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Maiden's Fashion As Eternal Becomings: Victorian Maidens and Sugar Sweet Cuties Donning Japanese Street Fashion in Japan and North America

An Nguyen
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Dr. Regna Darnell
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Anthropology
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of
Philosophy
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MAIDEN'S FASHION AS ETERNAL BECOMINGS: VICTORIAN MAIDENS AND
SUGAR SWEET CUTIES DONNING JAPANESE STREET FASHION IN JAPAN
AND NORTH AMERICA

(Spine title: Maiden's Fashion As Eternal Becomings)

(Monograph)

by

An Nguyen

Graduate Program in Anthropology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Supervisor

Examiners

Dr. Regna Darnell

Dr. Douglass St. Christian

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Andrew Walsh

Dr. Shelley McKellar

Dr. Harriet Lyons

The thesis by

An Thuy Nguyen

entitled:

**Maiden's Fashion As Eternal Becomings: Victorian Maidens and
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Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

Abstract

Lolita fashion is a youth street style originating from Japan that draws on Victorian-era children's clothing, Rococo aesthetics, and Western Punk and Gothic subculture. It is worn by teenage girls and women of a wide range of ages, and through the flow of related media and clothing aided by the Internet, Lolita style has become a global phenomenon. Wearers of the style are known as Lolitas, and local, national, and global communities can be found around the world outside Japan from North America to Europe. This study is a cross-cultural comparison of Lolita fashion wearers in Japan and North America, examining how differences in constructions of place and space; conceptualizations about girlhood and womanhood; perceptions of beauty and aesthetics; and formation of social groups and actor-networks have bearing on how an individual experiences the fashion. This work deconstructs Lolita style by using Japanese cultural concepts like *shōjo* ('girl' as a genderless being), *otome* (maiden), *kawaii* (cuteness) to explore the underlying framework that informs Japanese Lolita's use of the fashion as a form of subversive rebellion, creating personal spaces to celebrate their individuality and revive the affects and memories of girlhood that are distanced from gendered social expectations. English-speakers, not having the same social and cultural knowledge, attempt to recontextualize Lolita fashion along the lines of feminism, sisterhood, personal style, and escape from the 'modern' to give meaning and purpose to their involvement with the fashion. Lolita fashion allows wearers to travel in between the lines of becoming-girl and becoming-women by offering a way to access girl-feeling and its associated happiness objects.

Keywords

Japanese street fashion, Japanese popular culture, material culture, Internet, subculture, clothing and dress, women's studies.

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Introduction



Photo courtesy of Smileysquid (2012).

If you saw someone walking down the street wearing an outfit like the one in the above photograph, what would be your initial reaction? Would you be curious why she is dressed so differently from everyone else? Would you think she looks pretty, silly, or just plain crazy? Would you think her outfit was modest or sexual? Would you assume she is dressing up to perform in a play somewhere or wearing a costume?

The Asian-American woman in this photo is dressed in a street fashion style known as Lolita that originated from the metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka in Japan. Wearing a dress she designed and sewed herself, her outfit is

representative of Gothic Lolita, one of the many sub-styles within the Lolita fashion spectrum. Like others who frequently wear the same fashion style, she encounters many different reactions, both positive and negative, from those around her when she goes out in a Lolita outfit. When hearing that the style is called 'Lolita,' people often make a connection to the 1955 novel by Vladimir Nabokov and may wrongly make an assumption that the clothes are related to a sexual fetish - to 'Lolita complex' - of young women in provocative clothes who are dressed for men attracted to prepubescent girls.

However, far from wanting to attract sexual attention, Lolitas, or people who wear Lolita fashion, say they wear the clothes because they are beautiful. It is an act of adornment that is removed from the expectation of trying to please someone else or get the attention of the opposite sex. As the fashion style is so removed from conventional, current fashion trends for women, Lolitas feel it allows them an avenue to wear something that they find attractive and enjoyable for themselves, something that harkens to a bygone age and mentality defined by elegance, beauty, and modesty from a different time. Though Lolita clothing is not something that can be worn every day, for its wearers this is not a costume but a fashion. The distinction between costume and fashion is important for Lolitas as they believe that they are not pretending to be someone else but are expressing their individuality and creativity. Lolitas are not trying to be children or child-like, but through their dress they challenge social notions surrounding adulthood, womanhood, and childhood by reclaiming girlhood and its related

aesthetics as meaningful and important tools for agency and creating safe-spaces that can be shared with other women.

Lolita fashion as it is known today first appeared in Japan starting in the 1990s, emerging from the growing underground rock music and club scene and youth street fashion trends. It borrows stylistic elements from other subculture styles like Goth and Punk and historical fashion from periods in Western history like the Rococo and Victorian eras. The style is feminine and modest, utilizing frills, lace, ribbons, a bell-shaped skirt supported by a petticoat, and original printed fabrics depicting sweets, fairy tale motifs or floral patterns that recall a girl's childhood as found in an imagined Western history interpreted by Japanese designers. It is a female-centered and female-dominant fashion with many woman designers. There are masculine counterparts to Lolita such as the Aristocrat and Prince styles but they remain accompaniments to Lolita.

The naming of Lolita fashion originated in Japan, and, in an example of how words and their social connotations may get lost in translation; there are a number of Japanese people who wear Lolita fashion who have never heard of the book or its movie adaptations, and there are even more who see no connection between 'Lolita fashion' and 'Lolita complex,' or 'Lolicon' as it is known in Japan. For Japanese Lolitas, the word 'Lolita' does not conjure an image of the sexually-precocious Delores from the novel, but it is connected to the idea of a young girl and of girlhood. Both concepts have the word 'Lolita' in them, but they are separated by gendered gazes and thus seen as unrelated. 'Lolicon' is situated in

a male gaze that sexualizes young girls, but 'Lolita fashion' is a female-centric viewpoint in which women can protect and revive the things they associate with their own childhood and adolescence.

This work is a cross-cultural comparison that examines how Lolitas perceive themselves and how they understand and experience a global web of interactions between places, images, and clothing that tie them with other Lolitas. Japanese and North American Lolitas are engaged with the same material things, visual language, and aesthetics, yet how they interpret their involvement with the fashion is situated within cultural and social contexts. How Lolita fashion as a movement is experienced and understood by Japanese Lolitas and Lolitas elsewhere around the globe has in part developed through associations with places that are available to meet other Lolitas, interact with clothing, and to wear and be Lolita. It is also influenced by access to certain feelings and affects associated with being raised a girl in particular cultural and social contexts, as seen in the Japanese context and the effort expended by non-Japanese to make sense of and adapt these ideas to their own lives in meaningful and creative ways. Lolita fashion therefore provides a rich source for an examination of issues concerning aesthetics, experience, feelings, materiality, happiness, identity, social group formations and belonging, place-making, networks, connections, and global flows. Throughout the work, I focus on the following areas: the formation of networks connecting people, things, media, and ideas; concepts of cuteness, girlhood, and sisterhood; how places and spaces built and found in

both face-to-face and virtual contexts take shape; and how people relate to one another as they experience and remember the stories and things that tie them to these places.

How I Came to Study Lolita Fashion

Prior to this research project, I completed a M.A. thesis about non-Japanese fans in the United States and Canada of the music genre *Visual-kei*, also known as the J-rock music genre, short for Japanese Rock. The work explored perceptions about Japanese popular music from the perspective of non-native speakers or those who have very little knowledge of the language but enjoyed the music composition and the band's visual image without having to understand the lyrical content. The other focal point of the thesis was the examination of how online communities are created and defined and how these Internet-based groups facilitated interaction among J-rock fans and maintained fan hierarchies through social capital.

I was interested in exploring Japanese popular culture from the context of media globalization or the flow of media and images from non-Western sources to the West through the Internet and how online communities have been built around these shared interests. I had been a J-rock fan myself during my high school days when I discovered bands like Malice Mizer and Caligari in the late 1990s and early 2000s through the Internet, my local Japanese bookstore, and the import section of various music stores. I had not been following the music scene for several years and noticing how things had changed from the days when fans

would trade VHS and audio tape recordings over snail mail, I decided to study J-rock fans to examine a music movement whose growth and development had been affected by various computer technologies that have had implications for how individual fans conceptualized their experience as a fan and how they related with other fans and to the bands they loved. Ease of access to music, either through music sharing and download sites or online retailers specializing in 'indies,' or independent, music based in Japan, aided in the rapid growth of fans outside Japan. In addition, changes in the music scene in Japan meant that the bands that could fit within the Visual-kei genre had become so numerous and diverse that not everyone who labelled themselves as a J-rock fan would be listening to the same music, a drastic change from an earlier generation where most people taking part in an online forum in J-rock would be listening to pretty much the same bands and albums. They were limited to what they had access to because sharing mp3s through the Internet was cumbersome as most people were using dial-up modem connections and finding storage space online to upload files was not easy.

Using concepts such as participatory culture (Jenkins 1992) and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990[1984], Fiske 1992) in fan cultures combined with a discussion about Internet communities, in the study I found that 'community' was being defined and used in various ways. In one sense, J-rock fans talked about communities to express a feeling of attachment or affinity with other J-rock fans regardless of whether they knew them personally or not in a way similar to

Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' (1983) or Arjun Appadurai's 'communities of sentiment' (1996). On the other hand, the majority of people used the word 'community' to talk about 'virtual communities' in a technical and technological sense, referring to forms that are used for social interaction including websites, web forums, and chat rooms with no particular connotation to feelings of belonging or alliance to a group.

In addition to finding that examining the activities of J-rock fans online was limiting when looked through the lens of 'Internet communities' and feeling that I had exhausted any immediate interest in looking at relations to material things and media in terms of fan culture, I also found that it was difficult to get people to talk about experiences related to listening to music because of the nature of the activity. With J-rock fandom, there are some people who wear Lolita fashion though this is not a practice adopted by all J-rock fans. While I used this as a visual cue to decide who to talk to when trying to find interview participants for the project on J-rock I found myself also becoming interested in learning more about this particular style of clothing and its wearers. As someone who had not been very conscious of fashion trends, I found the idea of transforming oneself through clothing, the process of choosing and styling clothing, the interaction between clothing and the body, the issues surrounding sexuality and gender, and the materiality of clothing itself to be fascinating areas of study. Lolitas outside Japan are very active on the Internet, using it as tool to find other like-minded people, organize meet-ups and gatherings outside the

Internet, share photos of their outfits, and purchase items. Thus, studying this group of people also provided an opportunity to further examine my hypotheses about the formations of group belonging and social networks in virtual contexts that I was unable to explore previously.

This thesis is one of the first works to provide a cross-cultural comparison of Lolita fashion wearers in Japan and North America. Only a small number of articles in English published in academic journals and books address Lolita fashion as the primary topic, focusing on largely Japanese Lolitas with the exception of Rahman's article on Lolitas in Hong Kong (2011). Work has been done on the linguistic strategies of Gothic Lolitas in Harajuku as they try to maintain a delicate balance between being "figures of identity" and being "figures of desire" for the men who take their photographs and on the portrayal of Gothic Lolitas in the mass media and the language used to talk about these young women (Gagné 2008). Other scholars have approached Lolita in literature and media, discussing the style in relation to clothing designs donned by characters in Japanese animation and comics, or *anime* and *manga* (Winge 2008) or analyzing Lolita fashion-related novels written by Takemoto Novala, making ties to Japanese cultural concepts of girlishness and girlhood (Bergstrom 2011, Mackie 2010). A recent article discusses the production and marketing strategies employed by Lolita fashion companies and the mentality of shop staff who live for clothing and believe they are working against standard social expectations for young Japanese women (Younker 2011). An MA thesis looking at Lolita fashion

presents a comparison with Western art movements such as Gothic art in addition to a focus on doll collections and doll ownership (Bernal 2011). Finally, Matsūra Momo's work is one of the only Japanese-language books about Lolita fashion that does not focus solely on its designers and companies (2007). The author identifies as a Lolita herself, and the book is written for an audience outside academia and covers a wide range of topics designed to address common questions and issues outsiders may have with the fashion, such as the stereotype that all Gothic Lollitas look like how they feel inside and thus suffer from clinical depression and/or are wrist-cutters. Introduction to literature and music icons related to Lolita, the fashion's style history, reasons why some Lollitas like to collect dolls, and other topics are interspersed with short transcripts of conversations with her Lolita friends in which Matsūra asks them how and why they started wearing the fashion.

Building on the existing work that has been done on this topic, I use Lolita fashion as a starting point to examine the themes as noted earlier. I also move beyond the label of 'Lolita' to understand what connects people who engage with the fashion differently, such as doll owners, club-goers, and music fans, and how the seemingly visually disparate sub-styles somehow are all considered a part of Lolita fashion. I noticed some Japanese and North American Lollitas exhibited an obsession with labelling, categorizing, and defining sub-categories and sub-styles within Lolita to differentiate between visual and stylistic discrepancies that are not easily recognized or considered significant from an

outsider standpoint. This exercise is indeed important for Lolitas and wrongly labelling someone's outfit as one sub-style and not another can be offensive to some people. However, for this particular work I am concerned with bringing Lolita outside of itself and seeing how it ties to larger movements and ideas. I am not trying to find a definitive source or root, but an underlying affinity, a piece of thread that lightly connects each piece together. In order to accomplish this, I draw from interdisciplinary sources to frame the research analysis. This includes actor-network theory (Latour 1993, 2005), affect theory (Ahmed 2010, Massumi 2010), feminism and gender studies (Butler 1993), *shōjo* and girl studies (Dollase 2003, Honda 1983, Malatino 2011, Swindle 2011), materiality and material culture (Miller 1987, 2005), ethnographic approaches to place and space (Basso 1996, Boellstorff 2008) and concepts from the work of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) like lines of flight and becoming-woman.

Methodology and Fieldwork

This study utilizes a number of ethnographic methods to collect a combination of quantitative and qualitative data including an online survey, participant observation in urban city settings and Internet spaces, face-to-face semi-structured interviews in English and Japanese, and analysis of fashion magazines and other related mass media like films, music, and *manga*. This research project is focused on the perspective of the average wearer who is not in a position of power or prestige like designers for popular Lolita fashion brands

and musicians, artists, or models who are adored by other Lolitas who have an authority to dictate trends and an influence in media related to Lolita clothing. Therefore, though I did interview a handful of well-known designers, musicians, and models, the majority of research participants are people outside this circle of influence who most likely will never appear in any magazine 'street snaps' or be recruited to become a 'reader model.' In addition, coverage of Lolita fashion in the mass media, including newspapers both in Japanese and English has tended to focus on wearers of high school age. A large number of people who participated in this study are in their mid-20s to late 30s who continued to wear Lolita since their teens or started later in their life, demonstrating what happens when a youth movement matures and attracts different generations of followers.

Symbolic interactionism (Becker 1963, 1986; Blumer 1969; Goffman 1959; Whyte 1961) is based on the premise that humans act toward things based on meanings ascribed to things from material things, other humans to institutions; meaning is created from social interaction with others; through an interpretative process, these meanings are handled and modified by the individual in light of the situation at hand (Blumer 1969: 2, 5). These studies explore how individuals interact with others and how these interactions lead to the formation of groups and society, highlighting the process in which people actively evaluate and interpret each other's actions and reactions and allowing for the possibility for modification in behaviour based on observations and context of the situation. Becker (1986) argues that culture consists of shared understandings, explaining

how people are able to act collectively even if they are unfamiliar with the people they interact with. He gives an example of musicians who play a successful gig without having met each other; people are able to do so because there is shared knowledge and understanding between them. Like these musicians, people draw on culture as a resource of how to behave in certain situations in everyday life. People enter into each interaction with a personal frame of reference in tow that has been built up from past experiences and their behaviour continues to be shaped as they encounter people from other cultural groups or new social environments (Whyte 1961). Thus, even if people are coming from different cultural and social frameworks, it is possible to cross over these boundaries to form new cultures, social orders, and groups based on repeated interactions.

This approach examines the flexible and interpretative strategies employed by individuals when engaging in social situations. It allows for diversity in background, language, and thought between individuals yet also acknowledges the possibility for people to work and bond together within these differences. Inspired by this approach, when creating the research plan, I began the unit of analysis at the individual as a starting point to move towards larger processes. Through the collection of interview data to study how networks are formed out of shared interest in a particular aesthetic and style, focus is firstly placed on each individual Lolita's experience and understanding. These interviews are then transcribed and compared to search for patterns and recurring themes.

When conducting semi-structured interviews, I had a short set of questions prepared beforehand, but frequently the flow of the conversation followed paths the interviewee felt were important to discuss or branched out to tangents as I probed further to unpack what they had said earlier. Within the interview, the goal was to guide research participants to think critically and reflexively and share their observations and opinions in ways that they never had to before in relation to Lolita fashion. As I was only able to conduct one to three hour interviews once with most participants, there was a limit to how deep the interview could go as it becomes difficult to speak about experience that is lived and practiced but not often discussed. Extensive participant observation was important in supplementing the interviews, providing information about flows, connections, networks, and other implicit phenomenon difficult to obtain strictly through data from interviews and verbal communication.

Participant observation was conducted in a number of places in North America, Japan, and on the Internet. The places I chose to go and observe were based on the places that a typical Japanese and North American Lolita might traverse. When in Japan for a short trip in 2008 and two months in 2010, I observed hang-out spots, department stores, and shopping areas like Harajuku in Tokyo and America-mura in Osaka. I also attended concerts, promotional events, tea parties, flea markets, and *dōjinshi* (fanzine) events. Unlike Japan, North American Lolitas do not have access to a large shopping area like Harajuku, a street fashion mecca in Tokyo, hence temporary spaces like *anime*

conventions and local meet-ups provide important opportunities for Lolitas to gather. I traveled to various cities throughout the United States (Baltimore, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia) and Canada (Toronto, Montreal) in 2008 to 2009 for short trips never lasting more than a week to attend conventions and meet-ups and conduct interviews. In certain contexts such as tea parties and meet-ups, wanting to not stand out, I usually wore a simple and casual Lolita outfit without a petticoat. Though I never took the same amount of effort as those who may spend hours on intricate makeup, wear wigs, and plan their outfit weeks ahead, I made sure that my outfit met the basic standards for Lolita style. Even in instances when I was not wearing Lolita, I would carry a notebook to write notes and made sure to wear a skirt or a dress as I found in Japan it was easier to approach Lolitas dressed in such a manner than when I was wearing boyish-looking clothing like slacks. What I wore when talking to North American Lolitas was never an issue.

Sustained everyday interaction and engagement with Lolita fashion and other Lolitas, for both Japanese and English-speaking Lolitas, is found on the Internet through forums, blogs, and social networking sites. These Internet places are especially important for Lolitas outside Japan, and the bulk of my data were taken from daily observations on the Internet from 2007 to 2011 and was centred on EGL, an English-language based 'community' or forum on the Livejournal (LJ) blogging and social network platform. A large number of active participants are located in the United States, but there are also many others from

other parts of the world including Canada, England, Mexico, France, Finland, Sweden, Russia, Singapore, and South Korea. Aside from EGL, there are many other online forums that cater to specific national or language based groupings of Lolitas, but EGL remained, for the duration of the research, the locus of activities for English-speaking Lolitas internationally. I observed interaction and events on EGL and related Internet sites like image-sharing blogging platform Tumblr, Facebook, and Japanese anonymous forums and blogs. I chose to play the role of a lurker, and I kept my participation to a minimum, sometimes adding a comment praising an outfit or answering a question no one else had been able to resolve but only after waiting for a day or two. I was more involved in keeping notes of happenings, discussions, and events, tracking and archiving opinions and responses offered by users who commented on each post on EGL, observing other sites especially when certain events and upsets created waves of response and effect throughout different virtual spaces.

Before I began to collect interview data, I conducted an English-language Internet survey about Lolita fashion in 2009, targeting mostly the readers and contributors of the EGL online community, a hub for Internet-based activity related to Lolita that is hosted on the social networking site and blogging service Livejournal (LJ). I received a total of 475 responses. The survey data provided demographic information about EGL users worldwide and gave an overview of the variety of attitudes and opinions surrounding topics like Internet use and frequency of wearing Lolita clothing. The majority of responses came from

participants living in the United States, making 56% of the data set, followed by residents in other English-speaking countries like Canada with 11% and the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand drawing in a small number of surveys – less than 6% for each country. Responses came from other parts of the world, including Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, Poland, Singapore, and Sweden among other countries. It is important to note that no one of Japanese nationality is recorded as having taken the survey. Only five people responded they were of male sex, demonstrating that though there are a small number of men who wear Lolita dresses, Lolita wearers tend to be female.

According to the survey, the majority of Lolitas are 18-23 years old, female, and are attending or have graduated university or are still in high school. They have been into the fashion for 2-3 years and are most interested in Classical and Sweet Lolita styles, sub-styles that at the time were being heavily advertised in related Japanese fashion magazines and were becoming more easily accessible to buyers outside Japan. Most Lolitas wear the clothing once a week or once a month, usually to meet other Lolita friends and attend face-to-face social gatherings known as meet-ups. In addition to collecting other quantitative data such as frequency of participation on Internet groups and favourite Lolita fashion brands, survey takers were also asked to write about their attitudes towards wearing Lolita fashion, the EGL online group and perception of other

Lolitas, providing helpful feedback in the construction of questions for semi-structured interviews.

I carried out a total of 33 semi-structured face-to-face interviews in North America and 36 interviews in Japan with people who wore Lolita fashion or were designers of the clothing, either as their profession or as a side hobby. The majority of those interviewed were women, from their teens to their 40s, with a total of four men, three who wore Lolita dresses themselves and another a spouse of an American Lolita living in Japan. Interviews were conducted in English and Japanese. The only time I had an interpreter was when I conducted an interview with Angelic Pretty designers Asuka and Maki at the convention PMX. A translator is usually provided for press interviews held at *anime* conventions. I relied on the interpreter to translate my questions from English to Japanese but did not ask her to translate the Japanese responses unless I could not understand what was being said. All quotes from Japanese interviews have been translated to English by me.

Finding people willing to spend an hour or two to talk to me about their involvement, experience, and opinion about Lolita fashion in North America was facilitated both through the Internet and by attending *anime* conventions such as New York Anime Fest, Otakon (Baltimore, MA), PMX (Los Angeles, CA), and Anime North (Toronto, ON) which historically have had many events held by and catering to Lolitas. I posted a call for interviews on EGL when I was attending a convention, but I usually found it more efficient to just walk up to

people, ask to take their photograph, and engage in a conversation which hopefully would lead to an interview sometime during the three-day event. When I was passing through a city like Toronto, Montreal, New York, or Philadelphia, I would get in contact with the local groups in the area and attend their meet-ups or gatherings if one was being held while I was in town. These excursions were short, usually about a week or over the weekend. In addition to attending meet-ups to observe Lolitas interacting with one another, I would reach out to individuals I had met in person before at a convention or on the Internet and schedule an interview in advance. Sometimes I was able to meet them at their homes, was introduced to their family and friends, and caught a glimpse of their wardrobe. As the majority of English-speaking Lolitas frequently use the Internet for social interaction, they are comfortable with arranging meetings or responding to calls for interviews on the Internet with someone they have never met with face-to-face.

Using the Internet to find potential Japanese research participants in the same manner used for North America was very difficult unless I was contacting designers for interview requests. I posted on several Lolita-centric groups on Mixi, a social networking site similar to Facebook, to try to recruit people who would be interested in talking to me about their interest in Lolita. I only received one reply out of a group of hundreds and that lead eventually fell through. I could have pursued further on the anonymous boards, but I decided to focus my energy on finding people to talk to by hanging out at the spots Lolitas frequent.

Of the 36 interviews in Japan, 29 were with Japanese nationals and seven were conducted with foreigners living and working in Japan or on vacation and passing through. The national origins of this group included Germany, England, Thailand, and the United States. Being familiar with the Lolita landscape in Tokyo, instead of relying solely on snowball sampling, I sought out participants at events and other places where Lolitas would gather. I approached people wearing Lolita fashion, requested to take their photograph, and asked them if they would be interested in being interviewed for a research project. In Tokyo, I ended up collecting interviews from 20 people who are mostly unrelated to one another, not travelling in the same social circles. This sample is representative of the Lolita subculture in Japan which is more orientated around events (tea parties, concerts, exhibitions) and shopping areas that are frequented by people who travel into Tokyo and Osaka from the suburbs and neighbouring prefectures. Most people have small Lolita-related social circles, sometimes consisting of one or two other friends with whom they can wear Lolita and hang out with. Local groups in North America and Europe are relatively small, usually ranging around a hundred people at most, making it easier to know or know of every Lolita in an area, something not possible for Lolitas living in Japanese metropolitan areas. The lack of places for in which a regular group of Lolitas can constantly gather, hang out, meet, and talk also makes it difficult for most Lolitas to expand their social network.

The Jingubashi, a bridge near the Harajuku station, used to be a well-known Sunday hang out spot for Visual-*kei* cosplayers and Lolitas, but its popularity has waned, and many people who used to frequent it no longer do. During a two-week preliminary research trip in 2008, people still gathered at Jingubashi but it was beginning to show signs of decline. I was able to continue contact with two people I met from that time and requested to talk to them when I was in Tokyo again in 2010 for a longer two-month trip. I heavily relied on hanging out in other spots that Lolitas frequent, especially in Tokyo, to find people who would talk to me. This included shopping areas like Harajuku and Shinjuku and temporary spaces like *dōjinshi* or fanzine sales events, events where Lolita indie designers hawk their wares, and live concerts. The tiny upstairs café/bar *Sumire no tenmado* run by the musical duo Kokushoku Sumire in Shinjuku's Golden-gai area was one of the few places I encountered related to Lolita fashion that offered people a regular place to get together, sit down for a drink, and have a talk. Customers tend to be regulars who visit several times during the week or every day if their schedule allows it. In addition to Lolitas who are fans of the band or are close friends with them, their clientele also includes artists, fashion designers, other musicians, and 'salarymen' or white collared workers. The bar provided a prime atmosphere to strike up talk with strangers and overhear conversations. Though I did interview some regulars there, most of my interactions in Tokyo were with people who were not part of the same social circle and did not know each other - a reflection of the large

number of Lolitas in the area and the resulting lack of a central social group or network that connects all Lolitas in the city in the same way found in an Internet place like EGL.

Unlike Tokyo where there were several events or gatherings held every weekend, Osaka tends to have very few events to attend and observe that are spaced far apart. With only a month in the area and being unfamiliar with the city, I relied heavily on snowball sampling for Japanese interviews secured through the help of one American Lolita who had many contacts in Osaka after living there for several years as an English teacher for the JET programme. She had moved back to the States for a period of time but was on good terms with a large social circle of Lolitas in the Kansai region. She kindly introduced me to Ryoko, who in turn introduced me to people she knew through her years involved in organizing tea parties and get-togethers for Lolitas in the area, and I was able to secure further contacts through her. I also became acquainted with women from Nara and Nagoya involved in making Lolita clothes as indie designers while at a sales event for Lolita and Gothic indie brands held in Osaka. Snowball sampling provided me an opportunity to observe a large social group of Lolitas who know each other through tea parties and night club events. There was a centre to the social network of Lolitas I met in Osaka and the surrounding areas of Kyoto, Shiga, and Nara prefecture who travelled to Osaka regularly to participate in these group events. Though not all the participants were close friends, they had all met or knew about one another through mutual

friends who also wear Lolita clothing or are involved in related activities such as Gothic club nights. Not every Lolita in Osaka is interested in or is connected to this group, but since the number of publicly advertised events and gatherings is more limited compared to Tokyo, there appears to be a regulars who are often seen at most events.

About Words and Names

'Lolita fashion' as used in this thesis is a blanket term for all of the Lolita sub-styles - this includes Lolita, Sweet Lolita, Gothic Lolita, Classical Lolita, Punk Lolita, and other variations. 'EGL' is used strictly to refer to the popular English-language Lolita LJ on-line community though it is also recognized by insiders as an abbreviation of the sub-style 'Elegant Gothic Lolita.' 'EGL Lolitas' refers to people who frequent the LJ group and includes those who are not living in North America. 'North American Lolitas' refers to Lolitas living in United States and Canada or have citizenship in these countries. Japanese full names are mentioned surname followed by given name. The names of designers, brand labels, musicians, and performers have been kept intact and not changed. All interview participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Online personas have also been given pseudonyms unless I am quoting from a web source such as posts on EGL or blog posts that are available publicly in which the Internet handle of the poster is used.

Layout of the Dissertation

The work is divided into three major chapters preceded by a short informative chapter offering a history of Lolita fashion's style predecessors, magazine publications, and music movements. The first section, *Places and Spaces in the Virtual and the Actual*, looks at the creation of places connected to Lolita and the effect that these places have on how people see themselves in relation to ideas about individuality, to feelings of group belonging and bonding between other Lolitas, and to how they frame their opposition to 'mainstream' society and 'normal' people. The chapter is divided into two sections first examining Japan as a representation of a movement based in association to places built upon urban landscapes and shopping areas. This is contrasted to places developed outside Japan that started out as being Internet-based but have aided in connecting people globally and building locally based groups who frequently meet face-to-face. These groups then contribute reports and photos of their activities, creating a sense of connectedness and closeness that binds Lolitas around the world.

The second chapter, the crux of the thesis, *Girl Feelings, Aesthetics, and Becomings*, is focused on Japanese cultural concepts about girlhood and cuteness such as *shōjo*, *kawaii*, and *otome* and how these ideas relate to Lolita aesthetics, influencing how Japanese Lolitas talk about their engagement with the fashion. The chapter discusses at length the development of these terms over time as the media related to them has changed how girls and girlhood is depicted through

the generations within the genre known as *shōjo* culture. Lolita fashion engages with many different notions of girlhood over time, drawing both from pre-WWII conceptualizations to post-modern consumerism-driven ideas about ‘cute’ and combining it with ideas and desires drawn from Western historical and classic children’s literature as viewed through a Japanese lens. Using ideas such as affect and becomings, this chapter also examines Lolita fashion as a subversive strategy allowing Japanese wearers an avenue to explore and protect aspects of self, removing it from social obligations, responsibility, and expectations connected to adulthood such as marriage and child birth. Lolita fashion gives its wearers a way to walk between the lines of girl and woman, giving them the possibility of understanding themselves outside a relation to society. This chapter is an exploration of how Lolita fashion connects to a wider movement and cultural understanding that lies beyond youth subculture fashion.

The third and final chapter, *Global Flows, Fashion Systems, and Materiality*, explores issues of materiality and material culture, consumption, and the subject-object dichotomy. In addition to looking at how Lolita fashion is produced and marketed, this chapter explores how North American Lolitas understand their participation in the fashion and desire to foster sisterhoods or feelings of belonging with other Lolitas, a trait missing from the Japanese context. The chapter describes the movement of Lolita clothing around the world as images and material things by looking at the interaction between designers working for large companies in Japan, seen as the source for Lolita fashion innovations, indie

designers both in and outside Japan, and Chinese companies that either create new and original designs based on the Lolita aesthetic or manufacture replicas and copies of existing dresses from Japanese Lolita brands. The second half of the chapter is a discussion of how Lolitas on EGL situate their involvement with the fashion within the maintenance of boundaries such as trying to define what can and cannot be considered Lolita. North American Lolitas are concerned with being too materialistic and consumeristic, and attempt to manage their relationship to the style and the actual clothing items in a way they deem authentic and representative of ideas about personal style and true self that exist separately from Lolita fashion. Without the cultural and social context that Japanese Lolitas can draw from to contextualize Lolita, North Americans and other English-speaking Lolitas find it more comfortable to wear the clothes while in a group when out in public, actively seeking to foster friendships with other Lolitas. Despite the importance placed on cultivating group feeling and belonging, in relation to society in general, North American Lolitas tend to be more individualistic in their thinking, as exhibited in conceptions of adulthood, creativity, and being unique.

The exploration of themes including places and spaces; flow of images, things, and other media; aesthetics and beauty; and affect and emotions associated with girl culture in the following pages will provide insight to Lolita fashion, its wearers, and the nature of the connections that bind them together in networks that transcend national borders and localities.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Lolita Fashion

Before the term 'Lolita' became a popular way to describe their style of fashion, teenage girls and young women were already wearing clothes that today may be identified as 'Lolita fashion' or having a connection to it. Traces of these can be found in older magazines like *Olive* and *CUTiE* and fashion trends that emphasized ideas of fashion for girls who want to dress for themselves and express their individuality and creativity through dress. Examining the style predecessors to Lolita and the mass media and fashion system this style is a part of, this chapter presents a history of Lolita fashion looking at development of style, music movements, and fashion magazines from the 1980s to current day.

Though Lolita is a fashion subculture, its aesthetics and ideology tie heavily to the concept of *shōjo* (young girl) culture and a look at its stylistic history provides an example of contemporary Japanese girl-centric movements that develop and flourish in urban landscapes. Lolita is one of many youth subculture styles, past and present, and its story is intertwined with other movements such as Gothic and Punk, styles that are less dominated by female participants as is found in Lolita. *Shōjo* culture appears in other forms besides fashion subcultures, and an in-depth analysis and critique in Chapter 3 presents the historical development of cultural and social concepts of girlhood and *shōjo* (young girl) culture in pre-WWII and post-WWII Japan.

Lolita Fashion and Magazines

Lolita fashion's history as written in the Japanese magazines and books targeted towards potential and future youth subculture fashionistas often situates the fashion along lines of style development and club and music scenes. As seen in the diagram on page 29, Lolita is often associated with two other fashion styles: Gothic and Punk. These two categories emerged from subcultures in Europe and North America, and though there is a burgeoning Japanese Punk music scene, there are also a large number of Japanese people who adopt Gothic and Punk on a strictly aesthetic level, wearing the clothes without an interest in the music, political activism or the lifestyle typically connected to Punks and Goths in Western countries.

Within the context of the Japanese apparel industry, Gothic, Lolita, and Punk fashion brands are considered 'Minor' brands as they are representing street fashion and catering to a niche subculture market. This is a distinction from 'Major' brands that do not specifically cater to a subculture fashion trend. Brands like MILK and Jane Marple are examples of 'Major' brands that maintain an avant garde taste in their designs by tapping into aesthetics and ideas that Lolitas find affinity with while appearing in magazines that reach a wider audience including those interested in high fashion. Within the 'Minor' brand category of Lolita, there are 'Indies' brands, short for independent, that are not corporations and are owned and run by the designer who executes the entire

process of design, production, marketing, and retail by themselves – refer to the first half of Chapter 4 for more in-depth discussion.

The visual timeline in this chapter maps out when fashion brands, music movements, fashion trends, and bands relevant to Lolita were established. It also highlights important moments for Lolita's spread to North America and Europe. A detailed timeline can be found in Appendix 2. The years for the fashion trends are approximate as it is too difficult to pin down when the peak of one movement began or ended, and often times periods and movements overlap, decline and revive. The process is very fluid. Someone working in the fashion industry might know what year a certain trend was popular and when it declined, but exact information is usually not remembered or noticed by the average consumer who goes with the flow from season to season.

Likewise, it is difficult to say when Lolita fashion first appeared or where it originated from, but the standardization of the style and the development of 'Lolita' as a label for a subculture fashion is heavily connected to monthly *KERA* magazine and the *Gothic & Lolita Bible (GL&B)*, a quarterly publication, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Traces of what eventually is Lolita fashion today can be found in club and underground music scenes in Tokyo and Osaka where both attendees and performers adopted a certain style of dress. Magazines working together with clothing designers and clothing brands began to not only document the street trends but also to dictate and market new trends. This process helped Lolita fashion expand outwards to smaller cities through new

CATEGORIZATION OF FASHION BRANDS

Gothic, Lolita, and Punk are considered interrelated subculture styles that allow youth to express their 'individuality'. Lolita often overlaps or borrows from the two other categories to create sub-styles like Gothic Lolita. Classic, or Classical, Lolita is a popular sub-style, but the 'Classic' category itself is not used in marketing and magazines as a unique style like the other three. However, it is a term often used by wearers to describe their personal style. The Major and International brands here are seen as related to the Japanese Gothic, Lolita, and Punk brands in spirit and aesthetic; they are admired by both designers and wearers alike.

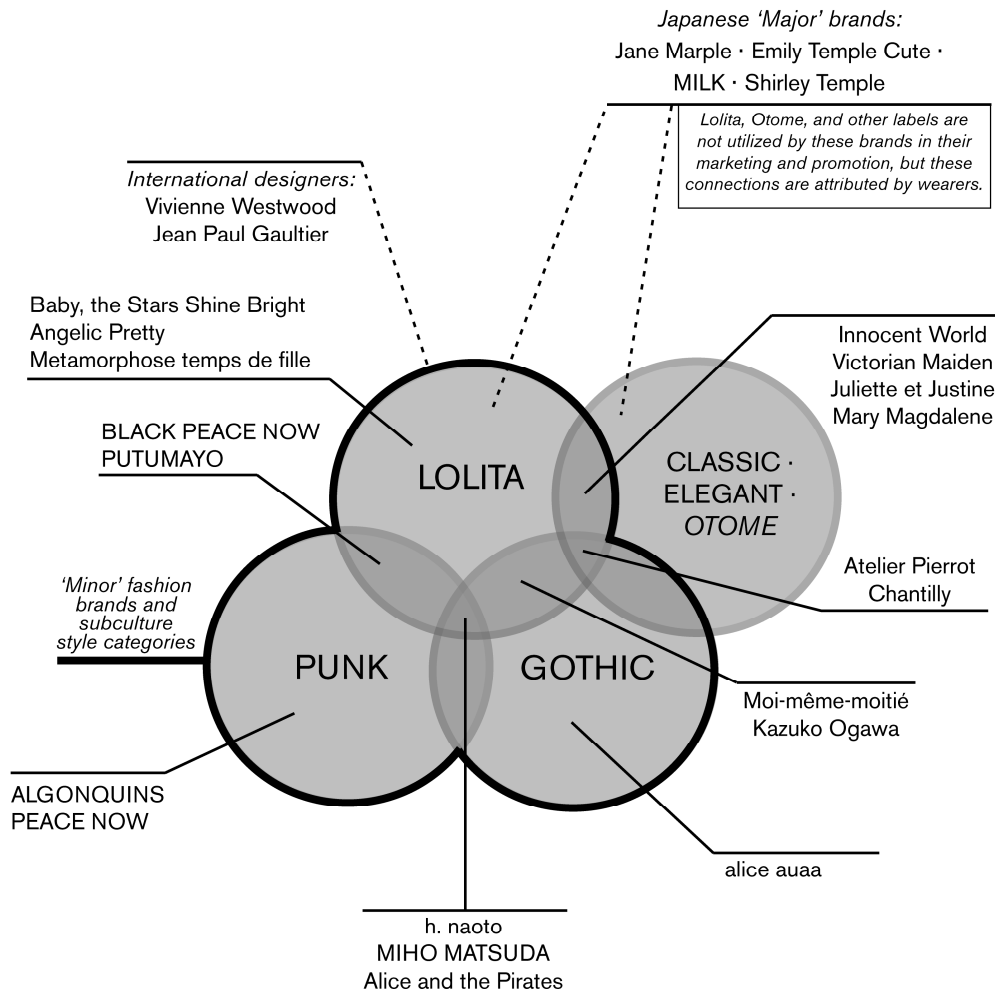


Diagram 1 - The above diagram demonstrates the style categories a fashion brand might be associated with based on their advertising, brand image, and impression of consumers. These labels are tentative and fluid as lines are often crossed from time to time with particular designs. Brands like Baby, the Stars Shine Bright, Angelic Pretty, and Metamorphose depend on the 'Lolita' label to advertise their wares.

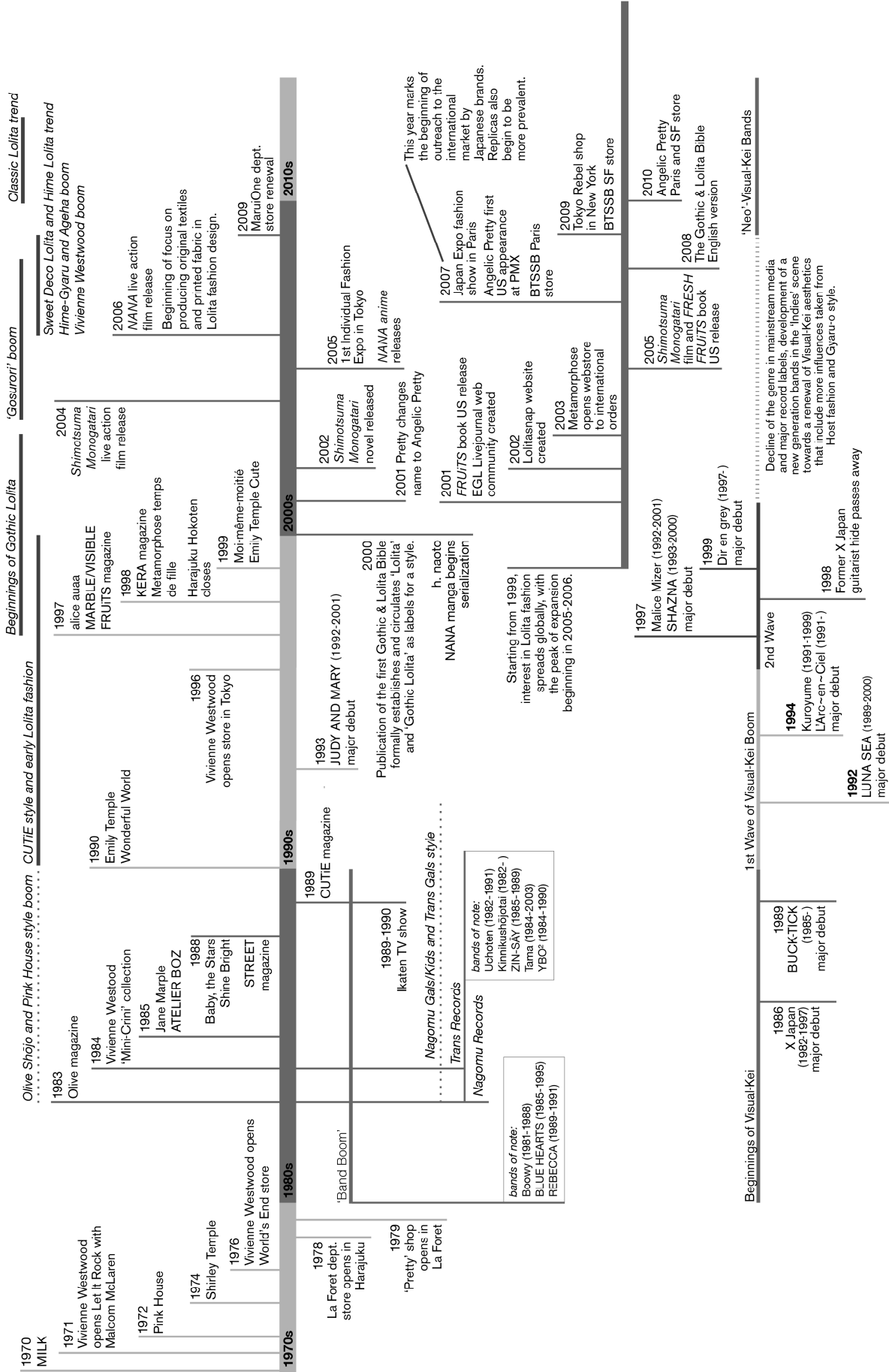
shop fronts and franchises, Internet shopping sites, and widely distributed publications that disseminate awareness of the style.

Magazines in Japan play an important role in influencing and setting consumer trends and labelling and creating fashion movements (Nanba 2009). Magazines tend to be presented like catalogues and instructional manuals. Though professional models are used, most magazines rely on non-professional models known as 'reader models' who look like the target reader audience instead of the runway model ideal that most people are unable to attain. Models are typically Japanese and reader models are recruited while still in art or fashion school. By using models that look like the publication's target audience, readers feel like they too are able to copy the styling presented in the magazine and transform themselves.

Lolita fashion is branded as a street fashion style. However, it is difficult to determine the percentage of influence coming from the creativity of young people on the street and the amount of sway a magazine editor has in determining trends by curating and selecting certain street snaps, being both influenced by what is seen on the street and having a discerning eye about what to look for. Reading a magazine like *KERA* that features many street snaps from cover to cover, a cohesive narrative connects fashion spreads with street snaps featuring youth in various cities throughout Japan. People popular with readers in street snaps are picked to be 'reader models,' turning murky the boundary between media authority and inspiration from the street. It brings in to question

TIMELINE

Unless otherwise noted, this chart maps the year when a particular brand, magazine, or company mentioned in Chapter One was established or created. Bands are listed with dates of formation and dissolution. 'Booms' are moments when a style or genre experiences a surge in widespread popularity or awareness in mainstream media. For a more detailed timeline, refer to Appendix 2.



who defines style. Street snaps are presented as providing an authentic window into what the youth, veering away from popular trends or 'mainstream' fashion, are wearing. Reflecting a readership mostly in their teens to early 20s, these models are young and have a certain recognizable look. Most of the people I interviewed would likely never be considered or appear on the pages of *KERA* or have their photograph taken by the professional photographers that scout the street of Harajuku. Regardless, magazines play an important part in Japanese street subculture fashions as they not only fuel creativity but are also documenting it.

1980s: Pink House, Olive Magazine, and Nagomu Gals



A Pink House outfit worn by an African American woman. The style features layering, long skirt length, corsages, and loose-fitting clothing. Photo and styling by Martha Taylor, used with permission (2011).

In the 1980s, a style called 'romantic fashion' became widely popular with teenage girls and young women. The brand Pink House, established in 1971 by designer Kaneko Isao, became immensely popular, and soon the style was also known as Pink House style (*pinkhausu-kei*). This style was connected to the magazine *Olive*, an off-shoot of the pop culture magazine *POPEYE*, established in 1982. 'Romantic fashion' was also referred to as

'Olive girl' (*Ori-bu shōjo*) style or 'Country' style (*kantori-kei*) and is distinguished by the round blouse collar, layering, and low waist silhouette. The magazine sold an entire lifestyle to young teenage girls introducing them to cute (*kawaiirashi*) products in addition to clothing, music, and places to go, creating a new *shōjo bunka*, or girls' culture.

Romantic fashion can be understood as a spiritual predecessor to Lolita in its similar exploration of concepts of cuteness and



A coordinate using Pink House clothing. The rows of frills on the top and many pin-tucks on the tiered skirt are typical of the style. Photo courtesy of Martha Taylor (2011).

girlishness but it draws inspiration from different sets of aesthetics and literature. The clothing style also is visually very different, placing emphasis on long, ankle-length skirts and dresses that are worn in multiple layers, creating a playful look using the patterned fabric featuring flowers and animals. Straw hats, flower corsages, and aprons are common accessories. Reflecting the Bubble era when the fashion was at the height of its popularity, items are more expensive than Lolita fashion. With layering being an important aspect of achieving the look, a brand-new outfit may cost up to several thousand dollars. The clothes typically have skirts with elastic waists. In addition, being layer heavy, there is a stereotype that most women wearing Pink House style are a little chubby or overweight. Most followers of this fashion are now in their 40s

or 50s, and sometimes on an average Sunday it is possible to see one or two people sporting the style in Harajuku. During the height of its popularity, many young women sporting Pink House-*kei* could be seen in Tokyo. Pink House exists today, continuing to design and create the same style of clothing that made it well-known more than 30 years ago.

Though Pink House was not exclusively connected to a music movement, it was one uniform utilized by the Nagomu Gals and Trans Gals, named after the female fans of Nagomu Records (1983-1989) and Trans Records (1984-1990s?), independent record labels popular during the 1980s. Girls, usually in middle or high school, started to wearing Pink House when vocalist Otsuki Kenji of popular Nagomu label band Kinniku Shōjotai once said in a fanzine that he liked the style (Macias and Evers 2007: 111). Aside from Pink House, Nagomu Gals often donned knee-length socks, mini-skirts, thick-soled rubber shoes, long-sleeved t-shirts, and had a taste for vintage clothing. Nagomu Gal style emphasized creativity and personal expression over attracting the opposite sex.

1990s: CUTiE magazine and Early Lolita Fashion

CUTiE magazine was first published in 1989 as a spin-off of *Takarajima*, a youth culture magazine. *CUTiE* drew inspiration from London magazine *i-D* that featured photos of youth street fashion. Makoto Sekikawa, *CUTiE*'s former editor, credits the magazine with being the first to use the word *kawaii* to talk about Japanese aesthetics and fashion. She explains that:

Kawaii came to be seen as the antithesis of traditional fashion geared toward an older generation of women, which emphasized womanliness and common sense. The styles featured in *CUTiE* were excessive, unbalanced or asymmetric, stage-like or humorous, and in extreme colors. The clothes were not necessarily practical; they were overly conspicuous, and not pleasing to the eye of most men. [Sekikawa 2007:73]

The magazine's tagline was 'For Independent Girls' insisting that girls and young women could "do whatever you want to do" and "do what you like" instead of fitting into socially expected roles of womanhood and motherhood (Sekikawa 2007:73). Like *Olive*, *CUTiE* in the 1990s and early 2000s presented a lifestyle to its readers with a focus on clothing and music. The magazine often featured photographs of young people at various club or fashion events and concerts in Tokyo. There was a heavy slant towards presenting street fashion as it is worn by young people. Early Lolita Labels such as MILK, Jane Marple, and Maid Lane Revue were heavily featured, but *CUTiE* catered to a wide variety of fashion styles including club wear brands such as Super Lovers and VIVAYOU and international designers favoured by Punks and Lolitas such as Vivienne Westwood and John Paul Gaultier.

Clothes that can now be identified as Lolita featured in *CUTiE* were made in primary colours such as bright reds and blues, stark whites and blacks or made from flashy, loud prints. Dresses were also shorter and blouses cut looser, reflecting the larger fashion trends of the day, and not all skirts were shaped in the familiar bell-shaped petticoat-supported Lolita dress of today. MILK and Jane Marple designs from this period are representative of early Lolita. Though

these companies have shed any connection to Lolita fashion in their current marketing, some Lolitas, especially those who grew up reading *CUTiE* in the 1990s see these brands as heavily connected to the Lolita subculture. They are sometimes referred to as an *ojō-sama*¹ style of Lolita, casual Lolita or CUTIE-era Lolita.

MILK was established in 1970 by designer Okawa Hitomi who draws on American and punk influences to create clothes that are described as “girly, romantic, and feminine, but not sexual,” turning punk into cute and connecting it with *kawaii*, or cute, culture (Godoy 2007:38). MILK made a name for itself in the 1970s by dressing Idol singers such as the Candies or Pink Lady, Minami Saori or Matsuda Seiko in the 1980s, and continues to dress Idol singers today. MILKBOY was created later on and markets punk-like clothes to young men. During the *CUTiE*-era, MILK was heavily associated with Lolita Punk style, a combination of Punk and girly that was worn by girls who went to underground Punk concerts. Also known as *roripan*, a combination of the two words, it differs slightly from its current day incarnation, and in some ways shared more affinity with Nagomu Gal style. One popular trend was to wear frilly peter-collar blouses underneath t-shirts – something not seen today. Yuki, female vocalist of the popular pop-rock band JUDY AND MARY (1992-2001), was considered exemplary of this style, decked in mini-skirts, T-shirts, and platform shoes when

¹ *Ojō-sama* can translate to daughter of a high class family or young lady.

she performed in concerts and on television during the band's early years. In a performance on TV show POP JAM, she is wearing a mesh see-through long-sleeved sweater, black bra top, mini skirt with crinoline, topped with a frilly apron. It also was not only the clothes she wore but also her attitude on stage that made her cute and admirable to a female audience. She gives an energetic, confident performance singing in a unique powerful high-tone voice. MILK has shifted its overall image and the cuts of the garments have become less Lolita-like over the years. Some designers have left MILK to establish fashion brands connected to Lolita fashion such as Shirley Temple, a children's clothing label, and Emily Temple Cute, catering to teenagers and young women. Designer Ogawa Megumi, also previously a designer at MILK, established her own fashion brand Jane Marple. Her work draws heavily on British culture and aesthetics, using fabrics such as tartans and stripes and incorporating themes such as British crowns and regal emblems.

CUTiE is still in publication, but the style focus has changed over the years. Its importance to Lolita fashion peaked in the 1990s and early 2000s, a period that is remembered with nostalgia by Japanese Lolitas in their late 20s to 30s but it is little known outside Japan.

Late-1990s: FRUiTS and Harajuku Fashion Travels Overseas

The street snap magazine *FRUiTS*, still in circulation and originally launched in 1997 by photographer Shoichi Aoki, created a larger awareness of

the Harajuku area in Tokyo within and outside of Japan. Aoki previously ran the magazine *STREET* beginning in 1988 which featured photographs of street fashion in Europe and the United States with the goal of documenting ways in which people were wearing clothes that were not dictated by the fashion magazines or industry at large. He turned his camera lens towards Harajuku when he noticed Japanese youth were wearing clothes that were not influenced by the West, leading to the development of *FRUiTS*. The *FRUiTS* compilation released in 2001 by Phaidon Press has played an important role in raising consciousness of Japanese street fashion outside the country. A second compilation, *FRESH FRUiTS*, was released in 2005.

As *FRUiTS* became better known, the youth that Aoki had photographed tried to wear more outrageous outfits in order to appear within the pages of the magazine. A collection of photographs from the magazine was published in North America in 2001 and brought wider attention to the eclectic fashion style of young Japanese people in Tokyo and introduced styles such as Lolita fashion and Decora, a style in which wearers typically adorn themselves with bright clothing and accessories, to North American youth. Aoki photographs a wide variety of fashion styles for the magazine, placing an emphasis on the originality of the outfit.

In an interview transcript from an Australian radio station in 2003, Aoki emphasizes the grassroots development of Harajuku street fashion that was independent from influence from magazines or movies, typical media outlets

that have been credited with the boom of various youth styles in Japan that he saw sprouting in 1997:

Basically Japan is still into brands, but the kids in *FRUiTS* are different, they are not obsessed by brands, perhaps when they are grown up they might be but they are not a present. In Shibuya and Ginza and places like that there seems to be still a brand obsession, but the kids in *FRUiTS* don't fit the bill. ... I felt like there was a new generation that was becoming visible and perhaps most poignant thing about this new generation was the use of the kimono. The kimono is something that Japanese people feel quite close to and yet it is traditional so also it's 'far away'. If commercial fashion designers had started to reuse the kimono it would probably not have worked but these young people took it back into their own culture and I felt like that was a streak of genius coming - and real self expression. I felt it wasn't something that was influenced by things in magazines or in the movies. [interview, quoted in Radio National, 2003]

Even in 2003, Aoki was noticing a movement in which Japanese city youth were beginning to take their fashion cues from Europe and the United States again instead of being inspired from within Japan or creating trends that had no roots in styles showcased in magazines and by established, well-known designers. He attributes this "backward" movement to the closing of the Harajuku *Hokoten*, in which streets are closed to vehicle traffic for pedestrians on Sunday:

There is a reason why it's going backwards. Most of that trend as documented in *FRUiTS* grew from Harajuku and for a long time the streets of Harajuku were closed off to cars on weekends and it was like a young people's haven - they'd all get together to hang out there. The fashion that you see in *FRUiTS* was a movement that grew out of those young people networking with each other, being together and being inspired by each other. About three years ago the streets were opened up again to vehicle traffic so there is no longer really anywhere for young people to get together, so that movement has kind of stopped and is going back to the commercial base with the designers feeding style to young people. [interview, quoted in Radio National, 2003]

FRUiTS contained a large variety of street styles. Aoki did not dedicate his magazine to just one particular style, choosing instead to record the plethora of

sartorial choices displayed by Japanese youth with each monthly issue. When looking for potential people to photograph for *FRUiTS*, Aoki was interested in originality and a look that was not so obsessed with brands and featured mixing and layering. Accompanying each photo was the name and age of the person as well as the brand their clothes came from as well as their 'point of fashion' and 'current obsession.' Unlike some of the style trends displayed in the photos, people wearing Lolita would sometimes write that their point of fashion was 'Lolita' or 'Gothic Lolita' thus giving a specific label and name for their clothing style which readers in North America could latch on to.

The magazine and the North American compilation *FRUiTS* contained photos from a variety of different kinds of styles, and when the book gained popularity, 'FRUiTS' or 'FRUiTS style' became a shorthand for Harajuku fashion and any kind of fashion style found within the pages of the magazine. A Livejournal community dedicated to *FRUiTS* fashion sprouted in 2002 where members could post photos of their outfits that have been inspired by the styles found in the magazine. The magazine encompassed a wide variety of styles but under the umbrella term 'FRUiTS' in North America, it became a somewhat recognized style in and of itself. Thus, what many people outside of Japan consider Harajuku fashion or *FRUiTS* fashion is heavily influenced by these older photos from the late 1990s and early 2000s that are no longer representative of the current style trends which Aoki continues to document in recent issues of *FRUiTS*.

Mid-1990s and 2000s: KERA, the Gothic & Lolita Bible, Gothic Lolita, and Visual Rock

Starting in the 1990s, more underground and independent fashion labels were established that were connected to the Visual Rock music scene and Lolita fashion. Two strains of Lolita fashion developed during this time: Gothic Lolita and Sweet Lolita. The beginnings of the Gothic Lolita style started with female fans who worshipped their favourite Visual Rock, or *Visual-kei*, musicians by emulating their dress. Visual Rock is a music genre that emerged from Japan beginning in the late 1980s during the Band Boom period when the independent music scene was flourishing and many new indie bands were being formed. Musically, it is difficult to categorize Visual Rock today as many bands draw upon a variety of influences from genres such as Classical, Thrash Metal, Rock, Gothic, Punk Rock, Dark Wave, and Industrial Rock. Considering the varied sounds of Visual Rock, the visual aspect of the bands as conveyed through their makeup and stage costume is one of the most important characteristics connecting bands coming from different musical influences into one genre (Inoue 2003).

The first wave of Visual Rock's rise in mainstream media came in the 1990s as the first generation of visual rock bands signed on to major label record labels and gained popularity (Morikawa 2003). A second wave of Visual bands in 1999 created resurgence in mainstream visibility of the genre with bands like Malice Mizer, one of the bands important for the development of Gothic Lolita.

The first generation of Visual Rock included such famous bands like X Japan whose audience tended to wear all black or copy the outfits of the band members, even emulating their Punk and Metal-influenced brightly coloured hair that stood up straight from the head using hairspray. The next wave of bands spearheaded by the popular band Malice Mizer marked a period when Visual Rock bands also adopted a more fantastic image, drawing on European period costume, Western Gothic subculture, and even vampire movies. Most of these all-male bands would have at least one member who adopts a feminine look by cross-dressing and wearing dresses to look like a doll. To show allegiance to the band and to feel closer to other attendees when going to concerts, many female fans started to adopt this dress as well. This was one of the ways in which Gothic Lolita was established as fans got their fashion tips and ideas from attending concerts.

Gothic Lolita borrows heavily from Victorian children's clothing and clothes worn by porcelain dolls. The clothing is also inspired by the aesthetics of fashion in the Gothic subculture, though Gothic Lolitas do not consider themselves part of this subculture. Gothic Lolitas often wear white and black clothes. Though the Gothic Lolita is depicted as dark and interested in the macabre and grotesque, like the other substyles of Lolita fashion, there was still an element of cute in her dress though her own personal definition of what is considered cute might include bats, cobwebs, and coffins.

The creation of various fashion labels focused on Gothic and Gothic Lolita fashion in Tokyo from 1995-1997 coincided with interest in Gothic trends in American and European high fashion. Marilyn Manson, Madonna's *Frozen* music video, and John Paul Gaultier brought a renewed interest in Gothic aesthetics (Suzuki 2007). In 1999, the well-known Gothic and Gothic Lolita fashion label *Moi-même-Moitié* was established by Malice Mizer guitarist Mana, himself already a celebrity icon among Visual Rock fans famous for his elaborate stage costumes featuring intricate dresses. His trademark stage make-up consists of a face painted white, accentuated eyelashes and blue lipsticks, paired with a wig of ringlets that make him look like a porcelain doll. Many of his fans copied



This Gothic Lolita is wearing a dress from *Moi-même-moitié* featuring an architectural themed print on the skirt. Photo by Mlle Chèvre, used with permission (2012).

this look when they attended Malice Mizer's live concerts. Mana named the specific styles of clothes as Elegant Gothic Lolita (EGL) and Elegant Gothic Aristocrat (EGA). With the creation of *Moi-même-Moitié*, the gap between costume and clothing became blurred. The following year the publication *Gothic & Lolita Bible* (GL&B) began. This marked the establishment of Lolita and Gothic Lolita as a label for a fashion style and the beginning of the styles standardization as *KERA* and *GL&B* both documented and set trends.

KERA and *GL&B* are managed under the same company, and both publications play an important role in shaping Lolita fashion into what it is today and establishing fashion trends within the subculture. These two titles are most influential and widely read among Lolitas residing outside of Japan. *KERA* has a circulation of 120,000 issues each month, and the largest readership group at 45% are 16-18 years old followed by readers 15 and under (32.5%) (Index Communications 2010). Reflecting the magazine's specialized focus and the long history of Lolita fashion, *G&LB* readership skews a little older though the majority of readers fit within the 16-18 year-old bracket (45.5%) followed by 19-22 year-old (22.5%) with a circulation of 80,000 copies published every quarter (Index Communications 2012).

First published in 1998, *KERA* started out as a street fashion magazine and has established itself as one of the major magazines to feature youth subculture and fashions related to Gothic, Punk and Lolita styles with connections to the Visual Rock music scene. The magazine was named after beatnik Jack Kerouac

in reference to his work, *On the Road*. Aside from editorial spreads, advertisements, and fashion tips, *KERA* also features street snaps of youth wearing alternative fashions. The establishment of the seasonal publication *GL&B* in 2000 helped to formalize the aesthetics of 'Lolita fashion' by offering a way for aspiring teens to know about the existing trendsetters who wear Gothic, Lolita, and Punk fashions as street fashion as well as providing a place for clothing brands to advertise their latest wares for each season.

