of their gender and sexuality. However at once, their resistance is met by the domination of others such as within the explicit and inexplicit pressures that Yuki-san felt as a mother wearing Lolita fashion or within the frustration that Kyoko-san felt after being misidentified as a *cosplayer* in Tokyo Disneyland. Similarly, as Lolitas feel pressures from the outside society, they also engage within a struggle to resist the invisible pressures that they feel exist as a result of unwritten rules and the gaze of other Lolitas when wearing particular coordinates or when engaging within certain behaviours. Despite these pressures, Lolitas work to safeguard their individual fashion practices either through maintaining unwritten rules as performed by brand name Lolitas, or through insisting upon the necessity of the abolition of such rules as sometimes done by indie brand Lolitas.

## **Conclusion**

As suggested by Toivonen and Imoto, impressions about youth in Japan are often formed by outsiders, and thus while for my informants determining what is and what is

not Lolita fashion is clear, outsiders often misunderstand the fashion as belonging to another group. My informants found that when Lolitas were mistaken as being maids or *cosplayers*, their own individual experience of wearing the fashion risked being negatively impacted. This chapter thus worked to analyze how Lolitas react to threats to their autonomy made by outsiders, more specifically through being compared with other groups, through being commodified by the Japanese government, through individual Lolitas not abiding by unwritten rules, and finally through pressures from societal expectations.

My informants found that despite *gyaru* being vastly different from them in both appearance and activities, both Lolitas and *gyaru* strove for a similar sense of temporary freedom from constraints in their everyday lives, such as from societal expectations being placed upon Japanese women. In opposition my informants resented being compared to maids or *cosplayers*, as they felt that comparisons to them both negated from their individual experience of wearing Lolita, and threatened the autonomy that they gained from wearing it. Both maids and *cosplayers* clothing was seen as poorer quality than Lolita and somewhat sexualized, which made my informants fear that Lolita clothing would too be seen as sexual and poorly made. Moreover, maids' outfits were seen as a uniform, and maids were seen as servers, whereas my informants wished to be individualistic and felt that others should serve them. My informants further resented association with *cosplayers* as they felt that Lolita should be thought of as a fashion, not as a costume, and furthermore, through it they strove to become their ideal selves rather than someone else as they felt that *cosplayers* did.

One way that many Lolitas felt that they would be able to protect the image of Lolita fashion was through abiding by unwritten rules, or through making sure that one acted in a particular way while wearing the fashion. Through acting in a certain way, such as through ensuring that one did not smoke while wearing Lolita, many of my informants believed that they would be able to ensure that the fashion maintained a positive image. In my research, however, the existence of unwritten rules became intertwined with the commodification of Lolita fashion, in addition to being part of the cause for a split between brand name and indie brand Lolitas. Brand name Lolitas often supported the commodification of Lolita fashion, and the existence of unwritten rules, because they felt that the combination of both would better distinguish Lolita and protect the sense of freedom that they obtained while wearing the fashion. In opposition, indie brand Lolitas found that commodification and the existence of unwritten rules threatened the individuality of their practice. Even still, both groups ultimately strove to protect the autonomy that they gained while wearing Lolita fashion. Finally, the chapter explores how as women continue to wear Lolita outside of its bracketed period of acceptability, they can face pressures from people around them. Moreover, how through continuing to wear the fashion they actively work to challenge gendered societal expectations, such as what mothers should act like.

Ultimately, many women choose to wear Lolita fashion because it provides them with a temporary autonomous space where they can somewhat escape from daily constraints and transform aspects of their everyday lives. Even still, the autonomous space that Lolita fashion provides for its wearers is often threatened by outsiders, and thereby individuals often try to protect the image of Lolita through mechanisms such as

the use of unwritten rules, or challenge the constraints placed upon Lolita by acting against societal expectations.

