AFFIRMATION & AFFECT

A sociological account of
kawaii fashion communities
PhD Thesis

MEGAN CATHERINE ROSE

Affirmation
and
Affect:

A sociological account of *kawaii*

fashion communities

Megan Catherine Rose

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis considers how *kawaii* fashion practitioners use clothing as a means to explore the self and to express their desire to be adored and admired. Associated with practices of femininity in Japan, '*kawaii*' is Japanese for cute or adorable. Current studies of *kawaii* fashion have overlooked the significance of the subjective experience of the wearer when considering the meaning behind this mode of dress. This thesis investigates the personal significance of *kawaii* fashion to practitioners and the creative process behind their mode of dress. My argument begins with the observation that *kawaii* fashion practitioners have an affective experience of cute objects, and proceeds to show that they seek to take on the properties of these objects so as they might be affirmed by others. This thesis draws upon qualitative interviews conducted in Harajuku, Japan in 2013 and 2014 with participants of *kawaii* fashion communities who identify with style categories such as Lolita fashion, Fairy *kei*, Decora fashion and *Hime Deko*. In order to explore how clothing enables participants to explore the self, the thesis uses Donald Winnicott's ideas about play to show that participants try to adopt the properties of the cute object in order to resolve their underlying feelings of lack and thereby creating new potential for the self. Dorothy Smith's writings on the active text demonstrate that *kawaii* fashion practitioners play with feminine texts as active subjects through this exploration and performance of the self. *Kawaii* fashion practitioners perform this new self for others so this new self might be affirmed, a process which is illuminated by Erving Goffman's theories of self and performativity. Johan Huizinga's theorisation of play is used to argue that rules of interaction and 'social worlds', which non-participants are not privy to, are formed when practitioners come together. Ultimately, this thesis finds that affect and affirmation play a key role in creative the practices of *kawaii* fashion communities.

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Acknowledgements

Either the well was very deep, or she fell very slowly, for she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her and to wonder what was going to happen next.

Lewis Carroll (1988: 10), Alice in Wonderland

Figure 1 – Advertisement for a Lolita Fashion collection titled 'Rainbow Prism Sweet Alice', by BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT published in KERA *(2013: 32).*

Often I have felt during this adventure like Alice tumbling down a rabbit hole, witnessing spectacular vignettes and peering into the lives of a cast of wonderful and impressive individuals. Except that rather than demonstrating the strange ambivalence found in Lewis's text, the individuals I have met have been exceptionally generous and kind in welcoming this strange PhD student into their lives.

Some encounters were fleeting, like that with the kind manager of VOLKS Shinjuku (a ball jointed doll store) who spent an hour teaching me some helpful Japanese words during my first day in the country. Some encounters seem fated to last a lifetime, such as my friendship with my translator Rei Saionji, who I encountered upon stumbling down into her Gothic Café in Harajuku one hot July afternoon. Or Kiko, to whom I awkwardly made a passing compliment at Princess Dream (a Lolita Fashion event) and who invited me into her life as a Lolita who was a female fan of dolls, anime, games and manga and kindly took me to all her favourite places in Tokyo. These are just an example of the kind individuals in Japan and Australia who I will remember forever, who live brilliant, wondrous lives and who taught this awkward Alice so much.

And so now, it is time to remember some of the key characters in the story of my PhD thesis and my quest to learn more of the Japanese roots of my fashion community.

First of all my thanks should go to my supervisory team, who have patiently followed me through this journey, and have provided crucial advice and guidance. Dr. Melanie White has been exceptionally generous and kind with the time she has given me, and in her thoughtful advice regarding the theory for the thesis. Her passion for sociological imagination and creativity breathed life into this thesis. Professor Paul Jones was vital in assisting in the initial design of the project and supervising fieldwork, walking me through key texts on subculture and encouraging

me to pursue a study of *kawaii* culture. Associate Professor Claudia Tazreiter has also kindly provided moral support and guidance in regards to career growth, networking and conferences and was crucial in the completion of my ethics application.

But then, of course, there are other academics who have provided intellectual and moral support in producing this thesis. Professor Andrew Metcalfe has walked patiently beside me on this entire journey, encouraging a sense of openness and generosity with my participants which I believe was crucial to the methodology of this thesis. Dr. Masafumi Monden has been a kind mentor and friend, sharing our interest in *shōjo* literature and culture over tea and scones. Dr. Emerald King, my *senpai*, always came to the rescue when I was experiencing an intellectual existential crisis and whose energy has motivated me to carry on. Dr. Katrina Moore's work on Japanese *Noh*; her words of wisdom have inspired me to capture the honest beauty of Japanese culture. Dr. Maren Goerdel provided some crucial insights into optimal distinctiveness, a concept that describes the way in which we all teeter along the tightrope between individuality and a desire to belong. And then there is lovely Dr .Sharon Elkind, who kindly supported me with rose tea and long rambling discussions of *moe, kawaii,* cosplay and identity.

This thesis would not exist without the kind souls who welcomed me into their lives and spoke so candidly about imaginings and creative process in making their k*awaii* clothing. Many also took me around Tokyo and Yokohama sharing with me their favourite places, food and memories of the place, or invited me into their place of business, showing me their creations and creative process. I've learnt so much from these individuals that 'research participants' is such a cold term to use for the warmth and kindness they showed me and the lessons I have learnt through them. So many of these participants have grown over the years and their careers have taken flight, and I congratulate them on their success. I particularly want to thank the participants whose interviews are featured in this thesis: 90884, Kumamiki,

Lolitina, Doll Classica, Tiara, Pink Hime, Alice and the Vice President of a Lolita designer label.

Thanks must also go to Goldie and Elliot from Deerstalker Pictures, who produced a wonderful short video on my research with the support of the UNSW Sydney Postgraduate Research Council. This video, with Japanese subtitles created by Mayumi Hirabayashi, was vital in interview recruitment, as it enabled participants to spread the word of the research to their peers in a way that was accessible and easily understood.

The enthusiasm of the Australian Lolita Community must also be acknowledged as a driving force during some of the difficult times of my candidature. Their spectacular response to conference papers, public lectures, conference panels and other public events attached to this research is what has motivated me to produce something that might help others understand *kawaii* fashion.

Another source of energy was found in my students at UNSW Sydney, whose thirst for knowledge and passion for social justice encouraged me to not only become a better teacher but also a researcher. Some of the most powerful lessons I learnt came from working with my wonderfully gifted undergraduates. It has been an honour to work with each and every student.

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This thesis is dedicated to Beatrice Lefebvre.

Your patty pan flowers, *kawaii* illustrations, little comments in the margins of my thesis drafts and flower girl support have brightened my PhD journey.

I hope that this research gives you and other girls a brighter future.

Harajuku is … What can I say … The town where there are people who are enjoying their life every day. Every day is a festival for them. People who work at shops and people who come to Harajuku for fun are like that. People here are somehow different from ordinary Japanese people. Ordinary Japanese people always think about work or study. They think they should do something or they must not do something. But here, there are many fun people whose way of thinking is different from others.

90884, Harajuku, 2013

Introduction

Figure 2 – Kawaii *fashion practitioners participating in a fashion walk. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525*

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role that emotion and imagination plays in the creation of *kawaii*[1] outfits worn by individuals in Harajuku, Tokyo. '*Kawaii'* is a Japanese adjective used to describe something cute or adorable.[2] '*Kawaii* fashion communities' is a term I use to describe individuals who engage in creative processes of style making so as to explore concepts of *kawaii*. A

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[1] Japanese words in this thesis will be written in *romaji* form. I have referred to *Kodansha's Furigana Japanese Dictionary* (Yoshida and Nakamura (1999) to formulate English defintions of these words. '*Romaji'* refers to a Japanese writing system that uses roman letters.

[2] Mito (2014: 5) traces the origins of *kawaii* to the Sei Shōnagon's (a lady in waiting to Empress Consort Teishi) text, *Makura no Sōshi* (trans. *The Pillow Book*). *Makura no Sōshi* documents the musings and observations of Shōnagon during the Heian period, and includes an entry on *Utsukushiki mono* (trans. lovely things) which includes a list of things she adores, including children playing, animals, small things, pure things and so on. The text includes descriptors such as '*ito utsukushi'* (praise expressing admiration for cute or lovely things) and '*ito okashi'* (praise expressing admiration of something beautiful, with connotations of adoration). Mito argues that Shōnagon's text is one of the first to document an individual's experience of *kawaii* things, even though the word *'kawaii'* was not in use at the when this classic text was written.

community designates the coming together of individuals as they participate in this process of *kawaii* style-making. Although the word 'subculture' tends to be used to describe such activities, the word does not quite capture the undertakings of this particular group, as it tends to presuppose strategies of resistance.[3] Alternatively, this thesis uses 'community' as an attempt to 'step outside' of this model so as to enable a more complex and emergent account of this grouping.[4] Accordingly, this study explores the emotional significance of *kawaii* for participants in this community, so as to understand how their fashion style explores both the familiar and unfamiliar. In this introduction, I provide an overview of the thesis aims, methodology, theory and key terms, and lay out my contribution to our understanding of *kawaii* fashion communities. I situate this research in current discussions about fashion, affect,[5] cuteness and *kawaii*. This introduction will conclude with an overview of the thesis argument and a chapter breakdown.

Kawaii fashion communities in Tokyo are more widely known as 'Harajuku fashion', which is a term used to describe a variety of fashion styles seen in Harajuku, an upmarket suburb in Tokyo. This fashion style emerged in Harajuku from the 1970s onwards, and this suburb still holds a special place in many participants' hearts today.[6] The style has many diverse genres that evolve rapidly, and this thesis will focus on just a few of them, including Lolita fashion, Fairy *kei*, Decora fashion, and

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[3] Another term used in Japanese to typify these groupings in the 1950s was '*zoku*' (trans. tribe, typified by 'creatively destructive rules' (Ueno 2003: 104). For more information on this terminology, see Ueno (2003) and Mabuchi (1989).

[4] Vera Mackie (2009: n.p) also uses the term 'community' to refer to the social practices of Lolita fashion, writing that they are 'forged through the performativity of parading through the streets in their chosen style, perhaps to be photographed for the pages of subcultural magazines such as *FRUiTS*, or to see their photographs appear on fashion blogs'. Mackie (2009: n.p) notes that '[c]ommunity is also forged through shopping in particular specialist stores, through dressmaking, and through the act of exchanging information through subcultural magazines and internet sites'.

[5] For references on affect, see Ahmed (2004;2010), Clough andHalley (2007), Dale, Goggin, Leyda, McIntyre and Negra (2017) and Swindle (2011).

[6] For more information on the history of Harajuku and the development of *kawaii* fashion, please see Monden (2015) and Steele, Mears, Kawamura and Narumi (2010).

Hime Deko (see Appendix 1 for a description of these styles).[7] These particular groups tend to use motifs such as princesses, dolls, literary figures like Alice in Wonderland, American pop culture including Care Bears and My Little Pony as well as Japanese pop culture, in particular Sanrio.[8] This fashion relies on putting together objects as a form of wearable collage with a particular fantasy or feeling in mind that is specific to the wearer. A vibrant colour palette is commonly used with a preference for skirts and dresses. *Kawaii* fashion experiments with 'thrifting' (shopping for second-hand goods) and hand-made garments, but also involves the consumption of garments sold in niche fashion houses that cater to this specific group. *Kawaii* fashion has also captured the imagination of literature and film. Examples include Novala Takemoto's[9] *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (2002; English Title: *Kamikaze Girls*) and its 2004 filmic adaptation.[10] This thesis explores the role that *kawaii* as a concept plays in shaping how participants design, create and wear their outfits. The term '*kawaii* fashion practitioner' is used to denote a 'member' of this community who practices the activity of *kawaii* style making.

While *kawaii* fashion may appear to be visually extroverted through its distinct use of bright colours, layers and textures and the extent to which it seemingly rebels against social norms, *kawaii* fashion participants tend to be somewhat introverted

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[7] This thesis uses the English terms 'Lolita fashion' and 'Decora fashion' to designate how participants refer to themselves in writing. Fairy *kei* is written in partial English for the same reason. For more information on how participants refer to themselves in spoken language, see Appendix 4.

[8] Sanrio is a Japanese company that designs cute characters, such as Hello Kitty. The company produces merchandise that feature these characters' likeness. Miller (2011: 24) and Monden (2015: 169) note that cuteness amongst practitioners circulates as a fluid cultural aesthetic which companies such as Sanrio then appropriate. I would argue that the reappropriation of these products and their transformation into accessories (for instance, a Hello Kitty plush doll becomes a necklace) is one way practitioners continue to develop the cultural aesthetic amongst themselves.

[9] In Japanese, one's family name is usually written before one's given name. As this thesis has been written with an English-speaking audience in mind, I have inverted this order for the reader's convenience.

[10] For more information on *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (Takemoto 2002; Nakashima 2004), see Mackie (2010), Monden (2015) and McKnight (2010).

and lost in their imagination. To this end, a *Gyaru-o*[11] interviewee contrasted 'Harajuku girls' with 'Shibuya girls'[12] and described *kawaii* fashion practitioners as 'quiet, introvert[ed], having a strange world inside their mind …' and Shibuya girls as leaders who were 'noisy' with 'gang-like personalities'. This observation was confirmed by the fieldwork conducted for this thesis; when participants were asked questions about their outfits, they gave emotional and imaginative responses. *Kawaii* fashion provides participants with the opportunity to explore and engage with a fascination with Otherness, such that participants explore what Donald Winnicott (2005; originally published 1971)[13] has described as the 'not-me'. This 'not-me' allows them to assimilate themselves with this fanciful 'Other' through familiar objects. This understanding is exemplified in 90884's account of Harajuku that opens the thesis: from her position as a wearer of the style, the movement is 'fun' because it involves a 'way of thinking that is different from others'. As such, it is apparent that participants are emotionally moved by the *kawaii* objects they incorporate into their outfits. This thesis inquires into the nature of these feelings and why *kawaii* objects have the power to move participants and feed the imagination.

This thesis is motivated by two concerns: firstly, a need to offer an account that privileges the perspectives of *kawaii* fashion participants when making claims about the meaning of the *kawaii* fashion phenomenon; and secondly, a need to explore new ways to understand meaning-making processes in *kawaii* fashion communities so as to capture the emotional significance of the style for participants. To date,

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[11] *Gyaru-o* refers to a male member of the *Gyaru* community. *Gyaru-kei* is used as a term to 'loosely' describe 'girls who wear cute and sexy fashion' (Narumi 2010: 240-241). Yusuke Arai (2009: 10), in his anthropological study of *Gyaru* and *Gyaru-o* in the late 2000s, explains that *Gyaru-kei* practitioners adorn themselves with hair extensions, wear heavy eye makeup and sometimes tan their skin. He (2009: 10) attributes this appearance to *Gyaru-kei* practitioners' desire to appear 'wild' and 'strong'. *Gyaru-kei* practitioners would gather in friendship groups called 'circles', each of which had different approaches to the fashion, such as especially darkened skin, particular hair colours such as bold pinks or permed blonde hair (Arai 2009: 1-26).

[12] Shibuya is a neighbouring suburb of Harajuku.

[13] Donald Winnicott (1896-1971) was a psychoanalyst specialising in childhood development, whose major contribution to scholarly thought was through his writings on play, creativity and the self.

studies of *kawaii* fashion tend to privilege the aesthetic value of the style from the perspective of researcher-as-outsider.[14] This perspective tends to neglect the way *kawaii* fashion practitioners create their identities and the central role emotion plays in this process. Likewise, many studies of cuteness in general, tend to focus on the formal design properties of cuteness through textual readings of objects. These studies seek to understand the caregiving relations that emerge from cuteness, creating a power discrepancy between object and subject.[15] According to this logic, cuteness operates as a form of visual communication, whereby those who wear *kawaii* fashion dress in a particular way that can then be received and understood by the viewer. This echoes the logic of early subcultural studies from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies[16] that argue that fashion operates as a text that can be read. From this perspective, alternative fashion is an expression for the viewer to receive as opposed to an intensely personal exploration of self and the imagination. This approach assumes that meaning only lies in the receiver's interpretation of an outfit. However, this thesis asks if the viewer can truly know if their reading of an outfit is in fact the intended one. This privileging of the viewer is as if to say that the community participant is removed from the equation, somehow akin to Roland Barthes' 1977 declaration that the 'Author' is dead. This thesis explores the possibility that fashion in alternative communities is more than a one-way communication of self: it can also be a form of introverted play and creative expression.

This particular reading of the role of fashion in alternative communities is further complicated when we consider recent studies into the role of affect. Here, affect involves emotion and the way that one apprehends and perceives the world. Furthermore, affect can also reflect an imaginative process through which objects

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[14] See for instance Winge (2008), Lunning (2011), and McKnight (2010).

[15] See for instance Sherman and Haidt (2011), Ngai (2012) and Dale, Goggin, Leyda et al. (2017).

[16] See for instance Hall and Jefferson (1977) and Hebdige (1979).

spark creativity. Primarily, this thesis explores the applicability of affect to our understanding of the *kawaii* fashion participants' experience of creating and wearing *kawaii* fashion by using the work of Donald Winnicott (2005) and Erving Goffman[17] (1990; originally published 1956) to capture the creative, playful and performative elements of the process of fashion creation. Furthermore, affect is used to explore the individual's experience of objects, and how people with common experiences are able to come together and form specific groupings such as *kawaii* fashion communities.

At the heart of this thesis is an exploration of the relation of creativity and the self. I consider the following questions: What role does fashion play in exploring and performing the self in alternative communities? What constitutes an expression of self when it is conceived without a viewer in mind? How do these individuals use materials to create an outfit that expresses their sense of self? If alternative fashion is a creative process of choosing things that interest participants and make them happy, in what ways does the presence of another's view transform or alter the participant's behaviour or creativity? What tensions lie in dressing for one's own self and wanting to be understood by others?

In order to explore these concepts, this thesis has the following aims:

> 1. To determine how the self is expressed in this group through the use of *kawaii* items.
>
> 2. To understand the meaning making processes of *kawaii* fashion communities.
>
> 3. To use theories of Winnicott and Goffman, along with Huizinga, in order to develop a sympathetic understanding of a group that is not expressly political in its self-understanding.

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[17] Erving Goffman (1922-1982) was a sociologist who specialised in symbolic interaction and a dramaturgical approach to interpreting social behaviour.

Fashion, Affect, *Kawaii* and Cuteness: Situating the Thesis

As this thesis explores the role that fashion or dress plays in the creative lives of these participants in Japan, its findings will contribute to knowledge about practices of dress in Japan, affect and dress and the phenomenon of do-it-yourself fashion. Since the 2007 'affective turn', the need for non-representational studies has been highlighted and so key literatures on affect provide an interesting lens through which to consider how participants might be moved by the materials they incorporate into their style. Non-representational studies refers to scholarship that endeavours to explore meanings through experience, action and interaction rather than attributing symbolic, semiotic or representational significance to sites of study. In exploring the relationship between affect and cuteness, this investigation also contributes to knowledge regarding how and why participants might be moved by bodies or objects which they feel to be cute. As such this thesis draws together a range of literatures across Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Fashion Studies, and Japanese studies. This section will provide an overview of the key debates in these disciplinary fields.

Fashion, Do-It-Yourself and the Kawaii Fashion: A Note on Terminology in the Context of Fashion Studies

There are several excellent contributions to knowledge about Japanese dress and beauty practices in terms of specific communities in Japan as well as the history of dress and aesthetics that this thesis builds on. Texts such as Masafumi Monden's (2015) *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, Valerie Steele, Patricia Mears, Yuniya Kawamura and Hiroshi Narumi's (2010) *Japan Fashion Now*, Tiffany Godoy's (2007) *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion* and Brian McVeigh's (2000) *Wearing Ideology: State, Schooling and Self-presentation in Japan* capture the fashion and dress practices of specific groups, including those who use *kawaii* as part of their style expression. Furthermore, other

significant texts such as Laura Miller's (2006) *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* and Slade's (2009) *Japanese Fashion: A Cultural History* have also captured broader aesthetic trends distinctive to Japan across its history. In the instances described here, scholars have sought to capture the modes of dress adopted by communities in Japan and focus on their aesthetic appearance. While this thesis engages particularly with the ideas about *kawaii* fashion presented in Monden's (2015) text, its primary contribution to knowledge lies in offering further insight into how fashion helps sections of Japanese society feel and imagine.

Through a study of fashion image consumption, Monden (2015) considers how Japanese street styles such as Lolita fashion and Ivy style reinterpret Western dress styles and engages with the complexities of dress and gender. [18] Monden (2015: 114) remarks that '… the voices of girls with senses of agency and positive attitudes are frequently disregarded' and thus his research attempts to give voice to this group of individuals through engaging with the design principles deployed in Lolita fashion.[19] His study of Lolita fashion traces the sources of inspiration for Lolita designers such as BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT, Innocent World and Victoria Maiden to concepts and forms found in *shōjo*[20] literature and European dress forms from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Monden (2015: 78) views the wearing of Lolita fashion to be a kind of 'delicate revolt' in that the style '… operate[s] in a position that moves between sweet, non-sexual and autonomous conditions'. This thesis will interrogate this idea further in terms of how playing

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[18] Monden (2015) exhibits a high degree of thoughtfulness and reflexivity in acknowledging the limitations associated with studying representations (i.e. images) of a community. He (2015: 13) observes that 'representations of a society and media and cultural texts, could possibly be selected and distorted, mirroring both the reality and ideology of that certain society'. Monden takes great care to draw upon the cultural context of the objects he studies and consults closely with designers.

[19] While Monden's (2015) study of *kawaii* fashion along with others (such as Nguyen (2016), Younker (2011), Winge (2008) and Lunning (2011)) specifically focus on Lolita fashion, this study has sought to also incorporate other lesser-studied *kawaii* styles. As a result of the emphasis on Lolita fashion in the literature, however, the thesis appears to focus on Lolita fashion at the expense of other fashion styles.

[20] *Shōjo* translates to 'girl' and has been described as 'the subtle state between 'child' and 'adult', 'male' and 'female', and is comparatively detached from heterosexual economy' (Monden 2015: 78).

with fashion enables *kawaii* fashion participants to exercise a form of autonomy. Most significantly, Monden (2015: 118) highlights the connection between dress and self, in that 'it reflects and is intertwined with our desires and wills' and is '… inextricable from our inner self'. This suggests that a study into the 'inner self' of these participants will help us understand better how the act of creating outfits reflects how they play with identity.

While Fashion Studies scholars over the years have attempted to map out the scope of the word 'fashion' in its contemporary usage, the word is often used interchangeably with 'dress' because 'fashion is associated primarily with dress' Kawamura (2005: 4). Given the limited scope of the thesis, it cannot properly contribute to this debate, and so this thesis uses 'fashion' interchangeably with 'dress' or 'outfit'. It is, however, possible to situate where this study sits within current understandings of fashion and dress.

Valerie Steele (2005: 12) defines fashion as 'the prevailing style of dress or behaviour at any given time, with the strong implication that fashion is characterised by change'. In this sense, this study seeks to capture a community of individuals who subscribe to a particular mode of dress between 2000 and 2018, and who also engage in similar creative behaviours. Although this fashion style is ostensibly niche, it has nonetheless prevailed over a sustained period of time. The temporality of Steele's definition implies that various forces (such as class, taste, philosophy and politics) shape and change fashion over the eras. This insight is supported by Wilson (1985: 3) who writes that '[f]ashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continuous changing of styles'. In the context of *kawaii* fashion then, we might ask who or what is directing this change? As this thesis focusses on just one period of time in Harajuku, it is not possible to capture this temporal change on a macro scale; however, given that it examines creative processes there is the potential to determine if affect contributes to this process of change.

Dress is also recognised in Fashion Studies as a form of creative expression. In particular Nicklas and Pollen (2015: 1) and Monden (2015: 9) recognise that it can be a primary mode of expression and negotiation of identity for those who identify as women. In his writings on *kawaii* Japanese fashion, Monden (2015: 9) considers dress to be that in which 'autonomy and independence are likely to be woven'. As such the objects that are chosen to be incorporated into one's dress constitute a form of creative expression and choice in the contemporary era. Wilson (1992: 6) supports this idea in her poetic description of dress as a tool that can be used to 'write' or 'draw' representations of the self. This approach provides a unique way to challenge the idea that fashion is a form of symbolic oppression of the wearer,[21] and highlights the potential for the creative practices of these participants to be meaningful.

If clothing is a form of creative expression and experimentation, then it is worth considering if this is an act that must be witnessed. If dress is a form of presentation of identity, does it need to be witnessed and validated in some way by an audience? This becomes relevant as we consider the introverted worlds of *kawaii* fashion participants mentioned at the opening of this introduction. This type of persona suggests that one might not wish to be seen or noticed by others. As such, we must consider whether their mode of dress is intended to be viewed by others, or if they are dressing for themselves.

Finally, Fashion Studies has recently turned to forming a deeper understanding of the relationship between affect and fashion, specifically in relation to its significance for the wearers and their experience of wearing the clothing. Taylor (2002: 102) writes that '[o]ne of the great voids of dress history has been its failure

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[21] One position proposed by Thorstein Veblen (2011; originally published 1984) is that feminine fashion signifies dependency and subservience, a concept that has been extrapolated upon by feminist scholars such as Sheila Jeffreys (2005). Other feminist scholars have challenged this view of fashion as an oppressive force, such as Leigh Summers (2001). Monden (2015) also interrogates this idea at length in his monograph, with a specific focus on the ornamental style of Lolita fashion.

to establish emotional responses to clothing and appearance'. This thesis explores this void in the context of 'do-it-yourself' fashion where emotional responses to materials and the final 'appearance' are crucial. This thesis describes the form of dress worn by participants as a 'fashion ensemble' to highlight the relationships between each found object in creating a holistic expression. As such, the practices of *kawaii* fashion communities fall within the category of 'do-it-yourself' fashion, whereby dress is formed from found or purchased materials to create a new look. If we consider Barnard's (1996) explanation of the Latin root word for fashion, *facere*, which means 'to make', we can consider the possibility that participants quite literally 'fashion' dress from the materials that move them.

Affect and Cuteness

The Sociological study of affect, emotion and imagination examines spheres of experience, and expresses a commitment to non-representational theoretical studies in the discipline. Non-representational theory refers to the study of embodied experience, and is an alternative approach to structuralist understandings of the social and cultural that involves the use of semiotics, symbolic interactionism and so on. Recently, these non-representational studies have placed particular emphasis on the 'micro' experiences of emotion, which refer to the individual's experience of action, reaction and meaning making in their everyday lives. Microsociology allows us to study social bonds, with an emphasis on 'the complexity of behavior and on the key role of sequences of emotion' (Scheff 1994: 19; Tamboukou 2015). That is, that it enables us to observe closely the feelings and actions that form in response to the individual's relations with others.

Contemporary uses of affect tend to rely on the understanding of affect developed in Benedict de Spinoza's *Ethics* (2005; originally published 1677). Affect refers to the individual's (subject's) sensorial experiences to the objects that they encounter in their everyday lives. In the logic presented by Spinoza, affect (*affectus*) is

considered to be a temporal state of bodily experience in response to the objects (including other bodies) around it. These states have the ability to increase, diminish, aid or restrain the body in responding to the objects around it. Spinoza uses 'affection' (*affectio*) to refer to the state which occurs when two bodies meet and experience each other. Gilles Deleuze (1988; originally published 1970) in his text S*pinoza: Practical Philosophy* sought to elaborate on these concepts, focussing on affect and affection as a form of sensorial response rather than emotional response (which they instead refer to as sentiment). Recently, researchers have sought to explore forms of bodily experience in a movement that is described by Clough and Hailey (eds. 2007) as 'the affective turn'. In summary, these studies highlight the potential of relations and experience to increase or decrease capacities for action. By exploring what participants feel in response to objects they find *kawaii,* we can come to appreciate the significance of their modes of dress in terms of how *kawaii* objects increase participants' capacity to act.

While authors such as Deleuze separate affect from emotion, recent research seeks to explore both together as part of the realm of experience. In particular, Sara Ahmed (2004: 6) in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* argues that 'the distinction between sensation and emotion can only be analytic' such that the process of distinguishing between the two treats experience as an abstraction, one that is removed from the lived experience of individuals. Ahmed seeks to address emotion and affect in the context of lived experience as mutually imbricated, whereby emotion leaves the individual 'affected by something'. In this sense, affect has the power to increase or diminish the capacity of the body through emotion. For example, a feeling of excitement from collaborative teamwork may increase the body's capacity to interact with other bodies with a sense of direction and purpose, whereas a feeling of depression from isolation from other bodies may diminish one's ability to seek out social contact. In her text, Ahmed (2004: 6) uses the term 'impression' to account for 'bodily sensation, emotion and thought' in order to avoid such analytical distinctions. I, in a similar respect, also interweave accounts of

sensation, emotion and imagination into accounts of 'affect', with a particular focus on how participants feel in response to *kawaii* objects.

This thesis seeks to explore the affective experience of participants in *kawaii* fashion communities in creating and wearing *kawaii* fashion. Do they experience states that increase or aid the body's capacity to respond to its surroundings, or do they diminish their capacity? What might constitute an 'increase' or an 'aiding capacity' in *kawaii* fashion communities? What states do participants experience in relation to other bodies wearing *kawaii* fashion, and what states do they experience when non-participants react to their body?

Furthermore, what I feel may be missing from this attempt to account for 'spheres of experience' is the capacity of the individual to creatively engage with the stimulus presented by the objects they perceive through the imagination. Through the imagination, the individual is able to create, explore and depict in their mind alternative realities and possibilities to everyday reality. There are different ways to understand what it is to imagine. For instance, cognitive scientists focus on the act of imagining as thinking while others explore imagination as imagery, where one can form pictures in the mind (Thomas 2010; Byrne 2018; Byrne 2005; Kearney 2002). In the context of this thesis, I consider how the imagination might be incorporated into discussions of affect.

In current studies, parallels have already been drawn between the imagination and emotion. For example, Kahneman and Miller (1986) and Roese (1997) assert that imagining alternative possibilities to one's current reality has the ability to amplify emotions. Byrne (2005) and Landman (1993) qualify these emotions as, in the words of Byrne (2005: 9) 'regret, guilt, shame, relief, hope and anticipation'. In addition to recognising the emotional potential of the imagination, scholars have typified two forms of imaginative thought and image-making in relation to objects in the everyday life of the individual. The first form is described as pure creative

imagining which does not have a direct relationship to the everyday. Bryne (2005: 2) describes this as, 'when someone writes a poem or a play or a piece of music or produces a work of art'. Dunbar (1997) and Sternberg and Davidson (1995) also attribute experiment design, scientific discovery or innovation as a kind of creative imaginative thought. Kearney (2002: 16) describes these creative processes as involving the 'fictional projection of non-existent things' and a fascination with 'illusions' which confuse 'what is real with the unreal'. The second form derives its logic and substance from objects of the everyday life of the individual which are then used to play out alternative possibilities or outcomes. Bryne defines this creative process as 'counterfactual' because they are contrary to what has occurred in reality. Some examples include 'when someone thinks about how an event in the past might have turned out differently, or when someone creates a daydream or a fantasy' (Bryne 2005: 2). As such this form of imagining is based upon reality in some way, whereas pure creative imaginings are not based upon reality. In the case of counterfactual thought, the individual is able to develop alternatives to reality, yet is still aware of the 'fault line' that separates reality and the imaginary (Miller and McFarland 1986). This thesis focuses on both processes to consider how the individual experiences imaginings that are both creative and counterfactual. This thesis explores what the affective themes and content of these imaginings might be.

In this sense, the imagination can act as an object that brings about emotional affect in the individual. I wish to use the instance of *kawaii* fashion communities to develop a better understanding of the imagination's capacity to engage with and amplify the experiences of emotion. This thesis seeks to explore what relationship objects have to the imaginings of *kawaii* fashion participants when they create their fashion style. Furthermore, I am interested in exploring how *kawaii* objects are able to act as a stimulus for this imagining and how they might amplify the potency of these imaginings through their use in style-making. In this sense, I want to suggest

that imagination can be identified as part of the realm of experience (specifically of objects), together with sensorial and emotional affect.

This thesis not only explores how *kawaii* objects cause individuals to think, feel or imagine, but explores how their responses influence participants' decisions to create their own fashion style. In this thesis, I show that the use of *kawaii* fashion allows participants to further amplify their experiences of *kawaii* objects by attaching them to their bodies. To what degree do the objects used by *kawaii* fashion practitioners shape their experiences of emotion? How does emotion, as it is experienced by the individual, shape the body?

As this study specifically addresses experiences of cuteness as a type of affectual response, it is important to consider current debates about the source of affect and the extent to which it lies between subject and object. Scholars who have explored affect have contemplated whether experience comes from the object itself or from subject. Some use Descartes to claim that objects themselves have the ability to evoke, and call out in bodies, particular emotions (Brentano 2003: 161; Greenspan 2003: 265). Ahmed (2004: 5) uses Cartesian ideas to suggest that '… objects have causal properties, suggesting that we don't have feelings for objects because of the nature of objects. Feelings instead take the 'shape' of the contact we have with objects'. If we consider this logic, whereby '… emotions are shaped by contact with objects, rather than being caused by objects …' then the experience can be attributed to something relational between subject and object, whereby 'emotions are not simply "in" the subject or object' (Ahmed 2004: 6). Through one's previous and ongoing contact with the object, one's experience of it shifts and moves. This distinction becomes significant when considering current studies of cuteness and affect, where there are two divergent views: 1) cuteness is something which is conveyed to the subject by the object (in that it has the capacity to evoke care giving behaviour); or 2) the subject projects ideas of cuteness onto the object itself.

This distinction is significant to this thesis as it seeks to understand how *kawaii* fashion participants experience their creative process of *kawaii* style making.

While Anglophone studies of cuteness and studies of Japan's *kawaii* tend to operate in separate spheres both have pointed to the potential for affect to enable us to come to a deeper understanding of the nature of cuteness. Sharon Kinsella (1995: 224) recognises, in her account of *kawaii* handwriting,[22] that individuals 'had an intimate relation with the text and express their feelings to their friends more easily'. In particular, her observation of the relational aspect of *kawaii* (whereby consumers might attempt to develop relationships through cute objects if they are unable to develop them with people) suggests that there is something experiential about *kawaii* (Kinsella 1995: 228). Allison's (2004: 43) work suggests that *kawaii* operates as a template for relations between the dependent child and the adult who is depended upon. Yano (2015: 56) develops this notion further in her own study of *kawaii* culture, in describing k*awaii* culture as creating ongoing connections and relationality that echo kinship bonds between mother and child (Yano 2015: 56).

Emerging studies that consider *kawaii* and affect have also sought to understand how this phenomenon might shape the experiences of alternative communities. For instance, An Nguyen's (2016) argues in her study of affect in Lolita fashion that the happiness experienced by participants towards *kawaii* objects leads practitioners to play with a *kawaii* mode of dress. Nguyen argues that Lolita fashion practitioners assert their individuality by surrounding themselves with objects that make them feel happy. For Nguyen this experience of *kawaii* puts participants in touch with a desire to be removed from social and familial obligations of womanhood. Lolita

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[22] Kinsella (1995: 222) characterises *kawaii* handwriting as 'extremely stylised, rounded characters with English, *katakana*, and little cartoon pictures such as hearts, stars and faces inserted randomly into the text …' In Japan, *kanji* and *hiragana* are the two main writing systems used for Japanese words whereas *katakana* is typically used to write foreign words. The decision to write Japanese words in *katakana* in this instance subverts the conventions of the language.

fashion in this account manifests as a 'girly' feeling that belongs to neither childhood nor adulthood.

Is Kawaii Infantile?

The focus of this thesis is on the experience of female participants who engage with these cute objects and how they create and wear *kawaii* fashion. This study focusses on four *kawaii* styles: Decora fashion, Fairy *kei,* Lolita fashion and *Hime Deko*. In extending the above discussion of the kinds of affectual experience that surround 'cute' objects to the study of these fashion styles, it is also important to consider the ways that cuteness plays out in the context of a women's fashion community in Japan. As a result, my discussion is pulled by an undercurrent that reflects on the relation between *kawaii* and gender in order to understand why women engage with *kawaii* objects and to consider the broader implications that this engagement has for patriarchal oppression. In this section, I will provide an overview of these discussions in order to set up some questions that this thesis will address in relation to *kawaii* being 'infantile' and performative for the male gaze. In the account below, I will briefly overview current discussions of *kawaii* as infantile and consider the different typifications of the *shōjo* in order to introduce related questions that this thesis explores.

To situate this thesis in current discussions of *kawaii*, it is important to examine the claim that *kawaii* is 'childish' or 'infantile'. Kinsella (1995) in her highly influential chapter on *kawaii* 'Cuties in Japan', asserts that *kawaii* involves a sense of the infantile, a claim that she supports through a mixed methods approach which includes interviews, surveys, document analysis and linguistic analysis. Her (1995: 221-222) etymological study of the word '*kawaii*' allows her to determine that '*kawaii* is a derivation of a term whose principle meaning was "shy" or "embarrassed" and whose secondary meanings are "pathetic", "vulnerable",

"darling", "loveable" and "small"'.[23] This statement is indicative of a broader tendency to associate cute objects with the infantile. Indeed studies of Lolita Fashion, such as those by Theresa Winge (2008) and Frenchy Lunning (2011) view *kawaii* fashion as a means to prolong childhood.

Furthermore, the concept of this cuteness being 'infantile' and 'childish' is further complicated when considered alongside notions of gender. Ngai (2005: 814) for instance, argues that cute objects tend to be 'soft, round, and deeply associated with the infantile and the feminine'. Current writings on *kawaii* and gender emphasise two attributes: first, they consider the relationship between cuteness and childhood; and second, they consider the relationship between cute performativity and young women. One way this is explored is through an analysis of typifications of *shōjo* in Japanese culture. The term '*shōjo*' in this respect is simultaneously (i) a representation found in media such as literature, illustrations and manga, (ii) an abstract concept circulating in the popular consciousness and (iii) that which can be performed through *kawaii* fashion. *Shōjo* is multifaceted and open to multiple interpretations that can emphasise the experience of young womanhood, romance, friendship and pleasure. For example, Monden's (2015: 78) text calls *shōjo* 'the subtle state between "child" and "adult", "male" and "female" … [which] … is comparatively detached from heterosexual economy' which allows '… Japanese women to appear girlish and cute while being segregated from obvious sexualisation'. In contrast, Christine Yano (2015) in *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific* defines the *shōjo* in two categories that perform for the male gaze: 'one through the adult come-on of sexuality, the other through the infantilised allure of dependency'. While accounts of the infantile and girlish practices of *kawaii* fashion practitioners and consumers of *kawaii* goods have been

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[23] Kinsella (1995: 222) acknowledges that current usages of the word *kawaii* diverge from this root meaning and while that *kawaii* 'still has some nuances of pitiful' *kawaiisou* now means 'pathetic, poor, and pitiable in a generally negative' but also 'pleasing' sense.

treated in a positive or neutral manner,[24] others critique this cute culture because it reproduces gender disparity and feeds into a broader issue in Japan's culture where '*kawaii* as the cute, the infantile, the feminine, and the sexual trivialises historical enmity and controversial realities of the nation' (Yano 2015: 266). To this end, Yano has highlighted concerns regarding *kawaii* culture's potential to infantilise Japan as a nation and to fetishise Japanese women as submissive. If we return to Spinoza's definition of affect, it could be said that infantilising the individual and acting upon their body accordingly 'diminishes' their body's capacity to act in the world by being rendered 'helpless'. As such, the act of labelling a group as infantile should not be taken lightly, and needs to be investigated with close reference to practitioners' views.

Research Questions

With the above discussion in mind of fashion, affect, cuteness and *kawaii*, this thesis poses these research questions:

1. What is the personal significance of the objects worn by *kawaii* participants? What informs their choice of particular objects to incorporate into their style?
2. How do practitioners use *kawaii* objects to express their sense of self and identity?
3. How does *kawaii* fashion come into being and what are the means by which a *kawaii* fashion community forms?

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[24] See for instance Monden (2015), Steele, Mears, Kawamura, Narumi (2010), Godoy (2007), Younker (2011) and Kawamura (2012).

Methodology

This research incorporates interviews with *kawaii* fashion practitioners – models, designers and consumers – who reflect upon their own visual practices. During 2013 and 2014, 20 participants and designers aged from 17 to 50 were interviewed; 17 females and three males.[25] This sample provided adequate saturation for the purposes of this study due to the high level of commonality in participant responses. The number was sufficient to demonstrate that the phenomenon of *kawaii* fashion is more complex than originally thought. As such, my study is informed by the principle that it is best practice for qualitative research to '… build a convincing analytical narrative based on "richness, complexity and detail" rather than on statistical logic' (Baker and Edwards 2012: 5; Marshall 1996; Sandelowski 1995).

Participants were recruited via the judgement sampling method (also known as purposive sampling). This method involves the selection of participants who were best positioned to aid in answering the research questions of the thesis (Marshall 1996: 523; Emmel 2014: 64; Corbetta 2003: 211-212). The suitability of these participants was determined by criteria based on: being involved in the community for at least three years; wearing or making *kawaii* fashion on a regular basis and actively contributing to the community through making, designing, modelling or organising events. While some studies of *kawaii* fashion have canvassed participants across Japan (Nguyen 2016), I focussed on the Tokyo area so as to explore the ideas held by individuals in this part of Japan in more depth. Snowball sampling was critical in locating suitable participants. This meant that I followed a participant's recommendation to invite others to participate in the study. The study was advertised by linking a recruitment webpage across social media including

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[25] Through these interviews it became apparent that *kawaii* has gendered connotations in Japan. Many males wearing colourful alternative fashion do not identify as *kawaii* fashion practitioners. Further research into the relationship between *kawaii* and gender performativity is required.

Twitter, YouTube and the Japanese blogging website, *Ameblo*. Doing so enabled participants to disseminate information about my study on their own terms, in their own slang and visual style. An experimental aspect of the recruitment strategy was the use of photography and graphic design to establish an image of me as a '*kawaii* researcher' via social media and the recruitment website. This created interest for participants (who blogged about my website as part of their personal *kawaii* fashion practice) and also allowed me to demonstrate that I was genuinely interested in and sympathetic towards *kawaii* fashion practices in my research. This was important because journalists or other outsiders regularly seek access to the community and consequently, the participants were concerned about whether their fashion would be represented in a way that they felt accurately reflected their ideas. By presenting the recruitment information as *kawaii* through the use of graphic design, and through my mode of dress (which was informed by four years of experience prior to the commencement of the interviews in 2013 and included pink hair, *kawaii* makeup, and Lolita and Decora fashion garments) participants were able to accommodate my presence into their creative imaginings and respond to and treat me as they might treat their own *kawaii* friends or belongings. For example, participants referred to me as 'Megu-Sociologist-*chan*'. This had the effect of transforming me into an accessible non-threatening figure.[26] The circulation of our interactions (e.g. collecting a photo with me) on their social media was another way that participants interacted socially with each other.

In this research a variety of participants were canvassed based upon the style genres they identified with (including Lolita, Fairy *kei*, *Hime Deko*, and Decora) as well as their mode of participation in the community (model, designer, musician, or someone who wears the clothes without a specific 'job' attached to this practice). This study captured a sample size of at least three participants for each of the above categories (which may intersect – for example, a Decora model may also be a

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[26] '*Chan*' is a common feminine honorific term of endearment for children, close friends and youthful women. It is commonly used in the *kawaii* fashion community as a sign of friendship, as opposed to '*san*' which is equivalent to the more respectful 'Ms' or 'Mr'.

musician) to ensure an appropriate level of saturation was reached. This methodological approach was chosen in order to gain clear insights into the participants' own perceptions of their creative practice as well as the thoughts and feelings each experienced while creating (Weiss 1994: 1).

Interviews were conducted in July 2013 and Feburary 2014. Each interview with ran for an average time of 90mins. By the use of qualitative open-ended semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3 for a sample interview schedule), participants were asked questions about their involvement in the community; their process in putting together their outfits and why they chose particular objects to complement their style; why they wear *kawaii* fashion; what concepts inspire their creative ideas; and their involvement in the community. The use of qualitative interviews was chosen over an ethnographic study to allow scope for the research to identify 'common patterns of themes between particular types of respondents' (Warren 2001: 85). While qualitative interviews involve direct discussion with individual participants and a focus on their experiences, an ethnographic study would have involved participant observation of the field site, which would result in a focus on my own experiences of the community instead. Semi-structured interviews allowed us to develop a discourse together that shaped the interview. It was a 'dance together' that extended 'outward in social space and backward and forward in time' (Warren 2001: 98; Mishler 1986: 2). For example, by responding to participants' answers in asking for more information or pursuing a topic relevant to the research that was of interest to them, I was able to playfully engage with their ideas without concern for a story being told in linear order. Because our interaction focussed on their specific experience, we were able to explore together the participant's social experience of the world in relation to *kawaii*. This process enabled the participants to lead as experts in their own lives.

The study used Frank's (2010) concept of the dialogical form to drive the semi-structured interviews and to interpret the data inductively. This approach places

emphasis on dialogue and interaction as a means of learning, and as such prioritises the individual experiences of participants as they understand them. This is a process of 'studying up' whereby a relationship is established between researcher and participant, where the researcher is there to learn from the participant, rather than to impose ideas upon them. As Frank (2010: 99) explains '[p]articipants are experts, at least in their own lives, and the dialogical interviewer is there to learn from the participant'. This approach is informed by the idea that '… humans (social actors) possess "inner states" by which they understand, interpret and evaluate the courses of action open to them' (Muggleton 2000: 10). By allowing interviewees to share stories of their creative processes and to be experts in their own lives, I was able to determine what aspects of the creative practice were constituted as meaningful for the participants, and what the fashion contributes to their sense of self or identity. This idea was determined by what participants offered as meaningful to their creative practice, including the concepts behind their clothing, the act of making, use of cosmetics and photography. Participants offered their insights as the dialogue of the interview unfolded, initiated by questions about specific items they were wearing on the day or questions about their favourite things. This process allowed me to theorise the answers to my research questions on the basis of what was 'related to whatever aspects of the empirical scene that seem relevant' rather than determining what was meaningful from the perspective of 'outsider-as-expert' (Woods 1977: 75). This required me to resist the temptation to 'polish' participants into an ideal political actor, so as to avoid the view that there is a singular 'true essence of reality that exists objectively and independently of how it appears to us in phenomenal forms' (Muggleton 2000: 16). To attempt to shape participants into an idealised political actor would result in a study whereby 'reality presents itself in a distorted way and appears to be other than it actually is' (Morrison 1998: 47). These participants are depicted in this study as they appeared in interviews – passionate, patient and prepared to teach me the ways of their community.

In addition to this inductive analysis, data collected from all 20 interviews were coded thematically, and then analysed through a case-focussed strategy. From these case studies, 8 were selected for a collective case study to be presented in this thesis. These case studies were selected by their ability to reflect the themes highlighted across all 20 interviews (thus, their generalisability) and their salience as illustrations of the theory discussed. Efforts were also made to present a diverse representation of the fashion styles found in *kawaii* fashion communities (Lolita fashion, Fairy *kei*, Decora fashion, and *Hime Deko*). This case-foccussed approach to analysing data and the selection of exemplary respondents is recognised in qualitative research as an effective means of conveying findings to readers (Weiss 1994; Flvbjerg 2013). A collective case study presents a 'coherent story' for the reader to track, whilst gaining a sense of 'image of how it all works' in terms of the theory and phenomenon accounted for by this thesis accounts (Weiss 1994: 153; Silverman 2010: 139). The intention of presenting the analysis in this way is to allow the reader to learn not only about these specific participants, but also other participants who are like them (Weiss 1994: 173). While this does result in the presentation of a small sample of data, it allows both author and reader to explore the richness and complexity of experience through the nuanced views of reality presented by each participant (Flyvbjerg 2013: 392; Silverman 2010: 139). Where applicable, any variations in participant answers outside of the case studies presented are noted in this thesis. The case studies themselves are interwoven throughout the chapters where they best illustrate the theory discussed, so as to aid the reader in tracing connections between participant experiences and the argument. The participants who are discussed in this thesis are 90884, Tiara, Kumamiki, Lolitina, Doll Classica, Pink Hime, Alice and the Vice President of a Lolita designer label. These participants have been assigned pseudonyms, which they selected themselves. An introduction to these participants is available in Appendix 2.

Ethics approval for this research project was granted by UNSW Sydney (project reference number HC12614) and was conducted under the supervision of the School of Social Sciences, UNSW Sydney. Participants were provided with a participant information statement and consent form in Japanese, and before the interview were given an opportunity to review its contents and offer their written consent. Participants were also provided with a withdrawal of consent form. In the case of one participant who was under the age of 18, written parental consent was sought and I underwent a working with children check.