G&LB is a quarterly 'mook,' or magazine book, a special release volume printed on thicker paper and perfect-bound. It typically contains a detachable pattern sheet and other bonuses like stickers. Each volume is similar to a catalogue showcasing the newest clothes and fashion accessories for each season as well as photographs of youth on the street wearing Gothic and Lolita fashion. There are interviews and articles about subculture icons such as Visual Rock musicians, underground artists, and writers. It also functions as an instructional manual meant to teach readers how to wear the clothes, introduce other related media products (movies, books, *anime*, *manga*, music), and basically inform the reader to help them build associations outside clothing such as tea parties, going to Europe, underground fetish clubs, or certain art movements like Rococo and Baroque. Every product appearing in both publications is listed with detailed information on the product name, brand, and price.

The Japanese version of the *GL&B* is well-read by Lolitas outside Japan who refer to the publication as 'the Bible' and either purchase or download the

magazine from the Internet. An English version of *GL&B* was published quarterly from 2008 to 2009 by the publisher Tokyopop, under licence from Index Communications, Corp. This version contained original contents specific to the English publication as well as translated articles culled from the original Japanese version of the Gothic and Lolita Bible. The full-colour magazine was distributed in large bookstores like Borders and Barnes and Nobles in the United States. The editors were active members of EGL and recruited submissions such as photos, illustrations, and interviews from recognizable members of the EGL online community. The now defunct Tokyopop specialized in licensing, translating, and distributing Japanese media products, particularly *manga*, to North American audiences and helped spearhead the distribution of translated *manga* to bookstore chains like Borders and Walden Books.

Mid-2000s to Now: Shimotsuma Monogatari, Sweet Lolita, and Current Trends

Shimotsuma Monogatari (Shimotsuma Story), known as *Kamikaze Girls* in the version of the film and book translated and released outside of Japan, is a 2004 film that played an important role in reviving interest in Lolita fashion and spreading knowledge about it to a mainstream audience. The film also played a part in shaping perception of Lolita outside Japan. It is based on Novala Takemoto's 2002 novel of the same name. Takemoto's novels and essays are well known among Lolitas, and he frequently appears in the pages of the *GL&B* and has collaborated with Lolita fashion brand Baby, the Stars Shine Bright (BTSSB),

once producing a line of clothing. Takemoto is considered a style icon, having started out as shop staff for Osaka clothing shop Maria Teresa before focusing on his literary career. Takemoto frequently centres his short stories and novels on characters who are devoted to a certain clothing brand like Commes Des Garçons, MILK or Emily Temple Cute. Characters outfits and relationship to clothing are often written about in detail.

Shimoshima Monogatari is a story about the growing unlikely friendship between two teenage girls, a Lolita named Momoko and a ‘Yankee’ girl biker gang delinquent Ichiko, living in Shimotsuma, Ibaraki prefecture located in Eastern Japan. The main character Momoko wears Sweet Lolita, a style featuring



This Sweet Lolita is wearing a pink striped dress from Angelic Pretty with matching bag and headbow. At Jingu Bridge, photo by An Nguyen (2008).

pinks, reds, and pastel colours paired with elaborate prints featuring sweets, animals, or fairy tales. The clothes are bright, cheery, and covered in lace and frills. Momoko is a big fan of Lolita brand Baby, the Stars Shine Bright, choosing solely to wear clothes from the brand when she is not in her school uniform and

travelling two hours by train to visit the flagship store in the Daikanyama neighborhood in Tokyo. Clothing from the brand was heavily featured within the film, connecting BTSSB with the epitome of Sweet Lolita and driving up sales. The company created a special dress design used in the film that was sold during the time of the movie's release in Japan.

Though Momoko tries to shut out reality and others through Lolita fashion, uses unethical means to procure funds for her clothes, and describes herself as rotten inside, the portrayal of a Lolita in the film is generally positive, a contrast from how the mass media had been depicting Lolitas, in particular Gothic Lolitas, up to that point.

The film's 2005 limited release in North America to independent movie theatres and festivals and eventual DVD release in 2006 was handled by Viz Media, LLC, another company focused on distributing Japanese *manga*, *anime*, and other media in translated and localized form for North American audiences. Before its official localization in North America, the movie could be found on the Internet via fan-subtitled versions, but the same year as the Viz release marked a rise in new memberships to the EGL Livejournal online community as knowledge and interest in the fashion spread overseas more rapidly than before.

After the film's release Sweet Lolita and BTSSB experienced a boom, and many Japanese Lolitas mark this as a period when Lolita fashion became 'Major' or at least more recognizable than it was before by mainstream society. Starting in 2004, Lolita brands began to move towards utilizing brand exclusive printed

fabrics featuring illustrations designed in-house, see Chapter 4 for more. It was also during the period of 2004-2006 that the line between fashion styles associated with the Shibuya and Harajuku neighbourhoods in Tokyo began to blur and influences of the girl-centric subcultures Gyaruru and Himegyaruru began to appear in Lolita. A style that emerged in the 1990s, Gyaruru are the polar opposite of Lolita with their 'sexy' and outgoing personality. Donning bleached hair, short skirts, and tanned skin, Gyaruru are often depicted in the mass media as aggressive, rebellious, and sexually promiscuous, though many of these stereotypes are exaggerated or untrue. Himegyaruru or Hime is the more grown-up and princess-like version of Gyaruru featuring florals, A-line dresses cut over-knee, stiletto heels, and bouffant-like hairstyles.

The crossover between Sweet Lolita and Himegyaruru coincided with the rise of fashion magazine *AGEHA* in the mainstream. A publication edited by and for women working in the hostess and nightclub industry, *AGEHA* acts as a space for these women to share and exchange information with one another by offering tips on make-up and hair and sharing stories about their life struggles. Ageha style as connected with the publication is associated with hostesses, and though not all Gyaruru and Himegyaruru are involved in this line of work, the fashion style appeared on the pages featuring outfits from reader models who regularly combined Lolita brand clothing from Angelic Pretty and BTSSB with Hime styling and makeup in a new genre called *Himerori* or *Gyarurori*. A trend towards big hair and wigs, fake eyelashes, and makeup centred on accentuating

the eye through eye line combined with stiletto heels instead of platform shoes created a new style of Lolita fashion. These elements continue to exist today within Lolita and are now considered necessary for a proper Lolita outfit. As *Himerori* style declined in popularity, Classic or Classical Lolita, a style that had existed before, is the current trend with more coverage in magazines. This style is less candy-sweet and focuses on retaining a sense of girlishness as found in Western children's literature classics like *The Little Princess*.

This review of magazines, fashion styles, and music movements has



A jumperskirt from Mary Magdalene is paired with accessories from indie brands in this Classical Lolita coordinate. This Lolita travels more than an hour by train to spend her free days in Osaka's America-mura and meet her Lolita friends. Photo by An Nguyen (2010).

demonstrated that Lolita is part of a larger girl's fashion that has existed in the late 1970s to early 1980s that has placed emphasis on girls and young women dressing for themselves and self-expression through *kawaii* aesthetics (see Chapter 3). Lolita has established itself as a staple of girls' subculture fashion for more than 20 years

by continuing to evolve and melding with current trends while keeping the traditional Lolita silhouette and underlying aesthetic intact.

Chapter 2

Places and Spaces in the Actual and Virtual

In writing about space and place from a phenomenological approach, Edward Casey (1996) examines the role of perception in the construction of place. By suggesting a spatio-temporalization of place where space and time come together, formed in place, Casey emphasizes an analysis of what 'being-in-place' means to a group of people. This focus begins in place, situated in specific localities and perceived through the body, instead of space, a boundless three-dimensional extent in which matter and events occur. "There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place, and to be in that place is to be in a position to perceive it" (Casey 1996: 18). Space and time exist, but both are understood through place, which is perceived through the body and culturally situated. This sense of place "represents a culling of experience. It is what has accrued - and never stops accruing - from lives spent sensing places. Vaguely realized most of the time, and rarely brought forth for conscious scrutiny, it surfaces in an attitude of enduring affinity with known localities and the way of life they sponsor" (Basso 1996:144). The way places are built and shared is in fact a way of constructing history, offering "not only a means of reviving former times but also of *revising* them, a means of exploring not merely how things might have been but also how, just possibly, they might have been different from what others have supposed" (Basso 1996:6, italics in original).

To understand Lolita fashion and its wearers, it is important to first consider the spaces and places connected to it. Spaces come to be places through the building of a sense of historicity, the way in which certain things, people, and places come to be considered important and are recorded in memory and experiences of time that are not always necessarily linear: places to be and wear Lolita, places to affirm that one is a Lolita, places to meet and see other Lolitas, places to come in contact with Lolita things and people are all essential to how experience is framed and understood.

Tom Boellstoff's distinction between 'actual' and 'virtual' worlds in examining the 3D virtual world Second Life as place is helpful to my discussion on the development of Lolita places in these two varying contexts. He defines actual worlds as "places of human culture not realized by computer programs through the Internet" and considers how, as a virtual place inhabited by people that is enabled by technologies, Second Life is not just a simulation of actual-world but a world and culture in and of itself that becomes the social, economic, and political context where selfhood, community, and notions of human nature are being remade (2008:21). Within the virtual world a particular cultural logic unique to that world is formed and shared, providing a common language of practices, assumptions, and social relations that inhabitants draw upon in their interaction with the world and each other regardless of their nationalities in the actual world.

How places associated with Lolita fashion have developed in Japan and North American/the Internet differ. This has implications for the movement and relationship between people and things in the sense of Bruno Latour's actor network theory (1993, 2005). This difference stems from the nature of place construction and meaning from a movement that originated in actual urban landscapes compared to one that originated from virtual landscapes. Though Japanese Lolitas are able to access a linguistically, socially, and historically rich context surrounding aesthetics and ideas about girlhood (see Chapter 3), non-Japanese speakers do not have access to the same background. For overseas Lolitas experience surrounding the fashion is largely defined and situated in interaction with people, things, and media that occurs in these actual and virtual places. How Lolita is understood and framed by North Americans is situated in definitions of place and relations between people. As such, place and social relations play a larger role in defining Lolita fashion for non-Japanese wearers.

Lolita in Japan represents a fashion movement that was firstly situated in city areas like Tokyo and Osaka partly in conjunction with club and music scenes in metropolitan areas like Tokyo and Osaka where attendees and performers both adopted certain styles of dress. Over time it gained popularity and became standardized into a particular look when mass media worked in conjunction with clothing designers and producers to record, dictate, and market new trends. This process helped Lolita fashion expand outwards to smaller cities through new shop fronts, Internet shopping sites, and widely

distributed publications that help disseminate awareness of the style. The unique point about girl-based subcultures in Japan is the ability to transform and indoctrinate them into the same media and production model used by the mainstream fashion industry, albeit on a smaller scale. A formalized production and distribution system developed surrounding the larger companies, department stores, and magazines. Catering to a niche fashion, these companies are larger than independent brands but have low production runs, sometimes running in the hundreds or low thousands, and are considered 'minor brands' in relation to the wider Japanese apparel industry, even though MaruiOne in Shinjuku is an entire department store dedicated to Lolita and related styles. Thus, Japanese Lolitas largely experience the fashion as they transverse across familiar cityscapes in actual places.

On the other hand, the movement of Lolita fashion from Japan to other parts of the world has largely taken place through the aid of virtual spaces and connections which facilitate commerce and the movement of goods across borders as well as make available media featuring information about and images of Lolita fashion. Lolita fashion as a movement outside Japan developed first via the Internet, bringing together people living in different localities who interact regularly online and use places like the online community on EGL hosted on Livejournal to organize meetings and connect people attending temporary spaces and events like *anime* conventions with others around the globe. As numbers of Lolitas grow large enough in one local area to form local

groups who regularly hold face-to-face meet-ups, photos and reports from these meetings are posted on EGL, creating an archive of gatherings around the world that allow others to observe the event from a distance.

This chapter is divided in two sub-sections that describe these two different points of departure for place-making and examine their consequences for building group identification, sociality, and relationship between Lolitas. The first part discusses spaces and places in Japan associated with Lolita, looking at the experience of people in Japan and how Japan is perceived by those who are physically distant but connected in mental image and imagination. This is explored through a discussion of the Harajuku neighbourhood, an area in Tokyo which has long been associated with innovative youth fashion in and out of Japan. It still remains an important symbolic centre for the fashion and is tied to the development of Lolita fashion into a unique style over the years despite the fact that Lolita fashion has been waning in popularity in Tokyo over the years. Other shopping areas of Tokyo and cities like Osaka are also examined to understand how shopping as an activity helps to build associations and memories attached to certain places in the cityscape. As Harajuku's importance as a gathering place for Lolita has dwindled, people try to find other places to wear Lolita through participating in temporary event-based spaces like live concerts, sales events, and tea parties.

The second part of this chapter examines the spread of Lolita fashion in North America and other countries through the Internet, social networking

sites, and online forums. Unlike Lolitas in Tokyo and Osaka whose experience of the fashion is primarily situated in face-to-face contexts and actual world environments, the development of Lolita fashion groups elsewhere is situated in places on the Internet, connecting people in different geographic localities on-line before bringing them together face-to-face off the Internet. This section explores formation of group and community identity by looking at the history of Lolita groups on the Internet, the 'underground' of EGL where people gossip about EGL off EGL, Internet drama, the resulting discontentment and distance with EGL and online Lolita interaction, and the growth of local based Lolita groups in the United States and Canada.

I. Japan

The Harajuku Myth

The fashion houses Yohji Yamamoto, KENZO, ISSEY MIYAKE, and COMMES des GARÇONS created a revolution on the runways of Paris in the 1980s that brought the Japanese fashion industry onto the radar of the Western fashion press (Kondo 1997, Kawamura 2004). This interest in Japan fashion continues with street styles like Gyarū, Decora, and Lolita that have gained visibility and followers outside Japan in recent years, capturing the imagination of youth around the world and constructing an image of Tokyo, especially Harajuku, as a place for crazy and innovative fashion style.

Fuelled in part by Gwen Stefani's Orientalist appropriation of 'Harajuku Girls' in her 2004 debut album, the Tokyo neighbourhood of Harajuku has a

reputation as Japan's fashion mecca outside of the country. It is home to innovative fashion styles and the hang-out place for Japanese youth who create new trends through their street fashion. From designer boutiques to 'minor' fashion brands to vintage clothing stores, commercial success in the trendy neighbourhood is a stepping stone towards potential growth throughout other cities in Japan (Yamada 1997).

Before it became an international fashion destination, Harajuku largely consisted of the Washington Heights housing complex for U.S. military built after World War II. The complex was finally bulldozed in 1964 in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics, transforming the neighbourhood with drive-ins, cafes, and shops selling Western goods, developments that would eventually evolve into Harajuku as it exists today (Watanabe 2005:211). The construction of the Harajuku Central Apartment building in 1958 established what would be the future character of the neighbourhood. Until it was demolished in 1995, the commerce building had been home to many professionals in the creative and fashion industries including many photographers, copywriters, and designers who would later exert tremendous influence in Japanese fashion, design, art, music, photography, and advertising. As rents were still low compared to Shibuya and Ginza, the late 1960s saw a boom in 'mansion makers,' small clothing brands were run out of rented apartments. The apartments acted both as a space for designing clothes and as a shop front. The department store La Foret, built in 1978, has become



Omotesando street lined with trees. On the left hand side is the Omotesando Hills shopping centre. Photo by An Nguyen (2008).

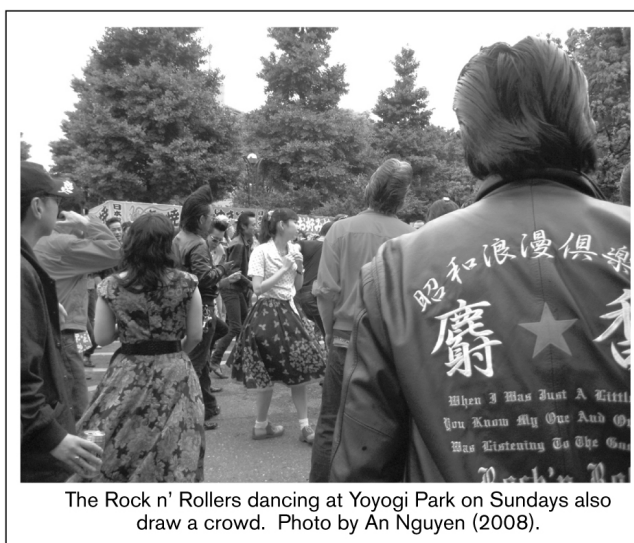
another symbol for Harajuku's status as a fashion mecca. Many of the first boutiques opened in La Foret were owned by 'mansion makers,' and the building continues to be seen as offering an opportunity for new designers and clothing brands to gain a following. By the 1970s, Harajuku cemented its position as an important centre in Japan's fashion industry.

The neighbourhood now consists of different blocks of streets that are characterized by shop clusters catering to a variety of niche markets: Takeshita-dōri, Ura-Harajuku, Meiji-dōri, Cat Street, Omotesando (Watanabe 2005:193-197). Omotesando, lined with trees on both sides of the street, has been called the Japanese Champs-Élysées and is a major avenue that lies in front of the Meiji shrine and stretches to Aoyama-dōri. It is home to upscale boutiques and international fashion brands like Louis Vuitton and Gucci that attract an older and richer clientele.

Aside from the high-end shops on Omotesando, Harajuku is typically a gathering and shopping place for young people, even attracting elementary to middle school students. Various youth subculture trends or 'fashion tribes' have used Harajuku as a gathering place. With the restructuring that resulted

from the Olympics as Japan prepared to showcase itself to the world after WWII, 1964 marked the emergence of the 'Harajuku tribe' (*Harajuku zoku*), a term used to describe the burgeoning youth culture specific to the area who had a taste for American film, fashion, dance, and music (Itō 1995).

From 1977 to 1998, an area of Omotesando stretching from Yoyogi Park was closed off to vehicles every Sunday, creating a pedestrian's paradise (*hokōsha tengoku*, or *hokoten*). There are other *hokoten* throughout Tokyo like



The Rock n' Rollers dancing at Yoyogi Park on Sundays also draw a crowd. Photo by An Nguyen (2008).

Shinjuku or Akihabara, but the most fondly remembered is the one in Harajuku. The Harajuku Hokoten attracted different groups from rockabillys to street performers to rock bands and the people who came to watch them. From this paradise emerged another tribe unique to Harajuku: the *Takenozoku* who gathered on the streets everyday Sunday in the late 1970s to early 1980s, decked their brightly coloured jumpsuits and kung-fu shoes to participate in synchronized group dance routines to the rhythm of Japanese pop songs. Many of the participants were high school girls, though the dance groups were commonly lead by a boy who would direct the movements.

In the 1990s, on Sundays Yoyogi Park became a place to see up-and-

coming independent bands perform for free. Band cosplayers, many of them female, dressed in handmade costumes imitating their favourite band's stage costumes also gathered in the area. After the Hokoten closed down, the Rockabillys still continue to hold dance sessions in the park today but in diminished numbers. Visual-*kei* bands like X Japan, Luna Sea, and Malice Mizer were really popular around this time. A remnant of the Hokoten, band cosplayers of these bands and Gothic Lolitas could be found at *Jingubashi* (Jingu Bridge), a pedestrian bridge that connected the area around Harajuku Station with the Meiji Shrine and Yoyogi Park. The bridge and the young women decked out in elaborate and colourful outfits combined with extravagant makeup became a powerful image connected to Harajuku in and outside of Japan.

While the book does offer a more complex portrait of Harajuku, *Style Deficit Disorder's* introduction (Godoy 2007) basically outlines the 'Harajuku myth,' an idealized construction of the area as "literally the most amazing place on earth: masses of youth successfully fighting to create their own trends at a 'grass-roots' level in the face of an increasingly-irrelevant global fashion market pushing industry-decided clothing on a rigid seasonal basis" (blog post, Marx 2008). To draw in the potential reader, Godoy relies on the existing ideas about Tokyo that her English-speaking audience may already have in place. According to the myth, Harajuku's uniqueness is touted in its self-containment. New trends formed from within Japan created by young people, are not dictated by fashion houses in Paris, Milan, and New York, and people are not creating to achieve



Trio of girls at Jingu Bridge getting their photo taken with a pair of female tourists. Photo by An Nguyen (2008).

recognition in the West.

Drawn to the belief that Harajuku is the centre of Japanese youth fashion, tourists flock to Harajuku expecting to catch a glimpse of the 'Harajuku girl' wearing alternative fashion

in her natural habitat. According to popular legend, Jingubashi is where they all hang out on weekends. Apparently, the number of people and the innovation in the clothes has been in decline since 2001. By 2008 when I was in Tokyo, the tourists at the bridge outnumbered the people who were dressed up. Returning to the bridge in 2010, I found that the people who originally comprised the main attraction had disappeared and were replaced with a crowd of tourists looking around for something but only finding each other. Stopping by another Sunday just to make sure, I found again a similar scene except for a lone couple surrounded by flashing cameras, a young Caucasian man and woman dressed in Gothic Aristocrat and Gothic Lolita clothes. I wanted to ask if they were tourists themselves, unaware that the Harajuku girls had all left, but I was unable to make my way through the crowd.

Satomi hung out at the bridge every Sunday after he first started to wear Lolita in 2003. I first met him there in 2008. Since then, he gradually stopped

going to Harajuku and wearing Lolita regularly. Like Satomi, many other Lolitas who have been into the fashion for several years feel that Harajuku has lost what had originally made it special.

Because lots of tourists, both from foreign countries and Japan, came (to the bridge) it felt like a lot of people came just to sightsee. Harajuku used to be a special place for people who wore individualistic fashions like Lolita, Gothic, Punk, Decora, Cyber. But now there is no one. Before there used to be different kinds of people who would come, unique people. ... There were Lolitas and Decora. And on Jingubashi were people doing several kinds of cosplay, like Malice Mizer and Psycho Le Cemmu. There were so many people there. Now the people who walk the streets are in ordinary clothing that can be found anywhere. It's a place for tourists. The fascinating people no longer go there so that's what I mean when I say Harajuku has lost its charm. The Lolita boom is over, and in Japan it has been waning. ... You know how at a zoo people think the animals are interesting so they take a photo. That's what the atmosphere felt like, and people stopped coming. They didn't like it. ... There used to be Lolitas who said that they hated Harajuku, but now those people have increased. So there became even less like-minded people. [interview, Satomi, March 7, 2010]

Cheryl, an American from New York, visited Japan for the first time in 1995 and again in 2000 remembered that Harajuku “was rough and a little grungy and a little seedy and nasty and a lot of fun. I don't mean dangerous or anything like that. It wasn't polished. It seemed to have a little bit of punk attitude, maybe, like what you imagine what the Village used to be like in New York City. That kind of feeling” (interview, March 29, 2010). The bands that played for free in Yoyogi Park were the main draw for her and others who came to Harajuku. The Hokoten provided a space for unregulated artistic expression. Once it was shut down, the live bands, street performances, people painting on the street or those selling handmade items disappeared leaving only the Jingu Bridge as a faint reminder of what had been.

Lolita fashion has been slowly declining in popularity in Tokyo over the past ten years as other, newer styles take over. From Satomi's perspective the area became less interesting as there were fewer Lolitas and people wearing fashions that he thinks are 'unique.' Saying that there are too many 'normal-looking' people, it seems that Harajuku has become alienating for him as there are less people like him. Satomi paints a picture of Harajuku devoid of any kind of fashion innovation and personality. It remains a nesting ground for new street fashion styles but none of them are styles that Satomi can relate to; thus he feels that the area no longer draws unique people and fashions. He still goes to Harajuku on his days off but it does not feel the same to him as he no longer has a place to sit and hang out like he had at the bridge. Most of the people he met on the bridge he has lost contact with over time.



Group of Visual Rock band cosplayers at Jingu Bridge. Photo by An Nguyen (2008).

The dissolution of the bridge as a meeting place for cosplayers and Lolitas had been influenced by a number of factors including the rise in tourists. Photos of people on the bridge started to be posted on the Internet without their consent to forums to anonymously slander them and post personal information. In addition, as the *Visual-kei*

band boom that started in the 1990s was waning, fewer bands like Malice Mizer donned over-the-top costumes that could be easily recognized as cosplay. For cosplayers, the bridge soon became irrelevant with more prevalent use of the Internet and digital cameras. “Instead of wearing cosplay and going to the Bridge to have their photo taken and make friends, websites created for that purpose became popular and people would upload photos to their blogs or to ‘community’ sites. With that it became easy for anyone to do, and I think that distanced the necessity of meeting at the Bridge or in Harajuku” (interview, Chisato, May 1, 2010). Displaying the difference between costume and fashion, Lolitas are still seen on the streets of Harajuku, but the occasions for wearing band cosplay is mostly relegated to live concerts or posting photos on Internet websites, as Yumiko suggests. Harajuku still remains a place for innovative youth fashion and up and coming designers and brands, but the styling associated with Harajuku as perceived overseas which also includes Lolita and Gothic Lolita looks has changed drastically over the years.

MAP of HARAJUKU

100m
200ft

Yoyogi Park



Jingubashi (Jingu Bridge)
Previously a popular hangout spot for Visual Rock cosplayers and Lolitas on Sundays. Known as 'The Bridge' among English speakers.

Harajuku train station

towards Shibuya
Yamamoto train line

towards Shinjuku

Jingu-mae Metro Station

MILK and MILKBOY flagship store

The majority of Gothic, Punk, and Lolita fashion-related stores in Harajuku are located in the basement of this department store. The rest of the building focuses on featuring new designers and avant-garde brands.

Takeshita-dori

Harajuku's famous fashion street is filled with small boutiques featuring used, vintage, and new clothes. Stores of interest to Lolita like Closet Child, Mari's Rock, and Bodyline can be found here. It is very crowded on the weekends.

La Foret

Cat Street

Meiji-dori

Kiddyland (under renovation)

Previous location of the Central Apartments and the Gap - an area where street snaps for KERA magazine are often taken.

Ura-Harajuku

Cat Street is the centre of this area also known as Ura-Hara, or the 'back of Harajuku'. It is home to hair salons, cafes, and shops run by new and young designers featuring street fashion style.

Omotesando

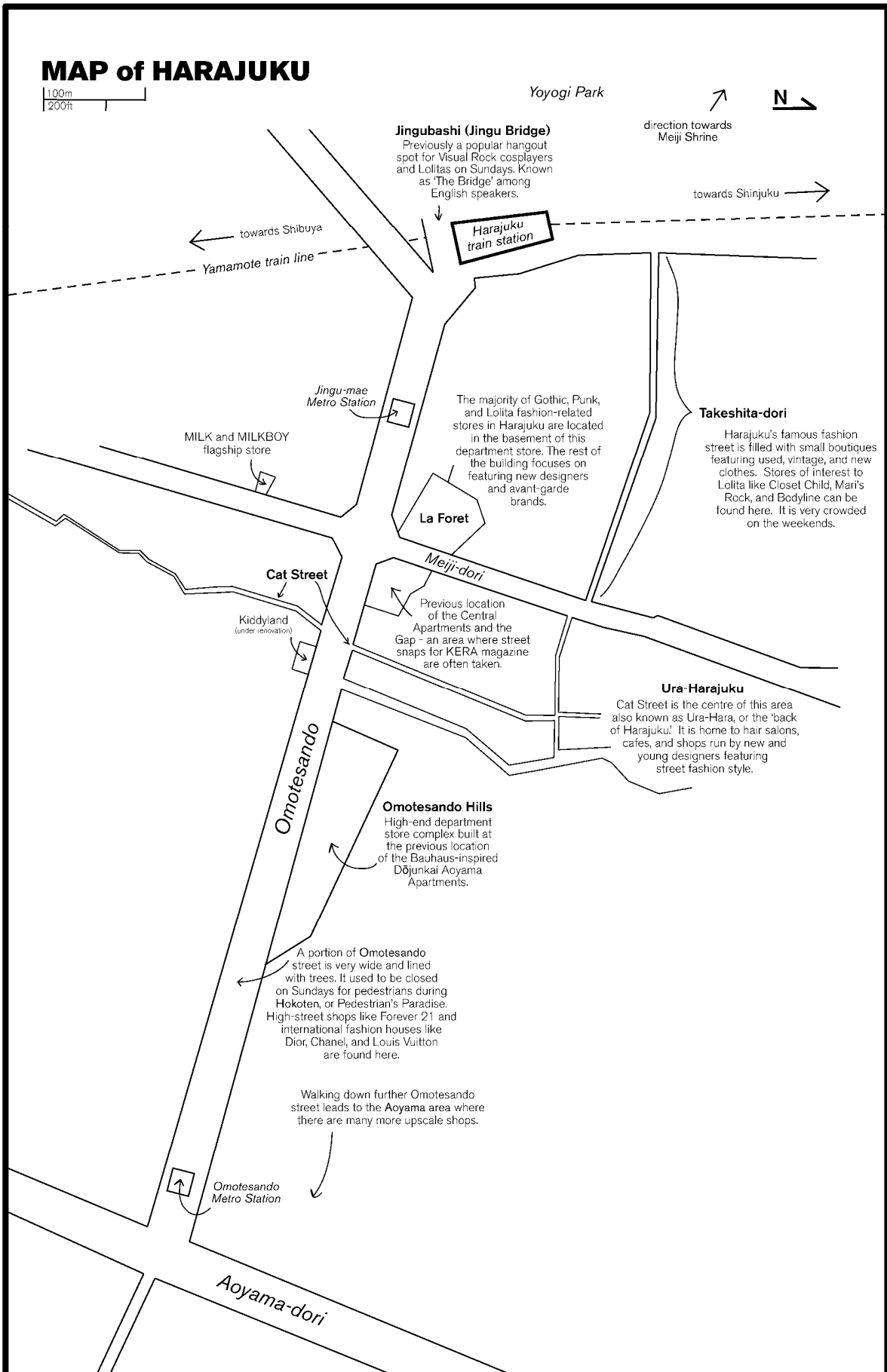
Omotesando Hills
High-end department store complex built at the previous location of the Bauhaus-inspired Dōjunkai Aoyama Apartments.

A portion of Omotesando street is very wide and lined with trees. It used to be closed on Sundays for pedestrians during Hokoten, or Pedestrian's Paradise. High-street shops like Forever 21 and international fashion houses like Dior, Chanel, and Louis Vuitton are found here.

Walking down further Omotesando street leads to the Aoyama area where there are many more upscale shops.

Omotesando Metro Station

Aoyama-dori



MAP of SHINJUKU

200m
500ft



Like an Edison and **Jishuban Club** are two independent record stores popular with Visual Rock fans.

Seibu-Shinjuku station
towards Ikebukuro

This area is known as Kabukicho, Tokyo's entertainment and red-light district. Night clubs, host and hostess clubs, and bars are found here.

Golden-Gai is an area of small bars and clubs. **Sumire no Tenmado**, a cafe/bar run by the musical duo Kokushoku Sumire is located here.

Closet Child is a used clothing store stocking Gothic, Lolita, and Punk items.

Christon Cafe
A Christian-themed cafe often used by stores to hold tea parties and other events.

Shinjuku Metro Station

Odakyu Department Store

Studio Alta is known for its large video screen overlooking the East exit of Shinjuku station. Along with the small park across the street, it is a popular meeting and waiting area.

Isetan Department Store

Keio Department Store

Shinjuku Train Station

A major hub, the station connects JR East lines Yamanote, Chuo, Saikyo; the Toei Subway; private lines Odakyu and Keio; and five Tokyo Metro lines.

Marui flagship department store

Nishi-Shinjuku Metro Station

Marui One
A branch of the Marui department stores. It is home to Gothic, Punk, Lolita, Gyaruru, and Hime shops catering to a clientele interested in subculture fashion.

Marui Annex

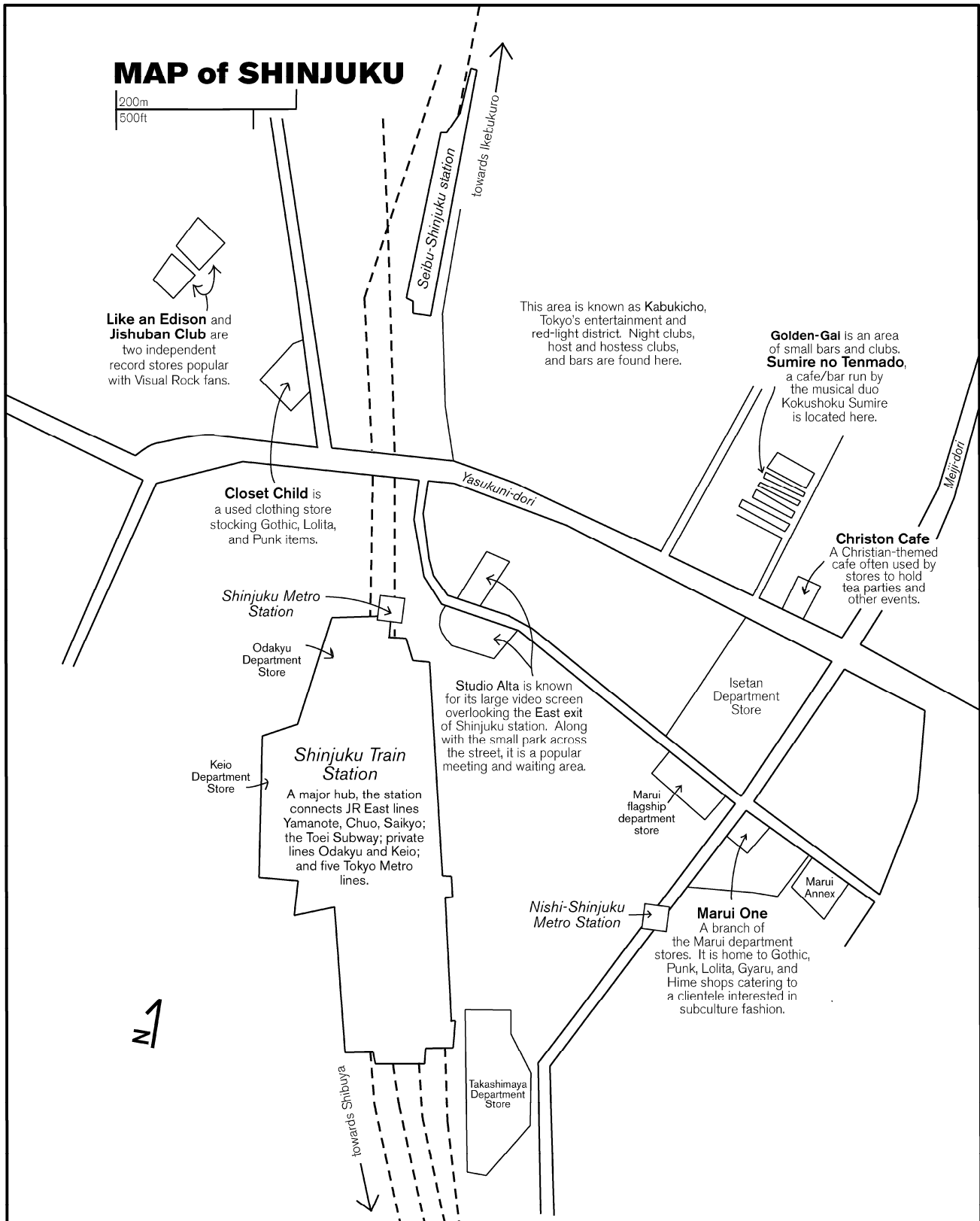


towards Shibuya

Takashimaya Department Store

Meiji-dori

Yasukuni-dori



Lolita Places in Tokyo and Harajuku's Changing Landscape

In Tokyo, the areas in which Lolitas can regularly be found are limited to three areas: Harajuku, Shinjuku, and Ikebukuro situated in West Central Tokyo. When asked where they would wear Lolita, most people, both Japanese and foreigners living in Japan, replied Harajuku and Shinjuku. Only occasionally was Ikebukuro or Akihabara mentioned if they had interests in *anime* and *manga* as well. Akihabara, also known as Akihabara Electric Town, is associated with Japanese *Otaku* culture and considered the place to purchase *anime*, *manga*, videogames, computer software and electronic hardware. From the vantage point of those outside Japan, Tokyo may seem like a haven for subculture fashions, where it is okay to wear any kind of fashion anywhere. The reality is that only certain areas of Tokyo are considered to be appropriate for Lolita and other kinds of youth street fashions.

Susan is a 26 year old Caucasian woman who is originally from the United Kingdom and has lived in Japan since 2007. During her time there, she has noticed the restrictions on when and where she can wear Lolita in Tokyo:

Susan: Japan is free only in Shinjuku, Shibuya, and Harajuku and Omotesando. Everywhere else in Tokyo people would look at you.

An: Why is it in those areas you feel free?

Susan: It's because of other people. It's that they're the areas of the subculture. It's like in London, Camden is where other people who break free of the conformity or the mainstream congregate. It just becomes accepted and people wear sort of the awesome, crazy stuff in Harajuku. Nobody cares. So you always feel safe in Harajuku particularly. Shibuya as well because Shibuya's the Gyarū, and they're still stretching fashion. ... They're not wearing knee-length skirts and little tops like you get girls in Ginza wearing. They're still

kind of doing their own thing with the short skirts and daring heels. Then Harajuku you get kind of people who, you know, Bohemian and Lolita, and etc. In Shinjuku as well, you kind of get that, and to an extent Ikebukuro. But anywhere out of those four areas, then Japan becomes very tricky – it becomes very conservative. [interview, March 25, 2010]

There is a certain style of dress associated with Ginza and other neighbourhoods, and one would not wear Lolita or feel comfortable doing so in these areas especially alone. It is not that other areas in Tokyo are unsafe, but, as Susan explains, she feels out of place anywhere else besides Harajuku or Shinjuku.

In recent years Harajuku's landscape has changed as international fashion retail chains like H&M, Zara, Top Shop, and Forever 21 have moved into the area, reflecting Japanese consumers' changing tastes for more affordable clothes



View of Harajuku's Takeshita street in the early morning. By noon it will be filled with people.
Photo by An Nguyen (2008).

with less focus on owning expensive brand-name items as the country continues deeper into recession. Urban development projects are also currently undergoing renovation in Yoyogi Park right at the location where the Rockabilly dancers used to congregate every weekend. Though they still go there to dance to Rock n' Roll music, wearing leather jackets and 1950's circle skirts, the space to do

so has been diminished. The overhaul of Harajuku and higher rents are redefining the atmosphere and experience of the neighbourhood for everyone, not only Lolitas. Lolita fashion has lessened in popularity over time. As Lolita brand stores scaled back or closed completely, the department store La Foret, used clothing shops on Takeshita Boulevard, and the intersection between Meiji Road and Omotesando Road leading towards those areas remain the only places one can expect to regularly see Lolitas. In fact, the areas people would typically traverse while wearing Lolita have become limited to a one-or-two-block radius.

As rent has risen over the years, the major roads are lined with retail shops from international brands, but the side streets that make up Cat Street, or Ura-Harajuku, away from the busy roads are more varied in character, including hair salons and shops selling smaller Japanese clothing labels headed by newer designers and used clothing. The prestige of the international fashion houses like Chanel and Dior on Omotesando contrasts with the quirkiness of the smaller Japanese labels giving Harajuku its unique character. The areas away from the main streets are very quiet and offer respite from the hustle and bustle of Omotesando and Takeshita Boulevards. Often, there are only one or two other people walking on the same street, and it is so quiet that it seems like a still oasis in the middle of Harajuku. There are some boutiques such as H. Naoto, Miho Matsuda and Putumayo located in this area that are of interest to Lolitas, but the number of people wearing Lolita in these areas is not as great as on Takeshita and at La Foret where the shops that interest them are concentrated.

Harajuku has become a less important place for Lolita and Gothic fashion because Shinjuku also has different branches of the clothing stores. The Shinjuku ward has one of the largest train stations in Tokyo and is a hub station connecting many suburb areas to the city centre. It is more convenient to go to Shinjuku from certain suburbs where more train and metro lines enter the station, unlike Harajuku which can only be reached by the Yamanote train line or Meiji-Jingumae station on the Fukutoshin and the Chiyoda metro lines. The Fukutoshin line was newly completed in 2008 and connects Tokyo's secondary city centres Ikebukuro, Shinjuku, and Shibuya with the stop at Meiji-Jingumae located in between. The Fukutoshin station exits right in front of Shinjuku MaruiOne, a department store that has made Harajuku less relevant.

Shinjuku has a high concentration of department stores including Marui, Mitsukoshi, and Isetan. Before MaruiOne opened Lolita fashion shops could only be found in Harajuku. A department store that has catered to Gothic, Punk, and Lolita styles since it first opened in 1998, MaruiOne is part of Marui Co, Ltd. that owns some department stores in the Tokyo and Yokohama area. Marui Co, Ltd. has five other department stores in Shinjuku alone including the flagship building. When Lolita was at its height of popularity, alternative fashions used to take up all 8 floors and the basement, but by 2006 these fashions were limited to floors 5 to 8 with the bottom floors containing more subdued, mainstream looks from youthful and girly brands like Cocue, Franche Lippe, and Olive Des Olives. The floors containing the alternative fashions were also advertised as

'OneJuku' in reference to Harajuku.

MaruiOne moved to a different building in 2009 located across from the flagship. The concept of the department store was revamped: the layout of the store is more unified, reflecting the image tourists or those outside of Japan may have of Japanese street fashion by highlighting the subculture styles including Hime-gyaru, Gothic, Punk, and Lolita. Clothes inspired by traditional Japanese fabric designs, avant garde casual wear, colourful wigs and goods featuring the *kawaii*, or cute, aesthetic round out the selection of stores. There are no elevators that can be accessed by the public, and visitors can only move from floor to floor through escalators. Sets of escalators going opposite directions are placed side by side, forcing people to walk through each floor as they make their way up or down the department store. At each floor in front of each set of escalators are clothing displays and backdrops featuring street snaps from the pages of *KERA* magazine or art with a pop and cute taste by Japanese artists and illustrators. Especially on a weekday when it is less crowded, the atmosphere and set-up of the newly rebuilt MaruiOne seems like a museum in which one can also purchase the items on display. The entire building is an ode to Japanese street fashion, each floor having a theme like the *Wafu* (traditional Japanese motifs and clothing styles adapted for modern fashion) floor or the Gothic and Punk floor. There are 'event spaces' on the first and top floor in which function as rotating retail spaces and feature different themed shops every two weeks.

Another popular area with youth, Ikebukuro is best-known for having

many stores that cater to female *anime* and *manga* Otaku (fan culture) compared to Akihabara which has more establishments marketing to men. There are a number of Lolitas who go to Ikebukuro because of their interests in *anime* and *manga*. Otome Road (Maiden Road), a cluster of *anime* and *manga* retailers such as Animate and K-Books carry merchandise such as *dōjinshi*, or books containing fan comics or fan fiction, catering to a female clientele. Most of these books centre on boys love stories or male-male romantic pairings, some sexually explicit, others not. Closet Child also has a branch in Ikebukuro and Brand X located near Otome Road is a music shop specializing in independent Japanese rock that holds promotional events and autograph sessions with popular bands.

There is a concentration of maid and butler cafes or *dansō* cafes (women dressed in men's clothing) in Ikebukuro catering to women. The Swallowtail café is an example of a popular place which requires reservations two weeks ahead. Servers are dressed in maid or butler uniforms. Patrons are treated at the café as if they were a lady or gentlemen from a rich family, returning home and served tea and cake. In *dansō* cafes, patrons could pay extra money to chat one-on-one with the female servers dressed in men's clothing. Many of the young women who work in maid or *dansō* cafes are *anime* and *manga* fans themselves and thus have much in common with the customers who come to their store. These spaces offer customers an opportunity to experience a fantasy world in which they can pretend to be someone else if only for an hour or two.

It is partly because of what Harajuku stands for that Lolitas continue to

visit despite the waning popularity of the fashion in recent years. Whether I was attending a meet-up with international Lolitas living in Tokyo or meeting a Japanese Lolita to be interviewed in Shinjuku, when there was nothing left to be done in Shinjuku after browsing MaruiOne and Closet Child, it was often decided by the people I was with that Harajuku should also be visited. We would end up browsing through the same stores again and looking at slightly different stock, but somehow the day did not feel complete without going there.

A Place Called Harajuku

For those who had experienced what Harajuku was like in the past, it may no longer seem as interesting, but Harajuku retains its importance, symbolical and actual, for innovation and creativity in Japanese fashion both in and out of Japan. The kind of style that is popular in Harajuku now is very different from what is showcased at North American *anime* conventions or in newspapers and fashion magazines overseas. Even if it is in no way representative of popular youth fashions at the moment, only particular kinds of subculture fashions like Lolita and Gothic fashion get featured because they are visually different from anything offered in the North America and as such are recognizably 'Japanese.' People who have never been to Japan often say that one of the things they want to do is go to the bridge in Harajuku to see the youth fashions. For many North American Lolitas, Harajuku has a special mythical status. Not only is it an exciting shopping place, but it is envisioned as a place in which they can go to feel that they belong.

Best friends Monica and Laura are both of Mexican heritage and grew up in Los Angeles. The two young women, both university students, visited Tokyo for the first time in 2008. Japan felt like a “home away from home,” and they described it as “walking into everything you ever loved” (interview, Monica, November 6, 2009). They felt they fit in because Tokyo contained so many things that were associated to their interests, including fashion and music. Monica and Laura visited the Jingubashi, often called ‘the Bridge’ by English-speaking Japanese street fashion enthusiasts, during their trip and when recounting the experience were excited about the feeling of “community” and “connectedness” they observed in Harajuku that they felt was missing in Los Angeles.

Monica: We don't have that type of community here in the States, I don't think – the closeness that they have over there. Everyone seems very uniform, but they really emphasize the group over there. I remember just seeing groups of people and the only time we get into a big group is at a meet-up, you know? Over there it just seems so much more connected. ... By nature, the U.S. emphasizes individuality, you hardly ever do anything together, you know. It's usually by yourself. Get a job, by yourself, go to school, by yourself. Study, by yourself. So over there they just seem so much more connected, I don't know. Yeah.

Laura: They meet up on Sundays too actually to be all together, and they don't start fighting, they start complimenting on other people's clothing. And even one time people would sing and all join and sing along. [interview, November 6, 2009]

Sharing a similar experience, Maggie, a Caucasian high school student from Maryland, also wore Lolita and visited Harajuku after years of researching and looking at photos about Japan. Maggie described Harajuku as having a friendly atmosphere and compared it to the Baltimore *anime* convention Otakon, where I had met her, “except 10 times better” (interview, July 19, 2009). One of the most

memorable moments there was when she was on the Bridge and was allowed to photograph another Japanese Lolita who had ignored the tourists who requested a photo. Having seen photos on the Internet, she knew there were men who dressed up in Lolita on the Bridge and had seen this particular Lolita many times. She felt special when he let her take his photo. His acceptance distinguished her from the other people who wanted his photo. At that moment, she was not a tourist but was acknowledged as someone who belonged there.

Fed by the myth, the affinity that foreign Lolitas may have for Harajuku or Japan is derived from experiencing these places from a distance, their importance built on perceptions accrued from articles and images capturing Harajuku street fashion. The Bridge was an entry point for this imagined connection with Japanese youth that some hope to fulfill by someday travelling to Japan. Even if they feel they have no one around them that understands their interests, they can believe that in Japan, especially in Harajuku, they can finally feel like they belong and find others like them. The Bridge is long gone, but its memory lives in the hearts of those who never been to Japan and of those who were there in the past.

When Japanese Lolitas were asked to describe their memories and experiences in Harajuku or about the history of Lolita, along with description of clothing styles, it would invariably become a story about the Harajuku landscape – about what stores used to be where and what was sold there, about the Jingu Bridge, the Hokoten, and the people who gathered there. With their experience of Lolita entrenched in the landscape, those who started wearing Lolita five to

ten years ago find that a lot has changed and feel that it is not the same any more. The same thing occurred in Osaka where people would talk about Shinsaibashi and America-mura, also centres for street fashion and culture. In these stories, the focus was not interaction with other people but a remembrance of the places themselves and the people that filled them. When asked what they did on Jingu Bridge each Sunday, despite having spent several years regularly going there, the typical responses included "What *did* we do there? I guess we talked? But I don't remember about what." (interview, Yumiko, April 1, 2010) or "Actually we didn't do anything!" (interview, Satomi, March 7, 2010). Too many memories have been built up and layered over time, making it difficult to choose one to pull out and talk about.

Instead, what was expressed was a keen sense of nostalgia and yearning for the Harajuku of the past, of 10 to 15 years ago when Visual Rock was popular throughout the country and the clothes associated with the music movement from Lolita to Punk were worn by more people. As the style has become less popular over the years, the stores associated with it have closed or moved to different locations to make way for new commercial ventures and fashion styles. Lolita, while still gaining new followers each year, is gradually being pushed out as newer style groups move in to build Harajuku into a different kind of place.

Lolita brand Angelic Pretty designers Asuka and Maki, who used to go to Harajuku often when they were younger before they started careers in the fashion also talked about their memories of Harajuku's past. They reminisced

about the kinds of people found at Hokoten each Sunday and the apartment buildings that used to house tiny boutiques and hair salons:

Asuka: Harajuku used to be a more interesting town than today. It's changed. Now there is *Shibu-hara-kei* which mixes together fashion from Shibuya and Harajuku. It's really popular so now you don't really know if something is from Harajuku or Shibuya. Before it was clear it was from Harajuku, but now you really can't tell. There are a lot of international brands and lots of sports shops now. There weren't that much - back then when we use to go there right?

Maki: There didn't use to be so many foreign brands.

Asuka: If you went to Omotesando there were some but there was Vivienne and Gaultier². Now there are more high fashion stores.

Maki: If you mentioned Harajuku, there were the Dōjōkai Apartments. I guess you could say it has become more focused on more expensive tastes.

Asuka: I wonder about all the foreigners who come there [to Harajuku], if they find it interesting or not. They go to Jingubashi because the travel guides say there are weird people there.

An: But there really isn't anyone.

Asuka: Yeah, nothing but foreigners. The power that overflowed from the town was very intense, but it has become faded, so I want to try my best [as a designer].

Maki: Because it belongs to the world.

Asuka: We really do love Harajuku.

Maki: It's not like we grew up there or anything but we really admired it and gathered there.

² Asuka does not categorize Vivienne Westwood and John Paul Gaultier as 'international brands' even though they show each season on the fashion runways in Paris and New York, suggesting how these fashion labels are seen as closely related to Lolita, Gothic, and Punk aesthetic as opposed to fashion houses like Chanel or Dior.

Asuka: They say that Harajuku is the 'best place.' It used to be so unique so we want to keep on designing and creating. [interview, March 25, 2010]

Asuka and Maki exhibited a kind of pride about what Harajuku had inspired and a desire to recapture what was once glorious about the neighbourhood. The place constructed here is Harajuku, but it is a Harajuku that does not exist anymore except in memory and other records, relived again only when brought out in conversation.

These changes in landscape brought by outside forces such as the foreign stores encroaching into the Harajuku landscape are alarming not only for Lolitas but other fashions creators and designers in the area. Owner and creative director of Harajuku boutique 6%DOKIDOKI, Sebastian Masuda expresses a sense of protectiveness over what makes Harajuku unique. Commenting on the then grand opening of high-street retailer H&M for a newspaper article, Masuda said:

What concerns us about big chains coming to Harajuku is that the special atmosphere of this place might be lost. People are interested in Harajuku because it is full of styles that came from the street, along with stores owned by individuals. But when a chain is expanded around the world, it winds up creating the same kind of landscape everywhere you go. People might eventually lose the need to come to Harajuku if they can just get similar goods in their local town. [quoted in Macias 2008]

As its landscape evolves, how people relate to Harajuku, their perception of it, and what it means as a place will continue to shift. From the designer's perspective, there is a strong desire to hold on to the area's image as a centre for different and underground styles, but only time can tell what Harajuku

will become. These changes have radically transformed the space in Harajuku to the extent that Harajuku is split into two different places for Lolitas - the Harajuku of the past and the Harajuku of current times.

For those who have frequent access to city centres, their experience is situated in physical places. The time, history, and memory for Japanese Lolitas is mapped out on the landscape of the shopping areas they frequent and the changes over time related to those places, like stores closing, new ones opening or changes in what a store used to sell or in shop staff. With so many more people wearing Lolita in Japan compared to North America, the subculture is fractured into individuals who have no Lolita friends and small groups of friends who meet through their interests in Lolita, forming their own social networks that socialize independently. They are tied to shared places that are not necessarily dependent on close interaction with people outside their own social group. Especially for those who live in or have access to the metropolitan areas of Japan, the common experiences shared between all Lolitas are in the shopping areas. The shops draw people from surrounding neighbourhoods and suburbs who adopt the same style aesthetic as found in the shops. The history of Lolita is founded on and remembered through the landscape of these places - Harajuku and Shinjuku in Tokyo, Amemura in Osaka, Sakae in Nagoya - that in turn informs the perception of the fashion outside of Japan.

Lolita's Fluid Spaces and Places

During a public talk, explaining why she decided to have a small table selling her clothes at a rock concert in Shibuya even though the event had no direct connection to fashion or the kinds of clothes she made, former designer for Metamorphose and currently working on her own designer label Physical Drop and Love Dice 56, Katō Kuniko stated that she wanted Lolitas to create places and occasions to wear Lolita outside the interaction between shop staff and customer:

There are some people who buy clothes and when going out would only go shopping because they don't have anywhere else to go. I'm not saying that those people are to be pitied, but they don't have any place to go so they buy clothes and wear them to go to the shop. They can't make any friends, but the shop staff are not their friend. The staff are there to help assist them when they buy things, not to be their friend. So, without a place to go to, they buy clothes, and wear them to buy more. Of course the shop staff is going to tell them they are cute. But it's an repetitive cycle, and that seems like a waste. A really big waste. [May 3, 2010]

One of the key points of her talk was to address some of the issues she has seen within the Lolita subculture gained from her years of experience as a designer. She encouraged people to be more creative with how they coordinated their clothes, be less judgemental of people who did not wear subculture fashions, and emphasized handmaking or personalizing clothing. Katō also wanted people to find ways to wear their clothes every day or more often, turning them from clothes only for special occasions into what she called “real clothes.” and taking their experiences connected to the clothing beyond a cycle of consumerism and interaction with shop girls.

In Japanese clothing subcultures, the shop staff play an important part in creating new style trends and 'charisma shop girls' have a talent for attracting customers who desire to copy their style, sometimes buying entire outfits the girl may be wearing that day (Kawamura 2006). For many, the relationship maintained with a certain shop girl plays a significant role in how they experience Lolita fashion. From a clothing brand's standpoint, this is an important factor in gaining new customers and forming brand loyalty. Katō calls for a movement away from this interaction as the only one people partake in while wearing Lolita. However, for someone like Satomi who is not interested in any additional hobbies typically connected with Lolita like music and sometimes *anime* and *manga*, his relationship to Lolita is strictly with the fashion and clothes. Now that Jingubashi in Harajuku is no longer as popular, the places associated with Lolita have become restricted for him. While wearing Lolita, Satomi finds that mostly he is browsing the shopping areas in Shinjuku and Harajuku, interacting with the shop girls with whom he has a good rapport, and going to a café for tea and cake or a light meal. Occasionally he may traverse this routine with a friend or two, but typically he is usually alone and rarely does he participate in environments in which there are a large number of other Lolitas. When he has free time he goes to a cat café while wearing Lolita where he pays money for a drink and pet and play with cats for an hour or two. Sometimes he goes to eat out by himself, wearing Lolita while trying out new 'family restaurants' and writing reviews to post on the Internet. Lolita has become

associated with this routine of shopping and eating out, and Satomi has a familiar route that covers mostly Shinjuku and Harajuku – these are the clothes he wears to traverse it. He does not appear unhappy with this arrangement as he shows no desire to change the way he is enjoying Lolita or what he does when wearing it. He is not interested in expanding his current circle of friends, many of which he had made during his time hanging out in Harajuku, and his experience reflects that of many others. However, he finds that he is wearing Lolita less and less compared to when he used to go to Jingubashi.

For some people, Harajuku was never an important place filled with nostalgia, beyond being a place where they could buy the clothes they liked. After all, even when it was at its height of popularity, not everyone went to the Hokoten or stood at Jingubashi every weekend. For some, their experiences in Lolita are practiced elsewhere in temporary, fluid places anchored not on physical landscapes but in events where it is appropriate to wear Lolita and do it with other people. Many who were introduced to Lolita after the boom years are continuing to participate in certain events. They are thus carving out their own places, creating a different trajectory in Lolita's history that is not necessarily reliant on shopping neighbourhoods. The variety of events is an indication of the different spectrum of Lolitas who come to wear Lolita through diverse avenues. Events include tea parties (*ochakai*) organized by clothing shops or individuals, *ofukai* (off-line meetings) similar to tea parties except specifically used to describe gatherings that bring together people who originally met on the

Internet, 'indies' rock concerts, flea markets, and *dōjinshi*, or self-published fanzine events that are similar in spirit to North American *anime* conventions. There are people who are only interested in wearing Lolita by themselves and do not seek out other Lolitas or only enjoy spending time with some close Lolita friends, but these events are important for those who want to engage in a social setting with other Lolitas and meet new people.

Store-sponsored tea parties are small intimate affairs with around 10 to 20 people in attendance. These parties organized by the local sales staff at a franchise shop are a way to strengthen brand loyalty and are supposed to offer customers a way to connect with one another while enjoying tea and a meal or

light snack. Designers, popular models or musicians may make an appearance and attendees are required to wear clothing from the brand. Tickets to the tea parties are usually given away for free with a purchase. There is often a bingo game or a drawing for prizes and a display of upcoming clothing designs available for pre-order only at the event.



Array of cakes at an event for Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* film hosted by Shinjuku MaruiOne department store at Christon Cafe. Photo by An Nguyen (2010).

One event I attended was a perfect example of the close partnership between magazines, department stores, individual clothing brands, and the music and movie industry. A promotional event hosted by the MaruiOne department store for the then-upcoming release of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* film was held at the Christon Café in Shinjuku in March 2010. The event opened with the movie's preview trailer, followed by a fashion show featuring both Lolita and Gyaruru brands that have stores in MaruiOne and two live performances by cellist and singer Wakeshima Kanon and duo Kokushoku Sumire. The fashion show models were popular 'reader' models from *KERA* magazine. With 150-200 people in attendance, this was the first time that I saw this many Lolitas concentrated in one place in Tokyo. The free tickets were given in pairs at shops inside MaruiOne a week before the event, so many people came with their friends or their boyfriends, some dressed in Gothic or Aristocrat style. The Christon Café is a Christian-themed restaurant franchise. The interior is decorated with crosses, altars, statues of angels, a large chandelier and other motifs that reimagine a European church from the Middle Ages with a Gothic touch as interpreted by the Japanese. There was a small sweets buffet and free beverages. The live performances were held on the stage at one end of the restaurant and the models in the fashion show ascended from the staircase to the second story on the other side. At such a large event it is impossible to talk to everyone, and people tended to stick to their own groups or sit with people who wore similar clothes. However, it is a rare to see so many Lolitas wearing

different styles of the fashion in one place, and along with the concerts and fashion shows, the opportunity to look at other Lolitas and be looked at is another reason to attend such events, evidenced by the many attendees who wore their best outfits with perfect makeup and hair.

Aside from these events sponsored by the larger clothing companies and department stores, there have always been individuals or small groups involved in the Gothic and Lolita subculture dedicated to organizing and hosting tea parties, night club events, flea markets, and other kinds of events. Flea markets or sales events held throughout the year like Alamode Market in Tokyo and AIDILA and Romantic A la Mode in Osaka showcase 'indies' designers throughout the country. Table space is sold to sellers who hawk wares such as clothing, accessories like hats and jewellery, stationery goods, and dolls and doll clothing. The event I attended in Tokyo also had young women selling photographs or videos of themselves posing in Gothic and Lolita clothing. A number of them were also involved in *anime* and *manga* fandoms as cosplayers, an indication of the crossover between *anime* and *manga* and Lolita fashion. There are a number of indie brands at these events that may not fit the typical Gothic or Lolita aesthetic showcased in the magazines. Each indie brand exhibits its creator's own vision of what they believe Lolita should be in terms of style, design, and ideals even if what they create is no longer in tempo with major brands, reflecting a nostalgia for designs from the past that are no longer being created, or pushes the boundary of Lolita style in an attempt to redefine it.

Further discussion can be found in Chapter 4.

Similar to the MaruiOne event, what I noticed at these markets was how attendees did not speak to one another unless they already knew the person from elsewhere or were talking to a seller. Attendees seemed more interested in the wares on sale than making new friends. Sellers, on the other hand, by default were more sociable. At flea markets, the focal point of verbal communication was between sellers and buyers who both shared a love for a certain aspect or style of Lolita fashion displayed in the wares offered on a seller's table. This commonality and the monetary-goods exchange creates an opportunity for some kind of verbal exchange that may lead to further conversation.