## Conclusion

The 1990s began with the burst of the Japanese economic bubble, which thereafter led to the first of a series of ‘lost decades’ where young people became uncertain about the prospects of their financial and social futures. Simultaneously, while many youth became unable to find stable employment and were thereafter unable to begin their adult lives, a series of moral panics in the form of neologisms emerged criticizing youth for the positions they were in, such as unemployment, despite their positions often being the result of wider neoliberal issues. Alongside the emergence of these neologisms came a variety of new youth groups and fashions, such as Lolita, which too often became criticized and swept within moral panics.

When Toivonen and Imoto examined Japanese youth problems in 2013, they suggested that opinions regarding youth problems often stemmed from powerful figures, such as politicians, without consideration of the perspective of youth themselves. Thereby, this study has aimed, through taking into account youths’ perspectives, to understand why individuals wear Lolita, one alternative youth fashion that emerged in the 1990s, and at first glance is enmeshed within contradictions. Mainly, Lolita fashion is at once being commodified by the Japanese government within its recent ‘Cool Japan’ campaign, yet often remains stigmatized by the general public, and moreover despite the difficulties that women face when they wear Lolita fashion they continue to wear it.

Lolita exists as one of a variety of Japanese youth groups and fashions, and is particularly gaining attention recently because of its incorporation into the ‘Cool Japan’ campaign with the appointment of cute ambassador Aoki Misako in 2009. Even still, while there have been two previous ethnographic studies upon Japanese Lolitas in

English, published research has not provided an in-depth study upon the contradictions within Lolita fashion, how Lolitas are reacting to its gradual commodification, nor what happens when women continue to wear Lolita fashion passed the bracket of societal acceptability. This project, built upon ethnographic field research in Tokyo 2014, helps to provide new knowledge upon Lolitas, including how they are reacting to the Cool Japan campaign, the development of Japanese indie brands, and moreover, a reasoning for why women continue to wear it, even past the time of social acceptability.

The research question for this project was, “*Why do Japanese women choose to wear Lolita fashion despite its simultaneous stigmatization and increasing commodification within Japanese society?*” Overall, I concluded from my data collection and analysis that women wear Lolita fashion because it provides them with a temporary sense of autonomy from the constraints that they encounter in their everyday lives, including the issues that they face in the workplace and the expectations placed upon them as women in twenty-first century Japan. This space of temporary autonomy is generated through the use of fantasy and nostalgia, and allows for individuals to make changes to their everyday lives. These changes can include having the ability to pursue an alternative career path, having the means to transform personality traits, as well as having the confidence to defy gendered or societal expectations placed upon them. Even still, as Lolita fashion is compared to other groups, commodified, and as individual Lolitas continue to wear the fashion past their age or stage of societal acceptability, it can encounter constraints, pressures and difficulties.

Taking an ethnographic approach, using photography, interviews, and participant observation, proved to be an effective method for gathering data for this project. As there

is little previous research upon Lolitas, and much of the published data is already ten years old, I found that going to the field was the only way that I could adequately gather the data necessary to answer my research question. Additionally, as a young woman dressing in Lolita who can speak Japanese, I found that I was able to collect rich data and furthermore I was granted access to events such as tea parties and fashion shows. Moreover, through conducting interviews and taking photography, I have been able to provide portions of conversations with Lolitas and their opinions regarding the fashion within this thesis.

In the means of answering my research question, this thesis has been organized in a way where knowledge and understanding about Lolitas can build throughout the reading of it. Primarily, I provide an introduction to my research problem, a basis for my methodological and theoretical approaches, as well as a contextualization of both Tokyo and Harajuku, where I conducted the majority of my field research. I then continue through providing a foundation of Lolita through showing that rather than being a new phenomenon, Lolita acts as the latest occurrence of shojo, a construct related to young women that was initially constructed by the Meiji government in the nineteenth century. I outline the characteristics of shojo and show how it has developed throughout the twentieth century, gradually being combined with consumerism and cute culture, and finally emerging as Lolita in the 1990s. I also show how shojo has consistently provided an autonomous space for young Japanese women since its conception, where they have been able to make changes in their everyday lives.