One issue that I encountered during the research design for this research project was the different expectations that Australia and Japan have of seeking consent and approval to conduct social research. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan does not have an ethics approval protocol for social research, and expects researchers to conduct themselves according to the rules of their institution. Likewise, the local council in Tokyo did not have a research approval procedure. As such, as per the guidance of the Human Research and Ethics Panel at UNSW Sydney, I ensured that I followed all UNSW Sydney codes of conduct and rules as per the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

In addition to the matter of differing expectations between Australian and Japanese research institutions, my insider status did not come without its own complications. Foremost, there was a need to recognise the ways that I, as an insider, was moved by *kawaii* objects, and to acknowledge that outsiders may not share my experience. Distance from the community after fieldwork was needed so as to best identify and qualify my personal biases. Secondly, my privilege and foreignness as a non-Japanese woman completing post-graduate education had the potential to create a barrier between myself and the participants. This was mitigated by the use of interpreters and my own presentation. The interpreters selected had experience with *kawaii* fashion, as participants themselves with relevant experience in the

Japanese and English language. These interpreters either wore *kawaii* fashion themselves, or provided services to participants (specifically, a tea house) along with relevant experience in Japanese and English interpretation. This ensured that the language used to communicate ideas was framed in terminology used by participants in the community, and allowed for greater nuance in formulating follow up questions. The interpreters were vital in detecting the subtleties in each participant's responses and reporting them to me at the time of the interview. These interviews were then translated into English by a professional 'Japanese to English' translator with expertise in the slang and expressions used by the community. The disadvantage of this approach was that I was unable to ask follow-up questions immediately and had to wait until after the interview transcription was complete. This said, such issues can also occur during interviews conducted in the researcher's native tongue, as it is easy to not completely appreciate the implications of things participants say until sometime later.[27] Along with interpreters who were genuine participants in the community, my presentation of self also communicated visually the understanding, enthusiasm and sympathy I had for participants so they might feel safe to communicate their ideas freely. This approach enabled participants to feel free in expressing playfully their experiences of *kawaii* fashion to an interested audience. While it is difficult to determine how significant this presentation of self was, it was commented on and praised through verbalisations and touch as participants inspected my dress, held my hands or touched my face with excitement. This suggests to me that my presentation contributed a degree of intimacy to the interview that may not otherwise have been experienced.

Furthermore, my status as an outsider (an Anglo-Australian PhD researcher) seemingly provided me with more mobility than a young Japanese woman, as most participants commented off-tape that they participated partly out of curiosity to

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[27] See for instance accounts and advice offered in Rubin and Rubin (2012), Weiss (1994), Berger (2015), Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2007), and Frank (2010).

see what a young woman completing a PhD might 'look like'. The feedback that I received was that it was unusual for a young woman to seek a PhD let alone investigate a topic as 'soft' as *kawaii* as opposed to others. Of course, there are numerous scholars in Japan, including women, who study aspects of *kawaii* culture, so this observation is indicative of the current perception of members of the *kawaii* fashion community of women and education. Their surprise also suggests that they do not view their community as worthy of academic acknowledgement or interest. As such, my privilege as an educated white woman enabled greater access in some areas, particularly to business and government sectors. But this outsider status was also carefully considered in the research design to ensure that any privilege was used to provide a platform for Japanese women to voice their experiences.

Theory

Now that the thesis has been situated in key literatures and a methodological overview has been given, this section will turn to the theory I used to explore the set research questions.[28] In order to explore the process in which *kawaii* fashion participants create their outfits, Donald Winnicott's (2005) notion of play and creativity becomes useful in understanding how one responds imaginatively to the objects that one encounters. I will provide an overview of the concepts of play and creativity below. Through creating and playing with fashion, I argue that participants are able to explore their identities and to develop who they feel they are or might become. This involves interaction with objects that occupy the individual's world and which are enhanced by their imagination and feelings. When turning to consider how this creative act manifests into a social activity, Erving Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical analogy allows me to offer interesting insights

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[28] Although it could be argued that these thinkers impart a Western bias, I have attempted to mitigate this concern by means of an inductive analysis of Japanese interview transcripts along with the incorporation of literature from Japanese Studies.

about how participants 'act out' and perform the identities (current or potential) realised through their created outfits. Together, Winnicott and Goffman provide an account of how fashion communities form and sustain themselves in both individual and group activities.

In this thesis, play is used to describe the process through which an individual responds to objects they find *kawaii*. The action manifests in them feeling inspired by the object to the extent that it is incorporated into a fashion ensemble. Individuals can also respond to the presence of others wearing *kawaii* clothing. This creates a kind of social play where participants are inspired by each other and affirm each other's creativity. Play refers to activities that involve experimentation, the imagination and creativity. Johan Huizinga (1950; originally published 1938) is one of the earliest authorities on play and explores the activity in his text *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. For Huizinga, play spaces are created by the coming together of individuals who have a collective sense of purpose and who are aware of the 'rules' which they must follow in engaging in play. These rules of play allow a social space to unfold between the individuals, one that is held together by its own internal logic. As these rules are primarily known by the players and not outsiders, the unfolding play forms a 'temporary' social world 'within the ordinary world' (Huizinga 1950: 10).[29]

Huizinga's work is helpful for providing a general insight into play, but for the purpose of this thesis, Winnicott offers an explicit account of how objects are incorporated into this process. In his text *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott, was largely

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[29] Eiji Ōtsuka (1996; 2004) also writes on the 'worlds' constructed by communities, with a specific focus on the phenomenon in Japan. Ōtsuka (2004: 12) studies 'media-dependent' groupings or fan cultures which he views to be as intelligible identities amongst a diverse range of other identities in Japanese society. As the economy has enabled a vast range of identities in Japan to flourish, particular communities present themselves as one among many. Ōtsuka (1996: 236) views these communities to be symptomatic expressions of specific generational issues in Japan and considers the documentation of these groupings as a historical moment to be paramount. Ōtsuka argues that this historical documentation is of greater importance than exploring the interiority and selfhood of participants. As such Huizinga's (1950) theorisation of play has been utilised in this thesis as it allows us to explore the nature of these 'social worlds' as well as the selfhood of participants.

interested in exploring how objects are used in acts of creativity and play. For Winnicott (2005: 55), playing involves the body interacting with objects in its surroundings. Certain transitional objects are selected which enable the individual to fantasise about broader, more fantastical things (for example, one can make a paper plane and have fantasies of flight). Distinguished from thinking and wishing, play is an action that is both real and imagined, and involves acting upon one's surroundings (Winnicott 2005: 55).

The imagination is another significant concept borrowed from Winnicott that this thesis uses. This term denotes the mental images, thoughts and feelings that an individual experiences as a means of exploring 'the world and … the place where dream and life are the same thing' (Winnicott 2005: 37). Participants attempt to conjure and invent new characters, scenes and happenings in their imagination in response to objects they discover in their everyday world. The objects that correspond with their fantasies conjure an affective response, and they can be selected as objects of play. For example, a participant might fantasise about what it would be like to be a kitten, but may not wish to become a kitten in reality. In contrast, a participant might fantasise about becoming or befriending a princess and all this might entail, but the individual also feels that this is a possibility they would like to realise in reality.

The final concept from Winnicott's text that will assist this thesis is the 'not-me', a term Winnicott uses to describe that which is neither part of nor associated with an individual's sense of self'. In contrast to 'me', the 'not-me' is 'that which the individual has decided to recognise (with whatever difficulty and even pain) as truly external, which is outside magical control (Winnicott 2005: 55). This term describes that which the individual perceives to be separate from themselves, something that is exotic and other. As such 'not-me' is a descriptive term used by an individual to differentiate that which is 'me' and that which isn't. Winnicott suggests that through play, an individual can explore what it would be like to have attributes of

the 'not-me'. That is, through engaging with creative or playful activities, individuals are able to immerse themselves in an experience of newness and difference with a sense of curiosity. This incorporation of the 'not-me' involves a transformation through struggle. The experience of playing enables the individual to experience illusions of omnipotent control, whereby they are temporarily able to become that which is different from their sense of self. In doing so, the individual can then adopt and absorb this into their identity or cast it aside. As such 'not-me' and the novelty it offers becomes something that individuals persistently aspire to or seek to overcome. In the case of *kawaii* fashion communities that which is 'not-me' is a crucial driving force that inspires participants to dream, fantasise and play. They may seek to salvage things lost in the past, be intrigued by fantasies of the occident or dream of luxuries they may not currently have. This motivates them to tinker with outfits and identities so that they might realise the *kawaii* things that they desire. Importantly for Winnicott, the pursuit of the 'not-me' is perpetual and found in any creative person eager to will their dreams into reality.

Part of this desire to manifest one's imaginings into reality is the need to be seen and acknowledged by others. As such, Goffman's (1990) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is used to map out the types of playful social behaviour that take place in *kawaii* fashion communities. In his text, Goffman uses a dramaturgical analogy to explore this act of presentation whereby individuals perform particular roles. He maintains that roles are performed in front of observers (the front stage) and subsequently 'relaxed' as the individual retreats from view (the back stage). The observer's role in this analogy is to receive the individual's performance (expressed through settings, appearance and mannerisms) of a particular role and affirm the identity that the individual takes on in the moment of this performance. In this thesis, the idea of the back stage is used to discuss how participants might create their outfits and prepare the presentation in anticipation of being seen. The front stage, the space in which one performs their identity then becomes a space where other participants and outsiders react to the presence of the individual

wearing their *kawaii* fashion. This thesis also uses Goffman's concept of the definition of the situation whereby individuals attempt to shape an understanding of the nature of the social interaction that unfolds through their performance on the front stage.

Throughout, this thesis also reflects on the connections between *kawaii* fashion and the gendered performance of femininity. In doing so this thesis explores how femininity is used by *kawaii* fashion practitioners to understand how gender shapes their understanding of self. To illuminate these reflections, Dorothy Smith's (1990) *Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling,* will be used. Smith (1990: 163) highlights the significance of women's agency in their use of femininity which is 'a complex of actual relations vested in texts'. According to Smith, scholars often treat the bodies, behaviours and presentation of 'feminine women' as texts, which results in an objectification of the women themselves. She challenges this objectification and calls for femininity to be interpreted by women who are 'active subjects'. This is achieved by examining how women use femininity as a means of exploring the self. By playing with feminine texts, individuals experience an empowering sense of control over the self. This play, however, can also encourage women to objectify their own bodies through comparing themselves to ideals of beauty. Smith's theory illuminates this tension for *kawaii* fashion participants who pursue a 'not-me' that is distinctly feminine. In this study, Smith's theory will be applied to the objects used by *kawaii* fashion practitioners (such as clothing and cosmetics) as well as some of the fantasies and imaginings described by participants that are considered feminine (such as princesses and dolls).

Argument

I argue that participants experience unique imaginings and fantasies about objects. This takes the form of a physiological and imaginative response which I call affect. Participants call their response to these objects *kawaii*, a term that is associated

with feelings of adoration, joy and comfort. While these objects may possess specific aesthetic attributes, one of their core qualities is that they are not part of the participant's immediate sense of self, and the novelty of the object stimulates the imagination. To explore the potential of these objects for the self, participants engage with these new objects as an expression of what Winnicott calls the 'not-me'. Participants imagine, make and assemble new things in a creative combination and recombination of the self and the new as expressed by the not-me. I argue that participants incorporate these objects into their everyday lives to carry as a form of presenting this combination of the 'me' and 'not-me' as their new self. In anticipation of being seen by others, participants modify their appearance to try to control what Goffman calls 'the definition of the situation' in the hope that others may see them as *kawaii*.[30] As such, both Winnicott and Goffman offer heuristic devices that help us consider the multi-facted nature of the self. As both theorists assert that the self is fluid and subject to change, placing their ideas in conversation with each other presents interesting opportunities to consider if one can ever 'truly' find the self.

I argue that participants come together through a mutual appreciation of *kawaii* objects and out of a desire to be affirmed as *kawaii*. Participants then collaborate with each other in a playful manner to act out this affirmation, and participants moderate their appearance even further in order to increase their chances of being praised. Through the 'rules of play' as defined by Huizinga, the participants are able to develop a sense of stylistic coherency. As those who do not partake in this kind of play are unaware of the rules of this fashion community, they become 'outsiders'

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[30] It should be noted that this thesis specifically focusses on how individuals create or assemble and then modify the outfits they wear, but also incorporates the perspectives of individuals who make clothing for others (for instance 90884, Pink Hime, Kumamiki and the Vice President of the Lolita designer label). The design team that works for the Lolita designer label interviewed, as well as 90884, Pink Hime and Kumamiki all wear *kawaii* fashion in public, but the Vice President does not. I classify those who make *kawaii* fashion as participants irrespective of whether they wear the fashion or not in public, due to their contribution to the community in creating items for others to incorporate into their own fashion ensembles. In such cases, a participant might see the dress another has made to be *kawaii* and purchase it to incorporate into their outfit. From Chapter Four onward, the thesis focuses on the experience of wearing *kawaii* fashion in public as an expression of the presentation of self. Further research is required to study the experience of making *kawaii* fashion for others.

and often threaten the stability of the play space and participants' sense of self by challenging their interpretation of the objects incorporated into *kawaii* style.

When an outsider does not understand the definition of the situation as it is conveyed by the participant, this can result in confusion and sometimes the denial that a participant is *kawaii*. This creates anxiety for the participant as it puts them in touch with feelings of separation from the *kawaii* 'not-me' object they originally admired. As such, participants have to negotiate feelings of wanting to be accepted and wanting to express their individuality. This is one of the indications that participants are not attempting to perform the role of a political actor for resistance per se, but instead find themselves entangled in misunderstandings out of their wish to bring their extraordinary outfits into everyday contexts. I argue that because their form of play explores adoration and longing for the 'not-me', participants ultimately seek acceptance and approval, and as such participants struggle between wearing what they love and their fear of rejection.

Contribution

This thesis seeks to contribute to Japanese and Western scholarship that studies *kawaii*, cuteness and affect, and subcultures. In particular, it seeks to strengthen pre-existing critical and descriptive accounts of *kawaii* texts with analytical tools derived from Sociological theory. This thesis also seeks to present an account of *kawaii* fashion that elevates the voices of participants into the international academic sphere, and to provide an analysis that is sympathetic and responsive to the participants' thoughts about their own style-making practices.

This thesis contributes to the field in areas of ethnographic research, current understandings of cuteness and new approaches for understanding fashion subcultures. Primarily, the data captured in this study provide a detailed account of how participants in *kawaii* fashion communities view their creative practices in

style making. As we will establish in Chapter One, many studies of *kawaii* fashion do not offer the participant's perspective in their interpretation of the style's meaning. The use of Winnicott and Goffman offers an entirely new model with which we can come to understand groupings of individuals who creatively use objects stylistically. Furthermore, while many studies have focussed on Lolita fashion,[31] other styles such as Fairy *kei*, Decora fashion and *Hime Deko* have received little attention. This thesis has sought to branch out and document other *kawaii* fashion styles in addition to Lolita fashion.

In terms of methodology, the use of Frank's (2010) dialogical form further reinforces Muggleton's (2000) call for subcultural studies to use qualitative interview approaches to determine the significance of subcultures. This thesis also pushes the theoretical understanding of cuteness and affect further than that considered in current bodies of work such as Sherman and Haidt (2011), Ngai (2012) Dale, Goggin, Leyda et al. (2017).

Chapter Summary

<u>Chapter One</u> situates the thesis in relation to current debates in the literature about cuteness and affect, as well as women and *kawaii* fashion in Japan. Are *kawaii* practitioners 'infantile' or 'childish'? Are they performing for the male gaze? This explores literature that analyses *kawaii* fashion from a distance, and compares its findings with those that consult *kawaii* fashion practitioners directly. In doing so, this chapter unpacks understandings of adulthood and childhood and the problem of 'cutesifying' research subjects (which involves objectifying them and speaking for them).

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[31] See for instance Nguyen (2016), Monden (2015), Kawamura (2012), Younker (2011) and Mackie (2009).

Chapter Two explores *kawaii* fashion practitioners' experiences of *kawaii*. This chapter argues that more attention needs to be paid to understanding the affectual experiences of these individuals to *kawaii*. I explore how the adoration of cute objects enables participants to experience what Winnicott describes as the 'not-me'. I argue that individuals are able to experience unique fantasies triggered by objects which can then be categorised in terms of a fascination with an Other, nostalgia, novelty, disorder.

In Chapter Three, we begin to explore how participants engage in play to create an overlap between inner and external reality to explore the 'not-me'. Through play in the imagination or by means of making, participants are able to incorporate the 'not-me' into their sense of self. This chapter uses interview responses to explore two common themes that constitute the 'not-me' for many participants: princesses and dolls. This chapter will trace some of the descriptions and explanations offered in interviews of how and why *kawaii* fashion practitioners admire princesses and dolls as a 'not-me'. In doing so, this chapter will demonstrate how making and consuming *kawaii* fashion allows participants to extend their affectual experience of *kawaii* into their everyday lives. Through the identification of the 'not-me' that practitioners find in *kawaii* objects through play, *kawaii* fashion practitioners discover new potential for the self.

In Chapter Four we explore how the presentation of self manifests when a participant feels compelled to take their private form of play into the public space. We examine how the process of becoming aware of being looked at informs their presentation of self. This modification of the presentation of self manifests as an attempt to mediate or control judgements from others. Goffman terms this as an attempt to control 'the definition of the situation' held by those participating in a social interaction. Through close readings of interview transcripts, we learn assertions of originality and expertise, producing beauty tutorials, modelling for

photography and makeup application can be considered to be attempts to define the situation.

Chapter Five explores the social nature of *kawaii* fashion communities in terms of the activities undertaken inside the group. Participants are drawn together out of a mutual appreciation of *kawaii* and a wish to be affirmed as worthy of adoration. Social relationships carried out in *kawaii* fashion communities are largely guided by what Huizinga would call 'rules of play'. These rules are understood to be different from the rules of mainstream or 'everyday' activities of individuals. This creates a separation between those who are 'in-the-know' – that is those who know the rules of *kawaii* fashion communities (participants) – and those who are not part of the game (outsiders). These rules shape the definition of the situation between members. In this chapter I draw upon Goffman's writings on expectations and discernibility to highlight the two key attributes of *kawaii* fashion communities' 'rules': that individuals expect to be affirmed, and that in order to be recognised and affirmed, participants must be discernibly *kawaii*. Play in *kawaii* fashion communities results in what Huizinga would describe as a rising 'tension' whereby participants seek to 'win' by being praised. As discernibility increases the chance of being affirmed, 'rules' that lay out style categories are often followed by participants.

Chapter Six examines how *kawaii* fashion participants perceive encounters with 'outsiders' (i.e. those who are not participants in the unfolding play). Unclear on the definition of the situation, outsiders can come to a different understanding of what is unfolding socially than the one held by the practitioner. While many would exercise what Goffman would refer to as 'tact' and others might affirm the appearance of *kawaii* fashion practitioners, others might react with 'hostility'. This chapter explores how participants feel about some of the common misreadings of *kawaii* fashion by people in the street, what behaviours are manifested, and why these misreadings occur in the first instance. I suggest that responses from

outsiders that deny that participants are *kawaii* may remind participants of the original separation they felt towards the *kawaii* 'not-me' object. I close the chapter with a discussion of participants' responses to misreadings of their fashion as cosplay, a sexualised performance or a regression into childish or infantile behaviour.

The thesis concludes by drawing together the findings of these chapters, exploring what has been discovered about *kawaii* and how play and affect may help us to understand *kawaii* fashion communities at a deeper level. Commentary on what insights Winnicott's Goffman's and Huzinga's theories have provided will also be offered, along with recommendations for further research.

Chapter One: A First Look at *Kawaii* Fashion Communities

Figure 3 – Kawaii *fashion participant at Harajuku station. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.*

In this chapter, we will explore how scholars currently understand *kawaii* fashion, as well as cuteness as a concept in general. While research into *kawaii* fashion has primarily focussed on its aesthetic appearance, newly emerging studies have begun to explore what it is like to create, consume and wear *kawaii* fashion from the perspective of participants. This feeds into a broader scholarly interest into cuteness as a concept, as researchers are now beginning to consider cuteness as an experience rather than a mere aesthetic. In canvassing this literature, this chapter considers some of these larger questions about cuteness. Is cuteness an aesthetic (based upon design properties such as roundness or softness), or is it an experience we have of things? Can we 'feel' cuteness? If cuteness is a feeling, is it 'given off' by people or things, or is it something we 'do' to that which we interpret to be cute?

Furthermore, studies into cuteness place emphasis on caregiving relations between the viewer and that which has captured their attention. While this reproduces normative behaviours between adults-as-carers and children-as-the-cared-for this process is disrupted by adults who alter their presentation of self to appear 'cute'. As such, this chapter also explores if adults who wish to appear as cute can only be considered as childish or infantile.

These questions have implications for *kawaii* fashion practitioners on two levels. Firstly, it shapes our understanding of how and why these participants select the objects they incorporate into their mode of dress, and how it might help them shape their sense of self. Secondly, it informs the researcher's perspective of *kawaii* fashion as a site of study in terms of how they conduct their research and how they respond to participants. In this chapter, we will focus on the latter instance by canvassing current studies of *kawaii* fashion.

This chapter will proceed with an overview of some of the key texts on cuteness, exploring the relationship between cuteness and caregiving, and whether cuteness is an aesthetic or an experience. In doing so, we will explore the implications of each approach which will inform the remainder of the chapter. This chapter will then explore studies that treat *kawaii* fashion as a text, which often relies heavily on the scholar's own experience of viewing this mode of dress in person or via pictures. For instance, some scholars such as Thereasa Winge (2008) rely on symbolic interactionism to interpret the meaning behind *kawaii* fashion, whereas Kimiko Akita (2005) draws upon autoethnographic methodologies. A historical understanding of cuteness as an aesthetic has led to a range of textual studies of *kawaii* fashion, where the researcher's own experience of the fashion is assumed to be equivalent to the practitioner's intention. In this sense, *kawaii* fashion practitioners become an object of study, rather than living breathing subjects, with their own motivations, and their own experiences. As a point of comparison, this chapter will then explore research into *kawaii* fashion that relies on qualitative

interviews or open-ended surveys, to examine if the interpretations of *kawaii* fashion offered by scholars correlates with the experiences of participants or other observers.

Cute as Care: Cute Adults, Caregiving and Cuteness as an Aesthetic and Affect

A key theme in studies of cuteness is the role that caregiving behaviours play as part of an individual's response to something cute. This theme derives from Konrad Lorenz's (1943) *Kindchenschema,* which was used to argue that physical attributes have developed in babies (human and animal) through evolution to ensure the survival of the infant by inducing caregiving behaviours in others. This approach was informed by Charles Darwin's suggestion that infants possess an evolutionary quality that encourages adults to provide care. By way of example, ideas of caregiving and cuteness are evident in Daniel Harris's (2000) *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism*, which acknowledges the caregiving role that plays out in cuteness. Harris (2000: 4) suggests that we determine things that are cute based upon 'a quality … [the thing in question] lacks, a certain neediness and inability to stand alone, as if it were an indigent starveling, lonely and rejected because of a hideousness we find more touching than unsightly'. According to this logic, the viewer 'cutesifies' things as part of 'the antiquated religion of infantilism' (Harris 2000: 21). We also see a more nuanced account in Christine Yano's (2015) *Pink Globalisation: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific* in her study of Hello Kitty and fancy goods. Based on her research, Yano (2015: 57) argues that '[f]or women, one can be both "childlike" and "maternal", both the cared for and the caregiver, by way of kawaii'. In this account, women are able to maintain a sense of power as the caregiver, but also relinquish that power in becoming that which is 'cared for'.

As such, responses to cuteness are often characterised in these studies by a need to care for or nurture the thing which has captured the individual's interest due to its small, fragile or pitiful state. In this context, the individual takes the role of caregiver, a position we usually associate with adults. When considering *kawaii* fashion, however, we can see that the standard model of caregiving is disrupted. While *kawaii* fashion practitioners' interactions with and appreciation for cute things can be seen to reproduce the logics of care giving between adult-as-carer and the cute-thing-as-cared-for, there is an added complication. By also wearing cute objects, *kawaii* fashion practitioners themselves may also wish to appear cute. This disrupts the aforementioned logic of caregiving, because here the adult adopts the form of one who appears to need care, a state unbefitting their stage of maturity. It prompts an unusual social relation to unfold between a viewer and a 'cute adult' such that it becomes unclear as to how the viewer ought to behave. Should the viewer in this instance care for this 'cute adult' – who interrupts their social space like a cuckoo fledgling – or should the viewer reject and shun them?

This chapter primarily explores the social moment that unfolds between scholars-as-viewers and *kawaii* fashion practitioners, by concentrating on extracts taken from studies conducted by Sharon Kinsella (1995), Theresa Winge (2008), Frenchy Lunning (2011) and Kimiko Akita (2005), all of whom label *kawaii* fashion practitioners' mode of dress as 'infantile' or 'childish', thereby blurring the boundaries between the child and the adult through a performance of cuteness. Definitionally 'infantile' can refer to behaviour that is unbefitting for someone's age.[32] The word is used to describe an adult or young person who carries out behaviours thought to belong to infancy, such as regression into requiring care or acting in a way that is 'foolish'. If we examine the etymology of the word 'infantile', further insights can be gleaned: the Late Latin *infantilis* suggests that which pertains to an infant, and the Latin *infans* connotes an inability to speak (*in* meaning 'not'

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[32] See Cambridge (2018).

and *fans* meaning 'to speak').[33] While the meaning of *infans* was used practically to refer to an infant who had not yet learned to speak, this has interesting implications when considered in the broader context of attributing to adults the label of 'infantile'. It suggests, perhaps, that the adult is unable to speak for themselves, and thus must be spoken for. In these aforementioned studies, scholars seek to relate their interpretation of *kawaii* fashion in terms of their understanding of the intent of the wearer, and consequently, they quite literally speak for the practitioners.

However, as this chapter will explore, cuteness may not necessarily involve the unfolding of caregiving relations. For instance, Sherman and Haidt (2011: 5) propose that 'in the features that amplify cuteness … social engagement is the recurring theme, more so than caretaking'. Whereas caretaking would involve nurturing the subject, 'social engagement' for Sherman and Haidt (2011: 5) lies in the ability to engage in other activities that are restorative for both the cute subject and the viewer, such as playing, conversing, creating and more. Their argument is that '[c]uteness is … an elicitor of play' (Sherman and Haidt 2011: 5).

Interestingly, studies of *kawaii* in Japan offer a more sympathetic perspective on the viewer's experience and response to cute objects. For example, Hiroshi Nittono's (2016: 89-90) study that found that irrespective of whether they fit the conventional aesthetic requirements, objects that viewers found cute 'draw attention or interest', 'induce positive feelings', 'increase carefulness and narrow the field of attention', and 'improve interpersonal relationships'. Informed by a quantitative study of Japanese students and office employees, Nittono (2016: 91) proposes that 'kawaii as an emotion involves the wish to exist together with the object, rather than consume or conquer it'. Interestingly, Nittono (2016: 91) argues

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[33] See Oxford Reference (2003b).

for the establishment of *kawaii* as a noun, describing it as an emotion 'related to the social motivation for engaging and staying with preferable persons and objects'.

Questions emerge that are pertinent to the study of *kawaii* fashion practitioners. Are those who engage with *kawaii* modes of dress seeking to convey a need to be cared for? If so, is this need for care indicative of a particular inability to care for oneself, or something generally intrinsic to the experience of any adult? Both of these questions imply intentionality on the part of the *kawaii* fashion practitioner, as one seeks to 'appear cute' for the viewer. It also suggests responsiveness on the part of the viewer who is 'cutesifying' the practitioner.

Before we begin to unpack these different interpretations of *kawaii* fashion in the literature, we must also consider another key question in broader studies of cuteness which is the tension between aesthetics and affect. Is cuteness a product of aesthetic qualities, which impact all individuals in the same way? Or is cuteness something the individual experiences and projects onto things in such a way that it makes that experience unique to that individual? Underpinning these questions is another important consideration as to whether cute things are an object (which implies they have no sentience or agency) or a subject (which suggests they have intentionality and self-awareness). This has implications for studies of *kawaii* fashion practitioners in terms of the degree to which they are objectified by viewers (and scholars) who interpret their behaviour as 'cute'. As such, in my consideration of various studies of cuteness below, I will attempt to identify those scholars who describe social logics between subjects and those who describe relations between subjects and objects.

Just as cuteness has long been associated with caregiving behaviours, it has also long been treated as an aesthetic category or 'feminine spectacle', in the West, as far back as the 1850s (Merish 1996: 192). Many studies of cuteness focus on the formal design properties of cute objects in an attempt to categorise their visual

qualities, informed by Lorenz's (1943; 1971) aforementioned development of the *Kindchenschema* which attempts to measure and categorise physical attributes common in infants across all species (both human and animal). The specific attributes that Lorenz (1971: 154-62) identifies are proportions of the body and face, in particular a '… relatively large head, predominance of the brain capsule, large and low-lying eyes, bulging cheek region, short and thick extremities, a springy elastic consistency, and clumsy movements'. From this particular perspective on cuteness, the cute infant (animal or human) still possesses its own agency as a subject, but also possesses physical attributes that actively elicit a response in the viewer. As the power lies within this cute subject to induce affect, this particular reading implies that any viewer would have a similar experience. Although Lorenz's study has been largely disproved by psychologists from the 1950s onwards,[34] the logic that cute objects have the power to elicit care persists in more contemporary studies. An example is Cheok and Fernando's (2012) study of cuteness and *kawaii* that expands Lorenz's criteria to include other aesthetic categories such as colour, texture, motion and sound.

Following on from this logic, those who do not possess these physical attributes (for example a person who is well advanced in the ageing process) might also be able to evoke cuteness through performed gestures and altered physical attributes, and thereby attempt to control and elicit responses in the viewer. Furthermore, objects such as drawings, sculptures or toys might also elicit similar responses in the viewer through the deliberate design of the creator who, for example, may utilise design properties thought to be cute. For instance, Dale, Goggin, Leyda, McIntyre and Negra (2017) in *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness* propose that '… cuteness increasingly constitutes a performative aesthetic and form of communication for those who seek to enact, represent, or reference cuteness (whether positively or

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[34] See for instance Alley (1981), Lehrman (1953) and Hinde (1970).

negatively) through self-presentation, affiliations with fandom, and other collective modes of expression'.

Other understandings of cuteness, however, place emphasis on the subjectivity of the viewer, and their ability to respond to and label things (both other subjects and objects) as 'cute'. This conception of cuteness was largely set in motion by Harris's (2000) essay on the phenomenon of kitschy-cute paraphernalia, such as kewpie dolls, 'So Shy Sherrie' dolls and animal-themed greeting cards. Harris (2000: 5) suggests that '[c]uteness … is not something we find in our children, but something we *do* to them …'. The reading Harris (2005: 5) gives of cuteness is not particularly empowering for either the individual or the cute thing in question, as he asserts that the viewer makes an '… unconscious attempt to maim, hobble, and embarrass the thing he [*sic*] seeks to idolize …'. In making this claim, Harris asserts that cuteness is something we impose on things for our own personal enjoyment. We experience a feeling that is intertwined with the satisfaction that comes from nurturing things (again echoing our discussion of caregiving behaviour). The process of 'cutesifying' a thing is disempowering because it reduces its meaning to one of ignorance and vulnerability. When this logic is applied to individuals rather than toys, it suggests a kind of objectification, where the act of 'cutesification' is carried out upon them, with or without their consent.

Sianne Ngai's (2012: 87-88) *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* offers a more sustained analysis of cuteness as an attribution made by the viewer, rather than something inherent in the thing itself. Like Harris, Ngai reflects on cute things that she categorises as objects – that is to say, she views them as not having subjectivity or feelings of their own. These objects include artworks, *avant-garde* poetry and toys. Ngai (2012: 98) interweaves her account of cuteness with considerations of the role of aesthetics and affect. She describes the cute object and the experience the viewer has of it to be the 'aestheticization of powerlessness' (Ngai 2012: 98). Ngai (2012: 54) understands cuteness to be an experience the

viewer has of the object, where they imagine the object to be responsive to a deep need for the individual's desire for a 'more intimate, sensuous relation' with it. In other words, the object appears to be loveable and open to the adoration of the viewer. This imaginative experience of the object 'depends entirely on the subject's [i.e. the viewer's] affective response to an imbalance of power between herself and the object'. This suggests that the cute thing appears to the viewer as helpless and in need (Ngai 2012: 54). However the cute object, according to Ngai, (2012: 64) has a power of its own over the viewer 'making surprisingly powerful demands …' in eliciting this care and interest from them. As such this experience, from the perspective of the viewer, involves a complex oscillation between power and submission which is informed in part by caregiving logics.

This experience, however, springs entirely from the imagination of the viewer who projects an 'aggressive affect' onto cute objects, and then imagines that the object mirrors these feelings 'back outward and toward the subject' (Ngai 2012: 98). That is to say that in looking at the cute object, the viewer is projecting their own feelings on to the object, such that it momentarily appears to be alive with its own subjectivity, and responsive to their care and interest. This relationship between subject and object presents itself as an illusory one that relies on the imagination of the viewer to the extent that any 'latent awareness' from the viewer that they are imposing this experience onto the object may very well 'augment' or enhance the experience rather than shatter the illusion (Ngai 2012: 65). In this account, the subjectivity of the thing found to be cute is merely illusory which then may also imply that people an individual finds to be cute are also objectified in this social moment.

Ngai (2012: 88) also highlights that the experience of cuteness involves a sense of difference between the viewer and the object. In part, it is found in the power discrepancy between the caring viewer and the cared-for object. Ngai (2012) develops this further using the writings of Lori Merish (1996: 194) who understands

the viewer's experience of cuteness to be a simultaneous expression and acknowledgement of the otherness of the cute object. The act of interacting with the cute object for Merish (1996: 60) is a means of assimilating otherness with the familiar. In particular, it involves transforming 'transgressive subjects into beloved objects' understood through 'middle-class familial and emotional structures' (Merish 1996: 60). As such the cute object appears as 'different' from the viewer's sense of self, but worthy of interaction, and the care-giving behaviours it inspires (which reflect a kind of parenting) are part of a wider strategy to reconcile this unusual thing into the everyday. As such, we determine things which are 'different' from ourselves to be cute, and through loving this cute thing, we are able to reconcile it with the familiar.

While both Harris and Ngai focus on the role of the viewer in imposing cuteness onto to objects, they both note that some physical attributes may prompt this behaviour. Harris (2000: 4) suggests that, '[t]he grotesque is cute because the grotesque is pitiable, and pity is the primary emotion of this seductive and manipulative aesthetic that arouses our sympathies'. Describing characters with disproportionately large heads or eyes, or stumpy limbs or 'droopy-eyed puppies pleading for attention', Harris (2000: 2) attributes the receptiveness of the viewer to such things as a 'conditioned' response that 'prevent[s] them from recognizing its artificiality'. For Harris (2000: 2), these 'grotesque' figures of kitschy-cute are 'the very embodiment of innocence' and simultaneously suggest the 'absence of the designed and manipulated qualities' but in actuality a 'heavily mannered aesthetic'. From Harris's account, a complex relation of a designer's intentionality, communicated through the objects they create, and the gleeful reception of the viewer emerges. The viewer, through cultural conditioning, is receptive and responsive to these visual cues, and enacts care upon the object.[35] His account

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[35] Harris (2000) does not appear to unpack this tension between the 'absence of the designed' and the artificial, citing repeatedly the exaggerated 'grotesqueness' of the cute forms he describes (such as Cabbage Patch Dolls, E.T., and the 'Lost 'n Found' plush dolls series) that seek to incite the pity of the viewer.

captures a relationship between object and subject that relies on the responsiveness of the viewer in addition to the aesthetic properties of the object itself.[36] While Harris describes things, in particular toys, the implication is that people as subjects may appropriate cute things with these aesthetic qualities in order to influence the viewer.

Contrastingly, Ngai's (2012: 64) playful account of aesthetics moves into descriptions of the sensuous and the tactile. She (2012: 64) argues that cuteness '… becomes most pronounced in objects with simple, round contours and little or no ornamentation or detail … [the] soft contours suggest pliancy or responsiveness to the will of others, the less formally articulated the commodity, the cuter'. These attributes not only suggest pliancy, but also convey a sense of softness or pleasantness to touch for the viewer. Ngai (2012: 64) takes this account to an extreme when she suggests that '[b]y this logic, the epitome of the cute would be an undifferentiated blob of soft doughy matter …'. This echoes her playful image plate on the next page of a sponge shaped into the face of a cartoon frog character, whose mouth scrunches under the force of a closing hand. This suggests that cuteness (at least for Ngai) is that which suggests a lack of resistance to the whims of the viewer, and thereby susceptibility to being carefully resituated in relation to their own experiences and interactions with objects. Obviously, it is somewhat complicated for individuals to appear as pliant dough (which complicates an understanding of how this might appeal to people who appear cute). It could be suggested, however, that individuals might present to others a kind of social pliancy and submissiveness, that bends to the will and whim of the viewer.

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[36] The boisterously playful style of Harris's (2000) chapter on cuteness is reminiscent of Hebdige's (2007) essay on Takashi Murakami's art, in particular his account of the 'sado-cute' which possesses similar 'grotesque' or 'deformed' visual qualities, but instead evokes caregiving behaviours with ill intentions.

Both Harris and Ngai offer very specific instances of cuteness in their accounts which offer some insights into a very complex phenomenon. The aesthetic properties of cuteness can be broadened further still. For instance, Nobue Mito's (2014: 7-9) essay '*Nihon bijutsu ni miru 'kawaii' no shosō*' (trans. 'Various aspects of *kawaii* seen in Japanese Art'), argues that the aesthetic attributes of cuteness can be broad and diverse, and include small things (such as animals, small cosmetics or dolls), humorous things (such as tricksters), *karen* or sweet-appearing things (such as flowers), and *honobono* or heart-warming things, such as the sight of children at play. Kazuma Yamane (1989: 228) in his study of cute handwriting created by Japanese school girls found that the participants of the study liked *kawaii* things because they were 'beautiful', 'funny', 'pretty', 'wonderful', 'great', 'interesting', 'kind' and 'loveable'. Furthermore, in reflecting on what makes something *kawaii*, Nittono (2016: 88) proposes that '*kawaii* is not automatically evoked by the physical attributes of the eliciting entity, but is induced through a cognitive appraisal process'. That is to say, we might find things cuter if we appreciate the story behind the cute thing, or have emotional memories associated with it. This sentiment is reflected in Nosu and Tanaka's (2013: 535) observations that Japanese university students have a preference for 'relaxed' and 'stress-free' characters who have 'unusual' backstories. Stevens (2014: n.p) develops this notion in her study of Rilakkuma, a *kawaii* character who provides 'emotional equilibrium in the face of instability' for consumers through his relaxed attitude. Nittono (2016: 90) also argues that we are responsive to others who engage with a *kawaii* object, and that they will respond to our positive responses (see Figure 4). This forms a social relationship between the subject's present that is mediated through experiences of cuteness. As such, Japanese scholars such as Mito and Nittono attempt to broaden understandings of cuteness that Western scholars have put forward. As these scholars speak of things, people and animals that are cute, it could be said that cuteness involves a process of objectification for them which is imposed on the source of the viewer's admiration. A subject, however, could attempt to fit into Mito's above categories, with no guarantee of success. Or alternatively, one could
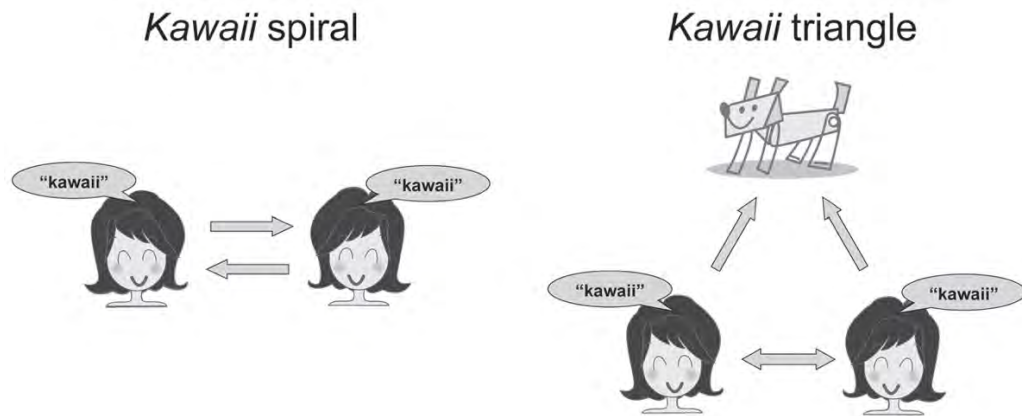
Figure 4 – Nittono's (2016) diagram illustrating 'the social effects of kawaii'. *In the* 'kawaii triangle' Nittono is operating under the assumption that the dog figure or toy is an object without a subjectivity of its own (otherwise further reflection on an animal's experience of cuteness would be required).*

evoke in another individual a '*kawaii*' spiral by appreciating something cute, as Nittono describes.

These ruminations have interesting implications for this thesis on two levels: firstly, in terms of how and why *kawaii* fashion participants choose particular objects for their outfits; and secondly, in terms of how these participants are viewed and interpreted as a 'cute subject' by outsiders. For instance, are the objects chosen by *kawaii* fashion participants considered to be universally cute? Are *kawaii* fashion participants performing gestures and taking on physical attributes in order to appear cute to viewers? The above overview also provides an interesting set of questions for this thesis, such as, is cuteness a subjective experience that relies on personal preferences?

Furthermore, the logic that views cuteness as a generalisable experience, communicated by particular visual properties, also suggests that it is possible for researchers to understand and interpret the cuteness performed by *kawaii* fashion practitioners by treating their complete outfit as a text which has been consciously

composed to be received. If the viewer's experience of the cute subject is generalisable to the experiences of other viewers as the above logic suggests, is it possible that the researcher's experience of the cute subject can then be documented as an understanding of *kawaii* practitioners' intent? This then also has implications for what methodological approaches are adopted to understand cuteness. If cuteness is something we impose on to objects, then how can it be accurately detected through textual readings of *kawaii* that rely solely on the judgement of the researcher? Is the projection of cuteness onto adults potentially patronising? How can the researcher form views of *kawaii* practitioners' intent by viewing alone? What strategies can be used to ground textual readings with the experiences of practitioners? Furthermore, what other qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, could be used to understand the intent of *kawaii* fashion practitioners?

This chapter continues to explore how scholars-as-viewers interpret and 'cutesify' *kawaii* fashion practitioners, in addition to considering the implications of the observation that *kawaii* fashion appears infantile. This will then be compared to an approach that explores cuteness from the 'cute subject's' perspective obtained via qualitative interviews. In doing so, we will begin to unpack some of the tensions between *kawaii* as it is presented as both an aesthetic and a feeling.

Is *Kawaii* Infantile? Problematising Studies of *Kawaii* Fashion

In order to consider some of the above questions and current understandings of *kawaii* culture in Japan, this section will explore some of the concepts that arise from studying *kawaii* practitioners from the scholar's perspective. This process involves observing images in print media, other media such as film, or actual fashion practitioners in an area like Harajuku, and drawing conclusions based upon the impression one has of them. In investigating some of the findings of Kinsella

(1995), Winge (2008), Lunning (2011) and Akita (2005) in their studies of *kawaii* fashion and then comparing them with Masafumi Monden's (2015) study of Lolita fashion[37] in print media and the film *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (Nakashima 2004), this section will set up some propositions about *kawaii* that the thesis will then seek to interrogate.

Due to the commonalities across these aforementioned texts, this section focusses in particular on the idea that *kawaii* fashion practitioners engage with the infantile through their dress. In the discussion below, each scholar develops their own notion of 'infantile' or 'childish', which includes a sense of playfulness, helplessness, a need for care, rebelliousness and transgressiveness. In exploring how and why they consider these claims within their own textual readings of *kawaii* culture, we will be able to investigate the degree to which the meaning of the word 'infantile' pertains to their own views.

Kinsella's (1995) book chapter 'Cuties in Japan' weaves together evidence from a range of empirical sites to try to capture the cute phenomenon in Japan. Overall, her study of diverse manifestations of *kawaii* culture argues that *kawaii* engages with infantile practices. For example, in her account of Japanese slang as it was used by youths in the 1970s and 80s, she uses the word 'infantile' to refer to the deliberate mispronunciation of words whereby speakers would 'mimic the speech of a toddler incapable of adult pronunciation'. She (1995: 225) describes this as a 'fashion for using baby-talk, acting childish and wearing virginal childish clothes' which she connects to the term *burikko* (an abbreviation of *kawaiko-burikko*, which means 'acting like a cute girl').[38] In this sense, the designation 'infantile' involves a

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[37] Many studies of *kawaii* fashion focus on the Lolita fashion genre, and consequently, this section will primarily focus on this category. Kinsella' (1995) and Akita's (2005) texts consider *kawaii* fashion in general as opposed to specific style genres typical to the Harajuku area. I have incorporated their views so as to explore in more general terms current views on *kawaii* fashion in the literature.

[38] For more information on *burikko*, see Miller (2004).

performance that Kinsella associates with behaviours that are suggestive of childhood. Her reading of childhood here implies a sense of ineptness, frivolity, irresponsibility and an asexuality, which she believes these young adults perform to 'mask' their true adult characteristics. Furthermore, in a study of *Cutie* magazine, Kinsella (1995: 229) claims that '[c]ute clothes were – and are – deliberately designed to make the wearer appear childlike and demure'. This assertion is then elaborated in her account of Idols (celebrities) who put on a *burikko* performance in cute character design. She (1995: 236) suggests that such performances are informed by the idea that '[c]ute things can't walk, can't talk, can't in fact do anything at all for themselves because they are physically handicapped'. As such, Kinsella argues that individuals who perform *kawaii* are seeking to convey a general sense of helplessness. This forms an interesting link to Harris's (2005: 5) own interpretation of cuteness as a projection, as Kinsella's description of these individuals appears to 'maim, hobble, and embarrass the thing' she tries to pay tribute to in this chapter. In summary, her view is that cuteness is puerile due to its connections to the infantile, and that this is informed by methodological approaches that priviledge observation of practitioners from afar.

If we are to examine one of her claims about *kawaii* more closely, we can see that the above analysis informs her view that:

> … cute fashion in Japan was more than merely cuddling cute things; it was all about 'becoming' the cute object itself by acting infantile … Being cute meant behaving childlike – which involved an act of self-mutilation, posing with pigeon toes, pulling wide-eyed innocent expressions, dieting, acting stupid, and essentially denying the existence of the wealth of insights, feelings, and humour that maturity brings with it. (Kinsella 1995: 237)

This analysis has a number of implications for understanding *kawaii*. Firstly, it suggests that *kawaii* fashion is about carrying out a performance in the hopes that

one might feel or make others feel similar sensations, emotions and imaginations when looking at 'cute things'. Secondly, this involves presenting oneself and behaving in a way that is 'infantile', and or an 'act of self-mutilation' in acting pitiful and also 'acting stupid'. Thirdly, this performance is ostensibly carried out because participants do not behave in a way that is associated with adults, and consequently, that participants are incapable of having the kind of insight, feeling and humour notionally associated with adults. This suggests that the infantile can be understood as lacking reflexivity, worldliness, intelligence and responsibility. *Kawaii* practitioners in this account are depicted as wilfully expressing a sense of helplessness, so as to evoke caregiving behaviours in the viewer. In the next section of this chapter, I will compare these findings with the study of qualitative interviews Kinsella offers in the same book chapter.

Turning specifically to *kawaii* fashion community practices, another example of the adoption of Kinsella's reading of *kawaii* is evident in Winge's (2008: 59) article on Lolita fashion, 'Undressing and dressing loli: a search for the identity of the Japanese Lolita', which emphasises the role that *kawaii* objects play in allowing participants to 'extend childhood' and thus continue in an infantile existence. [39] Winge (2008:59) argues that:

> … Lolitas reconnect to childhood through the use of *kawaii* objects, which
> embody and visually communicate much more than 'cute' or
> 'feminine/cute'; they also represent a desire for empathy, infantilism,
> compassion, and (dis)approval within the understood and hierarchical
> power structure. Therefore, carrying or wearing *kawaii* objects allows the
> Lolitas to hold on to and nonverbally communicate their childlike
> perspective toward the outside dominant culture, a culture that could be

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[39] As per Gagne's (2008) article, Lolita fashion practitioners tend not to describe themselves as 'lolis' so as to distance themselves from the '*rorikon*' (trans. Lolita complex; abbreviated to 'lolicon' in English) phenomenon in Japan, that involves the sexualisation of prepubescent girls.

interpreted as playing the parental role. In this way, Lolitas also garner compassion and interest when they present *kawaii* objects, characteristics, and images, which indicate nostalgia for a past era and a desire to escape adult responsibilities for the carefree days of youth. In essence, Lolitas are attempting to prolong childhood with the Lolita aesthetic via the use of *kawaii*.