Live concerts, often called 'lives,' for certain bands in the *Visual-kei* genre also are gathering places for Lolitas. If a band has a member who dresses in a Lolita-like stage costume or the band has really elaborate and fantasy based costumes they are more likely to attract Lolitas. *Visual-kei* bands typically have a primarily female fan base, and many young women copy the outfits worn by band members or wear Lolita believing that the best way to attract the band's attention is to wear something that complements or outright copies the aesthetic displayed by the band on stage. In recent years, *Visual-kei* bands are veering towards outfits that draw inspiration from styles associated with host clubs or

Gyaru-o.³ Likewise, female fans have changed their dress to the complementary Hime-gyaru or a combination of Hime-gyaru and Lolita. During the *Visual-kei* band boom, bands donned decadent historical or fairy tale-like costumes that drew influence from the Victorian era, Western Gothic subculture or Japanese conceptions of Western extravagant costumes like those also found in girls' comics, or *shōjo manga*. There are fewer bands exhibiting this aesthetic, but fans continue to wear Lolita to these concerts. There are some fans for whom the main interest is music; for them Lolita is an offshoot of that, something they picked up on later after attending concerts and seeing others wear it. Though it may help if the other person also wore Lolita, it is primarily shared musical interests that bring people together. Concerts occur frequently, especially in Tokyo, and people who like a certain band tend to like other kinds of bands. A frequent concert-goer can, within a year's time, establish themselves in the fan social network and be acknowledged by other fans. Lolitas who frequently attend concerts have more opportunities to create a close social network of 'live' friends than those who only limit their Lolita wearing to shopping trips. There is a particular 'livehouse' culture that defines proper etiquette and behaviour as well as set standards for participations during concerts. The experience of attending a concert with a group of people leads to stronger social connections

³ Gyaru-o are the male equivalent of Gyaru, a fashion subculture associated with the Shibuya neighbourhood.

that are predicated on music interest and shared memories rather than similar fashion interests.

Finally, there are *dōjinshi* events like Comiket and Comic City that occur across the country, drawing all types of people, not only Lolitas. *Dōjinshi* are short run self-published books, many of them fan books, parodying existing *anime* or *manga* works through fan comics or fiction. There are also original works but parody *dōjinshi* outnumber them. These books are produced by individuals or groups working under a 'circle,' or club name. In addition to books and paper goods like stationery, some of the larger events also draw circles that produce fashion accessories like jewellery or items connected to Lolita fashion. At these events there are often people who cosplay *anime*, *manga* or videogame characters. Not everyone wears Lolita, but because of the cosplay element, *dōjinshi* events are safe and accepted spaces to wear Lolita or any other kind of subculture fashion.

Like Tokyo, cities like Osaka and Nagoya also had places that functioned as Sunday gathering places that no longer exist. In Osaka it was the Osaka Castle Park, and in Nagoya it was the Nagoya TV Tower. There seems to be a more concentrated effort from the same group of people in Osaka and Nagoya to organize regular meet-ups and tea parties that are open to new and old participants alike. Compared to Tokyo, both cities have a smaller number of events and the frequent tea parties may fulfill a much needed gap by providing an alternative for Lolitas to gather.

With a population of 18 million, Osaka is Japan's second largest city but is not as large as Tokyo with a population of 35-39 million. The bulk of Lolita shops are contained within Amerika-mura (America Town). It is often referred to as Ame-mura by locals, so named because of the surfer clothing stores influenced by Hawaii and West coast surfing culture in the early 1970s. The small-scale replica of the Statue of Liberty is still a landmark in Ame-mura today. Located near Shinsaibashi shopping street, the retail and entertainment area is filled with shops that cater to different kinds of subculture fashions and is a popular hang-out spot with youth. Unlike Tokyo, where most of the Lolita clothing shops are in department stores, the shops in Ame-mura are stand alone storefronts and are scattered throughout the area. In the centre of the neighbourhood is Sankaku Park (Triangle Park) which is also a popular hangout spot on the weekends but not for Lolitas, though they can be spotted around Shinsaibashi shopping alone or with friends. Several years ago, Osaka Castle Park also used to attract amateur bands, Lolitas, and cosplayers on Sundays, similar to Harajuku's Yoyogi Park in Tokyo. People will undoubtedly say that Ame-mura is the center for the fashion, but the areas associated with Osaka's Lolita subculture were never as centralized as Tokyo's. Osaka Castle Park itself is at least a couple stations away from Ame-mura on another metro line. In addition, there are number of Lolita shops and cafés like the Victorian Maiden press room or the Doll Dress Galerie Brocante beer café bar where monthly club events are held that are located in entirely different areas. Because of the city's

proximity with other areas, many Lolitas from the surrounding areas of Kyoto, Shiga, and Nara prefecture travelled frequently to Osaka to regularly participate in these events or meet-up with their close friends.

Those who went to Jingubashi complained about having their photo taken without consent especially by tourists and other outsiders. Unlike at Jingubashi, people are polite and respectful of one another at events, asking permission for photographs before taking them. Events are often held indoors and offer an enclosed, safe space that shuts out most outsiders, giving participants an opportunity to wear Lolita without fear of being accosted or treated like an object on exhibit. On my way to a flea market from the train station, I observed the people walking in the same direction, heading to the same destination. Among them was a man dressed in a long black coat, his face with no make-up, and his hair short. He looked like a regular guy in a men's trench coat. But upon reaching the market, he took off the coat to reveal a black and white knee-length Lolita dress underneath. Before he left for the day, he once again adorned the coat and buttoned it up before making his way back to reality.

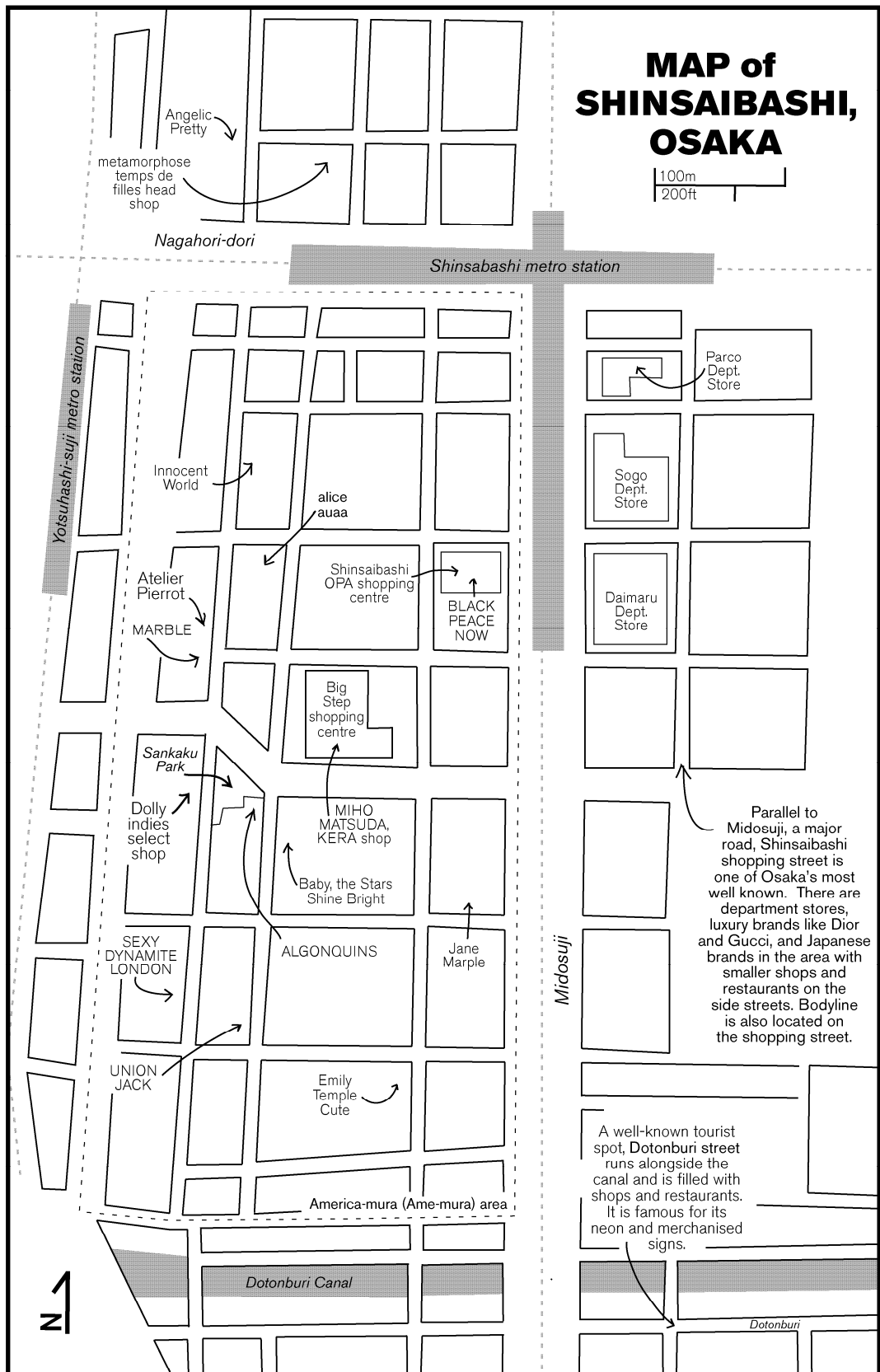
As mentioned earlier, I observed at tea parties or flea markets that people rarely talked to people they did not know. People caught up with old friends and looked at the outfits other people wore. From an American perspective, behaviour at these events can be baffling or even frustrating, especially since the tea parties in North America function as a way to talk to other Lolitas and make new friends:

It's really hard to break into the Japanese Lolita scene here without having those prior [social] connections. They do have tea parties here but you have to go one for almost a year before they open up to you. It's really hard. Even the Japanese Lolitas can't do it. Like the Baby [the, Stars Shine Bright] tea parties here my friend went to one once. It was so boring because no one talked to each other. They were there to experience the event not each other. Like, they wouldn't talk to each other. They were really quiet, they wouldn't really make any small talk because they're so shy and they don't trust people. So it takes them a long time to trust people. And then even if they're with a friend, they're around eight other people they don't know so they're going to be really secluded even if they're with a friend. They don't even talk to the friend that much since they don't want to seem like they're grouping because they would alienate everybody else but they don't want to talk to anybody else. [interview, Deborah, April 16, 2010]

Even though tea parties hosted by individuals are open to newcomers, Deborah feels that it is difficult to break into this group, requiring regular participation over a period of time before one is accepted as a member. Her commentary suggests that Japanese Lolitas tend to be shy and unwilling to step out of their shell to be social with one another, creating an atmosphere that is both a result of and the reason why Japanese Lolitas are more interested in hanging out with their friends than trying to foster a sense of belonging to a larger Lolita group. At the same time that she points out issues concerning Japanese Lolita subculture, as entry into any kind of social group as a new-comer requires time and patience within most contexts her comments also highlight the expectations North Americans have concerning 'community' and social interaction.

For Japanese Lolitas, enjoyment of these events does not necessarily require talking with other people, especially with people you do not know. Not talking does not mean people are not social or that the experience is any less important to them. Instead, people examine what others are wearing and how

they act from a distance. Their reactions are internalized and not verbalized except perhaps in the close company of friends. The moment of being there, perceiving the place and sharing that experience in the presence of other people is enough. The gatherings at the Jingubashi were by no means a permanent place as it only occurred on Sundays, but it was specifically rooted in a particular, unmoving point in the landscape. These events, on the other hand, are temporary and limited, scattered across different venues and cities across Japan, lasting only for a couple of hours despite the immense planning involved beforehand. Events divert from everyday life, creating a space for “collective performances of identity” (Maira 2003). To attend an event, to be seen there, to look at others is a declaration and reaffirmation of one’s identity as a Lolita.



II. Overseas and On the Internet

Wilson and Atkinson's (2005) study on rave music and straightedge groups in Canada provides an example of how the Internet has been integrated in youth subcultures and its participants' everyday lives, creating an overlap in connections between offline and online groups. Within these two groups, the Internet is used to organize and advertise events, concerts, and other get-togethers, but involvement in these subcultures is not experienced completely online. Lolitas in North America utilize the Internet in a similar manner to build and maintain local/national/international groups that meet frequently both online and offline while participating in a larger group of people organized through an Internet-based space. Though social interaction among those outside Japan does not depend strictly on virtual contexts, the development of the movement originally stems from places formed on the Internet which influences how Lolitas define and place importance on concepts like community, group formation, and social interaction. Face-to-face gatherings are temporary, temporal, and occasional. Sustained exposure to Lolita fashion is achieved through various tools and mediums via the Internet. It is impossible for most people to come to Harajuku every day, but this physical place exists in the real world and becomes a destination to which it is possible to travel. Instead, outside Japan, the English-language EGL Livejournal (LJ) community and the LJ social networking platform was the focal point, the locus of activity during its peak period from 2004 to 2010; and one gains prestige and notoriety as a Lolita

through posting photos of one's outfits and contributing in other ways to these spaces.

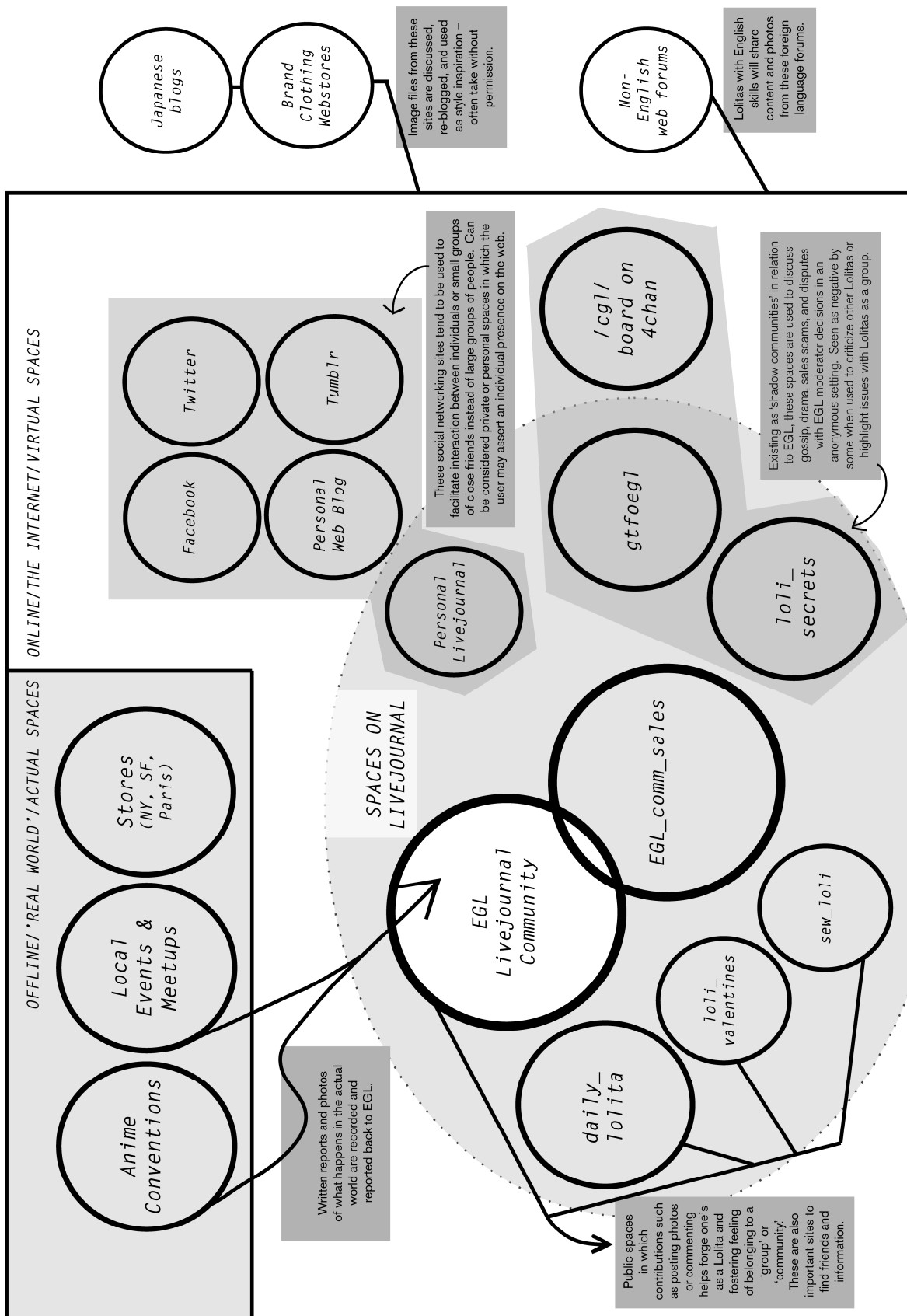
Locally or nationally-based groups outside the Internet, especially in North American and European countries, gradually developed over time after Lolita fashion was at the height of its overseas momentum around 2005-06. Prior to that, interaction with other Lolitas was dependent on various mediums on the Internet, and these tools helped to create these actual world connections in the first place. A lack of a physical landmark place like Harajuku meant that from the beginning Lolita fashion enthusiasts outside Japan were reliant on the EGL and other platforms on the Internet as a way to 1) learn about the fashion and keep up to date on new styles from official websites and from other Lolitas through blogs and forums; 2) exhibit and develop their own sense of Lolita style through posting photos and receiving feedback; 3) observe and meet other Lolitas and make friends; 4) learn about, organize, and participate in local and national events; and 5) buy and sell Lolita clothes, facilitated through buying from companies or from other individuals.

As it becomes easier to obtain the physical clothing and as the style has become more visible and known among more people, the dynamics of the online Lolita fashion-centered forums and other social spaces have changed along with its growing population. That was not always the case, and many older North American Lolitas remember when it was more difficult to obtain information or purchase garments from Japan. People would rely on magazine scans and

discussions were concerned with technical questions like how to replicate the clothes, the shape of the skirt, etc. The knowledge of Lolita fashion's existence outside of Japan has been heavily intertwined with the dissemination of images depicting Japanese street fashion either on the Internet or through widely distributed books printed for a North American audience through 'official' and 'unofficial' channels. The distinction made between official and unofficial terms here is whether the source has permission from the original creator to distribute said media and has paid for the licence and rights to distribute in a certain part of the world. In addition, unofficial channels are typically associated with offering media to others for free. An example of an unofficial channel to access media would be someone who buys an issue of *KERA* magazine, scans their copy, and shares it with others on a site dedicated to sharing Japanese magazine scans, but they do not have the permission of INDEX Communications, the publishing company in Japan.

The rising knowledge about and visibility of Lolita fashion is intertwined with both of these modes of media distribution; moreover, the Internet is helping facilitate discussion and connection between people located in different geographical locations. Not everyone who comes across a book containing photos of Japanese street fashion wants to emulate the clothes or learn more about it, but for those who are moved by these images, the Internet offers a way for them to find more information and connect with others.

MAP OF KEY ACTUAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES AND PLACES FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKING LOLITAS



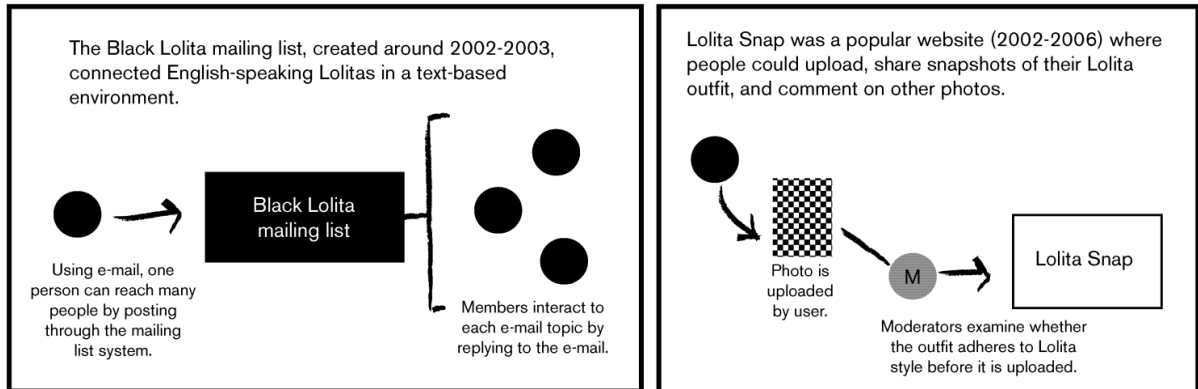
The following section is dedicated to examining the development of a sense of place and changes in group sociality and formation in virtual and actual settings within the context of the fashion's movement outside Japan. Perceptions and feelings associated with these interactions are discussed in-depth and reveal feelings of conflicts, tensions, drama, sisterhood, connectedness, and community that demonstrate how important Lolita fashion is for its wearers.

The EGL Community on Livejournal and Other Internet Spaces

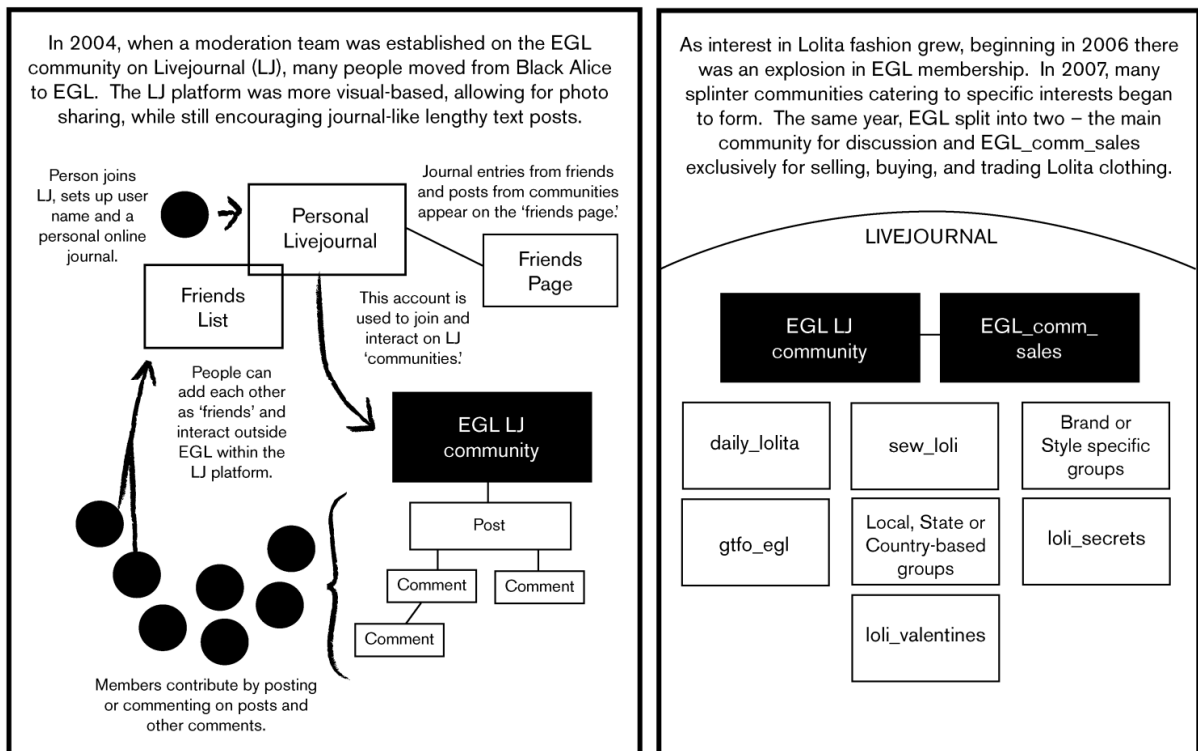
There are many places for interaction on the Internet for those interested in Lolita fashion, but the EGL LJ community (<http://egl.livejournal.com>), also referred to as 'EGL' or 'the EGL LJ comm' by its members, has remained one of the most popular since its creation in 2001, and the perception of Lolita fashion amongst outsiders who do not wear Lolita fashion but have an interest in some aspect of Japanese popular culture is in part influenced by the image these people have of EGL Lolitas as a whole. The diagram on the previous page provides an image of the current important actual and virtual spaces for North American Lolitas. Though EGL has become less active over the years because people have moved to other online social networking tools, it still remains an important place for Lolitas to gather online. This section briefly looks at changes in Internet tools and online interaction over time for international Lolitas.

Before the EGL LJ community gained popularity, two early forms of sociality for Lolita fashion were found in a mailing list and a website for posting

photos. This diagram illustrates the nature of the environment and interaction system:



Interaction with other Lolitas online changed with the introduction of a more visual-based platform through the LJ website that combined the functionality of a blog, an on-line forum, a blog feed reader in one convenient web-based platform:



EGL became more widely used starting in 2004, when a team of moderators, commonly known as mods, were introduced. Before the formation of a mod team, the community was described by long-time users as unorganized, overrun with flame wars and unrelated posts like sales posts for furry leg warmers that had no relation to Lolita fashion. Many people who were around during this period refer to this as the 'Wild West days' of EGL.

Since then, the community has ballooned to around 16,000 members though not all are active contributors. As EGL's membership increased, what was considered acceptable to be posted on the community changed over time and more control is exerted by mods as the amount of new content and potential for conflict and issues between members also increases. Usually a mod has some kind of social prestige within the group as a Lolita or is considered trustworthy by the current mod team before being nominated to the 'mod' position. The mod team, all volunteers, helps regulate the EGL community, dispel disputes between members, determine what kinds of posts are appropriate, and deal with problem members, trolls, and spammers, among other issues.

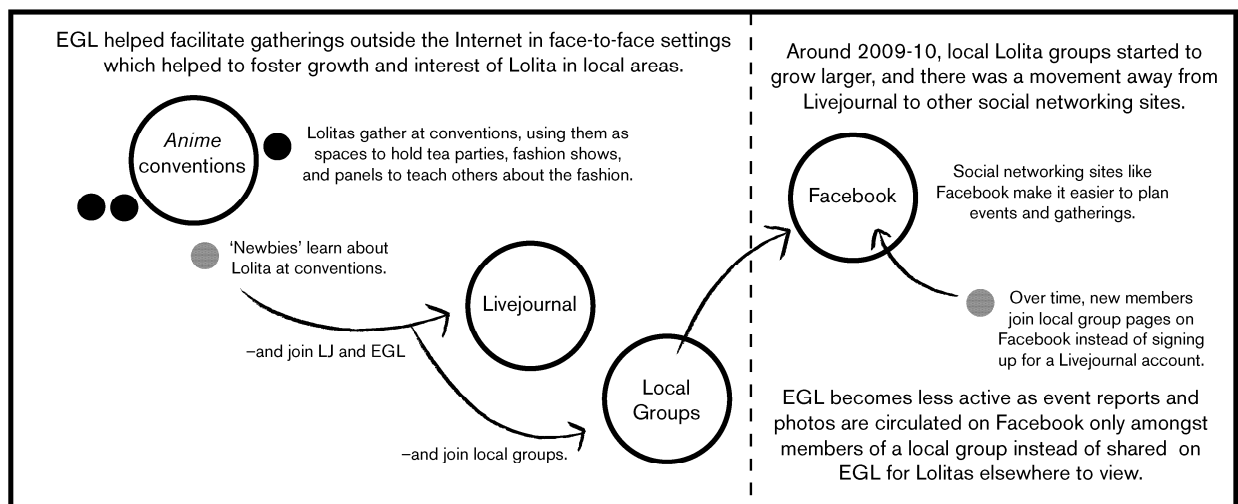
In 2007, as the volume of daily posts were beginning to become difficult for the moderators to manage, EGL split off sales-related posts to a sister community, EGL_comm_sales, and sales and buying were no longer allowed on the main EGL page. Members purchase and sell new or used clothing with other members. Currently, moderators review all potential sales posts before approving them, checking for whether the items advertised for sale fit into the

Lolita fashion aesthetic and whether they are of reasonable quality. Though members can question mod decisions, this decision to moderate all sales posts gives mods control over what items do or do not qualify as Lolita or 'Loliable.' The move toward heavy moderation of sales posts stems from the many different incidents over the years in which people from within the group have 'scammed' other members, either stealing money, refusing to send goods or providing goods or services not as described.

One important splinter community that emerged out of the boom of new Lolita-related groups on LJ is Daily Lolita ([daily_lolita](#)), created in 2007. Daily Lolita is only for photo posts showcasing outfit snapshots. Posts on Daily Lolita are a way to gauge someone's online popularity. More recognized and popular Lolitas receive more comments on their posts and commenters are typically more lenient in their critiques when the original poster deviates from the typical rules of Lolita if they are popular.

When the LJ online service began in 1998, it was based out of San Francisco. In 2007, the company was bought by the Russian media company SUP. By 2009, the development and maintenance of the site was completely taken over by staff in Russia. There have been changes made to the LJ site in correlation with this change in management and staff, including more ads and changes in the terms of service agreement with LJ users. Users claimed that there were more spambots and that some of these ads had caused computer viruses, leading many to abandon their LJ account. Despite the problems with LJ,

Lolitas still gathered on EGL, but as local groups grew and newer social networking sites were introduced combined with problems with LJ, such as server downtime, EGL became less active over time:



Starting in 2009-10, Lolita fashion had grown and become more spread out for North American Lolitas. Not only have locally-based groups and activities expanded, but there is more ease of access to clothing direct from Japan and wider flow of information about the fashion. Japanese brands also began to reach out more to their international clientele at the same time. Designers are invited as guests to conventions where they present fashion shows and sell their clothes. Brick-and-mortar stores have been opened in San Francisco, New York, and Paris. This is combined with the introduction of social network sites like Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Flickr, and Blogger that all allow users to build an online personality. There are now more ways to learn about Lolita fashion and avenues to meet and interact with other Lolitas outside LJ and EGL. As people continue to add newer Internet networking tools to their online repertoire their

time online and the original content they may create becomes divided across a larger number of platforms. Therefore, EGL is no longer the centre for Lolita fashion online and is past the peak of its popularity with less discussion on the main community compared to 2005-2009, but the sales community continues to be heavily active. Symbolically EGL still remains widely recognized as a place for Lolas to gather on the Internet and connect to others around the globe. It brought people together on a global scale and helped to facilitate growth of local groups and exchange of information and clothing internationally.

Within a short time span of under ten years, a lot has changed in terms of the platform and places where Lolas can gather on the Internet and technological advances have had a role in shaping the environment in which people interact with one another. The growth of Lolita fashion and the history of its related online spaces demonstrates a movement that grew from smaller, intimate numbers that reached a boom in population leading to increased information, interactions, and conflicts exchanged between members. After reaching a certain point the movement becomes spread out and splintered into smaller groups. Through intense connectivity, the Internet helps to speed the growth and dissipation of social movements. The next two sections deal specifically with the experience and opinions of people who were actively engaged with EGL when it was at the height of activity.

The Underground of EGL and Internet Drama

The anonymous Internet survey I conducted in 2009 had many participants who were members or readers of EGL. In the multiple choice question, "Do you belong to any Lolita or Japanese fashion related communities on the Internet? How involved are you? Participation can include making new posts or commenting on others' posts," I also received many comments in the fill-in box in which survey participants voiced their opinions, painting the online community and/or people on the community as "negative," "mean," "nasty," "annoying" or "scary." Below is a selection of comments received:

I don't contribute to the main lolita [sic] community because the overall culture there is kind of juvenile and negative and shallow, and I feel it is populated by people who are less in touch with reality than those I'd prefer to associate with. [survey, Anonymous, 2009]

I used to be an active member of the EGL community on LJ but then what was call 'drama' started to run rampant and I was tired of answering the same questions over and over again. Thus, I post when I feel the need but I also rarely check. I'm more active on the sister community EGL_comm_sales because Lolita is about sharing and wearing, not whining. [survey, Anonymous, 2009]

i [sic] have only been a member of any online communities for a year or two at most. i refused earlier on to join because of moral reasons. i believe most of the girls who are into the fashion use the internet as a way to bully each other and i just don't have the patience for that sort of thing. my impression of all other lolitas as that point was negative because of the select few i knew online who were total bitches. i have come to see most people are decent [sic] and there are one of two which are nameable which cause trouble and they are the rotten ones rather than [sic] the community. [survey, Anonymous, 2009]

EGL is a wonderful community but I wish some of the girls would be kinder. I know that lurkers that don't lurk long enough may ask repeated questions because they don't use the search engines but I hate seeing people get trashed on the internet. My first post to EGL was trashed terribly because people

misunderstood my question. I haven't brought it up again for fear of getting trashed once more. [survey, Anonymous, 2009]

The opinions expressed here are consistent with what I encountered when interviewing North American Lolitas. Within the span of one interview, the description of the “Lolita community” can run between two extremes, from a “close sisterhood” where good friendships are born to a place where “bitchness” and “general cattiness” reign (interview, Denise, July 11, 2009). EGL is seen as a rather restrictive place where people are ready to jump on others who wear Lolita incorrectly. Some of this animosity is directed at ‘newbies,’ or inexperienced members. With so many new members joining EGL every day, members often see the same questions asked over and over again, posted by newbies who do not use Google search or check the community ‘Memories’ that cover many questions and concerns common to beginners to the fashion. Those new to EGL tend to ‘lurk,’ afraid of soliciting angry responses if they did something wrong the first time they posted or commented. Based on the write-in comments for the question about online community participation, many people expressed this fear or anxiety about contributing to the community and becoming involved in ‘drama.’ A ‘survival guide’ on the blog Doll Part (2009) is an example of blogs or websites that present pointers for newbies on how to make their first post to EGL without offending anyone or starting drama.

‘Drama’ can be defined as any conflict, argument, disagreement, rumour or opinion that gets blown out of proportion, sometimes culminating at the point

of absurdity. Mods on EGL help quell any conflicts, trolls, and flame wars. They may delete comments or posts that seem inappropriate and potentially may themselves cause drama. Though members on EGL can be 'mean' or 'negative' in their comments on posts, the mod team is around to make sure that certain situations do not escalate. Moderators for the EGL sales community are also available to help resolve conflicts between members when a transaction goes wrong. Get Off EGL and Lolita Secrets on LJ and /cgl/, the cosplay and EGL board on anonymous image board 4chan, are examples of 'drama,' 'wank' or 'hate' communities that can be considered the underground or dark side of EGL. Unlike EGL, almost anything goes on these forums. Members can post comments and opinions that normally would be perceived as socially unacceptable on EGL.

One of the first hate communities on LJ was Lolita Fucks, created in 2005 by an anonymous LJ user who pretended to be a Japanese teenager. It was inspired by Cosplay Fucks, and members would post and discuss photos of people wearing 'cosplay Lolita' or clothes the group deemed as poor attempts at Lolita fashion or wrongly interpreting the underlying style aesthetics. Many photos of these 'Ita Lolitas' were taken at *anime* conventions. *Ita* is taken from the Japanese word *itai* meaning painful or sore. *Ita* is also said when something hurts and is the equivalent to 'ouch' in English. Japanese Lolitas use *ita* to describe someone who is wearing something horrible or in poor taste, and the use of *ita* among Lolitas on EGL stems from this usage. *Ita* can mean someone

who dresses poorly. Demeanour or personality can also be considered painful and labelled *ita* as well. Posts on the first incarnation of Lolita Fucks were not friends-locked so anyone, even non-members, could see whatever was being posted and said. As people began to react to the activity on Lolita Fucks on EGL, it soon became referred to as 'the community that must not be named.' Rules tightened up on the main community as moderators kept closer watch over interactions on EGL, and members could not be as openly mean to others.

Lolita Secrets is based on a concept similar to the popular website Post Secret in which people anonymously send the maintainer of the site images containing secrets they would have trouble revealing if they could not do so anonymously. Lolita Secrets is updated every Sunday with around 30 to 50 secrets. There are a multitude of different issues covered in these secrets each week, but some common themes include: critiques or personal attacks against the character of people on the Internet or in a local scene, racist or weight-related secrets including comments on how certain groups of people should not wear Lolita, general observations or comments about Lolitas as a whole, dislike of a certain style trend or sub-style of Lolita. To counter what is seen as the 'negative' atmosphere of sites like Lolita Secrets, another LJ community was created called Lolita Valentines showcasing anonymously submitted photos of Lolitas on EGL and Daily Lolita paired with text declaring admiration or praise for their outfit edited on to the image. Some valentines are submitted by people involved in a local group of Lolitas who want to show appreciation for their Lolita friends, but

a large number are from people who may not personally know the person in the image or have never interacted with her.

/cgl/ is a forum located off LJ on the anonymous image board 4chan (2003-) that is based on a similar design to anonymous Japanese image board Futaba Channel (2chan). /cgl/⁴ is the section on 4chan dedicated to discussion on cosplay and Lolita fashion. 4chan does not have a membership registration system, and posters are not required to enter a username when posting. When making a post without filling in the 'Name' field, the post will automatically be attributed to 'Anonymous.' The understanding on 4chan is that Anonymous is not an individual person but rather a collective hive of users. Content on 4chan is characterized by complex inside jokes and black humour. The /b/ board on 4chan, also known as the 'random' board, is infamous for its shocking and sometimes pornographic content. Not all boards on 4chan are like /b/, but the ability to post anonymously means that people can post degrading comments and personal attacks without having to worry about retaliation or direct responsibility for their actions. This coupled with unique jargon and modes of expression common throughout 4chan creates an intimidating environment. On /cgl/, anonymous users discuss drama on EGL and other forums and gossip about individuals' outfits and behaviour. There is a sense of paranoia surrounding /cgl/ especially because of incidents in which content from friend's

⁴ Cosplay + EGL equals 'Cgl.'

locked posts on LJ make it on to the board, suggesting betrayal from a 'friend' on LJ. Threads on /cgl/ are often deleted to make room for other posts on the server. Aside from screen captures of previous threads, there are no archives.

Get Off EGL on LJ, sometimes abbreviated as 'GTFO EGL,' is specifically for discussion about happenings on EGL when someone does something stupid or horrible that makes certain members just want them to 'Get the fuck off EGL.' Sometimes Get Off EGL responds faster than mods can act as members report on the community and make an archive of an offensive post, using tools like Freezepage before it is deleted on the main community. For the most part, people post and comment to this group using their existing LJ account. This provides a good place to discuss current drama and a way for people to be relatively outspoken, expressing their opinion without worrying that their comments may be moderated like on EGL. Get Off EGL can be considered a 'negative community,' but it also documents the development of drama in a way that is not done on EGL as controversial posts are quickly deleted by EGL mods. This is especially informative, for example, when trying to resolve certain kinds of drama e.g. scammers who take money from EGL members without providing services or goods as promised. It essentially acts as a historical archive that keeps track of turning points and drama that widely affected a large number of people within the network of Lolita groups on LJ.

These groups existing outside of EGL influence the overall perception that new Lolitas and outsiders to the fashion have about Lolitas' personality and

social interaction with one another. It creates an additional layer of tension as any activity on any Lolita-related space online may later appear on these forums where people may make critiques and other commentary behind the back of the poster. Many people do not follow activities on these communities and sometimes do not realize that they are being gossiped about unless they learn from someone else. These forums provide background remarks to activity on EGL, giving members an avenue to vent their frustrations, highlight and and make fun of underlying problems or issues on EGL and related communities, like when someone charges \$200 for a \$83 dress or asks a question that has been asked many times before. Get Off EGL also gives members a venue to question the actions of mods in a way impossible if they posted to EGL. But it also leads to self-regulation and creates an environment in which people are fearful they may unknowingly offend some anonymous Lolita and end up appearing on any of the drama communities. Thus, many turn to friends-locked entries on their own personal journal to vent and talk about certain things that they feel could potentially offend or cause drama if posted to EGL. When people talk about the negative atmosphere of EGL, they are not only talking about EGL but the combined atmosphere that arises from the fact that these drama communities exist in the first place. As members of these groups primarily also take part in EGL, by extension their behaviour becomes applied to the general perception of Lolitas on the Internet. Many of the drama communities mentioned here have become inactive or were deleted, but there will always be a subset of Lolitas who

create or find new avenues for drama discussion and gossip, reflecting the need for such spaces and interactions as a way to create bonds between people. The peak of EGL's popularity as a gathering place represented a time when the most drama incidents took place. Though these happenings shook the foundation of EGL and its members, these incidents were also shared experiences and memories that brought people together.

Conflicts and Distance

Most people who were already 'lurking,' choosing to watch from the sidelines instead of contributing to the conversation even when they were actively keeping track of the updates to EGL, turn away from EGL once they establish a group of 'Lolita friends' through their local community or on LJ where they limit their daily interaction to commenting on their friend's journals or writing their own. They remove EGL from their friends list so they no longer automatically receive the latest posts from EGL unless they visit the main page. Some still use LJ to keep track of the Lolita friends they made through EGL. Many choose to cut back their involvement on EGL because they lose interest in the fashion or become too busy in their life off the Internet to post more online, but I also met many more who left EGL because of drama or what they perceived to be problems within the group and with Lolitas in general.

Some people, like Stephanie, an Asian American living in Virginia, have become less involved over the years though she continues to keep track of related groups like Daily Lolita where she sometimes posts snapshots of her

Lolita outfits or Sew Lolita where she posts her current sewing projects and receives and gives feedback to others. Stephanie has been involved with the EGL LJ community ever since 2003 and remembers EGL's transition from the "Wild West days" to a moderated community. She became involved with local meet-ups in the Maryland, Virginia, and Washington D.C. area several years after joining EGL. Stephanie, considered a well-known member of EGL, still posts often on Daily Lolita and Sew Lolita though she restricts her participation to viewing EGL occasionally. She is currently exasperated with the status of EGL, believing that the community has grown too large:

I wish I could quit [EGL]. I feel like there's nothing worthwhile on there anymore. Before the community was small enough that you could get a decent amount of posts and decent amount of replies which were not completely overwhelming and people are less likely to jump on your throat for doing something wrong. But now everyone – every newbie starts off something by saying 'Please delete if not appropriate' – of course we'll do that – and then um, 'Please don't eat me,' you know. [laughs] So we got people who are fearful, who are one year into the fashion but think they know everything giving bad advice, people who have been in five or six years who can only give cynical remarks because they've seen everything and they think, you know, by being mean to people they gain some kind of like 'mean girl' status – that was the problem two years back when [an EGL member] was the instigator of all that drama before they banned Lolita Fucks from being mentioned. That was, like, huge – so much negativity coming out of that community that was like impossible to navigate through. ... I think the problem is 10,000 people? That's just too many people. That's why there's always splinter communities. Some are successful, some are not. [interview, Stephanie, July 18, 2009]

Beth, a 21-year old Caucasian woman, has also been involved with the Lolita fashion on the Internet for around the same amount of time. She found out about the fashion when she was 13 and bought her first dress when she was 15. She only just recently "disconnected" herself from communities like Lolita

Fucks and Get Off EGL by removing them from her friends list after spending so much time as a teenager contributing to these groups, making fun of people on the Internet for “acting stupidly.” Beth was one of the few Lolitas I met who talked extensively about her involvement on these drama communities. She said that her participation in these communities was “evidence that I spent too much time on the Internet” and felt that ultimately “creating creative output that is so hateful” was “even worse than doing nothing with your life” (interview, October 12, 2009). Trying to rationalize her behaviour at the time, Beth attributed her involvement in these activities to a desire to belong and become liked by making fun of others:

A lot of these girls are social outcasts, they didn't have friends in high school and now they are older they have all the money to buy all the brand and then they can be the queen bee. I think, a lot of the time, I would try really hard on Internet communities to get people to like me. I like making people laugh, and that started to grate on people because I didn't take myself seriously enough while wearing Japanese baby dresses. Especially more recently my outlook has changed, I don't post to Daily Lolita or anything because to me it's insincere to - for - like I don't have anything against Daily Lolita, I think it's really cool, but, comment count doesn't actually have a tangible effect on your value as a person. If you get a hundred comments, it's like indulgences. They think if they get enough comments they're gonna be - they're more valuable as a person. [laughs] I didn't like the feeling of getting caught up in that. [interview, Beth, October 12, 2009]

After an incident in which gossip and rumours involving her were posted on 4chan's /cgl/, Beth decided that she did not want her sense of worth to be determined by people on the Internet. Though she does not wear Lolita as frequently as before, she finds she continues to return to it because she has made friends both online and offline, including some who helped her when she and

her family were facing a tough time. However, after forming this group of friends Beth decided that she did not want to participate in Lolita-related Internet activities anymore. In addition, Beth felt alienated with the current local group largely consisting of newer and younger Lolitas. Though she does not harbour any particular dislike towards these Lolitas, she tried getting into the habit of attending meet-ups again and felt “old” being around them as she is at a different point in her life and in her understanding of Lolita, having been into the fashion for much longer.

For those that have been extensively involved in observing and contributing to EGL and its splinter groups like Beth and Stephanie, their conversation with me was very involved around their observations of behaviour on the Internet, constantly pulling from their memories of past events and incidents or drama to support and explain these opinions. When I first met Beth for our interview at a small tea shop in Pennsylvania, without any prompting from me, the first thing she talked about was about EGL and “the online community.” Both of these young women came from the early period of Lolita fashion’s development in North America in which the Internet was a very important and sometimes the only way to experience Lolita fashion in a group setting. It was through interaction on EGL that they made friends with other Lolitas and eventually found others in their local area. Stephanie harboured a sense of nostalgia for the time when EGL was a much smaller group:

Meghan Maude took over and got together a group of mods, and it became a cute, small little community. I really think you're seeing things through rose-coloured glasses now in retrospect but at the time I felt it was some place I really belonged. And like, I never really felt that in other communities before, not even in real-life. ... [Before there were] less people and less criticism. Like, you know, people are trying to learn all together. Nobody felt superior. That was the thing – there's more camaraderie and less judgment. I think it's inevitable after all these years of development. [2009]

EGL was portrayed by others as kinder compared to what it has become today even though there were conflicts and the occasional 'troll' that would upset the community. As EGL was her primary mode of interaction with other Lolitas, those like Stephanie feel a strong sense of belonging that is rooted in their experience of EGL that has over time become a meaningful place. As EGL membership has increased immensely from 3,000 members back in 2005, it is no longer the place that Stephanie remembers. Many of her "Lolita idols" from back then no longer actively participate on EGL and are rarely remembered.

With those who did not invest so much time and energy on Lolita-related Internet spaces, only occasionally checking EGL for updates on new clothing lines and event information, people only talked about the online community if I asked them about it. But, regardless of whether they are long-term EGL members or started to wear Lolita in the past year, everyone I met had some kind of opinion about the online community, most of it negative while also acknowledging that EGL is a good place for information and a way to make Lolita friends. Emily, Rachael, and Claire are represent a newer generation of Lolitas. Californians Rachael, an Indian-American, and Emily, a Caucasian, are

best friends who met in middle school through a mutual interest in Japanese and Korean music and fashion. Both are 19 years old and are university students studying science and business, respectively. They learnt about Lolita fashion because of the first Angelic Pretty event held at the PMX convention in Los Angeles. Claire (age 12) is Emily's younger sister and started to wear Lolita because of her sister. They often dress in the fashion together. They only started to use LJ after meeting an older Lolita active on LJ at AX, one of the largest *anime* conventions on the West coast. Out of the three, Emily is the most active on LJ, though compared to Beth and Stephanie she does not spend as much time on EGL nor is she as emotionally involved. Emily said that she started a LJ account because of the Lolita she met at AX, and after making some friends at another Lolita event at PMX that same year, she uses LJ to keep updated on the lives of her new friends. Since I met her, Emily has posted two to three photo posts to EGL. When asked about her opinion on EGL, Emily expressed a desire to distance herself from the happenings on it:

While I am a member of EGL I try to stay away from, like, some of the drama that happens because sometimes girls can post some things and a lot of mean comments and stuff were happening and also just the other communities on LJ called Loli Secrets and also GetoffEGL. And basically GetoffEGL is basically about (laugh) making fun of girls on EGL. Like, these girls post and they think they have the right, like, to tell other girls off. Like, the community is really mean and they think that they're better than us. ... And the thing with Loli Secrets is that because it's anonymous you don't know who said it, and like, when you read those things - I've read some of them and they are really stuck-up and mean and just nasty and horrible. And these girls just think that they have the right to put others down because they don't look like them or don't have the same things as them. I just think that's totally wrong so I try and stay away from that drama because first of all it makes me feel bad too, I mean, I read some of those things and I like oh, I could kind of apply it to myself when

I think about it. EGL I try to stay away from because of the drama but it's pretty good for, like, updates. [interview, Emily, November 7, 2009]

Like Emily, many Lolitas express disappointment with this vapid atmosphere on EGL and some of the members who perpetuate this environment by participating in drama or hate communities. Some like Grace (age 27), an Asian American, and Michelle have a distaste for “the girls in the community” and an overall negative attitude towards most Lolitas in general, characterizing them as shallow and judgemental. While talking to both in a restaurant in Harajuku, they discussed how they see the Lolita community, defined as both “the online community and real life,” as made up of individuals mostly interested in getting attention and obtaining desired material objects.

A lot of people see the community as an entity that you want to build and you want to support, but it's not - again it's just individual girls that make up this whole thing, and they're self-conscious, they want only the money, they don't care about the other people, they want their pretty dress, they want to look the best. [interview, Michelle March 24, 2010]

When asked how it is a community when it is made up of individuals, Grace replied, “It is their same interest in Lolita fashion,” but “these are girls I don't know and it doesn't mean I'm gonna like them just because they have the same interest ... You're not automatically friends with someone who is Lolita” (interview, Grace, March 24, 2010).

People join EGL and engage in their local Lolita group expecting to find a sense of community or a group to share with and belong to. Remembering the times when EGL was a smaller group, Stephanie felt that the only moment she

re-captured a similar sense of community recently was when Baby, the Stars Shine Bright released limited edition Lucky Packs on their website and many EGL members stayed up late, trying to keep track of when the website would be updated with these limited number items.

I felt that that night, where I sat in front of the computer, like posting comments, everybody was posting updates – that was the sense of community – I got that back that one night. It was so exciting, like everyone was like the same goal and no one – ‘Oh my god! Like I got 10 in my shopping cart - how do I remove it? I don't want to buy all that!’ ‘Buy it! Buy it! Give it to me!’ Like even if I didn't get any packs at the end, that was really fun, like a bunch of girlfriends doing goofy shopping things, like you know? And that was what I missed. But now it's a lot of snobbery. [2009]

Those rare instances of community-feeling come from shared interaction, when a large group of people are aimed at achieving one goal. Unfortunately for Stephanie, she finds these moments few and far between. Speaking about the leader of a group that has been involved in organizing Lolita fashion-centric fashion events, Michelle said, “She's trying to foster this community that she thinks really exists, she thinks it wants to be united under rainbows and ponies when really it's just a bunch of bitchy girls that wants their dresses, like, she thinks the community is something it isn't” (2010). This organizer desires to unite and build up the ‘Lolita Community’ through the events she puts together. However, it is unclear what exactly is meant by ‘community’ and what kind of unity she is ultimately trying to accomplish.

Many North American Lolas have a similar vague concept of ‘community’ as a place where everyone gets along with each other and there are

no conflicts, something that can never completely fulfilled by the current online environment provided by EGL and related forums and websites. When a newbie or troll posts something and is criticized by others, they commonly retort, "But Lolitas are supposed to be nice!" Lolitas are supposed to be nice because they wear nice clothes, and the jealousy, competition, and gossip exhibited in some pockets of the Internet is a contradiction of the fashion's image of elegance and beauty. This leads to an overall disenchantment with the promises of community that EGL is expected to offer and with Lolitas and the fashion in general. EGL is still an important space for Lolitas not only for sales and information. Many people have been able to crave meaningful relationships with other Lolitas despite the drama, but these connections are drawn between smaller groups of people and do not produce a vast sense of community that can include all Lolitas.

Outside the Internet

Lacking the fashion districts and department stores of Japan, Lolita fashion enthusiasts elsewhere have depended primarily on the Internet as a place for gatherings and seeing other people through self-posted photographs and magazine scans. In areas with a large concentration of Lolitas, locally based groups form that meet occasionally to engage in various activities such as tea parties, going to museums, seeing movies, going to arcades or taking photos together in a photoshoot. The Internet has been a valuable method to find people in one's locality and advertise meet-ups and related events. Before the

creation of area-specific LJ communities and the popularity of Facebook, EGL was the primary place to plan and discuss locally-based events. Members learn about meet-ups through posts on EGL, and after the meet-up, photos from the event are posted on EGL. Sharing photos on the Internet from a locally held gathering serves an important purpose of memorializing and preserving the event and highlights the relation between online and offline for most Lolitas.

As interest in Lolita fashion grows, there are many ways to get access or learn about the style without having to go through EGL. For example, there are now several storefronts in San Francisco and New York catering to Lolitas and other Japanese fashion style enthusiasts. These stores are a reflection of the large population of local Lolitas in the city and foster its continued growth and interest. *Anime* conventions are also important temporary spaces that can draw a variety of Lolitas from different areas in a country and bring together people who may not usually attend local meet-ups. Conventions are used as platforms in which to educate people about Lolita fashion through panels and fashion shows. The Lolitas involved in organizing these events tend to be interested in fostering a notion of 'community' through public engagement with people who do not know about the fashion and through bringing together Lolitas in the local area.

Once the number of people wearing Lolita fashion in a particular local area reaches critical mass and is active enough, a large international collective like EGL may become less important for those who choose to engage more in face-to-face interaction over engagement with people on the Internet. Even

people who do not have access to a local group in their area may in time contribute to or visit EGL less once they have used the space to find and establish their own social network of Lolita fashion friends. Though some eventually leave EGL or lessen their participation after it fulfills its purpose, there are always a new crop of Lolitas who continue to use and shape EGL in their own way. From two to three years after they first enter EGL most people either get bored with Lolita and quit or continue to wear Lolita but after witnessing the extensive drama and having already established sufficient social ties offline and online tend to shy away from EGL. There are some exceptions, as there are always a few people active in their local community who continue, year after year, to post event reports and contribute.

An example of the development of a local group that rarely contributes to EGL can be found in Montréal and Québec City. The members of the Montréal-Québec City alternative Japanese fashion group are active on their own French-language forum called QC-Harajuku. Meet-up information and photos from these meetings rarely posted on EGL. I found out about most events from the organizer's Facebook event page, and I probably would never know about them had I not met her by chance while doing fieldwork at Anime North, an *anime* convention in Toronto. There are Montréal Lolitas who use LJ who occasionally contribute to LJ groups related to EGL such as *daily_lolita*, posting photos of their fashion coordinates. Some of the Lolitas I met in Montréal were not so involved in, knowledgeable about or interested in the happenings on EGL,

because QC-Harajuku fulfills the same role while also offering interaction in French between people mostly in the same geographical locality. This was especially true for people who had gotten into the fashion with a history of one to three years, but some Québec Lolitas who have been into the fashion longer have established a network of friends on LJ and continue to check the EGL and have a memory of and sense of history concerning EGL and people on EGL. On the other hand, topic trends found on EGL can also be found on QC-Harajuku or in face-to-face conversation, suggesting that people read EGL but do not contribute to it and that EGL is a catalyst for conversation off-line and posts on EGL mirrors issues that concern international Lolitas as a whole. In addition, because of the way images travel and spread on the Internet, people are aware of and admire Lolitas in Japan and on EGL, sharing photos that inspire them on sites like Tumblr.

In the summer of 2006, I attended the first Otakuthon, a small *anime* convention in Montréal that was then held at Concordia University as part of the fieldwork for my MA thesis on Japanese rock fans in North America. I found out about a meet-up of Lolitas at the convention and attended it in hopes of finding some J-rock fans to interview. It was a modest sized group - around 12 to 15 people. Many of them wore handmade outfits, and only one or two people had on clothes from Japanese Lolita brands, but they were the envy of everyone. When I attended a social event in Montréal in February 2010 held at a large classroom rented in a CEGEP school near the Berry-UQAM metro station,

around 150 people were in attendance. The event was organized by the moderators on the QC-Harajuku forum who mainly wore Lolita fashion; but the event was open to anyone interested in any kind of Japanese 'alternative' or subculture fashion. Genres such as Gothic, *Visual-kei*, Decora, as well as Lolita were represented. The event mainly provided a gathering space, and people would sit with their group of friends in clusters, only all joining together near the end when group games such as musical chairs were introduced. Two TVs with video game systems were also set up and some people took part in tournament gaming. At the entrance, a professional photographer was on hand to take portrait photos for a fee.

The Ste-Dolores meet-up, occurring in August for the past four years, is a gathering organized by the moderators of the fashion forum on QC-Harajuku for Lolitas mostly from the Montréal and Québec City area. The meet-up in Montréal brings together around 50-60 participants each time, a number that is growing each year. There were people who wore handmade clothes, but there were many more wearing clothes procured from Japanese fashion brands or from Chinese manufacturers. The handmade clothes were of considerably higher quality in design and construction, and in general, the group has perfected the tenets of the Japanese style while adding an artistic taste to their coordination, playing with and building on the existing structure of Lolita and Gothic fashion.

Compared to the other groups I have observed, the Québec group has a

larger proportion of participants still in middle school, high school or CEGEP. Even some of the event organizers are still in their late teens to early 20s. The group in Montréal and Québec City provides an example of a burgeoning local-based group that has evolved due to the growing ease of obtaining information and items related to Japanese subculture fashion over the Internet. When they are not meeting each other at events, people carry on their daily interaction with each other through the QC-Harajuku forum or on Facebook for closer friends.

EGL exists as an important space in which to parade one's Lolita outfit through photo posts as a way to make authentic and to confirm one's involvement in the community as a Lolita. As people parade in Harajuku wearing unique fashion, EGL and other Internet sites are engaged similarly as virtual places that serve as a platform to display and verify one's existence as a Lolita. However, the desire to record and share photos on the Internet lessens over time for some, and the same group of people I had observed three years ago now sometimes forget to take photos even though they meet each other frequently. This in part has been a result of the shift from being Lolita friends to 'real friends,' a term applied to friendships in which there are other connections beyond an interest in Lolita fashion. As their interactions become framed in ways that stretch outside Lolita, it becomes less important to take photographs together solely for the purpose of posting on EGL. When relationships no longer rely on Lolita as the sole association tying people together, it becomes less important for some to affirm their Lolita-ness as people in a social group get

more comfortable with each other. Usually at this point, local or regional-based groups begin to post less on EGL and move towards more specialized social networks comprised of close Lolita friends they interact with on a regular basis.

Connectedness and Perception of Group and Community

I have been told that in Japan “you definitely have to be an individual to step out of the box, but in America, if you want to be a part of a group, you go into Lolita” (Grace 2010). Like some people who frequent EGL, Grace exhibited a wry outlook on Lolitas as a group, believing that ultimately it was unrealistic to be ‘real’ friends with most Lolitas whether they were Japanese or American. Some Japanese Lolitas said they do not care if they do not have friends who wear Lolita and having Lolita friends or not has no effect on whether they wear the fashion. Making friends with people who wear and like the same clothing style is not that important though it is nice when it happens. The general consensus is that it is difficult to make new friends with other Lolitas. It is common knowledge among Japanese Lolitas that it is difficult for Lolitas who like the same brand to be friends because there may be competition for the same clothes. On the other hand, it is often said that there is a rivalry between Lolitas who are loyal to different brands. When asked about this, though she admitted she never witnessed this herself, Keiko replied, “Isn’t it a matter of pride? You are proud of the brand you like the best and want to defend it” (interview, April 20, 2010). Nagisa does not have any Lolita friends though she tried to make some by exchanging phone numbers and emails with some people she met at events but

the relationships did not go beyond a few emails. She gained more friends from being involved in the underground Punk and Rock scene, and none of these people are interested in Lolita, though some like to dress-up and explore various fashion styles. Even among people who have a few close friends who are also Lolita, most people are not interested in having lots of Lolita friends or being part of some sort of community or group in the same sense as found in North America. In contrast, many North American Lolitas said they feel most comfortable wearing Lolita in a group with other Lolitas instead of when alone. This sentiment is not shared by all EGL Lolitas, but it was only in America that I encountered people who said this, never in Japan. Lolitas may want to feel a sense of belonging but how this is fulfilled and defined is largely by how places are perceived and made meaningful and memorable.

EGL is a virtual place that is remembered through certain kinds of events, mostly comprised of occurrences that disrupted the social order on the forum. When recounting the history of EGL and North American Lolitas in general, the conversations centre on topics like “Do you remember when that horrible thing happened or the drama that person was involved with?” Each upset and the various reactions to it result in a reaffirmation of the boundaries for acceptable behaviour within EGL during the aftermath during which the feeling of community and connection is rebuilt. But in Japan, the focus is “Do you remember that store that used to be there or what it used to sell there?” or “Do you remember that one brand?” If speaking about people, it is about the kinds of

people who dressed in a certain way or past style icons for Gothic, Lolita, and Punk kids who have appeared in the media, and even this exercise was not rooted in events that defined place and was more about discussing changes in style over time. This differs with EGL where there is frequent talk about specific persons and the things they did which ultimately construct how EGL, as a place and as a group of people, is perceived and remembered.

Lolitas on EGL express contradictory opinions concerning EGL and Lolitas in general because they are taking part in an imagined community (Andersen 1983) which is facilitated through a virtual place and the flow of media and information through the Internet. This allows for an experience of virtuality that emphasizes a connectedness between people and the effects of their actions in grades of immediacy and shortened distance in ways that cannot be achieved in movements that are primarily based in actual world cityscapes.

For Lolitas in Japan, the imagined community is built from similar experiences and knowledge surrounding certain areas of the city and shared affinity for particular aesthetics rooted in concepts of girlhood and consumption of certain media. However, there is no indication that they feel it is necessary to construct a community in which everyone gets along and is nice to each other. In addition, unlike EGL which caters only to Lolita related activities and discussion, the places found in the urban Japanese landscape are shared spaces that are not populated or utilized only by Lolitas. Group interaction is not an inherent in the environment in a place like Harajuku. It is possible to go to a Lolita shop in

Harajuku, buy clothes, and wear the clothes in Harajuku without having to directly engage with another Lolita, let alone a whole group if one did not want to do so. Even if one wanted to, it is difficult unless in a socially acceptable situation in which it is considered appropriate to approach a someone you do not already know such as at a tea party or the Harajuku bridge.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, English-speaking Lolitas engage with Lolita fashion but are missing the cultural background surrounding concepts of girlhood that help Japanese Lolitas to connect their engagement with the fashion to something beyond style and material objects. Instead, EGL Lolitas attempt to use concepts of place, community, and group belonging to fulfill a similar function but with dissatisfactory results. Lolitas on EGL are involved in an imagined community in which they try to search for something 'real' or 'deep' that reflects the realities of connectivity in virtual spaces. Their discontent stems from being unable to fulfill certain assumptions about what a 'community' is supposed to provide, backed by the idea that it is important to construct a group or community of Lolitas. Feelings of connectedness result from the manner and speed actions in movement across the web of relations formed on the Internet like ripples or vibrations from stones dropped in a lake, some making a larger impact than others. What happens in one corner of the web can become a discussion topic someplace else in seconds.