I continue by showing how exactly Lolita is able to provide its wearers with a sense of freedom through the use of fantasies and nostalgias, that have been influenced

by the development of the twentieth shojo. I then provide ethnographic data showing in varying ways how through wearing Lolita my informants have been able to make active changes in their lives. I also show how even when women graduate from wearing the fashion they are able to continue to receive its transformative aspects through using outlets such as dolls and renting their clothing to others.

In the final chapter I examine threats to autonomy that Lolitas encounter, primarily upon it being compared to other groups, Lolitas' gradual commodification, the split developing within Lolita fashion, as well as pressures that individuals receive from wearing Lolita fashion. I further suggest that as women continue to wear Lolita fashion outside of societal acceptability, they are effectively working to transform constraints around them such as what it means to be a mother, wife, or office-lady in contemporary Japan.

As Lolita continues to be commodified, and many of its wearers become married or have children, I suspect that Lolita fashion in Japan will change and more research regarding those changes will need to be conducted. I was not able to gather as much data as I would have liked about the development of indie Lolita brands, and more research needs to be completed within that area. More research can also be conducted upon the relationship between Lolita fashion and dolls, as well as homosexuality within Lolita fashion, which I have not been able to cover within the confines of this thesis.

Overall, this thesis seeks to understand why women wear Lolita fashion despite its stigmatization and gradual commodification, and finds that women wear it because it provides them with a temporary sense of autonomy where they are able to make active changes in their everyday lives.

## Glossary of Japanese Terms

**Amarori** (甘口リ): a neologism used specifically within Lolita fashion. It combines ‘*ama*’, a shortened version of the word ‘*amai*’ (sweet) and ‘*rori*’ a shorted version of “*rori-ta*” or Lolita. Combining *ama* and *rori* refers to ‘sweet Lolita’ fashion.

**Anime** (アニメ): Japanese animation.

**Baibingu** (バイピング): a Japanese neologism created by *kogyaru* that refers to the use of a vibrator.

**Burusera** (ブルセラ): a Japanese neologism combining the English word “bloomers”, referring to female high school uniform gym pants, and “sailor” referring to Japanese schoolgirl uniforms which are based upon sailor outfits (Kinsella 2014:23; Cambridge 2011). The term refers to the selling of schoolgirl uniforms and undergarments.

**Chūsei** (中性): a Japanese term referring to gender neutrality, allowing for an individual to exist outside of the confines of the dichotomized terms of male and female, most particularly in areas such as “speech patterns, gestures, movements... and so on” (Robertson 1998:47).

**Cosplay** (コスプレ): a neologism combining the English words ‘costume’ and ‘play’. It refers to the practice of an individual “dressing up as a favourite character from *anime*, *manga*, or video games” (Galbraith 2009:51)

**Enjo kōsai** (援助交際): compensated dating, refers to a phenomenon where “young women agree to meet strange men for dates, sometimes involving sex, in exchange for money or gifts” (Miller 2004: 239).

**Furita** (フリーター): a neologism that combines the English word ‘free’ and the German word ‘*arbeiter*’ which translates into part-time worker. Refers to young people who shift between part-time jobs for a prolonged period of time.

**Geisha** (芸者): women who “study classical Japanese music and dance, perform music and dance for parties in order to pay for their art lessons and elaborate public stage performances” (Foreman 2005:34).

**Gosurori** (ゴスロリ): a neologism used specifically within Lolita fashion. It combines ‘*gosu*’, a shortened version of the word ‘*goshikku*’ (gothic) and ‘*rori*’ a shorted version of “*rori-ta*” or Lolita. Combining *gosu* and *rori* refers to ‘gothic Lolita’ fashion.

**Gyaru** (ギャル): a Japanese neologism derived from the English word “gals” that refers to university-aged young women who wear *gyaru* fashion.