Winge uses an analysis of nonverbal communication to guide her interpretation of *kawaii* fashion, and here we can see that she bases her observations on what she perceives the Lolita fashion practitioners to be visually communicating to the viewer as an expression of their intent. That is to say, she views the act of carrying or wearing a cute object as a form of 'nonverbal communication' for outsiders to receive and interpret. In the above account, Winge uses high modality in her explanation, suggesting that her own interpretation of the objects carried or worn by Lolita fashion practitioners would be the same as another viewer's. In the next part of the above quote, we can see that Winge has interpreted the act of wearing this clothing as a means to 'garner' a response from the viewer, and that the act of wearing the clothing is a contrived 'presentation', which returns us to the view discussed in the previous section (i.e. that cuteness is inherent in the subject and a means of influencing the viewer). Furthermore, Winge describes the act of carrying or wearing the cute object as an indication of a 'childlike perspective', without further elaborating on what this perspective involves (aside from rejecting adult expectations). In this instance, it is implied that *kawaii* fashion practitioners seek to express a sense of helplessness, a desire to be nurtured and cared for and a wish to escape adult responsibilities. This echoes Kinsella's views described above, but Winge's argument is expressed in a tone that is more sympathetic. She implies that the Lolita practitioner longs for care and love and seeks to express this through their clothing in a thoughtful way. In this instance, we can see that Winge views *kawaii* fashion to be an infantile practice, through her analysis of the fashion style in general as a form of visual communication.

Frenchy Lunning (2011) in her article 'Under the ruffles: *shōjo* and the morphology of power' also relies on a broader textual analysis of Lolita fashion to inform her view that is an expression of the infantile. She compares her observations with some commentary on historical fashion from the Victorian era. In her account of the *shōjo* and Lolita fashion, Lunning (2011: 10) offers a loose textual analysis of the style to argue that 'Lolita ('Loli') *cosplay*' works into what she describes as a the 'paradox of the *shōjo*'. This paradox for Lunning (2011: 14) is in the *shōjo*'s appearance of 'the innocent and naïve little girl and at the same time the highly erotic and sexually suggestive adult woman'. In this account, the woman's body as a sexual site becomes critical to Lunning's analysis. In her discussion of the overall appearance of Lolita fashion, Lunning (2011: 15-16) claims that:

> Whether evoking the Victorian little girl, or a *shōjo* character from anime or manga, or both, the Loli performer … deploys the overcoded Victorian feminine costume as a constructed feminine identity that, in being a child, paradoxically becomes seductive as a subversively sexual subject, while being socially situated as asexual or presexual.

In her reading, Lunning seems to imply that the traces of Victorianesque frills, ribbons and ruffles found in Lolita fashion suggest that the wearer is attempting to communicate a Victorian childhood. This code is then subverted when it is transferred onto the body of an adult woman. Here the woman's body is coded by Lunning as a 'sexual subject' which erotically charges the clothing worn. This suggests that Lunning understands Lolita fashion to communicate an expression of the infantile by drawing upon childhood cultures, but also that she views this act to be subversive, one that borders on taboo.[40] While this account depicts the act of wearing Lolita fashion as transgressive and proactive, it does, however, make

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[40] In Lunning's (2013: 127) text *Fetish Style*, this reading of Lolita fashion is extended, where she cites her article discussed above and describes Lolita as a 'costumed performance of various fetishized character types based on the appearance of the somewhat fictionalized Victorian notion of the "little girl"'. Lunning (2013: 127) describes Lolita Fashion as centered around 'one of the last bastions of mythic femininities of the patriarchal culture'.

assumptions about the intent of the wearer based upon the author's own experiences of viewing Lolita Fashion. From this, we must consider whether Lolita fashion participants intend their clothing to play with ideas of the sexual, asexual and presexual.

Lunning's observations about sexuality, the woman's body and *kawaii* also feed into a much broader debate about gender relations in Japan. Studies of *kawaii* and gender have suggested that the use of cuteness by Japanese women endorses asymmetrical gender relations in which women are considered to be submissive and immature (Koga 2009: 206-20; Akita 2005). Aoyama (2008: 286) argues that many English papers in particular regard the *shōjo* as a mindless consumer or powerless victim. Furthermore, there are some reservations about *shōjo* culture with concerns that its connection to *kawaii* is a mode of indoctrination of the *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother') ideal (Kawasaki 2008: 293).[41] A scholar who explores this in detail is Kimiko Akita (2005) in her chapter 'Cuteness: the sexual commodification of women in the Japanese media'. Akita (2005: 44) situates her chapter as an autoethnographic study of her life as a Japanese woman, working at a junior college in Japan. Akita does not rely on semiotics to inform her interpretation, but relies on social interactions between young women who enjoy *kawaii* fashion and herself. That said, the chapter focusses on her own autoethnographic experience of observing these women from her own perspective, rather than by a means of participant observation that would enable her to learn from and/or live like these young women. As such, the young women she observes and interacts with become a text or site for study.

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[41] Up until the early 1900s women were largely viewed through their kinship ties, referred to with terms such as '*musume*'. '*Musume*' means daughter with, 'the implication of being governed by the patriarchal family system and the nation as its extension' (Aoyama 2008, p. 286). The notion of the 'girl' or '*onna no ko*' only emerged in the late Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-26) eras during which shifts in social relations and class resulted in the reconceptualisation of youth and gender (Kawasaki 2008).

Akita (2005: 44) argues that other scholars have missed the nuances about cuteness that form as a result of Japan's allocentric culture. Allocentrism refers to collectivism, or the social emphasis on placing others before oneself. Her critique of *kawaii* culture is premised on her own anxiety of young women performing cuteness as a form of submission to patriarchal social structures. The following passage is an example of her interpretation of the *kawaii* performance carried out by the young women she encounters in her life:

> When I was a women's junior college teacher in Japan, what struck me most were my observations of supposedly mature students (aged 19-21) wearing 'cute' childish outfits (e.g. mini skirts, *luuzu* socks [*sic*; trans. loose socks], or *atsuzoko* [*sic*; trans. very thick and tall bottomed] platform shoes), various Hello-Kitty items (e.g., slippers with a big Hello-Kitty face, hair pins, bags, accessories), speaking in 'cute', baby-like voices and behaving with 'cute' infantile manners and 'puckish styling' … such as fondling one's clothes and posing with pigeon toes. Those girls appeared to look like Sailor Moon or Hello Kitty, and I felt they came right out of *manga* (comics and animation stories) … I observed infantile linguistic or communicative behaviours, such as unnecessary, incessant smiles and giggling, often used to avoid saying full sentences … (Akita 2005: 45)

Akita describes the performance of these young women as 'infantile', 'childish' or 'baby-like' which she contrasts with her expectations from these 'supposedly mature students'. The listing of their modes of dress, gestures and speech catalogues activities which give rise to her frustration and her anxiety about *kawaii* performances in Japan leading to the infantilisation of women (Akita 2005: 45). In tracking her experience, Akita (2005: 51) argues that young women who exhibit these behaviours attempt 'to project themselves as appealing objects/images/symbols to comply with men who control the media and the social system' which according to Akita encourages submission from women as part of

the broader allocentric culture. While she (2005: 47) appears to suggest that this submission is intentional on the part of the young women, she also acknowledges a degree of unintentionality in the process when she argues that '[c]ute products and cute manners clearly represent an unconscious hegemonic oppression of women in a Japanese patriarchal society'. As such while she suggests that Japanese society does not intentionally seek to oppress women, the young women she has encountered in her autoethnographic study intentionally carry out these 'infantile' behaviours to please the male gaze. Akita (2005: 51) argues that cute culture continues to facilitate this infantilisation of women by encouraging them to be passive and submissive under patriarchal systems. In her conclusion, Akita advocates for critical thought and individuality on the part of the young women, a notion that would be supported by the Western school of thought that she questions at the beginning of her chapter. In this study, Akita's experience of viewing these women informs her understanding of their cultural role more broadly, in which *kawaii* is an infantile performance with implications for gender roles in Japan.

There are, however, other studies carried out by Japanese scholars that present a more nuanced account of *kawaii* fashion that also use textual analysis. In his study of Japanese Fashion Cultures, Masafumi Monden (2015) employs a rich mixed-methods study that consists of analysing cultural-historical texts, surveys, historical fashion texts, film, music videos, illustrations, as well as personal correspondence and published interviews with designers. Monden (2015: 13) demonstrates reflexivity in his use of textual analysis and its uses and limitations,[42] and is also careful to acknowledge a variety of perspectives on *kawaii* (including those of its critics). His study is not only exemplary in its excellent textual analysis for these reasons, but also for the high degree of precision he demonstrates in linking the

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[42] In his work with Lucy Fraser, Monden also uses the work of Stuart Hall (1980) to highlight that the 'original intention of the message or the sender cannot be prescribed or guaranteed' (Fraser and Monden 2017: 550).

design elements of specific Lolita garments to historical fashion motifs and for his consideration of the designer's intent. As such, while Monden does not claim to understand the intentions of the wearers of Lolita Fashion, he offers interesting insights into the garments themselves.[43] In the account below, we can see a detailed analysis of the design composition of Lolita fashion designer Innocent World's dress, 'Pompadour Bustle Skirt':

> Lolita dress often exudes an air of *robe à la française* style … This is explicated in a Lolita dress, designed by Innocent World (est. 1998) with the name of 'Pompadour bustle skirt (dress)'. Its name alone connotes the rococo reference. Pompadour refers to Jeanne Poisson (1721-64), known as the Marquise de Pompadour, a famous mistress of French King Louis XV; she had 'come to be the personification of the rococo in costume with its curving serpentine lines and riotous decoration'. Accordingly, the *échelle* of three detachable ribbons placed vertically on the bodice of this twilled cotton dress corresponds with 'the three-dimensional ornamentation of the dress that was an essential part of the rococo'. Combined with the classical rose patterns and the *robe à la française* emulated skirt with a matching petticoat on which pale yellow lace trims separate the skirts into three parts, as if the petticoat were being in front, these qualities of the dress bear resemblances to the dress the Marquise wears in the famous portraits by François Boucher (1756). The back of the dress, however, is bustled. Although it was not an invention of the Victorian period, the bustle became a fashionable part of women's dress between 1882 and 1889 … As noted in the previous chapter, until the 1920s, age and class hierarchies of female dress style in Europe were largely maintained through the length of skirts. Only very young girls or lower-class women would wear short skirts, and

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[43] Monden (2015: 14, 107-117) specifies that he is interested in the garments in their worn state, but primarily in his commentary on Lolita garments he relies on the design elements of the dresses themselves.

skirts lengthened as the age of the wearer. Thus, the short 'little girl' skirt emphasises the 'infantile' qualities of this Lolita dress, and hence accentuates 'youthfulness' or 'girlishness'. (Monden 2015: 111-112)

In this account, we can see a high level of precision as Monden links each design element of the garment to a historical reference of note. In doing so, Monden is careful to situate each aspect of the garment against a possible French design influence, thereby building support for his claim that Lolita fashion 'often exudes an air of *robe à la française* style'. In this sense, Monden seeks to contextualise the dress in broader fashion history so as to demonstrate the interesting intersections of design principles he has found in viewing this particular garment. As such his impression and analysis of the dress is carefully situated in an informed sense of dress history. Towards the end of his account, Monden situates his commentary on the 'infantile qualities of this Lolita dress' within this same logic, and comments on the relationship between skirt length and age. When he finally comes to make the claim that the Lolita dress has 'infantile' qualities, we can understand the observation as a very light touch, situated in highly detailed, informed and respectful commentary on the garment.

In the context of this instance of textual analysis, the infantile suggests 'youthfulness' and 'girlishness' for Monden (2015: 78; 100-101) which he views as a positive, playful and flamboyant quality of *kawaii* fashion and a means of subverting a sexualised gaze. In particular, Monden (2015: 78) interprets the *kawaii* performance in fashion to be a clever 'alternative to the established multiple binaries of aggression, sexualization and modesty in which women tend to be represented' as it enables women to engage creatively with the girl culture they have enjoyed consuming in their lives.[44]

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[44] Karen Nakamura and Hisako Matsuo (2002) write that the former typification of *shōjo* is both feminine and masculine and that its performance can form just one way women can practice agency in controlling their identity. Most significantly cuteness is something which the women themselves can mobilise, parody and modify (Miller 2011; Monden 2014; Yano 2015).

From Monden's approach to textual analysis we can see that for him, cuteness lies within the design principles of the garment, rather than serving as a product of the viewer's projection. Even so, this view becomes more nuanced when it is considered in the context of a broader examination of *kawaii* fashion as we see below. For example, when examining the views of *kawaii* designer Hitomi Owaka, the designer and owner of *kawaii* label *Milk*, Monden (2015: 80) argues that the *kawaii* performances (of, for example, ineptness) can be appreciated by those with 'certain mental capacity and experiences in order to be tolerant of, comprehend and adore such qualities'. This claim is situated within a discussion of Owaka's aesthetic interests in things which are 'infantile, fragile and perhaps imperfect' as part of her broader outlook of what Monden (2015: 80) describes as 'almost equal to the etymological definition of philanthropy – that is, "love of humanity"'. Monden (2015: 80) in this moment also comments on factors that contribute to different interpretations of 'infantile cuteness', (such as the insight that the aesthetic might affront those from cultures outside of Japan which praise 'maturity over infantile fragility and imperfection'). This has implications for the researcher-as-outsider, who may not cast the same careful eye over the cute text compared to one who is similarly well-versed in *kawaii* in the context of Japanese culture. In this discussion, it is evident that Monden also views *kawaii* to be part of an individual's experience of objects, rather than something expressed by a cute subject, to be received in the same way by every viewer. Beauty in this case is in the eye of the beholder. This discussion allows me to identify two key questions for this thesis: is *kawaii* fashion intended to be a performance for the 'male gaze'? Or are *kawaii* fashion practitioners enacting a sense of self-determination and agency in their creative expression?

Thus far, we have examined the ideas derived from studies carried out by Monden, Kinsella, Winge and Lunning. In doing so we have explored what aspects of *kawaii* fashion connote the infantile and what the implications of this reading then means. While Monden views the infantile as synonymous with 'girlishness' and an

appreciation of imperfection, Kinsella and Winge understand *kawaii* fashion to communicate a desire to escape responsibility. Lunning offers an account that is a combination of all of the above, but with the extra nuance that engaging with the infantile is a deliberately subversive act carried out by the wearer to confront the viewer.

Kinsella, Winge, Lunning and Akita appear to take the view that their interpretation of the fashion of text can be understood as an intention of the wearer, and thus that *kawaii* fashion practitioners are intentionally engaging with the infantile. When considering this logic, we can understand the *kawaii* practitioner to be a cute subject, who is influencing the viewer in a way that is generalisable to more than the individual. However, it could also be said that these scholars are 'cutesifying' the *kawaii* fashion practitioner as a textual object for examination, thereby highlighting the qualities they find cute and seeking to idolise them by documenting their own feelings toward them. This can be contrasted with Monden's approach to textual analysis, which is premised on claims made about specific garments and which considers both possibilities, that *kawaii* is expressed by the cute subject, but is also part of the individual's own sensory experience in relation to cute objects. Furthermore, Monden carefully hedges his claims within the context of his own experience of the garments, meticulously linking every claim to cultural and historical texts so as to show the basis of his opinion.

This then raises the question as to whether it is possible to understand a phenomenon such as *kawaii* fashion without direct consultation with the practitioners themselves, so as to compare one's impression of outfits with the intentions of the wearer. How can we assess their own perspectives as a living and breathing subject, if we strictly rely on textual readings and the risk of 'hobbling' or 'maiming' the cute thing we admire enough to study?

Dorothy Smith's (1990: 121) *Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* offers some interesting insights into the sociological study of texts. Smith (1990: 121) observes an accurate interpretation of a text 'depends upon the analyst-as-member's knowledge of the interpretative practices and schemata relevant to the reading of a particular text'. This suggests that when studying a group of people and the intent behind their actions, reflexivity and consideration of the views, practices and beliefs of this group is required. In the case of studies of *kawaii* fashion, it is essential to acknowledge that the scholar's interpretation may not be aligned with the views of the practitioners themselves. Smith's (1990: 121) monograph was written at a time when studies of women's use of fashion operated ' … from the presupposition of the inertia of the text, the dead text which the sociologist has read for its content, finding in that the dialectic of social conflict'. That is to say, textual readings tended to presuppose that texts are unmoving and unchanged by context (time and place), and that the scholar-as-viewer's perspective, looking at the text from their own position in time and place, will be the same as another scholar's, or even the same as the individual themselves. The 'dead text' in this scenario is able to be read in the same way by many individuals. It is entirely possible that researchers studying *kawaii* fashion perceive images and observations of these individuals to be 'dead texts' in that the interiority and intent of practitioners can be 'gleaned' from the scholar's interpretation of their appearance. This paints the treatment of people – live, breathing subjects – as 'dead', frozen and unresponsive under the analytical eye of the scholar. Smith is arguing that we cannot assume that our interpretation is 'correct' or that there is only 'one' reading. Smith (1990: 121) instead suggests that scholars treat texts as alive, 'activated by the reader' and 'dependent on the reader's interpretative practices', in acknowledging that every viewer will find something new and interesting in texts based on their context, experience and training. This opens up an alternative way of coming to understand *kawaii* fashion, which is through consultation with the wearers themselves. In the next section we will explore if

studies that involve direct consultation with *kawaii* fashion practitioners produce different results.

In the context of studying *kawaii* fashion, treating texts as alive means avoiding practices such as: conflating the scholar's impression of outfits with the wearer's intent; not considering how time, place and context can change the meaning of texts; and withholding the voice of the practitioner and pushing to the fore the scholar's voice instead. Treating the text as alive means attempting to understand deeply the schemata that are relevant to the study of *kawaii* fashion practitioners' intent. To attempt to capture the intent of the wearers of *kawaii* fashion would involve consulting the practitioners themselves, immersing oneself in their world through participant observation, and examining closely the texts that the participants themselves regularly engage with. We can see these practices in Monden's monograph, where his findings are carefully compared with the ideas of the designers themselves. In the case of Kinsella, her textual readings are compared to a survey's results. However the sample surveyed here is derived from the general population in Japan rather than from individuals who model, create or design the images and art-forms that she studies. In order to develop an alternative approach to studying *kawaii* fashion, I will explore some qualitative studies of *kawaii* in the following section. Before doing so, I will consider how studying *kawaii* fashion from the perspective of the scholar can be considered to be a kind of 'cutesification' and objectification of the wearers themselves.

Speaking for the Helpless: Exploring the Implications of Interpreting Kawaii Fashion as Infantile

As established, the above scholars detect the infantile in their textual readings of *kawaii* fashion, and in the case of Kinsella (1995), Winge (2008), Lunning (2011) and Akita (2005) this involves attributing the label of 'infantile' or 'childish' to *kawaii* fashion. This attribution can be construed as itself an act of infantilisation, which is

further enhanced by the power disparity between researcher and the researched. Thus, in order to better understand 'infantile', it is helpful to consider what the act of 'infantilising' might mean for the attributor and what the act involves. David Levy (1957: 71) in his text *Maternal Overprotection* defines infantilising as a mother's '… continuation of behaviour towards the infant, which reinforces closeness … with the added gesture of pulling the child back and of preventing his growth into more independent behaviour'. If we accept the premise that the development of a sense of self and independence is ideal for a child, then Levy's account here implies that the hindrance of development is a negative experience. In particular, the implication seems to be that the child would be unable to develop socially beyond interacting with the mother. Gresham (1976: 196) describes this act of infantilising adults as 'antagonistic to outside social influences which lead to social adaptation'. So, sociologically, the act of infantilising and being infantilised has negative repercussions for the social self. Gresham (1976: 204) asserts that 'infantilization can hardly promote a healthy adaption to ageing' because '[a]n individual trying to find a meaning to his past and present will be unsuccessful if society socializes him in an opposite direction, toward childhood'. In a study conducted by the Ralph Nader Study group[45] (Townsend 1971) of aged care in the United States of America during the year 1970, infantilism was recognised as one of the key issues informing the poor treatment of the elderly. In an interview with the study group, Dr Robert N Butler, a psychiatrist and gerontologist in Washington DC, observed that '… infantilism stems from the fact that helplessness breeds patronizing ...' which suggests that to infantilise someone, one must perceive an individual to be 'helpless' (Townsend 1971: 125). Furthermore, the group makes the interesting observation that those who infantilise adults whom they perceive as helpless seek to remove themselves 'from an anxiety producing [situation by] … treating the aged person as a child' (Townsend 1971: 125). This anxiety is informed by the fear of

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[45] Although the Ralph Nader Study Group consisted of 11 members, Claire Townsend, the Project Director, is acknowledged as the key author of the book.

becoming as helpless as the adult in question. Establishing this distance through infantilisation allows individuals to reassert themselves in their own ability as fit adults. As such, the act of infantilisation reflects the needs of the individual carrying out the act of infantilisation, whether it be the need to be close with the child in their care or the anxiety of seeing an adult express helplessness. Seeking to care for and nurture someone in this instance stems from something within ourselves. This again echoes Harris's (2005) claim that cuteness is something we 'do' to things, stemming from our own selfish need to exercise care. Perhaps then, the labelling of groups like *kawaii* fashion communities as infantile stems from our own anxiety associated with viewing adults who carry out acts we interpret to be 'childish'. Concern for these adults who appear to be regressing into childhood garners our sympathy and compassion, and moves us to perform care-giving behaviours to the 'cute' and 'helpless' *kawaii* fashion practitioner.

Perhaps then, articles such as those by Kinsella (1995), Winge (2008), Lunning (2011) and Akita (2005) are the scholar's way of demonstrating this care. For example, by saying the infantile act carried out by the *kawaii* practitioner is transgressive or rebellious, the scholar is situating this unsettling behaviour within a theoretical framework that they understand (such as power, resistance and deviance) as a gesture of care or support for the fashion that has captured their intellectual imagination. The *kawaii* fashion participant is flawed in their eyes, but also heroic in the stance they are taking against mainstream expectations of dress and behaviour. However, in carrying out this gesture of care, without then consulting with the *kawaii* practitioner, the opportunity to give the 'cute' and 'helpless' *kawaii* fashion practitioner their own platform is missed, and thus perpetuates the cycle of infantilisation where practitioners are reduced to a cute object that is admired from afar. As such, the *kawaii* fashion practitioner is denied an opportunity to voice their own opinions and perspectives on their clothing, lifestyle and outlooks as an expression of their own development and growth.

Furthermore, in order to properly understand the tensions between childhood and adulthood, and the observer and observed in the instances we see above, we must also situate this research in terms of discussions of adulthood and the adult engagement with things that are deemed 'childish'. By defining what is 'childish' for adults, we also define what we understand adulthood to be. Sociological accounts of adulthood given by authors such as Harry Blatterer (2007) seek to complicate the opposition between youth and adulthood by identifying the key normative markers (such as marriage, parenthood and work) and highlighting the newly emerging subjective interpretation of adulthood whereby individuals enter into this state on their own terms. If we consider the aforementioned normative markers, Kinsella's statement does not quantify which normative custom has been breached to 'shirk' adult responsibilities, save for perhaps blurring boundaries between the carer and the cared for. Blatterer (2007: 59) writes that in contemporary society 'a redefinition of the normative ideal of adulthood', is taking place in terms of 'its most entrenched expectations and representations'. With this in mind, if we are to take Kinsella's or Winge's view that dressing *kawaii* is not an adult behaviour and combine it with the idea that perhaps the participant seeks to redefine the normative ideals of adulthood, it is possible to suggest that observers such as Kinsella and Winge are unintentionally reinforcing an opposition between childhood and adulthood.

So far, we have explored how studies that privilege the scholar's impression of *kawaii* can inform the perspective that *kawaii* fashion is infantile, whether it is for the purposes of being playful, to rebel from adult responsibility, to evoke sympathy from the viewer or to carry out a transgressive act. We have learnt that textual readings tend to privilege the view of the scholar-as-viewer, with the assumption that their own interpretation of the visual stimulus before them is indicative of the intent of the *kawaii* fashion practitioner. This implies that cuteness is something wielded by the subject to evoke a response in the viewer, and that this experience of cuteness is generalisable. However, it could also be argued that cuteness is found

in the eye of the beholder, and is a quality we attribute to people, animals or things. According to this logic, cuteness is something individuals 'do' to things by adoring or nurturing them. This might mean that adoration can be nurturing and positive when it is expressly sought after, but equally complex when considered in relation to the cutesification of people or animals as active subjects. In the case of *kawaii* fashion participants, 'speaking for' their intentions in wearing *kawaii* clothing could also be viewed as a form of 'cutesification' or infantilisation. Perhaps, also, it is worth questioning the generalisability of diverse experiences of cuteness and the assumption that there is only one message expressed by *kawaii* fashion. Who are the participants dressing for, and who is looking? In the following section, we will explore whether the same perspective emerges from studies of *kawaii* fashion that try to incorporate the views of others – in particular *kawaii* fashion practitioners – which allow practitioners to voice their own views on their clothing.

Coming to Know the Individual's Experiences of *Kawaii:* Studies That Privilege the Voices of Participants

In the above accounts of *kawaii* culture, the researcher-as-expert takes the lead in defining *kawaii* clothing as a form of non-verbal communication. In accounts such as those offered by Kinsella (1995), Winge (2008) and Lunning (2011), the individual performs the infantile behaviour and dresses this way as an expression of agency or as a means to confound the male gaze. But what symbolic meaning do *kawaii* fashion participants in this study attribute to their clothes? In this section, we will explore some extracts from qualitative interviews and the analysis of open-ended surveys conducted by Kinsella, Terasa Younker (2011), Yuniya Kawamura (2012) and An Nguyen (2016).

When we consider the survey results[46] presented in Kinsella's chapter 'Cuties in Japan' (which we have also discussed above), an interesting tension arises from her discussion of the open ended survey question she poses to participants (where they were asked to write freely what cute meant to them) and her own textual reading of *kawaii*.[47] In her 1992 survey study of 18 to 30-year-old men and women in Tokyo, Kinsella (1995: 240) finds that for the participants 'the childlike state' they associated with *kawaii* was:

> … considered to be innocent, natural and unconscious. And it was one in which people expressed genuine warm feelings and love for one another… [this] childlike innocence of each individual, rather than disappearing forever, was still present in some naive individuals that could be glimpsed occasionally in the gestures, expressions and attitudes of almost any kind of person.

This summary seems at odds with Kinsella's textual account that suggests that *kawaii* is an artificial performance. Indeed, her survey study found that Japanese participants interpreted *kawaii* to be sincere and natural (which she acknowledges in her text on pages 240-242). More significantly, the participants in her survey viewed *kawaii* to be part of a 'normal' state that adults felt compelled to culturally mask. It is also interesting that her account mentions 'warm feelings' and 'love', phrases which imply that *kawaii* is more experiential than performative. From this vantage, several questions emerge: do *kawaii* practitioners view their fashion style as a performance of childishness? To what extent do they view *kawaii* as something 'natural' to them? Do participants view *kawaii* as something genuine that adults

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[46] The survey of 18-30 year old men and women in Tokyo during 1992 consists of closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. A random sample of 110 individuals was given the survey, and 89 responses were received (Kinsella 1995: 252-253).

[47] Kinsella (1995) also discusses the findings of Yamane's (1989) study of cute hand-writing. Yamane used qualitative interviews to gain further insights into this hand-writing practice. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed some of the key descriptors of *kawaii* that Yamane's participants used in his study. Yamane found that participants went to great lengths to master cute handwriting, and took the view that it was both creative and a social activity.

must mask? Furthermore, a methodological question emerges from this account: In creating accounts of affectual phenomena such as *kawaii* culture, what role does the scholar's textual reading of *kawaii* play alongside inductive methodologies (such as surveys and interviews) that investigate the accounts of participants' experiences?

Terasa Younker (2011) offers an interesting perspective on Lolita fashion, derived from her experiences as an employee of designers Mary Magdalene and BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT. Employing a methodology that could be described as participant observation, Younker followed the lives of nine employees as well as observing customers and staff located in Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe between January and July 2010. While Younker does make observations from her own perspective that Lolita Fashion has aspects of the infantile,[48] she also offers instances of social moments where participants demonstrate high degrees of responsibility and initiative. For instance, a manager of the BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT Kobe store informs Younker (2011: 102) that she paid for her own college education:

> My parents told me I was a girl and girls didn't need to go to college. But I wanted to go, so I paid for it myself. It wasn't easy … But even with a college degree I still only earn JP¥800 [US$9] an hour. But I wouldn't give up this job for anything. Life's just not fair, is it?

In this instance, the manager is demonstrating a high degree of agency and resolve in taking responsibility for her own education and pursuing her own interests. She even reflects on the consequences of her own decision making, which in this instance is choosing a position she enjoys at the expense of a higher wage. This

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[48] See for instance, Younker's (2011: 100) claim that '[a]cting childish is an effort to partake of childhood's legendary simplicity, happiness, and emotional warmth, something lacking in modern adult Japanese life. Lolita Fashion is primarily based in the neo-romantic notion of childhood and encourages its devotees not only to dress like children, but to indulge in childish activities such as playing with stuffed animals and eating sweets'. Interestingly, Younker (2011: 103) suggests that participants were not interested in their own childhood as the above passage from Winge (2008) implies, but instead a 'neo-romantic notion of childhood'.

reflection does not suggest an individual 'shirking' responsibility as the above discussion of the infantile and *kawaii* fashion practitioners would propose. While Younker (2011: 102; 106) finds that participants are broadly unaware of political issues (such as sex discrimination), her study highlights an acute awareness of financial matters and the need for frugality in spending. For example Younker (2011: 106) observes that participants were frugal with their spending due to their low wages and the high cost of Lolita dresses, with some participants choosing to forgo paying their mobile phone bill in order to afford a dress. Participants are also acutely aware of social expectations placed upon them, such as in the following response:

> I really want to make Lolita clothing and succeed at Mary [Magdalene], but I
> don't know. Maybe it would have been better to get a job at a big company
> like Wacoal. That's where most of my classmates went (Younker 2011: 109).

In this instance, the participant reflects on and weighs up what they would enjoy doing with what they feel they ought to be doing, informed by the actions of their classmates and the wages offered by bigger companies. Even though Younker (2011: 102) notes that these participants were 'quite wrapped up in their own self-centred worlds', her qualitative study does not paint a picture of a voiceless, helpless group of young women performing the infantile. Conversely, it illustrates a group of fiercely independent women, exploring an imaginative space together on their own terms and willing to make sacrifices in order to do so.

Yuniya Kawamura (2012) provides another perspective of Lolita fashion in Harajuku through an in-depth ethnographic study of the area (along with Shibuya, Shinjuku, Akihabara, Ikebukuoro and Kōenji) conducted from 2004 to 2010. Kawamura (2012: 4) primarily relies on the visual analysis of practitioners, and argues that 'outward appearances is [*sic*] the first step to understanding their worldview, values and

Figure 5 – A Lolita fashion practitioner. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.

norms …' She also provides some interesting responses from qualitative interviews with Lolita practitioners which provide the evidence for her chapter on Harajuku. In the below account, a Lolita offers an interesting insight into her experiences of putting together an outfit:

> I feel like a princess … When I put on a Lolita dress, I am thinking to myself 'which look do I want today?' After deciding that I want to go Ama-Loli [trans. Sweet Lolita Style], then I put all the accessories together and make that look. That thinking process itself and turning into a princess are great fun (Kawamura 2012: 69).

In this response, the participant focusses on the feelings of being 'a princess' rather than expressing her wish to be nurtured and cared for as Winge (2008) or Kinsella (1995) suggest, nor does she comment on her expression as a form of sexual transgressiveness as per Lunning's (2011) reading. Instead here we see a focus on her experience of 'put[ting] all the accessories together', 'mak[ing] that look', 'thinking', and 'turning into a princess'. The emphasis is placed on the creative experience and the feelings of elation and enjoyment that the Lolita practitioner feels in the process. Here in this response we glimpse the very beginnings of the description of an experience that occurs behind closed doors, where the individual creates, imagines and feels. While Kawamura's discussion of these interviews and analysis of Harajuku is brief,[49] her interviews indicate new potential in interviewing *kawaii* fashion practitioners in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of their interest in cuteness.

Nguyen's (2016) interviews with Lolita fashion practitioners in Japan also present an emphasis on *kawaii* as a feeling, but one which is enfolded into a discussion that

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[49] Kawamura (2015: 4) acknowledges the brevity of each chapter, noting that each could be developed into a book in its own right.

treats it as a mode of presentation or aesthetic. Specifically, Nguyen (2016: 23) argues that '… kawaii is best understood as an affect that expresses an aesthetic, describing things one wants to be surrounded with or bring within reach'. This reflects Nittono's (2016) argument that *kawaii* involves a feeling of wanting closeness or co-existence alongside the thing we admire. According to Nguyen, Lolita fashion practitioners use their mode of dress as a means of feeling close to and co-existing with the things they cherish. Nguyen suggests that this then manifests as an 'aesthetic' that is presented by the category of Lolita fashion. But what does this feeling of closeness and co-existence present for a sense of self, given the role that dress plays in self and identity? If one wishes to feel closer to the things they admire, what does this indicate about their sense of self? Nguyen (2016: 19) in her exploration of her participant responses presents this tension between separateness and closeness, illustrated by the following interview extract:

'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'.

In this instance, we can see that the participant feels that *kawaii* fashion – which she wears, identifying as a Lolita practitioner – is different from her current sense of self. This admiration and idealisation of the 'Perfect Lolita' establishes two things: a sense of inadequacy on the part of the participant for not being closer to her ideal self; and a strong desire to become like the thing she admires. In this sense, *kawaii* fashion also seems to involve an interest in difference and ideals that is far from the practitioner's established sense of self.

In these accounts, we see a more complex social phenomenon at work from the perspective of participants that involves active creating, participation in adult society, a sense of playfulness and wonder, and an optimistic outlook that is inherent to the individual. In this sense, it suggests that the *kawaii* fashion

practitioner is experiencing a more nuanced, individual form of *kawaii* than a scholar-as-viewer is able to immediately access.

This overview of some exemplary studies however, is only indicative of a complex phenomenon that requires a detailed sociological study. Accordingly, the only way to determine the veracity of these claims is to consider the views or perspectives of the participants themselves. The qualitative interviews conducted for this research seek to do exactly this. That is to say, this thesis seeks to better understand the personal significance of the objects worn by *kawaii* fashion practitioners, and to understand what informs their choice of these objects. Are they attempts to visually communicate with the viewer a rejection of adult responsibility, a subversion of the male gaze or something else altogether? In doing so, this thesis also seeks to comprehend the relationship between the participant's sense of self and these objects. How are objects used to mediate their sense of identity? Finally, by coming to an appreciation of the meaning of these objects for *kawaii* fashion practitioners, I hope to form a clearer picture of how *kawaii* fashion comes into being as a social phenomenon and how it brings participants together to form a community.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored current understandings of *kawaii* culture as a phenomenon that encourages women to engage in infantile practices which are primarily premised on the understanding that clothing acts as a form of non-verbal communication. In light of this tendency to read *kawaii* consumption practices as infantile and as a return to childhood, I want to determine whether *kawaii* fashion participants do in fact view their fashion as a form of non-verbal communication that expresses a desire to return to childhood. Specifically, this thesis will explore and ultimately complicate this notion of 'adult responsibilities' as participants understand them in the context of alternative *kawaii* fashion communities situated

in Tokyo. Are *kawaii* practitioners performing for a specific audience, and if so, with what intent? Do *kawaii* fashion practitioners interpret their style to be an expression of their agency? Do they attempt to flout, manipulate or confound the male gaze?

In addition to exploring the views of *kawaii* fashion participants about the claim that their interests are infantile, this thesis explores how and why participants choose particular objects that are then incorporated into their mode of dress. Are these choices based on aesthetic appearance, feelings and experience or all three? What does the process of selecting and engaging with these objects say about the participant's sense of self? In Chapter Two, we will begin to explore possible answers to these questions by considering Winnicott's (2005) understanding of play that might help us understand how individuals experience *kawaii* objects in terms of how it makes them feel or imagine.

Chapter Two: *Kawaii* and Affect: Experiencing the 'Not-Me'

Figure 6 – Hand-made accessory worn by research participant 90884. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.

This chapter explores what the concept of *kawaii* means on a personal level for participants in *kawaii* fashion communities, and from there, considers how participants incorporate their experiences of *kawaii* on an individual level. Through an analysis of interview transcripts, this chapter will show that each individual experiences *kawaii* in a unique way.

This chapter explores the degree to which *kawaii* can be appreciated as an affective experience and the kinds of subjective experiences *kawaii* fashion participants have of the objects they select for their outfits. In doing so, this chapter begins to address one of the core research questions for this thesis: What is the personal

significance of the objects worn by participants? What informs their choice of particular objects to incorporate into their style? This chapter relies on Winnicott's (2005) concepts of creativity and play, in particular the concept of the 'not-me', in order to understand the relationship between the types of experience participants report to have and the objects they incorporate into their style. This chapter also aims to provide an overview of the key aspects of Winnicott's theory of play and creativity which will be utilised across the first part of this thesis. In doing so, this chapter aims to develop an initial understanding of the meaning making process in *kawaii* fashion communities. To achieve this, I use Winnicott's notion of play to understand the process of how particular objects might appeal to a given practitioner. I use interview material where participants describe the emotions or imaginings they experience upon viewing an object they feel to be cute to lay the foundations for this argument.

The chapter proceeds in the following manner: firstly, I consider instances in which participants resisted attempts to place symbolic significance on the objects they chose to incorporate into their outfits. Then, I compare these findings to other studies of affect and Japanese alternative communities, in particular An Nguyen's (2016) work on Lolita fashion and affect. Once this is established, I then provide an overview of Winnicott's key concepts of play and creativity (inner reality, external reality, potential space, play and the object). Lastly, I qualify the nature of this affectual response to cute objects by drawing upon Winnicott's notion of play and the object as a negotiation of the 'me' and 'not-me' by means of a further examination of the interview responses.

'Because I Like It': The Role of Feeling in the Selection of *Kawaii* Objects

Thus far, we have discussed other scholars' interpretations of the *kawaii* fashion phenomenon. Some of these studies place emphasis on the symbolic significance of objects chosen by *kawaii* fashion practitioners, as if the wearer has intentionally sought to communicate a message to the viewer(s). As we will see, one interesting finding from my research is that the objects that participants select to play with through styling, customising and wearing are selected based on feeling. For instance, when participants were asked about why particular fashion objects were chosen using questions that were couched in terms of communication (such as branding, story or message), the participants reacted with surprise and emphasised that their selections were based on feeling.

For example, as part of an ongoing conversation with Alice (a Lolita Fashion practitioner at the time)[50] about her clothing, she was heavily resistant to the idea that there might be a deeper meaning associated with specific aspects of the style, even though she recounted at length some literary connections she had been studying as part of her schooling and Lolita fashion. For example, when asked about her shoes, she deflected the question:

> Megan: What brand are your shoes?
> Alice: I bought them somewhere in Harajuku without thinking anything.

This immediate deflection indicates both a defensive move, and perhaps a desire to express independence from the communicative system of branding. The location of the shoes is generalised to somewhere in the local vicinity, rather than associated

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[50] For more information on the participants featured in this thesis, please refer to Appendix 2.

with a particular store's branding and concept. She asserts that she did not think actively, and seems to minimise the selection process; however, something must have informed her decision to purchase these particular shoes (which were sold by a variety of Lolita fashion boutiques). In this social moment we can see some resistance to discussing the branding of the shoes she was wearing that day.

This pattern of denying a commitment to thoughtful or reasoned fashion choices continued throughout the interview, so when the conversation moved out from the personal, another strategy was employed for clarification:

> Megan: So you think Lolita girls don't think about why they want to buy Lolita clothes or why they want to be a Lolita girl?
> Alice: Maybe. Most people don't think about the story of fashion. So if they think 'this is cool' or 'this is cute' they wear the fashion without thinking deeply.

Here it is made clear that for Alice, participants do not select clothing with a concept or logic or intention to communicate particular ideas, let alone those that we discussed in the previous chapter regarding the infantile, agency or rebellion. What is instead significant is the significance of feeling in selecting objects. 'This is cool' and 'this is cute' are a direct response to the objects themselves. They are immediate feelings of approval that are not always susceptible to clarification through reflection. Alice allows us to infer that participants are often searching and looking in their daily lives for objects that move them in some way, that captivate their imagination in a manner akin to Roland Barthes' (1984) consideration of the 'punctum'. The object they come across in their day-to-day life metaphorically '… rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces' them, and 'strikes' or moves them in a way that is salient enough to capture their interest (Barthes 1984: 26). In this context, 'this is cute' is not just a statement of appreciation but an

exclamation of excitement or joy upon beholding an object worthy of incorporation into one's *kawaii* fashion outfit.

Part of this research sought to test the validity of claims that *kawaii* fashion was a form of visual communication for viewers. When participants were prompted specifically to offer a story or general comment about the outfit they were wearing on the day of the interview, some were taken aback or confused. They did not seem to have given thought to associating a narrative or meaning to their mode of dress prior to this point. As such, some participants decided to form an impromptu story in the interview situation. For example, Kumamiki (a Fairy *kei* model and designer), who was well-trained in conceptualising her work through her time at college, offered this account:

> Megan: What is your story of your outfit today?
>
> Kumamiki: Oh! Story?? Do I have to make a story of my outfit?? Well, there was a giraffe in a field of flowers. The giraffe always eats sunny-side-up which is his favourite. The point of today's outfit is the sunny-side-up collar. It's not just *kawaii* but I wanted to add something funny using food in clothes.

At first, we can see her initial surprise and confusion about being asked to explain her outfit. This would seem to counteract the hypothesis that the clothing is a coherent communicative practice, whereby onlookers are meant to derive a specific narrative from the coding of objects used. Generously, Kumamiki offers us a spontaneous narrative about what her outfit may be about. At the time, she was wearing a colourful pinafore with a collar that looked like two dripping egg yolks. She was carrying a backpack made from a plush giraffe that she likes, and carries with her on a regular basis. This giraffe takes the role of the protagonist in the story Kumamiki is creating. In the first movement of her explanation, her backpack represents a real giraffe playing in a field of flowers, which she imagines using the

floral textiles on her dress. Next she shifts into a second scene where the giraffe is eating the eggs found on her collar. In this instance, we see a resistance from Kumamiki to the formation of any clear message or symbolic pattern in her clothing; instead we are presented with an account that is open to whim and immediacy.

After this moment, Kumamiki's answer begins to shift, to become more aligned with the editorial discourse around *kawaii* fashion found in street photography compilations and magazines such as *KERA*.[51] Her reference to the 'point' of her outfit does not refer to purpose, but taps into a language used in street photography where the photographer asks the subject to fill out a brief profile questionnaire. One typical question is to ask after the 'style point' which means the most salient or favourite part of the outfit that the participant is wearing. In this case, her hand-made egg collar is the salient part of the outfit, most likely because it represents her own technical accomplishments and her own glee in disrupting the usual objects used in *kawaii* ensembles by other participants. This move may suggest that Kumamiki was feeling particularly vulnerable in her attempts to make a silly narrative, and so she moved to a language that that she felt was more socially acceptable (i.e. the street photography editorial discourse). In this form of communication, however, we can see that in actuality the construction of an outfit involves the choosing of objects that are placed together on the body, the process of which is not really given much thought. Rather, outfit construction appears to be intuitive, responsive and fragmented.

As another example of how feeling can shape the formation of *kawaii* outfits, we can consider the following response from Pink Hime, a *Hime Deko* designer who is

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[51] *KERA* was a print monthly periodical that ran 1998-2017. The magazine specialised in *kawaii*, Punk and Goth fashion, providing tutorials, editorials and information on upcoming releases from designer labels catering to the magazine's youth target audience. J International, who produced the magazine, have now launched a website called *KERA Style*, which produces similar editorial content to the original print magazine. For more information, see KERA (2018).

Figure 7 – Pink Hime's work room and hand-made creations, 2013. Image Courtesy of Manon Marguerite.

deeply moved by the colour pink which is the main colour she incorporates into her palate. Her work room is filled with pink and glittering baskets, chairs, toys, bags, shoes and many other daily objects. These different materials play a crucial role in her practice as a decoration artist where she takes found objects and sticks lace, rhinestones and plastic shapes called cabochons onto them. With this in mind, the key to accessing her process is to learn more about her materials:

> Megan: Where did the materials come from?
>
> Pink Hime: It is from the relationships that I created with many people for many years. I get materials through people that I know. And I go many places to see materials.
>
> Megan: How do you decide what is the best material?
>
> Pink Hime: That is a feeling, too. Inspiration.
>
> Megan: What kind of feelings?

Pink Hime: Intuition. I never think. I buy it instantly if I like it.

Megan: So, how do you find the same pink?

Pink Hime: I ask people to dye it or sometimes I dye it by myself.

Her selection of materials has two features. Firstly, it is part of her daily interactions with people and place: she collects decoration materials as talismans and souvenirs of her experiences. Secondly, it involves the selection of something that strikes or moves her upon first seeing the object, something that she describes as a kind of 'intuition'. Pink Hime chooses materials first based on how they make her feel, only to then customise the colour afterwards. It is interesting to consider, however, the symbolic value of the dye. Pink Hime does not make a specific trip to a hobby store to look for things that fit predetermined aesthetic criteria. She selects things intuitively and then assimilates them together into a coherent art piece. The colours must be changed for them to be reconciled with her vision, rather than her work being a response to the materials as they are.

For these participants it is apparent that there is a complex social phenomenon at work in the selection of these objects. What does it mean to 'like' something, or to choose something based on 'inspiration' or 'intuition'? As we have established in this section, the participants interviewed for this research place a greater emphasis on how *kawaii* objects make them feel. In this thesis, we will further unpack this concept of *kawaii* as feeling, and trace in depth the processes through which participants select, create, design and assemble their own outfits. This involves exploring initial responses to seeing *kawaii* objects, to the interaction with this object through the imagination and the creation of outfits. Before we proceed to explore this feeling or affect further, we will first briefly pause to discuss other studies of Japanese alternative communities, in particular An Nguyen's (2016) study of Lolita fashion and affect. In doing so I will identify why the concept of affect has become an increasingly useful way to understand the activities of alternative communities.

Affect in Other Studies of Alternative Communities

Studies of alternative communities have begun to rely on the concept of affect. For instance, studies of affect in *otaku*[52] communities who appreciate '*moe*' things in Japan have largely focussed on how affect influences consumer behaviours, brings feelings of closeness between fictional characters and the viewer or brings together fans with similar interests. Patrick Galbraith (2011) in his study of maid cafés, for instance, argues that the female employees are carrying out work akin to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2004) affective labour. Central to these communities is a feeling of '*moe*' which a participant of Galbraith's study describes as 'It's like, the inside of your heart is pink. ... When your heart is a bright, warm color, maybe that feeling is *moe*' (Galbraith 2009a: 136). Studies such as Pei-Ti Wang (2010; 2011), Izumi Tsuji (2012), Saitō Tamaki (2011), Henry Jenkins (1992; 2006), Matt Hills (2002) and Cornel Sandvoss (2005) seek to capture the feelings fans have towards objects that they 'like'. In Galbraith (2009a; 2011) and Pei-Ti Wang (2010; 2011), affect is offered as an explanation of the phenomenon, but the concept itself is not further qualified in terms of emotions and physical sensations.

One study that is pertinent to shaping our understanding of *kawaii* fashion and affect is An Nguyen's (2016) study of Lolita fashion and affect. In her study of Lolita fashion practitioners in Japan,[53] Nguyen (2016: 26) argues that the fashion 'offers a site for play, fantasy and a chance to express a part of oneself that is impossible in other venues'. Nguyen describes the act of getting dressed into Lolita fashion as a means of feeling closer to *kawaii* objects. Drawing upon the work of Sara Ahmed's

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[52] *Otaku* is a term used in Japan to refer to individuals who are devoted fans of a specific object of interest, such as a particular form of media, character, historical figure or tangible object. For instance, one might be a train or camera *otaku* or an anime *otaku*. The term is more commonly used to refer to fans of media such as games, manga and anime, whose devotion to the object of their interest eclipses what might be considered socially acceptable. For more information on the latter usage of *otaku*, see Galbraith (2014; 2011; 2009) and Kinsella (1998).