The word 'community' is problematic as it has multiple meanings and is used to refer in North America to many different concepts. 'Community' can be

used to talk about the EGL page on the LJ website. It can mean the actual people who make up the member roster of EGL or be used to talk about a local group of Lolitas someone is involved with. Community can refer to all of the places on the Internet Lolitas like to gather. Community represents friendliness found in a social group where people get along. Among Lolitas in North America, many people talked about 'the Lolita community' regardless of whether they self-defined as very involved, lurking or completely avoidant of 'the community.'

The word 'community' or a concept similar to it was never mentioned when talking with Japanese Lolitas. Large social networks do exist, but they are not discussed using terms like 'community' or 'group.' Though it is expected that there will be internal conflicts and tensions within any social group, these issues were never brought to light when talking to Japanese Lolitas. It was only through talking with Deborah, an Asian American working in Osaka for the past four years, that her observations and opinions about what she thought were issues and problems with the local Osaka scene and with Japanese Lolitas in general were discussed at length.

In North America, even people who claimed they were not active or interested in the 'online community' or EGL had something to say about the negativity surrounding the people on the Internet. Conflicts and tensions among Japanese Lolitas exist, but their specifics were never openly talked about with me, and I only learned about certain issues in specific detail through North Americans living in Japan or through observations of anonymous Japanese

Internet boards. These boards reveal a similar tone to that found on the English language drama communities. On the Japanese anonymous boards, people typically gossip about other Lolitas including shop staff, well-known people who wear Lolita and appear in magazines like *KERA*, rants about strangers they see or meet on the street; sometimes there are full-on attacks and bullying directed towards people who own blogs or websites and post their photos. The board is also used to talk about the clothing releases as people share their impressions or tell others what items they reserved or how they want to coordinate it.

Among Japanese Lolitas, I never met anyone who readily admitted that they frequented these anonymous boards or even talked much about using the Internet in any function related to Lolita aside from surfing brand websites and looking at personal blogs. Some would acknowledge that they knew of such sites, but one person was quick to add, "There is a lot of gossip and badmouthing there so I never go to those sites." Many Lolitas were located in or near city centres like Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya so even if they may use the Internet heavily, Internet use vaguely related to Lolita fashion is usually restricted to maintaining a personal blog or using the social networking site, Mixi, which is similar to Facebook, Myspace, and LJ.

On Mixi, people would update their journals and add their friends to their 'MaiMikku.' Some people list on their profile page that they would be happy to add anyone as long as they had some interests in common, but many profile pages, not just limited to users who wear Lolita, state that the user is only

interested in adding people they already know. There are also numerous Lolita-fashion related groups, from brand-specific groups to groups like “I like clothes with patterns” to “White colour Lolita clothes.” There are no groups on Mixi that have the same amount of activity or infamy as the English-language EGL on LJ. People add groups to their Mixi, but it does not mean that they are interested in participating and adding new content to the group. Group members can make new posts and upload photos to a group, but for many people, adding a group is more of a display of their interests than a desire to engage in or contribute with an Internet group. In comparison, the Japanese anonymous boards are much more active.

Online venues like Mixi are not places in the way EGL is for North American Lolitas. The Internet and virtual spaces are being used more as a tool to find individual like-minded people and are not often thought as a way to facilitate a group sensibility tying Lolitas together. Mixi has become less relevant as personal blogs on free blogging platforms like Yapog and Ameba become more popular. Many Lolitas who used to own personal websites have closed their sites and moved to blogging instead. Most people post photos of their Lolita outfits, usually with their face obscured to retain anonymity. Their adventures in the city while wearing Lolita are paired with journal entries about things associated with their Lolita life such as concert reports, thoughts on things they look forward to buying, or what cake they ate that day. Blogs are an unintimidating way to gauge if someone’s interests and personality might be

compatible with yours because the information is all there. Hence, it has become popular to establish Lolita friendships by having a blog and contacting others through their blog. Blogs function in a way similar to Jingubashi at its peak of popularity – to provide a place for people to get together and try to make social connections with other like-minded people. I met a trio of Lolitas from Nagoya who originally became friends through attending tea parties organized in the city. They observed that as blogs become popular, tea parties and other social gatherings became less frequent because people were more interested in cultivating close relationships through the Internet first.

Even though blogs are rising in popularity, for a Japanese Lolita, sense of place related to Lolita is still being situated in neighbourhoods and shopping districts in the city, not on the Internet which lacks a central point of social activity that a place like EGL offers. The city provides a place and space to be a Lolita and to see others wearing Lolita. This comment taken from one of the surveys mentions the Tokyo scene as being “more flexible” with the anonymous survey taker stating that she finds inspiration from people she encounters on the street or sees from afar:

I used to be more involved, but I feel too old for the social aspect and don't care for the way the fashion has changed. I especially dislike the strict attitude on international forums, which I find ironic because the local Tokyo scene is so much more flexible. I'm influenced by people I see on the street and the fresh ways they interpret the fashion, and I don't need advice from strangers on the internet. [survey, Anonymous, 2009]

The cityscape offers a sort of anonymity and distance quite different from virtual spaces. You can remain anonymous, unknown, unnoticed on an Internet forum as long as you lurk but once you post something or are active your actions are literally there for all to see, potentially preserved there even if you delete the original post, comment or photos. The visibility on a heavily updated and active place like EGL is very high. Any of those 16,000 members and non-member observers located across the world in different time zones can witness what has happened. In this way, space online is even more closed as people are more connected to one another's actions despite being physically located in different geographical locations. EGL brings together people from all around the globe and is at the same time feels small and claustrophobic.

Girlhoods and Sisterhoods: Creation of Places

As demonstrated in this chapter, experience, group and individual identity, formation of networks, and feelings of connection within Lolita fashion and among other Lolitas are largely situated in conceptualizations of place, history, and memory. Actual and virtual spaces and places fulfill similar functions such as creating a feeling of belonging and imagined community, providing a place to be Lolita, and offering venues to find other Lolitas; but the nature of each type of space results in differences in how they are approached and what people expect from these places, including the people, activities, and things attached to them. This ultimately is a reflection as well as an influence on how Lolita fashion is experienced and understood.

In a virtual place like EGL, people expect deeper social connections and affinity with all Lolitas involved on EGL. However, some Lolitas believe that this connection is impossible to foster or achieve as Lolita fashion is ultimately superficial as an activity centred in consumerist consumption, accumulation of objects, and beautifying oneself to garner attention from other Lolitas. Many people learn the hard way that the sense of community they may yearn for is largely imagined when they encounter conflicts, awkward moments, and drama that push them to reposition how they are oriented to the idea of a 'community' and makes them question what Lolita fashion means to them. The main issue for North American Lolitas is the conflict between self and the Lolita community. The desire to belong to and build a group is at odds with the dissatisfaction found in the perceived strictness, tenseness, anger, jealousy, and drama found on EGL and carried out in face-to-face interactions with other Lolitas. It is a contradictory experience in which community is framed as wonderful and horrible at the same time. Despite the clashes, some people still believe that Lolita helps to foster a sisterhood based in shared aesthetics, interests, and feelings of girliness not evident in other subculture movements.

What is missing from the Japanese Lolita side is group organization and regulation to the scale of EGL. For example, because of issues with scammers on the sales community, one of the moderators developed and hosted a separate website to record feedback from sales transactions that was dependent on contributions from EGL users. In addition, though people may loathe drama, it

plays an important role in forcing people to build and shape boundaries for acceptable behaviour and how the style is interpreted and defined. It also forces people to reconsider and critically analyze their relationship to EGL and to Lolita fashion. Exposure to drama habituates people to be not only more weary of interaction on EGL but also more likely to approach Lolita with a sense of humour and parody, ready to make fun of themselves and Lolita fashion in a way not found in Japan. Through gossip and talk about the ridiculousness of certain happenings, reminding themselves not to take things too seriously, that it is at the end of the day 'only fashion,' EGL Lolitas thus create a sense of community that arises from shared experiences embodied in conflicts and upsets.

If EGL Lolitas situate their experience in relation to group formation which they are either working towards or working against, then Japanese Lolitas are more interested in cultivating a sense of individualism and personal space in reaction to perceptions about mainstream Japanese society. Conflict is situated between self and society at large which is perceived as strict, bounded, filled with obligation and responsibility associated with womanhood and adulthood. Thus, through fashion style, Japanese Lolitas aim to build an area of their life in which they can separate from the stresses of their normal lives removed from 'society' and 'the mainstream.' They achieve this through cultivating a personal conceptualization of girlhood that is built upon existing aesthetics in wider Japanese culture that are turned on their head and taken to extremes. Places in the city are used in ways that are meaningful to individual Lolitas. Shared

meaning and imagined community are built not through connections to groups but from similar experiences of shopping districts and temporary spaces as well as through media like fashion magazines and literature that fit into the girlhood aesthetic that Lolita fashion is related to.

Chapter 3

Girl-Feelings, Aesthetics, and Becomings

I. The Shōjo and Her Culture

Beyond the 'Lolita' in Lolita Fashion

When asked to define 'Lolita,' most wearers focused on the various style components, talking about the unworn garments and the overall 'look' and presence achieved through an interaction between the body and the clothes adorned and stylized in a specific way. When asked to expand beyond the elements that usually frame an outsider's immediate impression, English-speaking Lolitas responded with often passionate stories about how Lolita changed their life for better or worse. Japanese participants took my question more literally and had trouble coming up with an answer beyond a connection to fashion genre or style. Despite a consensus between the interviewer and the person being interviewed that we were talking about the same thing, to pinpoint an exactness or a definitive meaning was utterly impossible. Maybe this is because there was an underlying awareness that it cannot be defined or boxed into clear terms. "It means different things to each person" was a typical response, and it was difficult to extrapolate further with direct questions. When describing what mental image was associated with Lolita, a common response was "feeling *fuwafuwa*," onomatopoeia used for something that is fluffy and bouncy, just like the movement and feeling visually and tactilely of a bell-shaped Lolita skirt with a full petticoat underneath as it sways with each step. Lolita

was *fuwafuwa*, something that cannot be tied down by straight boundaries as it evokes feelings of floating.

Lolita is the name of a fashion genre and clothing style. A reason why it is rigidly defined in Japanese is because it is consciously categorized first and foremost as a fashion. This is not to imply that it is discounted as something not important, like the dismissive phrase commonly thrown around during EGL debates that Lolita is 'just' or 'only' a fashion. Conversation with each research participant revealed personal narratives of discovery and transformations achieved through wearing Lolita fashion. Intangible concepts were mentioned like the Lolita heart or spirit (*rori-ta no kokoro*), an idea that could have not taken shape if there were no inner thought processes involved or effects garnered from the practice of wearing Lolita clothing.

Looking at the visual differences in style, there are a multitude of variations through time that were at one point labelled Lolita, but these varieties are connected to an existing larger discourse on girlhood that places it alongside other activities considered part of *shōjo bunka* (girls' culture) and *shōjo shumi* (girls' hobbies or girlish tastes) including comics and short novels (*shōjo shosetsu*) for girls. There were a number of people who wear what others might categorize as Lolita who may not consider themselves or accept being labelled as 'Lolita' even though they participate in the same social circles as people who do like and adopt Lolita as a term to be applied to their self-identity. Between the non-

Lolitas and the Lolitas, both groups are speaking on the same wavelengths, essentially drawing from interconnected pools of ideas and inspirations.

The clothing aesthetic borrows from an idealized interpretation of Western history and historical costume, but it is also about creating, living, being, and challenging a certain sense of girlhood, or '*shōjohood*' as Aoyama suggests (2005), that developed out of the context of Japan's modernization. For those who did not grow up within the same context, Lolita is a gateway or introduction to that world. Many North Americans claim that Lolita fashion was something that they had always been looking for, the missing connection that they could only find in a fashion style from Japan. Some felt their culture, society, and current fashion trends lacked a particular sense of 'cuteness' and 'modesty.' A number of the older North American Lolitas were already involved in the Punk and/or Goth subcultures before becoming interested in Lolita where they found feminine and cute style elements missing from Western Goth.

To begin to unpack this missing feeling shared with many overseas Lolitas, this chapter explores concepts like *shōjo* (young girl), *otome* (maiden), and *kawaii* (cute) and how they relate to Lolita fashion. As these are Japanese terms rarely employed by English speakers, the focus for this chapter is on how these ideas relate to Japanese Lolitas and the creation of Lolita clothes, images, and ideology. Though wearers may adopt 'Lolita' as a label for their identity, as seen by my Japanese interviews, it also creates a barrier from seeing the layers underneath.

Frustrated by the limited and literal definitions of 'Lolita' by Japanese research participants, I attempt to examine how 'Lolita fashion' relates to a larger concept of girlhood and how as a fashion it is a representation and physical embodiment of this mentality. Lolita fashion is not only a youth culture but also a strategy employed by women who lie outside the age range for *shōjo* to build an identity and a space removed from social and familial obligations. Though it may have threads connecting it to a *shōjo* sensibility, a *shōjo* identity is not embraced by women who wear Lolita. Instead, many choose to describe themselves as *otome*, a concept they see as ageless and not only related to clothing. If *otome* and *shōjo* are the backbone concepts, then Lolita is the incarnation in a world beyond texts, providing a site for practice and performance in which these concepts can be lived.

In the following pages, I present a brief historical and cultural history of *shōjo*, a concept that has helped build an environment for something like Lolita fashion and the accompanying aesthetics to develop. This is followed by a discussion of *shōjo*'s influence on *kawaii* culture starting from the cute boom in 1980s Bubble Era Japan. *Shōjo* and *kawaii* are often tied to an unproductive consumer mentality. These critiques are reviewed and discussed in terms of affect theory and how women who wear Lolita reject the restrictions posed by *shōjo* by claiming *otome* as framework for being.

The Beginnings of Shōjo and Shōjo Culture

Shōjo has a variety of possible meanings in English, including ‘little girl,’ ‘maiden,’ ‘virgin’ or ‘young lady,’ none of which totally encapsulate all of the nuances. A distinctive *shōjo* culture (*shōjo bunka*), or girls' culture, is primarily associated with the Taishō era (1912-1926) with the expansion of a middle class and the growth of urban culture and mass-production industries after World War I (1914-18). *Shōjo* culture is sometimes also referred to as girlish hobbies (*shōjo shumi*) which today includes the activities, media, and products that *shōjo* consume and engage in while they are in the liminal stage between childhood and womanhood. Today, the label is attached to various activities and fan cultures tying visual rock fans, Takarazuka fans of the all-female musical revue troupe, those who read *shōjo manga* (girls' comics), and women who draw *yaoi dōjinshi* (fan comics featuring male-male sexual relationships) into one category. The assumption is that these girls and young women will stop these activities once they become wives and mothers after which they cease to remain *shōjo*. In reality, participants vary in age. For example, Takarazuka has been an institution since 1913, so it is not odd to see women in their 50s or 60s attend performances or have memberships in fan clubs for their favourite star.

The word *shōjo* originates from the Meiji era (1868-1912), a period of great change in Japan as the country opened its doors to the West, leading to modernization, industrialization, and nationalization. Before *shōjo*'s introduction, *shōnen*, specifically meaning ‘young boy’ today, was a term that

applied to both boys and girls to mean 'juveniles' or 'youth' with no distinction made between genders. Magazines at the time like *Shōnen-en* (Youth's Garden, 1888) regularly featured both boys and girls on its covers, while *Shōnen sekai* (Youth's World, 1895) was dedicated to "the young men and women of the nation" (Nakagawa 2004).

In addition to industrialization, a consumer culture fostered through department stores and print media and advertising changed the way people bought things and related to material objects. Forging women as nation subjects and reforming language became national issues during Japan's shift to modernity in the late 19th and early 20th century. Gender and language underwent social reform, constructing new discursive spaces like 'women's language' (Inoue 2006). Through this new sociolinguistic category, the cultural meaning of women could be processed and managed, offering the possibility for indexing gender and reconstructing social conceptions of gender differences not previously considered (Inoue 2006:106). This same language space was also appropriated and subverted through, for example, utopian-like imagined communities for girls created through readers' letters columns found in numerous girls' magazines.

Compulsory education for both boys and girls was established by the Meiji government. The school system was instrumental in introducing the idea of 'youth' and 'adolescence' into Japanese society. This in particular has been an important development for female youths as it offered them a chance to lengthen

the time between childhood and marriage. In 1899, the Directive on Girls' High Schools incorporated women's secondary education into a state-regulated public education and was a part of various government projects in an attempt to nationalize women and shape their roles in relation to the newly formed nation-state. This directive led to an increased number of young women enrolled in secondary school. The phrase *ryōsai kenbo*, good wife and wise mother, expressed ideal womanhood based on traditional virtues and values, "a mix of Confucianism and the Western cult of domesticity" (Inoue 2006:80). The education curriculum also drew influences from Western Enlightenment balanced with 'traditional' Japanese ideals.

Most girls' schools were boarding schools, creating an environment in which girls could form social connections and create a life in which they were, for the most part, free from the constraints of family life. These girls were called *jōgakusei*, or school girls, used to describe those who attended the elite secondary girls' schools (*jōgakkō*). However, any girl or young woman, regardless of her social standing could become *shōjo*. Both *jōgakusei* and *shōjo* were identified with a liminal stage between childhood and adulthood as "not-quite-female" females during the Meiji era - as a category of a hyper-feminine ideal that was also an ominous threat to the feminine social sphere (Robertson 1998:65). 'Schoolgirl speech' (*jōgakusei kotoba*) that emerged from this new environment was considered cause for alarm by male intellectuals who attributed the new speech patterns to a corrupt and lazy form of speaking arising from exposure to geisha

and low-class samurai (Inoue 2006). These same speech patterns and verb endings which were considered offensive have over time become standard structures associated with contemporary Japanese women's language.

The magazine is considered to be one of the most powerful mass mediums in pre-World War II Japan that reached both urban and rural areas. Mass-circulation magazines and newspapers were widely read in urban communities with limited circulation among educated, wealthier families in rural areas. By the 1920s, there is evidence that readership expanded to include factory girls and peasant families (Inoue 2006: 103). Magazines like *Shōjo kurabu* (Girl's Club, 1923), *Shōjo kahō* (Girl's Pictorial, 1912), *Shōjo no tomo* (Girl's Friend, 1908) were among the most popular magazines for girls. Magazines typically contained serial novels featuring female protagonists, folk tales, historical tales, humorous short stories, and articles on etiquette, beauty, Western arts and fashion along with illustrations, short picture stories or comics, and photographs of young girls and of places both exotic and familiar. The magazine offered girls not only a written language but a visual language in which to draw from and build their own imagined *shōjo* worlds.

Magazines featured female writers like Yoshiya Nobuko whose writing style aligned closely with the *shōjo* experience. Western texts were also imported as translations of popular children's English language novels into Japanese. Titles like *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Shōkūshi, 1892), *Little Women* (Shōfujin, 1906), and *A Little Princess* (Shōkōjo, 1910) were originally translated with the idea that

they would teach girls. *Little Women* was intended to provide a good domestic model for girls, but girls seemed to be more interested with Jo for her outspokenness and tomboyish character (Dollase 2003: 726). These books brought to readers' imaginations new Western ideas such as sisterhood, romance, sentimentalism, and most of all, the idea of a 'home sweet home,' a concept of 'family' and 'home' based on a Western notion of romantic love that challenged the traditional *ie*, or household, system.

Like women's magazines at the time, girls magazines also provided a space for readers to communicate with each other and express *shōjo*-like sentiments (Sato 2004). Letters printed in the readers' section were addressed to people concerning problems or worries that the reader might have had difficulty confronting directly. It is difficult to discern whether these letters were authentic, written by the editors or were a writing exercise in which the author could participate in her own mode of *shōjo* expression, displaying sorrow, regret, nostalgia, and other emotions associated with the *shōjo*. Regardless, girls' magazines provided a space for potential participation in *shōjo* culture. "These magazines embodied a gender-specific public sphere; they constituted a virtual speech community where virtual friends communicated with each other through letter writing" (Inoue 2006:102). Girls often used playful pen names among these pages. A girl with a plain, regular name could use her imagination to transform herself with an exotic and dynastic name that could have jumped out from the pages of *The Tale of Genji* (Honda 1990:88). These fantastic names gave the

impression that the author was a young woman from an upper class family; this is an example of a self-created imagined world that is typically attributed to the *shōjo*. The letters pages gave readers a space to connect with one another, express their feelings about events in their life and share reactions to the magazine's contents like the serial stories.

Nobuko Yoshiya's *Hana Monogatari* (Flower Stories) was written when she was in her early 20s and originally serialized in a girls' magazine from 1916 to 1924. It is a collection of 52 short stories, each titled after a flower, and it still resonates with young women today. Takemoto has written the afterword for some of Yoshiya's books, including the re-release of *Hana Monogatari*, and has been invited to give lectures about Yoshiya's work. *Hana Monogatari* consists of unconnected short stories that usually took place in the dormitories of girls' mission schools and dealt with personal issues that girls might have encountered in the enclosed social world of the school. In her stories, Yoshiya created a world that was exclusively for girls, giving them a voice and a place where a girl could create a rich inner space for herself and listen to her inner voice. Yoshiya's characters are quintessentially *shōjo*.

Her work captures an idea of *shōjo* not only as a physical state and age-bounded category but a mental state in which young girls “want to temporarily take leave of reality and become something other than what they are” (Dollase 2003:727). The characters found in her stories are mostly teenage girls and young women who live in a moratorium, protected from the contamination of the

outside world as long as they remain within the confines of the school. “Yoshiya's girls resist evil patriarchal society in their own way. They resist society with their tears and collective emotions, through which girls (characters and audience) unite in imagination” in a kind of covert feminist resistance (Dollase 2003:740). In some stories, characters, realizing that the world that lay outside of the school walls was one in which they could not continue living as *shōjo*, decided that the only solution was to take matters into their own hands and commit suicide. Through suicide, they were able to remain *shōjo* for eternity. The creative and radical imaginations and desires that radiated from that inner *shōjo* voice were rarely actualized in society, making the *shōjo*'s world a much more vulnerable and fragile one.

As printing technology improved so did the quality of pictures in magazines, making it possible to reproduce colour prints, clearer one-colour prints, and detailed black and white line illustrations. By the late 1910s and 1920s, these advances in mass printing techniques helped bring about a more stylized depiction of *shōjo* in magazine illustrations. Popular male illustrators such as Takebatake Kashū (1888-1966), Nakahara Junichi (1913-1983), Takehisa Yumeji (1844-1934), and Fukiya Kōji (1898-1979) were drawing young girls that seemed to be part of some otherworldly atmosphere. The *shōjo* was distinguished by her thin, elongated fingers, tiny lips, and Western-like large eyes. These *shōjo* were created for girls to gaze at and admire, but they were so unrealistic that one could almost say that they were without nationality. Well-

known illustrators from this era were mostly men; male illustrators and *manga* artists continued to dominate this market until the 1970s when a group of female *manga* artists known as “the Year 24 Group” or “the Magnificent 49ers⁵” helped revolutionize and expand the scope of *shōjo manga*.

Nakahara Junichi was recruited by *Shōjo no tomo* editor Uchiyama Motoi and made his debut in 1932 at the age of 18 as an illustrator for the magazine. He became very popular with readers and his girls became the face of *Shōjo no tomo*, gracing each new front cover. Nakahara himself was influenced by Takehisa Yumeji who was widely known for his illustrations depicting Japanese women engaged in everyday tasks or deep contemplation that combined Japanese traditional style with early European modernism. Besides illustration, Nakahara was also interested in doll-making and women’s fashion. In each issue, he taught girls how to make dolls and drew illustrations of girls wearing Western fashions that readers at home could sew and replicate themselves. This allowed girls the opportunity to make a reality the illustrations they saw in the magazine and to imagine that they too could be just like those girls. He was commissioned to illustrate the re-release of Yoshiya’s *Hanamonogatari* and provided illustrations to other serial stories such as Kawabata Yasunari’s *Otome no minato* (Maiden’s Harbour 1938).

⁵ All of the female *manga* artists from this group were born in Showa year 24, or 1949, hence the name.

In accordance with new censorship laws like the 1938 *Jidō yomimono zasshi junka hyōtei* (the Standard for the Purification of Children's Magazines), it was perceived by state authorities that his depiction of dreamy eyed girls was 'unhealthy' and in direct conflict with the wider nationalistic and militaristic agenda (Nakahara 2004:314). "It was believed that sentimentality and beauty would blind young Japanese girls to the reality of war and their social responsibility to become wives and mothers" (Dollase 2008:326). Nakahara left so that the magazine would be able to continue, but this ultimately lost *Shōjo no tomo* 7,000 subscriptions and marked the end of an era for development of the *yumemiru shōjo* (dreamy-eyed girl) aesthetic that would not be taken up again until after the war (Endō 2004:78). These dreamy-eyed girls would be replaced with *gunkoku shōjo* (girls of a military nation) and *aikoku shōjo* (girls on the homefront) who were expected to fulfill responsibilities as Japanese citizens during war time (Dollase 2008). Both Uchiyama and Yoshiya changed the tone of their work to support government efforts. Yoshiya became a wartime correspondent travelling overseas, writing articles that focused on the experience of women and children in war stricken areas. *Shōjo no tomo* which had always introduced girls to Western art, films, culture, and literature now also included articles about frugality, nationalistic duties, and news from the war front.

Nakahara later resumed his activities as an artist and edited a number of magazine publications including *Soleilnuit* (1946-1960) and *Himawari* (Sunflower 1947-1952) that brought his work to a new generation of young girls and women.

The magazines and his essay books for girls reflected his ideals and goals in teaching girls how to live beautifully while being strong and kind to others, values that he believed were important to cultivate during the harsh times in postwar Japan. His drawings of wide-eyed girls remain well-known today as the model for the essence of girlhood and feminine beauty for a female audience. Nakahara's girls continue to have resonance and influence in the pages of girl's *manga*, and fashion designers like Kaneko Isao of PINK HOUSE and Takada Kenzo of KENZO have noted his influence on their own work (Koga 2009:29).

Contemporary Shōjo Culture and Kawaii Culture

The postwar era brought various changes to the *shōjo* concept including new mediums, languages, and spaces in *manga* and music subcultures for the aesthetic and the people associated with this category. Considering the climate of the times, prewar *shōjo* works tended to promote relationships between girls in a homosocial environment while de-emphasizing references to heterosexual relationships, reflecting the strict control exerted by educators and other institutions over what kinds of relationships 'good girls' were supposed to have with the opposite sex and who they could associate with. For example, the serialized translation of Jean Webster's 1912 novel *Daddy Long Legs* (*Ashinaga ojichan* in Japanese) in *Shōjo no tomo* removed direct references to love (*renai*) and dating. Judy's "love letter" to Jarvis changed in tone in the early translation in order to avoid censorship, becoming a letter to an older brother figure (*onii-sama*)

instead of a love interest (Endō 2004: 102-104). Postwar, portrayals of relations between men and women changed as topics like falling in love and dating became regular aspects in *manga* featuring schoolgirls written by girl audiences.

Shōjo, both the word and image of young girl, also became splintered in meaning and use. More young women go to university or spend several years in the workforce before getting married, thus extending the time period between childhood and marriage. *Shōjo* has become both a marketing category and a more limited age category, primarily used for elementary to middle school-age girls or up until adolescence. Girls who grew up reading *manga* in the 1970s led the consumer boom in *kawaii* (cute) aesthetics in the 1980s. Through this cute trend, the elements of *shōjo* and *otomechikku*⁶ that were found in girls' culture became extended to beyond its usual borders to infiltrate popular culture and society at large (Prough 2011:52).

The combination of girl and a consumerist sense of cute created a different vision of *shōjo* that transformed what was once primarily a girl-only space into something that was even being theorized as genderless and situated as a postmodern consumer identity by cultural theorists and critics like Ōtsuka Eiji (1989) and Horikiri Naoto (1988). The young or youthful girl figure became co-opted by male gaze, identification, and consumption through *bishōjo* (beautiful girl) characters and female protagonists in anime, *manga*, and videogames

⁶ The *-chikku* portion turns *otome* into an adjective.

marketed towards a primarily male audience (Orbaugh 2003, Taylor 2007). *Shōjo* and the accompanying *kawaii* aesthetic began to be used as a platform to reflect on Japan as a post-modern nation and social theories, anxieties, and hopes were projected from a mostly male perspective onto the young girl.

The publishing sector was one of the first industries to recover in the postwar era, and girls' magazines again flourished. *Shōjo kurabu* and *Shōjo no tomo* were among the magazine titles that survived the war years. Though written stories and articles were still important, as *manga* became more popular, by the 1960s, most magazines changed their focus to become *manga*-only publications. The majority of *manga* for girls was drawn by male artists until the 1970s when *shōjo manga* experienced an upheaval as girls who grew up on *manga* became artists themselves. Artists part of the year Shōwa 24 group like Aoike Yasuko, Ikeda Riyoko, Kihara Toshi, Moto Hagio, Ōshima Yumiko, and Takemiya Keiko played an important role in redefining the genre by expanding the scope of stories and emotions portrayed in *shōjo manga*. Publications began to breed new and future artists from readers through magazine-run talent competitions and contests. The new generation of artists created a style of visualization that carried over the literary *shōjo* aesthetic and expanded themes explored by illustrators past. *Shōjo manga* dealt with human relations (*ningen kankei*) and “matters of the heart in grand and dramatic style” using flowing montages and patsche of frames, creating spreads that spill out from the traditional bounded panel (Prough 2011:48). *Manga* from this era usually took

place in exotic, foreign settings. Series like Moto Hagio's *Toma no shinzō* (The Heart of Thomas, 1972-1974) and Takemiya Keiko's *Kaze to ki no uta* (The Sound of the Wind and Trees 1976-1984) were written for a girl audience but revolved around male homosexual love. The focus on homosexual relationships allowed these *manga* artists to explore themes of love and desire without having to be restricted by the social expectations and regulations tied to male-female relations.

In the 1980s and 1990s, *otomechikku*⁷ narratives were *bildungsromans* centered on innocent schoolgirl characters about growing up, exploring dramatic human relations and unrequited love, and the trails of friendship and family (Prough 2011:51). This trend coincided with the rising popularity of cute characters in popular culture and the consumer products on which their images appear, like Hello Kitty. Anime and *manga* have been noted as having influence in the proliferation of cute characters in everyday life in Japan. Cute characters and motifs are everywhere, and even major banks and airlines use cute mascots in marketing. The *kawaii* nature of these products and images are seen as heavily connected to *shōjo* culture even if specific characters did not directly emerge from *shōjo* stories.

The concept *kawaii* is typically linked to the childish, weak, and fragile, but like *shōjo*, it is a word fraught with many nuanced and complex meanings.

⁷ As mentioned before *otome* means maiden, virgin or young girl. The *-chikku* portion turns *otome* into an adjective.

Kawaii culture started as a widespread phenomenon embraced by both young men and women in the 1980s. Unlike prewar *shōjo* culture, *kawaii* is conceived as pop and plastic, disposable and commodifiable – a descendent of *shōjo* for post-modern times. Leaving behind prewar *shōjo*'s ideals framed by “pure and righteous beauty (*kiyoshiku, tadashiku, utsukushii*),⁸” young girls (*wakai onna no ko*)⁹ nowadays are instead embracing cute culture (*kawaii bunka*) as symbol of youth and being youthful (Koga 2009:33).

Cute fashion during the 1980s and 1990s drew on “neo-romantic notions of childhood as an entirely separate, and hence unmaligned, pure sphere of human life” (Kinsella 1995: 241). Childhood is presented as an ideal world, reimagined in nostalgic and sentimentalized terms removed from most actual childhood experiences. The phrase ‘moratorium people’ invented by Keigo Okonogi describes a group of students and other individuals who choose to embrace youth culture and children's culture, engaging in activities such as reading comics, as a way to reject mainstream adult culture (1995:250). ‘Moratorium people’ escape from reality through cuteness and nostalgia for childhood memories. By entering in this ‘moratoria period’ in which they act childish and engage in play, Japanese youth try to avoid responsibility, working hard, and repaying their obligations to society (Ōtsuka 1992:16).

⁸ This is also the motto for the Takarazuka Revue Troupe and the associated Takarazuka Music School. It can be literally translated as “be pure, be proper, be beautiful.”

⁹ See glossary for more on various Japanese terms for ‘girl.’

The cute culture movement as adapted by both young men and women occurred within the context of Japan's Bubble economy lasting from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. During this time, *shōjo*, stereotypically depicted as schoolgirls in sailor uniforms, seemed to be everywhere in popular media – their faces appeared in advertisements for consumer products from makeup to toilets, their voices are heard on the radio and the television as pop star idols, performing songs about youthful and naïve visions of love. The combination of *shōjo* and *kawaii* created a new wave of *shōjo*, one that became a symbol for “Japanese late model, consumer capitalism” as subjects that consumed but did not produce, constituting a completely different gender category as neither male nor female, as they were “importantly detached from (the) productive economy of heterosexual reproduction” (Treat 1993:362, 364).

Kawaii, from the viewpoint of adult society (*otona shakai*), is a sensibility rooted in consumer culture and removed from reality because it is “flat and has no respect” (Koga 2009:210). Respect, as defined by Koga, is given to outstanding and eminent things that command an upward gaze and are expected to be viewed with deference. *Kawaii* has no sense of respect because it has often been associated with things that are not strong but small and weak, qualities that project an aura of needing to be loved and protected.

Based on the survey he conducted that asked male and female university students to define *kawaii*, Yomota Inuhiko (2006) found there were so many different meanings and images associated with *kawaii* that it almost seemed

meaningless. The criteria for what can be considered *kawaii* vary from person to person, and some people may become offended when others do not agree with what they might consider to be *kawaii*. *Kawaii* is uttered among friends to point out things they think are good or interesting. There were people who disliked *kawaii*, expressing that they found people who said *kawaii* in reaction to everything seemed mindless. Yomota's findings indicate the view that *kawaii* is regarded in contradictory terms among young people as both magical and attractive yet repellent and disgusting. The varied meanings among individuals indicates that it is a concept that works on a psychological and emotional level, that holds a power not only from the outside but comes from personal inner workings as well (2006:64).

Koga (2009) argues that *kawaii* is used by young girls to frame their own individual inner sense of values and to forward their own beliefs above someone else's opinion. This usage gives agency to girls who exercise individual choice in what is named *kawaii* and what objects they chose to own. Surrounding oneself with *kawaii* things also suggests that one would like to be adored as well. It is a way to adore oneself, to see oneself as *kawaii* by being in close contact with other *kawaii* things. *Kawaii* is "the ultimate individualistic doctrine, a narcissistic value system" that cuts off from life and existence in 'reality' and 'real' society (Koga 2009:214).

The theorization of *shōjo* in the 1990s turned *shōjo* to an entity that "not only represented contemporary social ills and consumption itself (particularly

through *enjo kosai* (underage prostitution) and the parasite singles phenomena), she also became the symbol for the feminization and infantilization of postmodern Japan” (Prough 2011:10). *Shōjo* and schoolgirls are the quintessential consumers, the mascots for contemporary Japan. Ōtsuka Eiji (1989) argues that everyone is *shōjo* regardless of their gender or age because Japan has become an urban, consumptive and consumer-based economy as opposed to a productive economy represented by the ideal of the *inaka*, the hometown or the countryside.

Amidst this critique of Japanese consumer culture and its young-girl figures as shallow and empty emerged pop artists Yoshimoto Nara and Murakami Takeshi who combined traditional art techniques and forms meshed with popular culture styles found in *anime* and *manga*, crossing the boundaries between low and high art, art world and commercial commodity. Recognition abroad in 2001 through art exhibitions brought notice and acclaim in Japan. Murakami’s ‘Superflat’ movement emphasized the two dimensionality of *manga* and *anime*, which he argues mimics contemporary urban life (Murakami 2000). The Superflat art movement examines Japanese consumer culture, including *shōjo* and *kawaii* culture, as shallow and empty as well as offering a critique on the growing objectification of young women in mass media and advertising. Wakeling (2011) studies the practice of young female fine artists including Aoshima Chiyo, Kunikata Mahoni, Takano Aya, Sawada Tomoko, and Yanagi Miwa who use *shōjo* and *kawaii* motifs as a strategy of social critique through “girliness.” These artists may use cute and *shōjo* motifs in their work as a

method of critique as Wakeling suggests, but at the same time, their work is also highly commodifiable in products carrying their artwork – stationery products, packaging for consumer goods, etc.

Takano Aya, a part of the Kaikai Kiki art collective established by Murakami, takes inspiration from Japanese science fiction and *manga*. She has done numerous commercial illustration work as well, recently collaborating with Japanese cosmetics brand Shu Uemura, lending her drawings to create packaging for limited edition make-up products. In her artwork, Takano portrays girl-only spaces set against futuristic landscapes taken from science fiction. Her figures are androgynous with slim bodies and large eyes. They are almost always in a state of floating, partially clothed or fully nude with red gradient spots on the joints of their bodies. Her works are described as depicting human figures that appear temporarily suspended from adulthood yet are still in periods of growth. Works by Takano and other female artists focus on women and girls as subjects, presenting separatist, female-only worlds that “expel the dominant patriarchal hegemony and thus allow for the expansion of the ‘girl consciousness’ and a ‘community of fantasy’” (2011:136). However, these same artists do not claim that they are advancing a political agenda or making a social critique with their artwork. Wakeling describes this as a politics without consciousness.

Other work on different aspects of *shōjo* culture discuss how these fan cultures allow young women a venue to express themselves, but these activities

do not challenge the existing patriarchal structural. This is especially true when one considers the mostly female fanbase of Visual Rock bands (*Visual-kei*), a subculture that has many ties to Lolita fashion. Guitarist Mana from the band Malice Mizer has been credited with popularizing the Gothic Lolita look, and many Lolitas are *Visual-kei* fans. Takako Inoue suggests that instead of challenging existing gender roles, Visual Rock in Japan creates a new kind of male homosocial community for realizing “a new category of male aesthetics based on the appropriation of trans-gendered images even whilst producing the music of existing masculine aesthetics” (2003:199). She argues that there are very few women in Visual Rock, and most of them are vocalists. The few that are musicians are mostly restricted to instruments that are typically seen as more ‘female’-orientated, such as the piano instead of the guitar or drums. The Visual Rock social community is male-dominated and creates few opportunities for women, who continue to remain the fans who idolize the men who have embraced these new aesthetics.

Matthew Thorn, in a study about female fans of *yaoi dōjinshi*, has found that for some women, *yaoi* and love stories between boys “allow them to indulge in the fantasy of loving a man as a man, or, to rephrase it, as an equal, free of predefined gender expectations” (2004:177). Murota (2003) deals specifically with these kinds of Visual Rock parody *dōjinshi* and the depiction of rock musicians, both Western and Japanese, in Japanese girls’ comics. In both articles, *shōjo* are presented as being in a liminal stage in which they are inexperienced

with the opposite sex and exist without a sense of sexuality that is recognized as an important aspect of being a woman (*onna*); *yaoi dōjinshi* as a “reflection of a girl’s self image” is a way of finding a place to which she can belong as she experiments with her gender identity (2003:196). Girls and young women use male homosexuality as a way to deal with and explore issues of sexuality and sex that they would not otherwise be able to do as *shōjo*. By drawing and consuming *yaoi dōjinshi*, women are no longer the ones being violated. The gaze shifts and becomes controlled by the female artists and consumers of this genre of comic. Thorn suggests that what “fans share in common is a discontent with the standards of femininity to which they are expected to adhere and a social environment and historical moment that does not validate or sympathize with that discontent” (2004:180).

The message portrayed by Inoue, Koizumi, and Murota is that though these visual rock female fans are able to experiment freely through cosplay and creating and consuming *dōjinshi*, theirs is a subculture that has little influence on or direct challenge to the mainstream status quo. Instead, it continues to support gender division as demonstrated in the various activities that male and female fans choose to take part in. Koizumi writes, “it is important to stress that whether these girls are ‘wannabes’ or ‘expressive maniacs,’ it is through the experience of cosplay that these girls who have had experiences of physical oppression are able to carry out a personal positive affirmation of their own bodies. ... ‘Wannabe’ girls are not recreating a musical world, but reproducing a

visual one through means that are non-threatening to the established male dominated world of rock music” (2003:240). Visual Rock has only succeeded in normalizing the use of makeup and other forms of beauty treatment typically associated with women by men. Musicians and fans through various ways try to “express their rejection of and rebellion against the modern patriarchal order,” but in the end Visual Rock does not change existing gender categories (Inoue 2003:213).

The Critique Against the Young-Girl and the Potential of Girl-Feeling

In an analysis of contemporary *shōjo* writer Yoshimoto Banana who rose to popularity in the 1980s with her debut novel *Kitchen, Treat* (1993) discusses the generational gap between Yoshimoto and the older intellectuals and critics who saw *shōjo* and *kawaii* culture as alarming, indicating a vapid, empty, and disposable consumer culture and a threat to modernist high culture. Yet, those in Yoshimoto’s generation grew up on the same consumer products and images from comics, television, and magazines that were being denounced by critics. Those who have panned her work take issue with her style and language which seem congruent with that of a comic book, popular songs or television. Likewise, Yoshiya as a popular writer was not considered to be in the same class as more critically acclaimed authors and has been until recently relatively ignored by literary critics in Japan regardless of her influence, popularity, and sales (Frederick 2005: 65, Honda 2010).

Cultural critic Ōtsuka (1989) examines various aspects of *shōjo* culture, from school uniforms to cutesy handwriting that has even become adopted by boys in *Shōjo Minzoku*, a *Nihonjinron* study (literally ‘theories of the Japanese’), a discourse and essentialist genre that equates nationality with ethnicity and race. This particular wide body of literature aims to identify the essence of a unique ‘Japaneseness’ (*Nihonrashisa*) to establish a set of values and orientations that all Japanese are supposed to share (Sugimoto 1999). Ōtsuka argues that as Japan has moved from a rural-based society to an urban one, Japanese citizens have moved from being producers to being consumers who seek things (*mono*) that are not necessary for sustenance. Japanese society overall is described as being *shōjo*, to highlight the desire and consumption of things, which are also seen as pointless things (*muda na mono*) or symbols removed from reality (*jittai no nai kigō*), and the movement toward consumptive economies instead of productive economies (1989: 18). *Shōjo* is the period between childhood and womanhood. It is a period removed from sexual desire and thus is a waiting before re/production. *Shōjo* shield themselves from reality and the outside world using *kawaii* and being *kawaiisō* (pitiful, garnering pity from others). Ōtsuka argues that Japanese society and citizens are *shōjo* in a transition period which will either continue towards a pathway of consumption or move on to an ‘adult’ stage (*otona*), but the author never clearly defines what these states entail. All he notes is the importance of studying *shōjo* culture as there is an element of *shōjo* inside every Japanese person.

There are many issues with making a link between *shōjo* with Japanese mainstream society. *Shōjo* becomes a genderless concept, and, as Ōtsuka claims, everyone living in a consumer society regardless of age or gender can be called *shōjo*. He explores various aspects of *shōjo* culture but this analysis is removed from the experience and thoughts of actual girls. Their voices are not heard in this work aside from what can be found for media analysis in magazines, music, and television programs. It is the image of the young girl as a symbol for consumer culture, a concept that is removed from the opinions of living, breathing girls.

Tiqqun (2001), a Situationist-inspired French anarchist collective and journal, utilizes the Young-Girl figure similarly to portray the commoditization and objectification of bodies, regardless of gender, in the production of desires and hegemonic images set by capitalist marketing industries that place value on appearance to judge human value over capacities for making and building. In *The Raw Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, originally published in French in 1999, the writing is an assemblage, flanked by familiar word images and phrases found in advertising and marketing, to create a general sense of Young-Girl, an entity that is corporeally passive, in a state of pure consumption. An ontological virgin, her body is fabricated, burdened with commodity symbols and lacking interiority. The Young-Girl image is utilized because as the girl is removed from production and reproduction that will feed back into the capitalist system, her relationship to such an economy is one of pure consumption. Reflecting this

connection between girls and consumption while also suggesting that male labour is more important, Ōtsuka writes that both young boys and girls take part in conspicuous consumption while in their teens, but boys become men who are inevitably folded into the corporate production system as the salaryman. “Even though there are girls who aim to become ‘career women,’ boys work because they have to, while girls become OL (office ladies) to continue playing” (Ōtsuka 1989:21).

Working from the Tiquun theory, Hilary Malatino considers Young-Girlization as “the biopolitical rendering of bodies both spectacular and docile in a manner coextensive with the interests of communicative capitalism” to examine how the Riot Grrrl movement was co-opted and commoditized by the marketing machines it was originally against (2009:22). In the words of Bikini Kill band member Tobi Vail, Riot Grrrl was transformed into “lame corporate youth identity bullshit,” turned into a commoditized readymade (Marcus 2010:256-257). The anti-capitalist DIY ethic (do-it-yourself) is one that proposes that anyone can create something from nothing, regardless of whether they had years of formal training or displayed traditionally defined notions of talent. It is just a matter of finding the ‘guts’ to go out and do it. The Riot Grrrls expressed themselves through music and zines, opening doors and eyes for other girls and women to the possibility that they too can make and create, to express their anger and frustrations, to enter into a dialogue with others in “not-for-profit spaces for performance, interaction, and action” (Malatino 2011: 20). Mainstream

media outlets like *Newsweek* wrote articles about the movement that portrayed it as one primarily focused on social issues over the economic issues typically found in liberal feminism or pro-capitalist feminist politics including equal pay and reproductive rights. Many Riot Grrrls felt they were being misrepresented and that their political ideas were not taken seriously by the mainstream media which resulted in a corporate media blackout in 1992. Malatino argues that as an anti-capitalist politics, just because Riot Grrrls are not concerned with similar issues situated along the lines of capitalist economies does not mean that there is an absence of economic engagement or that the issues explored and methods utilized are any less important. Riot Grrrl instead focuses on issues like intersubjective erotics, alternatives to heteronormativity, addressing sexual abuse and examining the forces that create and enforce destructive body images.

Girls encounter a crisis when they move from adolescence to adulthood and find that things associated with womanhood, such as boyfriends, beauty, sex, careers, family, that are supposed to be pleasurable are sometimes not (Swindle 2011). The “removal of pleasure marks one of the ways that girls become (are made) women, quite literally by putting away childish things, girlish things, changing girls’ alignment towards the objects of girlhood and transferring it instead to objects of womanhood, thus moving from one collective from another” (2011:23). Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) concepts of performance and performativity highlight the regulative discourses that normalize conventional binary expressions and categorizations of gender and sex through

narrative and repetition. For example, a newborn baby goes through a process of gendering, a 'girling' that creates a discursive body and gendered subject that is continually being constructed (Butler 1993). Taking into consideration how 'girl' is also used as an adjective and to describe feelings and emotions such as 'feeling girly,' Swindle proposes to consider girl in terms of sensing, experiencing bodies by looking at girl as affect. This adds another dimension aside from understanding girl as discursive subject and girl as a gender and age position that moves linearly towards the positionality of woman. As an affect, girl is an embodied knowledge and experience that can be revisited and recalled. It can circulate unconsciously and can be self-consciously employed to engage in feeling girl (Swindle 2011:19).

Emotion and affect as understood by Brian Massumi (2002) is defined in terms of intensities. Emotion is qualified intensity, subjective and labelled using fixed sociolinguistic qualities of experience that form along the lines of semantic and semiotic progressions. Affect is intensity that is bodily and automatic - a suspension in linear temporality that is felt when there is a variation in the intensity. As a feeling brought about by forces or forces of encounter, it can be translated into an emotion but escapes consciousness and has no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to it. Affect is always a movement, a process of being that is underway rather than position taken. It is a gradient of bodily capacity that arises in the midst of an 'in-between-ness' (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). It is this ability to move within and across the in-between that makes

affect useful for understanding the 'real but abstract' incorporeality of the body, which Massumi identifies as being the virtual (2002:21).

"Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed 2010:29). In thinking about happiness and the promise of happiness as a happening, as involving affect and intentionality, and as a condition that is prepared for and cultivated, Sarah Ahmed explores how happiness puts us in intimate contact with objects. "Objects that give us happiness take up residence within our bodily horizon. We come to have our likes, which might even establish *what we are like*. The bodily horizon could be redescribed as a horizon of likes. To have our likes means certain things are gathered around us." (Ahmed 2010:32, italics in original). Objects are not only material and physical but are also anything that might lead to happiness, including sense of values, practices, styles, and aspirations (2010:41). Affects can be contagious and groups can be formed around a shared orientation towards certain things as being good and bringing happiness. There are also 'affect aliens,' those who do not find happiness or question the objects that are attributed by others as being happy or good. These 'aliens' encounter a disappointment from something that should have caused happiness, and through their alienation from "the affective promise of happy objects," imagine alternative trajectories for what may count as a good or better life (2010:50).

Girlhood consists of objects that circulate 'girl' as well as linguistic and cultural representations of girl. These objects may come from a variety of

sources from corporate or feminist activists, but girls often use and connect with them in unexpected ways. In addition, though consumption has become connected to girl feeling, Swindle calls for an understanding how these objects affect and are engaged with on a corporeal level not only as commodities. “Many of the objects of girl culture are not products at all, but aesthetics (pink, polka dots, and poodles), relationships (girlfriends and crushes), movements (dancing and hopscotch), rhetorical modes (gossip and diary writing), and affects (most notably, happiness)” (Swindle 2011:30). These objects create a collective of feeling and experiencing that draws boundaries between bodies, instead of separating them, allowing for the potential for participation in similar passages of affect.

The review of various studies about different aspects of *shōjo* culture suggest is that even if it cannot directly challenge the existing patriarchy or lead to a complete upheaval of the current system, it offers girls and women a way to create and participate in a world that men are not allowed to access. It is a world that is created based on the experience of having been a girl. This shared experience is something that men cannot participate in because they were not born as girls and not raised as girls. *Shōjo* are situated in a liminal existence. They are neither completely children nor are they completely women taking on the responsibilities of wife and mother. Their liminality allows them a space in which to engage in a separate discourse that runs counter to the mainstream. Also, as demonstrated by the young letter writers of the wartime *Shōjo no Tomo*

who criticized the magazine for censorship as well as the government's wartime agenda, their perceived innocence also allows them a position to openly critique or question without fear of suffering consequences for voicing their opinions (Dollase 2008).

Putting into consideration the affective nature of *shōjo* and its accomplice *kawaii*, it is possible to consider the felt experiences and feelings associated with *shōjo*, including the material objects, literature, places, motifs, and narrative styles that elicit certain reactions associated with being and becoming *shōjo*. *Shōjo* has become “not so much a literal description of any individual girl's consciousness” but a “cultural logic” accessible to writers and artists and the people who enjoy these works (Mackie 2010:199). In her influential essay describing the elements of *shōjo* aesthetics, in which Honda Masuko connects *shōjo* feeling to the notion of *hirahira* (flutter) found in the movement of objects like ribbons, frills, and lyrical word chains that “flutter in the breeze as symbols of girlhood” (1982[2010]:20). This evanescent fluttering feeling crosses sensual boundaries, creating an illusion of beauty and melancholy that is transient and elusive. Analyzing Yoshiya's writing and the visual language utilized by Ikeda Riyoko's famous 1970s *manga* *Berusaiyu no bara* (The Rose of Versailles 1972-1973), Honda discusses the colours, fragrances, and sounds expressed in *shōjo* work. *Hirahira* imagery is “shared by each sense, and thus blurs the distinction of each from another. It dissolves the boundary between body and outer world and amalgamates body and mind” (1982[2010]:35). The imagery transcends materialistic realities, blurring the

border between the ordinary and the imagined. Honda calls the movement *hirahira* as expressing a “force of life,” an image of “the free and the nomadic, of the movement of the Gypsies” (1982[2010]:34-35).

The construction of girl and of *shōjo* is ongoing and incomplete in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘becoming-,’ like the limit of a function in calculus that never reaches a definitive value or essential form but runs close to it or works towards it. There is always a gap between the approximation and the norm, suggesting that transitions between categories like girlhood and womanhood are defined by gradients, not a sharp rupture, and always in flux and movement. “Girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce *n* molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:277). Becoming-girl is movement that constantly traverses borderlines of childhood and adulthood, innocence and disenchantment, naiveté and wisdom. Becoming-girl has a liminal status that allows her the ability to break off from established molar identities and to travel in the in-between yet also makes her a subject for concern and control. She is perceived as dangerous, deadly, and delinquent or, even worse, frivolous and unimportant. However, there are also people who borrow the mask of the girl or *shōjo* so that they too can try to move like she does.

II. Becomings Through Eternal Maidenhood

Thus far I have briefly explored the historical development of the term *shōjo* including various conceptualizations and viewpoints concerning *shōjo* as a literary genre and as symbol of Japanese girlhood. Some of the works discussed in the previous section examine *shōjo* sensibilities as found in literature and media like books, comics and film, analyzing them as literary works and as works targeted to a *shōjo* audience or as created by authors who are themselves *shōjo* in their mentality. As a cultural logic, *shōjo* provides a repository of images, tropes, feelings, and motifs that are a valuable resource for certain kinds of expression in literature and art that convey senses of liminality and distance from conventional gender lines in Japanese society. There are many words that can be used to refer to girls in Japanese, but within the literature analyzing *shōjo*, academics, literary critics, and historians often use *shōjotachi*, the plural form of *shōjo*, to discuss real girls as a group with a word that also blurs the line between their lived realities with the *shōjo* as idealized and imagined form. In marketing and advertising, *shōjo* is also considered a marketable age range group, consisting of girls ranging from 8 to 15 years old, which is targeted for certain kinds of products and narratives.

I now turn the focus to grounding *shōjo* to explore how its sensibilities and related themes and motifs are utilized and understood by young Japanese women, particularly those who wear Lolita fashion. This is accomplished by examining individual Lolitas' own definitions, understanding, and usage of

terms like *shōjo*, *otome*, and *kawaii* in relation to their conceptualizations of Lolita fashion and its importance in their lives. I briefly address *shōjo* sensibilities and Lolita fashion in relation to contemporary feminism in Japan and conceptualizations of maidenhood and girlhood. Following is a discussion of Lolita and *otome*, or maiden, as a form of aesthetics, a way of looking and of understanding beauty, and how this is used as a way to affirm one's identity and find power in becoming-girl.

Shōjo Culture and Feminism in Japan

In an interview with shop girl Raine from Baby, the Stars Shine Bright (BTSSB), she is quoted as saying "Lolitas enjoy living alone, enjoy being surrounded by cute things, creating their own worlds" (quoted in Godoy 2007:144). Raine, as a Lolita, enjoys being in a world that she has constructed, a world that is considered a fantasy in contrast to the harsh world of reality. Matsuura (2007), who also self-identifies as a Lolita, writes that, as *shōjo*, Lolitas are interested in objects like inanimate dolls, old books written by authors of the past, and the grotesque and macabre because new books and new things contain new information about the world. They are representations of the things that are living in the present (*genjitsu ni ikiteiru*), a source of fear and concern for the *shōjo*. "To live in the present means that girls grow older, become adult women, their hearts controlled by the word 'love' and 'lovers.' Girls become slaves to time, their parents, and their husband in the present. They become wives, mothers,

experience hardships, and become grey and old without noticing it!" (Matsūra 2007:171). According to Matsūra, Lolita fashion acts as a sort of armour or shield against the social pressures Japanese women face in their daily life. Lolita fashion is not a part of reality or the everyday, but it is still a part of who they are. They can live out their Lolita selves on the weekends, parading in parts of the city, using it as a stage for their performance.

Prior to conducting research in Japan, influenced by the literature on *shōjo* culture and what I had read about Lolita fashion in Japan, I assumed that Lolitas would use and self-identify with *shōjo* in similar ways. However, I quickly realized that *shōjo* is strictly age-bounded and thus not a label that women over the age of 15 or 16 would ever call themselves. However, there is a difference in saying "I am *shōjo*" and "I wish to remain *shōjo*-like." I found that certain categories and words seem bounded or rigid in definition when people were asked directly to discuss or describe them. This contrasts with the more varied ways the word is actually used in conversation or the concepts the word is consciously believed to refer to. The number of subgenres and styles within the fashion also suggest an interest in categorization and differentiation, but many of these categories are primarily focused on variation in style elements rather than expressing a distinction of ideology or even personality stereotypes.

Swindle (2011) created a list of aesthetics, ideas, and objects commonly related to a North American conceptualization of girl and girl-affect:

Pink, glitter, rhinestones, dollhouses, dresses, joy, teddy bears, unicorns, flowers, bubble gum, long hair, fingernail polish, Barbie, American Girl, dolls, dress-up clothes, tiaras, bows, barrettes, tiny backpacks, posters of teen stars, rainbows, sassiness, lipgloss, hopscotch, funny, jumprope, cotton candy, princesses, giggles, tickles, gossip, girlfriends, crushes, diaries, secrets, magazines, notes, hula hoops, power, arts and crafts, bikes (with streamers of course), dancing, fashion, gummy bears, pop music, wonder, high heels, intelligence, happiness

Undertaking the same exercise, here is my own list for *shōjo*:

Ribbons, roses, sparkles, letters, poems, Western novels, long hair, frills, lace, aprons, straw hat, pleats, cakes, homemade cookies, unrequited love, pink, laughter, hearts, fluttering, blue sky, stuffed animals, onepiece dresses, fairytale princesses, Licca-chan¹⁰, book reading, dolls, puff-sleeves, rounded collars, dress-up, melancholy, tears, candy, magical girls¹¹, friendship, first love, giggles, polka dots, sailor collars, braided hair, sighs, Alice in Wonderland, carefree, dreamy-eyed

Many similar aesthetics and motifs in this list can easily be found or connected to Lolita fashion in some way. For example, some basic elements of Lolita dress design share a resemblance to the frilly and sparkly dresses worn by heroines in *manga*, especially in older works from the 1970s and 1980s. Lolita fashion and Lolitas pull from both the pre-WWII *shōjo* as well as the pop and cute postwar/postmodern *kawaii* youth. However, even if Lolita fashion seems to be drawing on the same sensibilities and pool of inspirations used by *shōjo* culture, most of its wearers do not adopt a *shōjo* identity or refer to themselves as *shōjo*,

¹⁰ A Barbie-like doll marketed in Japan, Licca-chan has long blonde hair and is produced by Takara-Tomy.

¹¹ A type of narrative genre found in *anime* and *manga* about young girls who magically transform into crime and monster fighting super heroines. The most notable example would be Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon.

which usually is seen as a girl 14 years old and younger, who is a bit child-like, being on the cusp of adolescence and still in middle school.

Lolitas are not *shōjo* in the sense that they do not claim it as a physicality, subject position or identity, but some express a desire to foster *shōjo no kokoro*, a *shōjo* heart– that is having access to *shōjo* affect and emotion. Like ‘girl’ or ‘grrrl,’ the affects and experiences connected to ‘*shōjo*’ may be recalled and felt regardless of one’s current physical age, but it is not a banner for subversive identity and political action in the same way that Riot Grrrls and the Girlie movement, connected to writers in *BUST* and *Bitch* magazines, attempt to take back ‘girl’ as a form of and site for agency, resistance, confidence, and critique. Japanese Lolitas show no indication of interest in feminism or seeing Lolita as a form of feminism, but North Americans are more likely to talk about the potential of social and political power in the celebration of femininity found in Lolita in terms that can be relatable to Third Wave feminism, see Chapter 4.

Wakeling argues that *shōjo* shares common tactics with the pluralistic politics of contemporary third wave feminism and attempts to frame it as a form of third wave feminism (132, 139). She also acknowledges that artists using *shōjo* motifs in their work seldom publically announce their work as feminist or even political in intent. The definition of Third Wave feminism utilized in this work is biased towards a North American/Western experience and is centered on the use of ‘girl power.’ The phrase ‘third wave’ in itself is also problematic and not directly applicable to a Japanese perspective. Junko Kuminobu (1984), for

example, splits the history of Japanese feminist movements into four different “high tides” or waves: 1870s-1880s after the Meiji restoration; 1910s-1920s before World War II; the years immediately after the war; and the 1970s. Writing before the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was passed in 1985, Kuminobu perhaps may have introduced a fifth wave to label the early 1990s, known as “the era of women” (*onna no jidai*) when women were able to exercise more freedom in choosing their path in life.

A volume edited by Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow (2011) exhibits the pluralities and diverse positions currently being engaged in feminism and activism, from gender roles to sexualities to ethnicities. I have been unable to find information on a feminist activist group or movement in Japan equivalent to Riot Grrrl and Girlie and searches for ‘third wave feminism’ in Japan have been unfruitful. It appears that *shōjo* is largely ignored as a having any political potential useful to address issues of institutional inequality such as women’s wages and discrimination in the workplace. *Shōjo* texts, including *manga* and written literature, and youth subculture movements are indeed open to a fruitful feminist reading and offer perspective into girl feeling and thinking, but they are not called feminist. Japan is a homosocial and gendered society that tolerates and encourages same-sex socializing. In addition, feminism is widely misunderstood by the general public (Dales 2009).