**Hikikomori** (引き籠もり): a Japanese neologism referring to young people who have withdrawn from social interaction for a prolonged period of time, sometimes over a period of years (Furlong 2008).

**Kawaii** (可愛い): a sort of umbrella term containing within it a multitude of variation, can be thought of as “an aesthetic that celebrates sweet, adorable, simple, infantile, delicate and pretty visual, physical or behavioural qualities” (Monden 2014:79).

**Kawaii taishi** (可愛い大使): ‘cute ambassadors’, a position created by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009 as part of the Cool Japan campaign.

**Kogyaru** (子ギャル): high school aged girls who wear *gyaru* fashion (Kinsella 2014).

**Kyōiku mama** (教育ママ): education mother, or a mother who strives to assist her child’s climbing up the social ladder through education.

**Lolita** (ロリィタ): a multi-faceted style of clothing that emerged in 1990s Japan where women dress as nineteenth century princesses, Western fairy-tale characters, or porcelain dolls.

**Maiko** (舞子): young women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two who are considered to be geisha’s apprentices (Dalby 1983).

**Manga** (マンガ): Japanese comic books.

**Meido** (メイド): waitresses dressed as maids who serve food, take pictures, and play games with customers in cafés.

**NEET** (ニート): a neologism originating in the United Kingdom that refers to those individuals who are Not in Employment Education or Training.

**Moe** (萌え): a prototype of young often-female characters found within anime and manga.

**OL** (オーエル): a Japanese neologism that basically refers to women who work in offices in Japanese corporations. OLs are typically hired straight from high school, two-year colleges, or university and are involved with such tasks as “operating copiers and facsimile machines, performing elementary accounting and doing word processing” (Ogasawara 1998:12). They are also tasked with doing company errands, serving tea to male colleagues, and receiving telephone calls.

**Otaku** (オタク): a term that emerged in the 1980s that refers to individuals with a profound interest in something in particular (though most often anime and manga).

**Parasite Singles** (パラサイトシングル): a neologism that refers to individuals who continue to live in their parental homes, into their late twenties and mid-thirties, spending the income that they procure upon luxury consumption (Genda 2003; Toivonen and Imoto 2013; Yamada 2000; Yoda 2000).

**Ryōsai kenbo** (良妻賢母): good wife, wise mother. A construct created by the Meiji Government to refer to the ideal attributes of Japanese women.

**Salaryman** (サラリーマン): A white collared businessman.

**Shōjo** (少女): a social construct stemming from the Meiji period that refers to the period of life for a young woman after childhood and before marriage. The term typically referred to high school girls in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan, and the subsequent magazines, novels, and writing that they produced, but has since expanded to refer to a myriad of popular cultural products including anime, manga, and clothing (Czarnecki 2005; Prough 2011; Robertson 1991,1998; Shamoon 2007, 2012).

**Sōtsugyo** (卒業): ‘to graduate’. A neologism often used by those individuals who participate within alternative fashions in Japan including *gyaru*, maids, and Lolitas. It signifies a rite of passage when individuals determine to move onto a different stage of their life, leaving the fashion, or job, behind (Galbraith 2013; Kawamura 2012).

**Yurukyara** (ゆるキャラ): a Japanese neologism that combines the word for quiver or shake, “*yuru*” with an abbreviated version of the English word “character”. Characters, or *kyara*, in Japan refer to a diverse range of, often cartoon, creatures that “occupy a space in the world of celebrity, have personalities, names, and often stories associated with them; they are typically viewed as representatives of specific social and cultural messages” (Occhi 2012:111). *Kyara* can refer to characters with as diverse a range as between Hello Kitty and the cartoon characters used on subway lines to promote safety. *Yuru kyara*, more specific than the general “*kyara*”, possess animal yet anthropomorphic features and work to “endorse actions related to capitalism, local identity and civil society” (Occhi 2012:111).

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