[53] Nguyen's (2016) publication focusses on her data on Japanese Lolita fashion practitioners, however it is important to note that her full study for her 2012 thesis also involved interviews with North American Lolitas.

(2010) chapter 'happy objects', Nguyen (2016: 17) views objects as a means of creating 'collectives of feeling, sensing and experiencing, [and] bringing people together through shared affect'. In other words people who experience objects in similar ways are able to come together to share and validate their experiences. Nguyen also acknowledges the sensuality of these objects, something that informs the experience of *kawaii* fashion practitioners. For instance, the participants in her study describe the sensation of a bouncing and fluttering full skirt as '*fuwafuwa*'[54] which captures 'the visual movement and tactile feeling of a bell-shaped Lolita skirt with a full petticoat underneath as it sways with each step' (Nguyen 2016: 17). Participants also describe the soothing effect of *kawaii* things, with one participant keeping cute objects in her room to look at every morning; doing so 'calms her down and makes her feel relieved' (Nguyen 2016: 20). From this, we can see that *kawaii* fashion participants experience a form of affect in response to objects that capture their imagination, something that overall can be described as playful and soothing.

Another interesting facet of Nguyen's (2016: 17) research is her attempt to qualify the nature of this affect as 'feeling like a girl'. Drawing upon the concept of 'girl' as affect from Monica Swindle's (2011) 'Feeling girl, girling feeling: an examination of "Girl" as affect', Nguyen (2016: 17) proposes that the concept of 'Girl' is not limited to a specific 'gender and age disposition' but is, in fact, an experience that 'comprises an embodied knowledge and experience that can be revisited and recalled'. This is reinforced by her reading of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987: 277) understanding of 'Girl' as a state that 'slip[s] in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages and sexes'.[55] In this sense, 'Girl' does not refer to a female child,

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[54] *Fuwafuwa* in Japanese is an adjective used to describe something full and fluffy. It describes something that appears fluffy, but can also be used to describe the sensation of touching something fluffy. In this instance, *fuwafuwa* also captures a full and fluffy petticoat worn by Lolita Fashion practitioners.

[55] You may recall from the introduction that Gilles Deleuze's (1988) reflections on Spinoza's philosophy were crucial for current writing on affect.

but instead to a state of being that is betwixt and between the playful childlike state and the responsibilities of the woman as adult.

For the participants of Nguyen's study, this experience of 'feeling girl' manifests in different ways depending upon their own personal attraction to this 'feeling like a girl'. For instance, one participant, Noriko, is drawn to *kawaii* fashion due to her inability to access girls' culture during her childhood in her rural hometown (Nguyen 2016: 21). As these cultural forms were readily accessible in urban areas, Noriko exoticises the 'city girl' as a fascinating 'other' that she feels is more interesting and exciting than her own childhood allowed. Being able to play with girl culture as an adult enables her to take control over her own life and actively pursue something that continues to fascinate her. Another participant, Nagisa, is described as pursuing an 'impossible ideal' of becoming a brilliant angelic woman through Lolita fashion (Nguyen 2016: 19). As a result of the impossibility of the image that Nagisa holds in mind, she finds herself in an 'ongoing and never quite complete' process of becoming a Lolita whilst, at the same time, feeling 'keenly aware' of the futility of her pursuit (Nguyen 2016: 19). In this interesting account, Nagisa is attracted to 'images of innocence and purity' which 'Nagisa, as an adult woman, feels she cannot claim to embody' (Nguyen 2016: 19). But the very difference between this ideal and her sense of self appears to be what draws her to engage with these images in the first instance. Her mode of dress forms part of 'a desire to recall these ideals even if she is unable to completely achieve them'.

In this account of 'feeling girly', we can see that there are two key elements that drive the practice of these *kawaii* practitioners. First of all, participants become fascinated by objects that they feel is lacking in their current sense of self. The image or object reinforces a sense of lack in the participant's sense of self. Secondly, the practice of playing with these images and objects through making, consuming and wearing *kawaii* fashion enables a sense of closeness to this difference to the extent that – temporarily – they feel as if they have become like

the object or image they admire. Nguyen captures this tension nicely but further exploration is necessary to better understand this social process. Is this 'feeling girly' the only experience participants have of their fashion? In what ways does *kawaii* fashion present itself as a site for play and fantasy? How might we better understand the creative process behind the formation of these *kawaii* fashion outfits? What role do these objects and images play in this process, and how does a sense of difference inform this? And finally, what experience do *kawaii* fashion participants have of the creation of their outfits? In order to explore these questions in depth, this thesis uses Donald Winnicott's (2005) theories of playing and reality as a tool for better understanding how and why *kawaii* fashion participants play and interact with the objects they incorporate into their outfits. In order to do so, we must first explore Winnicott's key concepts and set up their applicability to this study.

Winnicott: Playing with Concepts of 'Me' and 'Not-Me'

In his text, *Playing and Reality*, Donald Winnicott (2005) explores the origins of creativity as well as the function of play in the relationship between the individual and the outside world. The key objective of his text is to better understand how creativity can be appreciated and fostered as a means of giving individuals the opportunity to enjoy a fulfilling life. This thesis draws out four concepts that are central to Winnicott's argument: the 'not-me', inner reality, external reality and potential space. Winnicott's arguments are helpful in that they provide a means of coming to understand the creative process that *kawaii* fashion participants undergo in creating their outfits, and also the significance that objects play in this creative process. Furthermore, Winnicott's text also provides an interesting model from which to develop a theoretical understanding of the experience that *kawaii* fashion participants have of the creation of their own outfits. In particular, Winnicott's idea of potential space and his notion of play allow us to explore the connection between the objects chosen by participants for the outfits and the participants'

imagination. As we will see, his concepts of the potential space and transitive object indicate that individuals have unique experiences of the objects around them which are elaborated upon in their imagination.

Winnicott's focus on objects and the role they play in allowing the individual to create enables us to consider a core research question in this thesis: What is the personal significance of the objects worn by participants and what informs their choice of particular objects to incorporate into their outfits? Winnicott gives us an answer located in infant and child development. In *Playing and Reality,* Winnicott maps the trajectories from infant development to adult creativity and cultural experience. He suggests that what initiates this process is the transitional object, which is the first object that infants are able to differentiate from their body. This is subsequently referred to as the 'not-me' by Winnicott. This object is also a source of comfort and reassurance in the absence of the mother. Winnicott (2005: 119) defines the 'not-me' object as something that can be 'given cavalier treatment without effect' on the individual, meaning that it is not part of one's own body, but an object in its surroundings. The process of coming to understand what is 'me' and 'not-me' is developmental. An infant has the initial impression that everything it perceives around it to be 'me', and later develops the understanding at age 'four to six to eight to twelve months' that '[w]hat is inside me is me and what is outside me is not me' (Winnicott 2005: 176). Winnicott argues that as a result of this process, which is crucial to the development of self, the infant (and later the adult) thinks, creates and plays in patterns that trace these feelings of separateness. The significance of his argument for my purpose is that we choose to engage with objects that resonate with us in some way. This resonance is simultaneously the feeling that this object is new and interesting due to its 'not-me' status, as well as a desire to feel closer to properties of this different and fascinating object. For instance, we might see and admire someone on the street wearing a beautiful pair of shoes, and later decide to find our own version of that item to wear so that we might look like that person. We might visit a spectacular landmark, and take photos

and find souvenirs to display in our homes to feel closer to that place; or if artistically inclined perhaps we might sketch the landmark. Or, we might become fascinated by an artwork in a gallery, purchase a print for our living room and read widely to learn about the artist, thereby incorporating the experience into our everyday life – both in the home environment and in our own knowledge. In all of these cases, the thing that captures our interest is processed in such a way that it becomes a facet of our life and self, whether it be on our bodies, in our homes, or in our minds. This act of 'processing' can be through creation, consumption, imagining, reading, thinking and more. In all these instances, we are 'playing' with the object, picking and choosing the parts of it that we most like to engage with.

In these instances, it is not necessarily the symbolic value of the object that is important. Instead, Winnicott (2005: xvi) argues that what is more revealing is the meanings we attribute to objects and using them creatively, that is, the way the object might cause each individual to feel, think or imagine. Furthermore, we can learn more about an individual by understanding what it is about the object that draws their interest in the first instance. By way of exploring this further, let us consider the following explanation from Winnicott (2005: 18) about how we are drawn to objects:

> The object has become meaningful. Projection mechanisms and identifications have been operating, and … something of the subject is found in the object, though enriched by feeling.

This passage conveys a process of engaging with an object that is deeply emotional insofar as it is 'enriched by feeling'. The process of feeling moved in response to an object – which I have defined as affect – is enriching for the individual. In the logic presented in the above account, the individual perceives the object and processes the memories, thoughts and feelings they experience in response. They are 'projecting' and 'identifying' with the object, placing onto the object ideas that (in

this moment) begin in their imagination, thereby imbuing the object with specific properties. For example, in the instance of *kawaii* fashion, a practitioner may select a rubber duck to turn into a necklace based on a pleasant memory (such as a hot bubble bath) or something about themselves they feel is 'duck-like' (such as awkwardness). Winnicott would express this process of identification as 'something of the subject' that is, something in the individual's sense of 'me'. The rubber duck charms viewers and makes them smile as they recall a memory of the bubble bath, or laugh at the silliness of the high pitched squeak it lets out when squeezed. Somehow, they see themselves in this quirky object. The act of 'finding' this quality in the object implies active searching on the part of the individual as well as something that is not expected or inherently obvious in the object itself. Because this is an individual pursuit, the objects found to be 'cute' might not possess obvious aesthetic properties. For instance, a *kawaii* fashion practitioner might find aspects of a robot cute because they experience joy or reminiscence while looking at it, but this is relative to their individual experiences, tastes and ideas. In short, another participant may not experience the robot or the duck in the same way. Thus in the case of *kawaii* fashion communities, it is important to consult practitioners about these feelings so as to better understand why and how they have chosen particular objects for their outfits.

As previously mentioned, one of the ways that the individual measures the 'not-me' is through a sense of '[w]hat is inside me is me and what is outside me is not me' which develops from infancy onwards. The key way Winnicott explores the categories of 'me' and 'not-me' is through 'inner reality' and 'external reality' which attempt to define different realms of experience for the individual. In order to understand these categories and realms of experience, we must first pinpoint Winnicott's understanding of the individual. Winnicott (2005: 3) defines an individual with the capacity to play as someone '… who has reached the stage of being a unit with a limiting membrane and an outside and an inside'. That is to say that an individual has developed to the stage in which they have a clearer sense of

inner and external reality compared to an infant who tends to view everything it perceives to be 'me'. As such the individual has an inner reality and an external reality which they understand as 'me' and 'not-me', along with the capacity to play in a way that engages both of these states.

Inner reality is described by Winnicott (2005: 3) to be an 'inner world'. This world is only accessed by the individual, and is not available to others unless it is actively communicated by the individual through, for example, facial expressions, gestures, or verbal comments. This world is further defined as an 'inside where personal wealth builds up' (Winnicott 2005: 141) as if this were a place where things such as memories are 'stored'. Here, inner reality is described as an 'inside' or a 'container', from which the individual is able to conduct 'mechanisms of projection and introjection and to relate to the world in terms of introjection and projection' (Winnicott 2005: 111). So, for the purposes of this thesis, inner reality is the space where the individual is able to dream, think and feel in a way that is not immediately accessible to the outside world. This imbues the 'me' with qualities of a private space where an impression of self lies, over which the individual is able to exercise some degree of control. The 'me' is experienced as the familiar and the everyday, in contrast to the difference and excitement of the 'not-me'.

For Winnicott (2005: 135), external reality lies outside this space, and consists of '… objects and phenomena outside omnipotent control'. Winnicott (2005: 55) further defines external reality as '… part of the repudiated world, the not-me, that … which is outside magical control'. While the individual's dreams, thoughts and feelings can be controlled and shaped in inner reality in an omnipotent manner, objects outside of this space are not as easily available and may be restricted altogether. Moreover, an individual may perceive different objects that constitute their external reality, and may also perceive other individuals as part of that reality. In both instances, the individual is not able to control the object it perceives, nor enter into the inner reality of another person. They cannot fully comprehend their

thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, Winnicott (2005: 144) defines the external reality as something that is 'shared' by individuals to suggest that it is a common medium that all individuals move through and experience in some way. This means that the same objects exist for all individuals, but when considered alongside the subjective and uniquely personal nature of inner reality, this does not necessarily mean that all individuals have the *same* experiences of them. This suggests that the 'not-me' is beyond the control of the individual, and is a mystery to be explored.

Winnicott's discussion is helpful for understanding the *kawaii* phenomenon this thesis investigates, as it enables us to appreciate the articulation of preferences. It can be argued that *kawaii* fashion participants have individual experiences of objects. For instance, participants might have different ideas of what is *kawaii* and might perceive one specific object to be *kawaii* over another. They may perhaps decide a specific pink bow is *kawaii* based on feeling, but disregard another bow sitting beside it. As we will demonstrate through this thesis, particular preferences emerge as a consequence of the churning of one's inner reality and the call of the object.

In summary, inner reality and external reality convey the sense that the 'not-me' is that which the individual cannot control, belonging to a space they cannot immediately access. The 'not-me' presents itself as something less familiar and more fascinating than the 'me' and is something we can process and explore. But how does one process or explore the 'not-me', and how does it interweave feelings of union and separateness? What 'space' does this exploration belong to, if it involves both inner and external reality?

Winnicott posits in *Playing and Reality* that there exists a third state between inner and external reality, which he refers to as 'potential space'. He describes (2005: 3) the potential space as an '… intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute'. As such, the potential space is the coming

together of inner and external reality, where the individual is able to experience indistinct delineations between the 'me' and 'not-me'. In this space, the imaginations and emotions of inner reality meet with the tangible qualities of an object in external reality. It is in this space that for the individual, the boundaries between inner and external reality become less clear. Winnicott (2005: 71-72) captures this tension between inner and external reality in the following account of potential space:

> … inner psychic reality has a kind of location in the mind or in the belly or in the head or somewhere within the bounds of the individual's personality … whereas what is called external reality is located outside those bounds … playing and cultural experience can be given a location if one uses the concept of the potential space …

In this account, Winnicott goes to lengths to establish inner and external realities as a measurement of the extension between the 'me' and 'not-me'. Inner reality refers to that which only the individual is privy to – the individual's 'inner world' – whereas external reality is that which lies beyond this category and refers to the reality we share with others. Experience then, is a negotiation between one's inner reality and the outside world. Experience is not used as a technical term here, but rather an umbrella concept that organises events, feelings and sensations over time. It designates what *has* happened and what *is* important. In this sense, potential space describes a safe field in which one can try to play with concepts, interactions and actions that belong to inner and external reality.

The use of the potential space can be part of our everyday lives, such as reading an opinion piece in a newspaper and reflecting on the issues and ideas that matter the most to us. In this instance, the information of events and the writer's views belong to external reality and the process of reading and reflecting belongs to inner reality (thoughts and feelings). Here, the writing in the newspaper and the thoughts of the

114

reader converge into a moment of critical thought, where inner and external reality are less defined. The reader then finishes the task of reading and reflecting with a refined position on the opinion piece. Potential space can also be used to describe play, which involves light-heartedly engaging in creative activities. This could be the process of imagining a new cooking recipe to try tomorrow, drawing a landscape, painting miniatures or even developing a new outfit to wear. In these instances, the individual takes time to explore the self and to temporarily remove themselves from the everyday. In the everyday, we have less time for ourselves in the service of others, and this activity enables us to engage in moments of indulgent whimsy without a specific utilitarian purpose in mind (Winnicott 2005: 87).

In addition to the above, some commentary on the role of play in adult life is in order, particularly since this thesis aims to demonstrate that *kawaii* fashion is not understood to be an infantile practice by the participants. Winnicott, in *Playing and Reality,* focusses on play as it is experienced by both children and adults. At the crux of his argument is that although play begins in infancy, we continue to engage in the phenomena for our entire lives. He argues that the crucial difference for adults is that they are able to enjoy the 'personal intermediate area without making claims' about 'the objectivity of his subjective phenomena' (Winnicott 2005: 18). That is to say that adults are able to distinguish between what imagination and what is shared reality. This does not mean, however, that imagination does not play a role in inspiring action and change in our everyday lives and shared reality. Winnicott (2005: 71) writes of the essential nature of play in adult life as it is 'only in playing' that 'the child or adult is free to be creative'. In Chapter Five of his text, 'Creativity and its Origins', Winnicott explores how play informs the creative practices and lives of adults. As such, Winnicott's theory of play is intended to be

applied to adults just as much as children, without stigma or concern for the adult in question.[56]

In summary, Winnicott offers us some useful tools that enable us to explore why particular objects capture the attention of *kawaii* fashion practitioners. We are drawn to difference, which Winnicott describes as the 'not-me'. Our sense of what is different can be measured by understandings of inner reality (what is familiar and controllable) and external reality (what is unfamiliar and out of our control). When we explore this tension in detail – reflecting on who we are and who we want to be – we engage with what Winnicott calls the potential space. By playing in the potential space, we are able to 'try on' elements of the 'not-me' and find a way to make it part of our sense of self. This process of projection and identification suggests that it is not necessarily the wider symbolic social value of the object that matters most, but how the objects make us feel and how we decide to use them. While both values attributed to the object – the symbolic and how it makes an individual feel – can be interpreted, considering the feelings one has towards an object helps us to gain a clearer sense of who they feel they are and who they want to be. In short, it helps us develop a clearer picture of how *kawaii* fashion practitioners interact with objects and why they are drawn to particular objects and not others in the first instance.

As noted in Chapter One, researchers have primarily sought to understand *kawaii* fashion through interpretive means, such as textual analysis. If we consider the account that Winnicott offers of the unique experience that individuals have of objects, then we can see that it would be quite difficult to interpret what makes an object 'cute' without consulting those who find it to be cute. This is because, as the above discussion suggests, each individual has a unique experience of the objects

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[56] For more information on the role that play can have in adult life, Kwastek (2013) provides an excellent overview of theorisations of play and adulthood.

they experience in external reality and others are simply not privy to this particular experience. In other words, scholars would have difficulty in 'predicting' the experiences of participants without reference to the interpretative practices and schemata used by the participants themselves. Doing so would result in the viewer documenting their own processes of identification and projection with cute objects rather than accessing the experience of *kawaii* fashion participants. As such non-*kawaii* practitioners may not be able to fully appreciate all the facets of *kawaii* fashion communities.

Below, we will begin to explore how *kawaii* is felt in *kawaii* fashion communities as an experience of what Winnicott calls the 'not-me'. In doing so, we will begin to open up some of the diverse meanings *kawaii* objects have for these participants.

Exploring Experience, Affect and Not-Me in *Kawaii* Fashion Communities

Now that we have established Winnicott's (2005) key concepts, we will consider some of the feelings, thoughts, imaginings and sensations *kawaii* fashion practitioners experience in relation to objects they feel are *kawaii*. In doing so, we will attempt to gain a broader understanding of what *kawaii* means for these participants as a feeling in general terms. We will then begin to unpack how the objects chosen by *kawaii* fashion participants correlate to Winnicott's idea of the 'not-me'. That is to say we will seek to understand how the objects present themselves as fascinating to the participant. We will also explore just some of the ways that these objects appear to be 'different' for the participant such as, for example, an Occidental fantasy, a sense of discord, an impression of another time or a novelty.

While *kawaii* fashion practitioners acknowledge the significance of soft tactile objects, round shapes, soft or cheerful colour palettes, and nostalgia in the objects they find to be *kawaii*, I discovered during the interviews conducted for this study that participants experienced (or believed they were experiencing) a distinct set of physiological symptoms in response to objects they felt were *kawaii*.[57] For example Tiara, a designer, explains that *kawaii* makes her happy because it makes her feel 'excited and positive'. She mentions the presence of physiological symptoms in a vivid account of her love of dolls, which she immediately associates with *kawaii*:

> Megan: Why do you like dolls?
>
> Tiara: My heart fluttered when I first saw a Barbie. It was something like a shock, or inspiration … It was a feeling as if I had fallen in love for the first time.

In this description we can see a list of physiological responses that could be associated with *kawaii* – an increase in heart rate, a sense of breathlessness, a sudden shock. The experience is a punctum. Like the punctum discussed earlier, this first moment with Barbie 'strikes' or 'pierces' Tiara emotionally as a salient moment in her life. This moment is described almost as if it were a moment of revelation through a sudden unlocking of emotion. The presence of the object touches her in a profound way, and takes the form of 'inspiration' in her creative practice. Whether an embellished or a literal interpretation of an event from her youth, it is clear that 'Barbie' left an impression on Tiara. Through this example, we can see that *kawaii* can also be used to describe a kind of feeling of joy, excitement and love.

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[57] It should be noted that descriptive language employed by participants to describe *kawaii* objects also incorporated the experiential. For example, *fuwafuwa* loosely translates to 'fluffy' but tries to captivate the soft movement of something fluffy under one's hand. *Kira-kira* tries to reflect in language the twinkling of crystals and the glitter of stars as the sparkling refracts light and fills space. *Hira-hira* captivates the rustling of floating ribbon or cascading lace. All of these terms capture intimate, vivid, sensuous experiences of *kawaii*.

Kawaii practitioners are drawn to two types of experience – that which is soothing and that which is fascinating. In Tiara's account above, we can see that the incorporation of Barbie-inspired motifs into her fashion outfit allows her to access soothing memories of the joy she experienced in childhood. However, this moment is also intertwined with her original sense of fascination and wonder that arose in this first encounter. There is inevitably a difference between the toys she owned and the new doll before her; the reality of the human flesh and the impossibility of the plastic body; the young girl and mature woman; and the intermingling of the East and West. As such, the object of Tiara's adoration constitutes the 'not-me'.

In a similar regard, Doll Classica, a well-established Lolita fashion model in print media, also offers an account couched in terms of the literal and figurative heart. Doll Classica is comparatively composed in her account of what *kawaii* is. She offers the following account:

> Megan: What does *kawaii* mean to you?
> Doll Classica: It differs from person to person, but for me *kawaii* is something that makes my heart sing with a happy beat.

Firstly, we observe a poetic description of her elevated heartbeat, and secondly we can observe an acknowledgement of the diverse personal and subjective experiences of *kawaii.* It is interesting to see the use of the word 'sing' here. Doll Classica indicates in her interview that she has a strong interest in 'European Arts' and sees this as a partial explanation for her interest in Lolita fashion. We can only wonder if the song in her view is chaotic or steady, and if the happiness that is evoked is one of contentment or the same rush of excitement as Tiara's. Tiara's self-image is invested in chaos – in her words, 'a toy box tipped out' – whereas Doll Classica appears as a poised, elegant beauty à la Marie Antoinette. As Doll Classica says, the experience of what is and is not *kawaii* varies between individuals.

From this emerges another interesting theme, whereby feeling that something is cute involves finding in the object both something of 'me', as well as something that is 'not-me'. Through interviews it became clear that participants had different but generalisable *types* of experiences with *kawaii* objects that I explain via the concepts of the 'me' and 'not-me'. Typical experiences of participants in response to objects they deemed *kawaii* were fantasies, daydreams or imaginings of a fictional Other. The Other refers to those individuals we feel are different from ourselves, usually due to their existence in other cultures, times or places. As opposed to the binaries of 'the strong West' and 'the weak East' of Edward Said's (2004; originally published in 1978) concept of the Other, the 'Other' in this instance presents itself as a moment of wonder and admiration.[58] In his account of fantasying and imagining, Winnicott explores the individual's capacity to long for the counterfactual (in other words, we long to be doing things or being something other than we are). In a way, the experiencing of otherness enables us to contemplate these other possibilities for self. One key distinction Winnicott (2005: 38) makes is the difference between fantasying and action. Whereas action would involve actively seeking to find the Other in real life in some way, fantasying refers to the way the individual experiences action in their mind. For instance, they might fantasise about becoming a great painter they admire, but they will never pick up a brush in reality. In this sense, the experience of the 'not-me' here is a kind of fantasy where the individual explores something entirely in their mind. This may change into action at a later stage.

We can explore this sense of otherness and the 'not-me' through an interview extract from 90884 where she comments on a personal fantasy of hers about the

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[58] On the topic of Said's (2004) concept of the Other, there is another point of consideration that needs to be addressed. Some scholars might argue that the interests of these *kawaii* fashion participants in the Other and the Occident reproduce the binaries set out in Said's text between the West and the East. That is to say that the participants have internalised the suggestion that the West is 'superior' to the East. This is indeed a point of consideration, but I would argue that the sense of wonder, novelty and curiosity for the West (both the fictional and the real) that these participants have doesn't necessarily translate into a feeling that their own culture is inferior. Further study is required to understand how *kawaii* fashion practitioners engage with these binaries.

Figure 8 – Accessories worn by a Fairy kei *practitioner. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.*

1980s fashion and 1980s childhood culture. 90884 is a well-established street model for publications and advertisements for *kawaii* fashion labels. As a Decora model, she is well known for her unconventional and unusual beauty (recently enhanced by braces) and her *genki*[59] or lively personality. Central to her mode of dress are objects from the 80s, such as old toys, clothes and technology. She describes her love for the 80s as follows:

> Megan: Let's talk a bit more about the 80s. Do you like 80s fashion?
> 90884: I like it so much. I like it so much that I, by myself, always look for something old on internet
> Megan: Why do you like it?
> 90884: It seems a kind of strange. In 80s internet did not exist nor mobile phone. But the forms and colours are very eccentric and strange.

Here it is interesting to note that her account does not describe her personal journey but is focussed on an Other that is 'strange' and 'eccentric'. 90884 was born at the very end of the 80s fashion era, so her fantasy about this time that precedes her own life allows her to explore possibilities such as a world without the internet, or a world where unique designs of the 80s are still part of the everyday. By finding *kawaii* objects from this time that resonate with her fantasy, 90884 can imagine their origins and their own particular stories. She is compelled by the sheer differences between forms and colours of the past compared to the current reality of her everyday life. Here her account weaves in and out of a fascination with aesthetics and highlights her affectual experience of 1980s objects. It is this experience that leads her to feel that they are *kawaii* and worthy play objects.

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[59] *Genki* in Japanese means to be lively and energetic as well as to be of good health.

For other participants, the fantasy may be an extension of their own reality. Interestingly Doll Classica's fantasies are an extension of something very real, that is, her grandmother's French doll:

> Megan: How do you think French dolls inspire Lolita fashion?
>
> Doll Classica: Ummm. In former days, there was a French doll put in a glass case in every house, no? In my aunt's house and my grandmother's house there was a beautiful French doll and I liked them. Some designers also told me that their image of the princess came from a French doll which they saw when they were little. They said they had one in their home, too.

Doll Classica's fascination with these dolls is realised through her Lolita fashion outfit, which is connected in her own mind to the memory of these dolls. Doll Classica moves beyond her memories to a fantasy of a previous time in history where (in her mind) everyone was cultured and collected beautiful artefacts to keep behind glass. This is part of a wider fantasy Doll Classica expresses in her interview of a *shōjo* lifestyle, one that involves reading, romance and intrigue and crosses different time periods in France and England. Interestingly here, we can see that the doll represents desirability and beauty to Doll Classica given that it appears to express exotic qualities and exhibit a nostalgic value.[60]

Another way that participants experience the 'not-me' is through nostalgia for the past. Cute objects have the ability to act as a manifestation of memories of the past, and enable participants to bring these fond memories into their everyday lives. Kumamiki in particular, draws from her memories of childhood and her adult life in the creation of her label, Party Baby. She gave the following response when

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[60] There is an interesting parallel here with Gothic communities' interest in the past. Eiri Takahara (2004: 1) notes that Gothic practitioners are also interested in '… a fabulous past which never existed'. King and Fraser (2017) and Mackie (2009) have already explored the Gothic elements of Lolita fashion, but further research into the overlapping interests of different alternative communities is still required.

asked specifically about a detachable peter pan shaped collar she had made, where one side of the collar is a dripping egg:

> Megan: What inspires your egg collar?
>
> Kumamiki: Breakfast, maybe. When I have sunny-side-up eggs for breakfast I feel special. Usually I'm in a hurry in the morning and I eat only bread, but on Sunday morning, I have them and I feel something special looking at them. So I made the egg collar because I thought it is funny and happy to have sunny-side-up eggs on my collar.

Kumamiki, of all the participants who were interviewed for this research, was the most articulate in explaining her design concepts, and this is perhaps due to her formal training at a design college. These students, like fine artists, are encouraged to reflect on and write about the concepts behind their designs. For this reason, her explanation of her experience is bound up in a very articulate, coherent account that rationalises the object's function and 'concept'. We can see in the structure of her answer a clear establishment of eating eggs as a special experience for Kumamiki compared to her meals on busy days. The egg breakfast here represents a slower, relaxing day of self-care. Also, we might note that Sundays are a popular day for participants to visit Harajuku to meet friends or to shop. There is also a self-aware sense of humour attached to the collar in its design as it shows Kumamiki's clever observation that a normal peter pan collar does indeed look like two egg yolks. Kumamiki explicitly says here that the presence of her creation in her outfit makes her feel special. This 'special' quality is explicitly connected to her Sunday morning practice.

Kawaii objects also present some *kawaii* fashion participants with the excitement of difference and disorder of the everyday. The concept of disorder is about the sensory experience of a chorus of disorganised colours, shapes, textures or smells. There is beauty for these participants in the act of discord, expressed through mis-

matching colours, unusual toys turned into hair clips or bags, imperfect spelling on shirts or prints with motifs that do not adhere to a consistent theme.[61] This is visualised through fashion through the layers of unsual objects worn as well as other creative means used by practitioners such as the music. Print media such as *KERA* magazine or and audio-visual media such as Kyary Pamyu Paymu's music video 'PON PON PON'[62] also draw upon this sense of disorder.

Tiara offers an interesting account of this disorder, using the metaphor of a toy box:

> Megan: What kind of music do you produce?
>
> Tiara: I produce *kawaii* music which can represent a toy box, an upside down toy box, messed up.

In this instance, the description of the toy box is one that is explicitly 'messed up'. The box is not ordered or neat with a sign of the devotion of care that is culturally central to the appreciation of objects in Japanese culture.[63] The metaphor of the upside down box tipping, with the goods pouring out, tumbling in a cacophony of tinkling and rattling is not traditionally associated with *kawaii.* Rather than evoking images that are sweet and gentle, there are connotations of mischief associated with the image of this toy box. Perhaps then, this disorder represents a kind of freedom or abandon from the perfectionism found in the polished fashion looks of the Tokyo city-sider.

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[61] Mary Douglas (1966) also considers this experience of disorder. While Douglas's text explores how the boundaries between order and disorder take on organisational properties for society, she also views disorder as creative in its potential to reflect on 'being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death' (Douglas 1966: 6). I would suggest that the above experience of *kawaii* as disorder invites an exploration of this chaos. Emerging texts on Japanese street fashion such as Yagi (2018) also highlight the significance of 'chaos' as opposed to 'order' in allowing the style to evolve organically, separate from commercialisation.

[62] 'PON PON PON' was released July 2011 as part of Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's debut. The set for the music video was designed by Sebastian Masuda, the director of Decora fashion designer label 6% DOKI DOKI. The video depicts a surreal *kawaii* world, set in a room cluttered with brightly coloured found objects. For more details see Asobi System (2018).

[63] For more information, see Hendry (1991).

Figure 9 – Kyary Pamyu Pamyu in her 2011 music video, 'PON PON PON'.

Kawaii objects also present participants with the potential to create something new and different from the 'me'. One of the commonly mentioned experiences associated with *kawaii* objects was the creation of an object or a complete outfit. The pleasure primarily was derived from the process of matching and layering items, motifs or colours. In particular, there was also pleasure in the experience of surprise in examining and creating a look with something fresh or new, rather than simply repeating the same forms.

To illuminate this, let us consider the following response from 90884. 90884 has tried a number of *kawaii* outfits including Lolita fashion and colourful *Gyaru,* but has currently settled for Decora fashion. Her response is as follows:

> Megan: Why did you decide to wear Decora fashion?
> 90884: There was not a moment when I decided to wear Decora. I always wore something that I liked and someday I thought 'oh, I look a little modest today'. And I started to add something and it went on, more and more, like today I put more bracelets … And I've arrived at this point!

For 90884, there was not a singular moment where a decision was made to adopt an identity. This suggests that the construction of 90884's outfit was gradual with a slow exploration of objects that she was drawn to without a clear goal in mind. Decora fashion lends itself best to this mode of creation as its name is derived from the borrowed English 'decoration'. Decora fashion practitioners layer collections of random clips, pins, and accessories over brightly coloured clothing. 90884 uses self-deprecating humour to indicate that she is aware of the excessive nature of her mode of dress. In the humour, however, we get a sense of frivolity and joy that comes from the layering of things that she likes. It is also interesting to note her comment regarding her feeling of becoming accustomed to certain items and then feeling compelled to add to them. As the objects become assimilated with 90884's sense of 'me', additional objects are added to rejuvenate the feeling of creative 'newness'.

In summary, *kawaii* fashion participants' experiences of the objects they admire are diverse but at the same time generalisable. It involves a sense of excitement in viewing the object, with the sense that it is different from the viewer's current sense of self. This difference comes from the feeling that the object belongs to another time, place or culture either lived or imagined. This feeling of difference can also arise from the feeling of novelty or the creation of something new. In exploring interview responses from *kawaii* fashion participants, we have begun to unpack potential ways that they might experience what Winnicott describes as the 'not-me'.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore Winnicott's notion of the 'not-me' and to demonstrate its applicability to *kawaii* fashion practitioners. As we can begin to see, *kawaii* is a more complex phenomenon for these participants than current work which suggests it is an infantile practice might indicate. As argued in this

chapter, *kawaii* fashion participants describe an emotional and imaginative experience in response to particular objects. In this chapter, I have explored some of the subjective experiences of *kawaii* objects that participants reported during interviews. During these interviews, personal and imaginative narratives were offered up: dream-like memories, favourite fictional stories or imaginary beings. I have tried to show that in their accounts, the experiential takes precedence over the specific aesthetic attributes of the objects they choose to adorn their bodies with.

By exploring this idea of feeling difference or the 'not-me', I have sought to extend current understandings of *kawaii* fashion and affect, as offered by Nguyen's (2016) study of Lolita fashion in Japan. What we now must consider, however, is how these participants use the objects that captivate their interest. What compels these *kawaii* fashion practitioners to move from being struck by a cute object, to then using it as part of their mode of dress? In the next chapter, we will explore this next step, in which participants imaginatively engage with these objects as well as carrying out activities in real life, through making, creating or consuming *kawaii* fashion.

Disclaimer: I have published parts of this chapter elsewhere: Rose, M (2018) 'My heart fluttered: affect and emotion in kawaii *fashion communities', TAASA REVIEW, 27 (1). A copy has been included in Appendix 6.* [64]

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[64] The author was undergoing a name change at the time of submitting the article in March 2018.

Chapter Three: Playing With the 'Not-Me': The Imagination and Clothing Assemblage in *Kawaii* Fashion Communities

Figure 10 – Decora fashion practitioner at a 'Decora Walk' event, March 2015. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.

In the previous chapter, I argued that participants in *kawaii* fashion communities experience feelings of elation and adoration when encountering a *kawaii* object. Using interview responses, I explored some of the ways that participants experience *kawaii* objects through the pleasure of creating, fantasising and dreaming of an Other, sensory experiences of discord or assemblage of new things, and the recall of fond memories or nostalgia.

In this chapter, we will explore how these experiences of imagining and creating enable participants to explore new potentials for the self. Winnicott's (2005) concepts of play and the potential space will assist us in investigating how individuals are able to interact with the 'not-me' at the point where inner and external reality overlaps. Through play, the differentiation between inner and external reality becomes less clear to the individual and encourages one to move beyond extant limits to explore new possibilities. In this chapter, I will use interview responses from participants to explore how imagination and the act of making *kawaii* outfits illustrates the process that Winnicott describes. For the purposes of this chapter, I work with two themes to explore the concept of play – the princess and the doll – which emerged repeatedly in interviews and which describe the 'not-me' for participants. A focus on these themes will allow me to explore how play through the imagination and the making of outfits allows participants to transcend time and space and explore new potentials for the self.

Winnicott's Concept of Play

Winnicott (2005: 67) writes that 'playing is an experience, always a creative experience, and it is an experience in the space-time continuum, a basic form of living'. Playing is a fundamental part of life and cultural experience for the individual, a way of navigating through the world. Considering how *kawaii* fashion practitioners might use play to develop their sense of self and place in the world allows us to gain insight into their experiences of creating and making their clothing and outfits. Play also helps us understand the significance of particular objects worn by *kawaii* participants and what informs their choice of objects. Why have participants sought to incorporate things that carry traces of princesses, dolls, food, robots and so much more? Furthermore, Winnicott's notion of play provides us with further insight into how the process of interacting with these *kawaii* objects enables participants to mediate their sense of self and identity – that is, who they feel they are and who they want to be.

In Chapter Two, I introduced Winnicott's concept of potential space and how it represents the overlap between the categories of experience in inner and external reality. One might, for example, creatively consider ways to decorate a canvas with paint (with tools found in external reality) using memories, feelings and imaginings (experienced as inner reality). In the creation of the painting, the individual experiences an overlap of both types of reality such that they become blurred as to where the imagination starts and where it ends. Potential space, then, is the experience created when one creates or interacts with reality in a way that is personally meaningful. The moments of affect described in Chapter Two are the beginnings of experiencing this potential space, where an object in the real world stimulates feelings and thoughts for the individual. By feeling excited and emotionally moved by these objects, *kawaii* fashion participants engage in what Winnicott would describe as play.

In this chapter, we extend this idea of play further by examining participants' sustained interactions with objects.[65] We will consider how participants engage in imaginative flight, prompted by fragments of external reality, and also act upon shared realities by constructing and assembling new outfits using objects that they affectively respond to. But first, we need to further unpack Winnicott's idea of play and its applicability to both the 'imaginative' and 'construction and assemblage' activities.

Some of the key ideas that emerge from Winnicott's text about play are that it: is temporal; provides for the individual a means of acting out ideas belonging to their inner reality; attributes meanings to objects that are specific to the individual; and that it enables the individual to experience a temporary sense of omnipotent

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[65] It is also worth clarifying here what is meant by 'object' in the play process. An object may be something physical such as a toy, book or cup, but can also be an object encountered in the past or future. For example, in describing how a patient plans her activities for the week, Winnicott (2005: 37) describes the process as a form of play that is an '… imaginative exploration of the world and of the place where dream and life are the same thing'. In this sense the individual is exploring the world as it will be and how she will engage with external reality in the future, even though there is no tangible object in hand.

control over things out of their reach (that is, the 'not-me'). Winnicott describes play as a creative and meditative act where our imagination, thoughts and feelings meet with real objects from external reality. To unpack this, let us consider this complex picture that Winnicott (2005: 69) paints of play as an activity that blurs external and inner reality:

> Into this play area the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality. Without hallucinating the child puts out a sample of dream potential and lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragments from external reality. In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling.

In the picture painted here, Winnicott describes a process in which objects from external reality (such as toys) are gathered and imbued with special properties. These special properties come from a 'sample' of their inner reality that an individual, in this instance a child, wishes to 'act out'. For example, studies of dolls[66] have indicated that children playing with these objects pretend they are a mother, sister, self or more unpredictable things, such as an aeroplane. Meaning is created in relation to how the object is used rather than how it is intended to be played with.[67] In this example a doll, ostensibly belonging to external reality, is picked up by the individual and through the imagination becomes something more than a piece of plastic with some decorative paint. Here, the toy and one's own thoughts, feelings or meanings meet as the toy is manipulated or moved. Consequently, the

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[66] See for instance Rand (1995), Hains (2012), Best (1988), Godwin (2015) and Rogers (1999).

[67] Dolls also have the potential to be 'subversively refunctioned for women's pleasure' as part of a feminist statement (Rand 1995: 1). Furthermore, studies of toy collecting have found that dolls are a means of 'acting out' inner reality for adults (see Bryant, Bielby and Harrington (2016), Robertson (2004)).

doll may be used to act out a memory of a mother shopping or as an aeroplane soaring through the sky. In the process of playing in this way, the individual 'invests' or 'imbues' the object with meanings that are derived from their inner reality. For the individual, the toy is no longer a piece of moulded plastic, but a stand-in for something deeply personal.

My focus in this chapter is on translating this understanding of play to the practices of *kawaii* fashion participants. This will be achieved by examining how fragments of external reality are used and played with in the imagination of participants. In addition, we will consider how the objects which are sourced to create outfits serve as 'stand-ins' for things that are personal to them.

In the process of overlapping fragments of inner reality with external reality, play also gives individuals a temporary illusion of control insofar as they transfer their imaginings from inner reality onto something tangible from external reality. The appeal of play lies in the way that it allows us to access things which are usually beyond our control. Individuals are able to engage with concepts of the 'not-me', something which they feel is external and different from themselves. For example, as free flight is beyond human reach, the individual in the example uses the doll as an aeroplane to creatively explore what it is like to soar and tumble in the sky. They are able to play out myriad possibilities, and imagine what the sky and clouds are like, how the earth might look below, and so on. Likewise, role playing the mother through the doll brings the child closer to a life stage and to experience of the world beyond their age. As such, through play the individual is able to experiment and imagine the experience of being the 'not-me'. They are able to briefly reconcile the 'not-me' with their sense of self in a creative experiment that symbolises '… the union of two now separate things' (Winnicott 2005: 130). Their longing for and curiosity about the 'not-me' is satiated in this temporal state. In other words, play enables the individual to bring together that which they are (inner reality) with that which they wish to be. Through play, participants are able to feel closer to that

which they dream of, and to adopt or appropriate what they lack. Now, we will explore the way that this manifests in the play of *kawaii* fashion participants.

One site of interest for *kawaii* fashion practitioners is the precariousness that arises from reconciling the 'me' with the 'not-me' in play. We have already established that objects experienced as *kawaii* can cause practitioners to experience a rush of excitement. For Winnicott (2005: 64), the excitement that comes from playing is derived from the precariousness of the illusion of control and the reality that one is not in control. He (2005: 64) describes this as 'the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects'. For the participants in this study, this personal psychic reality refers to the individual's experience of *kawaii* objects which involves profound feelings and the transportation to the imaginative worlds. But from play arises a tension between expectations and reality. It is possible to obtain a compromised version of their deepest wishes, but the fantastical nature of dreams makes it impossible for the wish to be fully realised in reality. Thus, the 'precariousness' that arises between the object and individual is a tension or longing for the fantastic and the impossible. The act of creating the perfect outfit is a never-ending quest to make one's heart's desires reality. Next, we explore this tension further in the case of *kawaii* fashion practitioners.

Princess and Doll Themes

In the following section, we will explore the imaginations of *kawaii* fashion participants and how this informs their fashion style. Through an application of Winnicott's (2005) notion of play, we will explore how inner and external reality overlap in this moment, giving participants a sense of omnipotent control over that which they identify as their 'not-me'. As discussed in the methodology section of the introduction, interview transcripts were analysed both thematically and by case-studies. While the themes of princeses and dolls are generalisable across the

sample studied, we will be focussing on a small collection of these case studies (specified below) in the interest of painting an in-depth picture of the participants' experience of play and the imagination. The extracts used were taken from moments of interviews where a participant was encouraged to relate their imaginings of the 'not-me' and explain their experiences of engaging with these concepts. As such, the interview recorded at times moments of live play, where the participant's imagination would soar beyond their current situation (sitting across from me), and move across time and space. In analysing these transcripts, we will be able to explore how the imagination allows participants to move beyond their limitations in time and space. In doing so, we will explore the central concerns of the practitioners in terms of the personal significance of the objects they choose to use in their outfits, and how these objects enable them to meditate on their sense of self and identity.

This discussion is situated in relation to current research on femininity, girlhood and womanhood. Scholars such as Monden (2015), Gagne (2008) and Steele, Mears, Kawamura and Narumi (2010) have identified the princess and doll-like qualities of *kawaii* fashion. In particular Monden draws connections between *shōjo* illustrations and literature and the design properties of the *kawaii* fashion in terms of its abundant use of ribbon, frills and lace. Frederick's (2005: 68) description of the feminine qualities represented in *shōjo* art and literature includes '… an interest in flowers, clothing, dolls and dreamy thoughts of the moon and stars' echoed by some of the interview responses we will be exploring in the below. *Shōjo* refers to a hyperfeminine idea of the early 1900s and is understood to be a culturally constructed concept,[68] encapsulating what Frederick (2005: 67) describes as:

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[68] Studies such as Copeland (2000: 26) and Watanabe (2007: 112-14) have identified the construction of *shōjo* in the late 1800s as a means of social control of women. It embodied the values of of '*ryōsai kenbo*' (trans. 'good wife, wise mother) an ideology in Japan that reflected early 19th century European ideas of womanhood, but was specifically crafted for the modern Japanese culture. Fredericks (2005) and Monden (2015) argue that this cultural construction in *shōjo* culture was later co-opted and controlled by young women and the authors and illustrators who catered to them.

> … a conflicting set of ideas and anxieties about gender, sexuality,
> consumption, education and Japanese culture … Paradoxically, even though
> *shōjo* embodies a hyper-feminine ideal, she also poses a threat to the
> feminine sphere … she inhabited a liminal space between the close
> supervision of her parents and that of a husband after marriage.

The implication of Frederick's reading of *shōjo* here is that young women of the early 1900s were able to exercise some degree of agency over their choice of clothing, pastimes and activities when they were left unsupervised. Monden (2015: 85) agrees with this view and argues that '… crafting and performing *shōjo* through gestures, and particularly clothes, allows Japanese women to present themselves as being segregated from obvious sexualisation'. This is further echoed in Miller's (2011: 24) writings that describe the ways in which 'cuteness gets modified, parodied or deliberately inflated in diverse ways'. The clothing, toys, and makeup which are available to *kawaii* fashion practitioners are typically associated with femininity in Japan. But practitioners play with these objects on their own terms, and pick and choose what to engage with. This view in the literature on *kawaii* fashion is supported by Smith's (1990: 161) position that women are 'not just passive products of socialisation; they are active; they create themselves'. Smith (1990: 205) writes that, 'makeup, clothes, jewelry, hairdressing, all yield possibilities for creative elaboration, for art, for fun, for a play of intentions which references the discourse but is not limited by it'. However, Smith (1990: 203) would also argue that this choice would be mediated somewhat by the options available to them, which would be informed by social relations and cultural expectations of the time. That is, while these young women can choose a 'look', the relationship between that look and its interpretation, and therefore the signified messages of their look are pre-given in discourse. Below we will explore how feminine texts, which carry both 'pre-given' meanings and individual significance for participants, have been appropriated by *kawaii* fashion participants.

Theme One: Princesses

In the following section, we will explore how participants engage with ideas of the princess through play. The theme of princesses appeared in 15 of the 20 interviews conducted during this study. In this chapter, we will focus on a case study of Doll Classica, a Lolita fashion model, and Tiara, who wears and designs *Hime Deko* style clothing. Both participants' mode of dress have princess-like qualities and they spoke at length about these themes without prompting. The word 'princess' for these participants appears to take the fluid form of a fictional character who is a virtuous and gentle young lady who lives a lifestyle that, although sheltered, is nonetheless rich and full of beauty. For example, Tiara, gives a very excited account of princesses from the very opening of the interview where I attempt to mark out definitions of *kawaii*:

> Megan: What do you think *kawaii* is?
>
> Tiara: Something like admiration. Admiration of girls. Little girls' dreams … maybe.
>
> Megan: What is your ideal *kawaii* thing?
>
> Tiara: My ideal is dolls. Something like a princess. Oh, how difficult it is to describe what *kawaii* is … I long for something like a perfect woman.
>
> Megan: Why do you want to be *kawaii*?
>
> Tiara: It can be just a self-satisfied feeling and also can mean to be happy… maybe …? [*Pauses and sounds unsure*]

Tiara here perhaps has difficulty in defining *kawaii* as she is trying to translate into spoken word the sensations she experiences as her inner reality. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this space is not part of the 'shared' external reality where language exists. Winnicott (2005: 74) writes that attempts to articulate the ideas of inner reality can result in 'a succession of ideas, thoughts, impulses and sensations that are not linked except in some way that is neurological or physiological'. By

137

playing with the idea of being *kawaii*, Tiara here is attempting to reconcile the fragmented thoughts belonging to inner reality with something she has found in external reality. That is, through imagining herself to be a doll or princess from external reality, she is 'playing out' the possibility that she might be 'admired' as 'girls' 'dolls' or 'princesses' are. Here the 'not-me' is the concept of 'dolls', 'princesses' and the 'perfect women' all of which Tiara feels are different from her current sense of self. Her wish to be these things in inner reality is thus enacted through play, where she reconciles that which she finds to be the 'not-me' in external reality.