In research examining NGO women’s groups and government-run women’s centres in Japan, “the link between lack of experience of blatant

discrimination and the resistance to the term 'feminist'" resulted in the belief among women that 'feminist' and 'feminism' are labels earned by a woman "who is aware of inequality or of the difficulty of being a woman, and this awareness has grown from a tangible, personal experience of hardship" (Dales 2009:59). This includes single working woman, lesbians, or other women seen to be living non-mainstream lifestyles. Women who were married said that they were not feminist because they relied on their husbands.

Discussing contemporary Japanese female artists, Kasahara similarly argues that most women have little awareness of or contact with women's rights campaigns. She also criticizes Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for advocating a distorted image of feminism and gender studies in mass media and the public consciousness as "frightening, inflexible doctrines" (2007:99). The mass media has created an inaccurate homogenized view of feminist perspective leading many people to believe that feminism is only something that academics do, not something that ordinary people do (Dales 2009:63). Thus, many woman artists distance themselves from these ideas publicly. Instead, most women engage in a masquerade in which they appear to adopt values of society in order to protect themselves and enjoy its benefits by pretending to do what they are told, in reality rejecting these values and seeking a haven within a tiny world of their own (Kasahara2007:101). Nonetheless, Dale argues that women's projects and women's groups are sites for agency that may or may not identify as feminist in order to reach a larger group of people.

The 1990s era of women presented the image of the powerful Japanese woman who had more freedom of choice than her male counterparts who are weighed down by obligations to their work and company. However, the deterioration of the economy at the end of the 1990s has also led to an overall regression in Japanese women's lives, including growing poverty among women and declining status in the workplace where women are less likely to be employed as regular workers and have fewer benefits and lower wages. 70% of women cease work after the birth of their first child and the average length of continuous employment is six years (Fujimura-Fanselow 2011:xx). Despite government legislation such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1985 and the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society in 1999, the government has been criticized for the language used in the 1999 law and its lack of action in making changes at an institutional level to address sexual discrimination and inequality (2011:xxvii). Fujimura-Fanselow also notes that formal education continues to avoid addressing issues of gender inequality, violation of human rights or providing students with knowledge about social and political issues concerning women and about different future personal and career options.

Considering the history of *shōjo* culture that has brought girls together since its introduction as a liminal period before womanhood and the homosocial nature of Japanese society something like Lolita fashion might not be a site for liberal feminist political action and advancement of women's rights in Japan but it does offer an alternative creative space in which other work may take place.

Taking into consideration women's social status and limited options, though Lolita fashion is not explicitly labelled a feminist movement, it is a form of agency and can be utilized on both a conscious and unconscious level as a critique against society.

Rumi, a Japanese Lolita from the Kansai region, explicitly acknowledged her engagement with Lolita as a reaction to Japanese society. "In Japan, people have a lot of stress, so in a way, everyone is a kind of *otaku*¹², creating a fantasy in their head to escape from daily life. I'm like that too, except I can't contain it inside my head," pointing to her clothes (interview, April 14, 2010). According to Rumi, in Japanese society, everyone has to be together, everyone has to act the same. To stand out, to be self-assertive is "taboo." Rumi sees Lolita as a form of "anarchy" within Japan. Anarchy means standing outside society, not losing to authority and power, and to preserve one's own soul and beliefs. Through what she labels as a cute revolution (*kawaii kakumei*), Rumi wears Lolita as a "reaction" to current society by living by her own standards as to what is cute and engaging in a "slow style" of life in a world where time is a precious commodity. Japan is often portrayed as group-oriented society where even if one does not necessarily agree, one must learn to work together others and hold back personal desires to

¹² In this context, meaning someone who is obsessed with something, not necessarily *anime* or *manga*, see glossary.

achieve a common goal. Lolita fashion then is a response to this by offering a way to be selfish and think about one's own desires and wants.

Unlike Rumi, many Japanese Lolitas are reluctant to voice their personal opinions in terms of politics, association with political parties or view Lolita as a rebellion, but everyone claims that they are "wearing Lolita for myself" and that it is a fashion unconcerned with dressing to attract and be likable to men. Works on Japanese culture have highlighted the conflict between individuality and group solidarity or public ideology with private interest as well as concepts of obligation and duty to the family and to society (Befu 1980, 1989; Benedict 1946, Nakane 1970). Lolita is disconnected from these conceptualizations of social expectations and adult responsibilities and offers a haven from the constrictions and stresses created by these and other factors.

Because of the confusion concerning what is meant by 'feminism' and who can use this word, this action is not framed in terms of feminist critique made against gender inequality but is performed as a Lolita working against society as a whole that expects them as women to fit into certain boxes. It is not an attack against or an attempt to change the institutions that constrain them but an outright refusal and an endeavour in finding meaning that lies outside the confines of work and marriage that resonates with Malatino's (2011) suggestion that Riot Grrrl is an exit from the building instead of an attempt to break the glass ceiling.

Lolita Aesthetics in Personal Visions of Kawaii and Beauty

As per her request, I agreed to meet Nagisa in the Tanimachi area, far removed from Shinsaibashi and Ame-mura, popular hangout spots for fashionable youth in Osaka. “There too many Gyaruu in Shinsaibashi, and they’re so noisy.” Nagisa really didn’t like to deal with Gyaruu, calling them rude and too light-hearted in their actions. She invited me to a basement café where “no Gyaruu will ever come here so I can really feel relaxed.” It’s common knowledge, or rather commonly said, that Gyaruu and Lolitas generally don’t get along, but Nagisa is probably the first actual Lolita I met who displayed such contempt for them, taking great steps to avoid them on her day off. I arrived first and saw her slowly ascend the subway exit stairs, appearing from the underground wearing a printed dress with animals on it, decked out in various Vivienne Westwood accessories including a lighter masquerading as a giant orb necklace and a pair of ballerina rocking horse shoes with the high wooden heels that added 7cm to her already slightly above average height. Smoking a cigarette using a long Vivienne Westwood cigarette holder, her own hair dyed blonde and curled in soft ringlets instead of wearing a wig, Nagisa stands out wherever she goes.

One moment that stood out from our interview was when I had asked her “In your opinion, what do you think Lolita is?” halfway through. It was a difficult question for her to answer. She mumbled to herself, trying to produce a response, “Lolita – Lolita – What does it mean? The more I think about it the more I feel I don’t even know any more...” After spending a couple minutes

thinking about my question, a bit flustered, Nagisa turned to me, “Have you ever met a Lolita who was really, truly Lolita-like?” – that is, the Perfect Lolita (*risō no Lolita*).

“Well, in your mind, what image do you have of the Perfect Lolita?”

“Completely covered in white – like an angel. In other words, someone who is not like me” (interview, April 10, 2010).

Nagisa does not see herself as a Lolita or cute even though she wears Lolita fashion because she has a conception of an idealized form which she will never be able to attain or become. When asked if she thought she was a Lolita or not, Minami’s response reflected a similar opinion, “My friends call me *otome*, and that makes me happy. I would like to be called Lolita too, but in terms of fashion, I don’t really wear any knee length skirts and rarely wear any panniers. I wonder if it’s a little rude to proper Lolitas” (interview, April 1, 2010). According to Minami, someone like Sachi, the violinist of Kokushoku Sumire, or Kamome from Kusumoto Maki’s *manga KISS XXXX* or even her friend who wears head to toe Angelic Pretty and has pink hair are Lolitas. Minami describes Sachi as her ideal image of a princess (*ohime-sama*). She became her fan ever since she saw Sachi’s photograph in the street snaps in *KERA* and *GL&B*.

Minami, 26 years old, lives in Ibaraki prefecture and commutes to Tokyo every day where she works at a cosmetics company in the marketing department. She started going to Harajuku during the weekends to hang out at Jingubashi with the band cosplayers and other Lolitas starting in middle school.



Being a fan of visual-kei bands like Raphael and Malice Mizer but without the means to frequently go to concerts, she found friends who were willing to mail her letters filled with concert and event reports. Minami continued going to the Jingu Bridge for around eight years before gradually becoming too busy with work and losing interest as fewer people hung out there on Sundays. Still in contact with the friends

she made at the bridge, she feels a closer affinity with the people she met in Harajuku as there is a deeper connection made through fashion, music, and aesthetics that is missing from friendships made with her high school classmates.

Velveteen represents the epitome of luxury to Minami, and garments using the material make her feel special when worn. The very first piece of Lolita clothing she ever bought was a red velveteen hairbow from Jane Marple with adjustable wires sewn in so that she could shape the bow how she wanted. She wore sweet and classical style Lolita clothes from brands like Innocent World and Metamorphose as well but one day decided to stop. Recalling the particular day she decided to stop wearing Lolita:

One day, when I turned 20, still in vocational school – it suddenly happened – I wore my favourite skirt – one with a rose print – all of a sudden I felt, ‘It doesn’t look right! Why?!’ I suddenly felt cold towards

it. But I still wear Jane and Emily Temple Cute because it is something that is acceptable no matter the occasion or where I may go. ... It was strange. I looked in the mirror and just felt, 'something's changed.'
[interview, Minami, April 1, 2010]

She sold most of her Lolita clothes soon afterwards to used clothing stores, like many others who eventually decided to 'graduate' (*sotsugyō*) from Lolita. Many years later she has since re-purchased a small number of the same garments through online auction sites, but she has largely closed this chapter in her life.

Despite not wearing what she considers to be standard Lolita style clothing, defined as knee-length fluffy skirts, Minami's fashion style has evolved and become subdued over time as she adapted her style to a work appropriate wardrobe while still remembering her Lolita influences through a combination of vintage and used clothing with items from brands like Jane Marple, Emily Temple Cute, and MILK. These designers used to produce clothes that were identified by some wearers as Lolita or Punk but have since diversified with designs that reflect the times in order to appeal to new potential customers. Even with changes in style over the years, many older customers have grown up with these brands, still wearing the new designs and considering them as part of Lolita fashion. Ever since Minami started working, she had less time to dress up, go to concerts, and hang out with her friends, thus she felt she was beginning to forget about the things that were important to her during her high school days. She has a small collection of Blythe dolls that she displays in her room along with

other *kawaii* objects. Looking at these *kawaii* things every morning calms her down and makes her feel relieved. It helps her to remember that, “I am a Lolita.”

Minami sees Lolita as a lifestyle (*raifusutairu*) or a way of living (*ikikata*). Stating that “it’s the same as waking up in the morning, washing my face, and eating breakfast every day,” she believes that Lolita is a form of aesthetics (*biishiki*), an appreciation for a certain sense of beauty and emotion (interview, April 1, 2010). By framing it as aesthetics and an approach to life, Minami continues to have claim and access to the Lolita of her youth while participating in mainstream society as an unmarried adult woman in the workforce.

In addition to a way of living, the idea of a Lolita spirit was also discussed by several Lolitas. The idea is found in the two phrases *Lolita no seishin* and *Lolita no kokoro*. *Seishin* and *kokoro* can both be translated as the spirit or soul but each has different nuances. *Kokoro* is commonly translated as ‘the heart,’ and like in English, has connections to inner workings, feelings, emotions, and the intuitive. *Seishin* can also be connected to the heart but can also be situated in the mind in terms of the intellectual, philosophical, principles, ideals, and intention. It can be used to talk about developing the mind and intellect. Keeping this in mind, I only came across *shōjo no kokoro* during interviews, an indication that *shōjo* is being considered closer to dealings of the heart. Lolita, on the other hand, can also be conceptualized as a philosophy and way of being. *Otome-gokoro*, combining ‘maiden’ with ‘heart,’ is also sometimes described as a philosophy or way of living. These various phrases are connected by an emphasis on

understanding, embracing, and advancing a personally defined conceptualization of beauty which includes a *kawaii* sense that deviates from mainstream tastes.

Lolita is a way of living. This is what Takemoto Novala has written in his novels, and I also agree with him. I think it is a life, someone's way of living, a principle of thinking. To put loving *kawaii* things at the forefront, to live under a self-created rule to which one applies the things that one finds *kawaii*. I think that is what would be called in Japan a Lolita. [interview, Chisato, May 1, 2010]

Within Lolita there are different streams and standards of what is considered *kawaii* represented by the various sub-styles and based on internal feelings. What a Lolita who likes Angelic Pretty will consider *kawaii* is different from a Lolita who likes Metamorphose even though both are considered Sweet Lolita brands. A Gothic Lolita may consider skulls, bats, crosses, coffins, and daggers *kawaii* even if others may think these things are scary or strange. Among some, even antique items, from clothes to furniture, may be included in this category. Despite the differences in content, each sense is built on the importance of being aware of and being able to stick to one's likes and dislikes regardless of what surrounding people may think and say. In addition, *kawaii* items are considered to make one feel at ease, peaceful, and may become a form of healing.

Outside Japan, *kawaii* is typically marketed as a Japanese-influenced pop art-like cute visual and artistic style found in character goods like Hello Kitty and artistic and design styles featuring super-deformed characters with wide sparkly eyes found in the work of artists and companies like Mizuno Junko and Los

Angeles-based apparel and cosmetics brand Tokidoki. Recognition of Japanese girls donning street style is also coded as *kawaii* by the general public, a result of the efforts of entertainers like Gwen Stefani and recent Internet sensation KyaryPamyuPamyu who started out as a reader model for *KERA* before her music video 'Ponponpon' achieved millions of views on Youtube, cementing her as the newest Harajuku icon worldwide.

<i>Kawaii</i>	<i>Utsukushii</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cute - small - weak - youthful - energetic - endearing - imperfect - disposable - of the moment - attainable and reachable - personally defined concept based on an individual's likes and dislikes - consumer culture, popular culture, and mass media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - beautiful - grown-up - perfection - symmetrical - expensive - noble - sacred and distanced - long-lasting - landscapes - paintings - classical - requires a lot of money to obtain or achieve - placed in high regard

Images, feelings, and definitions attached to the two contrasting concepts of *kawaii* and *utsukushii*.

These images travel outside Japan but overshadow the more nuanced emotive and affective nature of *kawaii* things and people. *Kawaii* indeed does mean cute things and people, but it is also something that is loved, that is lovable, that exists to be loved, that can be taken in the hand, that can be made close to, that is reachable, that provokes laughter without thinking. An object, a person, a way of acting, a feeling can all be called *kawaii*. Based on the whim of the person using it, each pairing situates and defines *kawaii* in a myriad ways:

That sakura flower over there – it has a nice smell that makes you feel good, so it's *kawaii*. This strawberry juice – it's delicious, so it's *kawaii*. Stuffed animals – when you use them, hug them closely – that's *kawaii*. They are all different kinds of *kawaii*. I guess I end up using it however strikes my fancy. [laughs] [interview, Noriko, March 26, 2010]

Kawaii is best understood as an affect that expresses the aesthetics and things that one wants to be surrounded with or bring close within reach. It is uttered in succession whenever a girl enters a shop that she likes, picking up and touching everything, calling it all *kawaii* to highlight that moment of instant appeal that evaporates just as quickly. Unlike *utsukushii* (beautiful), *kawaii* can be imperfect, and it is this imperfection that makes it endearing and lovable. *Kawaii* can be connected to the disposable, consumerist, and post modern, but most important of all, it is an attainable ideal. *Utsukushii* things and people seem noble and far away, placed on pedestals for viewing but not for touching or close contact. Landscapes, paintings, and other objects that exhibit a balance and perfection are all considered forms of *utsukushii*. People who are beautiful (*bijin*) are seen as grown-up (*otonappoi*) in contrast to the childlike cuteness of *kawaii*. Most people preferred to be called *kawaii* by others as they desire to retain a sense of youthfulness and believe that the standard for *utsukushii* is much too high to even fathom attempting:

I would be happier being called *kawaii*. If I wanted to be beautiful I would wear other clothes. If I wanted to dress beautifully, I think it would cost a lot of money. Going to the beauty parlour, getting my make-up professionally done – those are ways to make myself beautiful. But, wearing Lolita-type clothes, I feel like I am *kawaii*. Frankly speaking, I can never be beautiful because there's the problem of my body type and shape. [Noriko 2010]

I was curious why *utsukushii* was given such special status but later realized that the Chinese character is the same as the *bi* in *bigaku*, an aesthetic or appreciation of beauty that is not personally defined like *kawaii* but adheres to standards set by a higher authority like scholars, art historians, philosophers, or religious principles but not by the regular person on the street. This distinction can be thought in the same way as an argument concerning the value and definition of art versus crafts and industrial design, or between things created for commercial or practical purposes and pieces of art found in museums, created for an elite audience that is not mass produced. Japanese aesthetics, for example, include the study of domains considered traditional and sacred including Buddhist art or the asymmetrical composition found in poetry and calligraphy (Hume 2005). In contrast, *kawaii* is a form of beauty that removes the overarching influence exerted by sources of perceived power like tradition or the patriarchy, granting young girls and women an aesthetic they have the power to define and categorize. Things that make girls' hearts go a-flutter like pretty flowers or cute ribbons, "things that men don't pay attention to, don't notice" are what girls call *kawaii* (interview, Asuka, March 25, 2010).

Real Girls Aren't Shōjo: Differences Between Young-Girls, Lolitas, and Maidens

As I continued my research in Japan I became increasingly unsure of what Lolita is, even questioning the focus of my research. Research participants would themselves begin to wonder what is meant by Lolita, noticing that they

had taken the label for granted without making attempts to unpack it. When asked to discuss the meaning of Lolita or what Lolita means to them, most people answered that it is a fashion, but I discovered that 'Lolita' was also used in various ways beyond a fashion genre label. 'Lolita' can be important for some people as a way to label their self identity and to assert that they are working against mainstream society. It is used to express an ideal person, real or fictional, and can also be understood as a philosophy or aesthetics.

There are a number of people who were completely unaware of the existence of Vladimir Nabokov novel *Lolita* (1955) or the movie adaptations (1962, 1997) until I told them, but those who did already know would vehemently deny any connection to the Nabokov novel or to *lolicon* (or *rorikon*), abbreviated from 'Lolita complex' as derived from the 1969 Japanese translation of Russell Trainer's book *Lolita Complex* (Takatsuki 2010:6). Patrick Galbraith (2011) provides a detailed account of the historical development of *lolicon* as a genre of *anime* and *manga* featuring two-dimensional young girl characters in sexual narratives that are consumed and created by both male and female *otaku* as a form of imaginative space in which they can perform *shōjo*, however, for those outside this circle, *lolicon* is typically associated with pornographic material featuring young girls or youthful-looking women, two-dimensional or not. Differentiating between the 'Lolita' used to refer to pornography and the 'Lolita' used to refer to the fashion became especially pertinent when using Internet search engines, hence some wearers of the fashion developed an alternative

writing, replacing the original *rori-ta* that uses the *chōonpu*, or long vowel mark, for a new spelling – *roiita* with the second elongated ‘i’ in its small version:

ロリータ *Rori-ta*, the standard written word in *katakana* writing system.

ロリイタ *Roiita*, the new word to refer specifically to Lolita fashion.

During my Japanese-language interviews, I asked participants to explain why Lolita was used both to describe the fashion and the complex and if they thought these two things were related or not. Everyone declared that the two words are completely different things. At times it seemed as if the person never really thought about or noticed this connection before I asked them. The topic was usually brushed aside when I realized I would be unable to extract any further information other than that on a conscious level, *lolicon* and Lolita fashion are conceptually seen as two entirely separate categories. Nagisa offered a potential explanation in which ‘Lolita’ is essentially connected to an idea about girlhood that is defined and approached differently by men and women. Based on these gender-based understandings, she placed Lolita fashion under the category of *shōjo*, defined as a girl in middle school or high school, and she connected *lolicon* to *yōjo*, or a little girl in elementary school or younger. The ‘Lolita’ in *lolicon* is defined by male gaze and desire, particularly “perverted older men,” that is directed towards prepubescent girls (Nagisa 2010). Men project their sexual desires upon Lolita, wanting to take advantage of and control her. For women, in contrast, Lolita lies in a domain removed from the sphere of male influence.

This Lolita, instead of being preyed upon, has agency and is a reminder of the woman's own precious childhood memories growing up as a girl.

Connections to the novel aside, no one knows the roots of the word 'Lolita' in terms of its use in 'Lolita fashion' such as why the word was chosen to describe this fashion or even when it was first used and by whom to describe the style. Even the designers of popular brands like Angelic Pretty and Metamorphose do not know where the word developed from, stating that the label had existed prior to when they started working as a fashion designer. There is a general understanding that there was a time when the style, or something similar to the current day Lolita look, existed but without the Lolita label. Though some have found themselves curious about the how, what, when, and why, it appears that most people never bother to ask, do not care or do not actively seek an answer. The 'Lolita' in Lolita fashion and what it entails is generally taken for granted as something that has somehow always existed, especially by Lolitas who have learned about the fashion largely through magazines and other media within the last ten years.

Lolitas outside Japan are interested in and always trying to search for a root, origins, or the beginning of the style's history, and my line of inquiry was in part influenced by this curiosity and desire for authenticity. There are Japanese Lolitas involved in documenting and explaining the style as evidenced by the existence of encyclopaedia-like web databases and personal webpages containing short essays on the Internet, however I never met in person anyone involved in

these types of projects. In addition, many of these websites have not been updated in years as more people leave behind or delete completely personal websites in lieu of blogging platforms like Yaplog and Livedoor.

Essays and timelines depicting the establishment of Gothic, Lolita, and Punk brands are published in *G&LB*, which republishes this information again every couple of years, and other publications like *Street Mode Book – Neo Gothic Lolita* (2007). These timelines usually situate the street style history in relation to national and world events as well as other fashion trends within Japan. Though these ‘official’ histories exist, the history that people are comfortable talking about is a personal one, situated in their own memory and experiences that they have themselves gone through and remember, some mapped in their mind, other reverberations evoked the changing urban landscape. There is a shared background and narrative that ties together Lolitas and their Gothic and Punk counterparts, but it is not something that can be defined or displayed on a timeline in chronological events. To say that Lolita is first and foremost a fashion genre is to bring focus to the importance of engaging with fashion, clothes, and style if one is to become a Lolita or come to understand a Lolita mentality. Engaging in Lolita allows for a certain kind of learning and becoming that is to be accomplished through clothing and fostering a particular aesthetic sensibility.

Though it can be used as a launching point for growth and self-exploration, it can also become perceived as a restricting label for some people especially as the fashion is folded into systems of marketing and advertising that

support the style as an industry. For people who are in a position to wear these clothes every day, as students in art-related programs or working as artists, musicians or fashion designers, to ask them to define Lolita as a category is like asking them to define their existence as a human being. It has become a part of their life to the point that it is not something that they actively think about or can easily extract into verbal language. Compared to those who primarily wear the clothes but are not involved in creating, most people in these fields are also less likely to adhere strongly to a Lolita identity as it places limitations on their creative output and its potential audience. They use the Lolita label as a way to market their works, but to stay only within this category may become creatively stifling.

Designers are in a different position from Lolita fashion wearers; it is their occupation and they approach 'Lolita' as another kind of fashion style but will not apply it as a label to describe how they live their life. Chantilly designer Fumiko sees it as an unavoidable category useful for marketing and attends events in North America, Europe, and China as a 'Lolita brand,' but actually dislikes the word. "I understand that my clothes are being put in the category of Lolita, but I'm not really saying it's Lolita. I don't really like the word Lolita. Lolita fashion and Lolita clothes - clothes are clothes" (interview, Fumiko, March 23, 2010). In her opinion, in recent years the Lolita aesthetic has become more closely associated with childish clothing that makes people look like children. She describes her clothes as "elegant, cute, and classical." But she also states that

she does not analyze what Lolita means since it is a part of her personality and she cannot imagine being anything else.

There are other small independent designers like Fumiko who came from the same era and social group who have grown from the glory days of the Harajuku Hokoten and the Gothic Lolita and Visual-*kei* boom to create designs that, while not strictly Lolita, seem to be pulling from a similar place of inspiration for a particular vision of femininity and beauty that contrasts to the pop, colourful, and over the top aesthetic from a Sweet Lolita brand like Angelic Pretty or BTSSB. These designers include Fairy Wish's Kobayashi Alice, who was previously a designer for Moi-même-Moitié and Nakamoto Kaori of SERAPHIM. Fumiko herself also worked for Moi-même-Moitié and Angelic Pretty before establishing her own brand. Violinist Sachi, also in this social group, does not see herself as a Lolita even though she is an idol for some Lolitas, saying that "it was a label that other people applied to me, not something I call myself" (interview, March 26, 2009). Sachi currently performs under the name Kokushoku Sumire with singer and pianist Yuka, and the duo are often labelled as a Gothic Lolita band in media and interviews. Many of their female fans identify with Lolita fashion and are familiar with Sachi since she appeared in street snaps in *FRUiTS* and *KERA* magazine wearing Lolita brands like Moi-même-Moitié and Metamorphose. In addition, Sachi and Yuka have in the past year held seminars at a university discussing Gothic and Lolita style, suggesting that the association is much more complex.

On their official profile, Sachi and Yuka are listed as eternally 14. Every year on their respective birthdays, they post a photo of a birthday cake on their blog with a caption that jokingly declares that they safely made it through another year to celebrate their 14th birthday... again. There were a small number of Lolitas who were reluctant to reveal their biological age to me. Like Kokushoku Sumire, some chose to playfully declare they are eternally 14 (*eien no 14 sai*). At the age of 14, girls are still in their 1st or 2nd year of middle school before the taxing entrance exam test preparations that mark the final year. In the 3rd year of middle school, boys and girls are expected to be more serious students and to dedicate large amounts of time and energy to study for exams instead of day-dreaming. The pressure exerted on students during this time can become crippling for some. By the time they are 14, most people will have experienced melancholy and other events connected to adolescence that earmark a move away from childhood. Still retaining aspects of child-like innocence and not completely disillusioned with life, 14 is a special age, representing a turning point. By claiming to be eternally 14, even in a joking manner, some Lolitas are keeping alive the feelings and experiences from that time.

In contrast to most people, Rumi declared that she was “eternally 17,” explaining that it was the year she turned 17 that “I finally knew what love meant” (interview, April 14, 2010). This suggests that the ‘eternal’ is about setting a suspension in time, protecting a period and its associated feelings and memories that have now passed but are still accessed and remembered in the

present, hidden away in a moratorium that is opened and entered from time to time. Justine, a Japanese woman who only went by her 'Lolita name,' declares that she wants to remain an "eternal girl" (*etanaruga-ru*) (interview, May 1, 2010). This English phrase combines 'eternal 14' with the idea of *otome*, or maiden. Unlike *shōjo* which has a childish and infantile nuance of a young child who is unable to do anything by herself, 'girl' is connected to *otome*, which Justine defines as the period around adolescence when girls are filled with curiosity and begin to look up to women who embody a "lady" image as a model they too want to attain. *Otome* are well spoken, elegant and graceful, beautiful both inside and outside, and while not entirely grown up are a little mischievous in nature. People in their mid-20s, regardless of whether they reject Lolita as an identity or embrace Lolita as a labelling category, are more likely to call themselves *otome*.

<i>Shōjo</i>	<i>Otome</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - young girl aged 14 to 15 - childish - teenage adolescence - carefree - dreamy - cute - pure feelings - middle to high school age girls - limited by physical age - cannot be used for anyone over 20 years old - can only be applied to girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ageless and timeless - elegant and graceful - lady-like - describes a personality - beautiful not only in appearance but also in character - someone keeping alive the appreciation and love for <i>kawaii</i> things regardless of or in spite of their age - a sensibility not connected to a physical state or outside appearances, thus men can also claim this identity

There are differences in how each person defines *shōjo* and *otome*, but the points of consensus are demonstrated in this table.

Like *shōjo*, *otome* is not a concept unique to or inherently connected to Lolita fashion. Lolita fashion instead borrows elements from *shōjo* culture and influences individual *otome* sense in ways specific to those who currently are or formerly were involved in Lolita. For some people, the three categories of *shōjo*, *otome*, and Lolita are part of a staircase-like shift in identity over time starting with *shōjo* and children's clothing brands like Shirley Temple, Emily Temple 160, and Mezzo Piano up until the age of 15. As one then moves on to Lolita, travelling towards *otome* if one does not 'graduate' or veer from the path before then. Lolita shares a resonance and sensibility with *shōjo*, but a Lolita, while still retaining some aspects of naiveté, is more world-weary and aware of the dark, ugly parts of the world. A *shōjo* "doesn't know very much, even more than a Lolita. A Lolita is – well, it's like she somehow knows something. –If a wolf like in Little Red Riding Hood came close, a Lolita would know that it was a wolf

when she comes near him, but a *shōjo* would continue to believe that was her grandmother” (Minami 2010).

Others see no connection between these concepts, discussing *shōjo* as childhood purity and innocence but not connected to media products part of *shōjo* culture or the image of the *shōjo* schoolgirl in middle school or high school even if they themselves are in constant contact with these motifs and images and use them in their daily life. This sentiment is found in Angelic Pretty designer Asuka’s comment:

Personally I haven’t really thought about tying Lolita and *shōjo* together. Like I said earlier, it’s a little bit child-like. Not *shōjo*, but in my mind, it’s something even- even more innocent [*junsui*]. During childhood, everyone is pure, like extremely pure. As people become adults, they come under different kinds of circumstances, and gradually their thinking changes, and they become no longer pure. Maybe a Lolita is someone who can hold on to that pureness. [interview, Asuka, March 25, 2010]

In an earlier interview conducted at the 2009 PMX convention in Los Angeles, Asuka separates those who wear Lolita from children:

Asuka [in Japanese]: These aren’t clothes that only someone young can wear. They aren’t children’s clothing. These are Western clothes that are for the girls [*onna no ko*] who want to keep on holding to the dreams that they have kept in their heart ever since their childhood.

Translator [speaking in English directly to me]: It’s not that they want to make clothes for children as there are still people who want to be like that person from their dreams from when they’re younger like fairy tales so that’s why they’re branding - they get so that these people who wants to wear this fashion don’t have to go to a children’s [store] - it’s not a children’s thing. It’s a girl’s dream kind of thing. [interview, November 6, 2009]

This is a conscious effort to disassociate *shōjo* from Lolita as it is heavily tied to childhood and an age-defined physical state which may present the dangerous potential of tying Lolita conceptually to infantilization. According to Asuka, Lolita fashion is not for children but for girls (*onna no ko*) who do not want to forget their dreams from their childhood. While *shōjo* equals child, *onna no ko* is similar to the English 'girl' and 'girls' and seems less restricted to a physical age. It was often used in the plural to talk about 'we girls,' about what girls think and what girls feel, creating an affinity between other girls and bringing together people in a way that was never accomplished with *shōjo*. Unlike *shōjo* which generally had to be prompted in order to be used by people, *onna no ko* appeared spontaneously. The removal of a *shōjo* connection to Lolita suggests that innocence, purity, and dreams can still be remembered and upheld without having to be bound by a child's body and mind.

There was no discussion of *shōjo* as Young-Girl but it presents an image of a child who is unable to do anything by herself. Though she is innocent and pure, she also lacks agency or the ability to make things happen. Mackie (2010) and Bergstrom (2011) have both connected Lolita to the *shōjo* genre. Though I agree with these scholars' analysis, I also realize that participants do not recognize or realize this connection on a conscious level. *Shōjo* culture has become so ubiquitous that it is inseparable from the experience of growing up as a girl in Japanese society. *Otome* and Lolita is then the continuation of this culture that takes into the account that these are the minds and bodies of adult

women past adolescence who re-appropriate the symbols and objects of girlhood that destabilizes categories of gender and social/national responsibility.

A Parade of the Innocent and the Grotesque

Fitting into the concept of the girl who loves to read, or *bungaku shōjo*, Lolita aesthetics is also in part informed by classic children's literature and avant garde texts. In addition to these media, there is an interest in the ephemeral, grotesque, and macabre which can, depending on the person, either feed into shaping *kawaii* senses or exist as a separate stream of art appreciation. This fascination is found in many Lolitas I met regardless of what sub-style they preferred to wear.



These Lolitas are 'twinning' the same dress from Baby, the Stars Shine Bright. Taken at Jingu Bridge, photo by An Nguyen (2008).

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is one example of an important literary work, providing inspiration for many dresses and original fabric designs in Lolita fashion. 'Alice sets' consisting of a light blue dress, white apron, and head bow sold together then paired with striped socks and black shoes used to be popular several years ago. Though complete Alice outfits are

nowadays not as commonly released, motifs and characters like trump card suits, clocks, cookies, potions, the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter's tea party, and Alice herself are explored year after year with some brands releasing Alice-related items several times a year. Alice with pirates, Alice and Bambi, Alice with animals, Alice-themed cookies and playing cards, trump suits in velveteen, Mad Hatter top hats- the possibilities are endless.

Some Lolitas want to be like Alice and are fascinated by the strange fantasy world filled with mysterious adventures and contradictions which some interpret to mirror the inherent contradictions in 'real' life. Minami made an important observation that Alice is a story in which there is no prince (*ōji-sama*) and is a story about self-control and self-jurisdiction. Expressing the idea of "my own personal Alice," Minami interprets the character as self-reliant, someone who knows who she is, and can carry herself even though she is still a young girl. Alice knows exactly what she likes and dislikes and can express clearly when she does not want something. A bit bold, perhaps stemming from her self-confidence, she never hesitates or doubts herself- traits many look up to. The ability to express one's dislikes is the ability to speak up, be heard, made heard, take action, and take control.

European fairy tales and Western children's literature featuring female protagonists like *Snow White*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little Women*, and *A Little Princess* are also popular models and sources of inspiration for both Lolita wearers and designers:

I buy clothes based on an image. Like for clothing, I want to wear something similar from *Little Women*, or this item looks like a straw basket from *Little Red Riding Hood*, or a proper bag and umbrella along with a hat to be like *Mary Poppins*. *Anne of Green Gables*, *A Little Princess*, young girls like in Takehisa Yumeji's drawings... I coordinate my clothes based on my imagination of existing fairy tales and stories. [Chisato 2010]

Because Japanese stories largely have male protagonists, Japanese girls fall in love with Western novels and fairy tales that have female main characters they can relate to and admire (Matsūra 2007:179). Novels like *Little Women* were among the first to be translated into Japanese in the Shōwa and Taisho eras and translations, some updated, are still read today. In addition, a number of these works were also animated in the 1970s and 1980s as part of Nippon Animation's World Masterpiece Series that adapted classic books and stories into TV *anime* series, reintroducing these narratives to a new generation of young girls. The adaptations remain well-known even today and include key works such as *Heidi* (1974), *Anne of Green Gables* (1979), *Princess Sarah* (1985, *A Little Princess*), and *Little Women* (1987). Miyazaki Hayao and Takahata Isao were involved in the production and direction of some series like *Anne of Green Gables* and would later leave Nippon Animation to form Studio Ghibli, known for feature animation films that feature young female protagonists and stories sometimes set in locations influenced by Europe like *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989). Other notable works include *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Spirited Away* (2001). In addition to Disney movies, these *anime* provide an additional visual component, making it easier for girls to envision, admire, and desire to look like

and wear the dresses of each story's heroine. These works are not in any way intrinsically Lolita and appeal to a wide mainstream audience. However, the European settings, costumes, and fairy tale stories resonate with many people who grow up and decide to wear Lolita clothing, refusing to forget these stories and now that they are older are in a position to become closer to the heroines and clothes they had admired as a child.

Though she likes the princesses who appear in fairy tales because they seem beautiful and ephemeral yet also sparkle brilliantly because their souls (*tamashii*) are strong, Justine told me that she didn't like fairy tales with a happy ending. Instead she was attracted to the stories with unhappy or complex, unresolved endings like *The Little Mermaid*. The mermaid was beautiful and had a beautiful love but unable to fulfill it was met with a cruel end. Justine didn't agree with the idea of a "happy end" because she sees that happiness as something that can never be everlasting. To attain an eternal (*eien*) happiness is impossible. Justine describes Lolita as fleeting and transient, breakable and frail, prone to vanity and narcissism- all properties that she feels differentiates her from other people. As such, like her, she feels that carrying these personality traits, Lolitas are drawn to stories filled with misery, sorrow, pain, and cruelty.

The interest in children's literature and fairy tales is counterbalanced by literary and artistic works favoured by Lolitas permeated with themes like death, melancholy, the grotesque, and sexuality that seem to be in opposition to the naivety and innocence of the prototype *shōjo*. Works mentioned include Osamu

Dazai's *No Longer Human* (Ningen Shikkaku, 1948), about a man who is unable to relate to the world and other people around him and tries to mask feelings of alienation, and Edogawa Rampo's bizarre mystery stories with an *eroguro nansensu* sensibility, short for 'eroticism grotesque nonsense', popular during the 1920s to 1930s. One well-known story is 'The Human Chair' (Ningen Isu, 1925), about a chairmaker who supposedly hides himself in a sofa he made so he can feel the people sitting on it and writes a letter to his favourite female author outlining his tale. Also brought up during interviews were works from avant garde dramatist, film director, writer Terayama Shūji active in the 1970s and *manga* artist, illustrator Suehiro Maruo whose works combine Shōwa era nostalgia with stories filled with graphic sex and violence. Active from the 1980s, he has illustrated album covers for punk bands like The Stalin and contributed to underground *manga* magazine *Garō*. A turning point in his career, the nightmarish *manga* *Shōjo Tsubaki* (Mr. Arashi's Amazing Freak Show, 1984) about a girl forced into a travelling sideshow troupe includes depictions of human oddities, deformities, and 'circus freaks' familiar in Maruo's work.

Though not as graphically explicit, *shōjo manga* artists Kusumoto Maki, Kawahara Yumiko, Kaori Yuki, Mitsukazu Mihara, and Nakamura Asahiko were among those mentioned who also explore similar themes in their work with an emphasis on human relationships and utilizing visual motifs and character designs that are likable for those sensitive to a Lolita aesthetic such as cute girls wearing Lolita clothing, feminine boys with long hair and makeup, or dolls in

intricate frilly dresses. Western fine art movements taught in middle school and high school including the Baroque, the Renaissance, Rococo, Gothic Romanticism, and Medieval Gothic are also noted periods of interest as well as artists like Yamamoto Takato, an artist creating 'ukiyo-e pop' illustrations with surreal horror and sexual themes, Matsui Fuyuko, contemporary Nihonga painter combining grotesque and supernatural elements with traditional Japanese art themes, and *Jan Švankmajer*, a Czech doll maker and artist most known in Japan for his 1988 surreal film adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Něco z Alenky* (Something From Alice), using live action with stop motion animation.

Not all Lolitas are interested in or embrace these particular works, but most Lolitas, even the sweetest looking ones dressed in all pink, harbour an attraction to and an awareness of things that are gloomy, bizarre, grotesque, delicate, and transient as if these too are traits that represent parts of themselves. Gyaru Lolita who do not seem to share the same interest in fine art are also frank about their discussion of the underbelly and darkness (*yami*) of human life that is filled with struggle, pain, trauma, and sadness as found in the pages and pages of stories shared by models and readers in magazines like *Koakuma Ageha*. Some people like Rumi find that life and 'reality' is surrounded by bad thoughts and events, thus she tries to carve out a practice which encourages positivity for her own well-being through wearing Lolita and working in order to afford to surround herself in activities and things that make her feel happy, like going to

concerts and collecting dolls. However, the fact that she knows about the existence of a harsh world she wishes to counter suggests that she is not naïve.

Lolita aesthetics thus display both elements of the innocent and of the grotesque which may be both understood as beautiful in different ways and exhibits an understanding of the fragility and harshness of human existence. It is these differences and contradictions that demonstrate that Lolitas are not 100% pure and innocent because of what they know. As such, those who like Lolita fashion do not claim to be *shōjo* because they themselves are travelling in the in-between of the in-between, the gap that lies in the middle of girl and woman.

Walking Between the Lines of Girl and Woman

Shōjo, *kawaii*, and *otome* as concepts influenced by a Japanese conceptualization of Western history, literature, and imagery have largely been situated in urbanscapes and connected to consumer culture and the acquisition of objects, especially for *shōjo* and *kawaii* culture. Noriko grew up in a small village in Iwate prefecture's countryside before moving to Tokyo several years ago where she has been working in the anime and video game industry ever since. Noriko recalls her childhood and school days as a time period when she was unable to know or feel that she was a girl. She paints a picture of a childhood that seemed grey and colorless when talking about the clothes she used to wear. Unlike girls living in the city, she never had *kawaii* clothes as a child and even when entering middle school and high school boys and girls still

basically looked the same, wearing what she called “*inaka* fashion,” or countryside fashion, consisting of shirts, trainers, and pants. Taking into account the cold winters up north and the difficulty of walking around in farm areas, most girls would wear pants or thick stockings instead of skirts. Even those who wore skirts would cover their legs with pants. Lolita clothes are important for Noriko who believes in terms of outward looks she is not *kawaii* yet she feels *kawaii* when she wears Lolita, affirming the existence of a feminine side she lacked growing up in the countryside:

I’m now able to believe that I’m a girl. That’s a valuable feeling. Because I spent a childhood in which I didn’t really know I was a girl [*onna no ko*], clothes that make it possible to feel that I am a girl are important. It’s important because it lets me live as a woman. It’s a spiritual backbone for my being able to believe I am a girl, that I am a cute girl. That’s why Lolita clothes which are intensely cute are so important. It’s my identity as a girl. To say if I changed or not, I think that the person that I was before never changed, but as a result of these clothes I can gain more confidence, so they are important. [Noriko 2010]

Being one of the few girls to leave her hometown to go to Tokyo, Noriko was able to find different opportunities from her female high school classmates who remained and are all married with children. Entering life in an urban area gave Noriko access to a colourful girl’s culture she was unable to experience growing up. Wearing Lolita clothes, revelling in its cuteness and pinkness, helps her to reclaim her femininity, gain self-confidence, and build a self-identity in a way that would not have been available to her if she had stayed in the countryside. I never asked Noriko more about her friends so I have no idea if Noriko would have felt she was missing out on something if she had never made the move to

Tokyo, but it is certain that by living in the city she was able to encounter things and images, aesthetics and affects that opened up a methods of becoming that were not available to her before.

Shōjo is often conceptualized as a neutral sex and unique gender that lies outside the constraints of man and woman, child and adult, boy and girl which allows her the ability to move in between the lines and outside boundaries and restrictions laid by the other social categories (Aoyama 2005, Bergstrom 2011). At the same time it is seen as a site of agency, it is also seen as restrictive in its connection to consumerism and consumption and is co-opted by the type of people or ideas that *shōjo* is intended to resist or work against. As something that lies in the in-between, *shōjo* is sometimes posited as a transition from girl to woman, marked by the change from sexual unconsciousness to consciousness. *Shōjo* yearning for a neutral sex or androgynous state as found in *shōjo*-related media is sometimes attributed to its transitional nature, as demonstrated in this comment by novelist Kanai Mieko:

Shibusawa Tatsuhiko once said about Alice [in Wonderland] that she is a girl in a sexual safety zone, the interspace between sexual unconsciousness and consciousness. Why do girls want to be androgynous? Why do they admire Jeanne d'Arc? Alice's state of consciousness gives us an insight about these things. In their transition from sexual unconsciousness to consciousness, girls are torn into two different sexes, masculine and feminine. What used to be one and undivided, or something that could be either earlier in their childhood is starting to be torn asunder within themselves, in the form of a notion of sex that goes against themselves. [1981:258, quoted in Aoyama 2005: 54]

In response to Kanai's remarks, Tomoko Aoyama adds that aside from the transitional and ambivalent nature of *shōjo* sexuality there is also a "the fear and

antagonism on the part of the *shōjo* who finds herself forced to become a female sexual being. In fact, as many critics have pointed out, the *shōjo*'s longing for androgyny is closely related to her questioning of, or rebellion against, conventional gender roles" (2005:54).

Analyzing novelist Takemoto Novala's Lolita fashion-themed works, Vera Mackie situates Lolita in *shōjo* culture as a form of anxiety about adult female sexuality and intertextual in nature, suggesting the shared background of literature, imagery, and aesthetics that Novala and his readers both draw on. Here she further argues that, as *shōjo*, Lolitas are prolonging their girlhood by clinging to innocence in an attempt to reject "the fate of defloration, of being reduced to a sexualized body, of the potential transformation into a maternal body. The nostalgia in the *shōjo* genre is a nostalgia projected onto a future when she will have lost her innocence. It is a nostalgia of the future anterior" (2010:199). Also writing about Takemoto's novels, Bergstrom (2011) provides an analysis that examines the differences between *shōjo* and the *otome* ideals portrayed in Takemoto's Lolita protagonists. These *otome* characters partake in "girly criminality" as an exercise of agency and expression of desire based on impossibility and anti-sociality while rejecting genital sexual practices that considered to be too worldly, conventional or revolting. Lolitas recognize their feelings of alienation in regards to mainstream society and deal with it through consumption. *Shōjo* and *kawaii* culture are signs of emptiness and lacks: "lack of

maturity, meaning, narrative, identity, history, value, productivity” that are challenged through Takemoto’s work:

... [He] attempts to reclaim this space of symbolic lack as one representing a *choice* on the part of those who tack on its hyperbolic signifiers as a strategy for escape. Replacing this concept of *shōjo* with *otome* can be read as a rejection of the euphemistic naturalization of *shōjo* sexlessness. Takemoto’s *otome*, by contrast, make choices that reject a numbingly dull sexualized world in favour of an intellectualized, subversive life in which the hyperfeminine is a strategy for control. [2011:34]

By reappropriating *shōjo* innocence and its space of lack, *otome* and Lolita use hyperfemininity as means to transform *shōjo* into what Bergstorm calls a “wilful antisociality” (2011:35). Matsuura (2007) ties Lolitas’ fascination with death or desire to create a death-like state which will allow them to freeze time and create a sense of stillness and suspension. By entering a death-like pre-death state, achieved through nostalgia and collecting objects and narratives of the past, weak *shōjo* create a situation in which others, especially men, cannot oppose the sense of ‘self’ they have built with their own hands (2011:172). This death-like nostalgic state is similar to the idea of being ‘eternally 14’ or the idea of protecting and remembering the ‘eternal.’ It is not something that exists in perpetuity in a timeline that moves forward forever into the future but as something that lies outside an orientation towards the future by remembering and protecting certain aspects of the past and suspending them in time.

Most people who wear Lolita clothes are unable to wear the clothes everyday and must set aside certain times, places, and occasions in which they can wear Lolita. If wearing Lolita clothing is the only way to be a Lolita then

most people are unable to do this on a daily basis. The *shōjo* and Lolita mentioned in literature are *shōjo* and Lolita throughout the story and their identity is defined using these terms. Outside of these stories, real people use Lolita as an identity but it is only one identity out of many. Most people have multi-faceted personalities, and they define themselves in different ways in relation to other groups, people, or situations. They may want to achieve an illusion of being 'the Lolita' when wearing the clothes and interacting with other people, but Lolita should be thought of a potential state and a becoming that can be partaken of at certain times. It is reaffirmed and engaged through wearing and buying clothes. As something that can be called Lolita or *otome*, depending from person to person, it is backed by an ideology and aesthetics that is not only connected to fashion and material things. With the Japanese Lolitas I met, I was never given a glimpse into their lives outside Lolita as most people tried to partition aspects of their lives, keeping separate their Lolita selves from their work, school or family selves. Even among other Lolitas whom they have known for several years and regularly meet and participate in tea parties, there are aspects of their lives, such as their real name or line of work, that are never discussed.

What is clear though is that Lolita fashion offers a site for play, fantasy, and a chance to express a part of oneself that is impossible in other venues. Lolita fashion does tend to attract a certain kind of person including those who are self-reflexive, those who were bullied, those who feel they do not fit

mainstream standards of beauty, those who feel like they are social outsiders, those who feel they are not normal and thus question what is normal. For example, when thinking about how other people around her often tell her she is strange, Justine responded, “Normal things like getting married, having a child, having a household – that kind of future is something I can’t completely imagine. I want to forever remain *otome*. What I consider normal is different” (2010).

Some people engage with other activities and things besides Lolita including being an anime fan and cosplaying or going to Visual-kei concerts, the rock genre typically associated with Lolita fashion especially during Gothic Lolita’s heyday. There are a number of Japanese Lolitas who are also involved in the Gothic, Cyber, and Fetish¹³ club scene. Those who attend club events sometimes do not wear Lolita, choosing to wear more Gothic and/or Fetish inspired outfits with accessories inspired by themes such as medicine (blood, bandages, nurse outfits) or bondage (chains, masks). Events include Alamode Night centered in Tokyo and *Nandemonai hi no ochakai* (Eventless Day Tea Party) held in Osaka. These events are considered part of the “underground” – a term applied to a wide array of performance artists, musicians and DJs, and artists rooted in Gothic, Punk, Rock, and Japanese avant garde scene.

In addition to giving patrons a space to dance with a live DJ, club events can also include musical acts, short plays, and stage performances with or

¹³ Cyber and Fetish are fashion styles associated with the underground club scene, see glossary.

without BDSM elements. Sarara is a performance artist working under the name Lolita Terrorist. Her performance has a Fetish element and the events where she presents are usually attended by a largely female audience, some of them Lolitas. In one performance, she is carried on stage completely covered in paper printed with Japanese text and tape while a man wearing a horse head-mask chants frenzied poetry with some electronic-based music in the background. Bursting from the paper cocoon, she emerges wearing a pink Lolita jumperskirt with frilly blouse. She removes the articles of clothing one by one while dancing in a trance-like state, finally taking off her blouse, she shields her front with the fabric. With her back to the audience, she turns violently, opening the blouse to reveal breasts that are taped over by the same pieces of paper earlier. Other Fetish performance groups may feature a Japanese form of sexual bondage using rope-tying techniques (*kinbaku*) or a mistress disciplining her female slave in their act. Other acts like Rose de Reficul et Guiggles involve elaborate Victorian Gothic-inspired stage sets and costumes combined with story-telling told through singing and acting.

Sarara wears Fetish clothing when attending club events, yet sees Lolita as conceptually detached from Fetish. She started wearing Lolita when in middle school, and it is upheld as non-sexual and pure, representing *shōjo* feelings. With Fetish she aims to express her sexual and aggressive side. Each style allows her to embody different aspects of self. Performing as Lolita Terrorist for the past two years, Sarara describes her name: “Even though I’m a Lolita, I am a terrorist.

I am destroying Lolita. I throw away the weak aspect of myself and become free. ... It's like breaking up Lolita. I seem like I'm cute (*kawairashi*), I seem like someone who needs to be protected. I'm not only that, but by myself I am strong, my spirit is strong" (interview, Sarara, April 13, 2010). Sarara believes that it is because people are weak that they wear Lolita. They feel they do not fit in, that they do not belong, so they wear their weakness on the outside. Through her performance she comes to terms with and sheds the weak side that is represented by Lolita clothing. Sarara's opinion differs from that of Rumi who agrees that Lolitas have a weak side to them because they tend to be overly kind but she also believes that wearing Lolita makes them strong as they become determined to go against social norms and share those experiences with other Lolitas. Rumi lost a high school friend who disagreed with her decision to continue wearing Lolita even after entering university. "I don't need someone who wouldn't understand my internal feelings." She added in English, "All or nothing" (2010).

Like the world of Alice in Wonderland, filled with contradictions, enigmas, and riddles that they adore, Lolitas too are filled with opposing forces – both fragile and strong, sensual bodies yet also wanting to protect a corner of innocence and pureness, liking sweet and cute things yet fascinated by death and the grotesque. Fairy Wish designer Kobayashi Alice conceives of *otome* as a spirituality, giving it a sense of flexibility and adaptation:

Over the years I've seen many maidens (*otome*) who decide to undergo 'graduation' (*sotsugyō*) or say 'I'm going to graduate from Lolita.' But *otome* isn't something that one can graduate from. I believe it is a spirituality that goes beyond fashion. Fashion is just one means of expressing it. What is important is not 'graduation.' Instead the essential thing is to accept the parts of yourself that are changing. That is, it is a process about accepting oneself. Your radiance develops when you can accept your body and spirit. Even if you grow older, even if you become an old woman, you can still feel *otome*. That is the pathway of *otome*, treaded lightly, like a flower. [Twitter post, February 2012]

Lolita is the fashion, clothing, and material expression of *otome* affect and becoming. If the Young-Girl and *shōjo* are at times taken to be embodiments of or co-opted by patriarchy, capitalist mentality, infantilization, and the social ills of postmodernity in which the Young-Girl's body is taken away from her, then Lolita and the *otome* sense connected to Lolita are the counters to this. It gives girls back their bodies and minds, acknowledges that these bodies grow and change over time, and creates a space to evolve and engage in practices to develop beyond gender binaries and narratives of normativity. Like the movement expressed by the notions of *hirahira* and *fuwafuwa*, moving between becoming-girl and woman, between the remembrance of girlhood memories through rose-coloured glasses, the nostalgia of a girlhood that was never their lived childhood experience crossed with their molar woman bodies built by and constrained by social conventions and expectations, Lolitas and *otome* travel between becoming-girl and woman.

Chapter 4

Global Flows, Fashion Systems, and Materiality

Lolita fashion is filled with 'happiness objects' that aid in a recollection of particular aesthetics and feelings. To understand what it means to be a Lolita, one must have an understanding and a prolonged proximity to these objects that are primarily material or visual/media-based. There are some Lolitas who agree that it can be possible to have a Lolita heart (*kokoro*) without ever wearing the clothes, but amongst people whose style has evolved into something different from the Lolita fashion trends found in current magazines some feel they are not quite Lolita even if they were Lolita in the past. Yet, they still want to remain connected to Lolita even if they are not wearing the trademark dome-shaped skirt or other markers that are part of a quintessential Lolita outfit. Even if they are not donning what might strictly be considered Lolita clothing, years of experience from wearing Lolita have led them to their current style and aesthetics and to familiarity with particular affect and emotions they desire to surround themselves with. Their practice has grown from a continual engagement between the body and clothing in addition to building a shared knowledge of literature, art, and narratives connected to Lolita, forming what can be considered a subculture habitus (Bourdieu 1990[1984]) in the same way that people are socialized through a continued engagement and relationship with everyday things. Objects and the material world have the ability to implicitly condition humans, and through practice, habitus is formed, providing a habitual

way of being in the world and grounding less tangible concepts onto tangible things.

If personhood is being perceived or defined as a subject that, in relation to objects, is entirely purified or removed from their influence then when something is labelled as an object, it creates a distance that erases or covers actual close bonds between humans and material things, making it difficult to realize that the object in question was once something produced by another human being from their imagination (Rowlands 2005). Both Daniel Miller and Bruno Latour are interested in breaking down dualisms between subject and object, object and society, personhood and material in order to understand the complexity of social links, connections, circulations, and entanglements of humans and non-humans that such absolute distinctions mask us from noticing and considering. With Actor Network Theory (ANT) Latour (1993, 2005) proposes that within networks of relations and connections, humans as well as objects and non-human entities, from transportation systems to microbes, are all actors that have agency and are engaged in a multi-sided exchange and relationship. Objects act in ways beyond the initial intention of their creators, existing not only as reflections of society or serving as a backdrop for human action but also having influence over and ability to affect other entities in a network. As actors, objects have the potential to be both transformed and transforming. Actors may be intermediaries that transport information, meaning or other elements without any changes or mediators that transform, translate,

distort, or modify, producing something that is always contingent on context and specific circumstances. "Objects, by the very nature of their connections with humans, quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries, counting for one or nothing, no matter how internally complicated they might be" (2005:79). Objects become mediators or are noticed as mediators when humans are confronted with them in situations that either present new objects or bring objects taken for granted out of the background, such as when something breaks down or goes awry. It is at that moment when newness or strangeness enters that an object's potential for action and importance is most pronounced. This realization is forgotten over time as familiarity sets in, and the object blends into the background once again. In what he calls "the humility of things," Miller (1987) suggests that the less we are aware of an object the more power it has in habituating, prompting, and affecting our behaviour, identity, and interaction with an external environment.

Using dialectical theory and ideas like objectification based on Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Subject* (1977) in his various anthropological studies on material culture and commodities, Miller discusses how everything we create has the potential to become alien to humans. The material can be used like a mirror as a tool to see and understand the self. Through objectification, things created by humans appear alien, like something that was never created by people, and appear to act in ways based on their own self-interests and trajectories that seem outside the sphere or scope of human influence. This can

be applied not only to material objects but also to social institutions and systems like education and finance. In this way, humans both produce and are the products of their creations. Both Miller and Rowlands (2005) argue that dialectical theory is not a theory of representation and does not presuppose a “mutual constitution of prior forms, such as subject and objects” (Miller 2005:9). The focus is on the act of creating form and how the process of creation brings that which is created and the creator into a relationship that transforms them both. It is “once we appreciate that these things are created in history or in imaginations, we can start to understand the very process which accounts for our own specificity, and this understanding changes us into a new kind of person, one who can potentially act upon that understanding” (Miller 2005:8).

Continuing with this conversation, Webb Keane emphasizes the importance of considering the historical and cultural contexts that shape how material things are understood within human society and what the interpreter counts as objects and subjects. In an ontology in which subjects are defined in opposition to objects, materiality becomes a moral question. Taking clothing as an example:

[it] seems most superficial to those who take signs to be the clothing of immaterial meanings. Like clothing, in this view, the sign both reveals and conceals, and it serves to mediate relations between self and others. These are the very grounds on which Thoreau and many other Protestants and modernists are suspicious of clothing and, often, of semiotic mediation altogether. In unmediated transparency they hope to discover unvarnished souls and naked truth” (Keane 2005:200-201).

Clothing is not just about expression, identity, and meaning, but clothing may also be understood in terms of physical and social experience, habit, and constraint. When privilege is granted to meaning and textuality over action, consequences, and possibilities, objects are considered an illustration of something else, acting as surfaces for communication of meanings or identities. Likewise, signs are dematerialized and treated as garbs for meaning which must be stripped bare to reveal some form of truth. Keane proposes thinking about the “openness of things” and how material things and icons have a potential and possibility for future uses and interpretations. Qualities found in things co-mingle or are bundled with other qualities that shift as they move across various contexts. Keane is interested in this idea of future possibility, stating that certain things like a chair instigate certain sorts of action and futurity. In speaking of style, “a relatively stable style produces a certain orientation toward the future. Style allows one to recognize, across indefinitely many further occasions, instances of ‘the same thing.’” (Keane 2005: 195). Recent innovations in technology and textile result in the creation of intelligent clothing and responsive fiber surfaces that interact with the body when worn; these are challenging perceptions of clothing and textiles as “entirely social and psychological phenomena, as tangible and three-dimensional material for the interpretation and translation of emotions, manners, or habits” (Küchler 2005: 211). Conductive wires woven into fabric allow for the surface of the cloth to change in response to body heat and touch or act as surfaces for which digital images can be projected.

Other examples include antibacterial yarn or shoe soles that change shape according to the shape of the wearer's feet. Intelligent clothing provides insight into the idea that thought can be conducted in things and things can be thought-like.

The previous section explored *shōjo*-becoming and affect as understood by Japanese Lolita fashion wearers. The ideology and symbolic meanings attributed here are culled from a wider history and culture surrounding Japanese concepts of girlhood found outside Lolita that are then subverted, taken to extremes, and used to play and live with. I now turn my focus to North American Lolitas to examine conceptualizations of material culture, matter, and materialism and how this affects human understanding of clothing and fashion as well as the experience of clothing on a physical and social level. Instead of discovering or reading Lolita fashion and Lolitas as texts containing symbols and meanings, in this chapter I look at wearers' experience, physically and socially, and how they relate to the qualities found in the material things of Lolita fashion to present how North American Lolitas engage with the fashion.

In the first half of this chapter, by examining the popular Lolita brand Angelic Pretty and its fans I will outline the production and movement of clothing, images, mass media, and other objects that travel beyond the national borders of Japan into the homes, minds, and computer screens of people around the world who have adopted Lolita fashion as an important part in their life. The latter part of the chapter will discuss North American Lolitas with a focus on

definitions of 'style' and 'lifestyle' and conceptualizations of materialism and consumerism that frame how people talk about their engagement with the objects that are part of a fashion subculture in a way that contrasts with their actions and behaviour. There is a concern with maintaining and being true to a sense of inner self that is disconnected from or uninfluenced by outside forces including mainstream body image ideals and 'superficial' material objects like clothes and make-up. Amidst the conflict between categories of subject-object, depth-surface, inner-outer and the idea that there exists a sense of 'real' self apart from outside appearance, there is a constant battle with preserving the individual from becoming overly influenced by clothing - to make sure that "you are wearing the clothing" and not the "the clothing is wearing you." Conversations about spending too much time or money on Lolita highlight an underlying concern with materiality and morality. Issues such superficiality, authenticity, body image, and peer pressure that are seen as negative aspects of Lolita fashion exist alongside positive aspects like self-confidence and expression, friendship and sisterhood, creativity, and beauty.

These concerns about materialism and objectification are only explicitly discussed and brought up by North American Lolitas and other people who have not been socialized in Japanese girls' culture. The late 1990s to early 2000s marked a boom in translated *manga* and *anime* licensed and distributed in the United States, leading to widespread interest in Japanese popular culture, a larger and younger audience, as well as more *shōjo* narratives and stories being

translated compared to the past when this genre was not considered as profitable. *Anime* series like *Sailor Moon*, adapted from *shōjo manga*, had wide release on various television networks and translated *manga* could be found in large chain bookstores nationwide. Studies on Japanese TV drama and music fans in Asia (Iwabuchi 2002), Pokémon fans (Allison 2006, Tobin 2004) and anime fans in the United States (Napier 2007, Roland 2006) demonstrate how these fans experience media in ways different from their Japanese counterparts. Japanese *shōjo* culture narratives, imagery, and aesthetics are accessible to North American audiences in English both through legal sources (goods and books sold in stores) and illegal sources (free fan translations on the Internet). These narratives may not be read or interpreted in the same way as they are by Japanese readers, but overseas fans of these media form literacy as they familiarize themselves with expressions, motifs, and themes unique to Japanese *anime* and *manga*.

A large number of EGL Lolitas became initially interested in Japanese popular culture through exposure to *anime* and *manga*, but not everyone continues their engagement with these media by the time they start to wear Lolita or form an interest in fashion. Though there is access to and knowledge of certain *shōjo* media, they are understood in different ways and usually considered a type of narrative genre found in *anime* and *manga* featuring female protagonists with large sparkly eyes and lots of flowers, stories written for a teen girl audience, typically about romance. What is missing is an understanding of *shōjo* on a historical and social level, and the concept of *shōjo* and *otome* is

generally not used to understand or frame Lolita fashion even though the style, motifs, and aesthetics utilized by Japanese designers are connected to these concepts.

In this chapter I look at how Lolitas outside Japan approach this fashion and its accompanying aesthetics that were developed in a different culture and society even as they engage in the same things and images as Japanese Lolitas. Defining Lolita fashion as important to them through ideas about feminism, sisterhoods, and women-centred spaces North American Lolitas fight against anxieties concerning authenticity, consumerism, objectification, and sexualization while coming to terms with the material aspect of the clothing-based culture and attempt to carve meaningful and empowering ways to understand their experience in spite of outward negative forces.

I. Lolita Fashion Economics: Production, Marketing, and Sales

These various domains associated with the creation of Lolita things include major Lolita brand designers, media platforms advertising new clothing and styles, replica makers in China, indie designers in Korea and the United States, and Lolita buyers around the world are all connected in a network that facilitates the movement of objects and image and that has effects on the value attributed to Lolita clothing in terms of monetary, emotional, and symbolic value given to the things by wearers. In order to begin to understand the relationship and interaction between Lolita fashion style and EGL Lolitas, who comprise the global English-speaking membership of the Livejournal community EGL, it is

important to firstly examine the various elements of this network involved in the Lolita fashion production.

I begin by examining Angelic Pretty, a well-known Sweet Lolita brand that started out as the 'select shop' Pretty in LaForet that carried clothes from a variety of Lolita-related brands before shifting completely to producing and selling original in-house designs. As one Lolita brand that is popular both in and outside Japan, Angelic Pretty provides a case study helpful in understanding Lolita as part of a fashion system involving design, production, marketing, and other areas associated with clothing industry and commerce on a global scale. The relationship between wearers and clothing, collector value and resale markets, replica and bootlegs manufactured in China, and the cultivation of a do-it-yourself (DIY) mentality through the numerous 'indies' brands will also be discussed and provide context to understand the experience of North American and EGL Lolitas.

Angelic Pretty and Dreams for Sale

Angelic Pretty (AP) has risen in popularity in recent years and has become ubiquitous with Sweet Lolita style yet remains a relatively small company even as its operations have extended to 16 stores within Japan and two stores overseas in Paris and San Francisco. AP started as a "select shop" known as Pretty located in LaForet that carried clothes from a number of brands including Metamorphose, Cornet, and other indies brands. Established in 1979, AP is the oldest Lolita-related shop in existence, though it is unknown if the stock from the

1980s era resembled Lolita fashion in its recent-day form. In 2001, the store started to release its own clothing line also known as Pretty and then later Angelic Pretty. The brand statement from the official English website states that:

Angelic Pretty provides adorable clothing covered in lace, frills, and ribbons like that of a fairytale that you dreamed about as a little girl. We want girls to never lose sight of that dream... And this is a brand for girls who want to keep that dream alive.

AP is in the business of selling dreams and thus wants its customers not to think of it as a company that has to meet a bottom line every fiscal year, but rather as a concept through which customers can enter into a dream world that is removed from the real world aspect of running and maintaining a business. Anything that could potentially break the dream and brand image, such as Maki and Asuka's real age, is protected and kept separate. Lolita customers likewise agree to participate in this symbolic economy by underplaying the reality of exchanging money in order to enter and continue participating in this dream world.

The brand's signature style has evolved over time. In its early form, the AP store was decorated with angel motifs, showcasing a Victorian influence. Though pink represents AP today from the stores to brand tags, previously the store was mostly decorated in white, to represent the 'Angelic' aspect of AP. The clothes were more reminiscent of what might adorn an antique Bisque doll. Today, AP's current style draws influence from American pop culture and retro chic and princesses found in Disney movies instead of from European fairy tales. Stores are covered in pink – the shelves, diamond floor pattern, and walls are in

various shades of pinks. Retro children's toys, tableware, and other interior accessories from America line the wall, each picked out from Ms. Honda's own private collection of antiques and collectibles. Honda, referred to by staff as *Shachō* or owner, is AP's president and founder. From shop displays to clothing designs, *Shachō* is actively involved every aspect of AP and everything must be approved through her. She often sports colourful outfits using fabric like tiny white dots set across pink and red fabric. Long ankle length skirts are paired with her long slightly wavy brown hair tied up in a pony tail creating a look reminiscent of the rockabillys who gather near the Yoyogi Park to dance to rock n'roll and be-bop every Sunday.

AP's rise in popularity can in part be attributed to appointing designers Asuka and Maki as the brand's public face and spokeswomen thus creating a pair of Lolita idols that others can aspire to emulate. There are other designers but AP is secretive about how many there are. Maki has illustrated many popular original prints and also models for the brand in ads and in fashion shows. Popular model/musicians like AMO, Kimura Yu, Kokushoku Sumire have also appeared in their ad campaigns. Illustrator Imai Kira has created illustrations for screenprinted images on fabric and for promo images featuring cute girls wearing the newest clothing releases. Like many other brands, collaborations with musicians, magazines, and movies to create limited edition and special release items are another way to promote the clothing label to a

potential wider audience and also to provide an indication of current customers' interests.

In order to maintain the consumer perception and experience of AP, much effort is put into brand image management, maintaining and protecting how the company is perceived. When Asuka and Maki came to California as special guests at the Los Angeles-based convention PMX, the shopping space set aside at the convention within a small conference room at the Hilton Airport Hotel was decorated and set up to resemble the shops in Japan. The room for the tea party was similarly decorated to transform what would have been a drab space into a pink, sugary fantasy world. The American English-speaking staff at the shop and related events, all volunteers, were trained by AP according to certain customer service standards and were required to wear only AP clothes when working.

Asuka and Maki never reveal their ages, though Asuka is the more senior employee of the two. It can be assumed that they are in their mid-20s. When I was granted an interview with the two designers at PMX, I was reminded not to ask about their personal life; and specifics about how the business was run were also off-limits. Little things like politely refusing to reveal how many designers there are in total or showing photographs of what the shop used to look like indicated how important it is to preserve and control brand image as well as to shield certain business practices from competitors.

Because they interact with customers on a regular basis, shop staff are on the front lines, helping to maintain this illusion and fantasy. Rumi, shop staff for BTSSB in Japan, insists that what she is doing is not just about doing her job but actually coming from the heart. “It’s not just service. It’s how I truly feel. We all know what it’s like to want these clothes. As shop staff, all of us are like little helpers in a dream world (*yume no kuni*). The customers are the princesses. We are the dwarfs in this world – like the ones from Snow White. We work hard for the princess. We all enjoy it” (interview, Rumi, April 14, 2010). According to the BTSSB recruitment webpage, shop attendants are part timers, are paid starting at 750yen an hour plus a 1000yen daily allowance for commute. It is expected that shop staff will wear only company clothing and the latest releases. This expense comes out of the employee’s own pocket, and staff discounts are relatively small. Rumi was already a frequent customer at BTSSB on close terms of the shop staff when she was invited to fill out an application for a new branch opening in a nearby city.

Like Rumi, most people employed in Lolita fashion companies have a history with the street fashion before becoming involved in the apparel industry. Their interest leads them to pursue an education and career in fashion though not everyone is successful in gaining employment at the company or in the fashion genre they personally like. Asuka and Maki already made Harajuku their stomping grounds and, as Lolitas, had memories of the LaForet AP store before even working there. Commercial success is typically associated with

being 'a selling out,' 'inauthentic' and 'insincere' in America and the UK, where young fashion designers frequently take issue with juggling the balance between making enough money to keep producing and being true to their artistic vision (Skov 2003). This mentality is absent among young designers in Hong Kong where commercial success is seen as means to an end. Likewise, the contradictions between creating art and making money that British fashion school graduates grapple with seem to be absent from Japanese Lolita fashion designers and employees; running and maintaining a successful business does not mean they are becoming more mainstream or any less Lolita. These people at one point bought into the dream world that can be entered via Lolita fashion and have now become involved in its production and upkeep on a larger scale. As a company, AP is concerned with expenses and profits, but the existing system also gives people like Asuka and Maki the opportunity, space, and resources to continually create new things, keeping alive this fantasy world, and share their vision as designers with others by selling their products.

The fact that livelihoods are dependent on the sales and creation of Lolita clothing is often overlooked by Lolitas who are not involved in the industry. Many people 'fall in love' with a particular series or have certain motifs and themes they are drawn to. AP makes mass-produced items, but their fans exhibit an appreciation and attachment to particular items in intimate and affective ways. Like many Lolita brands, the bulk of AP's original textiles depict inanimate things like flowers, cakes, candies, fruit, ice cream, carousels, stuffed animals,



On the left, this New York Lolita is wearing what she calls the 'radioactive cupcake' skirt because of the neon colours. The African-American Lolita on the right is wearing a Pirate Lolita outfit with a jacket and skirt herringbone ensemble from Alice and The Pirates. Photo by An Nguyen (2009).

dishes, perfume bottles along with people and living things associated with girlhood like Alice, mermaids, birds, rabbits, cats, and sheep. AP is unique for adding to the existing European and Victorian English influences found in *shōjo* culture and Lolita fashion by drawing on an American influence, taking from postwar pop culture icons like Barbie and Disney princesses and an aesthetic sense that uses bright and sometimes

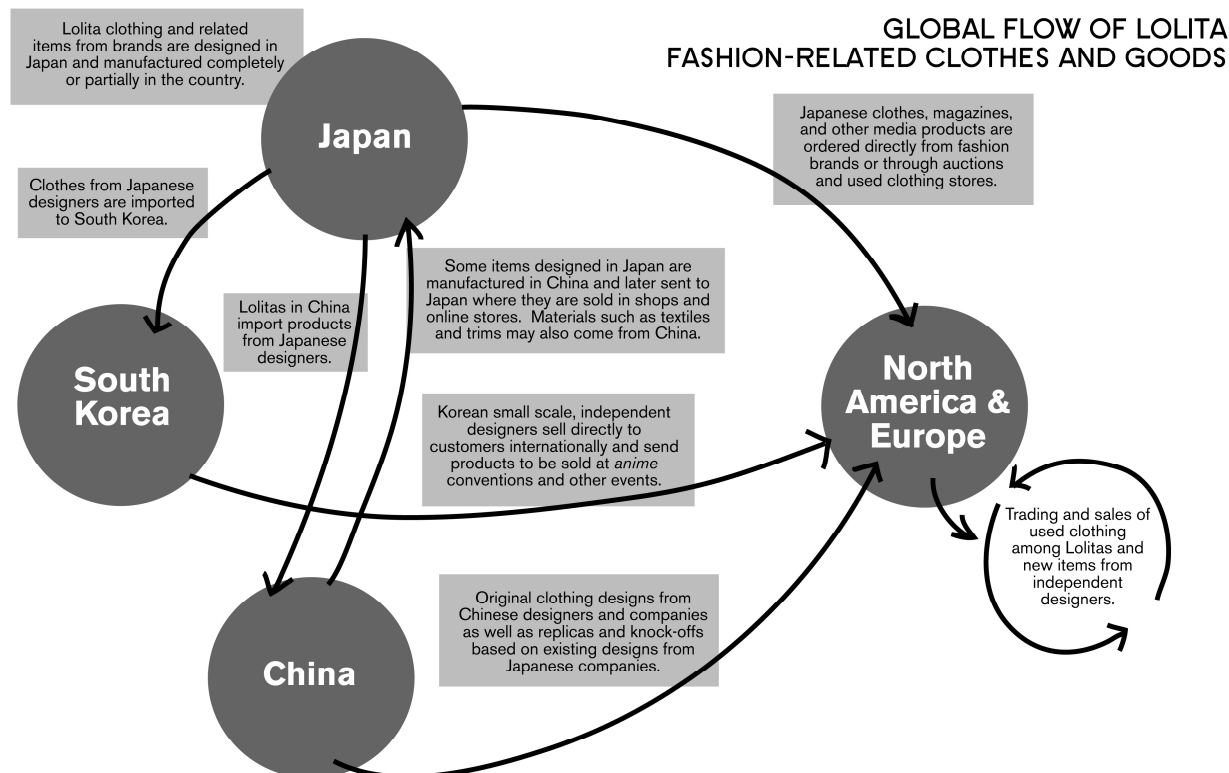
loud colour and fabric combinations like dot on dot or vivid pinks paired with blacks.

There are some designs that have been directly influenced from Asuka and Maki's travels outside Japan to France and the United States. *Yumemiru Makaron* (Dreaming Macaron) was released after AP presented in the fashion show at the Japan Expo in Paris during a time when Japan was experiencing a macaron craze as the confection, associated with Marie Antoinette and famous French bakery Ladurée, appeared in bakeries everywhere and soon became a popular motif in fashion textiles and accessories. Prints like Whipped Magic and Wonder Cookie are inspired by the cupcakes and sweets decorated with intense,

unnatural food colouring found in the bakeries of Los Angeles. Whipped Magic in particular is also known as 'Radioactive Cupcakes' on EGL because of the neon colours utilized in the print. Another example of homage to Americana is the pancake-themed Honey Cake series showcasing a spread of waffles and ice cream, a stack of pancakes covered in syrup and topped with butter, a milk carton, a box of pancake and waffle mix, a can of cherries, a bottle of chocolate syrup, and a container of honey shaped like a bear. Some of AP's most popular prints are hem prints in which the focal point is the bottom of the dress where the illustration runs around the garment with a repeating background in a lighter complementing colour covering the entire garment. The composition, the way in which things are arrayed, creates the same effect as a still life painting on clothing. By wearing a dress with an original print, one is literally surrounding oneself with one's favourite things not by buying or owning the physical thing but displaying their image on the clothed body. These clothes are filled with things you can eat, animals you want to hold close, and things or people you want to become or be like.

Donna, a Korean Lolita living in Canada, fell in love with AP when she saw an advertisement in a magazine featuring then-popular reader model Chikage. For two years she bought everything that Chikage wore because she was enamoured both with Chikage's cuteness and the dresses. Her favourite item from AP is a onepiece long-sleeve dress with a round peter pan collar in pink from the Toy Parade series. This popular print featured an array of stuffed

animals and children's toys and the particular version Donna owned was highly sought after, selling for high prices on the resale market. "There is a lot of different pink, but that pink was 100% pink. The things - stuff on it - the pastel colour - so poofy. Cute... and the colour was so cute, and the lace was so cute" (interview, Donna, October 31, 2009). Donna recently went through a period in which she wanted to quit Lolita as she was feeling conflicted with her obsession and the amount of money she was spending. She ended up selling most of her collection of 60 AP dresses which included her Toy Parade one-piece dress. Even though she feels unmoved by most of AP's designs in recent years, she still misses Toy Parade, and while talking about that particular dress she exhibited a feeling of nostalgia and loving memory. Toy Parade was her "therapist." She felt a sense of a happiness just to have it near her, to be able to look at it and touch it.



This diagram maps the movement of Lolita fashion commodities between four major geographical areas.

The Production of Lolita Fashion

AP was not one of the first Lolita brands to produce original all-over prints, but their success from 2005 onward in creating sold-out print lines like Sugary Carnival, Fruits Parlour, and Puppet Circus represents an overall shift within Lolita fashion towards more garments featuring printed textiles whether, sporting custom in-house created designs or not. Prior to this, dresses in plain fabric and patterned fabric like plaid, stripes or flower patterns were typical. Details were conveyed in the construction of the garment, using pleats, pintucks, shirring, and several kinds of lace and trimming. In addition, there were designs with illustration blocks screenprinted several times on fabric to run across the

skirt portion of a dress. This technique is still utilized for printing on velveteen and is a relatively inexpensive way for smaller brands to create original lines. Many AP print series are highly sought after on the resale market and can fetch up to 100,000 yen (around \$1,000US) on auction sites though in recent years the fervour in the resale market has quelled down, especially on EGL as it became too saturated and the online community as a whole became less tolerant of overpriced used items. AP fans on both sides of the Pacific are obsessed with tracking upcoming releases and preorder periods to ensure they can own the latest print. There are scalpers who purchase new releases only to resell later for exorbitant prices to those who were unlucky in securing a preorder spot.

Original print designs require six or more months of design and planning before the actual release. During this time the illustration and dress designs must be approved, patterns drafted and tweaked, and samples ordered before items make it to the shops. In addition to the actual garment design, many detailed elements must be taken into consideration from fabric choice, trim, lace, and buttons to the colour of the lining fabric. In the spring, the AP design team is already thinking about the fall and winter collection around the same time that the Paris, Milan, and New York couture and ready-to-wear collections have already been shown.

Scale of operation separates the larger Lolita brands and indies brands that are typically run by one or two people who create whenever they can. Most designers working in Lolita or Lolita-like styles, including AP designers Asuka

and Maki, see what they produce as just another genre of clothing that happens to have a smaller market than other styles. On the other hand, the company also relies heavily on the Lolita label for marketing and distribution of their products. Larger Lolita brands introduce new elements to the fashion but must still work within the boundaries of what may be considered Lolita while pushing at the edges, creating new things that reflect ongoing trends and styles existing outside Lolita to remain relevant by incorporating elements from other popular girl subcultures of the moment.

The basic elements that comprise Lolita fashion are seemingly static, unchanging from season to season. Especially with the focus on original prints, several basic dress designs seem to be recycled and the newest print slapped on. However, major Lolita brands also keep track of mainstream and subculture trends in Japan and on the international stage while setting trends within the microcosm that is Gothic, Lolita, and Punk street fashion. Indies brands are less tied to the seasonal fashion system and the need for constant novelty on a large scale. For a big company like AP, there is a constant flow of new items that enters stores weekly. Releases are patterned by seasonal cycles which also determine fabric and motif choices for prints and accessories (i.e., gingham and strawberries for summer and velveteen, school, and 'royal' for winter). Usually one new original print series or highlight series is released each month, buffered by other low-key releases: non-print dresses and skirts, accessories, tops, bags,

shoes. Every new major release is announced in a two-page spread advertisement in *KERA* a few weeks before preorders open and the actual release.

Most Japanese Lolita and Gothic fashion brand clothing is constructed in Japan though it is unclear where materials like fabric and lace are sourced from. As companies grow they outsource more of their garment production to factories outside Japan. Smaller brands like Victorian Maiden and Mary Magdalene are more likely to be manufactured in Japan. Their production numbers are lower and they are less likely to have the resources to take on the larger orders needed to produce in China. Mary Magdalene, for example, is run by four people and only 50 of each dress item would be produced (Younker 2011).

Even as textile printing, shoes, and accessories manufacturing has moved overseas in order to lower retail prices, Japanese companies still remain heavily reliant on Japanese factories, and the March 2011 disaster in Northern Japan has had an effect on clothing manufacture. Many Lolitas complain about the lowered quality over the years from construction to materials used, especially from rapidly expanding companies who turned to Chinese manufacturers to meet wider demand at lower costs. Original brand-exclusive printed textiles from China are associated with not being colourfast, which some find disappointing considering the high cost of the completed garment.

Sales, in which retail prices may be lowered up to 75%, usually occur at the end of the spring/summer season in July and fall/winter season in January. Japanese department stores rarely slash prices outside of these set end-of-season

sale periods, but with the recent economic climate, special sales for certain series or items now occur more frequently throughout the year. Point cards, free 'novelty' gifts with purchases, and tickets to tea party events are other methods used to promote customer loyalty and sales.

Instead of revealing their full collections during each season, most Lolita brands release information about new items throughout the year in small spurts. Spec sheets with hand drawn illustrations, measurements, fabric swatches, and prices of upcoming merchandise are available in-store. Sample garments of future print series often 'tour' various store branches, allowing customers to touch and view the items in person before making a reservation. Preorders and reservations are an important aspect of Lolita retail fashion. AP is notorious for having items sold out in preorder periods, and competition to get access to a preorder spot is intense. Preorders are a way for a company to gauge how many customers are interested in a line and to set the production run accordingly. Smaller companies offer their products only through reservation. Dates when reservations open are a mystery, and usually shop staff do not reveal such information unless they are close to the customer. People thus rely on word of mouth and knowledge of release patterns to gauge when preorder periods begin. For certain upcoming popular series there is an intense frenzy to get a reservation spot that it drives up the desire for and interest in AP items, creating a mentality that if you do not buy something right away someone else may snatch it up. At the same time, this competition alienates those who like AP but are tired and

jaded by having to work so hard to buy something or are upset with scalpers who resell new lines for exorbitant prices.

Starting in 2008, it became easier to obtain items from Japanese Lolita brands abroad. Prior to this, Metamorphose and BTSSB were two of the first Lolita brands to offer international shipping and English language websites and hence, for many years were two of the top Lolita brands overseas because of the ease in purchasing items. In addition, both brands, especially Metamorphose, construct garments that have more give in sizing and are adjustable using techniques like full or partial shirring and elastic waist bands. Other Japanese brands have slowly expanded their online shopping operations as well to handle international sales and English-language websites. Some started to consider overseas shipping only after many inquiries from potential customers from outside Japan, indicating that overseas expansion was never a goal for some companies. Even with international shipping options, most companies seem more focused on catering to their Japanese clientele as demonstrated by clothing design, sizing, and product runs. During this period more EGL members and other Lolitas living outside Japan started to use auction deputy services and commission shopping services to purchase items directly from companies that do not ship overseas. Access to auction deputies meant that people were able to bid for used Lolita clothes for less or find rare items from online auction sites such as Yahoo! Auctions, Mbok, and Rakuen. Many of these services advertised on EGL

are run by foreign Lolitas residing in Japan who often use the commission fees to fund their own clothing purchases.

Though AP continues to be a highly desired brand, its peak of popularity on EGL lasted from 2008 to 2010 in part because of promotion activities in California and France at conventions that coincided with a row of successive series that were popular both in and out of Japan. Japanese Gothic, Lolita, and Punk brands like BTSSB and h.naoto have made appearances at conventions, commonly called 'cons,' in the United States and Europe as a way to introduce their label to potential customers, highlighting how *anime* cons have become one stop destinations to reach a potential audience already interested in and knowledgeable about Japanese pop culture. When PMX invited Classic Lolita brand Innocent World (IW) in 2011, more people on EGL started to take notice of the brand, producing a rise in discussion and photos of people wearing IW. A general shift recently towards Classical styles began to emerge more strongly on EGL corresponding with the IW event in the US and a more frequent appearance of this sub-style in street snaps and magazine spreads in *KERA* and *GL&B*, in the same way that AP's Sweet style crossed with Hime makeup and Deco coordination gained popularity on EGL after the first AP event was held in Los Angeles.

Events offer a way to touch, feel, and try on the clothes in person before purchase as well as see a large number of Lolitas congregated in one area, an experience missing up until then because there had been no brick-and-mortar

storefront for Lolita in the U.S.. After the event, many new people took up wearing Lolita, especially AP, citing that seeing the AP designers and other Lolitas at the event made them decide they wanted to try doing it too. Many AP fans told me that seeing Asuka and Maki working hard in promoting the brand or seeing how cute they were in person made them love AP more. As AP events have largely taken place in California, the U.S. West Coast has become associated with OTT (over-the-top) Sweet Lolita style and Deco Lolita since these styles tend to dominate what is seen at events and meet-ups.

DIY Lolita and Indies Lolita Brands Around the World

Building on existing style elements found in Lolita and combining them with other subcultural and historical fashion, Lolitas interact with the fashion creatively, not only through putting together an outfit coordinate but also through making Lolita things. Customizing and making one's own Lolita clothes and accessories is an important aspect of taking part in the fashion and reflects a punk-like DIY (do-it-yourself) aesthetic and sense of action. Lolita fashion picks up and melds with other styles and elements as



The rider jacket, boots, belt, and other elements associated with Punk fashion are combined with the Lolita silhouette to create a Punk Lolita outfit. Courtesy of Miakoda Van Kuykendall (2012).

it travels outside Japan, emphasizing the different localities and historical resources drawn on by those who wear and make Lolita. This innovation can be seen in the way people dress in Lolita, but it is most visible in handmade and indie-brand produced clothes. This section discusses indie brands in Japan and North America.

Many Japanese and North American indie brands are one-person operations; dresses are not factory produced and are often made to order in accordance with the customer's sizing. A number of people who start indie brands are fashion students who are interested in pursuing fashion as a career and thus desire to start their own label as a stepping stone towards running a full-fledged business and establishing a career in fashion. Others are sewing hobbyists who are confident enough in their skills to sell their wares to a wider audience but do not desire a career in fashion, choosing to create an indie brand as a side business or a hobby that creates revenue.

Among the students at Bunka Gakuen University, a prestigious fashion school in Tokyo, many come to class wearing Lolita among many other subculture fashion styles. Some Lolitas pursue a career in fashion because they fell in love with the fashion style in the first place. Reflecting this growing sector of potential fashion students, VANTAN, a vocational school also in Tokyo, has recently launched a collaboration with brands such as BTSSB to offer a special curriculum in Gothic, Lolita, and Punk fashion design during the final semester of training that gives students an opportunity to work with BTSSB designers and

staff. The following pages introduce Lolita indies designers from Japan and the United States.

Sachiko is a self-proclaimed 'Lolita otaku,' confessing that when she first started wearing Lolita she was obsessed with checking the brand sites several times a day, building a knowledge of each brand's history and the clothes that have been released. Because of her desire to break into Lolita fashion as a career, Sachiko decided to pursue studies in fashion and start her own indie label, Shortcake Poodle. Before venturing into making dresses that feature appliqués sporting her own illustrations, Sachiko started out creating gift-box shaped hats overflowing with candies, large headbows decorated with tiny fake flowers and pearls, and necklaces sporting spoons paired with sugar cubes or dipped in fake chocolate. Indies brands that focus on creating accessories that can be paired



Shortcake Poodle stall at a Lolita sales event.
Courtesy of Shortcake Poodle (2012).

with Lolita are more numerous than those that produce original clothes. Making accessories requires less labour and a lower start-up cost. Items also sell for less money than clothes, making them an easier sale at events when attendees do not have a

lot of cash, and issues such as garment sizing do not need to be considered. Even though she now makes dresses under the Shortcake Poodle label, Sachiko's main focus is still on producing handmade accessories. She places her items under consignment at the Kobe select store Aruhiya apartment. The store does not specifically deal in items from Lolita brands but carries stock from brands like Jane Marple that are of interest to some Lolitas. Based in Nagoya, she also travels to Tokyo and Osaka to participate in sales events there.

Sachiko's brand has been gaining more visibility and recently photographs of her garments were printed in an issue of the *GL&B*. Regardless, she is still considered an indie brand, producing very small, limited runs of each design that she sews together herself. Before the placement of her clothes in *GL&B*, she was already receiving emails from people living overseas who learned about her work through photos other overseas Lolitas post to image-sharing sites like Tumblr. However, because of the potential hassles with handling customer service in a language she is not familiar with and the limited number of things she is able to produce, Sachiko currently has no plans to expand her online shop to take international orders. Even some larger Lolita brands are reluctant to open their operations to overseas customers because of various concerns mostly centered on handling payment, overseas shipment, and customer complaints if something goes wrong like missing packages or issues with the product received.

Yuki is another fashion student who runs her own indies label YUKi, and she is the head organizer of Romantic A La Mode, a sales event based in Osaka. It is broadly defined as an event for girls who like cute and fashionable (*oshare*) things, reflecting Yuki's changing interests and desire to deviate from the Lolita label as she moved from wearing Gothic Lolita to a brighter and sweeter Lolita style. Her own clothing line deviates from the standard Lolita shape while still retaining a sense of femininity and cuteness. Like many designers who aspire to establish their own label, Yuki does not want to be weighed down by the conventions and constraints of only designing specifically within Lolita fashion style. Along with Lolita fashion, both Yuki and Sachiko are inspired by MILK, Emily Temple Cute, Shirley Temple, and Jane Marple. According to Yuki, these brands are looked up to by many Lolita designers because they eventually transcended the subculture boundary to appeal to a larger audience while still expressing an aesthetic and sense of cuteness not found in mainstream clothing.

Indies brands are less constrained to the Lolita label and can afford to experiment or stagnate, deviating from or build on ideas that are no longer trendy. Designers like Hanao of Moon Afternoon and her friends at Sincerely pick elements of Lolita they enjoy and continue to release the same items or similar designs year after year based on those aesthetic choices. Hanao, a generation older than Sachiko and Yuki, grew up in a small town in central Japan during the era when *Olive* magazine was popular and remembers many of her female classmates from middle school read and talked about the magazine. She

learned about Lolita fashion during her university days in Kyoto when the style was becoming more well-known where she was studying in a field unrelated to fashion or art. Content with remaining an underground indies brand, Hanao draws influences directly from Victorian children's and women's clothing combined with Romantic-*kei* brands like Wonderful World that are associated with the magazine *Olive*. Hanao has also branched out to establishing another label called berry berry tea time dedicated to creating clothes for Blyth dolls for people who want to match with their doll or dress their doll up in clothes that they admire but are unable to wear themselves.

Her work seems almost static; even though new items may be introduced occasionally the overall look rarely changes and is removed from whatever is happening and popular elsewhere the fashion industry and in the Lolita fashion system. Hanao believes that some of the clothes currently found in *KERA* are not really Lolita fashion because "Lolita fashion is supposed to be modeled after Victorian children's clothing but these clothes don't look anything like what a Victorian child would wear" (interview, Hanao, April 17 2010). Moon Afternoon features the clothes that she herself would like to wear that are not being made by other Lolita brands. Through her online web-store and Lolita sales events she is able to share this vision with others who are attracted to the same aesthetic. Hanao is not particularly concerned with becoming a fashion designer as her main career, and her designs and indies label offer her a method of communication with other Lolitas in the same way that the author of a fanzine or

artist of fanart may use these mediums as a way of expression and to connect with other fans.

Indies Lolita designers are not tied to the same need for constant innovation and new releases like designers working for the larger Lolita brands that stock new items each week. Designers like Hanao takes a limited number of custom orders every couple of months; she sews each order herself, closing web orders when she has to dedicate her time to preparing for events. Some indie brands like Fumiko of Chantilly send her dresses to factories where they produce a small run of 10 to 15 pieces each time. Her original sock designs are also factory made in Japan but accessories like headdresses and her signature diamond print bonnets are constructed by the designer herself. Compared to some of the sweeter Lolita brands like AP and Metamorphose, if the designer is not drawing on Goth subculture and Gothic Lolita style, many clothes found in indie Lolita display a closer affinity to an aesthetic tied to Western children's literature, Nakahara Junichi and Showa retro girls fashion, and Western historical fashion, blurring the line between Lolita and *otome*, eschewing a modern pop *kawaii* sense for the more old-fashioned *shōjo* culture.

Lolita fashion's homage to the Victorian and Rococo era in aesthetic and inspiration is often what draws people to the style. North American indie designers also continue this tradition by adapting Western historical fashions to a Lolita silhouette and style while combining it with other subculture styles that they are also invested in, such as Western Goth, Punk, Cyber, Steampunk,

Rockabilly, or even incorporating Hip-hop and Urban streetwear sensibilities into their designs. There are a number of designers who work with the Lolita silhouette and style basics as their base, but do not design strictly within the style or for Lolitas. A fascination with and borrowing from Western history is prominent, but it is not filtered through the same *shōjo* lens found in Japan, and designers are inspired not only by English history but 18th and 19th century American history as well. The range of historical periods that designers reference are more varied though still European-centric, including Edwardian, Medieval, and Renaissance eras and retro and vintage styling from the 1960s and earlier. North American Lolitas also draw on other areas untapped by Japanese designers including expressing their 'nerdy' interests through making clothes or putting together outfits that reflect their fandom in Harry Potter and Star Wars or love for videogames like Super Mario Brothers.

Most independent brands based in North America are designer-run, creating very small production runs or making items on demand from a set arsenal of original designs. They cater to different body sizes and types, breaking the mould of Lolita clothes from Japan that are only offered in one-size. There are a number of indie brands active on the United States' east coast that exhibit new lines yearly at Lolita fashion show in Baltimore, MD held during Otakon, an *anime* convention that has become a popular yearly gathering for Lolitas on the East Coast. For these fashion shows, multiple outfits are made but many do not go into production beyond the one sample dress or are only

available through commission. Because of resources, most indies brands are not able to produce more than one line or series at a time. North American indie brands have a small customer base that communicates with each other frequently, meaning there are more risks and consequences if something produced flops. Many others on EGL also make their own clothes, and if anything, involvement in this fashion scene trains people to be picky about construction, materials, design, and even customer service. Lolitas have high expectations and can be extremely critical, writing reviews to praise or critique. There are benefits to buying from North American Lolita designers, including lower cost, low shipping fees, custom fitting, and knowing that one is supporting a friend or acquaintance. Sweet Rococo based in Southern California, for example, offers an interesting mix-and-match system in which users choose from a list of preset bodice and skirt designs, imported from Japan fabrics, and embellishments to create a customized dress or skirt that is made to order.

One unique point about Lolita designers in North America is the frequent use of digital on-demand fabric printing to create custom prints in small productions. One popular service is Spoonflower which offers a variety of fabrics and the ability for designers to upload their textile pattern and sell to others, receiving a small commission fee from Spoonflower with each sale. This and other on-demand sites makes it relatively easy and inexpensive for aspiring



designers to create their own Lolita clothing brand. An application of this resource can be found in the creation of Lovely Horse Derpy-chan, an homage and reference to one of AP's mascots Milky-chan, a pink deer, on the /cgl/ discussion board on the infamous anonymous forum 4chan that parodies and pokes fun at Lolita in a humorous way unique to non-Japanese Lolitas and demonstrating a form of community action and group creativity. Users on /cgl/ have previously parodied popular AP prints, for example transforming Milky Planet into a print of rabbits excreting rainbows jumping over an ice cream castle. The 'derpy' character, an endearing term meaning 'awkward' or 'stupid-looking,' originated from an illustration by an EGL member in which one Lolita was caring a funny-looking horse-shaped purse. A collaborative effort that was fuelled by active conversation and brainstorming on /cgl/ led to several handmade items and parody prints featuring Derpy-chan. Different people took

on the tasks of drawing, colouring, inking, and designing the fabric and offered the finished product for sale on Spoonflower. Released right after 2011 disaster in Fukushima, the fabric was offered at cost to encourage people to create using the fabric and donating the profits to charity.

Lolita fashion in North America is centered on a celebration of girlhood that lies in the expression of one's individuality and creativity. This may be achieved through a practice of creating and crafting that is an acknowledgement and homage to labour and domains typically associated with women throughout history, the existence of a sisterhood achieved through shared appreciation in



Sailor-style dress from New York-based American indies brand Morrigan NYC with hand screenprinted illustrations based on Moby Dick. Photo by Bianca Alexis. Courtesy of Morrigan NYC (2012).

aesthetics and sensibilities with other women, and the agency achieved through partaking in girly activities and feelings including dressing up. This sense can be found in the work of indies designers like Zoh Rothberg of Morrigan NYC who is inspired by Neo Victorian, Gothic, Lolita, and other style. It is one of the few indie brands producing original custom prints.

Designer Zoh has roots in Western Goth, an interest in contemporary and Victorian-era pattern drafting, and experience in Broadway costume construction. Her work displays her interest in Romantic Goth and the Gothic side of Lolita. She aims to combine historical aspects from Western culture with Japanese street fashion, describing the image of the brand to be a cross between Wednesday Addams in her black uniform and a young Marie Antoinette when she first came to France at age 14. She has currently released two pre-order-only custom screenprinted series inspired by 19th-century literary classics 'The Raven' and *Moby Dick* sporting illustrations by artist Matthew Boyle. Aiming to create designs and clothes that appeal to older women as well, Zoh offers her pieces in two lengths, a short knee length typical for Lolita fashion and a more sophisticated under-knee length skirt.

Her interests in rediscovering historical fashion techniques and applying them to her designs is feminist in nature, fostered by a respect for women in the past expressed through examining the "culture that women developed over history" from their unpaid labour in activities like handwork and stitching before the introduction of the sewing machine (interview, Zoh, August 8, 2009). Zoh is also concerned with ethics regarding clothing production, garment quality, and workers rights, having her clothes manufactured by hand in small sweatshop-free factories in New York City. In addition to exhibiting her wares at Otakon, she is also active in fashion shows and events in the Goth scene. In addition, an indication of the varied scope of most North American indie

designers, she has recently founded and organized the NYC 19th Century Extravaganza, a three-day event celebrating nineteenth-century life.

Another New York based designer is I Do Declare's Kelsey Hine who explores elements of Lolita fashion by creating new designs based on knights, pirates, British history, and Americana along with the usual Rococo Marie Antoinette references. Her fascination with heraldry and armour construction also appears in her work. In addition to Otakon, she has presented several fashion shows at club and dance events organized by Dances of Vice that are described by the website as incorporating "a myriad of anachronistic and new romantic influences in (the) Dadaistic celebration of the liberating effects of beauty, fantasy, and surrealism." Dances of Vice presents a myriad of themed events including Rockabilly and film noir and pulp fiction that draw a variety of attendees all dressed to the nines in outfits matching each event focus. Many Lolitas take part in these events which give them an opportunity to wear Lolita in a more outlandish way than usual and provide a great venue to show off their outfits. Kelsey has displayed her work at shows like 'Secret Life of Toys' and, most recently, 'Pure Imagination,' where she showcased a line of outfits inspired by her favourite cakes and sweets. Unlike Zoh who produces her pre-order lines in larger numbers, Kelsey makes each dress by hand, usually creating only one of each design which she later sells on Etsy. Some pieces are made using found vintage fabric or feature screenprinted illustrations.

Aside from the United States and Canada, there are a number of indie brands in Europe and Australia as well as South Korea. Unlike Japanese indie brands, South Korean indie brands like Haenuli, Baroque, and Lief have been reaching out to customers on EGL, posting in English about new releases, accepting orders overseas, and sending their wares to be displayed and sold at *anime* conventions. These brands also release original print textiles manufactured in Korean factories.

Establishing one's own indie brands offers a way for a Lolita to explore the elements of the fashion she finds attractive and in the case of American designers, gives a context to their involvement in Lolita by tying it together with other subcultures and resources that inspire them. As demonstrated by the designers introduced here, many indie brands outside Japan try to develop clothing that can be worn not only for Lolita but can be coordinated in different ways and thus able to attract a wider potential audience. Objects from Japan are still more highly regarded, as exhibited in the resale market that favours made-in-Japan products. But there is a growing clientele that chooses to support these hobbyists, designers, and seamstresses who foster a distinct North American Lolita fashion style through their practice and small businesses. Criticisms from people within EGL about poorly made items and bad customer service hold locally produced items to a higher standard and push designers to explore different styles, cuts, and materials not found in Japanese brand Lolita items.

The 'Walmart of Lolita': Replicas and Knockoffs From China

Though Lolita clothing designs from Japan are sought after, buying Lolita from China is much less expensive and is a popular option especially for beginners to Lolita, people on a budget, or those who are unable to fit into tiny Japanese dresses. Based on exchange rates in 2011, a dress from China costs from \$50 to \$150US compared to \$300 to \$500US for Japanese clothes. It is also possible to request custom sizing as items can be made to order. One issue people have with 'buying brand' is the limited sizing options as garments are sold only in one size, a standard Japanese size 9 that is equivalent to a U.S. size 6 for women. Though some brands now offer multiple sizes, many garments are not cut to look flattering on certain body types like shapely bodies with large busts even if the garment measurements are larger. As buying clothes requires such a high monetary investment, virtually every Lolita on EGL who has been into the fashion for a while can determine what will and will not fit and what dress styles look the best on their body type just by looking at a stock photo.

Prestige and respect are attached to owning items from Japanese brands, and there are debates on EGL whether to buy or boycott replicas. Those who do not fit into the standard petite Japanese sizing or have the extra income to drop down \$400 a dress welcome the replicas. Some justify purchasing replicas because the items being bootlegged have long sold out and the company is not losing money from potential sales. There are people who buy both the original and the replica, choosing to wear the replica to keep their original in pristine

condition. Chinese companies producing Lolita clothes, whether replicas or original designs, allow people of all different shapes and sizes access to Lolita fashion through custom sizing and cheaper prices and are a key factor in the growing numbers of people interested in Lolita fashion outside of Japan.

Several Chinese manufacturers and companies produce Lolita, Gothic, Punk, and sometimes Cosplay and maid costumes. It is possible to order from overseas directly from these companies or through an agent that can handle the transaction in Chinese. Agents check quality of merchandise received, handle disputes between buyers and sellers, and consolidate merchandise for shipment. Many of these merchants sell their wares via Taobao, a Chinese online shopping site based in mainland China, or some list their products on Ebay. Clabbao and Qutieland are two agents that deal exclusively with Lolita fashion clothing from China. Products listed on Ebay are notorious for being of dubious quality, using photos from Japanese brands when the actual product received may be entirely different from the design pictures with sometimes disastrous results. Dream of Lolita and Kidsyoyo are examples of companies that are known for their outright copies of brand prints and embroidery patterns primarily from AP and BTSSB and on occasion Innocent World and Emily Temple Cute. Companies like Fanplusfriend sell some of their wares through Ebay listings and have a history of directly copying existing garment designs using different fabric and offering custom sizing for each made to order dress; they also cater to the cosplay market. Another company that deals in replicas through Ebay is Milanoo, especially

notorious for stealing existing stock photos from Japanese brands and delivering clothes that look nothing like photos in the original sales post.

The Taobao sellers who create replicas are primarily catering to Chinese Lolitas who are unable to purchase the Japanese originals. However, Oo Jia is one recent popular option for prints replicas who operates through Facebook and directly caters to Lolitas outside China. Oo Jia appears to be a one-woman-owned operation or headed by one woman who takes into consideration requests from people who write on her Facebook fan page suggestions for prints they want her to reproduce. New event groups are then created to propose future print copies and people are asked to 'like' the page to gauge interest. Once an event group reaches 30 or more people, Oo Jia reproduces the print in a limited number of colours. If she does not own the original dress herself, she asks followers on her fan page to send her their dress so that she can borrow and capture the images directly from the originals. There are several ways to reproduce images, either by scanning the fabric or tracing the image using a vector-based computer graphics program. The patterns are then digitally printed on cheap materials similar in quality to bedsheet cotton, muslin, or even canvas. It is an imperfect process as there are often errors in the replication, from differences in colour, poor registration, and mirrored images.

Print replicas made from China can come out just a few months or weeks after the original release in Japan and are now so frequent that people commenting on EGL posts about upcoming Lolita brand releases often write,

“That’s cute! I can’t wait for the replica.” To the untrained eye, these replica or knock-offs look the same as the items from Japan. Print replication varies in quality. Compared to the original, colours can be washed out or letters printed backwards because of the process used to reproduce the image. Dress designs may be different from the original, lesser quality material is used in construction, and not all colour choices found in the original Japanese release are made available. Corners are also cut in trimmings and lace which are usually not the same quality as the original Japanese brand pieces. Bags and shoes designs are also copied, and because the original items are already being manufactured in China, construction, quality, and design of brand and replicas can often be indistinguishable aside from a missing brand label. Based on review on EGL, some people claim that replica shoes tend to last even longer and cost less.

Aside from replicas, there are companies that largely focus on producing original in-house designs based on Lolita and Gothic Lolita style that draw inspiration from existing garments released by Japanese brands. Indie Chinese Lolita brands like Surface Spell, Dear Celine, Infanta, HMHM, and Rose Melody sell on Taobao and release seasonal collections. Some people believe that the quality of clothes are close to or equal in construction and material to items produced in Japan by brands like AP or Metamorphose; certain items from Taobao designers are popular among EGL members. With some designs it is possible to discern what Japanese brand and particular dress the designer may

have drawn inspiration from, but there are also unique designs using embroidered illustrations with less focus on original printed textiles overall.

Information is sparse regarding the designers and who owns these companies as they are never put into the spotlight in the same way Japanese designers are, nor do Lolitas on EGL display any curiosity about the Chinese companies or designers as they are apt to do with Japanese designers. There are some companies such as Infanta where the owners themselves are interested in and wear Gothic and Lolita fashion. These companies, especially those producing replicas, are marketing primarily to Lolitas in mainland China who are unable to afford or purchase clothes from Japan. With the aid of third party agents, the market for these Chinese-based manufacturers has expanded to North America, Europe, and areas in Asia with a sizable Lolita population like Singapore. There are Japanese agents for Taobao, but it seems that Japanese Lolitas do not utilize it to purchase Lolita clothes. I did not see anyone wearing Chinese Lolita brand clothing when in Japan or observed specific Taobao brands being discussed on Japanese blogs or forums and aside from the occasional mention of 'Chinese manufacturers' ripping off (*pakuri*) Japanese designers on anonymous forums. These discussions are primarily focused on Bodyline and sellers on Rakuten. A definite stigma is attached to direct copies or even items inspired by existing designs.

Access to lower priced Lolita clothes in Japan, including knock-offs, can

mostly be found on Rakuten, a popular online Japanese shopping site. Dubbed the Walmart of Lolita by EGL Lolitas, Bodyline (BL) is a well-known example in Japan and elsewhere. Established as early as 2002, BL is owned by a Chinese company and has two stores in Japan, placed in strategic places with high traffic – one store is smack dab in Harajuku's Takeshita street and another is on the busy Shinsaibashi shopping street in Osaka. The storefront in Osaka is rather gaudy and eye catching. Painted in bright red, the familiar Bodyline logo set in gold is placed above and around the entrance, framing the stairways on the left hand side leading up to the doorway with a large chandelier and mannequins on the right. Above all this is a large billboard set on top with a photograph of a young Caucasian woman dressed in Bodyline Lolita clothes sitting on a red Victorianesque couch.

Clothes are manufactured in China and imported into Japan and sold around the world through their online retail site. BL started out as a sex shop selling costumes and lingerie, items that are still carried today though they are no longer the main focus. The company later branched out to knock-offs of Gothic, Lolita, and Punk clothing, cosplay, maid costumes, and other garments associated with *Akiba-kei*-like school uniforms. The company shifted towards creating more Lolita clothes over the years, first selling direct copies of popular prints from AP that removed the brand logo, then creating a line of inexpensive original custom print dresses. BL also conducts design contests open both to Japanese and international entrants. Winning submissions are produced and

sold on the website. Items are hit-or-miss in quality and design. Some clothes are made out of materials like satin, shiny polyester or synthetic lace in designs closer to cosplay than Lolita, but other items can easily fit into any Lolita wardrobe and work well with even brand pieces. BL pieces use cheaper and less fabric, sometimes resulting in skirts that are less full than the standard Lolita garment. Prices range from \$20 to \$50US, and there are many free shipping promotions and 50% off sales. Items are indeed not as high quality as something one would pay several hundred dollars for, but many buyers do not mind the difference in quality especially because the prices are low. In addition, because it is not required to go through an agent to purchase from BL outside Japan, it is fast and cheap fashion.

On EGL, BL is seen as an acceptable alternative for cheaper cute clothes offered in a variety of larger sizes. Though the EGL community is split in regard to the replicas, BL does not have a good reputation in Japan and is not considered a proper brand even with the trend towards original pieces. The stigma towards replica and knockoffs are much stronger because it is seen as an insult to the original designers. Brand sponsored events even have a clause reminding attendees that wearing Bodyline is strictly forbidden. Many Japanese and EGL Lolitas express dislike towards Bodyline's blatant copying of existing designs, feeling that it is an insult to the original designers. The sex shop origins also are viewed with disgust. BL is often associated with cosplay and cosplay Lolita which some believe cheapens Lolita fashion as a whole and creates

wrongful assumptions by outsiders who then associate Lolita with costumes and sexual fetishes. Thus, anyone who wears BL is not considered to really understand or respect Lolita fashion. As Japanese Lolitas do not have access to Taobao companies who are producing original Lolita clothing, Lolita clothes coming from China are perceived as cheap and/or a rip-off of some existing design.

Japanese designers are concerned with protecting their intellectual property and brand image. Out of all the companies, AP's designs have been some of the most copied, sometimes with more than one Chinese company releasing a copy of the same print. Brands are concerned that unknowing people may purchase a replica and associate the brand with merchandise of poor quality and construction. In order to differentiate their products from replicas, Japanese companies have taken measures such as printing custom fabric with embellishments such as custom buttons with the brand logo, printing in gold ink or a custom polka dot printed fabric with the brand logo in a small heart inserted among the dots. Careful pattern drafting and better quality fabric result in more polished garments that are finished with extra details that are difficult to reproduce inexpensively. AP uses custom tulle lace that combine the AP logo with unique images like teddy bears, cupcakes, and stars. Jewels or golden charms are sewn on to the ends of waist ribbons attached to a dress. Bags are lined with custom fabric featuring the brand logo. Information about new

releases is kept secret until near release time in order to prevent counterfeiters from stealing designs before they are actually released by the original company.

Networks of Lolita Things

The ease of access to Japanese goods, both new and used, in addition with the growing production of Lolita clothes in China has changed the market in EGL in many ways. This network of flows of things and images has led to a change in attitude on EGL concerning the value of 'brand items' and handmade items as it became easier to purchase items from Japan, new or used. AP's popularity and the difficulty in purchasing popular series lead to a collector mentality on EGL in which certain items could be sold over retail price on the EGL community sales page `EGL_comm_sales` because of their rarity. Before, most people relied on seamstresses on EGL or tried making their own Lolita clothes adapting existing U.S. costume or square dance dress patterns to fit the Lolita style. The word 'brand whore' was a frequent insult used to describe someone who put too much emphasis on owning Japanese Lolita brand clothing or seemed to own 'too much' brand. This phrase has gone out of fashion as an insult but is now sometimes used in a joking or self-deprecating way.

A number of EGL Lolitas choose to continue supporting handmade items and items created by seamstresses and indie brands, but in the used clothing market it is difficult to resell these items. Some community members question the retail cost of EGL indie brands especially if the prices are near to or on par with Japanese brands. Seamstress work and labour on EGL has become less

valued, both in terms of its social standing and monetary value. A popular seamstress sold handmade skirts for \$30 which led to the expectation that other seamstresses should be charging similar prices and not higher. However, for many seamstresses, \$30 does not even cover the labour involved, the amount of time spent drafting patterns, cutting fabric, and the actual hours needed to assemble more complex skirt designs or even the material costs. In addition, handmade work is more carefully scrutinized than before with higher expectations for quality, construction, and originality. There is still a strong movement for DIY and making one's own Lolita clothes on EGL, but it has become more difficult to sell one's work to other people unless the designs are exceptional or different in comparison to Japanese brands. Some people see products from Japan as being higher in quality, superior in design elements and construction, or more exclusive, rare, and desirable and thus choose to save their money for Japan-made items instead.

Replicas control resale prices of original items from popular series, especially outside Japan, keeping prices from going too high but at the same time making it more difficult to resell original items as the market becomes saturated with replicas. Original items that have been already bootlegged tend to have lower value on EGL, and some people who have bought the original dress resent replicas for making their dress seem less unique and worth less. Some people who buy replicas say that they understand the moral implications of their purchase, but they also believe that the existence of replicas is justified as it

allows people to enjoy Lolita fashion on a budget. It is also a way for people to wear the designs they like of popular series that have long been sold out and are too rare to even buy used. The type of person who regularly buys replicas, some also argue, lies outside of most Lolita brand's target customer base and would never pay \$300 or more for an original AP dress even if a cheaper copy did not exist. There are many replicas, knockoffs, and inspired pieces that copy designs from haute couture and fashion runways but downscaled for a different market by offering similar styles at lower prices, using cheaper material, construction techniques, and labour. However, Lolita fashion is a niche market even within Japan with product runs in the low thousands or less for many brands. Inexpensive digital printing allows for pieces that are not only inspired by Japanese design ideas but are like lower quality photocopies that replicate the image, the print that Lolitas desire then slapped on to a cheaper dress base.

Many Lolitas tend to contrast the Lolita fashion with what they label 'mainstream' fashion which is seen as cheap and fast - the opposite of Lolita's attention to detail, higher quality materials and construction for longer lasting clothing. But items from Bodyline and replicas are the contradiction of this aesthetic which is an attempt to reposition the relationship between consumption, consumer, and clothing to something more sustainable and not throwaway. While problematic, cheaper items from China also level the playing field by giving people who are too poor or too large to fit into tiny, expensive Japanese dresses a chance to wear Lolita. The influx of replicas and their popularity

reflects a variety of things about the nature of engagement with Lolita fashion outside Japan, most importantly that a lack of access to storefronts and avenues to see clothes in person means that people are first encountering Lolita style and things on a visual level and less of a combined tactile, visual, and bodily experience. For people who buy replicas what matters is not the complete package of the actual dress or the material thing itself but the image that is on it. They may want to surround themselves with the images found on Lolita textile prints but it is not important that the dress they are wearing has the same aura as an AP original. It is a hobby and something they enjoy wearing, but they may not see the point in spending large amounts of money on a fashion they are unable to wear frequently.

American indie brands provide a counterbalance to this attitude by attempting to bring back the importance in quality and workmanship while also offering flexibility in sizing as demonstrated in Morrigan NYC's conscious attempts to find factories that do not use sweatshop labour for the manufacture of their clothes; they offer garments in many different sizes. Replicas also push Japanese designers to be more creative with garments to create desire for the 'original' as well as take steps to make available their products to potential international customers. Despite measures to differentiate originals from copies, replicas are still being made to meet a growing market of Lolitas outside Japan who support these Chinese companies with their dollars and even in some cases by providing the original garments in order to make the copies. The issue

concerning Lolita fashion replicas highlights the web of relationships that tie together designers, producers, and wearers around the world in a movement of things and images. It also brings into question the value attributed to Lolita as clothing and a niche subculture fashion genre. In the summer of 2012, an AP representative asked EGL mods to ban discussion and sales of replicas on the EGL forum. EGL members were divided on the issue, but mods were concerned with potential legal repercussions and complied with the request. Currently, reviews, discussion, and sales of replicas containing licensed mascots, brand logos, and images from copyrighted original print textiles are banned from EGL. Thus, any person wanting to discuss or resell replica Lolita items must turn to different avenues to do so.

II. North American Lolitas, Individualism, and Style: Conflicts Between Materialism and Concepts of Self

Lolita fashion is not a mass group movement working towards some kind of ultimate goal or agenda. Lolita can be a way of being, an embodied knowledge that could not be so easily and simply expressed in words. It can become a way of feeling, choosing and coordinating, creating a world out of selective consumerism, bringing into one's life objects that fit into a particular aesthetic and fantasy. Lolitas are people who are attracted to similar pools of information, symbols, media, and material things. Through this attraction, they enter into a network of connections that bring them together with the things they like, with places, with other Lolitas, with people who make and design Lolita

clothing, and other entities that collectively create and are created by Lolita fashion. With easier access to media depicting Lolita fashion and more ways to come in contact with and own Lolita-like things, there appears to be little difference in how Lolitas around the world style their fashion coordinates and understand how to wear Lolita. However, despite the surface similarities, there are differences in how Lolita fashion and the relation to material culture are defined.

As presented in Chapter 3, Japanese Lolitas have at their disposal words and ideas about cuteness, girlhood, and maidenhood with which to frame their involvement with Lolita that even if they may not use consciously or use frequently to describe their Lolita experience, it is knowledge that every Lolita has an understanding of, can define, and relate to the fashion. Lolita can be an expression of and embodiment of *shōjo*, *otome*, and *kawaii*. North American Lolitas are engaging with the same things and images, but without having the experience of growing up in Japanese society, these words along with their accompanying ideas that define them are missing. These keywords open doors to an awareness of a wider array of possible connections, concepts, and categories that bring Lolita outside of itself. Outside Japan, the ideas and aesthetics found in *shōjo*, *otome*, and *kawaii* are rolled into one and labelled 'Lolita.' 'Lolita fashion' then is an amalgamation of these separate but related things and because of the language barrier there is never a trackback to the parts

that make the whole except for *kawaii* which has been able to travel globally as Japanese cute but with limited definition.

Though North Americans and other Lolitas on EGL are utilizing the same things and motifs as Japanese Lolitas, because there is lack of similar words and concepts like *shōjo* and *otome* to describe and give a context to the fashion subculture, engagement with Lolita fashion is simultaneously upheld as empowering and beautiful yet materialistic and superficial with relations to and desire for things getting in the way of relationships with other people. This opinion is exhibited by Grace and Michelle's discussion of community found in Chapter 2 in which they refer to other Lolitas as "bitchy girls" who only want their dresses who "don't care about other people" (interview, March 24, 2010). This sentiment is not unique to Grace and Michelle. When drama occurs on EGL, it creates an upset in social relations and expectations which leads people to analyze and discuss the character of Lolitas in general and evaluate their own involvement in EGL and Lolita fashion. Especially if they get caught up in drama, these upsets can sour Lolita fashion for some people, eventually pushing them to leave Lolita completely or restrict their involvement in group activities online in order to preserve the beauty and happiness they are able to find wearing Lolita clothing.

In the short-lived English version of the *GL&B*, in an interview with Meghan Maude, a long time EGL mod and popular seamstress, she says that she believes that Lolita "doesn't have enough of its own identity to stand up to mass

marketing. Lolita just doesn't have that kind of strong subculture in America right now" (2008:93). With varied inspirations that include doll clothes, the details and lines of vintage clothing and furniture, and traditional equestrian style, Maude mentioned that as a designer she wanted to help Lolita reach acceptance and recognition among other subcultures so that for example, Lolitas would be able to mingle with different types of Goths. There are many others who share her opinion that Lolita is not a subculture, explaining that it lacks the literature, music, and political aspect of other more established subculture groups like Goth and Punk. This crossover can be found in the practice of North American indie designers who combine Lolita elements with other subculture fashion styles.

Hence, there are different points of departures and movements that are dependent on prior knowledge culled from cultural contexts and the context in which Lolita fashion style and related networks have developed. For non-Japanese Lolitas, instead of a movement towards Lolita being a specialized subcultural expression of certain concepts found in mainstream society, Lolita fashion style is the entry point moving outward to these concepts. Without a particular vocabulary to talk about Lolita fashion in terms of philosophy, aesthetics, and ideology, the relation to and reflection of clothing as object and materiality of Lolita fashion is brought to the forefront and used as a starting point for understanding and framing one's experience and engagement with Lolita things.

The importance of Lolita fashion in one's life and the desire for Lolita things among North American Lollitas exhibits similar aspects of exploring and engaging in girl-feeling and affect as discussed with Japanese Lollitas in Chapter 3. But this is also countered by a cynical view of Lolita as materialistic and superficial – points that are supported by drama on places like EGL, self-policing of other Lollitas, conflict between subject-object, a lack of vocabulary similar to the Japanese *shōjo*, and other issues brought about by extreme imagined sociality achieved through virtual spaces.

This second half of the chapter explores how Lolita fashion is understood and experienced by English-speaking wearers. The focus is on Lollitas from the United States and Canada with a discussion of Japanese Lollitas to provide a point of difference and comparison. There is a discussion of the bodily experience of wearing Lolita clothing; the exercise of setting and maintaining boundaries for Lolita fashion; issues surrounding Lolita 'lifestyle,' individuality, authenticity, style; and finally, how Lolita can be understood by its wearers as empowering, feminist, and a reaction to the sexualisation and objectification of women in Western society.

Bad Lace and Good Lace: Drawing Boundaries

Knowing the difference between 'good lace' and 'bad lace' is an important aspect of being a Lolita. Good lace is soft, intricate and delicate, and harkens to older times and antiquity, the feminine and girly. Not every Lolita garment features lace, but many do, and knowledge of lace is usually a good indicator

that someone has a grasp of Lolita style and aesthetics. There are different types of lace and some are more preferred than others. Bad lace is made from synthetic fibres, scratchy, hard, has visible netting, and looks cheap. A similar general distaste for synthetic and 'shiny' looking fabrics like satin, velour, and polyester also demonstrates this issue of quality. Preferred types of lace include tulle, venise, torchon, Chantilly, cluny, chemical, and eyelet laces. It is not easy for beginners to distinguish various types of lace, and like many of the potentially 'bad' fabrics, requires experience with Lolita fashion to distinguish the nuances between good and bad materials.

Cultivating this sort of specialized knowledge is important for Lolitas. Regardless of where they are living, Lolitas have to deal with public perceptions about Lolita fashion and about themselves when they wear it on the street. Maintaining boundaries for what is or is not acceptable for Lolita fashion, from behaviour to style, is important to Lolitas especially when there is a danger that what they are doing might be generally misunderstood or wrongfully read by outsiders as being connected to categories like 'sex' or 'costume' that wearers themselves do not associate with Lolita. This is strongly felt among Lolitas outside Japan, and there is a sense of panic when these boundaries are crossed or threatened to be crossed especially on EGL.

This section begins an exploration of themes of boundedness, separation, distinction, categorization, and definition. These points of obsession found among North American Lolitas is manifested in ways indicative of various

factors that shape engagement with the fashion style, including social-cultural contexts and differences in the formation of group identity as well as access to and interpretation of information from Japan, seen as the primary and definitive source for the style.