Tiara's response also interweaves a sense of the 'not-me' in terms of nostalgia, as she shifts from using 'girls' to 'women' in her response. It is interesting to consider what informs Tiara's concept of 'little girls' dreams' and how she has accessed these concepts. Is she informed by literature or is she idealising her own experience of girlhood? In an attempt to make the account of *kawaii* specific to her own experiences, the second question asked her to define her ideal *kawaii* thing. Here she gives two answers – dolls and princesses. Later in the interview, we learn that Tiara is mostly interested in Barbie, but also in Licca-chan, a 12" tall plastic doll produced by Takara Tomy and sold in toy shops in Japan. Some iterations of Barbie, and most iterations of Licca-chan, have attributes in common with princesses. Princesses and dolls in Tiara's world have qualities of beauty such as sumptuous and extravagant gowns, lustrous hair, and carefully applied makeup. These toys are made available to girls in Japan, and in their feminine appearance reflect the social and cultural expectations of Tiara's time. As Smith argues, women's choices are mediated somewhat by that which is available to them. It is important to note that not all Barbies have this form of styling, nor would a modern princess, such as the late Princess Diana, necessarily present herself in this way. But these particular examples are not included in Tiara's dreamscape, because they do not capture her attention in the same way. This may be due to a lack of interest in the political world and its layered complexities (social intrigue, philosophy and ideology,

bureaucratic systems etc.) or because these concepts rarely appear in the fictional content she consumes (such as Grimm's Fairytales or *shōjo* literature). The topics are too 'heavy' for participants such as Tiara to find experiences or feelings of joy, elation or love.

In her next jump, Tiara exposes something quite vulnerable when she says she 'longs for perfection'. It is unclear here if she longs to view perfection or to be perfection itself. She does not elaborate as to whether it is her personal view of what perfection is or a Japanese social ideal regarding ideal femininity, typically characterised by a demure disposition and physical beauty. Given she has sought a form of stylistic expression that goes beyond a proto-typical beauty standard, one can assume she is referring to a personal set of values that is required for perfection. Longing here seems to imply a continuous search and strong desire for something in an attempt to fill a gap. This is implied by her next answer regarding how being *kawaii* results in a sense of satisfaction and feeling happy. It is as if it offers both relief and contentment. However, what does it mean to be *kawaii*? In this context it seems to involve an immersion in this sensory experience of being an extravagant woman but also a sense of being looked at or treasured. But by whom and in what context? If Tiara is the key viewer admiring these things, perhaps it is her own approval she is seeking so that she can simultaneously look at the princess doll and appreciate herself as one and the same.

Doll Classica offers a descriptive and imaginative account of a similar concept that echoes Tiara's interest in a nostalgia for girlhood and the Other. She is an avid reader, and thus as in an articulate novel, her fantasy world is a mixture of characters, settings and scenes. Below I include a few of her responses for analysis. As with Tiara, the concept of the princess first appears when opening the interview with a discussion of *kawaii*:

> Megan: Why do you think girls like to be *kawaii*?

Doll Classica: I have no idea what girls think in general, but the reason why I want to be *kawaii* is … all the princesses in fairy tales are *kawaii* and stay beautiful forever. So I made an effort to be *kawaii* as I wanted to be like the princesses.

It is significant to note that she immediately redirects the discussion from a general one about the community (i.e. 'girls') to a personal one about herself. In some ways, this may appear to be a polite move to avoid speaking for other participants (and in so doing, to socially position herself and avoid reprimand from other participants who do not identify with the imaginings she describes). But it is also an interesting acknowledgement of the highly subjective and individual nature of her inner reality. This becomes clearer in later passages (discussed below) as she describes concepts, people and scenes that reflect her own personal interpretation.

Just as Tiara had in her response, Doll Classica here brings up the ideas of 'princesses' and 'fairy tales' to describe the feelings she has towards the concept of *kawaii*. In doing so, she is referencing fragments of external reality and is drawing them into her imaginative description of *kawaii*. These tales would be accessible to her in the socio-cultural context of Japan, but are appealing in their connections to the West. If we consider the characters in these stories, they are said to possess ephemeral, physical beauty. They are archetypal embodiments of innocence, divorced from reality.[69] This is emphasised by the words she uses at the end of the

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[69] Many studies focus on the typification of the princess in fairytale literature and adaptations and its influence on its readers. For instance, Holly Porteous (2017) has explored how fairytale princesses form one of the many feminine archetypes in Russian print media. Patricia Louie (2012) has discussed the potential impact that the princess's typification in fairytales can have on women. Max Lüthie (1984; originally published 1909) explored the role of beauty in fairytales and how it shapes representations of women. Emily Chandler (2017) provides an interesting analysis of the typification of 'the Girl' in North American Disney Princess media. Of course, there are other typifications of heroines in fairytales or folktales – see for instance Hsieh and Matoush's (2012) discussion of Mulan (both the original folktale and its English adaptations). Other studies also focus on the Japanese adaptations of these fairytales, such as Lucy Fraser's (2017) work on the Japanese adaptation of 'The Little Mermaid'. There are also further complexities around this interest in fairytales in *kawaii* fashion. For instance, Nguyen (2016: 27) explains that one Lolita Fashion participant, named Justine, views Lolitas to be 'frail and prone to narcissism' and for this reason, Justine believes Lolita Fashion practitioners are drawn to 'fairy tales full of misery, sorrow, pain and cruelty'. This echoes Masafumi's (2008: 28) observation that Lolita fashion practitioners 'tend to endorse the egoism and cruelty associated with childhood rather than its innocence, naiveté or submissiveness'. As such, further research is required into use of fairytales in *kawaii* fashion communities.

sentence; 'stay beautiful forever'.[70] Enfolded in the world of the text, princesses of fairytales live on in their youthful state as their stories are retold across the generations. They cannot age because their stories never progress. The real world however does progress, and this stationary realm is impossible to sustain in external reality. As such, the 'not-me' in this account takes the form of a wish to remain as youthful as these princesses, and perhaps to be admired and loved widely for many generations. Unable to realistically achieve this in her everyday life, Doll Classica plays with this idea imaginatively so that she can at least temporarily experience what it might be like to live as the 'not-me' fairytale princess.

The fascination for the Other in this account is found not only in the external beauty of the princesses they admire but also of their (likely) European origin. Such princesses live a different lifestyle compared to what Doll Classica perceives is the case in Japan. In this sense, it can be inferred that her imaginings of these fairytale princesses also call up a sense of the Occident and the exotic for her. She elaborates on this theme in later passages which we will analyse shortly. Regardless of whether she is referring to a princess in the Grimm's Fairy tales, Disney films or *shōjo* literature, this lifestyle would consist of Western customs associated with a historical upper class such as fine dining, etiquette, elaborate Western dress, and Western Gothic and Neo-Gothic architecture. In particular, the emphasis is on the tactile, physical sensations of a princess's beauty regime, such as enjoying the luxury and self-care associated with baths of milk, the drinking of fragrant teas, or having one's hair curled and styled by handmaidens. Perhaps then the 'forever' in Doll Classica's response suggests that she wishes to be closer to and experiencing this for longer periods of time in reality than she can access in her fleeting

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[70] Nguyen (2016: 27) explores this notion of 'beauty forever' in her study of Lolita fashion, and how it is used to protect and remember 'aspects of the past'. Nguyen (2016: 27) suggests that this interest in 'freezing time' is related to her participants' feelings towards something they have lost in making the transition from girl to women and that Lolita fashion enables them to 'preserve some space that may protect that precious and important quality'. Matsuura (2007: 170-177) in her reflection on her life as a Lolita fashion practitioner also reflects on this idea of stillness and suspension in Lolita Fashion with respect to some practitioners' interest in death. Nishimura (2004: 35) notes the role of 'static, eternal realities' in Lolita fashion. Participants in this research did not reflect further on this idea of the eternal and the concept was only raised by Doll Classica, and so this research cannot contribute to this discussion.

imagination. Finally in her closing sentence, we can see a clear intention of wanting to create a lifestyle that allows her to be close to this imagining of a princess's lifestyle. What this extract from my interview with Doll Classica shows is that she is playing with ideas found in external reality (fairy tale princesses) that she feels drawn to as a product of their 'not-me' qualities. In the potential space where boundaries between inner and external reality blur, she is able to temporarily experience and feel closer to that which she feels is 'not-me'. Through the imagination, she is able to move from the limitations of her life as a woman in Japan and temporarily experience what it might be like to be a fairytale princess.

Shortly after this exchange, Doll Classica's world shifts from fictional princesses to imaginings of aristocracy. Her account is quite rich and has three movements which we will explore one after the other:

Megan: What do you think Lolita fashion is inspired by?

Doll Classica: We loved French aristocrats or French dolls, since after World War II, maybe. At that time there were (rich) families who let their daughters dress in '*ojōsama* fashion'. Ummm, what would it be … What led me to Lolita fashion was Marie Antoinette … and a manga, *Berusaiyu no Bara* … So, I think that Lolita fashion was inspired by the adoration for Medieval European aristocrats. In fact, I wanted to wear the dress which European aristocrats were wearing and I searched for it. And the dress I found was Lolita.

It is interesting to note that the words 'love' and 'adoration' are used to describe the relationship between participants and the imagined experience of upper class

lives in France.[71] The word 'adore' echoes *kawaii's* definitions ('adorable') in the lavishing of care and affection towards something, but also has a deeper etymological meaning of worship, fascination, admiration and esteem, that carries a religious connotation.[72] The word 'adore' describes an intense affectual experience of being deeply moved and struck by something that is felt to be better than or higher than oneself. So Doll Classica's imaginings here not only involve a fascination with the Other, but also a sense that this 'Other's' life must be more spectacular and wondrous than her own life, at least prior to her encounter with Riyoko Ikeda's (1972-1974) *Berusaiyu no Bara* (trans. *Rose of Versailles*; first printed in 1972 in *Margaret* magazine) which we will consider below. In other words, we can infer that something was not entirely satisfactory about her current life such that she became enchanted by something else.

In her opening comment here, Doll Classica seems to move from talking about Lolita fashion practitioners to talking about an abstract generalisation of Japanese people. 'We' here initially appears to correspond to the question about 'Lolita fashion', but the moment she cites World War II, her account travels from the contemporary Lolita fashion community to the experiences of multiple generations of people living in Japan since World War II. This provides an interesting connection to the emergence of *shōjo* literature, which had a strong presence in the illustrations and short stories of girls' magazines post World War II and was strongly influenced by fantasies of the Occident (a combination of British, French and North

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[71] Those familiar with *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (Takemoto 2002; Nakashima 2004) may draw parallels between this description from Doll Classica and the montage of Momoko's fantasy of the Rococo era (discussed in Monden 2015: 122-123; Mackie 2010; McKnight 2010). Doll Classica did not indicate that she was a fan of *Shimotsuma Monogatari* but it is entirely possible that she has read the book and seen the film and this fragment of experience has re-emerged as part of her imagination. An interesting observation McKnight (2010: 135-136) makes is that while Momoko fantasises about the Rococo era and the luxuries of the ruling classes at that time, she is able to exercise a kind of imagined class mobility through the power of her labour. Her attempts to make money to purchase her dresses and her ability to embroider and decorate garments brings her closer to this fantasy in a tangible way. But it does not enable her to fully assume the role of people in the ruling class from this time period because they would not have had to carry out such activities to afford their luxurious lifestyle. *Shimotsuma Monogratari* in this sense highlights the power and limitations of the 'do it yourself' ethos.

[72] See Oxford Reference (2003a).

American cultures).[73] This is what perhaps informs and fuels Doll Classica's own subjective recounting of history, where she assumes that all women were interested in 'French aristocrats' or 'French dolls' and that 'rich families' encouraged their daughters to dress in *ojōsama* fashion.[74] In this stage of Doll Classica's response, we can see some very complex narratives of the 'not-me' being drawn together in terms of time period, culture and class. Here Doll Classica imagines not only Japanese people of the past, but also their intersection with people from different countries. Furthermore, these imagined people of the past are admiring a different culture from their own, that is, French culture. Here these intersections form a complex tapestry that Doll Classica weaves together as her imagination moves through various 'not-mes'. Her imagination allows her to move through various persons, cultures and customs that she cannot immediately access as a woman in Japan, sitting in a café in 2014 and participating in an interview with me at the time she made this comment.[75]

Next, Doll Classica moves to describe *Berusaiyu no Bara* (Ikeda 1972-1974), a manga series that inspired her interest in Lolita fashion. *Berusaiyu no Bara* is an interesting example of the *Shōjo* Manga genre, due to its historical setting. In the narrative, the protagonist is Oscar François de Jarjayes, a woman who dresses in soldiers' attire, and trains to become the leader of the Palace Guards at Versailles. Oscar's tale touches on the class tensions present at the time of Louis XVI's reign as

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[73] For more information, see Aoyama (2005), Honda (2010) and Dollase (2003). As Monden's (2015: 81) text explores, there are some connections between the illustrations of Jun'ichi Nakahara – a *shōjo* illustrator, fashion designer and doll maker – and this style. In particular, Nakahara sought to create 'European-inspired visual images of elegantly dressed, ladylike young women … exquisitely dressed … with delicately coiffed hair, tiny ribbons, thin waists and long limbs' (Monden 2015: 81).

[74] '*Ojōsama* fashion' refers to the style of clothing that is opulent in terms of fabric quality, detailing, trimmings and so on. For an interesting account of an *ojōsama* style icon post World War II, see Bardsley's (2002) account of Empress Michiko.

[75] In his analysis of the design principles of Lolita fashion, Monden (2015: 109) also detects this tapestry of mixed style-influences, stating that the style is 'transtextual', in that 'references to other texts or sources are deployed, and definitely not a straightforwardly accurate and monotonous replication of period dress'. Monden (2015: 110) notes that a '[c]lose observation of Lolita style reveals that its incorporation of European fashion aesthetics has not necessarily been concerned by historical or stylistic authenticity'.

she becomes increasingly aware of the trappings of life at Versailles, causing her friendship with Marie Antoinette to become increasingly complex.[76]

Interestingly in her mention of this story, Doll Classica's focus is not on the heroine, Oscar, but on Marie herself and her costuming.[77] Historical accounts of Marie Antoinette's life document her ostentatious taste with the sensational incorporation of ruffles, trimmings and jewels to create an abundance of visual delights (such as hand-painted and bejewelled silk fans or her hand-carved harp which shimmers with diamonds).[78] Furthermore, Marie's own unabated exploration of these delights also involved her own exploration of the 'not-me' that she attempted to realise in her infamous toy farm that sought to recreate a rural lifestyle as she imagined it to be.[79]

So perhaps here Doll Classica is not only using the imagination to explore a particular manifestation of an Occidental lifestyle organised by culture and class, but perhaps she is also declaring a wish to explore aesthetic whims of her own just

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[76] Ikeda's (1972-1974) *Berusaiyu no Bara* offers itself as a fictional manga with a historical setting, told through a Japanese lens. Lee (2017: 104) writes of the value of the text's setting in that it 'effectively created an alternative space-time in which readers could linger on their feelings'. Lee (2017: 105) notes the parallels between the text and Lolita fashion in that it 'may be the most literal example of this mode of immersion in a perpetual dreamland'. Shamoon (2007: 8-10) writes that Ikeda began producing the series as a biography of Marie Antoinette, drawing details from Stefan Zweig's (1933) text *Marie Antoinette: Portrait of an Average Woman*. In response to reader feedback however, she shifted the focus towards the fictional character, Oscar François de Jarjayes. In Anan's (2014: 43) exploration of *Rose of Versailles* and its relationship to Socialism in Japan at the time of its reception, she notes that Marie in the text '… has no concern for those outside of her small world. All she does is to idle away her time by wasting the national expenditure on luxuries and thinking of her love, Hans Axel von Fersen (even though she feels guilty about her affair)'. Anan is critical of Marie's characterisation in favour of Oscar's reflexivity and proactiveness. For more information on Oscar's characterisation Rose of Versailles, see Duggan (2013).

[77] Honda (2010: 28) in her account of *hirahira* (trans. fluttering) and its symbolism in *shōjo* literature describes Marie's outfit in *Rose of Versailles* as follows: 'Her breast is festooned with a mantle of frills. Frills, from which Marie's wrists peek forth, plump and stamen-like, are gathered with carnation pearls at the end of her sleeves and studded with decorative ribbons that sway like sprays of weeping cherry blossoms.' In Honda's (2010: 29-31) reading of the text, Marie and her costuming is: 'offered as a living symbol of womanhood … Regardless of her changing roles and positions, which include wife, mother, and queen, she strives to be honest with her inner voice and wagers everything on love. In other words, she escapes the confines of demands such as reason, sense, duty, and responsibility and devotes herself to passion ... When harmonised with the 'vacillating feelings' inherent in girls, they assist in creating a form of existence we might define as dreaming'.

[78] For more information on these specific objects, see Saule, Ward and Château de Versailles (2016). For more information on Marie Antoinette's fashion, see Chrisman-Campbell (2015), Ferriss and Young (2010), Weber (2006).

[79] For more information on Marie Antoinette's *laiterie d'agrement* (pleasure dairy), see Martin (2011).

Figure 11 – Marie Antoinette in Berusaiyu no Bara (Ikeda 2010: 70, 265; Originally published 1972-1974). On the left, Marie debuts in the French Court at 13 years of age. Onlookers are affirming appearance as dignified and elegant. Marie is elated and reflects on how wonderful it is to be admired by the onlookers. On the right, Marie is now queen at age 18. She remarks on how wonderful it is to be free to do whatever she wants including attending masquerades, horse races and operas and being able to buy fine jewellery. Her elation is juxtaposed with the poverty of another character, Rosalie, who is struggling to find employment.

as Marie did once upon a time, without the everyday economic, cultural and logistical limitations of living in Tokyo. Doll Classica rounds off this part of her response with a description of this kind of lifestyle as that of 'Medieval European Aristocrats' which jumbles together different times, geography and cultures that do not immediately correlate with Versailles's position in time and space of eighteenth century France. This form of imaginative play with Marie as the 'not-me' does not need to be fixed accurately in time or space, but instead involves drawing upon

fragments of external reality found in cultural historical accounts and in fiction. The imagination allows Doll Classica to select the ideas in a way that she feels closer to. She does not focus on the heroic actions of the protagonist Oscar in the fictional representation of Versailles, but instead chooses to engage with Marie. She also does not integrate a consideration of the political implications of Marie's behaviour in terms of the extravagance it performed in a nation full of poverty, nor does she reflect upon how this performance contributed to Marie's demise during the French Revolution.

In an attempt to open up this explanation further, a follow up question was asked with a particular focus on feeling:

> Megan: What's the attraction of France?
> Doll Classica: Elegance. Things like frilled sleeves or dresses made with plentiful cloth … They took so much time and money for these kinds of unnecessary things and they spent their days immersed in their interests. That's the elegance that I long for.

She immediately responds to the question with a single word that encapsulates her imagining of France: 'elegance'. In her elaboration of this word, she offers a visual image of abundant cloth formed into sleeves or the body of a dress. Factoring in definitions of elegance, this voluminous form of costume is an example of stylishness or grace for Doll Classica. It is the focus of time and money put into this pursuit of extravagant design that appears to interest Doll Classica, particularly insofar as it reflects the luxury to be 'immersed in their interests'. This imagining suggests that Doll Classica feels that she is unable to devote herself to the pursuit of these activities in her everyday life. Perhaps this is why she is drawn to this representation of 'France'. 'France' in its conceptualisation here presents itself as a form of escape from the everyday into the extraordinary, reflected in this instance

through the artisanal craftsmanship of bespoke clothing made for the French Aristocracy. By imagining others and herself as immersed in interests such as creative and intellectual pursuits, the dream of France comes to represent the experience of being completely engaged in a safe creative space without disruption, fear or worry. Her feelings about daily life that belong to her inner reality overlap with and shape that which she draws upon from external reality. By playing with the elegance of this version of French culture, she is able to explore the possibility of immersing herself in her own interests.

To prompt Doll Classica to elaborate on her feelings about the extravagant costuming she describes above, my translator and I asked a follow up question:

> Megan: What's good about the feeling of excess or extravagance?
> Doll Classica: I think that is elegance. I have a passion for other things than Lolita, such as watching performances of Takarazuka, drinking tea, playing tennis … That is, I think, good for my mind. It is like nutrition for my mind and mental training, which is a very good thing.

In this response, the concept of being immersed in one's interests is further clarified. Earlier, the people from a fictio-historical French setting were the playthings of Doll Classica. Now, in her elaboration, she offers more insight into her activities such as wearing Lolita, drinking tea and playing tennis. Her creative pursuits are connected to her desire to be closer to the 'not-me' that she perceives in European culture. The art of Takarazuka stage shows is a spectacular style of theatre where an all-female cast plays out the roles of women (*musumeyaku*) and men (*otokoyaku*) in a format consisting of a musical drama, a revue and a finale

where 'the entire cast cascades down a giant illuminated staircase in glittering tuxedos and gowns, from which sprout huge ostrich plumes' (Robertson 1998: 7).[80]

Jennifer Robertson (1998: 7) in her account of Takarazuka notes that 'Generally speaking, with the exception of wartime revues, contemporary Japan and Japanese were not and are not now represented on the Takarazuka stage, which instead offers audiences a chance to dream of other lives in other worlds'.[81] The content varies from original productions to adaptations of Western texts such as *Pride and Prejudice* (adapted to *Tenshi no Hashigo* (2012) trans. *Angels' Ladder*)[82] and *Madame Butterfly* (adapted to *Shukusatsu Chōchō-san* (1931),trans. *Concise Madame Butterfly)[83]*, to adaptations of manga such as *Berusaiyu no Bara* (1974).[84] Attending these performances would be a very interesting and creative way for Doll Classica to make connections with a Western canonical literature that is also extremely visual. All of these activities are described by Doll Classica as 'nutritional' for the mind, in that they metaphorically stimulate her imagination and sense of closeness with that which she feels is a 'not-me'. In her account, she describes her fascination with another world that moves across shifting intersections of time and space, one that she brings closer to her 'self' through the act of play. This involves imagining, drinking tea, playing tennis, going to the theatre, and of course, by wearing Lolita. Her imagination not only allows her to temporarily transcend reality

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[80] The *Takarazuka Kagekidan* (trans. Takarazuka Revue) was founded in 1913 by Kobayashi Ichizō (Robertson 1998: 4; Yamanashi 2012: xxi).

[81] Yamanashi (2012) elaborates on this concept in her text by exploring how the performances embody themes of love, dreams and hope. Yamanashi also argues that Takarazuka had a strong influence on *shōjo* manga.

[82] For more information on this performance, see Takakuwa (2015).

[83] For an interesting discussion of this adaptation and a translated version of the script, see Shikō, Selden, Selden and Groos (2015).

[84] For an analysis of this production, see Yamanashi (2012: 139, 178-180).

Figure 12 – Images from a Berusaiyu no Bara *production by the* Takarazuka Kagekidan, *published in the* Gothic and Lolita Bible *(2005: 69).*

and walk amongst Marie Antoinette and her peers, but also inspires her to carry out activities in her own life and to invite them to figuratively be with her as she goes about her daily life.

Thus far, we have explored how some *kawaii* fashion participants play with the 'not-me' through the imagination. Now, we will investigate how this play might translate to the use of physical objects. First, we can explore Doll Classica's own rationale for the selection of her dresses in her Lolita fashion assemblages. While Lolita fashion initially involved hand-sewing garments, many Lolita designers labels have since emerged, providing practitioners with an array of options for their outfits. While some still hand-sew their clothing, others opt for dresses sold by these designers. This part of the discussion refers to the latter practice. In this instance, Winnicott's theory still applies, as participants experience affect towards the garments they 'like' the most, which they then 'coordinate' with an array of accessories, shoes and socks that they also like.[85] In this section, we will ascertain how these practitioners experience affect towards these pre-fabricated garments by focussing one key quality of these items: highly detailed textile prints which would be expensive and difficult for practitioners to produce individually.

Lolita fashion participants were asked about these textile prints, and why they were so popular in the community. This enabled practitioners to develop a sustained discussion with us about their own personal experience of Lolita dresses as an interpretative practice rather than a specific recounting of the artistic intention of the designers. In the following, we will explore extracts from our interview with Doll Classica where she guided us through the process of creating her outfits:

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[85] Furthermore, the designers of these garments are also participants in the community, and explore their own 'not-me' through their creative practice. These particular participants also love *kawaii* fashion, and are fortunate to have the technical skills and access to resources to produce garments.

Figure 13 – Close ups of Lolita fashion textile prints. The print above, titled 'Rose Toilette', was produced in 2007 by Angelic Pretty. The print below, titled 'Star Night Theatre', was produced in 2009 by Angelic Pretty. Photos taken by author.

Megan: When you buy a dress, do you pick the print first, or the colour first?

Doll Classica: … if I choose a dress with prints I buy prints which have a story … that is the characteristic of Lolita clothes, which casual clothes don't have.

Megan: Do you have a favourite story? Favourite prints?

Doll Classica: I like Vampire's stories so much. So I frequently buy clothes of ALICE and the PIRATES.

Megan: Why do you like it?

Doll Classica: Ummm, because it is my aesthetic. I don't know why, but I liked it since I was a small girl.

In this extract we learn that the 'story' is not the history or design process behind the garment, but the use of images and montages on the dresses that recount a particular narrative. This is a unique attribute that Doll Classica has found in Lolita clothes that she has been unable to find elsewhere. She is particularly drawn to dresses with textile designs that retell narratives of vampires. Doll Classica doesn't offer a lengthy account of why Vampires appeal to her. The motif moves her and just *is*.

In the following extract, we asked Doll Classica to respond specifically to some of the motifs found on the dresses she has modelled in the past for the brand, BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT:

Megan: Why do you think BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT likes to use Alice, Snow White or flowers for prints?

Doll Classica: As I told you it is a Princess thing. And I think BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT uses fairy tales for their prints because there are many people who want to live in a place a bit disconnected from reality. And flowers, because they are *kawaii*. Recently *ALICE and the PIRATES released* a dress series called '*La Traviata*'. I was surprised to hear that the prints

included '*namanamashii*'[86] expression. BABY tends not to make those kinds of prints.

It is interesting that Doll Classica immediately connects these motifs to the princess theme. The jump from the use of 'fairy tales' to 'many people' implies that in Doll Classica's view, other practitioners would in fact be attracted to the dresses because of their stories, rather than just feeling they are cute. The reference to the role of prints in allowing wearers to move into a place disconnected from reality resonates with my previous discussion of the way that potential space and transitive objects act as tools to access alternative reality. These realities, made accessible through such dresses as are directly tied to the branding concepts of each designer label. ALICE and the PIRATES – the sub-label of BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT – has made its name as a Gothic Lolita brand with darker motifs, as an alternative outlet for BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT designers who have concepts that conflict with the main brands' sweeter concepts.

In this section, we have explored the motif of the princess as just one of the interests of *kawaii* fashion practitioners. We have analysed the responses of Tiara and Doll Classica as individual yet indicative experiences for many of those who participate in the community. In doing so, we have explored how the princess is a form of 'not-me' for Tiara and Doll Classica insofar as the princess represents beauty, eternity, love and adoration, extravagance and a safe space to explore and pursue one's own interests, all of which are arguably the things that Tiara and Doll Classica feel they lack. By playing imaginatively with these ideas, Tiara and Doll Classica transcend the physical limitations of sitting with me in an interview in Tokyo in 2014, and delve into imaginary worlds beyond time and space to become closer to their 'not-me'. By 'playing' with me during interviews and sharing their imaginings, they are able to demonstrate how play allows for a temporary feeling of

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[86] *Namanamashii* can mean erotic, sensual or scary.

Figure 14 – Design for a textile print produced in 2013 by BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT, titled 'Labyrinth in the Reminiscent Mirror'. The illustration depicts the following verse from 'The Lady of Shalott' a lyrical ballad by Lord Alfred Tennyson (1894; originally published 1832) moments before The Lady's death: 'A longdrawn carol, mournful holy/She chanted loudly, chanted lowly/Till her eyes darken'd wholly/And her smooth face sharpen'd slowly/Turn'd to tower'd Camelot …' Image from BABY, THE STAR SHINES BRIGHT (2018).
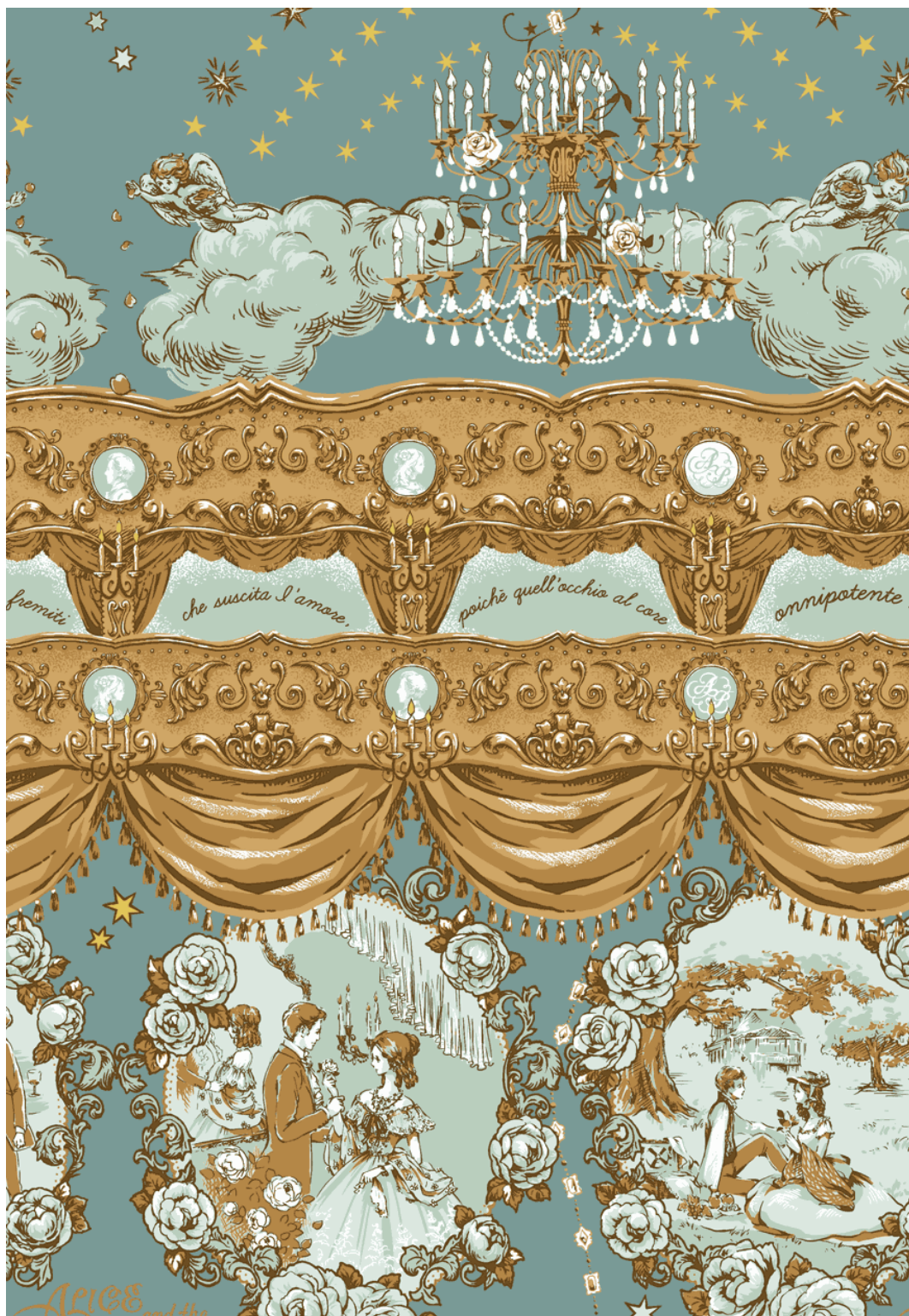
Figure 15 – Design for a textile print produced in 2014 by ALICE and THE PIRATES, a sister label to *BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT. The print is titled 'La Traviata – The Time This Flower Dies'. Image from BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT.*

closeness to the 'not-me'. I believe these participants engage in these play spaces regularly outside the interview as they readily offered up these imaginings as an explanation of why they like *kawaii* and why it is an important part of their lives. In the following section, we will extend this discussion, using a different motif: dolls.

Theme Two: Dolls

In this section, we will continue our analysis of the imaginative play of *kawaii* fashion practitioners with a focus on the motif of dolls. In doing so, we will see the other forms of 'not-me' that this play seeks to reconcile with the self, and to understand how the imagination allows participants to transcend the limitations of time and space.

The concept of dolls as an organising principle for this research first arose when Lolitina, one of the first participants to be interviewed, mentioned that her makeup had doll-like qualities. This statement was significant coming from someone who is heavily influenced by the shaping of Lolita lore by cultural producers such as Novala Takemoto (author of *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (2002) and the essayist for the periodical the *Gothic and Lolita Bible*).[87] Equally, her statement may have been inspired by the fact that Groove Inc had recently collaborated with her to create a Pullip Doll of her.[88] In this section, we look at her responses to prompts that my translators and I gave when participants mentioned dolls or girl culture in their first accounts of *kawaii*. These include responses from the Vice President of a Lolita

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[87] The *Gothic and Lolita Bible* is a quarterly print publication associated with *KERA* magazine. It ran from 2008 to 2017 and featured tutorials, editorials and advertisements tailored to those interested in Elegant Gothic and Lolita fashion. For more information, see J International (2018).

[88] A Pullip Doll is an adult's collector item, manufactured by Jun Planning in Japan and now Groove in Korea. The doll was created by Korean artist Cheonsang Cheonha in 2003. The doll is characterised with a large head and moveable eyes. For more information on Pullip, see ARS GRATIA ARTIS (2018).

label (assigned the pseudonym 'Lolita Designer'), Tiara, and Alice, a 16 year-old wearer of Lolita fashion.

While stylistic qualities of dolls and princesses are similar, one significant difference is that dolls have a physical and tactile nature. Moreover, individuals have the ability to control and play with them. In contrast, princesses are not only human-sized but tend to possess power through social structures or wealth. The princess is also a human being who occupies an explicit socio-political role (that is as a potential monarch to a kingdom) whereas the doll is socially 'free-floating'. That is to say that it exists without tangible power and without thoughts and feelings. In short, 'real' princesses think and feel, but dolls are inanimate. And yet, dolls are also empty vessels through which one can role-play what it might be like to be a princess. This allows for additional layers of meaning making for the participants as they playfully imagine and reflect upon the physicality of the ideal of the doll and their capacity to actualise themselves by highlighting their own doll-like features.

We can consider the following response from the Vice President of a Lolita designer label as a way of opening up a discussion of dolls and the role they play in the creation of fantasies in inner reality:

> Megan: Is there something in common between dolls and Lolita fashion?
> Lolita Designer: Yes. Every little girl play with dolls, don't they? Especially in Japan they play with Licca-chan dolls. Playing with dolls is playing in their imagination. I think it is a real dream of all the girls to wear dolls' clothes.

Here the Vice-President of this Lolita label offers her own imaginings of those of her customers. In this extract, like Tiara in the above section, we can observe that she is making an assumption about the cultural experiences of girlhood and the prolific nature of Licca-chan. What is particularly interesting in this response is that she seemingly acknowledges Winnicott's theory that play involves an overlap of inner

Figure 16 – A Licca-chan Doll from 1967 by Takara. Photo courtesy of An Phuong Gorham.

and external reality where the doll is a tool with which to imagine. The second turn of the response introduces the additional layer that dolls are not only a tool of play, but also a role that one can fantasise about assuming. In this instance, the role consists of wearing the fantastical clothes of Licca-chan, thereby allowing the individual to become the figure that was the source of their inspiration. At least, this is what the Vice-President believes in the fantasy she accords to her customers. And here lies the final layer of the response to consider: without wearing the fashions herself, the Vice-President's customers are like dolls to her – they are dolls that she can adorn, admire and adore. In this example, the 'not-me' is not only Licca-chan which *kawaii* fashion practitioners reconcile with their sense of self through play. The practitioners themselves become a 'not-me' for the Vice-President who she can create and play with as way of bringing herself closer to this Intriguing community of young women.

In the previous section, we examined Tiara's interest in perfection and how this was symbolised by the concept of the princess. Tiara also finds the 'not-me' in dolls for similar reasons that are possible to identify in this particular interview response describing dolls:

> Megan: What do you like about dolls?
>
> Tiara: They are something like another me. Or an ideal woman or an ideal girl … Dolls are beautiful. They have artistic beauty. They have things that are different to mortal human beings. They are far from animals.

The turn of phrase in her initial response offers an interesting insight into her imagination. The doll is not just a substitute for Tiara or a representation of her. It is also an alternative to Tiara – 'another me' and an 'ideal woman'. In this response, complex layers of these representations of 'me' and 'not-me' unfold. Through the imaginative play (in Winnicott's sense) with dolls, Tiara is not only able to have a sense of omnipotent control over her appearance and lovability by transforming herself into a doll, she is also able to explore the possibility of being someone else, one who has achieved an ideal. The phrase 'ideal' also has its own connotations: Tiara here may be referring to the beauty of the doll, the submissiveness of the doll (in allowing itself to be played with) or perhaps the myriad narratives that dolls can carry out in many alternative timelines (such as caring for toy animals and going shopping for them, flying through the sky as a bird or simply lovingly watching over Tiara from their shelf in her room). Here we can see that by imagining the doll to be 'another me', Tiara is playing out new possibilities for herself in a way that is otherwise inaccessible for her in everyday life. Her wish to be something other than herself overlaps with the 'ideal' qualities she sees in the dolls that she collects in a way that allows her a temporary sense of omnipotent control.

In her elaboration, Tiara offers an account that primarily focusses on the doll's beauty, one that she feels is distinctly different from the beauty of humans and

animals. In this sense, the doll's beauty is somewhat alien or foreign, and as such, the very opposite to what she feels the human flesh will allow. In this respect, beauty is not just something that follows conventional design principles and aesthetics. It has the ability to captivate and stun the beholder. Artistic beauty in particular has qualities that are unusual and creative, yet also present an artificial, human-made technical accomplishment. Without the properties of animals, dolls are removed from suffering, biology and feeling. They are calm, still and serene. They are unresponsive and indifferent to time, their gaze and benign smile fixed. If we imagine this 'not-me' then, we can imagine that it offers a kind of peace for Tiara. The other observation about this response is that it points to the fact that Tiara's underlying concerns and thoughts centre on a sense of imperfection. This is what draws her to dolls to serve as the play objects that she imagines here in the interview. Here, we cannot ignore the observation that dolls such as Licca-chan offer up, a cultural normalisation of particular beauty standards. As such, one can see threads in her account that intertwine – she wishes to be at peace with her appearance, to be removed from the slings and arrows of space and time, but also to be seen as perfect and perhaps loved within the cultural context of Japan. The doll represents a desire to belong, and to be loved and cherished in the loving arms of someone else.

Thus far, we have examined two responses from research participants who believe that dolls are *kawaii* and who use them (imagined or real) as a way to be closer to this feeling. It is important to recognise, however, that not all *kawaii* fashion practitioners want to become a doll and would find the prospect of being fixed in place and submissive quite alarming. As such, we must be careful to avoid making blanket statements about the generalisability of these motifs. Indeed, dolls are interpreted and used diversely by different participants. This is an important distinction to make not only for the purposes of illustrating the very individual nature of play for each person, but also for concerns that may arise from a group of women who fantasise about symbols of perfect womanhood in society from a

feminist perspective. In particular, one might read the desire to be a doll as a desire to conform and relinquish agency to the patriarchal system by reproducing hegemonic beauty standards. In this context, dolls represent a paranoia from a broader feminist perspective that women might be unwittingly playing into the hands of patriarchal systems through their interest in beauty.[89] The response to this concern is, of course, that not all alternative communities seek to disrupt social systems. It is this insight that, as research previously has implied, gives a justification for this thesis's exploration of alternative ways to understand fashion communities. It follows scholars such as Andi Zeisler, who interrogate the use of feminism as an 'objective metric of quality' whereby Feminism is used as 'an assessment of whether or not a product is worthy of consumption' (Zeisler 2016: 36) This calls for a more patient and considerate analysis of the experiences of the women of the *kawaii* fashion communities as they imagine and play with concepts that are meaningful to them.[90]

We can begin to complicate this narrative by examining the following response from Alice, a Lolita aged 16, who appreciates the customisability of dolls, in their potential to become fluid and diverse in appearance. In the below, Alice offers a lively account of becoming a doll and playing with dolls:

> Alice: I like dolls but I don't want to be a doll.
> Megan: Why?

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[89] See for instance Jeffreys (2005), Wolf (1990), Akita (2005) and Koga (2009).

[90] In addition to this, since 2004, media bodies have also circulated a moral panic around 'living dolls' in Japanese and Western culture, referring to both a small group of women who tried to become more 'doll-like' in appearance and demeanour and *kawaii* fashion practitioners.[90] This came to a head with the reality show *Strange Addictions* (TLC 2014) running an episode on living dolls, deceiving an American Lolita fashion practitioner into participating alongside other individuals she did not identify with and presenting an edit that mocked her mode of dress.

Alice: I want to move by myself! Maybe, they (Lolitas) can do anything that they want to dolls – their hairstyle or clothes to wear … They can customise dolls how they, themselves, want to be. The doll is a reflection of themselves. They put all their ideas which they think are *kawaii* to dolls. And dolls will never say no to them, right? They won't say that they don't like this hairstyle or clothes …

Megan: Do you mean the girls act as if they were mothers of their dolls?

Alice: Not mother. Just a reflection of themselves, how they wanted to be, I think … They can put all their dreams in dolls. So they are happy if people say their dolls are *kawaii*. Because the dolls are themselves …

In this exchange, Alice first offers us a humorous retort – 'I want to move by myself' – to assert that she does not view herself to be submissive or passive. She then describes how she imagines her friends playing with dolls and is misunderstood by the interpreter and myself to mean that they might be role playing the mother in this process. Alice closes by clarifying that that this play is less about nurturing, and instead about using the doll to play out new possible appearances and to imagine a transformation in the self. In this account, Alice is imagining her peers, but at the same time, safely distancing herself from specifically partaking in the play herself.

From Alice's account emerge two important themes: first, that dolls are a tool with which to imagine new possibilities for the self; and second, that dolls are a passive, non-threatening small object which cannot challenge or disrupt the play taking place. In describing how dolls are a customisable tool that one can 'put all their dreams' into, Alice affirms the basic claim of this chapter: that play involves the overlap of inner and external reality. By playing with and customising the doll, the individual is able to imagine new possibilities for themselves where they are '*kawaii*' (belonging to inner reality) that are realised through customising the doll (external reality). Interestingly here, Alice also personifies the doll in explaining that they 'will never say no' to this. In this sense, the doll is somewhat alive in the

imagination but nonetheless compliant albeit in an accepting and grateful way. As such, it could be said that in this form of play, the doll presents itself as an object that resembles a human and always safely accepts the individual who customises it and their views. The doll represents new possibilities for the individual and is constitutionally accepting of new ideas. It is also important to note that in this account, the doll is no longer the 'not-me' but a conduit for other things that captivate the individual. It is instead other *kawaii* things that are added to the doll that form the 'not-me'. The doll is just the canvas. In this sense, the doll is a way of externalising the inner wishes and whims of the individual.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored how the processes of imagining and creating enable participants to explore new potentials for the self. We have explored how *kawaii* fashion participants engage in play before creating their own outfits through the imagination. Play is the overlap between inner reality and external reality, and involves the creation of a potential space through which new ideas of self can emerge. In the act of play, inner and external reality overlap to create a sense of omnipotent control over that which the participant feels they are not. Play allows the individual to temporarily feel closer to the 'not-me' which is symbolised for some participants in themes such as princesses and dolls. By playing with the 'not-me', the participants are able to feel closer to that which they feel is *kawaii* and temporarily experience what it may be like to be loved, adored, be perfect or to indulge in luxury. In that moment, they are able to become the adored object and experience what it would be like to be *kawaii*. The 'not-me' though, is individual, and so some participants might appreciate other things in these themes, such as Alice's account of the customisability of dolls. In short, through imagining, participants are able to transcend the limitations of time and space (that is, their reality as Japanese women in Tokyo in 2013 and 2014) and enter into something more fantastic. This play is particular to the individual, but is also generalisable to

the community. We identified two themes: the princess and the doll. Through play and creating objects that they adore, participants are able to explore what it would be like to be adored themselves. In the next chapter, we will explore how this play then manifests as a presentation of self, when participants prepare their outfit as something they would wear for others to admire.

Chapter Four: Performing the 'Not-Me': A Newly Emerging Self

Figure 17 – A Decora fashion practitioner. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.

In the previous chapter we considered how participants explore new potentials for the self by imaging and making *kawaii* outfits which express properties of the 'not-me'. This discussion, illustrated by two examples – princesses and dolls – demonstrated that taking on the properties of the 'not-me' for participants involves playing with ideas of what it would be like to be adored. This reflection on adoration comes from the participants' experience of objects they believe to be *kawaii*. In playing with the *kawaii* object, they too wish to be adored. But once this moment of play concludes, participants sometimes decide to bring this play into the everyday by wearing the outfits they have put together and to go outside, take photographs or make friends with people with similar interests. In this moment, participants become aware of being seen by others. How are these objects then

altered or modified to allow practitioners to express their sense of self and identity? In this chapter, we will consider whether this awareness influences the way that a *kawaii* fashion outfit is 'polished'. We will also consider whether this influence plays into the participant's attempt to reconcile the 'me' with the 'not-me'.

Below, we examine how *kawaii* fashion outfits are polished and performed as a further step taken by participants to reconcile the 'not-me' with the 'me'. Through the use of Erving Goffman's (1990) concepts of the front stage, back stage and definition of the situation discussed in his text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, we will explore the strategies employed by participants to polish and perform this *kawaii* sense of self. Certainly, the performance of self for Goffman is part of everyday social life for any individual, and is not unique to groupings such as *kawaii* fashion communities. But in the performance particular *to kawaii* fashion communities, participants attempt to author and express their *kawaii* sense of self in the hopes of being adored and admired. As we will go on to consider in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis, this performance is not always interpreted by audiences as intended. As such, this chapter places emphasis on the intent of the wearer, rather than on an external reading of the *kawaii* fashion participant offered by viewers.

One issue of note that this chapter will touch on is the distinctly gendered nature of the move to polish *kawaii* outfits through the use of cosmetics and other beauty practices. As this topic is already of interest to other scholars who study women in subcultures,[91] this

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[91] While this thesis argues that the use of cosmetics involves a compromise of creativity and conformity for *kawaii* fashion communities, the current literature focussing on women in subcultures appears to be at unease with this concept. An overview of the literature finds that the use of cosmetics by female subculturalists reproduces hegemonic expectations of women, thus unsettling the researchers' narrative of the grouping as resistant. For example, Gunn (2007: 58) argues that the reproduction of beauty practices onto female bodies 'simultaneously extends the mainstream obsession with beauty and beautiful', and Brill (2008: 47) says that for this reason grooming cannot 'primarily work as a signifier of subcultural transgression despite it being a specific subcultural style of makeup whose use of strong dark lines and effects sets it apart from fashionable female styles'. In these accounts, beauty practices are a 'matter of course' rather than an exercise of choice (Brill 2008: 47). As a result, body modification appears to be the more comfortable topic (Jeffreys 2000; Wojcik 1995; Simonelli 2002; Osgerby, 1998) due to its transgressive nature. Other researchers have attempted to redirect this narrative, such as Shumway and Arnet (2007: 137) who suggest that makeup allows female-identifying participants in alternative communities to 'disguise the existence' of facial features, and 'replace' them 'with a new, more elaborate fictitious one

chapter considers how Dorothy Smith (1990) explores this performance of femininity. The decision to rely on Smith is warranted because she works closely with Goffman's text to explore how femininity is a performance of individuals actively picking and choosing those elements that interest them (such as cosmetics and dress). This approach treats beauty practices as a form of playful experimentation and an act of creativity rather than something which is a necessarily prescribed behaviour as part of an oppressive patriarchal system.