Japanese Lolitas have access to a discourse and aesthetics surrounding *shōjo* and *kawaii* concepts which they can use to put Lolita fashion and their involvement into context. This is also supported by the existence of shopping areas and niche media that seep into the mainstream occasionally through television or the distribution of magazines to bookstore chains around the country. However, living in a society that does not have a similar *shōjo* and *kawaii* culture as found in Japan even though they have become at least partially literate in these aesthetics through continued engagement with Lolita fashion and *shōjo* things, images, narratives, and other media that have been either translated or not, North American Lolitas exhibit a concern with preserving the boundaries of the fashion and how their involvement is to be understood by themselves and outsiders. Immediate perceptions and assumptions surrounding the word 'Lolita' taken from Nabokov's novel and the movie adaptations connect the word to the image of a seductive or sexually precocious young girl. Many EGL Lolitas have recounted that if they use 'Lolita' to describe their way of dress, reactions from outsiders typically connect it to a sexual fetish or believe the wearer desires sexual attraction from men. However, if 'Lolita' is never mentioned, these associations are rarely made. Thus many have turned to

describing the fashion in words, simply referring to it as ‘a street fashion from Japan’ or even ‘princess fashion.’ There is also misunderstanding and confusion for outsiders unfamiliar with Lolita over Sweet Lolita because there is no reference point for cuteness portrayed in lace, frills, and pink in the same way that Gothic Lolita can be categorized as some form of Goth, a subculture that with more exposure in mass media, thus recognizable by the general public.

Japanese Lolitas rarely have to contend with people on the street framing the fashion as having potential sexual connotations connecting the word ‘Lolita’ to pedophilia as part of Lolita complex or *roricon*, and many Lolitas are completely unaware of the existence of the novel or its movie adaptations – this is discussed at length in Chapter 3. But concerns about Bodyline’s sex shop origins produce an effort to differentiate Lolita from *anime* cosplay and Akihabara maid costumes connected to *otaku* culture. In addition, though this viewpoint is not shared by all Japanese Lolitas, some take issue with men who wear Lolita dresses and try to exclude them from certain events or group activities to create girl-only spaces. Some consider that there is no such thing as a ‘male Lolita’ as Lolita is heavily entrenched in concepts of *shōjo* and girlhood, an experience that one cannot completely know without being born and raised a girl in society. Internet bullying directed towards men who wear Lolita on Japanese anonymous boards is generally a non-issue for EGL Lolitas who are more accepting both online and in face-to-face interaction with male Lolitas who are called ‘brolitas’ in English.

Also in contrast to their global counterparts, in Japan it is Gothic Lolita, not Sweet Lolita, that can be seen as different, dark, depressing, dangerous, and difficult to classify, especially in Osaka and the surrounding Kansai area where there was a murder incident in 2003 in which a male university student and his high school girlfriend plotted the murder of their families. The male student ended up killing his mother and heavily injured his father and brother. The high school girl had been planning to kill her parents and hid knives in her home. The two had intended to murder their families, live together in the university student's home, and die there. The unique point of this news story was that the university student was interested in Gothic fashion and the high school girl proclaimed an interest in Gothic Lolita, or *Gosurori*, fashion. Media focused on the female accomplice, who has been described as “a top student in her school but a Gothic Lolita” (Duits 2004). This incident brought the existence of Lolita and Gothic Lolita fashion into mainstream consciousness, creating a sort of moral panic among the general public. The media portrayed these girls as mentally unstable, anti-social, having “hearts filled with darkness,” and practicing wrist-cutting (Matsūra 2007:141). The release of the movie *Shimotsuma Monogatari* in 2004 provided a more positive portrayal of the fashion and marked a beginning of television coverage that did not sensationalize the fashion but framed Lolita as a different but generally harmless youth subculture. Negative stereotypes still persist and the effects are especially evident for Lolitas in the Kansai region who continue to be more affected than their peers in Tokyo by these perceptions when

dealing with family and friends who are uncomfortable that they wear Lolita fashion and expend more effort in separating their Lolita selves from other parts of their life, including school and work.

Writing about the popularity of plastic lens-less glasses frames fashion trend among young women in Tokyo, David Marx (2011), fashion marketing researcher and writer for fashion magazines in Japan and the U.S., demonstrates Japan's "fashion manual culture" in which readers closely study and copy trends presented in magazines, a practice that Marx argues is an example of how fashion in Japan is "explicitly costume" as the point is to look like you are trying hard and making an effort to follow a certain style or aesthetic. Marx contrasts this with Western fashionistas who must exhibit a sense of effortless and "plausible deniability" in order to be considered fashionable and cool. "The fundamental philosophy is that (1) the individual is naturally blessed with excellent taste and that (2) the individual is not trying to look fashionable because trying to look fashionable is not cool" (blog post, July 19, 2011). A pair of glasses without its lens renders its original function of vision correction void, thus when worn they are an intentional fashion item, which according to Marx, exudes effort and thus would be considered 'uncool' in America. However, in Japan it is 'commonsense' to remove the lenses from fake glasses to accommodate long fake eyelashes or to prevent lenses flare in photographs. Even subculture fashions like Gyarū, based in working-class delinquent culture, follow similar practices of "obvious play" to declare "playful allegiance to a

certain subculture and peer group” (Marx 2011). Marx states that, “Otaku cosplay like famous characters. Gyaru cosplay as themselves” (2011). He considers Gyaru a costume in the sense that it is explicit attempt at style, as opposed to implicit ‘natural’ style, based on a Gyaru archetype and tradition as presented in magazines that readers copy down to the tee in order to fit in and participate in a subculture. Following his argument, there can also be an archetype Lolita that provides a basis for how Lolitas should look and act.

Lolita wearers, both in and outside Japan, will argue for a distinction between ‘costume/cosplay’ and ‘fashion’ with Lolita being categorized as a fashion, not a costume. To remind, cosplay is short for costume play and is defined as wearing the outfit of a pre-existing character from a TV show, comic, video game, or even copying the outfits of one’s favourite music group. Depending on the cosplayer, some people may choose to mimic the character whose costume they are wearing, especially when posing for photographs. Fashion, as defined by both English and Japanese speakers, is the expression of one’s personality, individuality, and creativity and is clothing that can potentially be daily wear. Fashion is different from cosplay because it is about being yourself, not pretending to be someone else or a character. Even people who both do cosplay and wear Lolita fashion separate the two categories.

Differentiation is made between costume and fashion in terms of the quality of clothing, especially important in regards to ‘cosplay Lolita’ and ‘authentic’ Lolita clothing. Many cosplayers who take pride in their handmade

intricate costumes that may cost more to make than the average high quality Lolita outfit, but Cosplay Lolita is typically associated with poorly constructed garments made with low quality materials manufactured in China. Items that look like maid outfits or costumes found in *anime* and *manga* may also be labelled cosplay and are not accepted as part of Lolita fashion.

From the perspective of other Lolitas, outfits associated with Cosplay Lolita are cheaply made and look like it, hence there is an assumption that the wearer did not take the same amount of effort and energy to put together an outfit. These clothes are considered cosplay because the person wearing it is only pretending to be Lolita without an understanding of Lolita that is partly culled from the practice of learning how to wear Lolita and building a sense of beauty, art, and creativity. It is not exactly a matter of whether one owns an expensive brand dress or not, though issues of exclusivity and elitism among wearers certainly come to play for some Lolitas, but rather the time and effort taken to build an awareness and relationship to the clothing. Knowledge about the various garments, how to coordinate and wear the clothes, discovering what motifs one likes and design elements that are flattering to one's body and style are all aspects involved in the formation of a Lolita practice.

Cosplay Lolita is also referred to as *Ita* Lolita. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the word '*ita*' describes pain and like 'ouch' is uttered when encountering something painful like being pricked by a sewing needle. Used both by Japanese and English speaking Lolitas, an *Ita* is someone who dresses so badly that it is

painful to look. When discussing their own personal narrative of how they got into the fashion, many English-speaking Lolitas say that they started out as an *Ita* in the beginning and over time learned more about the style and refined their look to become, as one person put it, “a real Lolita.” They were *Ita* because they did not understand the style and once they found a community of other Lolitas who could tell them how to improve their outfits and what they were doing wrong, they evolve from the uninformed *Ita* stage as they develop knowledge about the fashion.

This distinction between costume and fashion defined by wearers aside, Marx provides a valid point about issues of style, authenticity, and fashion trends in different fashion markets (Japan and U.S.), and his discussion of the different ways in which style is seen as authentic and ‘cool’ can be related to the data I collected, though the parallels are not in the way people defined their own style and individuality but how they partitioned the style from the other parts of their lives especially vis-à-vis me as the researcher. With some Japanese Lolitas, there was an impregnable boundary set up between their Lolita selves and other aspects of their lives. Most people only wanted to present themselves to me as a Lolita and were taken aback or became defensive when I over stepped those boundaries. These Lolitas tended to not be or were not aiming to be artists, designers, or musicians and were not students but working in other fields where it was imperative they separate their hobbies from their professional life. In this sense, these people fit into the idea of subculture fashion style as costume

discussed by Marx – when they wear Lolita clothes, they are able to step into the fantasy world surrounding Lolita fashion and embody that archetypal Lolita while adapting it to their personal style and playing with it.

Many Japanese Lolitas see Lolita fashion as an expression of their individuality and personality, and some feel that Lolita allows them to feel and express a truer sense of self compared to any other type of clothing or uniform. So even if Japanese consumers tend to copy what is seen in magazines and adhere to a type of subculture style uniform or essential basics, wearers want to position their involvement in fashion as an activity that allows them to display and express their individuality and uniqueness even if they may buy and wear an outfit that is the entire set from a series release and look exactly like the models in the magazines. The Japanese Lolitas I met tended to want to separate themselves from people who are *mi-ha*, who only do things because they are popular, and from people who are wearing Lolita only because they think it is *kawaii*, suggesting that they want to differentiate themselves from those who are lacking authenticity and a deeper understanding of Lolita aesthetics.

Some Japanese Lolitas try to manage and partition aspects of their personal lives and social interactions in an attempt to separate their Lolita selves from social circles related to school, work, and family. Even among groups of Lolita friends who regularly meet and have known each other for several years, some personal information such as physical age, legal name, and occupation is never mentioned or asked about. They are considered ‘event only friends,’

people that you only meet during events like tea parties and concerts and try not to intermingle with other parts of your life. One reason is to maintain the 'fantasy' world associated with wearing Lolita fashion and the escape that it offers, to keep it away from 'reality' and 'responsibility' as well as separate it from other hobbies or fashion styles they may like that are counter to Lolita. This practice is not limited to only Lolitas and their social circles but can be found in other contexts in Japanese society such as among people who are regulars at a bar or pub. Not mentioning one's line of work or age is considered a strategy to equalize relations between people by removing markers for social class or seniority.

Another factor involved in attempts to draw boundaries between different selves may be the desire to not stand out at work or school, an issue that several Americans working in Japan noted. Many are working as English teachers, either for high schools or language schools. Even during their off hours, their actions are considered a reflection of the institution they work for. When they wear Lolita and hang out with their friends outside work, they try not to be seen by students or teachers, and it is definitely considered a faux pas to wear Lolita in the workplace. There have been instances where they have been spotted outside work by fellow employees and have gotten into trouble over it. As foreigners trying to adapt to living in another country, these American Lolitas talked about the pressure to fit in, to not stand out, and to learn to follow certain social rules if they wanted to take part in Japanese society. "We understand the

mentality of Japan so we try to work with that. We don't agree with it but we realize that we live here so we have to conform to their ideas so we don't cause problems," says Deborah, an Asian American who has lived several years in Osaka teaching English (interview, April 16, 2010). Thus, some Japanese Lolitas who are working adults create a second identity that cannot be traced back in order to protect themselves while continuing to participate in the fashion they love.

For Japanese Lolitas, the person they are at work, the person they are at school, and the person they are while wearing Lolita fashion are all aspects of who they are, and it is not seen as inauthentic to try to partition and manage separate selves that are presented in accordance with the appropriate place and situation. From the standpoint of Americans like Deborah, this creates what are seen as rigid structures for social interaction and being in which the self that is presented at the moment cannot be separated from what is being worn. She recounts accidentally bumping into one Japanese Lolita friend outside of the events where they would typically meet while that friend was dressed in Hime Gyarū style. Among those who wear both Lolita and Gyarū/Hime, a number try to keep these two selves separate especially, as the styles are often posed as polar opposites, modest and reserved versus sexy and outgoing. Those who do not separate their involvement in both subcultures can often be stereotyped as rude and brash, not fitting what Lolitas are supposed to be, and/or as being involved

in hostess or night work. This opinion was discussed by the majority of Lolitas in Tokyo.

Deborah's friend apologized immediately upon seeing her, "I'm sorry for wearing Gyaruu. It must be strange for you to see me out of Lolita." Deborah found this odd as she did not think it was offensive or strange to see her friend in something besides Lolita. Her friend was afraid of being rejected, but Deborah accepted her Lolita friend in her Gyaruu form and acted like it was not a big deal, strengthening their friendship. After many years interacting with the Lolitas in the Osaka area, Grace believes that "Americans don't hate on other fashions because we realize that fashions can change. It is not 'your' identity or 'you.' It's an expression of yourself. ... The clothes are so much the identity (for Japanese Lolitas). It needs to be that one set thing. Foreigners can be much more fluid with it" (interview, Deborah, April 16, 2010).

North American and EGL Lolitas emphasize understanding the basic style rules of Lolita and learning to 'get it right' before one can attempt to successfully break and bend the rules. Garments released from Lolita brands can be worn in creative ways, but if the outfit does not adhere to Lolita style basics, the wearer is often advised by others not to call their outfit 'Lolita.' Fashion is a form of expression, individuality, and creativity but in the context of Lolita style it is also important to make an effort to follow certain rules.

In contrast to Japanese Lolitas, North American Lolitas are less likely to exhibit the same sense of compartmentalization of their lives in regards to

separating different selves for different occasions. Interviewees were more likely to open up to me and it was easier to develop a rapport in a short period of time. People were more willing to talk about certain aspects of their everyday life outside Lolita and to discuss specific traumas and anxieties that they feel bear on why they choose to wear Lolita fashion. In some cases I was even able to visit their homes and meet their family and friends, but more importantly, people did not have to be 'on' all the time when being interviewed. They did not attempt to play the part of 'The Lolita.' Most people approach Lolita fashion as a type of clothing they enjoy that they can use to access certain aspects of femininity and beauty not found elsewhere, but as revealed in the definition and debate surrounding the idea of 'lifestyle Lolita' discussed in the following section, though Lolita is an important part in their life, many are weary of consciously altering their behaviour and personality to be more girly or childish because they are wearing Lolita clothing which is perceived as being inauthentic.

People are concerned with the idea of being true to oneself. There is a concept of the individual that is unadorned and things like makeup or clothing masks this true self which becomes hidden underneath. The self is at odds with these outside factors, and Lolitas try to strike a balance between boundaries of self identity and influence of the material and the social, coming from outsiders' perspective of the fashion and from other Lolitas perceiving them. Hence, Lolita clothes are a part of their personality and interests but it does not, or rather they do not want to, alter their self identity because of the clothes. Instead of

boundaries set by social situations and contexts, other aspects of their life seep into Lolita which becomes a part of an individual positioned against categories like 'mainstream' and 'normal' and creating what Deborah earlier described as a fluid interaction with fashion style and behaviour.

The older someone is the more aware they are that certain types of clothes are not appropriate for work or hanging out with particular groups of friends. They exhibit more concern about occasion and how people in particular parts of their life perceive them when they are wearing Lolita. However they still exhibit fluidity in terms of how sense of self is defined and how they present themselves to other Lolitas. Katie, a Canadian Lolita in her mid-30s working in a corporate job, says that she "compartmentalizes" Lolita fashion for other aspects of her life. She is self-conscious about how she presents herself when is wearing Lolita in public and finds that since she knows people are going to look at her she tries to have straight posture and a smile when going out in Lolita. For her, the difference between costume and fashion is partly dependent on the body language of the person wearing the clothes. A costume is defined not only by the quality of the fabric and construction but also body language. Someone who is not comfortable with what they are wearing may scrunch their shoulders inward and keep their head down. As fashion is something that one should not feel ashamed to be wearing in public, Katie tries to affirm that what she is wearing is fashion by exhibiting confidence in her bearing and pride in her outfits.

Katie found herself becoming increasingly concerned about the chance that someone from her workplace may see her wearing Lolita and after realizing she was spending more time worrying than enjoying wearing the fashion, she quit Lolita. However, she later came back to it. Speaking about when she quit:

I didn't feel like myself. I felt like I was getting up every day and putting on these clothes that made me blend in with everyone else, but I just felt like a mess. But I decided it really wasn't worth doing [Lolita] all the time. It's not that Lolita defines myself like 'I have to wear it all the time or I'm not being true to who I really am.' But it's a sense of 'this is something I like - that makes me very happy.' And so long as it's in the context where it is appropriate and not have negative repercussions for other areas of my life, there's no reason why I can't enjoy it. [interview, Katie, October 30, 2009]

When Katie entered university in Toronto after growing up in a small town, she began to be involved in the local club scene, donning crazy outfits she sewed herself to events several times a week. Fashion was very important for Katie at that time in her life as a way of asserting her individuality and personality. "There was a time when I felt or needed to be very aggressive about it - like this is me - I'm different, you have to accept me as I am. I had felt a lot of pressure while growing up to be a certain way. ... I'm still me no matter what I wear" (2009). As she got older she realized that she was not "selling out" or being untrue to herself if she did not dress a certain way. Clothing and fashion are important to her, but even though "it means a lot of things to me but at the end of the day it is just clothing - clothing that I enjoy a lot. It makes me feel good about myself - it isn't always appropriate but it is a lot of fun" (2009).

Some people feel that Lolitas on EGL are overly concerned with rules and policing other people by calling them out when they are “doing it wrong” which contributes to general perception of Lolitas as people who “pick on beginners and make them cry,” according to a short essay written by a member of EGL about the elitism and critical judgement among Lolitas (toujourprets, November 11, 2007). Using the phrase “wearing a duck on one’s head” as a metaphor for Lolita fashion because it would probably be seen by the general public as an equally silly fashion practice, the essay writer questions her own behaviour when encountering poorly dressed Lolitas online and why instead of bonding with others who like to wear ducks, people enjoy hurting others for wearing the wrong kind of duck. In the comments to the post on EGL there is discussion about ‘Lolita crusaders’ who feel it is their responsibility to judge and critique when people are wearing Lolita wrong and the difference between online anonymity and reacting to a photograph versus meeting someone face-to-face and realizing that they are an actual human being. The author of the essay met in ‘real life’ a group of people whom she had been making fun of for their poor fashion choices on the Internet but got along well with them in person and realized that she had been in the wrong to judge them without knowing them. Criticizing and judging other Lolitas is one way to alienate other Lolitas and other people from wanting to try Lolita fashion themselves, but Lolitas also want draw boundaries for what is acceptable because they feel they have something important to protect as demonstrated in this excerpt from the essay:

Elitists don't hate you. Really. We hate it when you do it wrong, we hate it when you refuse to listen to criticism, we hate it when you tell us our advice is wrong. We hate it when the fashion is mucked up and presented to others in an unflattering light, as a fetish, or a costume, but we don't hate you. We love you; we want more lolitas. We want an army of excellent lolitas out there, sharing the fun of dressing like retarded Victorian children, having tea parties well into our twenties, and bonding over the ducks on our heads. Just don't wear a pigeon and tell people it's a duck. [Livejournal post, *toujourprets*, November 11, 2007]

In North America, when speaking about their involvement in the fashion, wearers tend to set themselves apart from the 'mainstream' and 'normal' people or clothing. Especially when going out in a group, Lolitas are often approached by strangers who are curious about their clothing and receive reactions that range from positive comments to hostility to general confusion. Different Lolitas react to these encounters in various ways - some feel defensive or upset when people misunderstand the fashion, some try to ignore negative reactions, while others feel they need to educate people about Lolita fashion or set a good example so that outsiders will have a good image about Lolitas in general.

Though engaging in Lolita fashion is perceived as an individual form of expression, North American Lolitas also display feelings of belonging to a group of Lolitas, wanting to foster community either regionally or online and globally, and a desire to spread knowledge about Lolita fashion to educate outsiders and to help spread awareness of the style to potential wearers. When Lolitas judge others, it creates pressure and conflict within the group and provides potential drama. At the same time that this inward policing is seen as destructive for community building and how Lolitas are perceived by non-Lolitas, it reflects a

desire to protect something seen as important. Beth, who has spent a lot of time participating and observing Lolitas in online groups since her teens, sees Lolitas as different from hipsters who “try hard to look like they’re not trying hard.”

That’s the thing I like about Lolitas – they care – to the point that they get too angry. Sometimes they need more of the sense of irony because if you’re wearing a cake on your head, you gotta take a step back and think should I really be making fun of someone else ever? ... Lolitas take themselves too seriously and they need to take a look at themselves and realize that it is a beautiful fashion, it’s great that people wear it, it’s great that we’re enthused about it but, uh, you’re judging someone who’s dressed like a Japanese baby while you’re dressed like a Japanese baby. [interview, Beth, October 12, 2009]

The phrase “Japanese baby” used here is typical of the self-deprecating humour making fun of the clothes, the people wearing it, and the fashion companies producing it that is employed by many Lolitas on EGL. By making fun of the fashion they love, they remind themselves that though Lolita fashion is beautiful, it is also over the top, ridiculous, and silly. Humour relieves tension and is used as a way to bond and express affinity with each other while making commentary about Lolita fashion. It provides a counter to the seriousness, witch-hunt mentality, jealousy, and judgmental attitudes that surround drama and certain attitudes online. There are LJ communities created solely to make fun of horrible or questionable looking items released from Japanese brands, or groups where contributors subvert the ‘Lifestyle Lolita’ stereotype or the image of the perfect Lolita through humour.

People who are more active with a face-to-face community tended to have a more positive outlook about the fashion and the people involved in it. As

discussed at length in Chapter 2, EGL, as a place and as a representation of Lolitas as a group, is seen as problematic and uncommunity-like because of drama. Those who interact or observe Lolitas on the Internet like Beth tend to be more cynical about Lolita fashion and clothes.

Though Olivia and Sarah live in two different states, they often travel to New York City where they hang out with a group of Lolita friends living around the tri-state area. Sometimes they attend club events and meetups in the city or invite close friends to visit them outside NYC for a weekend outing. Olivia is an African American working in a medical field and her friend Sarah is Caucasian whose work in the information sciences field. Both young women, currently in their 20s, have been involved with this group of New York Lolitas for several years, and they are all close enough to each other to consider each other “real,” not just Lolita, friends. Olivia and Sarah used to occasionally post outfit snaps on EGL and Daily Lolita but over the years have cut down on their participation, choosing instead to interact with their circle of friends and lurking, but not participating, in the online forums.

Sarah, who feels it is easier to wear Lolita in a group because “people see a sense of purpose instead of when being alone,” finds that in Lolita there is a lack of competition between women (interview, July 19, 2009). The following conversation between her and Olivia provides insight into themes of personal development and history, the idea of looking good for the group, and desire to add to the overall aesthetics of Lolita:

Sarah: Society says that women compete with each other for looks no matter what, but in Lolita it's not taken as seriously because everyone is just looking at you like something so out of this world. Then you can joke about it freely. But if you are friends in normal clothes, if you joke about it like, 'Oh I look cuter than you,' then they might take offense.

Olivia: [It's] competition not with each other but with yourself. You compare yourself with other people and want to improve. All Lolitas want to see other Lolitas looking good. It's eye candy, and we love looking at it - seeing everyone looking good together.

Sarah: You dress nicely for your friends. 'I'm going to look pretty for the group.'

Olivia: When you all look good together it's almost like you're fulfilling this desire you have - you want to strive to look better to contribute more to the aesthetic. [interview, July 19, 2009]

Japanese Lolitas also place importance in personal development and discovery of self through clothing, but in addition to individual experience, North Americans exhibited a more group-oriented mentality as well. Interview participants focus on the contributive nature of their actions and desires to create community and enrich the aesthetic or question of the actions and attitudes of Lolitas as a group.

Lolitas are critical towards one another because they are invested in the fashion and want to protect the fragile boundaries that leave so much room for confusion, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation. Protecting Lolita fashion and maintaining standards for the style are practiced in part in order to sustain it for Lolitas themselves - to justify that what they are doing is something important, viable, and valid. Despite the fierceness of the 'Lolita crusaders' being perceived as damaging to community feeling, it is, in a way, a necessary measure as without the support of mass media like magazines and consumer

spaces like department stores that can be recognized as structures for people not involved in the grassroots networks, Lolitas outside Japan rely heavily on the work and responsibility they put upon themselves to upholding these boundaries. They are not selflessly concerned with fostering group identity or cohesiveness, but rather in order to maintain and believe the legitimacy and authenticity of their intentions in dressing up in such an over the top fashion they attempt to maintain a group standard and the idea of a group that they can relate to:

It's different cuz when you're in a group of Lolitas people are less rude to you, because they see a whole bunch and they think, 'oh maybe it's something I haven't heard of before' but obviously there's many people doing it as opposed to when it's either just me, and they haven't the experience of seeing other Lolitas. They're just, 'What's wrong with that person?' When people wear it together, they judge it as a fashion whereas when people wear it by themselves they judge it by the individual level. I always try to explain it to them because I want them to see it as a fashion and not an individual being crazy. [interview, Rachael, November 7, 2009]

Assaults toward Lolita, either by the poorly dressed or the smirking man on the street, can be taken personally because Lolitas are all too aware of how fragile the balance between Lolita as a beauty, as fashion, as aesthetics, as sisterhood can be broken down into unwanted categories like costume, sexual fetish, social and mental disorder by outsiders and the mass media. The next section will continue to explore this idea of individual style, authenticity, and maintaining balance.

Building Self Through Style: Issues of Authenticity, Personal Style, and Anti-Lifestyle Lolita

Both in English and Japanese, Lolita fashion is placed in contrast to 'normal' clothes that 'normal' people wear. This generic outfit is usually described as t-shirts and jeans or pants. This difference from normality forces the person who wears Lolita clothes to reconsider their relationship to clothing. It opens an opportunity to explore, understand, and utilize the transformative and emotive potential of clothing. A number of women said that they were tom-boyish and had no interest in fashion before Lolita, but wearing it made them more aware of their body and of their own femininity which they viewed as something positive and affirming. Some people claimed that they never felt that they could be beautiful until they started to wear Lolita and started to care more about their appearance. One Japanese Lolita said that she was constantly bullied when she was in high school and because of those experiences she felt that she was ugly and unwanted. By chance she found a copy of the *GL&B* in a bookstore in her small suburban city, and it changed her life. She was inspired by the fashions in the book and began to wear Gothic Lolita every day. Through the process of learning how to apply make-up, style her hair, purchasing clothes, and putting together an outfit, she gradually began to gain confidence in herself and learned that she too could look pretty. Gothic Lolita helped pull her out of a deep bout of depression and eventually helped give her direction in life, and she eventually decided to pursue a career in fashion.

These stories of positive and empowering transformation achieved through Lolita are common for both people who never paid special attention to their attire and appearance before and for those who were involved in other subculture-related fashion styles. However, most North American Lolitas try not to emphasize a change in behaviour when wearing Lolita. Any changes are connected to the way that Lolita makes them feel, such as feeling self-confident which makes it easier to interact with other people, instead of the way they feel they should act because they are wearing Lolita clothing. Some Lolitas who call themselves 'anti-lifestyle Lolitas' refuse to change their personality just because they are wearing frilly dresses by swearing, smoking, drinking, and partying or clubbing while in Lolita clothes, eventually taking and posting humorous photos of these activities online. It is a way to poke fun through a subversion of stereotypes that Lolitas should behave properly, speak politely, drink tea, eat only cake, and listen to classical music all the time. Those who appear to be purposely changing the way they act and speak because they are wearing Lolita or are perceived as being too princess-like or child-like are sometimes criticized by others to be inauthentic or 'trying too hard.'

Similar critiques do not seem to be found among the Japanese Lolitas I met, but North Americans often worried about appearing inauthentic or fake and being untrue to themselves. Thus, at the same time that Lolita fashion is seen as having a positive influence in their life, it is also perceived as superficial and materialistic. Some Lolitas criticize other Lolitas for being shallow as they only

care about getting the newest or rarest clothing releases. These same people claim it is difficult to make friends within Lolita because the only thing they have in common is the same interest in clothes which is not a basis for long lasting friendship. In addition, as Lolita is seen as 'just fashion' by some, there are those who seem to be at odds with their own involvement as well as questioning why other Lolitas care so much what other people look like or what other people think about them.

For Japanese Lolitas, concerns about being materialistic appear to come from outsiders including cultural critics, scholars, and the news media who describe *shōjo* culture as being superficial, flat, expendable, consumerist, throwaway and thus cause for social concern. Among North American Lolitas, these are worries coming from within the group, often seen in the interviews I conducted and lengthy discussions on Internet forums. The English interviews are filled with conflicts and self-critiques from individuals who feel they are working against moral matters concerning materialism and perceived pressure to fit in with a wider Lolita community that exists on the Internet or locally.

Instead of agonizing over whether they are consuming too much or being too materialistic, some Japanese Lolitas discussed how they used Lolita as a way to become a better person based on personal standards not set by outward mainstream society, suggesting a more interactive engagement with clothing, bodies, and selves in which they are working through with the clothing. Justine speaks of a constant quest for self-improvement that is defined in her own terms:

“If I am satisfied with the best person I can be right now, I won’t be able to become more than what I am now. In order to develop, I can never be satisfied with who I am today” (interview, May 1, 2010). *Saikō no jibun, besuto no jibun, ichiban ii no jibun, suteki na jibun, junsui na jibun, hontō na jibun* - the supreme self, the ‘best’ self, the utmost good self, the beautiful self, the pure self, the true self – these phrases expressing ideals for the self were peppered throughout the interview and are all different types of selves she wants to attain. She recognizes that Lolitas are vain and narcissistic, but also believes that by wearing Lolita in public she is able to present to the world the best parts of her being. Justine mentioned the idea of “to live stoic,” defined as being harsh to oneself and exhibiting self-control, controlling the body in order to preserve it to continue looking good in the clothes with a focus on hair, makeup, face, body size and shape (Justine 2010).

Though many other Lolitas regarded her as an example of someone who was a perfect Lolita, and as one person told me, “amazing” in her dedication to the fashion and lifestyle, Rumi, who studied Buddhism as her major in university, felt the limitations of using Lolita as a form of personal development, expressing that someday she would like to live a beautiful life (*utsukushii*) over a *kawaii* life offered by Lolita and the things she likes. Though she feels that her obsessions with Lolita fashion, Visual Rock music, and dolls fits the person she is now, she ultimately will have to move on from it someday. Rumi is an exceptional case as most Japanese Lolitas rarely directly addressed this topic. In

contrast, these topics were volunteered and often discussed in my English-language interviews through a discussion of individual style, authenticity, and Lifestyle Lolita. The latter part of the section will be dedicated to an in-depth discussion of these themes.

Cheryl, half-Japanese and half-American, has a small frame and facial features that make it easier for her to blend in with the crowd in Tokyo compared to other foreign women. Born and raised in the United States, Cheryl spent several years working in New York City before moving to Tokyo nearly ten years ago where she has been since. After spending most of her life living in large metropolitan areas and being involved as a frequent concert-goer who travels nationwide when her favourite band tours Japan, Cheryl has a keen awareness of changes in fashion trends and feels pressured to keep up with whatever is new. Cheryl primarily discusses her involvement with clothing in terms of material engagement, management of outward appearance, and bodily experience instead of ideology, affect or emotion or discussing the end result and emotional feelings connected to wearing Lolita. While most people praise how Lolita makes them feel elegant or pretty, Cheryl provides a more pragmatic response coupled with laughter, "Lolita takes up a lot of space. I have to be careful where my skirt brushes. I feel hot and my feet hurt" (interview, March 29, 2010). She exhibits sensitivity to the physical appearance and body language of those around her as demonstrated by her observations about the differences between Japanese and American women in Tokyo. Foreign women are

portrayed as more aggressive, likely to speak up for themselves and complain, and take up more room, stereotypes that Cheryl believes helps give them more leeway to behave in ways that are unfeminine. In contrast, Japanese women restrict their body space to take up less room and make themselves as small as possible and tend to raise their natural voices when speaking in certain situations. Cheryl notices how they sit and walk smaller compared to American women and finds herself copying them even though “it’s so tiring” to constantly try to regulate her body in similar ways.

Cheryl wears both Lolita and Hime and experienced the introduction of Gyaruru and Hime elements to Lolita that changed the overall silhouette starting in 2004-05. She called it a breath of fresh air as Lolita was beginning to feel “stale” and outdated as she felt the style was unchanging and beginning to recycle ideas, such as platform shoes, that have largely gone out of style with most youth fashion styles. The Gyaruru influence brought huge hair in a bouffant or beehive-like style, heavy eye makeup with fake eye-lashes, and ruffles at the bust area moved emphasis from the ‘bottom heavy’ skirt and chunky platform shoes to the face. Shorter A-line skirts that are less poofy show off skinny legs in stiletto heels. The Lolita bell skirt began to be paired with delicate heels from Jesus Diamante, a popular high-end Hime brand, along with the bouffant and striking eye makeup for a new look. These introductions occurred during a time when *Ageha* magazine was experiencing a boom among women who were not involved in hostess work but who wanted to copy their makeup and hair styles.

In addition, musicians in new and popular Visual Rock bands, a genre that has been closely connected to Lolita fashion, were beginning to move from Gothic, Punk, Baroque, and *shōjo* fairy tale European tastes in lieu of stage wear consisting of suits, teased spiked hair, and other looks pulled from magazines popular with Gyaruo, the male component of Gyaruo, like *Men's Egg* and *Men's Knuckle* and from the look of men who work for Shinjuku host clubs. "Traditional" Gothic Lolita began to seem out of place at live venues as *bangyaru*, band girls or female Visual-*kei* fans, started to wear clothes that matched the bandmen's host club look in order to get their attention during and after concerts.

Though Cheryl believes she is getting too old for Lolita, she is the most at ease when wearing Lolita to a *Moi-Dix-Mois* (MDM) concert alongside old time fans who have followed the guitarist Mana from his previous band Malice Mizer. "It's okay because we are all getting old together, we're all the same" (2010). Mana practically started the Gothic Lolita movement when he established the brand *Moi-même-Moitié* (MMM) and many MDM attendees wear his creations. Japanese Visual-*kei* concerts are a shared group experience with an emphasis on crowd participation in which attendees do things together such as *furitsuke*, hand motions and dances done in beat to the music, sometimes expressing the lyrics or copying band members on stage. Cheryl frequently ends up part of the *saizen*, or the front rows, during concerts and as a long-time fan of her favourite band also aids in developing complicated *furitsuke* for new songs and helps lead other

people in the back rows during concerts by executing the moves perfectly. Because of her position as a fan and as someone who only wears Lolita and formal Hime outfits, complete with full makeup and hair, when attending concerts, Cheryl places a lot of emphasis on fitting in to the atmosphere of these live events and fitting in with other fans.

Both Hime and Lolita involve a lot of work and maintenance, and she has gathered a lot of knowledge about hair and makeup techniques from reading magazines, sharing tips with other concert goers, and from personal experience. As Cheryl lives in a small apartment, she has trouble getting out the door in a full petticoat. Whenever she plans to wear Lolita she waits until the last moment to get dressed, checking and double checking to make sure that she has her purse and her things needed for the day in order before heading out. The last things she puts on are her shoes which she does after exiting from her apartment as there is no room. With Hime she feels a constant need to check her hair and makeup to make sure everything is in place. Makeup takes her about half an hour to do each time and touch-ups are required throughout the day. Hairdos are delicate, "like a meringue," and can easily collapse from a door slam or wind blowing.

When asked why she puts so much effort in her appearance and keeping up-to-date with new fashion trends, Cheryl responded, "Because everyone else is. It's an arms race. Because if you don't do it, you look plain in comparison to everyone else. I can't help starting it because everyone else is doing it or so it

seems. If you don't want to be the one that's left behind then you have to do it too" (2010). She is "resentful" to be caught in this cycle but at the same time feels like she is a "slob" or is "losing out" if she doesn't participate. Many people are also caught in the same cycles and changes in trends, and Lolita fashion is no exception. The week that Mori Girl, a Japanese street style in which the wearer aims to look like a girl from the forest, was discussed on EGL for the first time, many Lolitas on EGL joined the Mori Girl community on LJ and started to shift towards Mori or try to combine it with Lolita. Several years ago, EGL members would have debates about whether wigs in unnatural hair colours, fake eyelashes, tights or high heel shoes with stiletto heels are 'Lolita or not,' but these have become accepted elements of a Lolita outfit and in some sub-styles are even expected elements required for a complete look.

Thus, Cheryl is not unique in her behaviour, but she is one of the few people who talked about the realities of changes in fashion in which ideas, styles, and innovations are shared with and copied from others as well as the concerns of fitting in within a subculture group through visual appearance. Cheryl's concerns with fitting in, not being out of fashion or left behind leads her to notice and be inspired by those around her. She agrees that fashion is a form of expression and a way to display one's mood, but she is less concerned with cultivating individual style. In addition, unlike most people, Cheryl did not exhibit the same kind of personal fan-like connection to particular garments the same way Donna describes AP's Toy Parade. It is more about belonging,

wearing things that fit the atmosphere, and looking good while wearing clothes that have elements that flatter her body type and allow her to feel sexy and cute. Fashion can be a way to portray one's unique individuality but in order to claim belonging to a certain style group it is also pertinent to adhere to and have knowledge of particular style conventions before they can be played with and deviated from. It is less about following rules and more about 'reading the atmosphere and mood' by noticing what other people are doing and keeping track of new developments through reading magazines and talking to others.

Cheryl has the advantage of living in Japan for several years. Having carved a place of belonging in livehouse culture and having a keen desire to fit in with everyone else, as opposed to wanting to pass along within the limits of a different culture, Cheryl's experience reflects more closely that of Japanese Lolitas as she has constant access to actual places where she can be Lolita and refine her practice of Lolita. Most North American Lolitas focus on ideas of developing personal style and individual creativity through non-mainstream fashion instead.

Why is style so important? I wondered this as I sat on a bunk bed placed in the first room one encounters after opening the door to one bedroom apartment Denise shares with her mother and two brothers in Brooklyn. Denise is a 19 year old African American who was working over the summer and finishing her high school degree at the time. I wasn't too familiar with the area, so she came to pick me up at the stairs leading down to the subway. She was

wearing a jumperskirt with no blouse underneath from Baby, the Stars Shine Bright, paired with flip flops as it was only a short walk from her home and it was a pretty humid summer day. The print dress was decorated with white lace and featured panels of green gingham with roses encased in lace and ribbons lining the hem. Aside from the bunk bed I was sitting on, shelves, dressers, and other furniture and objects line the room and lay on top one another, making it feel cramped in the already small space. Denise hangs her dresses in her mother's closet while her other Lolita clothes are folded in different drawers scattered throughout the room, and her Japanese fashion related books are located on a shelf accessible from the top bunk where she sleeps.

'Style' was certainly a key word for Denise, who spent much of the interview describing her own personal style, how she wanted to develop it, and how she spent much time thinking and "fantasizing" about it. Defining 'lifestyle' in her own terms, Denise believes "It's not like the cookie-cutter Victorian style thing. ... It's about bringing Lolita into my own life ... and use it in my own personal style but - to actually figure out my own personal style, because before Lolita I wasn't a very fashionable person. I didn't care about that stuff. I was, you know, t-shirts and jeans - I didn't care if my hair was a bird's nest. I really didn't care until I got into Lolita" (interview, July 11, 2009). Developing style is a continuous process of exploring different fashion options, mixing and matching, and honing a sense for what looks best on one's body type. Denise was obsessed with the word, and it seemed that style was a way for

her to develop a sense of self as well as provide an escape from the drudgery and normalcy of her daily life. Lolita was as much a mental exercise as it was a type of garment with which she could adorn her body.

There are others like Denise for whom thinking about clothes is a soothing and relaxing activity. Many claimed that trying on clothes and creating different outfits after a stressful day was a way to calm down and create time for themselves. Spending money and looking at clothes on websites are a form of stress release and comfort. Caitlin, a Caucasian Lolita from Maryland, buys and sews clothes whenever she is depressed and finding Lolita fashion in the first place kept her from becoming depressed. For Caitlin, "It's something that saved me, that steered me in the right direction. I can't necessarily dress Lolita all the time, but I try to apply the aesthetic to everyday wear. It's a reliable kind of happiness that I know will always be there" (interview, July 21, 2009). Her life is made happier through decorating her room, finding new clothes, and engaging with other material things. Inanimate things are more reliable as, unlike people and the "real world," they only disappear and change when and if she wants them to. Thus, she feels that material things are the one constant in her life. Olivia feels the same way as well, seeing Lolita as an opportunity to create your own fantasy. "I love that control over it too. It is a kind of a matter of control. Even when I had a crappy day or something, sometimes I just have a bad day, and I just want to wear frills. Makes me feel better, I can wear something completely for me, that I enjoy for me" (Olivia 2009).

Stress release comes not only from wearing the clothes. Though Lolita is not a form of daily clothing for most people, many still spend a considerable amount of time thinking about and looking at it every day. The 'dream dress' or dream dresses are items that they yearn and search for but have not been able to obtain. Dream dresses are special, even more special than the standard Lolita dress because of some meaning that is attributed to them or there is something unique about the design and cut that pull at one's heart strings. Finally procuring and owning a dream dress is a big deal. Other activities which involve thinking about clothes including making 'want lists' consisting of clothes and accessories that one hopes to own some day or cutting and pasting clothing images to create imaginary coordinates. These are sometimes shared, sometimes kept private but are visual manifestations of the mind work involved in Lolita.

The 'perfect coordinate' is the culmination of these efforts, resulting in an outfit in which every aspect, from the dress to the accessories to the shoes, matches perfectly while exhibiting a unique sense of creativity and style. After attaining the perfect coordinate, depending on their attachment to the dress or skirt on which the outfit was built, some Lolitas may decide to move on, selling the centerpiece garment to raise funds to purchase different clothes. This process make take up to months as each single item to be used in an outfit is searched for, and some people will not wear a dress out until they feel it can be coordinated properly.

During AP's rise in popularity on EGL many new people entering the fashion tended to be AP fans. This ushered in the age of the 'AP clones,' or people who look exactly like the models in magazines since they would wear items from the same series all at all. The word 'AP clones' may have been influenced by the blog of a popular Japanese reader model who appears frequently in *KERA* and posts photos of her and her friends wearing the same AP dress coordinated similarly. Some people dislike this practice as it defeats the point of what style is supposed to be about. "Style is something you invented yourself, not something you saw and copied from someone else. You should put on your own personal spin. You don't have to go out and buy everything. Lolitas can buy matching things in a print. That doesn't involve a thought process, just taking out a credit card" (Beth 2009). Though Lolita fashion has certain style rules, among English-speaking research participants, style is seen as a way to assert unique individuality and the freedom to dress however one wants. Though many Lolitas saw themselves as being a bit different or a total outsider to mainstream society, Lolita is not about social rebellion but is a technique to find, develop, and express one's self identity. Fashion is regarded as a form of self expression, and authenticity is displayed by remaining true to one's personality regardless of what one is wearing and by developing a personal sense of style.

Lolita is often attributed to helping people find themselves or uncover a part of their identity that had existed prior or lay dormant. "(Lolita) made me

not be afraid of who I am. It made me feel more comfortable being me” (Sarah 2010). Though the clothes and style helps aid transformations, wearers often do not want to frame the material as having transformative properties that alter or shield their true selves. Someone can be considered inauthentic or ‘fake’ when they try too hard to change their personality to fit the image of the clothes. Instead of being true to themselves and expressing self through style, they allow the clothes to dictate how they act. These people are often called ‘Lifestyle Lolitas’ on EGL, a term with no equivalent in Japanese. Lolitas on EGL tend to categorize themselves as either Lifestyle or not-Lifestyle, that is those who think Lolita is ‘just a fashion’ or ‘just clothing’ and do not believe that there is a set philosophy around the clothing. The latter group is seen as more grounded and realistic, situating Lolita fashion as primarily materialistic, ultimately consumerist and thus ‘shallow.’ They are not pretending to be the perfect Lolita or acting like a Lolita when they wear Lolita. These Lolitas, a group that make up the majority of EGL, do not force themselves to act in a certain way because of what they are wearing. Instead, they believe that how they interact with others and present themselves personality-wise is remains independent of what kind of clothing they are wearing. Those who do not identify as ‘Lifestyle’ often state that Lolita is only a fashion, a hobby or clothing and thus it does not have any deeper meaning for them. However, a lot of energy is invested on EGL towards discussing how to wear the clothes and related accessories and criticizing or critiquing people who are ‘doing it wrong.’ Even those who strongly do not

want to identify as a Lifestyle Lolita have some kind of conception of what these clothes do or do not symbolize, how they should be worn, and how one should act when in Lolita clothing.

There have been articles and photos in Japanese magazines *KERA* and *G&LB* that depict people wearing Lolita or Gothic clothing eating cake, drinking tea, and listening to classical music. In one photo-illustrated article charting a 'typical day' for a Lolita, the model wakes up in her bed having worn a white Lolita dress as her sleepwear, eats cake throughout the day, and spends her afternoon working on embroidery. These articles are often meant to be tongue-in-cheek, joking tributes to a kind of ideal Lolita or Gothic life that most people are unable to achieve for practical reasons. The stereotypical Lifestyle Lolita is someone who takes articles like these seriously as suggestions or guidelines for how to live a proper Lolita life. They try to transform all aspects of their lives or find 'Loli-able' items to fit the Lolita aesthetic instead of considering time-place-occasion, social and practical constraints, or behaving 'naturally.' Examples include trying to wear Lolita to the gym or adding lace to vaguely related fashion items like sneakers. Criticizers of Lifestyle Lolitas say that they are 'trying too hard.' Though Lolitas are expected to try hard to accomplish certain style quality guidelines, trying too hard is when your efforts impede on a pre-existing or true personality or when you pretend to be someone or something you are not.

The word 'lifestyle' in relation to Lolita Lifestyle is defined as something all encompassing in someone's life, dictating their political and religious beliefs,

social and physical behaviour, and even their way of thinking. When asked to describe this lifestyle, typical traits given include: wearing Lolita clothes everyday throughout the day even when doing mundane things like running errands or cooking, trying to fit Lolita clothes and the related aesthetic into every aspect of their life such as trying to adapt sneakers or gym wear, listening to classical music and engaging in other activities considered appropriate to the 'Lolita image' including embroidery, writing letters, drinking tea, and eating cake. Lifestyle Lolitas are often accused of being inauthentic because acting out the role of the perfect Lolita by talking in a tone higher than their natural voice or trying to act 'cutesy.' Those who are 'anti-lifestyle' react by not engaging in 'princess-like' behaviour when wearing Lolita. At the heart of the dilemma is a concern and perception that Lifestyle Lolitas are masking their true self by acting instead of being 'natural,' reflecting general attitudes regarding the domains of self-identity and material things.

The heavily caricatured Lifestyle Lolita is often made fun of by others, but in reality, there is a varied spectrum in how intensely someone adheres to the stereotype. Even someone who wears Lolita clothing on a daily basis may claim to be living a Lolita lifestyle even if they do not engage in other practices like eating sweets and cakes all day or have any interest in classical music. This particular example of lifestyle appears consistent with the Japanese use as exemplified in Minami in Chapter 3 who surrounds herself with *kawaii* things and considers Lolita a lifestyle because thinking about it even when not wearing

the clothes has become a part of her daily life and shapes her own personal aesthetics and worldview.

However, the definition of the Lifestyle Lolita that is limited in scope prevails, and most people will proclaim that they are not a Lifestyle Lolita when asked what Lolita means to them. Most North American Lolitas try to distance themselves from this category, considering it 'delusional, 'child-like,' 'too extreme,' or 'stupid.' Because of the negative connotations associated with the word, many Lolitas shy away from calling it a lifestyle even though their aesthetic sense has been changed because of the fashion and this has permeated to other areas in their life, as it does for Minami who does not alter her voice to speak higher, try to wear Lolita clothes everyday to work or engage in any of the activities typically associated with Lifestyle Lolitas.

Katie does not feel comfortable with Lifestyle Lolita as she sees aspects of it as overly domestic, affirming traditional femininity and roles for women in society in ways that she interprets as anti-feminist. Rachael shares a similar sentiment:

I'm a feminist, and I think some of the concepts of Lifestyle Lolita are not towards feminism in the way I employ it. The movie *Kamikaze Girls* - the main character Momoko says that it's more elegant for a girl to faint and have a guy protect her rather than stand up for herself. And that's the opposite of what I fight for. [2009]

In addition to feminist issues, negative perception among North American Lolitas towards a Lolita lifestyle is also situated in matters of practicality and the meaning of adulthood and childhood:

Lolita lifestyle to me is an elaborate fantasy. Like, when people describe their Lolita lifestyles to me, it sounds like an elaborate fantasy life and something that a child would want or an adult with a child-like mentality. ... Adult femininity in Lolita is about being confident to wear the clothes you want and act how you normally act without elaborate child-like affectation. [Beth 2009]

Beth defined adulthood, not in terms of responsibility and contribution to society at large like Japanese Lolitas did, but in terms of individual independence and freedom. This includes privileges associated with adulthood and the level of self-sufficiency expected from adults such as knowing how to drive, having a job, being financially stable, having had sexual experiences, and being able to drink.

Negative opinions among North American Lolitas directed towards Lolita as a lifestyle surrounds what is considered practical and what adulthood entails. If someone has an idea to do something that is considered impractical in relation to what others consider the 'real world' and 'adult responsibility,' they are likely to be made fun of or criticized on EGL. Such was the case of the young woman who asked how she could make her workout clothes more Lolita. She later deleted her post after receiving comments from those who found it hilarious or strange that someone would try so hard to adapt Lolita clothes to a strenuous activity like exercise that may eventually ruin the clothes. Someone even posted a drawing making fun of the original poster, depicting her running on a treadmill while wearing a short Lolita skirt and sweating profusely.

This is all connected to concerns, again, about maintaining boundaries and balances that the extreme definition of Lifestyle Lolita threatens. Lifestyle Lolita is seen as too childish, dangerous because most Lolitas want to assert that they

are adult women and not trying to pretend to be children or act infantile – categorizations that potentially trump the power and validity of the fashion for them. This danger is especially felt with sweeter styles like found in AP. Even those who do not wear AP appreciate the sweet and over the top look of their designs, but EGL members also express concern over some of the motifs and themes of print series depicting children’s toys as potentially infantile or having the potential to be confused with adult baby fetish or other sexual fetishes. Prints from other brands that look like something belonging in a baby’s nursery or remind too much of actual little girl clothing usually make EGL Lolitas uncomfortable though they are not ‘read’ in the same way by Japanese Lolitas.

Though Lolita dresses are partly inspired by Victorian children’s clothing and uses fairy tales and children’s literature as source materials, North American wearers want to emphasize that these clothes are not for children but for adult women who are not trying to pretend to be children or little girls and any associations that may suggest thus are heavily contested and debated among other Lolitas. Californians Rachael and Emily are best friends who started out wearing another Japanese street fashion – the colourful Decora style which they explained has a childlike innocence expressed through self-decorating oneself in bright colours and layering of accessories such as plastic items in the hair and everywhere. From the perspective of these young women, Decora, which they wore heavily in middle school and high school, is much more childish and very

different compared to Lolita which is seen as innocent but elegant, regal, grown-up, proper, and graceful:

Rachael: I think you have to be very mature and know what you're doing to wear something like Lolita and pull it off well, to do your research and get the brands right and to have the confidence to wear it in front of other people.

Emily: It's not a mindset of a child. There's an easygoingness and outgoingness of a child, but you're still an adult. Like AP, in particular, they incorporate little girl things like pastel colours, but it's directed toward adult girls – young adults. [interview, November 7, 2009]

Maturity for these young women is expressed through the act of doing research and honing one's style, suggesting an active role in deciding one's dislikes and likes and having confidence in what you yourself have chosen – something mentioned by Minami's discussion of Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* in Chapter 3. A child usually does not have a say in what she is wearing, her decisions are made for her. An adult is not dressed by someone else but is making the choices about what she wears herself. If people look at what she is wearing and thinking that she is trying to be a child or act like a child, according to Rachael, then their opinion is more a reflection of their own prejudices and narrow labels. "I don't understand why when you're younger it's okay to wear bright pink, it's okay to wear bright yellow and then you hit 10, 11, 12 and suddenly it's not – you're just wearing dull colours like browns and blues, and it's almost restricting which is bizarre because it's supposed to be that the older you get the more freedom you have" (Rachael 2009).

Personality and individual selfhood are expressed and built through cultivation of one's style developed through active decisions about adornment, consumption, and aesthetics. Most Lolitas do not want to be identified as Lifestyle Lolitas because they do not want to say or believe that they are changing themselves to fit the image of the clothes. That gives power to the material and to objects and also questions their authenticity because style is supposed to come from inside. As there is a perceived separation between subject and object, there is a battle between the self and the clothing as the self attempts to claim control instead of exhibiting evidence of being controlled or influenced by outside forces. Japanese Lolitas exhibit a softer approach to



These French-Canadian Lolitas are wearing Sweet Lolita dresses but also combining elements found in other styles like *Fairy-kei*. The furry leg warmers and hairstyle of the girl in the middle are elements from 'Cyber' clubwear style. Photo by An Nguyen (2012).

engagement between selfhood, clothing, and the material that does not have this same demarcation and accompanying internal and external debate. As the actions and behaviour of North American Lolitas suggest, such as in the activities of thinking about Lolita even when not in Lolita, even their engagement with the clothing is on some level a much more fluid, symbiotic, and multi-directional relationship.

Wearing It For Ourselves: Sisterhoods Working Against Sexualization and Objectification

Going back to the earlier quote from Sarah about the lack of competition between women in Lolita, those on EGL with a more cynical outlook may argue that there is competition between Lolitas in terms of the material – such as owning the newest and rarest dress or having the most brand clothing. But it is widely agreed among my English-language interviews that what is missing from Lolita is competition between women to gain attention from men as Lolitas frame their involvement with the fashion as ‘wearing it for myself.’ Instead of relying on concepts of girlhood and the aesthetics connected to a shared experience of growing up as a girl as with Japanese Lolitas, North American Lolitas tended to speak about involvement in the fashion and ties to other Lolitas in terms of sisterhoods, feminism, and/or women-centric spaces. Lolita is upheld by a support group of women who evaluate and support each other, determining what is attractive and beautiful based on criteria in which input from men is not considered very important. English-speaking Lolitas exhibited a strong desire to subvert, challenge, or avoid sexualisation, infantilization, and objectification of their experience as a women in public spaces and the fashion as seen by outsiders as they themselves try to make meaningful their participation and interest in Lolita.

Lolita fashion is placed in opposition to more mainstream sexy clothing by its wearers, but because it lies outside accepted or expected areas of dress for

women, outsiders may decide to box it as sexual or fetish wear as an initial and uninformed reaction because it is so strange and different. Lolitas outside Japan encounter a spectrum of reactions whenever going out in public, including positive affirming comments from old women praising their outfits to little girls calling them princesses to befuddlement, harassment, and threatening situations in which they are bullied, attacked or leered at. The majority of Japanese Lolitas interviewed tended to have difficulty describing what exactly constitutes 'sexy' clothing or 'clothing worn for men,' but most North American Lolitas had a clear conceptualization of these categories. This type of clothing was often described as body conscious, showing skin, emphasizing parts of the female body such as the bust and hips, and tight fitting, hugging the body's curves. In contrast, Lolita fashion is modest, covered, and not sexy. 'Sexy' can partly be about work on the body to show it off, but Lolita is about covering the body to use it to show off things on it like the images on a printed fabric dress. Unlike sexy clothing, Lolita clothing places emphasis on the clothing itself instead of displaying the body, something that many find an attractive aspect of the style. With Lolita, "it's about the shape of the clothing, not the shape of your body" (Olivia 2009). Lolita clothes sit at Olivia's natural waist or above the waist which she says makes her feel prettier. She is self-conscious about her big hips and likes how this part of her body can be hidden underneath the poofy Lolita skirts. Overall, wearing Lolita makes her feel more confident and comfortable with her body:

Olivia: When I wear Lolita, I feel more confident in every way that everyone can see. And then my attitude, too. My attitude changes when I wear it, just because I feel more confident. I guess I feel more...

Sarah: Well in a sense you can feel like a really unique person. I guess that sounds kind of weird to say. If you're dressed so intricately, it's so anachronistically, like, estranging compared to everyone else too. If you look around at them while you're wearing Lolita clothes, your perspective has totally changed because everyone really does look exactly alike. Everyone is wearing jeans, and everyone is wearing T-shirts. It maybe a different type of jeans or a different type of T-shirts but what you're wearing is so special and unique in comparison that gives me a huge ego boost. Like, god damn – like this is an entirely unique thing – look at all that. It's such a jerk-reaction.

Olivia: – Like they don't know what style is. [laughs] I become a jerk too, like totally. [2009]

Deflecting emphasis away from the body allows wearers to establish a different relationship to clothing and fashion that they feel is not dictated by the mainstream fashion standards found in mass media. Though some people may want to alter or work on their physical bodies in relation to Lolita they tend to do so in order to fit in the clothes better or fit the aesthetic better through honing makeup and hair styling skills. Some Lolitas do feel pressure or believe they are being judged by other Lolitas if they are overweight or 'fatty-chans,' a self-referential term usually used jokingly to refer to one's weight. On the other hand, there are also Lolitas who make their own clothes, commission items from seamstresses, or alter brand clothing to fit and work with their body instead of working on their body shape. Unless they live in the few areas of the world with storefronts selling Japanese brand items, Lolitas outside Japan are unable to visit physical stores and interact with the clothing before purchase. After being involved in the fashion for a certain amount of time, Lolitas cultivate a

knowledge of the various types of designs, cuts, and construction elements, are aware of their body measurements, and can determine from looking at a shop stock photo whether the dress will fit them or not.

Most people do not care about the shape of their body or shaping their body through Lolita clothes like they would with other types of clothing in the sense of trying to look skinnier or taller or accentuating parts of the body:

I don't worry about 'Does this make me look fat?' Because of course Lolita makes me look fat. There's a giant petticoat covering my ass, right? Unless I wear something with a corset on top I'm going to look a little paunchy. I don't care. It's not about *that*. ... It's about the sense of frill – there's also a sort of light quality because I find walking in it very bouncy. I always have a slightly up feel when I'm wearing it. It's almost like an urban fantasy. ... (It's) slightly out of place in the modern but it also fits, like that element of feeling a little bit off-kilter from things. [Katie 2009]

Lolitas use the body to display their aesthetic interests and the things and motifs they love. They are less concerned with presenting or altering perception of their body through dress to fit certain social standards. Dresses with prints are purchased because they contain images from a favourite fairy tale or contain elements the wearer has an affinity towards like certain sweets, animals, architecture, paintings or design themes. Similar to the *kawaii* concept, Lolitas enjoy surrounding themselves with the things they love, and they display it through their dress. Discussed in the previous section, Katie is concerned with time, place, and occasion for her dress, and like other Lolitas, is aware that she is being scrutinized for what she is wearing:

Sometimes I have something important to say, and I am aware people are thinking, 'Who is that weird woman in the frilly dress?' And those are the

moments I realize I should've put on a pair of jeans that morning. So it is frustrating that sometimes people don't take you seriously. They are judging you by what you are wearing. [2009]

There is an awareness of the importance of looking 'normal' and taking into consideration the appropriate dress for particular situations, but Lolita provides a valuable avenue and space in which dress, adornment, and statement of identity is unconnected to normal societal expectations for how women are supposed to dress and behave in order to achieve certain things in life or receive certain kinds of attention. If Lolita is talked about as a separation from social responsibility in Japan, then the focus of conversation among North American and EGL Lolitas is its separation from and refusal of the sexualisation and objectification of women.

Angela lives in Los Angeles and comes from a Japanese-Mexican background. She was different from most Lolitas I met in that she specifically stated that she modeled her look after the Blythe and Pullip dolls she started collecting before deciding to wear Lolita, desiring to look like the dolls she owned. Even though she describes her personality as shy and quiet, she wears Lolita to stand out and to be different: "A doll to me is innocent and sweet. A doll is like for show, for display. And it's something that children like. Something that reminds you of childhood. ... I feel that the way I am dressed is for display, for people to look at. If I went out and no one looked at me there would be no point to it" (interview, Angela, November 6, 2009). Seeing herself as a collector of objects, Angela is interested in dolls, vintage toys, teddy bears,

and cute character goods from companies like Sanrio or Tokidoki. Lolita fashion has become another collector hobby, allowing her to change her clothes and mix and match herself like she would with her own dolls. Angela says she admires artists because she has no artistic ability of her own, but honing her skills in fashion coordination and styling through Lolita does provide an artistic and creative outlet.