This chapter commences with an overview of Goffman's concepts of the front stage, back stage and definition of the situation. Then, I will examine specific activities mentioned by my participants that illustrate how *kawaii* fashion practitioners polish and perform their emerging sense of self. Through this discussion we will explore how these activities also relate to an engagement with the 'not-me'. These types of activities have been organised into three sections: a performance of originality and expertise; modelling, poses and photography; and the use of cosmetics, in particular those that replicate a 'doll-like' look. We will also explore some of the limitations participants experience in this act of polishing and performing their *kawaii* self, as they come to realise that the 'not-me' is ultimately unobtainable. We reflect on how the process by which a new self emerges is a compromise of 'me' and 'not-me'.

Goffman: Performing the Self

By using dramaturgical language as an analogy for the presentation of self, Goffman uses 'front stage' and 'back stage' to distinguish between the self that is performed in the presence of others, and the self that is experienced when this performance is no longer required. The 'front stage' is the social space where a performance of self is carried out for others to receive. For instance, one might smile and make jokes to appear to be fun and outgoing among friends, or wear a neat and carefully coordinated suit to work to communicate professionalism. The 'back stage' is the site where an individual relaxes this performance, as there is no longer an

'audience' that needs to be convinced of this sense of self. For instance, the individual in the previous illustration might not tell jokes to themselves when alone, and the individual with the nice suit might be less concerned with appearance when at home with their family.

This terminology relies on an understanding of a proscenium stage, which is a design classically associated with the theatre, where maximum control is exercised over audience vision and interactivity. This is achieved by carefully screening areas of the stage that are not part of the performance with curtains, usually at the back and sides of the stage. The seats are positioned so the audience can only see the performance space, forming the 'fourth wall'. This arrangement thus operates with a high degree of control, so as to maintain the illusion that for the time of the play, the actors are in fact the characters they perform on stage. We cannot see them change costume or wait in the wings for their cue or any other activity that is out of character.

Goffman (1990: 23) argues that individuals carry out set activities (a 'performance') when in the '… continuous presence … (of) a particular set of observers'. That is to say that when observed by people of consequence, we carry out sets of actions and other communicative strategies to encourage the observers to accept the persona we perform as our 'self'. These observers are 'influenced' by the performance of the individual and form an understanding of the individual's identity or role in the activities they witness. The performance ends once this observation ceases, during which time the individual relaxes and may prepare for their next performance. Just like an actor in a theatre, the individual in the front stage is very much swept up in the moment, immersed in and convinced of the self they portray. Furthermore, this performance of self can involve conforming to social expectations, but can also involve playfulness and creativity in reflecting on how one wants to appear.

To develop the concept of the front stage and back stage and its use for understanding *kawaii* fashion communities further, we must consider the qualities of these concepts in greater detail. Goffman's (1990: 23) front stage refers to 'the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance', which can take the form of setting, appearance and manner. The performance carried out in the front stage also involves some degree of curation where actions aligned with the individual's desired impression are 'accentuated', whereas any actions that 'discredit' the impression are 'suppressed' (Goffman 1990: 79). Tools used to create this impression can include clothing, body language, facial expression and verbal communication that the observer is able to perceive and interpret. In doing so, the individual is seeking to convince the audience of their performance and 'the definition of the situation which they come to have' (Goffman 1990: 3). That is to say that by influencing the audience's understanding of the situation, the individual is 'likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain' (Goffman 1990: 3). From this, we can gather than individuals believe that by acting a certain way in the presence of others, they can control the outcome of the social interaction and be seen in the manner in which they wish to be seen. This however relies on a trust that the audience and individual have a mutual understanding of what each element of the performance represents and to be attuned to a shared feeling. In the case of *kawaii* fashion communities, this means that the *kawaii* practitioner relies upon the audience having the same experience and appreciation of *kawaii* that they have.

In the process of performing a particular given self in the front stage, the individual seeks to 'define the situation'. This is a term that Goffman uses to describe the understanding that individuals possess of the social roles that they must play in any given moment. This act of defining the situation can involve behaving in a 'thoroughly calculating manner' whereby an individual expresses themselves '… in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to

evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain' (Goffman 1990: 3). For instance, if someone shows a colleague a photo of their beloved dog, the other person is expected to respond with enthusiasm and interest. In this case, the situation is defined as a moment of sharing a love of animals, and the individual with the pet photo is affirmed as an adoring companion to the dog.

The attempt to define the situation, however, does not need to be calculated or contrived. It can also be intuitive, with the individual not being expressly aware of their performance (Goffman 1990: 3). For instance, one might help a less able person carry a heavy item with the feeling that it is 'the right thing to do' or out of concern for the other, that is without consciously thinking 'if I do this good deed, people will think I am a thoughtful person'. The product of such a gesture, however, is that others will likely view them as generous, and the beneficiary will respond by thanking them. In this instance, the situation has been defined by a spontaneous act rather than a forced contrived performance.

Goffman (1990) argues that by understanding the objective of a performance, and by implication, the desired definition of the situation, we are able to analyse the individual's sense of self and understanding of the world. That is to say, that 'a particular definition of the situation' represents an individual's 'claim as to what reality is' (Goffman 1990: 53). As such, the situations we seek to define reveal what we want others to see in ourselves. They convey our sense of self to others. When others accept our definition of the situation, our sense of self is affirmed. The acceptance of the definition of the situation we establish by others is affirming for this sense of self we have. As such, the role of the audience is crucial for affirming the sense of self and thus must be chosen carefully. For instance, if the aforementioned dog lover were to share their photo on social media, the audience becomes increasingly difficult to control. While many might praise the individual for their love of their pet, other users might mock them or criticise their ability to care

for the animal. The presentation of self in this sense also involves the risk of rejection.

If we consider Dorothy Smith's (1990) application of Goffman's theory to her exploration of the performance of femininity, we can also appreciate the extent to which the definition of the situation emphasises individual control. The individual is an active author in their sense of self in this case, and Smith (1990: 161) emphasises that 'women are not just passive products of socialization; they are active; they create themselves'. That is to say, from Smith's perspective, women pick and choose particular aspects of femininity and use them as tools to author their sense of self. This is not to say that processes of socialisation do not exist, for of course there are still particular behaviours women are praised for in society, in particular compliance with beauty and fashion trends. But progressively, as the fight for gender equality continues, women are able to actively 'play' with femininity as a tool of creativity. They use these tools to explore the self, which can then be affirmed by a receptive audience.

These performance strategies are devised in what Goffman (1990: 73) describes as the back stage where the performance is dropped or 'knowingly contradicted'. Actions which were suppressed in the front stage are now being carried out with a sense of ease, and the settings, appearances and mannerisms performed in the front stage are now no longer essential. It is in this space that the constructed nature of the performance in the front stage is acknowledged, and is in fact 'openly' and 'painstakingly' fabricated (Goffman 1990: 73). The use of the word 'openly' here by Goffman implies that this is the space where one can construct a performance without the need for concealment or fear that a front stage role will be discredited.

Smith (1990: 193) in her elaboration of Goffman's dramaturgical analogy in the context of women performing femininity explains that '... the production

appearance calls for thought, planning, the exercise of judgement, work, the use of resources, skills. Behind appearance and its interpretation is secreted a subject who is fully an agent'. In this respect, it is possible to claim that *kawaii* fashion participants consider in advance how they wish to be perceived by others, and employ various strategies that they believe will assist them in achieving this goal. From this, we can understand that *kawaii* fashion practitioners, once aware of being looked at, prepare a performance of self that incorporates the clothing and imaginings they have produced through playing. They carefully prepare and think through this performance, much as any other individual does. It is important to note however, that this careful preparation involves what the participant believes will be successful in expressing their sense of self, and does not guarantee that the audience will respond as planned.

The next thing to consider then, is how Winnicott's (2005) 'not-me', which we have explored in previous chapters, works with Goffman's theory of the performance of self. One of the important insights that Goffman offers is that the performance we offer in the front stage embodies our truer self insofar as it captures who we would like to be. In the context of *kawaii* fashion practitioners then, performing cuteness is a way of 'taking on' and 'becoming' the 'not-me' they so admire. Goffman (1990: 30) likens this act of 'taking on' the role of the 'not-me' to wearing a mask in the following:

> In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of *ourselves – the* role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be.

'Conception' here speaks directly to the form of play we explored in Chapter Three, whereby imagining is a way for *kawaii* fashion participants to explore who they are and who they would like to be. Playing helps us to realise new possibilities for ourselves, moving beyond the constraints of our everyday lives. In this chapter, we

will explore the ways in which participants 'strive' to take on the properties of the 'not-me' that they have experimented with through play by performing and reconciling it with their extant sense of self. The performance they give here is their 'truer self' and the one who they 'would like to be'. In this sense, the performance is still playful. For example, Smith (1990: 206) characterises the process of decorating and preparing the body as a form of play through which individuals are able to experiment with ideas, refine skills and feel satisfied in their technical abilities. For Smith (1990: 206) 'decorating one's body can be seen as an elaborated expression of who one is, who one might be, who one would like to try on for the evening'. Through preparing a 'mask' which takes on the properties of who we would like to be, we are able to take on properties of the 'not-me' as part of our performed self.

In summary, Goffman offers us four key concepts which will assist us in exploring how participants perform a sense of self through modifying their mode of dress: the front stage, the back stage, the mask and the definition of the situation. The front stage is a term used to describe social situations where strategies are carried out so as to perform a self for others. The strategies are planned in a relaxed environment where the performance of self is no longer required, a social space which Goffman refers to as the 'back stage'. The self that is performed for others – which Goffman describes as a 'mask' – is not necessarily 'false' or completely counterfactual to who we are, but is genuinely who we are striving to become. Connections can be drawn here to Winnicott's notion of the 'not-me' which, if you recall, is that which we feel is different from our current sense of self and what we might wish to become. As such, the performance of self does not simply involve 'being who we are not' but also consists of attempts to develop and transform the self.

For the remainder of this chapter, we will now explore three ways in which *kawaii* fashion practitioners seek to define the situation through performing their 'cute

self'. The three strategies we will study by way of example are (i) a performance of originality and expertise, (ii) the use of photography and modelling, and (iii) the use of cosmetics. All of these strategies have an audience in mind that influences the way the individual attempts to perform their 'cute self'. In this chapter we will unpack these strategies and explore how and why the practitioner believes they will successfully define the situation for audiences.

This is me: Performing Originality and Expertise

One of the ways in which *kawaii* fashion participants modify their behaviour so as to assert their identity as *kawaii* is through a performance of originality and expertise. Originally, their experience of *kawaii* involved experiencing the 'not-me' as distinct from their sense of self (in which they feel, perhaps, they are not '*kawaii* enough'). Now, participants actively seek to assert their ownership of the new *kawaii* mode of dress they have put together, one that is a creative expression of self. In this performance they view their expression as 'unique' and worthy of adoration by other *kawaii* fashion practitioners. Furthermore, the amateur *kawaii* fashion models interviewed for this research viewed themselves as experts in *kawaii* fashion, who had the ability to 'teach' others to become cute like them. One interpretation is that the individual realises that it is possible to be perceived as 'not-me' by others, and in turn to be admired and complimented. In carrying out this performance of self, participants seek affirmation from others and hope to be seen as the *kawaii* 'not-me' that originally captured their imagination. Below, we will consider how 90884, Kumamiki and Doll Classica express their desire for affirmation.

One of the ongoing themes that arose from interviews conducted for this research was that participants were proud and excited to share their creations with others. In particular, they emphasised the originality and technical skill of their compositions. This sense of originality was not only performed in the everyday lives

of these participants, but was also performed for my translator and me during interviews. For example, 90884 during her interview went to great lengths to enthusiastically inform us of her originality, such as in the following response:

Megan: Where do you get ideas for your makeup?
90884: This is my original. I don't get ideas from anybody or anything. I make my original makeup match my outfit.

The exchange begins with me posing a somewhat fumbling question, where I try to seek a beginning point with which to describe 90884's unique makeup style as if its origins existed somewhere else. During the interview, she wears bright, delicately applied, pink, yellow and blue eye shadow, thick false lashes, large purple contact lenses and small twinkling sequins on her cheeks. This question was prompted by her earlier accounts of the 'not-me' which as discussed in Chapter Two, involved an appreciation of unusual colours, textures and shapes of 1980s Western culture. Perhaps her colourful style was in some way a 'remix' of colourful makeup from the eighties. Her response suggested that I had misunderstood parts of her performance by attempting to define the situation myself. In response, 90884 corrects my assumption with the defensive reply that the style is original and belongs to her. In this swift response, the definition of the situation is clarified, and it is made clear that she views herself as creative and original. Her use of the personal pronoun[92] 'my' indicates a sense of ownership or possession over the aesthetic presented as 'her' style. Now, her dreamy account of the 'eccentric' and 'strange' eighties culture is almost forgotten, with the assertion that her concepts are not informed by reference to 'any' person or thing. 90884 also emphasises that the makeup complements her outfit. This suggests that by assembling and polishing her outfit, she has prepared a presentation of self that is able to be interpreted by other participants in a way that she feels is comprehensible. At this point, 90884

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[92] In the original Japanese transcript this is indicated by 'watashi no', which is used as a possessive particle.

appears to be very confident in declaring her style to be her own. She is, in this moment, the self she would like to be – clever, cute and original – which is what she had admired so much in Western 80s culture.

In this sense, 90884 has sought to define the situation through her outfit. As an audience, we are supposed to recognise the outfit as a presentation of her clever, cute and original self and respond affirmatively. We can see in my fumbling question how I had misunderstood the definition of the situation – I had assumed that she had sourced ideas for her makeup style from somewhere else. In this social moment I am quickly corrected by 90884's verbal response, and as such the definition of the situation moves from '90884 draws upon inspiration for her makeup' to '90084's makeup is an entirely original creation'. In this moment, 90884 seeks to make it abundantly clear that she views her makeup to be original, as if it were plucked out of the depths of her imagination, rather than perhaps an amalgamation of colours, motifs and other makeup styles she has appreciated over time.

The role of the original and creative *kawaii* expert also enters into Kumamiki's description of her *kawaii* practices. In Chapter Two, we explored Kumamiki's play with nostalgia which inspired the design of her *kawaii* egg collar. Here, we will consider a discussion of her artistic practice and its relation to the performance of her *kawaii* identity. In doing so, we will identify the specific strategies that Kumamiki uses in her performance, one that she both reproduces and reflects upon over the course of the interview. Kumamiki describes her artistic practice for her independent fashion label as follows:

> Megan: If [your fashion label] had its own world, what would you describe it as?
> Kumamiki: What I'm making is clothes, accessories … so, some kind of fashion. But for me it is not just fashion but nearer to art. I express my

feeling with fashion items that I make and if people put them on, my fashion items will become a part of their feeling. So recently making fashion items has become too small, I mean, what I want to do is overflowing from 'fashion', I'm doing shows with films that I make and the music which I ask somebody to make … It's a kind of modern art and something that surpasses fashion.

Here Kumamiki also works through a tension that she identifies between fashion and art in terms of conceptual experimentations and objects with utility. By insisting that her clothing is more than 'fashion' Kumamiki appears to be emphasising that the clothing is an expression of self, highlighted by 'I express my feeling with fashion items'. Kumamiki feels her work, which takes the form of clothing, is just one facet of a diverse creative outpouring in which film and music also have a place. Art is something that can be reflected upon, as well as observed and appreciated on a deeper level. While initially her clothing was created through play, whereby her feelings overlapped with the materials used to create her clothing, now they are presented with an audience in mind.[93] In this sense, the clothing created by Kumamiki is presented as an expression of self and feeling, one that the audience is expected to receive and understand as 'art'. As such her presentation of self as an artist here is carried out so as to define the situation that her creations are not just clothing, but art – something that she appears to believe is more admirable than simply making clothes.

Now Kumamiki has explained her artistic practice, we are expected to recognise the artistic value in her work and affirm her identity as an artist. In her response, Kumamiki indicates that she imagines a certain kind of audience that will recognise her *kawaii* identity. She hopes that when they look at her clothes and accessories, they will recognise them as the art which expresses her feeling. Furthermore in this

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[93] It could be said that the presentation of her clothing is also playful, however this is beyond the scope of the chapter at hand.

response, Kumamiki also indicates that they will receive and translate the feelings she expresses through the clothes and accessories by choosing to wear them. So in this sense, Kumamiki is performing the role of the artist who conveys ideas to an audience through the clothing and accessories she has made. In this way, she is able to take ownership of the 'not-me' (here, her nostalgia) and incorporate it into her sense of self through art. Through her performance of self, she imagines that the audience will not only accept and praise her work as art, but also understand that the clothing is an expression of feeling.

Another way of performing a self that evokes the '*kawaii* expert' is through the creation of beauty and fashion tutorials, which are disseminated online through YouTube channels and up until 2017 via print magazines such as *KERA* and the *Gothic and Lolita Bible*.[94] These platforms enable amateur models – referred to as *dokumo* (shortened from *dokusha-moderu*; trans. 'amateur model') – to disseminate their ideas, perform their expertise in *kawaii* fashion communities and position themselves as a potential 'not-me' for audiences. The *dokumo* is an 'ordinary model' that is, an amateur model who has been scouted by publishers on the streets whilst wearing *kawaii* fashion. Through being 'scouted' and given access to different media to present their ideas, the *dokumo* is able to perform a sense of self that affirms their identity, which is a combination of both the 'not-me' and 'me'. For instance, a Lolita fashion practitioner might look like a princess in fantastic attire (akin to the 'not-me') but carries out their everyday life in Tokyo, shopping, studying and visiting friends in this clothing. In this sense they are like the 'not-me' but now, with a unique twist, 'the Tokyo princess' as it were. The tutorials are communicated through a photography montage, carefully curated for the gaze of other community members. The presentation of these beauty and fashion tutorials with their heavy editing also communicates a sense of poise and command over the creative form, as each tutorial gives a sense of expertise and perfection in the

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[94] Examples of such YouTube channels include KAWAII PATEEN (2018) and RinRin Doll (2018).

application of cosmetics. In the tutorial, the *dokumo* appears to effortlessly apply her makeup and achieves the desired result with minimum hassle. The reality of putting on makeup, such as a gaffe where the false lash peels off or the eyeliner smears, is not recorded in these tutorials. Futhermore, sometimes these models have their makeup applied by professionals, but give the impression that it has been done by themselves. For the remainder of this section we will explore how the models we interviewed viewed their role as experts and the kind of self they perform in the process of producing these materials with the assistance of editorial teams.

In her role as a *dokumo* for *KERA* magazine, 90884 prefers to have full control over the makeup styles she presents in her fashion spreads. In doing so, she is able to perform her expertise and originality for a receptive audience who may respond by attempting to experiment with her ideas in the creation of their own outfits. In her interview, 90884 describes the strategies she uses to perform this self for the magazine editorial team and readers:

> Megan: Do you do makeup tutorials in *KERA*?
> 90884: Yes. There are 'projects' on makeup in *KERA* ... For those pages I introduce my own makeup.
> Megan: They don't tell you what to do?
> 90884: I do my makeup by myself. Of course there are makeup artists, stylists, or hair arrangement artists. But I say to them 'don't worry about me. I do it by myself!' Then they say 'ah, OK, OK!'

In this moment, 90884 is not only performing for us her originality (by communicating to us that she does her own makeup) but is describing how she consciously performs her originality for the *KERA* magazine editorial (the makeup artists, stylists and hair stylists). By saying she can 'do it herself' 90884 is displaying confidence and command in her technical skills. In essence, she is communicating

that she is able to produce a polished look to the same standard as these professionals. The 'projects' she is describing here are one page layouts with photomontages, written descriptions and annotations that show how a makeup or outfit styling look is created. By doing these herself and allowing the editorial team to photograph each step, she is able to demonstrate to readers how she does her own makeup or outfit styling in a way that is 'authentic' and akin to how she usually dresses. This not only presents the readers with 90884's originality, but the editorial also communicates that her presentation of self (fashion and makeup) is something to be sought after or copied. In this context, 90884 is positioned as a potential 'not-me' for audiences.

Interestingly, Doll Classica has also been invited to produce books specialising in beauty tutorials, which involve creative collaborations between a professional styling team and Doll Classica's own creative vision. The books include photo spreads of Doll Classica modelling a range of *kawaii* fashion in fantastic scenes. For example she appears as a beautified version of the Queen of Hearts growing larger in a room full of mirrors and spilling playing cards (creating an interesting remix of the narrative of *Alice in Wonderland*). The book includes detailed instructions that concentrate on makeup application and dressing one's hair so that readers can replicate them. She describes the experience of producing her book as follows:

> I was asked to publish my personal book. The publisher asked me how I wanted it to be. I included many kinds of things in many different genres because I thought my characteristic was to appear in many kinds of magazines in many styles, Lolita, casual look, and cross-dressing [in prince-style]. I wanted to show many different 'mes' …

In this account of the vision for the book, Doll Classica describes the ideas she seeks to communicate and present to audiences. In particular, she wants her capacity to present different selves to be appreciated, and from this, to be seen to be

multifaceted in her play with a variety of *kawaii* outfit 'genres'. By labelling her performance of self in her Lolita, casual or prince *kawaii* styles as 'me', she indicates that she views her outfits which have been developed through imagining and play as 'herself'. The book provides an opportunity for her to perform this self to an audience, and she asserts this further in playing the role of 'style expert'.

The self that is presented in the book *Doll Classica*, is also carefully curated to a specific audience which Doll Classica herself imagines to be receptive. As such she deploys specific strategies, in the hopes that they will define her role in the text as a likeable, *kawaii* and informed source of inspiration. She describes her audience as follows:

> Megan: Who do you want to read your book?
>
> Doll Classica: I want all girls to read it because in my book I put everything that girls would like, *kawaii* things, casual things …

Here it is unclear if she means 'girls' as in *kawaii* fashion participants, or 'girls' as in young women in general.[95] Regardless, for her, this audience is appreciative of *kawaii* as a 'casual' or everyday fashion. In other words, this imagined audience enjoys dressing cute every day, rather than just for special occasions. Doll Classica here expresses a curated sense of self that includes the things which she believes would be approved by these readers. When she appears in a book, and presents these things, she also performs the role of the expert who 'knows' what these readers want. In this fantasy, the 'girl' reader picks up the book and enjoys every page, which may not occur in actuality (for instance, not all women in Japan enjoy *kawaii*, and those who do may not like Doll Classica's mode of dress). This observation is reminiscent of Goffman's (1990: 213) idea of impression management, where '[t]he circumspect performer will … attempt to select the kind

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[95] In Japanese 'girls' is used to refer to young women as well as children.

of audience that will give a minimum of trouble in terms of the show the performer wants to put on …'. With her book, Doll Classica 'pitches' a particular performance of self to an audience that already appreciates her mode of dress (having purchased the book in the first instance). In the interview, she appears to promote the book to appeal to a wider audience ('I want all girls to read it'), but in actuality the book is very much made for her fans. In presenting herself as the expert through this book, Doll Classica hopes that readers will not only approve of her style, but also seek to try and replicate it themselves. Here, Doll Classica hopes that readers of her manual may find her to be *kawaii,* and in so doing, to find something of the 'not-me' in her appearance. By these means Doll Classica successfully performs a sense of self that embodies the *kawaii* ideals she admires; she becomes an elegant matriarch of a fashion community, who is given the time and means to explore her own creative pursuits, which echoes her fantasy of Marie Antoinette and aristocracy which we discussed in Chapter Three. In this instance, Doll Classica does not just want to be seen as *kawaii* but as 'queenly' and as an original source of inspiration to her admirers.

In this section we have explored how some participants in this research sought to present themselves as experts and originals in *kawaii* fashion. These participants carry out activities in the community which are aligned with wishing to appear as such, for instance by presenting oneself as an artist or by working as a *dokumo*. We have studied some of the instances where they have sought to define the situation by way of correction, assertion of self and through participating in the production of editorial content. Often, the self presented in these contexts echoes the 'not-me' that was discussed in Chapter Three, however this is not always consciously remembered by the participant. In the next section we will explore photography further as a means for kawaii fashion practitioners to express their sense of self and identity.

Modelling and Photography: Performing *Kawaii*

Another form of performance that some *kawaii* fashion practitioners carry out is modelling for photography. By modelling *kawaii* outfits (that they have either created or have been asked to wear by designers) practitioners attempt to hold poses and form facial expressions that they anticipate audiences will understand to be *kawaii*. As such, their primary goal in this activity is to appear as *kawaii* as possible for the viewer. This involves some anticipation of who their audience might be and what they might appreciate. As such, the participant carefully prepares their performance with 'foresight and design in determining in advance how best to stage a show …' (Goffman 1990: 212). This presentation of self creates an interesting dance between the practitioner's sense of originality, and their anticipation of the audience. Interestingly, the imagined audience tends to be limited to other *kawaii* fashion practitioners with the assumption that its members experience *kawaii* in the same way. Below we will explore some of the intersections between these facets of modelling *kawaii* fashion.

Specifically, we will explore the strategies used by Lolitina, another Lolita model, and Doll Classica, both of whom model for BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT along with many other Lolita designer labels. In particular, we will explore what aspects of the 'not-me' manifest in their performance whilst modelling, and in doing so, note how these practitioners seek to take on the qualities of that which they admire. These images involve one or two models wearing the latest monthly limited edition 'prints' in a setting which reflects the story or world depicted on the textile of the dress. While they are given limited stylistic input into these editorials, the clout of

Figure 18 – Advertisement for a collection from Lolita designer label, Angelic Pretty, *titled 'Elizabeth Unicorn' printed in the December 2015 issue of KERA Magazine (2015: 31).*

BABY. THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT elevates the status of Lolitina and Doll Classica in the community as Lolita fashion practitioners one ought to admire and adore. Lolitina's primary vision when modelling *kawaii* clothing is to pose in such a way that the outfit appears enticing to wear. A great deal of care is put into absorbing the mood and detail of the clothing she is to model, which she then attempts to display and show off through the positioning of her body. For example, Lolitina explains:

> As a Lolita model it is a key to me to be as close as I can to a doll. To show the whole clothes by picking up the skirt like this – [*Lolitina gestures by neatly fanning out her skirt*] – is also important because there are many tiny motifs all over the clothes … The expression of the face should not be wild and should be like a doll. I call it the 2.5 dimension point between the 2D and 3D. I always try to place myself in that position.

Here is a richly detailed reference to dolls as possible 'not-mes' for *kawaii* fashion practitioners. In this moment, Lolitina is not performing a self-as-original as discussed in the previous section, but is instead performing the role of a doll to dress and admire. That is, she is being dressed by the editorial team of this Lolita brand, and is posing for viewers of the final photograph. The honour she believes to be bestowed upon her in modelling for this designer label results in the careful consideration of how she ought to pose. By complying with the demands of the designer label, as opposed to fulfilling her own personal desires, she takes on the role of 'expert model'. It seems somewhat fitting then, that she describes herself as a doll here, which as discussed in Chapter Three is a source of admiration of some *kawaii* fashion practitioners because of its customisability. By assuming the role of the doll here, Lolitina means that she must be entirely still and calm so as not to distract from the presentation of the clothing. Here she plays the role of a mannequin, whose purpose is to hang the clothing, rather than to appear alive. At the same time however, this act allows her to submit to the lavishing of attention

and praise. She is carefully dressed, groomed and daintily placed in the set, the most important focus of attention, second only to the product – that is, the dress itself. Here, ultimately, she has become the doll she so adores. She attempts to define the situation in relation to her modelling by using doll imagery. She poses in ways that she thinks other *kawaii* practitioners will find *kawaii*. Because she likes dolls, she assumes that other *kawaii* fashion practitioners will like the way that she performs a doll. Here, the tension between her own expression of self and the anticipation of an audience's view emerges.

There is also a sense of the inhuman here, which must be staged as it cannot be achieved by appearing 'natural'. The reference to the 2.5 dimension in Lolitina's response refers to a larger body of work in Japan that explores the interaction between two dimensional forms – such as illustrations and cartoons – and the real world. Most famously, the artist Takashi Murakami experiments with this through the production of life-sized cartoon-character sculptures.[96] And so here, Lolitina is perhaps wishing to express a sense of the unreal through her posing such that she might dissolve into the world conveyed by her dress. Finally, we see how important the print is to the overall fashion style conveyed, as this is the only real gesture explained by Lolitina: the skirts, where the salience of the textile design lies, are stretched out in a curtsey-like motion so viewers can see the details. As such, Lolitina aims to portray a cute self, where the clothing 'speaks' more loudly than her body. She believes this will successfully convince practitioners-as-audience that she is *kawaii*. Following Goffman, she is using a playful mask of who she would like to be and feels it more accurately expresses her sense of self.

Doll Classica's account of modelling has similar qualities to Lolitina's in terms of performing something larger than life, but is instead focussed on her own 'not-me'. We might recall that it consists in the faux-French aristocrats discussed in Chapter

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[96] For more information, see Hebdige (2007).

Three. I asked Doll Classica for more information on the specific facial expressions and gestures involved in her modelling to get a clearer idea of how she seeks to perform a 'cute' self:

> I have to do it all by myself because there is nobody to tell me what to do and how to do it. So I read what kind of faces I have to make from the clothes to wear. When I started to be a model I didn't know what to do at all. So I read the art book of Mihara Mitsukazu[97] and I studied the facial expression and posing. He drew all in the detail of the posing right `down to the tips of their fingers, so it was easier to understand than looking at photos … the clothes are so beautiful. I think I have to take out the humanlike qualities of my self. More stage-like, it can be even too exaggerated. Not casual … the clothes are far from reality. So I want to express these unrealities.

In this response, Doll Classica moves in and out of what she expects audiences to want to see, and what she personally would like to see in her modelling. She begins by pointing to her lack of formal instruction, and her unspoken expectations that she would be given instructions on how to pose, which did not come. We might infer that she is imagining an audience which has a pre-existing set of expectations of how the clothing should look and what would be deemed *kawaii*. This would then be communicated by a director of the shoot, providing instructions on how to perform *kawaii* modelling. Without this direction, Doll Classica then turns to performing ideas that are inspired by the clothing itself, and returns to her experience of *kawaii*, which an audience might perhaps be receptive to. She expresses this as 'reading' the clothing for ideas of 'what kind of faces' she has to make. In this sense, her performance (as a response to the *kawaii* clothing she is being asked to model) can be understood to be another form of play that is

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[97] Mihara Mitsukazu is a manga artist, and the art book Doll Classica refers to here is *Chocolate* (2005).

documented through photography. Like Lolitina, Doll Classica also prioritises the clothing insofar as she tries to show off qualities of the clothing that she admires.

As with Lolitina's response, there are also qualities of the 'inhuman' in Doll Classica's description. Mihara Mitsukazu, who was a featured illustrator in the *Gothic and Lolita Bible*, is an interesting choice to use as a guide for posing, because of the macabre nature of his subject matter and the exaggerated forms of his figures. Her figures are elongated, grim or demure as they are depicted in settings of torment and mystery. Doll Classica describes the expressive and exaggerated qualities of Mihara Mitsukazu's illustrations to be more helpful references than other photographs, suggesting that in her performance she strives for something as fantastical as an illustration. Mihara's figures are indeed quite exquisite and inhuman, so it follows that Doll Classica might be seeking to replicate this ethereal expression through her body language. She seems to acknowledge this in her answer by describing her performance as one of 'taking out' human like qualities in the sense that she feels the need to perform something more spectacular and theatrical than the 'humanness' of everyday life. In this sense, Doll Classica is trying to perform the hyper-real, theatrical figures of aristocrats, that we can connect to her own 'not-me'. In doing so, she hopes that her audience may interpret her performance as *kawaii* in a similar way to how she feels towards her fictional characters. Here we can also see how *kawaii* can converge with other aesthetics – the exquisite combines with the cute.

In this section we have studied how two models present *kawaii* fashion to viewers. What distinguishes our discussion here from our previous consideration is that these models are given already constructed *kawaii* fashion to wear. Although they are not wearing their own creations, they nonetheless spend time thinking about how they look and admiring themselves before posing for photographs. Time is spent actively finding that which they like about the outfit (the 'not-me') before they wear it for the photo-shoot. In this act of presentation, Doll Classica and

Figure 19 – Beauty tutorial spread from the Winter 2014 issue of the Gothic and Lolita Bible
(2014: 70-71).

Lolitina not only pose in ways that they feel are *kawaii*, but also in ways they anticipate might 'look cute' for the viewer of the final photograph. In this moment we can see an interesting convergence between what they think is *kawaii* and what they assume others will find *kawaii*. Of course, not all *kawaii* fashion practitioners would like to appear doll-like or as an exquisitely illustrated figure. These instances present an interesting feedback loop where the model's expression is shaped by anticipation of a look, and how ideas about what is *kawaii* can be disseminated by photography. Of course, we must remember that these are just two instances of modelling, in particular modelling for an editorial as opposed to a 'street-snap'.[98] Further investigation is required in respect to 'street-snaps', or other practices such as taking 'selfies' to see if the particular social processes of performance discussed above are reproduced, and in particular if there is a difference between outfits assembled by the model and outfits that are gifted to them. Nonetheless, this section presents just one interesting facet of modelling *kawaii* fashion and highlights the role that presentation and performance plays in attempts to cultivate the self.

Becoming the Doll: The Theatrical Potential of Cosmetics in *Kawaii* Fashion Communities

The final example of *kawaii* fashion practitioners seeking to define the situation that we shall explore in this chapter is the use of cosmetics, specifically the 'doll style' technique. Coined as 'doll style' by printed media such as *KERA* and the *Gothic and Lolita Bible* this particular style of makeup involves the use of cosmetics to 'flatten' and emphasise or artificially construct the eyes, lips and cheeks. It is activated through a set of various facial expressions including the demure smile or

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[98] A 'street-snap' refers to the practice of posing for a photograph on the street. The practice was largely set in motion in Harajuku by FRUiTS magazine (developed in 1997 and led by photographer Shoichi Aoki). While street-snaps originally documented pedestrians' attire, the practice has since evolved to a staged production where models are dressed and posed in the street.

pout. The basic premise of this style of makeup is evident in other sources outside of the *kawaii* fashion community, as shown through other Japanese printed media such as *Koakuma Ageha* and *Sebuntīn*[99]. However, it is important to observe that participants claimed that their particular take on the style was unique to the community. This was reinforced in Lolitina's interview, where she described the key features of 'doll makeup' as, '[the] eyes should be larger, the cheek is in brighter colour …'. Here, emphasis is on the importance of the salience of the eyes and cheeks in this style of makeup. Overall, this creates a very artificial kind of beauty that does not conceal the cosmetic process but further exposes its presence through its sensational nature. In this section, we will look at the connections made by participants between their use of cosmetics and their source of inspiration. In contrast to 90884's response above, many practitioners draw upon inspirational sources to develop their makeup style, and during interviews dolls were frequently cited as one of those sources.

In order to understand a participant's perspective on this style, we can consider Lolitina's response about cosmetics in its full context here:

> Megan: What would be the important thing in Lolita makeup?
> Lolitina: I change the colour of my lipstick or blush depending on the clothes. I choose the colour to match the clothes. When I go out dressed in Lolita fashion a 'must' is eyelashes. Japanese people have a plain face so I put on 'full makeup' in order to look *kawaii* …
> Megan: Do you do your makeup like a doll?

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[99]*Koakuma Ageha* (trans. *Little Demon Swallotail Butterfly*) is a Japanese *Gyaru* fashion magazine that entered into print from 2005 onwards (by Inforest (2005-2015), then by Neko Publishing (2015-2016) and currently by Media Boy (2017-present)). The magazine is targeted towards *Gyaru* practitioners with an interest in nightlife, and provides fashion editorials, makeup tutorials and lifestyle articles. For more information see Media Boy (2018). *Sebuntīn* (trans. *Seventeen*) is a monthly periodical (1967-present) produced by Shūeisha, targeting teenage girls, which produces fashion editorials, beauty tutorials and topical articles. For more information, see Shūeisha (2018).

> Lolitina: Yes! Eyes should be larger, the cheek should have a brighter colour … but the makeup should match to clothes. The protagonist is the clothing, not the makeup.

Here are two core design principles for Lolitina – that cosmetics should be used to cultivate and enhance the face so it will be seen as *kawaii*, and that the cosmetics should draw attention to the clothes, and not the wearer. The application of colour to the face draws out key colours in the clothing – for instance, the deep pink in the flowers lining a Lolita dress is drawn up to the face with a deep pink flush to the lips and cheeks from lipstick and blush. By echoing the colour palate the body disappears into the visuals of the clothing, like a mannequin. The body does not dominate, but is secondary to the clothing.

To explore this idea further, let us consider the attraction of this doll-like face for participants. I will show that it operates on multiple levels of fascination with art, the visual Occidental fantasy relating to elegant ladies that was largely set in motion by *shōjo* illustrations. All of these present themselves to the Japanese participant as part of the 'not-me', that is, as an aesthetic ideal that is felt to be different from the natural appearance of one's face without makeup, thus necessitating cosmetic enhancements. In the previous chapter, we explored the role of the fascination with dolls as played for some of the *kawaii* fashion practitioners' experience of the 'not-me'. Here, we now extend this discussion to form a better understanding of the role of the doll's face in this experience and how this then carries over to the presentation of self. Below follows an exchange with Tiara, regarding her interest in dolls:

> Megan: What's your favourite part of dolls?
> Tiara: Eyes and bodies.
> Megan: What do you think about doll eyes?

Tiara: They are transparent. The eyes of Japanese people are normally black. So for us, eyes in other colours, such as light blue, are objects of our admiration. I am attracted by something that the Japanese don't have.

Megan: Have you ever tried dolly makeup?

Tiara: I have tried it once before. But it was tough wearing coloured contact lenses. They make my eyes dry. So now I use normal black lenses, such as Define. The look is Japanese like … I make my eyelids doubled, I put on eyelashes, and I use eye shadows. My eyelids are very single. My face is really Japanese-like one. So I adore Western people. I adore something far from me. So I tried so hard but I was not able to catch up. So I changed my mind and I do makeup that suits a Japanese-like face. Something like that.

Here, there is a clear juxtaposition to that which Tiara believes she has and what she believes others to have. Interestingly, she does not attribute these eye colours to a particular ethnicity here, but simply refers to the fact that other colours exist. It is interesting that she describes the dolls' eyes as transparent. The dolls that Tiara collects (i.e. both *Koitsukihime* Dolls and Blythe Dolls)[100] have glass and high quality resin eyes that glisten and reflect the light. They are enhanced, spectacular representations of the real human eye. Like precious jewels, they are open and clear to the world. Furthermore in Japanese 'blue eyes' (*aoeme*, 青目）is a phrasing used to refer someone of European extraction, irrespective of their actual eye colour. What then, does this mean for Tiara, who describes Japanese eyes as 'black'? If we refer back to Tiara's words here, there does not appear to be anything negative attributed to black eyes other than that they are common in Japan. So perhaps the attraction lies not just in something exotic and other, but in the fantasy of a Japanese woman with blue eyes. Thus the depiction of a Japanese woman with

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[100]Koitsukihime Dolls are artisan ball jointed dolls produced by Luna Angelico Studio in Suginami, Tokyo. For more information, please see Luna Angelico (2018). Blythe Dolls (intellectual property of Hasbro) were originally produced in 1972 by Kenner, but were discontinued shortly afterwards. New editions have been produced by Takara since 2001. Blythe Dolls are characterised by their large, round eyes, which change colour with a pull-cord. For more information, please see Hasbro (2018).

blue eyes would present itself as a striking sight in Tiara's fantasy, involving an individual who is different and unique. In practical terms, this blue eye colour is achieved by individuals like Tiara through the use of contact lenses, with a sharp contrast created through the use of deep jet-black eyeliner and thick false lashes.

Furthermore, we should also note her attempt to make her 'eyelids doubled', as opposed to 'single' ones, through the use of makeup. Here Tiara is referring to the practice by which some Japanese individuals seek to create a 'fold' between their eyelid and brow bone to redistribute the fat around the eyelid. Laura Miller (2006: 118-119) in *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* explores techniques to create this fold through cosmetic surgery that involves the removal of some of the fat. While Miller (2006: 119) argues that Japanese women claim 'they are not creating the extra fold in order to appear Western', we can see here that Tiara is offering a more complicated narrative as one Japanese woman with different views on the personal appeal of 'double lids'.[101] If we consider the Japanese word used to describe the 'double lid look', *patchiri* (trans. bright and clear eyes), we can see how 'double lids' might enhance the appearance of the 'transparent' eye colour that she desires.

This wish for 'transparent' eyes, for something one biologically does not have, likely feeds into what we have previously explored in this thesis with regards to Winnicott's (2005) 'not-me'. We want to have that which is different from us, *because* it is different. Once we obtain this 'other thing' it becomes part of our everyday, the fascinating quality it once had becomes arbitrary. Or, we might find that it is impossible to obtain the 'other thing' in a way we had hoped, which leads to a sense of disappointment in that which we cannot have. This is aligned with Goffman's (1990: 91) observation that those who seek to transcend their

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[101] Miller (2006: 119) rejects the view that Japanese women have internalised a 'white-woman beauty ideal'. Miller's (2006: 119) participants claim that they prefer 'double lids' as it makes them appear 'more awake' or 'younger'. Miller (2006: 3) warns that viewing all beauty practices as a 'Western import obscures the historicity of particular practices and suggests an ethnocentric stance'. As such, we should carefully consider Tiara's views in the context of broader beauty practices in Japan.

designated roles in life come to their new position to find 'unanticipated similarities with their old one' in that 'both involve the presenter in the grubby, gossipy business of staging a show'. That is to say, that for Goffman, individuals sometimes fantasise about a 'better self'. For instance, we might fantasise that if we were wealthier and able to purchase all the things that we wish for, we might become happier. However, even if we were to have these things, we would still carry the same emotional baggage with us. Furthermore, the level of performance required for this persona would still be the same. After all, those who perform the persona of 'someone with wealth' seek to express the satisfaction that they can purchase what they want in others. This is a front stage strategy that is adopted by one who is genuinely wealthy and one who, following the example, is not genuinely wealthy, but performs as if they are. Goffman (1990: 91) explains that the disappointment experienced in achieving this new self is a result of attempting to acquire 'the character projected by individuals in that position' rather than the fully realised life of the performer, which must be derived from the hopes and dreams of the back stage.

If we return to Tiara's response here, she is longing for her impression of what it might be like to be someone with blue eyes (it is unclear if the fantasy is based on seeing someone in person with blue eyes, a photoshopped image or seeing an illustration such as that found in anime or manga etc.). Tiara experiments with cosmetics to become this person in a way that echoes Goffman's concept of the mask which enables one to experiment and 'try on' different ideas of the self. A tension between familiarity and otherness emerges alongside the wish for the impossible and its sheer unattainability. In this pursuit lies the self which they wish to be, a truer self that they believe they will become, and the mistakes and flaws they will overcome. In denying these mistakes and flaws, however, can they really say that this self is what they are really like? This version of the self cannot stand the test of daily life. As such these pursuits of the 'not-me', as we find below, are coloured both by elation and disappointment. In the latter half of this section, we

shall look at the firm limitations of this dream in terms of the personal acceptance of self and the body.

We cannot forget Tiara's deep fascination with Barbie discussed in earlier chapters, the Western counterpart to Japan's Licca-chan and Jenny – 12" playline fashion dolls sold *en masse* to children. In reflecting on her makeup processes, Tiara offers an interesting comparison between Barbie and Licca-chan in relation to her own feelings about her appearance, which we will draw out further below:

> Megan: What's the difference between Barbie and Licca-chan?
>
> Tiara: The face and the height are different … The form of face, and the outline of the face is different. Barbie has longer and thinner face. And the proportion is different. Barbie is more like Westerners. Licca-chan and Jenny-chan are more like Japanese. So, I adore Barbie more.
>
> Megan: When you do your makeup do you do it like Barbie or Licca-chan?
>
> Tiara: To tell you the truth I want to be more like Barbie. But my original face is that of Japanese. So I tend to be like Licca-chan. But I like Barbie more.
>
> Megan: Why do you think your face doesn't fit Barbie?
>
> Tiara: I don't have the outline of face or the framework of Barbie!! If my face and my body were like hers it would fit me … I have larger face, shorter arms and legs … So I have Licca-chan's proportions.

Specifically for Tiara, Barbie here represents this fascinating other, with a defined facial structure, whereas Licca-chan is the familiar, with rounded proportions and softer features. Tiara believes her face 'to be like Licca-chan' but she wants to be like Barbie, in spite of both of these dolls having highly stylised representational faces as opposed to realistic ones. As such it would seem that to some degree she is projecting onto these dolls ideas of familiarity and otherness, ethnicity and a wish

for something entirely fantastical (such as achieving the beauty of the painted representational face placed on dolls).

This becomes complicated further when we consider the representational factors behind the design of Barbie and Licca-chan. In the case of both of these dolls, their design attempts to transcend accurate representations of any one specific woman. For instance, Barbie's original design was derived from a German Doll, Bild Lilli, where she inherited from this predecessor her 'illustrative', simplified appearance and demure pin-up face paint. This included pouting lips, a beauty spot and sleek, black-lidded eyes, her eyes side-glancing with a sense of aloofness to the viewer. While much attention has been paid to the hypersexed body sculpt in the literature on Barbie and the fashion dolls (Peers 2004; Rand 1995; McDonough 1999), little attention has been paid to the moves made by Mattel to soften her gaze where her eyes now look forward at the person holding her. The shape of her eyes was made larger and rounder with the addition of 'shimmer' marks. This was done to give the overall impression that the Barbie, in her new persona, is brimming with optimism, engaging in the child's fantasy play with the same level of enthusiasm.[102] Here Barbie possesses her own '*kawaii*-like' spirit, with a persona that is represented by the way her face is painted. She is a representation of a woman rather than an attempt to depict the real. The wide-open eyes of Barbie also echo the shimmering round eyes of Licca-chan, whose face was derived from the artistic style of *shōjo* manga artist Miyako Maki.[103] As discussed earlier in this thesis, *shōjo* characters have appeared in illustrations, magazine covers and advertisements as well as in worlds they exist in are often a hybrid of European cultures, and while the costuming and props are Western, the common expression, gestures and cultural attitudes of the characters are Japanese. They are a Japanese dream of the

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[102] For more information on the change in Barbie's design over time, see McDonough (1999).

[103] For more information, see Toku (2015) and Tomy (2018).

Figure 20 – Illustration by Miyako Maki for a 1968 cover of Ribon *magazine. Image from Takemiya (2011: 30).*

Figure 21 – Artwork by Macoto Takahashi used on the cover of the Gothic and Lolita Bible *(2006).*

manga. Characters are depicted with European hairstyles, pale skin and large orb-like eyes which are used to convey emotion (Berndt 2013, Ogi 2013). *Shōjo* characters are not entirely Japanese, nor entirely European. The occidental fantasy Occidental other (Dollase 2003: 730-732, Berndt 2013, Ogi 2013). A *shōjo* manga illustrator, Macoto Takahashi, once explained in 'The doe-eyed world of Macoto Takahashi' (2010) that his characters were inspired by a small European-appearing girl with blonde hair he once saw during the occupation of Japan post World War II. Her smiling face was an uplifting image to him in a time of cultural malaise. When re-imagined as the stencil for his *shōjo* characters however, her life became subject to his imagination in which Japanese culture would be a realistic reference point. His subjects are always facing forward and smiling at the viewer in order to maintain a dialogue, in which 'the girls will cheer them (the viewer) up when they are not happy … ' (The doe-eyed world of Macoto Takahashi 2010). It could be said then that *shōjo* characters, appealing to their young female demographic, were truly Japanese girls disguised as Europeans living in exotic fantasy narratives. [104] For this reason, the *shōjo* aesthetic has a certain appeal to *kawaii* practitioners. With this in mind, we can now see the impossibility Tiara is faced with in trying to play the role of these dolls through replicating this makeup application process. The theatrical performance here is limited because one cannot truly become the doll. One can only reinterpret the style upon one's own body.

In her study of how femininity is used as a text by women, Smith (1990) explores the feelings of disparity between the ideals of beauty presented in these texts and the reality of the body. For instance, on the topic of women aging, Smith (1990: 179) writes that women's bodies change 'in relation to the texts' but have 'no power to enter an independent presence into the interpretative process'. That is to say, although women's bodies change as they age, and no longer appear as

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[104] This reflects Miller's (2006: 23) observation that Japanese cosmetic styles do not necessarily involve a 'simple emulation of non-Japanese styles'. The Japanese individuals in her study create looks that are entirely their own, rather than trying to replicate a Western appearance.

youthful as they once were, women's bodies are still compared to the images of beauty seen in magazines, shopping centres, television and more. They cannot escape the comparison with these images, and they cannot escape comparing themselves to these images. They cannot exist separate from this process of comparison. Femininity – in this case 'beauty' – is considered by Smith to be a reference point of comparison for all women, irrespective of their appearance or desire to appear feminine. The comparisons of existing women to images are conducted by others and by individual women themselves. This process is carried out upon all bodies, for experiencing 'imperfection of the body in relation to ideality of the textual images is not exceptional. No body is perfect …' (Smith 1990: 187). As a result, women who decide to engage with ideals of beauty reflect on their 'self in terms of the discourse [of femininity], examining her body to appraise its relation to paradigmatic image, becoming an object to herself' (Smith 1990: 187). In this sense the woman objectifies her own body, studying it for its flaws and comparing it to an unobtainable ideal. We can see this reflected in Tiara's comparison of her own Japanese face to her ideal of Barbie or the 'blue eyed Japanese woman'. While her 'not-me' is pursued in order to materialise her original *kawaii* experience, the object she is drawn to – in this case Barbie or the 'blue eyed Japanese woman' – has elements of the feminine text, and has idealised qualities that are impossible to reach. To emphasise, Tiara's choice to engage with these cosmetic practices is her own, and her interest in Barbie is due to her individual response to seeing the doll for the first time. As Smith suggests, she is not merely a passive subject of socialisation, but the doll carries with it aspects of femininity as a text, and perhaps this is part of its subconscious appeal for Tiara. Irrespective of this, the doll is certainly idealised by Tiara due to its possessing aspects of the impossible. She wants to become the 'not-me' *because* it's not like herself. While individuals can feel closer to the 'not-me' through making their outfits, it's not always possible to take on all of its properties that originally captured the imagination. This reality leaves Tiara disappointed in her own appearance and feeling that she may not be able to perform a self for others that is *kawaii*. If she

cannot perform a self that is *kawaii* for others, she cannot clearly define the situation for observers and be understood and affirmed. Consequently, she imbues eye colour with great personal meaning for her creative process. Its significance is shaped by how she wishes to be seen by others.

When we consider Smith's (1990: 206) aforementioned view that 'decorating one's body can be seen as an elaborate expression of who one is' in combination with this caveat, we can see that engaging with femininity as a text can be creative, but that it can also be underscored by feelings of deficiency. The adornment of the body becomes a 'project' for the individual, for 'the body is always imperfect, is always still to be brought into a relation of simulacrum to the text' (Smith 1990: 185). The main activity associated with the project of adorning the body is one of 'rectification' where cosmetics or other artefacts of femininity are used to attempt to modify the body in the pursuit of an impossible ideal (Smith 1990: 185). This process however is not merely a 'happening of culture', but is instead a project actively carried out by individuals who use their agency to form relationships between their own bodies and those they find appealing in texts (Smith 1990: 185). Furthermore, this process is inescapable for anyone, for femininity as text is a tool used in culture to 'measure' the expressions of others, irrespective of the intent of the individual themselves. As such, femininity presents itself as an inescapable double-edged sword. It is a text we can choose to engage with, but like all things, it has its own obstacles.

It is important to note that agency and choice still remain when it comes to the application of cosmetics. For instance, participants have the ability to transform and change their cosmetic style to complement the uniqueness of their own faces, rather than feel pressured to conform to a particular beauty ideal. For example, we can recall Tiara's account of her more recent cosmetic experiments, where she uses mark making to accentuate the qualities of her face that she identifies as Japanese:

Megan: Have you ever tried dolly makeup?

Tiara: I have tried it once before. But it was tough wearing coloured contact lenses. They make my eyes dry. So now I use normal black lenses, such as Define. The look is Japanese like.

Megan: What's the difference between Japanese makeup style and dolly style?

Tiara: In my case, there is also an outfit as well as makeup in order to become Japanese style. I have my hair and eyes black. And also I draw my eyeliner sleek and long. Now I have blonde hair, though … But I want to take advantage of my very Japanese-like face … I wonder if foreigners know 'eye-*puchi*'? I don't want to do it because it takes time. I don't do it every day because it is bothersome. Eyelashes, either. It's bothersome to put them on.

In this account, Tiara covers the aspects of common 'dolly style' makeup in terms of her own discomfort and the attempts she has made to adjust these techniques to suit her own body and levels of comfort. The coloured contact lenses she refers to often do not have the same levels of moisture as those one might get from an optometrist. They are much firmer and larger than standard contact lenses, and so allow less oxygen to the eye for the duration they are worn. For this reason, they can create discomfort and a feeling of dryness to the eyes, which is treated with eye drops. Eye-*puchi* (trans. eye putty) refers to a water-soluble cosmetic glue that allows users to create a crease in their top eyelid. Here Tiara actively decides to not use eye-*puchi* due to the time-consuming nature of their application and the level of endurance it requires to wear it for an entire day.[105] Instead she applies the cosmetics she deems suitable, including darker lenses and eyeliner to accentuate her eye shape into one that is elegant, long and sweeping. Here she has accepted her 'Japanese-like' face and uses cosmetics to enhance its appearance. In doing so,

[105] Miller (2006: 115-116) provides a detailed account of the eye-*puchi* process.

204

Figure 22 – Flyer advertisement for Sanrio collaboration circle lenses (large contact lenses) produced in 2014

she has resolved within herself some of the conflict that initially arose from appearing like her 'not-me' ideal – a Japanese woman with blue eyes.

Tiara understands that this decision to pick and choose makeup is common in her own social circles. For instance, she says the following about her *kawaii* participant friends:

> Tiara: My friends rarely do dolly makeup. A few may … But not so gaudy. They are doing some kind of 'natural dolly' without eyelashes. Even if they put eyelashes on, they use simple and natural ones … It depends on one's taste …

The 'natural dolly' is an interesting turn of phrase that appears in many Lolita fashion cosmetic manuals, such as Doll Classica's book. It is *wasei-eigo* (trans. a Japanese word or phrase that is made from English words) that presents an interesting juxtaposition of the natural and the artificial. In this context, the doll is 'gaudy' through the overzealous layering of cosmetics on the face to a level of revulsion. So a more 'natural' look in this context allows participants to become a reinterpretation of their 'not-me' (in this instance the doll) that reflects their own sense of self. Here a compromise forms where they are able to find strategies to define the situation for observers, which is aligned with the limitations of their own bodies. Participants take the elements of the 'not-me' that excite them and deploy them creatively through decorating the face. They find pleasure in discovering new potentials and effects through the application of different cosmetic colour combinations and techniques. In this way, the choice follows the logic of Goffman's (1990) presentation of self as a conscious decision but still touches on the pleasure of creating that Winnicott (2005) discusses. Although becoming like the 'not-me' can sometimes be an impossible ideal – a fantasy if you will – participants are able to find strategies to achieve it in a compromised way.

In this section we have considered the role that cosmetics play in allowing participants to theatrically perform the role of the 'not-me' that they adore. Many mainstream beauty processes and techniques are borrowed to create this style, but they are also transformed and reinterpreted to reflect feelings of self and to express moods depicted in the clothing worn. Through performing the self, participants attempt to define the situation for potential observers, but sometimes they are disappointed to discover they cannot fully take on the role of the 'not-me'. They are indeed limited to their own bodies, and so experiment with cosmetics in a way that pleases them and suits their level of comfort. In doing so, they are able to form a kind of compromise between the 'not-me' they are performing, and their extant sense of selves.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored how participants attempt to define the situation for observers by deploying strategies they believe others will find *kawaii*. These strategies involve ideas of what the participant finds cute themselves, rather than those which specifically anticipate an audience. In successfully performing the *kawaii* self, participants seek to reconcile the 'not-me' with the 'me' by taking on aspects of the 'not-me' as their identity. We have explored this performance using Goffman's (1990) concept of the front stage, back stage and definition of the situation, further developed through Smith's (1990) writings on femininity and performativity. As illustrated through the examples of performing expertise or originality, modelling clothing for photographs and cosmetics, these experiences can be creative, but also do involve the discovery of the limitations of the self, particularly in the case of cosmetics.

One question is how does this performance translate to social relations in *kawaii* fashion communities? Why do participants seek to perform a *kawaii* self for other participants in the first instance? How might the definition of the situation be

successfully communicated between participants, and does the social environment of the community further shape strategies deployed by participants to appear *kawaii*? In the next chapter, we will explore the reasons participants in this study indicated they wanted to form social relations with other *kawaii* fashion practitioners. We will also explore how expectations shape the social relations in the community, and how the community encourages 'aesthetic rules' to make *kawaii* outfits more discernible for *kawaii* fashion participants. In doing so, we will come to understand how an individual phenomenon of experiencing an object to be *kawaii* and wanting to be similarly adored progresses from the creation of unique outfits to generalised stylistic forms.

Chapter Five: Affirmation and the Definition of the Situation: Inside the *Kawaii* Fashion Community

Figure 23 – Decora fashion practitioners at a 'Decora Walk' event, March 2015. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.

Thus far, we have explored how *kawaii* fashion participants experience objects they feel to be *kawaii*, and how this experience is centred on Winnicott's (2005) concept of the 'not-me'. In playing with these objects through imagining and making outfits, participants are able to explore new potentials for the self that take on the properties of the 'not-me'. This forms part of a reflection on what it might be like to be adored by others in the same way that participants adore cute objects. By wearing their outfits into spaces where they can be seen, and by performing cuteness, participants hope to incorporate the 'not-me' as part of their identity. In

Chapters Five and Six we focus on how participants understand the social interactions between other *kawaii* fashion community members as well as their interactions with outsiders. In this chapter we will attempt to better understand how the *kawaii* fashion community space is formed, and how social interactions guided by rules define the community space shaped.

In Chapter Four, we established that *kawaii* fashion practitioners define the situation by performing cuteness for an audience. This involves anticipating what others may find *kawaii* and by also selecting the audience who will receive the performance. Why does the participant seek to do this, however, and how do they know what others may find *kawaii* beyond their own personal preferences, and how does the other participant know how to respond to this *kawaii* mode of dress? This chapter explores two key ideas: that participants seek to be affirmed in their appearance and as a result wish to appear *kawaii* for others; and that in order to be affirmed by other participants, their outfit must be discernible.

In this chapter we will explore how Johan Huizinga (1950), and Erving Goffman (1990) may help us understand how *kawaii* fashion communities form rules as a means of allowing the situation to be defined with a greater sense of ease. This will help us to understand how an activity carried out by an individual (imagining and assembling an outfit) is able to move to a wider social phenomenon whereby people with similar experiences are able to come together. Studying the 'rules' that guide these social relations will also help us gain an understanding of how the outfits of participants, worn in the presence of others, have a generalisable appearance which results in the developments of style genres such as Lolita fashion, Fairy *kei*, Decora and *Hime Deko.*

In studying Huizinga's text, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, two clear themes emerge. First, communities that play possess their own kind of internal logic or 'rules' that participants are familiar with. Second, the community

involves the creation and maintenance of a unique 'world' that participants construct together. Huizinga allows us to explain how the community is able to withdraw or separate itself from the outside world through the creation of new rules and practices that only members are aware of. If we return to the original definition of alternative communities in order to consider their social nature, we can see that they are understood to have shared conventions, values and rituals (Gelder 2007) that have evolved into a complex set of values, attitudes, lifestyles and behaviours which are distinct from the dominant culture yet still related in some way (Bennett 1999: 55; Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Baron 1989; Kawamura 2012: 8). From this definition we can see that it is the sense of collective behaviour, whereby participants adhere to agreed social activities, which are considered to be 'different' or 'separate' from mainstream social activities. While this point of difference is sometimes interpreted to be an act of defiance or resistance, I propose that this not the case for *kawaii* fashion communities. I propose instead that the formation of *kawaii* fashion communities is premised on coming together through play, at the exclusion of outsiders. In this way, the community tends to be 'inward looking' and engaged in play in this shared space, rather than actively antagonising or shocking outsiders.

This chapter also explores different forms of interactions that take place in *kawaii* fashion communities, and how and why participants come together. In doing so, this chapter theorises the participants' understanding of how and why this community comes together under the outfit categories of Lolita fashion, Fairy *kei*, Decora fashion and *Hime Deko*, and at the same time, what strategies are in place to ensure that these outfits continue to be uniquely personal to the individual. A key focus of my discussion is to better understand how each *kawaii* fashion group develops aesthetic coherency in stylistic negotiations between members. To do so, we will explore further Goffman's concept of the 'defining the situation'. I will argue that, by collaboratively defining the situation, *kawaii* fashion participants are forming a creative space that is generally responsive to the ideas of others. This

involves generosity to each other, but also the need for clear communication on the part of the individual putting forward the idea.

In this chapter, we will first explore some of the reasons participants give for wanting to make friends with similar experiences of *kawaii*. Then, we will use Huizinga's writings on play to explore how a community forms a kind of 'play space', and how rules come to define the space's formation. Finally we will explore some of the activities carried out in *kawaii* fashion communities. In doing so, we will explore how rules shape the conduct carried out in the community so as to reinforce the expectation that individuals are meant to affirm each other's appearance, and will themselves appear in a style that is discernible to others. This reflects Goffman's concept of the definition of the situation whereby practitioners have a mutual understanding that by presenting one's self to the group, there is a reasonable expectation that they will be affirmed.

Affirmation and Sharing Experiences: Perceived Benefits of the Social in *Kawaii* Fashion Communities

In this section we explore how participants determine the benefits of making friends with individuals who have similar experiences of *kawaii* and also make *kawaii* fashion outfits. During interviews, participants reported that they were interested to maintain social relations with other participants out of a wish to be acknowledged and affirmed by others, to exchange experiences, and to satisfy their curiosity as to how other participants engage with their interest in *kawaii* things. Central to these accounts was a desire to learn more about others, but also a strong need to be seen and validated.

A fundamental attraction of forming social relations through *kawaii* fashion communities is the potential to have one's outfit appreciated by other participants.

This functions as a means of validation and affirmation, and boosts the participant's belief that they have successfully taken on qualities of their 'not-me'. That is to say, they are affirmed in their belief that they are *kawaii*. Acceptance into this community affirms the participant's experience that they have successfully become as *kawaii* as the 'not-me' object that they adored in the first instance.

By way of example, let us consider an account offered by Kumamiki. You may recall from our discussion in Chapter Four that Kumamiki considers herself to be not only a designer of a small fashion label, but also a practising artist. Kumamiki explains that the specific part of the community she interacts with (those who still gather in Harajuku as shop staff, shoppers or photographers) embolden her to wear outfits with the *kawaii* things that she loves. In her account below, we can see her reflection on the performance of self (which we explored in Chapter Four) and its relation to the validation of others. She also reflects on the importance validation plays in allowing her to feel confident in wearing *kawaii* fashion. Kumamiki's description of this experience is as follows:

> When I wore *kawaii* fashion for the first time I chose pastel colours. If I were to wear something pastel around my home I would feel awkward. However, when I'm in Harajuku with pastel colour on, everybody tells me I'm '*kawaii*' or 'cool' and they praise me. Ummm … perhaps pastels are a colour that adults don't want to wear normally … But in Harajuku it's okay … I like pastel colours maybe because everyone praises me.

Here we can see the surface level aesthetic observation in her statement that 'perhaps pastels are a colour that adults don't want to wear normally … But in Harajuku it's okay'. It implies that her creative interests are invested in the unusual and what is not 'normal'. This comment regarding pastel colours echoes the discussion we had in Chapter One about the infantile, however in this instance the emphasis appears to be placed on the unusual aspect of an adult wearing pastel

colours. The support from those she meets with in Harajuku allows her to explore interests that are out of the ordinary. 'Home' represents 'normality' for Kumamiki, whereas the people she meets in Harajuku represent something alternative or other. In this response, we also see Kumamiki weaving between what she likes and what others like in describing her decision to wear pastel colours. It is unclear to her at this socialisation stage if her interest in pastel colours comes from something she is drawn to personally, or from the affirmation she receives for wearing these colours. *Kawaii* fashion can be seen as not just an individual preference, but also influenced by collective preferences. This group appears to affirm the extraordinary (in this case the use of pastels) as *kawaii* or cool which is an affirmation Kumamiki believes she might not receive outside of the community. It is also interesting to note the interest in pastel in the first instance. Are the participants in this account responsive to pastel because it is *kawaii* or because it is unusual for an adult to wear pastel? It is unclear, but perhaps the two reasons are intertwined.

This idea of affirming the extraordinary is also evident in 90884's description of the social interactions she seeks from peers:

> Megan: Why do you like rare clothes?
> 90884: What can I say … I want to avoid putting on the same items that others have. Changing the way to put on is not enough. It's meaningless to put on the same things as others. So, I want to put on something that nobody has. And I want to have a conversation like, 'Oh! That's *kawaii!* Where did you buy it?'

Affirmation from peers partly motivates 90884 to wear her outfit as part of her everyday life. At this stage of the interview, 90884 is discussing her love of second hand vintage from the 80s and 90s, which is 'rare' because other identical items have long since deteriorated or have since been disposed of. The items she selects are from second hand stores in Harajuku such as Kinji which source material from

second-hand clothing stores in the United States. There is something about the particular items on the rack that resonates with her so that she selects them because they seem to be *kawaii*. Furthermore, 90884 is also interested in hand-made accessories, which would also be unique and rare on the basis that they are made as 'one-offs'. So the allure of the objects she selects is derived from its uniqueness. She selects these objects from the jumbled rack of clothing items on the basis of the way they make her think or feel.

It is evident that 90884 expects that her rare clothes will be appreciated by other participants, and this affirms her wish to be seen as 'original', which we discussed in Chapter Four. Here, in her answer we can see a clear expectation of how the situation might play out in the group. 90884 wants to be recognised for her originality and individuality above anything else. By having clothing that cannot be sourced by others, 90884 wants her elaborate process of sourcing these clothes to be affirmed. Her use of the word 'conversation' over 'compliment' implies an ongoing exchange rather than a fleeting one, with the hope that it moves over a range of topics that can strengthen or lead to a friendship. That is, in discussing her outfit, 90884 and other participants may exchange ideas to further develop each other's outfits. In this instance, the exchange around 90884's outfit demonstrates how other participants carefully and attentively acknowledge and feed off 90884's ideas.

This longing for affirmation from other *kawaii* fashion practitioners is also present in Lolitina's reflection on what she was like before and after she began to wear *kawaii* outfits. In the account below we can see how her affirmation from others in regards to her *kawaii* outfits enabled her to feel more confident:

> [Before I wore Lolita fashion] I was not such an active girl who wanted to stand out. I had no confidence in myself – I mean, I had many complexes. During school I was in the shade. However when I clothed myself in Lolita

fashion, everybody told me that I was *kawaii* and gave me their attention. So Lolita fashion was some kind of armour, or a battle dress for me which gave me self-confidence. That's why I became devoted to Lolita fashion.

In this account, Lolitina describes the role that affirmation from others has played in her continued experimentation with *kawaii* fashion. Her participation as a model (discussed in Chapter Four) also acts as a kind of affirmation, and forms part of the 'attention' she describes above. Lolitina characterises herself before wearing Lolita fashion as someone who was not 'an attention seeker' who proactively sought praise from others. She felt beforehand that perhaps she was not worthy, as she had 'no confidence' and 'many complexes'. This left her 'in the shade' of the spotlight which shone on other students at school. This part of her narrative interweaves what she believes she has with what she lacks. As such, the 'not-me' in this scenario is someone worthy of adoration and 'attention', which Lolitina feels is distinctly different from herself.

After wearing Lolita, however, Lolitina finds herself transformed, and suddenly worthy of interest. Perhaps in some way, her confidence did not necessarily emerge from the praise of others, but rather because in this moment, she herself personally felt *kawaii*. By wearing the dress, she became the *kawaii* figure that was her 'not-me' in youth. In other words, in putting on the dress , she became 'worthy'. Here in her account, praise from others mingles and affirms her sense of worth. For both before and after wearing the dress, Lolitina was and is the same person, the same individual worthy of the affirmation of others. Something inside her unlocks in wearing this dress, however, and opens up a different self for Lolitina to perform. That is to say, the dress allows her to see her own worthiness, and the affirmation from others becomes crucial in validating this experience for Lolitina.

In the next moment of Lolitina's account, she describes her clothing as a 'kind of armour' or 'battle dress' that 'gave' her 'self-confidence'. In this part of her answer,

it is not only the battle imagery[106] that carries significance which the verb 'gave' conveys. The clothing permits Lolitina to be prepared to 'combat' the everyday, the clothing protecting and shielding the self from the slings and arrows of social life. Perhaps then, without her *kawaii* clothing Lolitina feels vulnerable to the gaze of others. Perhaps she feels they will see something less likeable about her, something that the *kawaii* dress masks. It is perhaps the case, then, that Lolitina has not yet attributed the feeling of self-worth to herself as a person, but only to the dress she wears. The clothing literally 'gives' her the confidence. With this 'gift' from the clothing, Lolitina perhaps feel she can go about her everyday life, with the illusion that she is no longer plagued by her 'many complexes' and lack of confidence. As such the affirmation from others is crucial in maintaining this sense of confidence, the sense that she is worthy. Temporarily, through the dress, she becomes the 'not-me'. We can now begin to understand the attraction of wanting to be around individuals who have the capacity and knowledge to praise her *kawaii* outfits: they affirm her sense of worth and support her feeling that through her clothing she is closer to the 'not-me'.

Another factor that contributes to participants seeking our social relations with other participants is the desire to connect and form friendships with those who have a similar appreciation of *kawaii*. While wearing *kawaii* fashion can act as a performance of originality and expertise, not all participants want to be alone. For instance, Alice offers an interesting account of the concept of having friends in *kawaii* fashion communities:

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[106] Lolitina's imagery of armour echoes ideas found in Novala Takemoto's (2006) article titled 'Rules of Lolita'. Takemoto is a contributor to the *Gothic and Lolita Bible* and author of the novel *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (2002), which follows the friendship of a Lolita fashion practitioner and a Yankee Girl. It is possible that Lolitina has read this text and it resonated with her in such a way that she uses it herself in her own description of her personal experience.

Megan: Why is it good to have Lolita friends?

Alice: We cannot talk with other normal people about [*kawaii*] clothes. We are special. [107] In Lolita world there is not any one specific trend … There are some subtle trends, though … Anyway, the types of themes, magazines and brands are limited in the Lolita world and so it is easy to find something in common [with other Lolitas]. People want someone who they can share [their thoughts on] these topics with.

The first part of Alice's response offers an interesting perspective on how she understands the community in relation to the space 'outside'. Here, the spaces are defined by what she defines to be 'normal' and 'special'. These spaces delineate between those who are participants in *kawaii* fashion communities ('special') and those who are not ('normal'). The term 'normal' is a general term that refers here to people who do not identify as *kawaii* fashion practitioners and perhaps by implication, the experience of an intense response to *kawaii* things. For Alice, only other participants can understand and relate to *kawaii* experiences with each other. It is interesting that labelling one's self as 'not normal' is also said with a sense of ironic pride.

Moving on to her explanation of why it is easy or positive to have friends in the community, Alice discusses both the richly diverse and simultaneously specific world of Lolita fashion ('the Lolita world'). There are trends that are subtle (such as dresses with a particular bodice cut, or common motifs between Lolita designers that appear in monthly releases), but what she discusses here is something more generalisable. Alice narrows these down to themes, magazines and brands. 'Themes' refers to specific Lolita genres such as sweet, Gothic and classic, and also

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[107] Alice uses the Japanese words '*futsū no hito* (普通の人)' to refer to 'normal people' and '*tokushu* (特殊)'to describe Lolita fashion pracitioners as 'special'. We should note how she contrasts these two groupings through her use of adjectives.

to common themes found on textile prints.[108] In this sense, common ground could be found in a love of colour, a motif, or particular styling of the outfits. Participants can exchange views on upcoming themes that are new, but also recurring themes and how they are reinterpreted very year. Magazines tend to be rather niche, with only two publications (i.e. the *Gothic Lolita Bible* and *KERA* magazine) moving to online-only publishing in 2017. Participants can view the pictures and articles and comment on their own affectual experiences of them. For instance, they can open one of these magazines and flick through various editorials and advertisements that display the latest upcoming releases from Lolita brands (such as limited edition dresses with matching socks, hair accessories, jewellery and bags), beauty tutorials, comic inserts, sewing patterns for Lolita clothing and accessories and more. Participants can inform each other of those things they feel is *kawaii* in the magazine. Finally, Lolita fashion brands each have a distinct sense of style inside the Lolita genre, and so participants are able to discuss their favourite brands and their favourite releases (on which we will elaborate later in this chapter). In this instance, one participant might prefer a black dress with an illustration of roses on the textiles, whilst the other might prefer a different dress that is pink with cakes. In this instance, they would agree that both are part of *kawaii* fashion, but that the respective dresses appeal to different tastes. Alice specifically says here that it is about finding something in common between participants, which suggests an ongoing negotiation between participants, until similar interests are found. In this way, participants are able to validate and compare their experiences of the 'not-me' in objects they feel are *kawaii*.

Wanting to not be alone in this *kawaii* world and to share one's experiences appears to be a strong theme in discussions of the social aspects of *kawaii* fashion communities, and it is interesting to reflect on why it is that these participants are afraid to be alone, especially given that imagining is such an individual experience.

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[108] For more information on the different styles of Lolita fashion see Appendix 1.

This interest in finding others with similar interests also extends to wanting to connect with others and learn more about their experiences of *kawaii*. For example, we can consider Doll Classica's response here:

> I have been doing many 'Tea Parties' all over the world, but I want to talk with many more Lolita girls around the world. I'd like to know how Lolita girls around the world spend their time and I'd like to go and visit many countries to meet more Lolita girls.

Doll Classica used the opportunity of participating in this interview, with the knowledge that *kawaii* fashion practitioners outside of Japan might read this thesis, to reach out to any readers who are themselves participants in the international *kawaii* community. Here she expresses her interest in being invited overseas. She does not follow the convention of inviting international Lolita fashion practitioners to Japan; rather, interestingly, she expresses a desire to travel and 'get out'. The tea party events she refers to here are located in Paris, London and America, and are sponsored by pop culture conventions or by overseas stores opened by the brands.[109] As much as her message is an expression of her wish to continue this line of work, she also specifies an interest here in finding points of similarities and differences with Lolita fashion practitioners in other countries. In this respect, Doll Classica is seeking affirmation from other practitioners overseas by being invited, but is also hoping to learn more about the practices of others, and how 'they spend their time'. In doing so, she can validate and confirm her own experiences of *kawaii* and potentially learn of other things people find *kawaii*.

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[109] For instance, events are run by overseas branches of *kawaii* fashion stores such as BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT San Francisco and Paris (the Paris branch closed in 2017) and Angelic Pretty San Francisco. Some of the event organisers that would invite models like Doll Classica include RuffleCon Connecticut (2015-2017), FrillFest Sweden (2015-present), Anime Expo Los Angeles (1992-present), FanExpo Toronto (1995-present), Japan Expo Paris (1999-present), Hyper Japan London (2010-present), The Tea Party Club United Kingdom (2010-present) and Hellocon Helsinki (2013).

In summary, participants in this research expressed an interest in forming social relations out of a wish to be affirmed as *kawaii* and to share experiences of the objects they admire. In the examples offered by Kumamiki and Lolitina, one's interaction with another is able to contribute to their presentation of self because the confidence of the wearer is boosted. By affirming that the practitioner in their outfit is *kawaii,* participants felt validated and affirmed in feeling like they had become like the 'not-me', and thus felt inclined to continue to wear their clothing. *Kawaii* fashion practitioners sought to share experiences so as to discover the similarities and differences between their idea of what was *kawaii* with what others thought. They are validated in consuming, making, assembling and wearing of *kawaii* fashions because others deem the activity to be worthy. In this sense, participants seek to have their specific experiences of *kawaii* objects affirmed. In the next section, we will begin to examine how these social relations form a 'community' of *kawaii* fashion practitioners, and how participants perceive the community to further shape and build upon their mode of dress.

Affirmation and the Rules of Play: Defining the Situation and Social Relations in *Kawaii* Fashion Communities

In the previous section, we explored some of the reasons *kawaii* fashion participants are interested in socialising with each other. Primarily, participants reported that they wished to be affirmed by others and acknowledged as *kawaii*. This validates the participant's belief that they have become like the 'not-me' that they adore. In turn, this validation carries with it influences on the individual's sense of worth. That is to say, being deemed *kawaii* is not just an experience of elation, but one that helps the individual to feel worthy of adoration. Other activities such as sharing experiences and learning about others also help participants not to feel alone in their creative endeavour of creating *kawaii* fashion outfits. All of these activities require a social relationship between members with

clear roles. That is to say there is an exchange: one presents one's self in *kawaii*
fashion and the other is expected to affirm this appearance and presentation of
self. With a focus on the act of affirmation, we will examine the goals and rules that
shape this social relation in *kawaii* fashion communities using Goffman's (1990)
definition of the situation. I will also use Huizinga's (1950) idea that play between
individuals involves the creation of social worlds and that rules are essential to the
creation of these worlds.

In Chapter Four, we explored how individuals seek to define the social situation
unfolding between themselves and other individuals through behaving ' … in a
given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to
evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain' (Goffman 1990: 3).
This involves verbal and visual signals that convey the nature of the social relations
taking place. Already we have established that participants wish to be affirmed by
other participants that they appear *kawaii*. It could be said that the definition of the
situation between *kawaii* fashion participants is that at least one participant is
seeking to be affirmed. In this chapter, I describe this wish to be affirmed as the
'goal' of the performer. This goal is achieved by clearly defining the situation. By
appearing before the other practitioner, the participant visually declares 'I'm here
to be affirmed in my *kawaii* appearance'. In this social relation, the goal is to affirm
the other, but this is not an absolute rule. Most likely, the participant will be
praised, but it is possible for the participant to not be affirmed. In this chapter we
will explore how participants can be affirmed and identify what contributes to the
likelihood of this occurring. We will examine how social expectations in the
community further shape the outfits worn by participants in these social situations.

As I have indicated in Chapter Four, *kawaii* fashion participants are prepared to
present themselves in such a way that might be considered *kawaii* by other
participants. In this sense, they have a specific interest in being found *kawaii* which
causes them to modify and shape the outfit they originally created in private. In this

section I propose that one of the key ways that participants ensure they are affirmed by others is by modifying their outfit so it is discernable as *kawaii* to other *kawaii* fashion participants. For example, they might refine their outfit so it conforms with features of the Lolita fashion style by wearing a blouse, bell shaped skirt, and carefully applied makeup so they might be recognised by other participants as performing 'Lolita style'. In doing so, the definition of the situation is established more clearly – 'here is a participant wearing Lolita fashion, she looks *kawaii!'* Out of a wish to be affirmed, it could be said that some participants might feel pressured to appear in a way that is discernible to other participants. This is a subtle extension of the argument presented in Chapter Four. These are not strategies that the participant 'hopes' might work, but tend to be an expression of what they 'know' might work. Thus, the expectations of those in the community further shape the activities carried out by individuals.

Before examining responses from participants which explore these social relations, some further discussion of Goffman's definition of the situation is required. Goffman (1990: 9) describes the definition of the situation as not only something that the individual 'projects', but also something that observers also 'project' in responding to the performance before them. By observing the performance and by responding with a reciprocal performance, individuals are able to collaborate to form the definition of the situation. For example, if someone is performing the role of someone who is witty, they might tell a joke for the observer. The observer then is expected to perform the role of someone who is amused by laughing or praising the individual for their wit. The definition of the situation – that the individual is great at telling jokes – is created collaboratively between members. The observer affirms the self performed by the joke-teller. Furthermore, if they want to continue the unfolding interaction, they will not openly contradict the other. For instance, it is likely that the observer will laugh at the other's joke out of good will, even if it is not truly amusing. This forms what Goffman (1990: 9) describes as a 'surface of agreement' which 'is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants

223

behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip-service.' This requires a sense of generosity towards all those participating in the unfolding situation. The social pressure of wanting to 'save face' derives from an expectation that individuals defining the situation together need to affirm the performance unfolding between them, rather than to contradict it. By defining the situation by way of response, the observer is demonstrating expectations of the role of the audience, which include: ' … giving of a proper amount of attention and interest; [and] a willingness to hold in check one's own performance so as not to introduce too many contradictions, interruptions, or demands for attention …' (Goffman 1990: 148). This involves patiently observing the performance, not openly contradicting the definition unfolding before them (such as refraining from telling the joke-teller they are not funny), and abstaining from 'changing the subject' too early – the performer's joke must be acknowledged before the observer can then offer up a joke of their own or start a conversation with the performer. In doing so, the observer is fulfilling the expectation that they are to affirm the self being performed by their peer thereby achieving the 'goal' set out by the definition of the situation. In this sense, affirmation plays a crucial role in defining the situation.

In order for this affirmation to occur however, all performers must have a clear understanding of what the definition of the situation is and what response is required of them. For the 'goal' set out by the definition of the situation to be achieved, it is important that 'different participants are sufficiently attuned to one another so that open contradiction will not occur' (Goffman 1990:9). That is to say that all participants need to be able to interpret the performance before them with a sense of what the performer is trying to achieve, and will take measures to ensure they understand the goal before responding. For instance, if we return to the above example of the joke, there may be instances where the delivery of the punch line is not clear and the observer does not realise what has happened. As such they may not realise that a joke is being told and that they are supposed to laugh. An awkward pause might then occur, where the joke-teller waits for the laughter, and

then has to explain the joke so as to prompt the observer to respond. In this moment the definition of the situation is suspended and quickly clarified through verbal exchange – 'oh, it's just a joke' and 'ah, I see! Sorry about that'. The jovial tone of the exchange is disrupted through this act of clarification and while the performer is somewhat affirmed, the relation is not as 'seamless' as the performer would have liked. This creates a sense of uncertainty and self-doubt that perhaps they are not funny at all. It exposes the performance the observer is giving by humouring them out of politeness (see for instance, Goffman's (1990: 149) discussion of tact). Goffman (1990: 10-11) notes that it is easier to 'make a choice as to what line of treatment to demand from and extend to the others present at the beginning of an encounter' as opposed to attempting to 'alter the line of treatment that is being pursued once the interaction is underway'. That is to say, it is easier for the performer to consider in advance how the performance would be clearly interpreted by the audience rather than have others try to instruct them in the middle of the performance. A clear performance creates an air of 'seamlessness' and 'naturalness' to the social relation unfolding, and affirms the performer in the sense of self performed. So, in the above example, the goal of being affirmed would have been achieved fully and to the satisfaction of the performer if they considered what the audience would understand and how they might tell the joke clearly and effectively in the first instance. As such, it is crucial for the affirmation of self that the individual performs in a way that their peers can understand.

In summary, in order for performers to be affirmed in the self they are presenting for others, there is an expectation that the observers will respond and collaborate with them to maintain the definition of the situation. This response from the observers also constitutes a performance of self – for example, the attentive listener or the kind friend – and involves a suppression of their true thoughts and feelings. In order for the social interaction to continue smoothly, the observers must also be clear on what performance is taking place otherwise they might not

know how best to respond. Lack of responsiveness or confusion on the part of the audience reduces the elation experienced by the performer of being affirmed. It creates doubt in the performer's mind about the 'truthfulness' of the self they are seeking to present. As such, the performer 'pitches' the performance in a way that the audience is able to understand. From this emerges a compromise, where the performer is 'true to their sense of self' but is modifying this performance for the audience. This is applicable to the presentation of self offered by *kawaii* fashion practitioners to their peers, for out of a wish to be affirmed as *kawaii,* the practitioner might shape or tailor their performance based on what they 'know' other practitioners like and admire. These strategies include activities such as cultivating one's outfit to a recognisable *kawaii* fashion style, such as Decora or Lolita fashion. Furthermore, in partaking in the social relation unfolding between *kawaii* fashion participants, there is the expectation that *kawaii* outfits are to be affirmed and found *kawaii*.

In Kumamiki's below account of Harajuku, she suggests that social interactions involve affirmation. Her description is as follows:

> I heard from many foreign people that if you walk in colourful clothes in a town outside Japan you'd be kicked and bullied. It was so surprising to me. So Harajuku must be a generous town … Everybody is seeking things that are *kawaii* and cool and they find some kind of joy in competition and something new is born from the competition.

Kumamiki's response indicates what she feels to be the unspoken social rules of behaviour in this space. The first involves a sense of generosity towards 'colourful clothes', although it is unclear who is being generous. It could be retailers, pedestrians, shoppers, tourists or even those travelling down Meji Dori and Omotesando (the main roads) by car or bicycle. The area itself has a few apartment blocks, with a residential area stretching beyond the very back street of *Ura-Hara*

(trans. 'back of Harajuku'), so the area is not generally considered to be a residential suburb. For Kumamiki, *kawaii* fashion participants engage in contests to create outfits that look cute or cool. The mention of joy around this practice suggests that this competition is a positive activity, whereby rather than negating other participants' attempt to captivate the imagination it inspires others to emulate a similar look. Here Kumamiki's account moves in and out of incorporating non-*kawaii* fashion practitioners as part of the community – it is fluid and moves according to the social relations between individuals in the area and herself. It can be argued that those who know how to respond positively to *kawaii* fashion, as suggested in Kumamiki's account, would likely be familiar with the definition of the situation taking place. For instance in Kumamiki's account above, those who recognise that she is wearing *kawaii* fashion respond positively and understand her purpose wearing her outfit. As such, the responder and Kumamiki are both aware of the definition of the situation – that Kumamiki is wearing her outfit out of pride and is hoping for affirmation.

In order for observers to be aware of the expectation that they are to affirm participants like Kumamiki, they must in some way be 'in the know' or be aware of *kawaii* fashion. This expectation is transmitted through a sense of commonality. As one participant might like to be affirmed by another (or in the case of retailers, shop assistants and others in Harajuku, they might know a participant who wears *kawaii* fashion socially for this reason), they can anticipate the expectation of the wearer. They affirm the appearance of the other participant out of an appreciation of what they are each trying to achieve. Kumamiki's response below discusses in general terms this sense of commonality:

> I think all the fashion styles [in the community] have something in common, such as trying to create their own world with fashion … So I'm sure they like each other.

What connects these individuals is a sense of commonality, which Kumamiki describes here to be the act of constructing 'their own world' through their fashion. Through the mutual appreciation and respect for this creative process, participants are able to come together socially and understand that they are expected to affirm one another. The processes of 'liking' each other that Kumamiki describes here would involve viewing other creative outfits and discussing the creative process itself, which involves a presentation of this creative world realised through wearing *kawaii* outfits. In order for participants to 'like' each other, as Kumamiki describes, there must be a way in which participants detect and understand the performances they present to each other. An internal logic or set of rules enable participants of the community to interpret and understand the situation that a fellow member is attempting to define. Through rules, participants know who would like to be recognised as *kawaii* and how to respond appropriately.

Kumamiki offers a nice analogy when describing another commonality between participants as that they 'create their own world with fashion'. In his conceptualisation of play between individuals, Huizinga (1950: 10) uses a similar language to describe the formation of '… temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart'. In this sense, play enables the formation of a smaller culture or community that exists within broader society. Existing inside the framework of the real world, Huizinga argues that individuals form a separate social 'world' as a way of creating a new social space with a distinct set of rules and behaviours. The description of play as a 'dedicated … performance' implies that play focusses on a set of activities, serves a set purpose, and aims to separate the activity off from the everyday. Play establishes a new definition of the situation and shapes a new social space.

Arguably, *kawaii* fashion practitioners have a specific definition of the situation that they themselves are privy to. As a community, they understand the purpose and goal behind wearing *kawaii* fashion in public and why it is important to participants.

In this sense, a specific social world unfolds between members; it has a specific role but is also playful in part due to its affirmation of the extraordinary. This echoes the idea that play involves the formation of 'social worlds'. Huizinga argues that these worlds are created through social relations between individuals who are 'in the know'. Huzinga's conceptualisation of play as a social activity tries to demarcate this new world as separate due to its 'extraordinary' nature. That is to say that for Huzinga, play has the capacity to transport the individual away from the mundane. Huzinga (1950: 9) argues that play 'adorns' or 'amplifies' everyday life by providing 'expressive value'. Huizinga (1950: 13) describes play in this sense as a '… free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly'. This is applicable to *kawaii* fashion communities because the social relation unfolding between participants creates a sense of excitement that is derived from performing and observing the spectacular. Delight is taken from being 'in the know' about the expectations that are required of participants when they observe someone wearing *kawaii* fashion. Indeed, the representative of the Lolita fashion label that I interviewed for this research described *kawaii* fashion as 'something extraordinary in ordinary life' to suggest that by consuming, making, assembling and wearing *kawaii* fashion, participants are able to transport themselves out of the everyday. This echoes Huizinga's (1950: 9) comment that play 'adorns' the everyday with excitement and creativity. By participating in the unique relations that unfold in *kawaii* fashion communities, and by presenting the self and affirming each other, participants are able to step 'out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own' (Huizinga 1950: 8). This temporal sphere is formed by 'rules' which are equivalent to the way Goffman (1990) explains the definition of the situation. The rules are that the participant must present themselves in a way that is discernibly *kawaii* and observers will then affirm their appearance as *kawaii*. The knowledge of these rules and the ability to follow them indicates who is 'playing' and who is not.

Figure 24 – Kawaii fashion practitioners, January 2014. Photo taken by author.

From these rules of play a tension emerges, as players contemplate whether their performance will succeed. A rising excitement or 'tension' out of a desire to 'win' directs the individual's actions (Huizinga 1950: 10-11). In the case of *kawaii* fashion communities, this tension arises from the hope of being recognised as a participant in the unfolding play and the potential of being affirmed as *kawaii*. By achieving both these things, the participant is able to 'win' and also feel included. This affirmation, however, is not always guaranteed. A 'tension' emerges between participants which takes the form of the question 'will I be recognised as *kawaii*?'. This wish to be recognised and affirmed as *kawaii* is crucial to many participants'

sense of self, for they want reassurance that they appear as 'adorable' as the 'not-me' they wish to be like. In this sense, by playing in communities, participants are seeking to successfully define the situation, whereby they are a participant who 'looks cute'. For example, an individual might go out with a friend with the specific purpose of wearing *kawaii* fashion together. In the process of doing so, the individual might seek to look as *kawaii* as possible so that their friend will approve of their appearance and ability to be *kawaii*. Together they might excitedly take photos, look at *kawaii* things in galleries, cafés or shopping centres and share these experiences. The two friends will actively praise each other with the clear idea that the purpose of meeting between the two of them is to affirm each other. The 'tension' Huizinga describes might arise in the anxiety experienced by the practitioner who worries if they will be '*kawaii* enough' for the friend.

One strategy of 'winning' is to anticipate what the observer might appreciate. Another is to consult with another practitioner for ideas. Some individuals decide to 'team up' with other practitioners. For instance we can consider the practice of creating the 'twin look' which is considered to be a popular and fun activity. Although not carried out by all participants, it is a play strategy that involves creating outfits to match or complement another participant's. 90884 offers an interesting account of how people create a 'twin-look' by matching each other's outfits:

> There are lots of people who do both [Decora and Fairy *kei* style] depending on the occasion. For example, they change their style according to who they go out with. They do 'twin-look' with friends. And when they go out in groups called '*shūkai*', they gather in the same style …

The 'twin-look' is what 90884 explains to be the 'same style' here, but this sameness is also variable: it can involve dressing in the same outfit, simply wearing

Figure 25 – Lolita fashion practitioners, Tokyo June 2018. Photo courtesy of Tomoike_2525.

identical accessories or wearing the same outfit in different colours. There are many variations. The idea is that in standing together, the two participants amplify their cuteness combined. Together, the two participants look 'twice as cute' as they emphasise the love of a particular dress, colour or motif through repetition. For instance, consider Figure 25. In this image the participants wear the same dress and carry the same bag, but have different blouses, accessories and wigs. Here we can see the participants present a similar overall look through the salience of the dress and bag, but each outfit has slightly different nuances. By standing together and matching each other, they present a collective self, and express their mutual appreciation of, in this instance, a love of this particular dress. Together they present their shared appreciation of the outfits they find *kawaii*, even though it involves a sacrifice to their individual expressions of originality. 90884 uses the phrasing 'change their style' to describe this compromise. It indicates there is a style that must be modified to be attuned to one's participant partner. Who these participants socialise with will also change how they modify their style. Each item

that is incorporated into the twin-look would need to be negotiated between participants. In this instance, the decision to wear similar attire affirms their friendship, for what better way to guarantee your friend will like your appearance than to wear something you both appreciate? Furthermore, their joint appearance is deemed 'more *kawaii'* by other participants perhaps because of the extraordinary attention to the matching details. Together the pair are making the definition of the situation clearer ('it's not just chance I am wearing something you might find *kawaii*, we made a concerted effort to appear *kawaii'*).

90884 in her response also indicates the role that the *shūkai* (trans. gathering) plays in shaping style. Going out with the purpose of attending a gathering that focusses on a specific type of *kawaii* fashion in 90084's view shapes the way participants present themselves. That is to say they dress in a way that might increase their chances of being affirmed as *kawaii* by complying with the definition of the situation at hand. For example, a participant might go to a 'Decora style' gathering and wear Decora fashion as opposed to Fairy *kei*. Their chances of being affirmed are increased by wearing Decora fashion rather than Fairy *kei*. Wearing Fairy *kei* to this meeting would decrease the chances of 'winning' and thus increase the level of tension experienced by the practitioner. Will they be deemed *kawaii* even if they subvert the expectations of others at the gathering? While the pay-off for winning in these circumstances would be satisfying for the individual, it would be better to play the 'safer route' of adhering to the rules and appearing in Decora fashion. Thus, the tension of potentially 'winning' guides the participant's behaviour and presentation of self. In this instance many will have chosen the strategy of wearing Decora style so they might 'win' at being affirmed.

On the topic of the *shūkai*, other more general *kawaii* fashion gatherings also rely on a clear definition of the situation. One example of such an activity is the 'Harajuku Fashion Walk' which is a quarterly gathering where participants can

Figure 26 – Kawaii *fashion practitioners taking part in the July 2014 Harajuku fashion walk.*
Photo taken by author.

dress up, meet in Harajuku and walk through the streets.[110] Participants prepare for

the event with the idea of being affirmed in their ability to create *kawaii* outfits and

to be photographed by other participants. The definition of the situation is clearly

established – they are to walk through Harajuku as a large group to admire each

other's outfits. The 'tension' arises out of their ability to put together an outfit that

pleases other participants. There is a potential for an individual to 'not win' at this

particular form of play. For instance, during the walks I observed in January and July

2014, there were individuals who were not photographed. This included myself on

one occasion, and I can only assume this was because my outfit on that particular

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[110] For more information, see Harajuku Fashion Walk (2018).

day was not '*kawaii* enough', as many other foreigners, first-time visitors and even another researcher who attended were photographed. The feeling of disappointment and embarrassment I felt in not being complimented was quite marked, but no ill-will was expressed by the participants through insults or remarks. Affirmation was simply absent. This perhaps suggests that some attempts to put together *kawaii* outfits with the aim of being affirmed by others are not always successful. Consequently, the 'tension' that arises from the possibility of not being affirmed is real. This space is welcoming and open, but affirmation is not guaranteed.

Another gathering that involved affirmation was the Princess Dream *Tenji Sokubai-kai* (2015; Trans. Exhibition and sale event.) which ran from 2009 to 2015.[111] This gathering involved Lolita fashion participants buying and selling hand-made accessories for their outfits in a private function room in cities near Tokyo, such as Kawasaki. Participants were encouraged to wear *kawaii* fashion. Stall holders offered up their hand-made creations for others to purchase, and most of the conversation was centred on this activity. Participants would stop at stalls with items they liked and praise the skills of the stall vendor. For this social activity, participants attended with the hopes of being affirmed either as *kawaii* or in their ability to make *kawaii* goods, as well as to find something that could be incorporated into their own outfits. This allows the process of experiencing objects to be *kawaii* (as we discussed in Chapter Two) being shared between participants; it also provides an opportunity for participants to choose items to wear that they 'know' others like and will likely comment on. As such, participants tend to shape

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[111] For more information on Princess Dream, Ai Akizuki (2013; 2014) published reports of these events. Ai Akizuki was the President of Gothic & Lolita & Punk *no Kai*, a club from Waseda University and has since formed a new club called 'Wonder Teatime' (2018).

Figure 27 – Hand-made rosettes (above) and headdresses (below) for sale at the July 2014 Princess Dream Tenji Sokubai-kai. Photo taken by author.

their outfits based on what they feel other participants might approve of. The event also involves interviews with some of the vendors and a raffle of accessories and dresses as prizes. In this way, participants are able to share a love of *kawaii* that is self-affirming.