Her engagement with Lolita also gives her a way to keep alive her Japanese cultural heritage, renewing important connections and memories she has of grandmother and mother who also collect cute things like Precious Memories figurines. Growing up surrounded by Japanese toys given to her by her Japanese maternal grandmother, Angela continued her interest in cute things through high school into adulthood, using it as a safe haven from her daily life:

[It's) comforting, makes me happy to think of childhood - you don't have to worry about anything, it's just really carefree, and it reminds me of childhood and being happy and not worrying about anything, just enjoying life. So at work it's kind of a stressful job so to make me happy throughout the day I carry cute pens and cute paper, cute stationery, things like that my customers don't see it, but I see it, and it makes me happy when I have that stuff. So it takes me away from work and makes me think happy things. [2009]

Many women who wear Lolita dislike being seen as sex objects and find in Lolita a haven away from being objectified and sexualized by being cute and feminine in a way that is not to attract men:

I don't like attention for being sexy. I want attention for being cute. Because I think sexy gives you bad attention, attention that can lead to bad things like someone could try to kidnap or harass you and that's pretty scary to me. [Angela 2009]

Angela's fear and distaste about being seen as a sexual object highlights a sense of loss of control over how she is viewed by other people, especially men. She defines 'sexy clothing' as clothing that makes men think of her naked, which makes her feel "awful." Even when she is wearing Lolita she notices older men her parent's age leering at her. Her boyfriend sometimes finds her wearing Lolita as sexy, but she thinks "well, that's okay because it's my boyfriend" indicating that as long as there is already an established mutual relationship in place, Angela does not mind expressing her sexuality (2009). Context is important to Angela, and being involuntarily placed into a sexual context or becoming a sexual object for someone else's enjoyment feels dangerous and unsettling. Some people do use Lolita clothes in a sexual context but this is seen as something to be kept private between those involved. Most of these people would argue that it is not something intrinsic about the fashion style itself. After all, Lolita clothes are considered appropriate to be worn in public, constructed using higher quality fabrics and long lasting materials and are not the same as the costume quality of the average Halloween sexy Alice in Wonderland or nurse outfit. Using Lolita clothes, those like Angela attempt to manage how they are perceived in public as women. There is a personal solace and power to be found in participating in a form of dress which is removed from societal norms surrounding 'sex,' allowing the wearer to be something besides a sex object subjected to male gaze.

Lolitas often discuss how past or present boyfriends do not find Lolita fashion to be particularly attractive. On EGL, posts about un-accepting boyfriends usually draw comments that suggest the poster dump the guy if he is unable to understand or accept her interests. Some men feel self-conscious when going outside with their girlfriend when she is in Lolita because they feel like people are staring at them and judging them for going out with someone who looks much younger. Even men who are supportive of their partner's interest often times prefer Classical Lolita styles over Sweet because they are more subdued. They may feel uncomfortable with a partner who wears Lolita because they believe what she decides to wear is a reflection of their own sexual desire and interests, implying that they might be interested in some form of deviant sexuality in the public eye.

A lot of men don't like [it]. They think it looks weird, baby-dollish – they feel like pedos [pedophiles] if you wear it with them. And as I got to Lolita more and more, I don't care if men like it or not. And that means that I'm wearing it completely for me, completely what I think looks good. And I think what a lot of women think looks good is different from what they wear to attract men. I think a lot of women wear things they don't like because they feel the need to be attractive. [Olivia 2009]

Being around those who wear Lolita fashion, non-wearers re-evaluate their understanding of clothing and women's fashion. Beth provides an example of the social expectation and assumption that women are dressing to get the attention of men:

Men think that whatever you wear it is to attract them. [They] initially think Lolita is weird at first but once they realize that you show adult femininity and [do] not act like a child then they feel okay to feel attracted to it and it can

become a sexual thing. ... I don't want dudes to have a Lolita fetish because then to me that subverts what it's about to me. I don't wear it for that. I wear it for me. But then again, abject disapproval - 'you look stupid in that' - I don't like that either. 'I like you look cute in that, it doesn't affect my sexual attraction of you' - that's optimal. But unfortunately, sometimes I only get hit on when I'm walking around in the city or whatever if I'm wearing something weird, not just Lolita. If I'm wearing jeans and a t-shirt no one will notice me. [2009]

Though she wants acceptance from her boyfriends, she does not want them to sexualize the clothing. The contradiction between trying to assert one's beliefs and to maintain a separation from sexuality is constantly being encroached upon from outside factors that try to sexualize Lolita because they do not understand the fashion or make assumptions about why women wear what they wear.

Before she came across the band Malice Mizer and Gothic Lolita fashion, Linda, a Caucasian woman from Montréal, had been involved in various subcultures since her early teens including Western Goth and Mod because of her interest in music. Unlike most Lolitas, Linda did not have a prior interest in or advanced knowledge of Japanese popular culture. Her discovery of Malice Mizer and their music was entirely accidental but was life-changing. Wearing Gothic clothing almost every day, Linda felt that outsiders sexualized her, viewing her as a "sex-goddess, dominatrix, or slut" because of media portrayal of Goth women, including in pornography, as promiscuous. In Lolita fashion, she found something that was removed from this negative attention but still contained elements of Gothic fashion she enjoyed:

I like Goth music, but there was something really off about these other clothes and PVC gowns. I was fine in them, but there was something that wasn't quite

right, like a missing link. People want to think you are like a sex hungry vampire. But I'm interested in classic literature, elegance, and romance. This separates me from all that, and it is liberating. [interview, Linda, November 1, 2009]

There are many different genres in the Goth subculture, but the Goths I met who also like to wear Gothic Lolita were in their 30s and tended to have connections to Trad Goth, rooted in the early days of Goth when it developed as a musical movement spearheaded by Bauhaus or Siouxsie and the Banshees, or Romantic Goth, inspired by the literature, fashion, and social customs from the Romantic and Victorian period. In Western Goth, unlike Visual-kei, women are very active contributors and producers, working as DJs, club promoters, and musicians. Feminine aesthetics are respected as being powerful and are adopted by men and women, allowing for gender fluidity and androgyny. Goths are very respectful of one another's private space, and sexualizing women or giving them unwanted sexual attention is a faux pas. Though fashion plays an important part for involvement in the Goth subculture scene, many people placed more emphasis on knowledge surrounding music genres, musicians, and bands in the same way that Lolitas place importance on knowing about fashion, as one older Goth who wore Gothic Lolita explained to me.

Although aesthetic and ideological bridges can be made between Western Goth and Lolita, socially Lolitas as a group tend to be younger and are almost all women. Like Linda, Margaret enjoys the aesthetic potential of Lolita and its particular portrayal of femininity. Lolita offers a pool for inspiration, but in

terms of philosophy and 'lifestyle,' she defines herself as a Romantic Goth. Margaret, a Caucasian in her 30s living in New York, felt that Lolitas exhibited some of the destructive aspects of social interaction found in younger women such as being judgemental of other people's appearance and actions or being competitive towards one another, an atmosphere she believes is not found in interactions among Goths. Initially Margaret felt that the EGL community was "shallow and bitchy," but after reading *Kamikaze Girls*, she gained a better understanding, especially of Sweet Lolita. Lolitas exhibit a type of self-respect and sharing of creativity through creating clothing and putting effort into outfit coordination that she finds also resonates with Western Goth. In addition, being a female dominated subculture means that Lolitas are making the rules:

Goth is a little bit more sexual than Lolita. Because even the High Gothic, they're wearing corsets for example. There are sort of more erotic stuff. And Lolita is more like play dressing like kids do. ... The guys are removed. They're not Lolitas. When I talk to my fellow Lolitas - I should call them sister Lolitas - when I talk to them and the idea is, like, a guy might have an opinion on Lolita, but he's not a Lolita so how does he know what he's talking about? His opinion doesn't matter because he doesn't know about the fashion. Guys don't really have a say unless they wear the fashion. ... It cuts men out of it. [interview, Margaret, July 15, 2009]

It is important for Margaret that Lolita lacks a dominant male presence or influence. It is through this trait of the style and its related social groups that she finds the potential for political and cultural formation in female bonding and female-only spaces where she can "relive" her femininity and be around people who are also doing the same thing. Margaret sees Lolita as a "conscious sisterhood" providing "healing time for feminine stuff" in a society she feels

does not give women enough spaces or opportunities to be and bond together. Things like ladies night and chick flicks are often made fun of and panned for being feminine, and she feels that “in Western society, women are never allowed to reject the company of men” (interview, Margaret, March 5, 2012).

Margaret describes growing up in a female body as painful, lonely, and traumatizing. In a follow-up interview over the phone, Margaret revealed that she was a tomboy as a child, which she believes was influenced by being taught that women were stupid, not powerful but doormats while men were smart and capable. She often played on the boys’ team as a kid, but the day when she looked in the mirror and realized that her body was starting to change, she burst into tears. She felt that her body being female cuts people out. “Even now I don’t look at myself in the mirror much except when I’m putting on makeup” (2012). Coming from this background, she separates Lolitas into two groups, those who are taking part in a sisterhood, “those who get it,” and those who are interested in the fashion, focusing only on the material and style. However, she thinks that “even the fluffiest” of people have a similar understanding of Lolita in the same sense she does. For her then, “Lolita is super radical. It’s about accepting the stuff we rejected before. This [femininity and feminine things] is worthwhile, these people are worthwhile, I am worthwhile, my body is worthwhile. My deep hope is that other Lolitas also have the same feeling” (2012).

Several other women expressed how Lolita offered them a way to get in touch with their body, in being a girl and being a woman by reclaiming feminine aesthetics as powerful and important:

I was so uncomfortable with being a girl when I was younger and getting into Lolita just restructured my conception of who I was. Because as a girl, like, after I started wearing Lolita, even when I didn't wear it, I had to be more put together, I had to take care of myself better, I had to wear girlier things because I didn't – the big pants, the big shirts, and all those things hid me. [Beth 2009]

Throughout a conversation that took us from the hallways of the Mitsukoshi Nihombashi department store to the Tokyo subways finally leading to her small one room apartment in the suburbs outside Shinjuku, Susan was concerned with why liking “girly” things and wearing skirts was such a social barrier and cute things met with such disgust in England because of what they represent. I asked her to define what she meant by “girly”:

Enjoying feminine things. Like, enjoying things like makeup, the colour pink. All stuff that- I think basically cuz so many modern women are taught that they can be strong women and- you don't have to wear a skirt, you can wear jeans, you can wear trousers, you can do this, you can be a man, basically. And I think so many women in that have forgotten how to be feminine and have forgotten- like, actually no flowers are lovely- you don't have to be- I think so many people have gotten kind of the association of, like, ‘Oh it's so sissy- it's so oh- you like girly things’. Whereas I think there is nothing to be ashamed of. ... Like cakes and cute things and flowers and bunny rabbits- and a lot of things that people just go [makes a retching like sound]. [interview, Susan, March 25, 2010]

She started wearing Sweet Lolita and Gothic Lolita to *anime* conventions with her friends when she was 20 years old, but she stopped for several years because she felt it was too childish. But once she discovered Classical Lolita and Casual Lolita, Susan found a way to look and feel “lady-like.” Asking her to explain

what she meant when she said she felt “the world today is a scary place,” Susan cited the early sexualisation of girls and the loss of childhood as examples. Through the style she celebrates her love for an “old-fashioned world,” an interest that existed even before she started to wear Lolita:

I like to think of the past as the world’s greatest story, and it’s always fascinated me since I was younger. It kind of builds my imagination. Why I like it in terms of a fashion aesthetic, I think because it’s kind of treasuring something that’s gone. Something that is kind of very beautiful and ... it’s the rebellion against that kind of masculinisation. [Susan 2010]

In comparison to Japan where women often wear skirts, she felt that in England the skirt and overly cute things are both a liability and a barrier when trying to obtain a social position. The masculinisation in the above quote is in reference to what Susan observes is a tendency to reject feminine things as being weak in lieu of masculine things and imagery as being powerful and desirable. Margaret, coming from a Punk and Goth perspective, had trouble understanding Lolitas even though she enjoyed the fashion herself until she read the novel *Kamikaze Girls*. In speaking about the main character Momoko, Margaret attempts to frame her understanding and experience of the fashion in a way that is meaningful for her:

I really liked how Momoko was sorta like a sort of evil, ruthless bastard. But then she was still- ‘I’m really powerful as a female, like, I don’t need to do male stuff to take on the trappings of personal power.’ And Lolita to me seems like that. It’s a reaction to sexism- instead of being ‘oh I’m going to be very boy-like or be very androgynous. No, I’m going to be a super girl, like aggressive, be very girly to you.’ I also liked how, like Goth, women are in control, which is an anomaly in society. [Margaret 2009]

Caitlin shares a similar viewpoint when speaking about how she personally feels about Lolita in terms of feminism and femininity:

It's feminist in an untraditional way. I'm not afraid to embrace female values. And I'm not afraid to embrace a traditional view of being feminine. Whereas I feel that a lot of feminists are 'No, you don't do that - you wear pants.' I think that there's nothing wrong with crafting and sewing because it's what women always did. It's kind of having pride in what it means to be a woman. I think that dressing in a feminine fashion is saying it's okay to look like this and still have an opinion on what it means to be a woman. A lot of times I get really offended that if I dress like this I have certain views about - that I'm not a feminist, but I feel that I am aware. [Caitlin 2009]

However, later in the same interview, when asked about Lolita in Japan, based on her experiences living in the country for two months, Caitlin felt that Lolita might not be much of a feminist movement inside Japan:

I don't think Lolita necessarily steps outside of the bounds of a domestic woman. You're dressing like someone who needs to be cared for and tended to. Someone who has a lot of needs, like a little bit childish. [2009]

Both positions highlight the contradictory nature of Lolita both in and outside Japan in which wearers are teetering the lines between being totally aware, playfully subversive or unconsciously submissive. In their talk and actions, Lolitas on EGL try to find a balance so that their displays of femininity are empowering and not connecting them to stereotypes that box women as meek and powerless. When trying to challenge what can become oppressive using the same symbols and images that can be used to oppress, Lolitas run the risk of being misunderstood as compliant, hence there is a constant need to re-establish meaning and boundaries. Some people may be uncomfortable with using the word 'feminist' in connection with Lolita if they are not familiar with feminist

movements or personally believe in the various stereotypes surrounding feminists such as being anti-fashion and anti-feminine. However, it is generally agreed that far from being a docile child-like woman, Lolitas feel that what they are doing is subversive and an important part of their life, providing a way to still be an adult while reclaiming things that are 'feminine' and 'girly' that society told them to leave behind when they grew up. "It's like I have this secret treasure trove of femininity that normal women can't even access" (Caitlin 2009).

Swedish blogger, Maria, who used to run the Lolita blog Paperlace and was active in organizing events like fashion shows and flea markets for Swedish Lolitas, described Lolita fashion as a subculture in which women dress for themselves and secondarily dress for each other:

In many ways I see the lolita culture as homoromantic. And by homoromantic I do not mean to say that all lolitas are lesbian, bisexual or queer. The homoromanticism I refer to within the lolita culture is about saluting, acknowledging and supporting each other, lolitas to lolitas, in a way that I have not seen in any other subcultures that I have been a part of. [blog post, May 5, 2011]

In the same blog post, Maria outlines the ways in which Lolita is homoromantic. She makes points like "Lolita fashion is a fashion for girls that guys have to ask to be a part of" and "Lolitas want to adored by other Lolitas" to highlight the style's woman- and girl-centric nature in a tone that is consonant with attitudes among North American Lolitas (2011).

A similar idea came up in my conversation with Susan as we discussed the differences between Gyaru and Japanese Lolitas based on her observations

having lived in Japan for several years as an English teacher. In opposition to the aggressive sexuality as power found in Gyarū, she labels Lolita as innocent and asexual. Media directed towards Gyarū places emphasis on female bonding and creating spaces where girls can exchange information and feelings with each other which includes complaining about their boyfriends with their Gyarū friends. Magazines for Gyarū may have articles that contain tips on how to get a boyfriend or feature a popular reader model with her boyfriend. Lolitas do have boyfriends, but trying to attract the opposite sex is not inherent to the fashion and topics about getting or finding a man are never covered in magazines. On the other hand, Gyarū are stereotyped by society at large as being boy crazy and loose women. The sexiness of the style places Gyarū in relation to men who are either terrified of them or desire them. Especially among Lolitas in Tokyo, there is a general disregard for Gyarū and Hime-gyarū precisely because of the perceived connections to assertive sexuality and night work such as hostessing.

Speaking about Japanese Lolitas:

Susan: I don't think they're [Lolitas] are trying to make a statement. They're not trying to be strong. They're not trying to make a statement of 'Oh yeah, we're together - girl power!' They're not trying to do that. They're just trying to get along and live in their own little dream worlds. Maybe because it's a kind of little lonely world as well, but -

An: Why is it lonely?

Susan: I wouldn't say lonely actually, but it's more just kind of - again it's the idea of innocence. Like the whole idea of the girl power thing is like its power - it's bringing down the man that's bringing us down. Whereas whenever you see a Lolita, it's a sweetish, like, girlish friendship. ... If the Lolitas don't need men - don't want men to begin with, then it's very different from Gyarū. It's asexual to begin with. The friendships are definitely more innocent.

Whenever I look at the magazine spreads ... you just get the idea that it's just two girls, like, 'let's bake some cakes.' [2010]

The idea of girl-only spaces, bonding between women, celebration of the girly and cute, and the existence of *shōjo* culture combined with a lack of information and discussion about feminist movements that circulate in Japanese society play a role in why Japanese Lolitas rarely discussed their participation with the fashion in the way as English-speaking Lolitas. Missing from my Japanese interviews is mention of feeling sexualized or being self-conscious of their woman-bodies. I asked Japanese interview participants about their opinion on women's current social status in Japan, and the typical response was that women's status has improved in years past because women can choose to do what they want, but some people also noted that women are still not equal to men and that there is still a gender gap and issues with employment. However, I had a difficult time getting interviewees to make a connection between the topic of women in Japanese society and Lolita fashion. Concerns with outsiders equating Lolita with sexuality or costumes among other issues covered in this chapter are also the concerns of Japanese Lolitas, but these issues were seldom voiced or only mentioned in passing and never a point of anxiety or distress. Even though they are involved in acts of subversion, it may be because they can rely on existing social and cultural contexts that Japanese Lolitas do not question themselves to the same extent as the Lolitas introduced in this chapter do.

Lolitas in North America and on EGL are more diverse and come from a wider range of backgrounds compared to those in Japan. The fashion and its aesthetics provide a common language connecting them in the celebration of beauty, girl-feeling, and women-centric spaces. Coming from a point of difference, non-Japanese Lolitas appear more active in self-questioning their involvement in the fashion, placing it within contexts that give meaning and empowerment to their engagement as they try to close the gap between their own experiences as a woman or teenage girl and the perception of media, images, and things from Japan.

Learning From the Clothes

Lolita fashion is a subculture based in consumer consumption and material things that in Japan is balanced by the existence of an underlying ideology that backs the aesthetics, experience, and individual understanding of Lolita, providing it a context that connects it to widespread social ideas about girlhood that are then deviated from or taken to the extreme. For those without Japanese language skills, the ideology and history of shōjo culture is largely unknown aside from a purely visual-based exchange instead of a verbal, literary or text-based one. It is this visual language expressed in printed textiles and garment design that fulfills the missing element, thing or feeling that cannot be found in current clothing and styles found in North America and Europe – the feeling of girlishness, femininity, modesty, frills and lace, attention to detail, high

quality clothing instead of throwaway poorly made fast fashion. There is always an underlying desire to be on par with Japan especially for those new to the fashion, to close a perceived gap, to understand Lolita fashion better, and figure out how to wear the clothes the 'right' way. With little direct communication between wearers in Japan and elsewhere because of the language gap, in lieu of possible conversations, those outside Japan are sometimes better versed in whatever is new and follow magazines and other media more closely than their Japanese counterparts.

The moral issue for Lolitas outside Japan is not about the self against society and social expectations directed towards adult women but the self against materialism, objectification, relationship to objects, and judgement from other Lolitas in addition to all the issues and pressures women face in contemporary Western society including body image, sexuality, and gender inequality. Therefore, though the positive power derived from Lolita clothes and the importance attributed to them is explained in terms of feminism, freedom of self-expression, individualism, and creativity, it is also checked by an intense social connectedness with other Lolitas that is a result of a movement that originated on the Internet and brings together people not only in North America but from around the world outside Japan.

The group acts as a strong basis for participation in Lolita and the online forums provide a venue for people living in disparate places to affirm that they are indeed a Lolita through posting photos, contributing and receiving positive

affirmation from other Lolitas. The sense of belonging to a group, needing to fit in, gaining approval from others, and criticizing those who do not fit in can become very important for North American Lolitas. There are indeed issues with gossiping, bashing, bullying, and smack talk among Japanese Lolitas especially on anonymous Internet forums. Japanese Lolitas have pointed out that people are competitive when it comes to getting the things they want. However, these are not issues that are used to define group behaviour whereas these topics dominate discussion with English-speaking Lolitas and work in contrast to the beauty of the clothing and the positive feelings gained from wearing Lolita. It is not framed as a problem propagated by a few individuals but is seen as a community or group problem, as something that is intrinsic or characteristic to Lolitas as a whole that also includes perception of Japanese Lolitas. In relation to wider society and other people outside of the niche group of Lolita clothing wearers, North Americans situate themselves in ways that stress individuality as exemplified in the discussion about what entails adulthood. Instead of seeing themselves as someone who has to function in society while finding methods of escape that lie outside social obligations and restrictions, they are individuals who want to assert that they are different and creative, attributes that are supported through association and camaraderie with other Lolitas.

All of the critiques, problems, and dangers associated with clothing and materialism listed by Keane at the beginning of this chapter can be found within the internal critique from North American Lolitas directed at the self and at the

group which is seen as vicious, consumerist, superficial, judgmental, discriminatory, exclusionary, and hateful. A similar anxiety is rarely expressed consciously by Japanese Lolitas because they do not have the same feeling that they are part of a connected community and being able to draw from shōjo and otome aesthetics gives meaning to their experiences and consumer practices. For North American Lolitas, issues surrounding materiality and morality exist because of an underlying demarcation between subject and object wherein the subject is at odds with the potential power of the object to control and mould a true self and identity that can stand alone from the material. These concerns are valid but they also mask the actual bodily and affective experience of wearing the clothes and the power of happiness objects. As demonstrated in the final section of this chapter, healing and happiness can be found in women-only spaces that have been created out of shared affinity to certain material things and styles. A subculture where aesthetics and beauty are defined by other women in a way not related to what men think gives participants a way to think about their relation to things and engage with their body in ways that let them travel between the lines in a fight against dualism machines.

Conclusion

Not An Escape, But A Distance

Kana was the first Japanese Lolita I interviewed for this research project. I met Kana during Otakon, an *anime* convention in Baltimore, and was introduced to her by Caitlin who I had also met during the same event. Originally from a small city in the Kagoshima prefecture in Kyushu, the most southern of the main Japan islands, Kana was majoring in graphic design at a university in Baltimore and had been studying abroad in the United States for four years at the time.

At one point during the interview, Kana remarked, “It’s funny because the Lolita look same from outside, but inside there are so many individual Lolitas” [interview, July 21, 2009]. Though our interview was mainly in English with some moments of Japanese when she found herself unable to express herself clearly, when re-listening to the recording several years later only after I had reviewed the bulk of data I collected in Japan, I noticed that many of the ideas she discussed were consistent with other Japanese Lolitas. These included ideas about the connection to *Alice in Wonderland* and the power of choice and solving problems by oneself, ideas surrounding sexlessness and femininity, and the lack of importance placed on creating a group or social connection with other Lolitas as exhibited among Lolitas outside Japan.

Each person comes to the fashion and engages with it in different ways because individuals have different personalities, temperaments, goals, and dreams. Yet there exists various kinds of underlying frameworks, ideologies,

aesthetics, and threads of understandings that Lolitas tap into when talking about their experience that they either agree with or reject as being relevant to how they see the world. This seeing and being is culturally and socially situated, as demonstrated in the comparison between Japanese and North America/global contexts, and is dependent on how actual and virtual places are created and used. Wearers are parts of networks accessed through 'Lolita,' putting them in relation to other actors in a system that connects to other Lolitas, media and images, and material things in movements and flows.

Since most Lolitas do not wear Lolita clothes every day, can someone still be Lolita even if they are not wearing the clothes at that moment? Who does a Lolita become when she sheds her clothes for something else? These were the things I wondered when I was working on this project. Even though this work is about Lolita fashion, at the same time it is also not about Lolita fashion. Especially when the people wearing Lolita are in a wide range of ages with a large number continuing to wear these clothes even as they exit their teens and university years, I wanted to think about Lolita fashion not only as a youth subculture 'style tribe' or a 'street fashion style.' Instead, I wanted to go beyond the limitations of the name and label 'Lolita' to see how people use clothing and things as a way to understand and work on the self. This was achieved through an examination of the Japanese concepts *shōjo*, *otome*, and *kawaii* and how Lolita is a fashion that allows wearers to embody these ideas through their dress. Without reference to the same cultural concepts, people outside Japan who

engage with images and things created from Japanese contexts try to bridge the cultural gap by drawing on their own situated experiences and understandings. For North Americans, Lolita is a label that brings together style with particular conceptualizations of femininity and beauty that are informed by ideas about what it means to be involved in a subculture and to be a woman and an adult in 'Western' society.

Since 2009 and 2010 when I collected the bulk of my interview data, many of the North Americans I met have changed or altered their involvement with Lolita. Some people left Lolita completely, selling off all or most of their clothes and moved on to other hobbies. Others, while still wearing Lolita, decide to put more effort in to interacting with people in their local groups instead of dedicating the same amount of time to fostering an Internet presence as they did before. They may still post on the Internet, but they are more interested in keeping track of existing friends than making new ones. A small number of people deepen their understanding and involvement with Lolita through crafting, making their own clothes, and trying to build side businesses by selling their designs to other Lolitas. A larger number continue to wear Lolita but meld it with other fashion styles, crossing over genres and breaking the style rules as they become more comfortable with using clothing and adornment as a site for play, exploration, expression, and recuperation. In comparison, though some left Lolita, sometimes because of health problems, evolved their style or wear it less

frequently, the majority of the Japanese Lolitas part of this study are still involved in Lolita fashion, in one way or another, as wearers and/or designers.

Instead of thinking about Lolita as subculture, it may be better to think about it as a key that allows people a way to engage in becomings and take flight, moving in the in-betweens in spaces to think about self in a way that is distanced from perceptions of society, responsibility, and normality. People who are Lolita or know Lolita can enter into these modes, depending on the person, through wearing certain kinds of clothing or through the act of thinking about the style, the people, and the places that these clothes bring them closer to. Those who call themselves Lolita are engaged in this practice, and even when they do not wear the clothes frequently they may want to continue calling themselves Lolita in order to keep the connection alive as they still feel affinity with some of the aesthetics of Lolita. It is fluid, and though it may be taken by some people as a label to describe their self identity, more importantly, it is an entry point from which one can move to related connections, things, places, and people and is unbounded by the limitations of verbal and written language, allowing for a international exchange in images and things.

One moment in the interview with Kana that stood out to me even then was when she described how she started to wear Lolita when she was in high school in a city where there were no Lolitas like her. Because of this she felt that she was similar to the heroine Momoko of the novel *Shimotsuma Monogatari* who lived in the countryside as the lone Lolita:

Kana: Because when I was in high school I was kind of alone. You know there are some group of girls – like the Gyarū group or the Otaku group – I was not in any group so I feel, like, I feel I am same as Momoko. I had a friend but not – I had one really good friend, but not like group of people.

An: What do you think is Momoko's view on Lolita fashion?

Kana: Momoko says that outfits is her teacher so I feel – I feel like same way. Because she says that when she go to buy outfit, and the – um, there's always only one outfit for her. And so, it's like a fate.

An: Do you feel the same way when you buy? That it's fate?

Kana: Yeah, when I go store and I find one and I feel really, I was born to meet this dress. It's like that.

An: Just talking about the dress – what connection do you feel with it?

Kana: Yeah, I was say same thing as Momoko does. 'Outfit is my teacher.'

An: What does she say in Japanese?

Kana: '*Yōfuku wa watashi no sensei.*'

An: In what way is it your *sensei*- your teacher?

Kana: If when you – when you go to buy outfit, and there is an outfit you want to try and you wear it but it doesn't look as good as much, it means that that outfit is telling you, 'You are not ready yet to wear me.'

An: Do you feel that way when you go buy clothes?

Kana: Yeah, when I looked at outfit online and then I go to store and I try it, and it doesn't look good, then I feel – 'Oh, I'm sorry.'

[2009]

That one can learn from the clothes and that clothing can teach was something encountered among some of the other Japanese interviews where Momoko was also quoted, suggesting a different relationship to things and the material than among North Americans. Clothes and other things are used to express one's

individuality, but they also reveal the possibility of being different and show how one can be an individual:

It opened my eyes because before I wore it I was one of the many people. I feel that I am not individual, but I find out how to be myself. Because when I wear Lolita, people act differently than usual outfit so I learn how to be polite to people, I learn how to, hmm, like myself. [Kana 2009]

Like Kana, Rumi also talked about learning from the clothes and believed that in order to be worthy of and reflect the beauty of the clothing, she herself had to work on improving herself inside and out. By adorning frilly Sweet Lolita dresses in red, her favourite colour, Rumi feels that she is making a visual public statement about her individuality and reaction to Japanese society, affirming her ability and desire to live her life by her own standards. Lolita fashion is often defined as a way to carve out a world of one's own and do something for oneself instead of for others. It is a suspension in time, providing a sanctuary that protects aspects of self that are innocent and pure in contrast to their woman-mind and bodies as defined by society at large while at the same time acknowledging a knowing that is not found in a little girl.

If Japanese Lolitas appear to be self-reflexive and in a complementary engagement with material things that is embodied through practice and rarely consciously questioned, then North American and EGL Lolitas are more outward looking as they question why they like Lolita fashion in the first place and why other Lolitas act the way they do. Decisions made, aesthetics defined, and value formed in the feminine-centric spaces created through shared interest in Lolita

fashion allow some of these women to reclaim their femininity and their bodies as important and valuable. The intense feelings of connectedness fostered by happenings that occur in virtual places help to build a group identity but at the same time increases people's disappointment and discontentment with the perceived behaviour of other Lolitas. Though Lolita fashion is seen as empowering and an embodiment of beauty and aesthetics missing from the 'modern' world, it is also believed to be consumerist, materialistic, and shallow.

Instead of seeing clothes as having potential to teach, North American wearers may sometimes feel at odds with the clothing, the fashion, and Lolita as a group while they try to maintain a sense of authenticity of a self that is not influenced by outside forces. Though the contradicting emotions surrounding Lolita fashion among English-speaking wearers of Lolita may demonstrate the limitations of participating in a consumer sub/culture as a way to learn about oneself and engage with the world, these conflicts are also evidence of active engagement and internal thought processes. Frequently, these same conflicts drive people to become more reflexive about their own actions and involvement in the fashion, allowing them to learn and grow from facing tense social situations they are directly involved with or observing from afar. Looking at Lolita as a style that deviates greatly from the 'mainstream' has given a way to discuss meaning making, emotion and affect, girl-feeling, and happiness objects, and this study contributes to understanding materiality and human experience.

This work has approached the topic of Lolita fashion and its wearers through a cross-cultural comparison that examined memories and experiences in places and spaces; and conceptualizations of girlhood, womanhood, aesthetics, and beauty. With this study as a basis, in addition to examining the development of the fashion style in European or other Asian contexts, there are several avenues for potential future research about Lolita fashion, other girl-centric style subcultures, and movements typically connected to *shōjo* culture in Japan. Lolita fashion was traced to *shōjo* and *otome* cultural concepts in this thesis in order to move out of the limited category of ‘fashion’ that Japanese Lolitas were using to talk about the style and explore the frameworks that inform their experiences. Research about Japanese girls’ culture, from *manga* to Visual Rock, has tended to look at girls culture in terms of *shōjo* studies. I attempted to move away from this by speaking not in terms of *shōjo* as a conceptual and theoretical genderless being but by speaking to real women who wore Lolita and by presenting *otome* as an accompanying alternative – that, while still idealistic, allows for movement in-between *shōjo* and woman as it acknowledges the desire to retain senses of affects and emotions associated with girl in minds and bodies that are growing and aging.

Talking to the people who wear Lolita clothing, I wanted to give a voice to the wearers and to present that their decision and desire to wear these clothes is not ‘flat’ or ‘plastic,’ but meaningful, filled with agency and subversive intention. I do believe that Lolita fashion, by turning to the ultra-feminine, is in a sense, an

exit from the building and, as an American Lolita told me, a 'refusal' achieved through carving out personal, yet also shared, spaces. As I was unable to approach my Japanese research participants beyond their Lolita selves they presented to me in the one or two hours I got to know them, it was difficult for me to understand how Lolita fashion is situated in relation to other parts of their lives as women. I want to make a bridge between individual experience and society at large to explore the efficiency of these strategies and what these activities and aesthetics say about Japan as a society and women's social status. Thinking beyond Lolita fashion, this study has also led me to an academic interest in narratives about place and memory-making, materiality, and the relations between people and material things outside of a Western subject-object dichotomy.

Katie described wearing Lolita outside as "not an escape from reality but a distance - making your own reality" (interview, October 30, 2009). When wearing it she feels that she is "zenning" herself to the world around her. "It's like I'm there but not quite" (Katie 2009). This statement is something that many people who wear Lolita, either Japanese or English-speaking, may agree with though as demonstrated throughout this work, how people approach and build this distance from their surroundings is, again, situated amongst a multitude of varying contexts. It is not an escape from reality and other aspects of their lives, but it is an invitation, maybe not to a wonderland or a fantasy, but a temporary pass to the eternal, to protected spaces, to sites for play and exploration.

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Appendix A: Glossary

AGEHA -

1. Japanese fashion magazine with content created by hostesses for other hostesses that became popular in the mainstream because of the elaborate makeup and hair tutorials.
2. *Agejō* is the label to describe people who wear the fashion style found in *AGEHA* and is commonly associated with hostess work.

anime -

Japanese animation.

AP -

Abbreviation for Lolita brand Angelic Pretty.

BTSSB -

Abbreviation for Lolita brand Baby, the Stars Shine Bright.

cosplay -

Short for costume play. A costume of an existing work, typically *anime*, *manga*, or videogame characters. Visual Rock cosplayers also replicate their favourite band's stage costumes and wear their cosplay to live concerts.

cosplayer -

Someone who engages in cosplay.

Cyber and Fetish -

Fashion styles associated with Goth and Cybergoth fashion subcultures and electronic dance music club scenes. Cyber, short for Cybergoth, combines inspiration from rave, Goth, and cyberpunk. Bright and neon colours in clothing, hairstyle, and makeup are combined with a black Gothic outfit using matte or glossy materials like rubber and black PVC. Gas masks and goggles are popular accessories. Fetish does not utilize neon colours and takes references from BDSM culture with the use of materials like rubber, PVC, leather, and latex. Corsets, catsuits, stockings, and mini skirts are popular items.

Decora -

A youth fashion style associated with Harajuku and *FRUiTs*.. The word is derived from the English 'decorative.' Outfits are brightly coloured and accentuated with an array of accessories such as multiple rings, hair clips, and plastic jewellery piled on top. The more accessories one can coordinate into an outfit the better.

dōjinshi -

Self-published comics or zines typically sold at Japanese *dōjinshi* sales events (*sokubaikai*) created by circles (*sa-kuru*) consisting of groups or individuals. The majority of *dōjinshi* are fanworks derived from *anime*, *manga*, videogames, and other media though there are also many original works. The largest related-event in Japan is Comiket, held twice yearly in Big Site Tokyo.

EGL -

1. Name of the popular English-language Internet forum for Lolita fashion hosted on Livejournal.
2. Short for Elegant Gothic Lolita, a term coined by guitarist and designer for Moi-même-Moitié, Mana.

fatties, fatty-chan -

People who are fat or overweight. Used by EGL Lolitas to describe others or a label used to describe oneself as a form of self-deprecating humour. The -chan suffix is taken from Japanese, usually used as a term of endearment or to establish friendship.

gyaru/gal -

A Japanese youth subculture that is associated with the department store 109 in the Shibuya neighbourhood in Tokyo. Bleached or dyed hair, slightly tanned skin, short skirts, fake nails, and loose socks are some typical elements associated with Gyaruru style. The style was at the height of popularity in the 1990s when numerous teens tried to copy the fashion style of singer Amuro Namie and has evolved through the year into various substyles such as *ganguro*, in which darkly tanned skinned is paired with heavily bleached hair and white concealer used as eyeshadow and lipstick. There is a moral panic surrounding Gyaruru as they are stereotypically perceived by outsiders to be rude, sexually promiscuous, and engaged in teenage prostitution. Because of their 'sexy' image, Gyaruru is often portrayed as a polar opposite to Lolita.

gyaru-o -

The male counterpart of Gyaruru. Men's Egg is a magazine known as a style bible for *gyaru-o*.

hime-gyaru -

A princess and elegant form of Gyaruru, also called *hime*, meaning princess. A typical outfit consists of A-line dresses with frills and lace cut above the knee paired with stiletto heels, pearls, tiaras, bouffant hairstyles, and striking makeup highlighting eyes with fake eyelashes and dark eyeliner. Hime-gyaru are often wrongly associated with Ageha style worn by hostesses, but not all Hime-gyaru are hostesses. Around 2005, elements of Hime-gyaru crossed over with Lolita fashion, especially the makeup and hairstyles. Jesus Diamante is a well-known brand for this style.

hostess -

Someone who works as a hostess club or *kyabukura* (cabaret). It is a line of work associated with the *mizushōbai*, literally water-trade, or night-time entertainment industry, in Japan. Hostesses act as companions, flirting with male patrons, pouring their drinks, lighting cigarettes, and offering other entertainment such as sing karaoke. This is different from *fūzoku*, or the sex trade. There are also host clubs, the male component, in which a large percentage of patrons are women who work in *mizushōbai* or *fūzoku* industries.

indies -

Short for independent, the label can be applied to a variety of things including music scenes or fashion brands and designers. Indies Lolita brands typically consist of a designer who creates patterns and sews each dress themselves. They create on a smaller scale compared to the major fashion companies and release on a more erratic schedule. English-speakers may use either 'indie' or 'indies.'

JSK -

Jumperskirt.

Loli -

Term used by EGL Lolitas when talking about Lolita fashion with non-Lolitas in order to avoid negative association with Nabokov's *Lolita*.

Lolita-chan -

Used in Japanese to refer to Lolitas as a whole.

Lolicon (roricon) -

Derived from 'Lolita complex,' a label used to call someone who is attracted to underage girls or to describe such attraction. Typically connected to a genre of pornography or *otaku* fanworks depicting youthful looking female characters in narratives that may be erotic.

Lolita fashion -

A subculture street fashion style from Japan worn primarily by young women emphasizing girliness and cuteness through a bell-shaped skirt and other style elements drawn from Western historical costume and children's clothing. Unrelated to the sexual and erotic nature of *lolicon*.

live (raibu) -

Live music concert.

livehouse (raibuhausu) -

Concert venue.

LJ -

Abbreviation for the Livejournal Internet social network and blogging service.

lucky packs

English translation of the Japanese *fukubukuro*. Usually sold at end of the season sales are mystery bags filled with unknown merchandise sold at a price lower than the total cost of the actual contents to clear out unsold merchandise.

NANA -

The *manga* *NANA* by artist Ai Yazawa, originally released in 2000 and still in serialization, is about the friendship between two young women living in Tokyo trying to achieve their dreams created wide mainstream interest in Westwood's designs when

the fictional series reached the peak of its popularity with a TV animation series and a live-action movie in 2005 and 2006. One of the main characters, Nana Osaki, is a singer for an up-and-coming Punk band. The heart collar jacket and jewellery she wears in the story are all from Vivienne Westwood and are highly sought after pieces because they appeared in the *manga*. Other subculture fashions like Gothic, Punk, and Lolita are also worn by characters in the story.

***ofukai* -**

A meeting or organized group gathering 'off' the Internet.

***manga* -**

Japanese comics.

mods/moderators

adslfkjg

***ochakai* -**

A tea party.

***OP* -**

Onepiece dress.

***otaku* -**

People with obsessive interests particularly *anime* and *manga* fans though the label can be applied to any hobby or interest. The word has been adopted by fans outside Japan to refer to themselves, but it is a socially stigmatised label in Japan. This negative perception towards *otaku* culture and its fans stems from Miyazaki Tsutomu, the serial killer also known as 'The Otaku Murderer' in 1989. His murders and his collection of erotic *anime* and *manga* created a moral panic against *otaku*.

***otome* -**

1. A maiden. Other meanings include young lady, virgin, or even a young girl. *Otome* is a bit old fashioned though it is starting to make a comeback in fashion magazines like *KERA*. The phrase '*Koiseyo otome*' (fall in love young maidens) is a line from the 1915 popular song *Gondora no uta* (Gondola song) that is often referenced in contemporary popular culture.

2. Female fans in *anime* and *manga* fandoms also call themselves *otome* but instead of the importance of keeping alive one's love for *kawaii* things as found in a Lolita-filtered *otome*, focus is on the importance of keeping alive one's love for *anime* and *manga* especially for original and fan-derived works concerning male-male romance. Both approaches to *otome* are concerned with upholding one's own tastes and likes and maintaining a fantasy-like world removed from reality. Mentioned in Chapter 2, Otome Road in Ikebukuro is filled with *anime* stores and used bookstores catering to female fans. The word *fujoshi*, literally 'rotten woman,' has in recent years begun to supplant *otome*, especially in the mass media.

***shōjo* -**

1. A girl, usually in middle school or high school.
2. Used to describe an aesthetic informed by a genre of literature, *manga*, and other media marketed to young girls as explained in chapter 3.
3. The Japanese language has several different terms that can be translated as 'girl' into English so it can be confusing to the reader. *Shōjo* as explored here has many different nuances and connotations as presented in Chapter 3. *Onna no ko* as employed by many other Lolitas I met means 'girl' in a way similar to English. It seems to be a less loaded word than *shōjo*. Women may use *onna no ko* to refer not to children but other women or their female peers - kind of like saying in English 'these are my girls,' 'we girls' or 'us gals.' *Shōjo* is not to be confused with *shojo* (virgin) or *dōjo/yōjo* (little girl, prepubescent girl). Other terms of note include *joshi* (girl, woman) and *josei* (woman, female) merely indicating difference in sex from the male *danshi*.

***the Bridge* -**

Reference to Jingubashi in Harajuku, a bridge near to the train station that was a popular hangout spot for Visual-*kei* cosplayers and Lolitas.

***Visual Rock/Visual-kei/VK* -**

A genre of music developed in Japan since the 1980s and 1990s in which bands do not have similarities in music style but are connected the fact that members don elaborate style costumes and makeup when performing. The genre was at the height of its popularity in the mid-1990s and continues today largely as an underground, indie music scene. Bands of note include X Japan, Luna Sea, and Malice Mizer.

***Vivienne Westwood* -**

British designer Vivienne Westwood, also known as 'the Queen of Punk,' has been a huge influence on Punk and New Wave fashions since 1971 when she opened the 'Let It Rock' boutique with then-husband Malcom McLaren. The shop, currently known as World's Ends, has changed its name and image numerous times but the location on 430 Kings Road in London has remained the same throughout the years. In 1974, the shop was renamed to 'SEX' when McLaren became the producer of seminal Punk band The Sex Pistols, and many people involved in the Punk movement either were shop staff or frequented the store. Some elements now standard to Punk fashion were influenced by Westwood's designs during this era like BDSM fashion, bondage gear, safety pins, and spikes. Westwood also drew heavily from English historical costume and dress, incorporating 17th and 18th century clothing cutting techniques in her work. She had a cult following in Japan even before she opened her first shop in Tokyo in 1996. Style elements associated with Westwood's design have had influence on Japanese Gothic, Punk, and Lolita fashion as evident in the use of motifs like crowns, tartan or printed fabrics replicating famous artworks and paintings, and themed releases inspired by British history and fashion. Her 1984 Mini-Crini collection, in particular, showcased dome-shaped short skirts with crinolines that arguably may have had an influence on the standard Lolita cupcake-like skirt of today. Her 'Rocking Horse' shoes with a wooden platform sole are inspired by the high wooden clogs donned by the Maiko. Also popular with Lolitas who import these expensive shoes, many Japanese brands have created footwear inspired by the original Westwood design.

Appendix B: Timeline

Each year is separated into different sections:

1. Japanese fashion and popular culture with attention to Lolita fashion.
2. Fashion and popular culture outside Japan.
3. Development of Lolita fashion outside Japan.
4. Notable events in Japan and the world.

1970s

1970

- MILK clothing brand established in Harajuku's Central Apartments by designer Ogawa Hitomi.

Japan's population reaches 1 million. Expo '70 in Osaka is the first world's fair to be held in Japan.

1971

- Vivienne Westwood starts activities as a fashion designer, opens Let It Rock store with Malcom McLaren at 430 King's Road, London.

McDonald's opens first fast food restaurant in Japan.

1972

- David Bowie releases 'Ziggy Stardust' record, commissions Japanese designer Yamamoto Kansai nine costumes based on Noh theatre for his UK tour.

Okinawa is returned to Japan.

1973

- Pink House clothing brand established by designer Kaneko Isao.

The first oil shock.

1974

- Shirley Temple children's clothing brand established by Rei Yanagawa, previously a designer for MILK.

- Vivienne Westwood and Malcom McLaren start the clothing shop SEX, playing an important role in defining Punk style and dressing musicians in the subculture until its close in 1976.

McDonald's open the first fast food restaurant in Japan.

1975

- Commes des Garçons puts on first fashion show.

The Vietnam war ends. *Manga Rose of Versailles (Berusaiyu no bara)* by Ikeda Riyoko at the height of popularity in Japan.

1976

- Vivienne Westwood opens Worlds End shop.
- Jean Paul Gaultier debuts in Paris.

1977

- The Sex Pistols 'Never Mind the Bullocks, Here's the Sex Pistols' album released.
- Hana Mori, Japanese designer, participates in Paris Haute Couture collection.

1978

- La Foret Harajuku department store opens in what is now its current location at the intersection between Omotesandō and Meiji-dōri.
- Appearance of the Takenokozoku who spend their weekends dancing in Harajuku's streets to pop music.
- Punk fashion is popular in Japan. Renewal of the 1960s Ivy boom.

Disco rises in popularity.

1979

- Predecessor to Angelic Pretty, PRETTY select shop opens in La Foret Harajuku eventually carrying stock from Lolita and Gothic indies brands like Cornet and Metamorphose in the 1990s.
- Shibuya 109 department store opens.

-
- Sex Pistols' Sid Vicious dies from drug overdose.
-

The 2nd oil shock. Sony Walkman is released.

1980s

1980

- Takenozoku and techno band Yellow Magic Orchestra at height of popularity.
 - Beginning of the 'Band Boom' period lasting until 1990.
-

1981

- BOOWY forms.
 - The Rock n' roller 'tribe' appear at Harajuku dancing to American oldies music and sporting outfits inspired by the 1950s and 1960s.
-

1982

- *OLIVE* magazine begins publication. It is an offshoot magazine from *POPEYE*, targets a highschool and university age female audience.
 - Culture Club and Duran Duran come to Japan. New Romantics boom.
-

1983

- Olive *Shōjo*, Pink House, and Commes des Garçons boom.
 - Independent record label Nagomu Records established along with term Nagomu-*kei* (music genre). Fans have a distinct fashion style and are called Nagomu Gal and Nagomu Kids.
-

Tokyo Disneyland opens.

1984

- Vivienne Westwood opens store in Tokyo's Aoyama neighbourhood.
- Designer Atsuki Ōnishi begins activities.
- Independent record label Trance Records established and is closely associated with Nagomu-*kei* and its fans.

1985

- Jane Marple established by ex-MILK designer MURANO Megumi.
- Tokyo Council of Fashion designers formed.

- Vivienne Westwood debuts her 'Minicrini' collection featuring iconic designs including the Harris Tweed crown hat and the short over-knee length bell-shaped skirt in velveteen supported by crinoline and plastic boning.

Nintendo Famicom videogame system released.

1986

- Increased domestic interest in Japanese brands results in the DC (designer and character) brand boom. Clothing with brand logos and other markers identifiable with a particular designer are popular.
- X Japan (1982-1997) debuts on major record label.
- Tight-fitting, revealing clothes of Bodycon style associated with Tokyo dance club Juliana's becomes popular, hip-hop fashion also experiences a boom.

1987

Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Beginning of the Japanese bubble economy.

1988

- Baby, the Stars Shine Bright clothing brand established by Isobe Akinori and his wife.
- Kusumoto Maki's *KISSxxxx* (1988-1991) *manga* runs in *Weekly Margaret manga* magazine.
- *STREET* magazine established.
- Super Lovers established.
- DC brand children's line boom.

Tokyo Dome is completed. Seoul Olympics. Miyazaki serial murders, labelled 'The *Otaku* Murderer' by mass media, the incident fuelled a moral panic against *anime*, *manga*, and *otaku*.

1989

- *CUTiE* magazine established by Takarajima, Inc.
- Gothic and Lolita designer Kazuko Ogawa begins activities.
- Ikaten TV show (1989-1990) is an important venue for indies bands to perform on network television and catch attention of major record labels.
- BUCK-TICK (1985-) has major label debut.

The Berlin Wall falls. The Japanese Emperor passes, ending the Showa era while beginning the Heisei era.

1990s

1990

- Kaneko Isao leaves Pink House to establish company and clothing brand under his own name.
- Emily Temple established.
- PUTUMAYO select shop established in La Foret carrying indies brands.

Reunification of East and West Germany.

1991

- Grunge fashion becomes popular fuelled by success of Nirvana's (band) 'Nevermind' album.
- Street fashion brands become popular.
- Dance club Juliana opens in Tokyo.

Japan's bubble economy crashes.

1992

- Visual rock band LUNA SEA makes major label debut.
- SEXY DYNAMITE LONDON established.
- Appearance of *kogyaru* style, revival of interest in punk style.

Barcelona Olympics.

1993

- ZIPPER magazine established by SHODENSHA Publishing Co., Ltd.
- Metamorphose clothing brand established by designer Katō Kuniko in Kyoto, later moving to Osaka.
- Street fashion and club wear brands like A BATHING APE, Hysteria Glamour, Super Lovers, World Wide Love become popular.
- JUDY AND MARY (1992-2001) has major label debut.

1994

- Jane Marple Dans Le Salon, sister brand to Jane Marple, established.
- Wonderful World established by designer Kaneko Isao.
- Manga artist Mitsuhashi Mizukazu debuts.
- Indies Visual-*kei* bands L'Arc~en~Ciel (1991-) and Kuroyume (1991-1999) have major label debut.

1995

- ATELIER BOZ established.
- PEACE NOW established.
- alice auaa established.
- MARBLE established.
- Traces of what is now associated with Gothic Lolita style begin to appear.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake in Kobe, Japan. Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks by Aum Shinrikyo cult.

1996

- Visible established.
- MAXICIMAM established.
- PUTUMAYO store establishes original clothing line.
- Vivienne Westwood opens first store in Japan
- New DC brands created focused on street wear.
- Singer Amuro Namie, style icon for Gyarū, sells 34 million copies of her album *SWEET 19 BLUES*. Loose socks, dyed hair, and mini skirts become popular with middle and high school girls.

Moral panic and wide coverage in mass media concerning compensated dating (*enjokōsai*) in which older men give teenage girls money or material goods in exchange for their companionship which may possibly include sexual favours.

1997

- FRUiTS magazine established by Shoichi Aoki.
- Innocent World brand established by designer Fujihara Yumi.
- Visual Rock bands Malice Mizer (1992-2001) and SHAZNA (1993-2000) debut on major label.
- X Japan, one of the early bands influential in the Visual-*kei* genre, disbands.

-
- Second film adaptation of Nabokov's novel *Lolita* is released.
-

Consumption tax raised to 5% in Japan. Hong Kong is returned to China.

1998

- Harajuku Hokoten (Pedestrian's Paradise) closes.
- Visual Rock is at the height of its popularity.
- Ex-X Japan guitarist and solo artist hide dies. His death is officially deemed a suicide. 50,000 people attend his funeral.
- *CUTIE Comic girl's manga* magazine published by Takarajima, Inc.
- Takemoto Novala's essay collection *Soleilnuit* releases.

Nagano Winter Olympics.

1999

- *KEROUAC* (currently *KERA*) magazine established by INDEX Communications, LLC.
- Moi-même-Moitié clothing brand established by Malice Mizer guitarist Mana. The brand coins the concepts EGL (Elegant Gothic Lolita) and EGA (Elegant Gothic Aristocrat) established by Malice Mizer guitarist Mana.
- Victorian Maiden is established.
- BLACK PEACE NOW, new line for PEACE NOW, is established.
- Emily Temple Cute is established.
- Baby, the Stars Shine Bright opens shop in Daikanyama neighbourhood in Tokyo.
- Metamorphose temp des filles opens headshop in Osaka.
- Yazawa Ai's *manga* series *Nana* begins serialization in *manga* magazine *Cookie*. *Paradise Kiss manga* series also begins serialization fashion magazine *ZIPPER*.
- Dir en grey (1997-) makes major label debut and is produced by ex-X Japan leader YOSHIKI.

-
- Awareness of Gothic Lolita begins to spread globally coinciding with the release of Mana's clothing line.
-

Livejournal social network and blogging website created.

2000s

2000

- Gothic & Lolita fashion is beginning to become established as a style category.
 - h. naoto established by Naoto Hirōka.
 - Takemoto Novala debuts as a novelist with *Missin'*.
 - LUNA SEA disbands after 12 years of activities.
-

2001

- First issue of quarterly publication Gothic and Lolita Bible released by INDEX Communications, LLC, publishers of the magazine KERA.
- Excentrique established first as a corset maker, moving into a clothing and accessories line later.
- Clothing store and original brand Pretty is renamed Angelic Pretty.
- Malice Mizer ends activities.
- Novel *Shimotsuma Monogatari* by Takemoto Novala released.

-
- 2001.12.29 EGL community created on Livejournal.
 - *FRUiTS* compilation book containing photos culled from the magazine published by Phaidon Press in North America.
-

September 11 attacks.

2002

- Sequel to *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, *Shimotsuma Monogatari – Yankii-chan to Rori-tachan* – (Kamikaze Girls), the novel, by Novala Takemoto released.
-
- black_lolita mailing list created on Yahoo! Groups.
 - Lolitasnap website opens.
-

2003

- Mary Magdalene established by ex-Victorian Maiden designer Tanaka Rieko.
- Fairy Wish established by ex-Moi-même-Moitié designer Kobayashi Alice.

-
- Metamorphose opens English language website and offers overseas shipping on its webstore.
 - 4chan anonymous image boards hosted in the United States created using similar structure of Japanese anonymous image board Futaba.

Kawachi-Nagano incident in which a university student and his highschool girlfriend attempt to murder their families, resulting in the death of one person and serious injury of two others. The media reported that both were interested in Gothic Lolita, putting the fashion style in an unfavourable light especially in the Kansai area.

2004

- *Shimotsuma Monogatari* live action movie released in Japan.
- Alice and the Pirates, sub-brand of Baby, the Stars Shine Bright established.

-
- EGL Livejournal community ownership is changed and a full moderation team implemented, marking the beginning of EGL as it is known today.
 - Baby, the Stars Shine Bright opens webstore to international orders.
 - Lolitasnap website re-opens on unique web domain, until its closure in 2006. (<http://www.lolitasnap.com>)

Athens Olympics. Indian Ocean tsunami and earthquakes. *Chūetsu* earthquakes in Niigata prefecture.

2005

- First INDIVIDUAL FASHION EXPO highlighting Gothic, Lolita, and Punk fashion held in Tokyo.
- *NANA anime* releases. Popularity of the *NANA manga* helps bring renewed and wider interest in Vivienne Westwood.

-
- 2005.06 / *Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma Monogatari)* movie premieres at Los Angeles Film Festival.
 - 2005.10 / lolita_fucks community (now deleted) created on Livejournal.
 - Second compilation of street snaps from *FRUiTS*, *FRESH FRUiTS* is released in North America.

Hurricane Katrina disaster.

2006

- *NANA* live action movie released
- *AGEHA* magazine and related fashion style at height of popularity.
- Lines between Shibuya style and Harajuku style blurring, ie. Hime and *Agejo* appearing with Lolita coordinates.
- Angelic Pretty's over-the-top version of Sweet Lolita begins to rise in popularity.
- Beginning of focus on producing original textiles and fabrics in Lolita fashion design.

-
- 2006.01 / *Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuna Monogatari)* DVD released in North America.
 - 2006.04.06 / loligoth_dbs Livejournal community created as a feedback database for sales on the EGL LJ community.
 - 2006.09 / Cosplay Oneesan invites writer Takemoto Novala to PMX convention in Los Angeles.
 - A surge of new local-based groups and Lolita clothing brand specific communities created on Livejournal.
-

Twitter is created.

2007

- 2007.02 / *Baby, the Stars Shine Bright* opens first international store in Paris, France.
- 2007.03.25 / egl_comm_sales community created on Livejournal as an extension of EGL. Sales post are no longer allowed on the main EGL community.
- 2007.04.17 / loli_secret community created on Livejournal.
- 2007.05 / *Gothic & Lolita* photo collection/look book similar to FRUiTS published by Phaidon with photos by Masayuki Yoshinaga and Katsuhiko Ishikawa.
- 2007.07 / Gothic, Lolita, and Punk fashion show held at JAPAN EXPO in Paris sponsored by MaruiOne Shinjuku.
- 2007.07.15 / getoffegl community created on Livejournal.
- 2007.08.01 / daily_lolita community created on Livejournal.
- 2007.09 Cosplay Oneesan hosts Angelic Pretty designers as guests at Los Angeles convention PMX. This is their first appearance overseas, and it marks a period in which the brand enjoyed immense popularity both in Japan and overseas.
- 2007.12.05 / loli_valentines community created on Livejournal.
- /cgl/ board created on anonymous English-language image BBS 4chan.

Virginia Tech massacre. *Chūetsu* earthquakes in Niigata prefecture. Shinzo Abe resigns as Prime Minister of Japan. Tumblr blogging platform is created.

2008

- h. naoto begins to exhibit runway collection yearly at Tokyo Collection fashion show.
 - Wonderful World closes its doors, and Kaneko Isao retires from fashion design because of health reasons.
-
- EGL member talia_speaks creates the EGL/EGA feedback database to help keep track of feedback for members who use egl_comm_sales to sell and buy clothing.
 - 2008.02 / First issue of English version of Gothic and Lolita Bible released by Tokyopop.
 - 2008.09 / New York Anime Festival hosts events and fashion show with designers and clothes from Baby, the Stars Shine Bright and Alice and the Pirates.
 - 2008.09 / Fantasie de Monde event held separately but at the same time as PMX convention is hosted by Cosplay Oneesan with Angelic Pretty designers and Kokushoku Sumire as guests.
-

2008 Global Financial Crisis. Akihabara massacre at Chūōdōri street in which a man killed seven in an attack on a crowd using a truck and dagger.

2009

- Renewal of Marui One Shinjuku department store at new location.
 - Popular *KERA* and *Gothic & Lolita Bible* model Aoki Misako is appointed *Kawaii* Ambassador by the Foreign Ministry of Japan as part of a program to promote Japanese popular culture overseas. As part of her duties she is invited to various events around the world to showcase Lolita fashion.
 - 2009.12 / Designer Katō Kuniko quits Metamorphose Temps De Fille to start her own clothing brands Physical Drop and Love Dice 56.
-
- 2009.04 / Fifth and final issue of English version of Gothic and Lolita Bible released by Tokyopop.
 - 2009.8.6-9/ First ever convention for Japanese street fashion and dolls Innocente Seraphim held in Bellevue, WA. Designer for Baby, the Stars Shine Bright, Uehara Kumiko is special guest.
 - 2009.08.15/ Opening of New People building in San Francisco Japan Town. Baby, the Stars Shine Bright opens store in the building. Black Peace Now / Peace Now and 6% DOKIDOKI clothing brands also open stores there.
 - 2009.09/ PMX hosts events with designers from Angelic Pretty, Takuya Angel, and Hangry and Angry.
 - 2009.10/ Tokyo Rebel select shop opens storefront in East Village neighbourhood in New York City. The store carries Angelic Pretty, Victorian Maiden, Innocent World, Putumayo, Maxicimam, and other Japanese brands.
-

Barack Obama inaugurated as President of the United States. Typhoon Ketasana hits the Phillippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand.

2010s

2010

- Classic Lolita style begins to gain more popularity.
-
- 2010.04 / LoligothDBS closed by creator talia_speaks.
 - 2010.05 / Fantasies dans le Monde des Rêve event hosted by Cosplay Oneesan in tandem with San Jose, CA anime convention Fanime. Guests included Angelic Pretty, Chantilly, Atelier Pierrot, musicians Kokushoku Sumire, and American designer Vivcore.
 - 2010.07.03 / Angelic Pretty opens first international store in Paris, France.
 - 2010.08/ h. Naoto designer special guest at Otakon. Fashion show featuring the clothes and interview panel with the designer.
 - 2010.09/ PMX convention hosts events with Innocent World designer and Alice & The Pirates designer.
 - 2010.11/ Angelic Pretty opens storefront near San Francisco Union Square.
-

Athens Olympics.

2011

2011.03 Great East Kanto Earthquake and Tsunami disaster.

2012

- 2012.04/ Angelic Pretty and Sixh. IBI as fashion guests and LM.C and Iruma Rioka as musical guests at ACEN in Rosemont, IL.
 - 2012.06/ First 'Frill' Lolita convention in Atlanta, GA.
 - 2012.06 / Third 'Convention Lolita' in Paris.
 - 2012.09 / Event held in London organized by local Lolita group The Tea Party Club invites Juliette et Justine designer Nakamura Mari and The Gothic & Lolita Bible editor Suzuki Mariko.
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Curriculum Vitae

Name:	An Nguyen
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	<p>San Jose State University San Jose, California, United States 2002-2004 B.A.</p> <p>Carleton University Ottawa, Ontario, Canada 2005-2007 M.A.</p> <p>The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2007-2012 Ph.D.</p>
Honours and Awards:	Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Masters Fellowship 2006-2007
Related Work Experience	<p>Teaching Assistant Carleton University 2006-2007</p> <p>Teaching Assistant The University of Western Ontario 2007-2011</p>