The *Tenji Sokubai-kai* also offers an opportunity to witness different degrees of effort put into one's attire. For instance, in Figure 28 we can see a *kawaii* fashion practitioner running a stall with her mother who is a seamstress of *kawaii* clothing. The practitioner feels confident to combine elements of both Lolita and the everyday; her outfit has pastel colours, puffed sleeves, but no full petticoat, or elaborately dressed hair. Her mother is aware of the definition of the situation but chooses not to appear in elaborate *kawaii* fashion, in order for her daughter to shine. Her mother could potentially be affirmed for appearing *kawaii* but 'scales back' her appearance to a level that suits her own comfort and also allows her daughter to be perceived to be 'more *kawaii*'. In this sense, the mother is deploying

Figure 28 – Mother and daughter selling their hand-made dresses at the Princess Dream Tenji Sokubai-kai*, July 2014. Photo taken by author.*

Figure 29 – Flyer advertisement for the March 2015 Princess Dream Tenji Sokubai-kai.

strategies that clearly define the situation – 'I love *kawaii* things, but my daughter is more *kawaii* than me'.

Thus far, we have discussed instances of *kawaii* fashion participants coming together with the expectation of being affirmed. These activities involve a definition of the situation that is oriented around the goal of affirming others and sharing a love of *kawaii* fashion. This involves being 'in the know' and working within the terms of the existing definition of the situation that unfolds at these gatherings. Participants may sometimes experience a 'tension' that arises if they are not affirmed by others. In order to increase the chances of being found *kawaii*, participants might modify their outfit to incorporate aspects that they 'know'

others will approve of. For the remainder of this section, we will explore how participants know what others approve of, why this knowledge is disseminated and the significance of presenting oneself in a way that complies with this knowledge.

In accounting for ways that groups seek to maintain the definition of the situation between each other, Goffman (1990: 145) observes that participants must be 'disciplined' and 'not perform their parts in a clumsy, gauche, or self-conscious fashion'. Members of the group decide in advance what is required of each participant in the performance. One way of interpreting this idea and applying it to *kawaii* fashion communities is the way that the community collaboratively creates 'styles' or categories of *kawaii* fashion, from which follows a set of aesthetic rules, and an expectation that participants follow these guides to ensure that they are affirmed for their *kawaii* appearance. These aesthetic rules result from a negotiation of individual unique styles. They evolve over time, and are used as a general rule of thumb that enables participants to recognise other individuals with similar interests. They enable a Lolita fashion practitioner to identify another Lolita, just as a Decora practitioner can spot another Decora practitioner. The different styles are recognised by the practitioner who follows set rules in creating their outfit in order to present a particular style. These rules play out a tension between individual interests and the expectations of other participants as viewers who have the ability to praise and affirm the fashion ensemble as *kawaii.* From this we can understand the role that clear signalling plays in defining the situation between participants, and a clear idea of what the social interaction requires of each person.

Kumamiki in particular moves in and out of style genres and offers a very interesting response to the following prompt:

> Megan: Do you identify your fashion as a certain kind of *kawaii* style?
> Kumamiki: Oh, that is absolutely a difficult question. I don't think that I'm doing Fairy *kei* fashion so much. Of course sometimes I'm very Fairy-like.

There are many people who identify themselves as 'I'm *Gyaru*,' or 'I'm Decora,' but there are also people who identify as 'themselves'. So I would identify myself as 'Kumamiki style'. I think the genres or styles are used for magazines or something like that in order to make it easy to understand. If so, my style would be Fairy *kei*. Actually when I started my style I thought I wanted to be a Fairy *kei*! But my style has been developed and I would say this is 'Kumamiki style'.

In this response, Kumamiki weaves in and out of categorising herself with the simple message 'I'm doing Fairy *kei* fashion' as she refers to her own current interests, other participants, magazines and her past self. This suggests that these categories apply in particular social contexts, which as this response suggests occur when individuals try to simply explain their 'identity' ('I'm *Gyaru*' or 'I'm Decora') or when other mediums, such as printed magazines, try to simply communicate what it is they are 'doing' through creating these unique visual styles. To be able to 'fit' these categories, one has to classify one's existing visual traits under a particular umbrella style. This suggests that, in a way, these generalised umbrella styles are easier to digest than 'I am myself'. Kumamiki concedes that at the beginning she wanted to be a part of this practice of categorising one's fashion as a particular style, but now has evolved into wanting to be herself, which goes beyond being comprehensible to other participants in the community. Kumamiki's response indicates the role that clear style categories play in the community, but also shows how participants can seek to move beyond this.

How then are these different style-groups characterised? Participants suggest that there are key visual attributes that distinguish each style. These attributes are a simple form of messaging that enables participants to quickly identify each other. The symbolic significance of the clothing still lies with the inner reality of each individual, but it is shaped in a way that is possibly recognisable to other participants. 90884 offers the following account of what 'makes' Decora fashion:

Megan: Can you tell me what Decora fashion is?

90884: Decora fashion is … [pauses] Almost everybody wears a pannier. Without panniers it cannot be called as Decora. It becomes another genre, '*Hade-ko'*. So, a style with pannier like this and with lots of accessories on is called Decora.

Immediately in this account, 90884 offers some key visual cues (known as 'style points' in the community) or aesthetic rules, that one can use to spot the Decora practitioner, rather than discussing conceptual interests or social activities. Here the key style points are the brightly coloured short pannier, which is more like a tiered tutu than a petticoat, and the many accessories layered all over the outfit and the wearer's hair. 90884 is saying that without the pannier, the style falls into a different genre referred to as *Hade-ko, 'Hade'* meaning gaudy, loud and flamboyant, and the suffix '*ko*' meaning child or young person. The crucial nature of these style points as communicating a clear style genre to other participants is also seen in this further discussion of Fairy *kei* and Decora:

Megan: Is there any difference between Fairy *kei* and Decora fashion?

90884: [Decora fashion] is completely different from Fairy *kei*. In Fairy *kei*, pastel colours are used. Fairy *kei* is a fashion in which panniers in pastel colours or longer petticoats are used. While, Decora fashion is a style in which skirts are always short and lots of accessories are put on and the colours should be vivid anyway. That's Decora fashion. But maybe everyone thinks that they are same.

Both Fairy *kei* and Decora rely on a pannier and many accessories as their key style points, and so to the untrained eye, may be mistaken as the same genre. To the discerning eye, however, particularly the participant who wears one or the other on a daily basis, there is a nuanced difference. Fairy *kei*, inspired by American 80s pastel aesthetics, uses a softer colour palate and slightly longer petticoats (usually

one hand length above the knee). The accessories used are equally softly coloured, but fewer in number compared to Decora. Decora, on the other hand has a shorter petticoat (usually two or three hand lengths above the knee) in a vibrant colour, with a significantly larger amount of accessories worn. The interests of the wearers are slightly different – the Fairy *kei* wearer may be softer and more gentle like Kumamiki, where as the Decora fashion practitioner is more outgoing, like 90884.

Another visual cue that signals similar interests to participants is hair colouring and styling. For example, 90884 says:

> It seems that recently Decora people increased. Some time ago, people in colourful fashion were not seen. But now I see many people whose hair is gaudy and who put many hair pins. That makes me happy a bit.

Without knowing every single person on the street, 90884 is able to ascertain their interests and inner worlds by interpreting their style choices. Specifically in this instance, she is able to ascertain people are Decora fashion practitioners visually, by spotting brightly coloured hair (blue, green, pink, yellow, red etc) and checking for a large volume of colourful hair pins layered through their hair style. Without stopping them and befriending them, she is able to find happiness in seeing them in increasing numbers, perhaps affirming that her own interests are popular and valuable to others. As discussed, Harajuku presents itself as an interesting space where participants can wear their fashion ensembles and appreciate the ensembles of others. Through simple messaging, participants are able to signal to each other their specific *kawaii* interests, and this is read as a cue by the participant-as-viewer as a sign of solidarity, but also as a cue to appreciate and affirm the *kawaii* appearance of the other.

Now that we have established that these style groupings exist, we must also give some thought as to how their rules are 'enforced.' As discussed in the opening to

this section, clear communication on the part of the *kawaii* practitioner is required for the observing participant to know how to respond. What occurs, however, when a practitioner makes an 'error' in their presentation of self, and does not clearly adhere to a recognisable *kawaii* style?

Goffman (1990: 149-150) writes that while 'embarrassing mistakes' carried out by beginners in a performance can result in 'extra consideration' on the part of the audience not to create social 'difficulties', more experienced performers are expected to take hints from observers about how to improve their performance. For example, if a Lolita fashion practitioner arrives to an elegant tea party with other practitioners without a petticoat or blouse, the others might not say anything to save her embarrassment, but then speak with each other about her faux pas afterwards. Later, they might collectively decide to encourage her to try adding things to her outfit to help her appear more *kawaii*. Once this 'beginner phase' has passed, however, the careful policing and expression of expectations may become more pronounced. Goffman (1990: 150) notes that the '… performer must be sensitive to hints and ready to take them, for it is through hints that the audience can warn the performer that his show is unacceptable and that he had better modify it quickly if the situation is to be saved.' Therefore, in order to succeed in performing a self that is *kawaii* for other participants, it is in their best interest that they be receptive to feedback to ensure affirmation. This, of course, is not essential if one is able to believe they are *kawaii* without affirmation from others and thus confident in themselves. If the individual's sense of worth is tied to being affirmed by others, however, these rules and feedback carry some weight.

Alice was able to inform us about the practice of enforcing rules for Lolita fashion, but presented herself as an individual who was able to critically engage with this exercise. For instance she offers an interesting account of 'Lolita rules' when asked about the newly-emerging Lolita 'how-to' books:

In the world, where there are many on-manual-Lolita girls, the new people have to get informed in order to enter the world. That's why I think Lolita girls are eccentric. Lolita world is like a school. They have to keep school rules. Lolita world has a rule … They must keep the rules in Lolita world. If they don't keep the rules they cannot live in this world.

It is interesting that Alice immediately describes the Lolita pocket of the *kawaii* fashion community as a world that that one can 'enter' and that the construction of this world is 'eccentric'. Eccentric here seems to imply the whimsical world they have constructed and adhere to so reverently. Alice, still in senior school at the time, immediately likens this world to her current daily environment, where strict uniform codes apply, which perhaps speaks to her frustration in that her fantasy is slowly echoing the constricting nature of her daily life. If one cannot follow the aesthetic rules, then one cannot exist in this world as a 'true' Lolita. The rules in this context act as strong 'hints' about how one ought to present oneself if they wish to be affirmed as a *kawaii* Lolita practitioner. In order to be affirmed and to successfully convey the definition of situation to other practitioners, Lolita fashion practitioners need to take these 'hints' and shape their performance accordingly.

We can also see in Alice's account the rules of play that establish what Huizinga (1950: 8) would describe as the 'social world' of the *kawaii* fashion community which has a 'disposition all of its own'. You must not only be aware of the rules but also comply with them in order to be part of the play unfolding. If you do not follow the rules you become a 'spoil-sport' and are 'cast out' for threatening 'existence of the play-community' (Huizinga 1950: 11). As Alice still identifies as Lolita, but illustrates some disdain for the 'eccentric' rules mandated by the style, it is possible to suggest that perhaps not all participants comply, but that they are at least aware of the 'rules'. It is worth reflecting on the constraining aspect of this social interaction in *kawaii* fashion communities. Lolitina, who as previously discussed produces style manuals, confirms Alice's view that there are rules involved in Lolita

fashion, which include 'choos[ing] or … match[ing] up, items such as socks, blouse, pannier, drawers'. This is an interesting social moment where the good intentions of style icons such as Doll Classica and Lolitina, who wish to help others achieve an optimal *kawaii* result, are transformed into a text to be consumed and received by some as a way of 'gate keeping' and controlling the collective visual look of the Lolita through the application of simple rules.

If these simple visual cues are not received and interpreted by participants in *kawaii* fashion communities, this can result in a confused social interaction or negative response towards a participant. Without simple and clear messaging the ensemble becomes incomprehensible to the viewer who then cannot affirm and praise them as *kawaii*. Alice offers the following insight into such instances:

> Megan: Have you ever seen somebody break the rules? What would happen if they break the rules?
>
> Alice: Yes. They will be picked on via *Ni Channeru*. Luckily nothing has ever happened to me.
>
> Megan: What would happen if someone says 'I like Bodyline'?
>
> Alice: Yeah they will think you are an idiot …

Ni Channeru (trans. *Two Channel*; Rebranded in 2017 to *Five Channel*), is an anonymous online textboard used by Japanese speakers.[112] Users are able to start threads, or comment on threads, anonymously, without needing an account, and these threads are deleted after a certain period of time or if a certain number of posts are made. The activity is thus fleeting and temporal. As such, a user could post a photo of an incomprehensible *kawaii* fashion outfit and others could comment on it freely, without fear of being identified. 'Bodyline' refers to a chain store that specialises in prefabricated costumes, which include a line of 'Lolita style'

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[112] For more information, see Loki Technology Inc (2018).

clothing.[113] Another faux pas on the part of the participant would be to confuse these 'costumes' with the 'real' Lolita fashion items. In both cases, rules that have been established by observers have been broken, and 'hints' of the mistake in the performance are given in an indirect manner online. This discussion online might not be observed by the performer, but it tends to keep others who see the post 'in line' by reinforcing these rules under the threat of rejection. Thus, this act of 'gatekeeping' can be considered to symbolise rejection in the community,[114] and an indication that the participant does not 'belong' with the group.

Another way these 'hints' are conveyed by observers in the community is by presenting alternatives for participants to consider. An observed performance might not correlate with their experiences of *kawaii*, and might inspire the creation of something that is closer to their own vision and which others might subsequently adopt in their own presentation of self. In this way, they are able to move the definition of the situation away from actively observing and praising to a passive role. That is to say, the response offered is 'I understand you are trying to appear *kawaii*, but here is another idea'. The responder then moves from the role of the 'good observer' to 'supportive peer'. Another alternative is that they move to the role of a 'bad observer' in that they seek to compete for attention and 'steal the performance' away. One example of this complex strategy is articulated by the Vice President of the Lolita designer label when interviewed about the concept behind their clothing:

> Megan: What concept would you say represents the clothes [produced by you designer label]?
> Lolita Designer: … It is '*kawaii* with elegance.'

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[113] For more information, see Bodyline (2018).

[114] It is unclear what compels these participants to carry out this discussion on forums such as *Ni Channeru*. Thus, further research is required in order to understand the social logic.

Megan: Why are you interested in elegance?

Lolita Designer: Every brand like us that started in 90s is on a small scale and all the brands make the designs with very similar concept of *kawaii*. Looking at what others were doing, we didn't like the clothes of other brands which were too *kawaii*. We felt that they were too gaudy … We thought that we didn't have to go that far [in our designs] to express '*kawaii*'. We wanted to keep the designs graceful.

Megan: Would you describe something that is 'too *kawaii*', which can be categorised as 'gaudy'?

Lolita Designer: Other brands, such as [name redacted], for example, are investigating pop culture and *kawaii* thoroughly, I think. The meaning of this kind of clothing would be something like 'I want to stand out from the others' and it would be on the contrary of the kindness [we want to convey]. I don't like that kind of self-assertiveness so much. On the other hand, I want to emphasise gracefulness and 'girliness' through our clothing …

In this account the designer makes it clear that their honest views on the designs produced by others is that they are too 'gaudy' or *kawaii.* Although they have been affirmed as *kawaii* and recognised as a participant in the community, this viewer doesn't quite like what they have observed. Rather than immediately insisting the designer change their ways through scathing feedback, they are first recognised for their contribution to the community, and the participant then offers another alternative for other Lolita fashion practitioners to consider. This alternative provides a different interpretation of *kawaii* that is aligned with the Vice President's 'not-me', one that is an elegant, demure and graceful figure. In this way, both interpretations coexist. The Vice President also notes here the tension in wanting to be recognised as *kawaii* but in a way that is aligned with her own views. As such, her designer label attempts to negotiate the Lolita style into a presentation that is commensurate with her vision. Other participants-as-consumers then have access

to another type of Lolita dress, which they can view and potentially experience to be *kawaii* enough to incorporate into their outfits.

In this section, I have sought to establish the role that affirmation plays in *kawaii* fashion communities, and to show how activities guided by a wish to be affirmed are shaped by expectations and 'rules'. Through having a clear definition of the situation, *kawaii* fashion participants are able to affirm each other and share experiences of *kawaii*. Those who are aware of the 'rules of play' are able to understand the situation as it unfolds, and are able to respond accordingly by praising the *kawaii* fashion participant or by sharing an experience of *kawaii* with them. Participants who observe the performance of self are able to comprehend the role performed ('this is a person who is wearing *kawaii* fashion'), and are thus, aware of the expectations embedded in the encounter. For example, the observer may recognise the fashion, and then respond affirmatively by commenting that they find their whole outfit to be *kawaii*, or they may affirm one specific aspect, such as a necklace the practitioner is wearing. In doing so, the practitioner and participant take on clear roles as those who are partaking in play, and a tension arises as they both navigate the threat of potential 'failure'. Through this interaction, a 'social world' of play forms which is exclusive and exciting because of the tension it creates out of players' desire to 'win'.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated how participants come to feel affirmed by other members and are able to feel validated through the sharing of experiences. We also explored some of the activities in the community, as they were described by participants. We established that the expectation of being affirmed shapes the definition of the situation that unfolds between participants. In order for participants-as-observers to understand that the *kawaii* fashion practitioner is wearing *kawaii* fashion, the ensemble must be discernible to them. This can lead to the formation of 'rules' that

guide the presentation of practitioners. But what of the spectators who watch this unfolding play who are not aware of the situation and the social relations involved?

We must acknowledge the presence of non-participants in observing the two *kawaii* fashion participants out on the street together, and the Harajuku Fashion Walk parading around Harajuku, and the Princess Dream Craft Fair unfolding in the function centre. From afar, the affair would likely appear spectacular and surprising. The situation would be undefined from their perspective. Moreover, an outsider might understand *kawaii* but not know either how to react to affirm the wearer (which as we have seen are the required rules to establish the specific social relation between participants). Play in the *kawaii* fashion community would be described by Huizinga (1950: 12) as existing separately from 'ordinary life' and something that actively excludes outsiders. Huizinga (1950: 13) writes that social groupings who engage in play 'stress their difference from the common world.' Their behaviours, activities and rules are used to form this sense of difference from the everyday. In this account, the baffled, curious or enchanted spectator can only refer to situations and performances of self that belong to the 'common world'; they are not privy to the rules of play enacted by practitioners. For instance, they might wonder if practitioners might be going to a fancy dress party in costumes, or perhaps promoting a product or event.

In Chapter Six, we will consider examples when non-participants who are not aware of the definition of the situation come across someone wearing *kawaii* fashion. Do these outsiders understand the importance of affirmation to these participants? How do they manage the uncertainty around the definition of the situation between themselves and participants? In this final chapter we will explore some of the anecdotes offered in the interviews conducted for this study in order to study the significance of insider knowledge to understand the intentions of participants who wear *kawaii* fashion.

Chapter Six: Through the Looking Glass: Interactions Between *Kawaii* Fashion Communities and Outsiders

Figure 30 – Kawaii fashion practitioners in Harajuku. Photo Courtesy of Tomoike_2525.

In this thesis, we have considered how participants attempt to become closer to their 'not-me' as they explore their sense of self. In Chapter Five, we examined the central role affirmation plays in the interactions between *kawaii* fashion participants. Participants come together with the expectation that their *kawaii* fashion outfits will be affirmed by others and this, following Goffman (1990), defines the situation between participants. In order for participants to discern who is or is not seeking to be affirmed as *kawaii*, the participant must appear in a way that is recognisably *kawaii*. In order to increase the chances of appearing in a way

that is discernibly '*kawaii*' to others, participants modify their outfits, drawing upon what they 'know' others will approve of.

In Chapter Five, I also argued that this interaction constitutes a form of play, which Huizinga (1950) views to be 'separate' from the everyday and allows for the formation of 'social worlds' between individuals. This separation from the everyday is formed through the creation of rules that guide the unfolding play. These rules are usually guarded with a sense of secrecy, thereby enhancing the extraordinary nature of the separate social world that they have created. One has to be invited into this social world as players view 'others … outside' the space, as 'no concern' of theirs as they '… are different and do things differently' (Huizinga 1950: 12). As a result, there are those who are 'inside' this social world, where the action unfolds, and those who are 'outside'. This creates a divide between those who are familiar with the definition of the situation (the insiders), and those who are not (the outsiders).

When play is carried out in public – for instance a *kawaii* fashion participant wearing their clothing whilst shopping – outsiders may become aware of the presence of a social world they are not part of. Without the specialist knowledge or rules that form the social world in the first instance, the outsider is unable to discern the definition of the situation and as such will need to consider how to conduct themselves.[115] Goffman describes a variety of reactions that individuals can have when the definition of the situation becomes unclear. For instance, they may exercise 'tact' by giving hints to the performer they come across, or they may pretend not to have seen the performance. They can also make assumptions about the definition of the situation, and act accordingly. Or they might confront the performer with hostility in an attempt to gain control over the definition of the

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[115] In her article on Lolita fashion, Mackie (2009: n.p) also notes the difficulty in 'controlling how this style will be read by disparate kinds of viewers'.

situation. In this chapter, we will explore *kawaii* fashion participants' experiences and perspectives of encounters with outsiders, and draw upon accounts offered during the interviews conducted for this research.

During interviews, participants reported a range of responses they have received from outsiders. In particular, they highlighted the 'misunderstandings' that outsiders have of *kawaii* fashion. While some reactions described were interpreted by participants to be positive, many reported instances of heckling or comments that the participant felt were inappropriate and rude. In this chapter, I call these inappropriate behaviours 'hostile' to reflect the way participants perceived them. Furthermore, participants responded to misunderstandings that their activities involved cosplay (an activity that involves wearing a character costume),[116] a sexualised performance or a regression into childhood. These anxieties appeared to affect Lolita fashion practitioners the most. The concerns raised by participants not only reflect their frustrations in being misunderstood, but also demonstrate the high value they place on affirmation. In this chapter, I argue that behaviours that disrupt the order created by *kawaii* fashion communities put participants in touch with the sense of lack they originally felt when they encountered their 'not me'. Through exposure to actions that are not affirmative, participants experience a sense of separateness from their ideal self while dressed in *kawaii* fashion. In order to reassert their belief that they are now like the 'not-me' they originally beheld, participants carry out strategies to promote a greater awareness of and sensitivity to *kawaii* fashion.

In this chapter, I will use Goffman and Huizinga to explore some of the encounters with outsiders reported by *kawaii* fashion participants. Firstly, this chapter will consider some participant accounts of interactions with outsiders, both affirming

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[116] Cosplay is written as *kosupure* (コスプレ) in Japanese. As cosplay is now a worldwide phenomenon, the English spelling has been used.

and hostile. In doing so, we will explore why certain behaviours exhibited by outsiders are deemed by participants to be hostile. Then we will examine strategies taken by some participants to try to inform 'outsiders' of the rules of play, indicating that some participants value affirmation over the possible secrecy that surrounds the *kawaii* fashion community. The chapter will close with a section that explores some of the common misreadings of *kawaii* fashion as perceived by participants, and their complexities.[117]

The Encounter with the Outsider: Participants' Accounts of Interactions with Non-Participants

In the previous chapter, we explored instances where affirmation shapes the presentation of self in *kawaii* fashion communities. This presentation is intended for other practitioners, however sometimes unintended audiences can come across the performance taking place. This results in an encounter between the *kawaii* fashion participant and the outsider. In this section, we will explore what participants understand to be happening in these instances, using Huizinga's (1950) idea of play and its relationship to the 'real world' and Goffman's (1990) ideas of faux pas and tact to illuminate the discussion.

Before proceeding, a moment must be spent reflecting on the importance of order to *kawaii* fashion communities and the potential 'threat' that outsiders pose to this order. Huizinga writes that one of the key attractions of play is that it 'brings a temporary … limited perfection' into an 'imperfect world'. Play 'creates order' in

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[117] In this thesis, I have primarily focussed on the views held by *kawaii* fashion participants. In this chapter, I will continue to focus on their views, but I will also consider in the footnotes how outsiders view *kawaii* fashion. By speculating on this matter, I hope to consider the encounter between participant and outsider in a way that provides participants (and other interested parties) with an account of why others form misunderstandings of *kawaii* fashion.

the face of 'the confusion of life' (Huizinga 1950: 10). That is to say play allows individuals to experience a temporary sense of control and have a clear expectation of the types of activities that will take place. This is perceived to be different from the 'unpredictability' of everyday life, where one cannot reasonably expect activities to go as planned. As Goffman (1990: 156) argues, 'there is no interaction in which the participants do not take an appreciable chance of being slightly embarrassed or a slight chance of being deeply humiliated. Life may not be much of a gamble, but interaction is'. It follows that not all interactions between *kawaii* fashion practitioners and outsiders will be pleasant. Indeed, sometimes the interaction might be 'embarrassing' or 'humiliating'. As such, the expectation that a *kawaii* fashion participant will be affirmed by other participants creates a sense of 'safety' in the social world of the community. While there is a tension that rises from potentially not being affirmed by one's peers, there is a relatively assured way of modifying one's presentation to obtain this affirmation. One can choose how much of their individual expression they want to include in their mode of dress (at the risk of rejection) along with which 'rules' to follow (to increase the chance of affirmation) when creating their *kawaii* fashion outfits. In order to be seen and affirmed by other participants, this sense of order must be maintained and respected by those participating. It is important then to consider how an outsider might impact on this order.

There is always a possibility that an outsider stumbling upon the play unfolding is able to understand the definition of the situation enough to carry out actions that affirm the practitioner. For instance, let us consider Alice's account of a positive interaction she once had:

> I've had a good experience where a girl talked to me and now we are still friends. She is not a Lolita. This little girl – an elementary school girl – told me that I was *kawaii.*

In this account a young girl appreciated Alice's outfit, and decided to act upon it by praising Alice's appearance and initiating a conversation with her. This interaction eventually led to friendship. In this instance, the girl was able to carry out the behaviours expected in the *kawaii* fashion community by affirming Alice's appearance as *kawaii*. As this girl was not a Lolita fashion practitioner herself, this behaviour is informed by the overlap between Alice's appearance and the young girl's appreciation for *kawaii* things. In fact it is perhaps unsurprising that a girl of this age would be well versed in *kawaii* as a general concept considering the important role that *kawaii* plays in girls' culture.[118] While we should not assume that all girls like *kawaii* things, it seems that the young girl in this instance saw something in Alice that she liked enough to strike up a conversation with her. So while not understanding what Lolita fashion is, the young girl was still able to approve of and appreciate Alice's outfit. The fact that Alice mentions in her account here that the girl is not a Lolita perhaps suggests her own surprise over the connection, but also the relief that someone outside the community 'gets it' enough to understand how best to respond. As such, their encounter led to a positive, sustained relationship between participant and outsider.

In the above instance, we have explored how affirmation from an outsider inadvertently follows the rules of the *kawaii* fashion community, and results in an interaction that pleases the *kawaii* fashion participant. In this sense the 'order' that *kawaii* fashion communities seek to maintain is left intact, and the participant feels that they have successfully become like the 'not-me' they admire. Another way that order could be maintained is when outsiders feign disinterest or do not respond. Here, the separateness between the community and outsiders is preserved. Goffman spends much time exploring how individuals exercise 'tact' through feigning a lack of a awareness, or disinterest, so as to spare embarrassment for those performers who commit a faux pas. In the case of the scenario above, many

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[118] For more information on *kawaii* and girls' culture, see Yano (2015).

pedestrians on the street might have seen Alice in *kawaii* attire, but decided not to comment on its perceived 'strangeness'. Others may not have perceived her clothing to be of note or strange at all. Goffman (1990: 147) writes that '[i]ndividuals voluntarily stay away from regions into which they have not been invited' out of generosity to others, recognising that they are not the intended audience for the performance of self that is being carried out. Outsiders 'tactfully act in an uninterested, uninvolved, unperceiving fashion' to create space for the performance being carried out by the performers and intended observers (Goffman 1990: 147).

What then might occur when an outsider 'disrupts' a performance that was not meant for them? For instance, what if an outsider questions the appropriateness of a *kawaii* outfit or criticises a *kawaii* fashion participant's appearance? Huizinga (1950: 10) writes that '[p]lay demands order absolute and supreme' and that deviation from the established rules 'robs … [the game] of its character and makes it worthless'. If one does not follow the rules, the game is 'spoiled'. Spoiling the game 'reveals the relativity and fragility of the play world' (Huizinga 1950: 11). In the case of *kawaii* fashion participants, breaking the rules and not affirming the participant may shatter the illusion and the hope that they are now 'adorable'. I hypothesise that this in turn reminds the participant of the original separateness they felt towards their 'not-me' and puts them in touch with the lack they originally felt. This causes a temporary sense of unease for the participant, which is why such encounters are perceived to be unpleasant. In this moment of rejection, the practitioner may potentially realise the underlying feeling of separateness from their 'not-me' which has informed their behaviour in creating *kawaii* fashion in the first instance. You may recall in Chapters Two and Three, we discussed how the experiences that participants have of *kawaii* objects involve feelings of separation. In the object they find aspects of who they want to be. Central to the experience of the 'not-me' is a feeling of separation from the object which individuals then seek to eradicate. As such, rejection may remind *kawaii* fashion practitioners of these

initial feelings of separateness. In order to explore this possibility, we will study an instance of an encounter between Lolitina and an outsider.

During her interview for this research, Lolitina offered an example of what she described to be a negative encounter with a non-*kawaii* fashion participant. In the discussion of her anecdote below we will explore what parts of the outsider's behaviour Lolitina feels are negative, and how this might reveal the relativity and fragility of the sense of self she performs. Lolitina's anecdote is as follows:

> Megan: Have you ever had a bad experience while wearing Lolita fashion?
>
> Lolitina: Yes of course! For example, when I walked back at night from work a middle-aged guy – drunk – asked me 'Why are you dressed that way? Did you have a party today?' – Even though I am dressed in clothes which are for me normal and everyday – 'are you going to a Halloween party or something?' 'You must have a Halloween party every day!' 'Did you have a marriage ceremony?'

If we look closely at what behaviour is being displayed and what is being said, we can identify three behaviours that would be considered negative by Lolitina: the questions posed, the association of the outfit with special events, and the jokes made at Lolitina's expense. One view might be that these questions are not necessarily negative, and rather invite the other person to respond and clarify their intent. Lolitina, however, takes the view that they constitute as a negative reaction to her clothing. The likely contributing factor here is the fact that by being intoxicated, the man has also given off non-verbal cues that are disruptive and intrusive. In this way, the tone of the question is less inviting than a prompt from a peer.

Firstly, we should consider why the unwelcome questions may be construed by Lolitina as negative behaviour. Primarily, these questions do not pertain to the

kawaii world Lolitina is interested in – she is not being asked if she likes dolls, for instance, nor is she asked where she found her beautiful dress. Instead the questions call into doubt the social world formed in the *kawaii* fashion community, by attempting to draw her in to different social contexts – parties, Halloween and weddings. This is amplified when we consider the implication that she is wearing attire for these special events that may not be accepted by others when worn elsewhere. For instance, whilst one could wear their wedding gown down the street, the assumption from others would be that a wedding (or a related event such as a photo-shoot) is taking place, not that the individual simply likes the dress. The questions posed by the man draw attention to his view that Lolitina's attire is 'impractical' to wear while commuting home from work, and perhaps also that her clothing is outlandish and 'strange' in general. Here the order established in *kawaii* fashion communities is disrupted with unexpected questions and reactions.

Furthermore, the man's response exposes the fragility of the self that is performed by Lolitina, through his emphasis on her clothing as a 'costume'. Participants want to be affirmed by others that they are *kawaii*. They do not want to be reminded of the original 'separateness' they once felt towards the *kawaii* objects that captivated them in the first instance. Suggesting that she is wearing a costume to 'be someone else' separates Lolitina from her conceived sense of self. We will explore this in further detail later on in this chapter when discussing the relationship between *kawaii* fashion and cosplay. In her recollection of this incident, Lolitina emphasises her surprise at this insinuation by describing her clothing as 'normal' and 'everyday' and thus not worthy of such commentary.

Finally, the perceived negative behaviour is felt keenly by the joke made at Lolitina's expense – 'you must have a Halloween party every day'. Underlying this joke is the insinuation that her outfit is a costume, and that it is being worn outside the socially acceptable time period of Halloween. The joke is a way of commenting on the 'inappropriateness' of her social conduct whilst walking home. While some

practitioners might like Halloween and see this as a compliment, the joke can also be interpreted as veiled social criticism.

What, however, is the social criticism behind this man's joke, and what are the reasons for his behaviour? He appears to comment on what he perceives to be a faux pas on Lolitina's part. The man's definition of the situation unfolding on the public streets where these two have encountered each other has been confused by a performance that is not tailored to his expectations. The man expects a certain type of performance to occur on the streets – in this case that people travelling home typically do not wear spectacular clothes – and feels he needs to point out Lolitina's 'mistake' to her. Goffman acknowledges instances where individuals might decide to be rude or hostile towards individuals who are disrupting the definition of the situation as they understand it. In situations where interactions are 'disrupted' and 'no longer defined', Goffman (1990: 23-24) explains that 'others present may feel hostile, and all the participants may come to feel ill at ease, nonplussed, out of countenance, embarrassed, experiencing the kind of anomie that is generated when the minute social system of face-to-face interaction breaks down'. In other words, the observer in this instance perceives Lolitina's clothing to be a disruption to the street scene and is 'nonplussed'.[119]

In this instance, Lolitina has her own understanding of the definition of the situation whilst walking home from work, which may not be the same as the man's.

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[119] As we are reliant on Lolitina's account of this encounter, we cannot know for certain how and why the man responded in this way. However, by referring to the above quote from Goffman, we can form a hypothesis. It could be argued that observing Lolitina in extraordinary attire provoked a feeling of uneasiness in the man. This puts the man 'out of countenance' as Goffman's aforementioned quote explains, and as a result he becomes unsure of how he ought to react. Because Lolitina does not abide by his definition of the situation – that all pedestrians ought to wear practical clothing – the man feels unsure of her role and his role in observing her. Lolitina is behaving in a way that constitutes an 'inept performance' as a pedestrian on the street. The man can 'no longer countenance' her presence and as a result '… blurt[s] out immediate public criticism' of Lolitina's conduct (Goffman 1990: 134). While there are other ways of responding to this feeling of unease – such as looking away – some may feel a 'hostile' reaction is necessary to reassert the definition of the situation that is 'supposed' to take place in the streets. In this instance, the man's alleged intoxication may have also fuelled the 'hostile' reaction to Lolitina. Furthermore, we can consider the generational element to this social encounter, whereby the man as an older individual feels it suitable to criticise the young woman.

Her definition of the situation is that that she is travelling home from work, wearing Lolita fashion or 'everyday' 'normal' clothes. She believes that it is acceptable to express herself as she pleases. She feels happy wearing this clothing and expects to be affirmed for appearing *kawaii*. The reaction from the man puts her 'out of countenance' as it is unexpected and unwelcome. Goffman (1990: 156) notes the 'individual may deeply involve his ego in his identification with a particular role' and when this role is disrupted, the individual may experience distress and confusion. Lolitina frames this encounter as negative by describing the man's behaviour as 'rude' in order to reassert her performance of self. She might also complain to other participants to gain sympathy. In doing so, the fragility and relativity of her *kawaii* self is no longer exposed and the order perpetuated by the community is re-established.

In order to understand why this confusion around the definition of the situation arises between outsiders and *kawaii* fashion participants, we must also consider the wider social principles in Japan that might inform outsiders' views. Joy Hendry (1991: 49) in *Understanding Japanese Society* writes that *kosei* (trans. individuality) has 'become an ideal' in Japan, and is 'sought in the pursuit of personal interests and achievements' which are 'perfectly acceptable as long as they don't interfere with one's obligations to others'. However, Hendry (1991: 50) also notes that the development of 'self' in Japan involves being trained to present different selves for different occasions. One example of a presented self is *tatemae* (trans. public position or attitude) which one carries out in public contexts (Hendry 1991: 50). With an allocentric social structure, there is an expectation in Japanese culture that people should give attention to others and not draw attention to themselves. For instance, Katrina Moore (2014) in her ethnographic study of the *Sumire Kai*, a group of amateur practitioners of Noh Theatre, found that ambitious women were criticised by their families for pursuing their interests at the expense of social obligations. '*Wagamama*' in Japan is a term used to describe such self-centred individuals and translates to 'selfishness, egoism, wilfulness and disobedience' with

a 'strong connotation of childishness' (Moore 2014: 44). Hendry (1991: 44) writes that *wagamama* implies 'an untrained state', '*waga*' referring to 'self' and *mama* to 'as it is'. Hendry (1991: 44) writes that this word is associated with children who have not yet been trained out of their 'natural selfishness'. For Hendry, socially in Japan there is an expectation that individuals conduct themselves thoughtfully and with consideration for others. Perhaps some outsiders might view the bold and colourful appearance of *kawaii* fashion practitioners as a declaration of individuality, and as a form of 'attention seeking'. By 'disrupting' the perceived definitions of the situation on the streets, the *kawaii* fashion practitioner may be thought to exhibit a lack of consideration for those around her by unnecessarily attracting attention to herself. Her display of interest in the self can perhaps also be read by others as an expression of selfishness and self-indulgence.

While the hostile reaction described by Lolitina could be experienced by any individual who draws attention to the self (irrespective of gender), it is possible to interpret this reaction in gendered terms. For instance, while Hendry (1991: 44) attributes the quality of *wagamama* to any untrained child, Moore (2014: 44) associates it with the disobedient woman. Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley (2005: 8) in their introduction to *Bad Girls of Japan* note that women who are considered troublesome '… sometimes blur the distinctions between public and private domains'.[120] They (2005: 11) describe the Japanese understanding of 'good female character' to continuously 'think of others first'. In this instance, Lolitina's presentation of self does blur the boundaries of public and private through her display of a personal pastime. By demonstrating how much time and energy is spent on herself in creating her *kawaii* outfits, she may be expressing to outsiders a high degree of self-interest, which might be perceived as 'unbecoming'. While this is certainly a consideration, I would argue that if we consider Hendry's account of

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[120] The anxiety around Japanese women in the public sphere and their right to self-expression has a long history in Japan. For more information, see Mackie (2003).

Japan's allocentric culture and the prevailing understanding of self, these qualities would also be considered inappropriate if performed by anyone, irrespective of their gender.

The man's question in Lolitina's account about her dress being a wedding gown also carries with it gendered overtones when considered in conjunction with Sarah Frederick's (2005) chapter 'Not that innocent: Yoshiya Nobuko's good girls'. If we consider *kawaii* fashion practitioners in this study to have similar attributes to the *shōjo* characters in literature and print media they admire, they too might present themselves as a 'hyper-feminine ideal' that 'poses an ominous threat to the feminine sphere' (Frederick 2005: 67). That is to say that while they appear as 'girls', they are 'neither fully daughter nor wife', caught between social roles (Frederick 2005: 68). Only one participant in this study was married, and perhaps the 'girly' presentation of *kawaii* fashion practitioners feeds into this anxiety with regard to women who do not perform in a clear way their obligations as a daughter or wife. In this sense, I concede that gender plays a role in shaping the man's response to Lolitina in terms of the types of questions asked, but I would also argue that we cannot definitively know if Lolitina's gender contributed to his reaction without asking him directly.

Thus far, we have discussed in depth a reaction from an outsider towards a performance of self that was presented by Alice and Lolitina. We have discussed what might constitute a positive interaction and its relationship to the significance of order to *kawaii* fashion communities. While some outsiders may affirm the appearance of a *kawaii* fashion practitioner, others may choose to exercise what Goffman (1990) would describe as 'tact' by pretending not to notice the practitioners. Another possibility is that outsiders may be hostile or 'disrespectful' towards *kawaii* fashion practitioners. We have considered, using an example provided by Lolitina, what behaviours towards participants are considered to be negative, and how they potentially disrupt the participant's sense of self. We have

also speculated as to why the outsider in the example offered by Lolitina responded in this way. In doing so, I have sought to consider holistically why this encounter could be described as negative. From the practitioner's perspective, the hostile behaviour is unexpected and confronting. From the outsider's viewpoint, the practitioner is flouting the social conventions they expect to be observed in public.

Kawaii fashion practitioners are aware that wearing their outfits in public spaces may not comply with the social values or norms held by others. For instance, Alice explained during her interview that 'Lolita fashion is not something that we have to wear socially, right? It is not suitable'. Here it is interesting to note Alice's word choice: she uses 'have to' to describe the 'social' pressures that she perceives. While individuals are assigned the 'role' of needing to wear particular sets of clothing in public settings, Lolita fashion is something that one chooses to wear. For Alice, wearing *kawaii* fashion in this account is not something expected socially but something she decides to do of her own accord. As such, participants like Alice are aware that *kawaii* fashion goes beyond the pre-established social scripts in society.

In response to negative reactions to their outfits, some participants seek to spread awareness of *kawaii* fashion so that their presentation of self might be discernible to outsiders. In this respect the 'secrecy' Huizinga (1950) describes as essential play is broken. What was previously insider knowledge about *kawaii* fashion is increasingly made available to outsiders. In doing so, it appears that participants hope to make their presentation of self more recognisable to outsiders. For instance, Lolitina explained that she wanted to 'do something to improve the position of Lolita fashion in society' because 'people disrespect Lolita fashion and there are some people saying "What is that dress!?"' In spreading awareness about Lolita fashion, Lolitina aims to help outsiders to understand what *kawaii* fashion involves. In doing so, she is also providing outsiders with context with regards to what kawaii fashion is so they can understand the self that is performed by *kawaii*

fashion practitioners. In this way, outsiders might become aware as to why asking particular questions might be considered to be disrespectful to the wearer.

Furthermore, by instructing interested outsiders in what *kawaii* fashion is, participants invite others to make their own *kawaii* outfits, or at least understand that they are expected to affirm the appearance of a practitioner as *kawaii*. At the time of her interview, Alice was still in High School and had recently participated in a business oriented speaking event where she gave a presentation on Lolita fashion. This inspired her to try to 'spread the word' about Lolita and encourage others to participate through business activities once she graduated from school. Alice explains this ambition as follows:

> I want to increase the number of opportunities people have to encounter Lolita clothes. But I don't want to recommend Lolita clothes to everybody. There will always be people who dislike it. So I have no intention to recommend it to everybody. I just want to increase the people who wear Lolita clothes. The more people wear Lolita clothes, the more people will see and know about Lolita clothes. So I would like to take an indirect method, not a direct method, by making Lolita clothes, which will increase the number of people who will think that Lolita is *kawaii* and that Lolita is easy to wear.

Alice believes that in making her own business that allows more people to access Lolita fashion, she might be able to spread awareness about what the fashion looks like and how participants expect to be treated when wearing it. This would be achieved by increasing the number of people on the street wearing Lolita, which in turn might allow outsiders to 'acclimatise' themselves to the presentation of self that *kawaii* fashion practitioners put forward. Alice acknowledges that it is expected that some people might not like Lolita fashion, and would respond negatively, but overall her ambition is to increase the number of people who 'think

Lolita is *kawaii*' and is 'easy to wear'. Perhaps then, Alice is seeking to make Lolita more acceptable as 'everyday wear' rather than for 'special occasions'.

Part of this ambition, however, involves the loss of 'secrecy' that Huizinga believes might attract individuals to engage in play in the first instance. Alice and Lolitina's intentions suggest that some practitioners are concerned less with being 'different' from the mainstream (which is maintained through secrecy) and are more interested in being accepted and admired. At the same time, their presentation of self in public carries an air of rebelliousness as they continue to flout social expectations of appropriate conduct. As such, it could be argued that Alice and Lolitina are simultaneously seeking a mode of expression that is both extraordinary and yet accepted as ordinary or everyday. This logic echoes behaviour described by the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory in social psychology whereby individuals seek to balance feelings of belonging and individual expression (Brewer 2003; Leonardelli, Pickett, and Brewer 2010). This governs the behaviour of all individuals, irrespective of whether they engage in alternative communities or not. We all want 'to be ourselves' and to be accepted for 'who we are'. This however, leads to some compromises in the selves we perform for others. As explored in Chapters Four, Five and Six, we carry out our performances in ways we feel the audience might be responsive to. Indeed, the negotiations between creativity and acceptance are recognised by Winnicott (2005: 134) who writes that '[t]he interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems to me to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union'. In the case of *kawaii* fashion communities, it could be argued that the strong desire *kawaii* fashion participants have to be worthy of adoration results in degrees of sacrifice of the secrecy of their community. Strategies to reduce the chance of rejection are part of the practitioner's attempt not only to strengthen their performance of self for a receptive audience, but perhaps also to reduce the chances of being confronted by these feelings of separateness.

In summary, participants are aware that their clothing disrupts 'social norms' and in response, some enact strategies to make their fashion more 'normal' or 'everyday'. Some participants experience a tension between wanting to be adored and wanting to be extraordinary, and this tension also exposes the vulnerability of participants. Instances of rejection may confront practitioners with the original feelings of separateness they felt towards their 'not-me'. Misunderstandings of the presentation of their *kawaii* self can cause their sense of worth to temporarily be disrupted. In the next section we will examine some other ways that *kawaii* fashion practitioners believe they are misunderstood and what participants would like to say in response to these misconceptions.

On Cosplay, Sexualisation and the Infantile: Responses from Participants Regarding Misreadings of *Kawaii* Fashion

In Chapter One, we explored how researchers can sometimes unintentionally objectify and project their own creative fantasies onto the participants they study. This involves the treatment of the participant as an object to be interpreted creatively by whoever is looking. In this section, we will explore three key misreadings of *kawaii* fashion communities made by outsiders – firstly, that they are engaging in cosplay, secondly, that they are seeking to pander to a sexualised gaze and finally that they are dressing 'like children'. In the case of misreadings that suggests *kawaii* fashion is cosplay or sexualised performance, this appears to impact Lolita fashion practitioners the most. Participants raised these misreadings in interviews and strongly objected to them. Here we will explore some of their responses and draw upon some of the arguments already presented in this thesis in order to illuminate the discussion.

One complaint that was made repeatedly in interviews was that some participants felt uncomfortable with being categorised as participants in cosplay communities.

Cosplay involves transforming oneself into a character one admires from literature, anime, manga or games through costuming.[121] Outsiders may make this assumption because of the spectacular appearance of *kawaii* fashion and its recent incorporation into anime and manga character design. For instance, Miwako Sakurada in *Paradaisu Kisu*,[122] Kuroneko in *Ore no Imōto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai*,[123] Shōko Sugawara in *Saiko Pasu*[124] and Rinko Ogasawara in *Shirobako*[125] wear elements found in Lolita fashion such as headdresses, bell shaped skirts and round-toed buckled shoes. Also, *Rōzen Meiden*[126] and *Anazā*[127] feature Germanic dolls and other characters which are dressed in outfits similar to *kawaii* fashion. Furthermore, some *kawaii* fashion practitioners are also fans of some of these texts themselves, and *kawaii* fashion brands are beginning to collaborate with franchises in response. For example special replicas of the outfits worn by the dolls in *Rōzen Meiden* have been produced by the Lolita brand, *Innocent World* which could be worn as cosplay or as *kawaii* fashion (Innocent World 2013). Additionally, as we discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, some *kawaii* fashion practitioners are inspired by illustrations that appear in manga, such as Marie Antoinette in *Berusaiyu no Bara.*[128] With the rise of popularity of *kawaii* fashion characters in anime and manga, costume stores such as Bodyline have produced their own line of clothing that enables wearers to 'dress as' a Lolita, Decora or Fairy *kei* Fashion

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[121] 'Cosplay' can also refer to the use of non-Japanese source media. However, for the purposes of this thesis I will be focusing on cosplay that relies on Japanese sources.

[122] English title: *Paradise Kiss*. For more information, see Yazawa (1999-2003) and Kobayashi (2005).

[123] Trans. *My Little Sister Cannot Be This Cute*. Abbreviated title: *Oreimo*. For more information, see Kanbe (2010).

[124] English title: Psycho-Pass. For more information, see Shiotani and Motohiro (2012-2013).

[125] Trans. *White Box*. For more information, see Mizushima (2014-2015).

[126] English title: *Rozen Maiden*. For more information, see Peach-Pit (2002-2007), Peach-Pit (2008-2014), Matsuo (2004), Matsuo (2005-2006), Matsuo (2006) and Hatekeyama (2013).

[127] English title: *Another*. For more information, see Ayatsuji (2010-2012), Mizushima (2012).

[128] For more information, see Ikeda (1972-1974).

practitioner and other stores such as COSPA offer cosplay costumes which one can customise to appear like a *kawaii* fashion practitioner.[129]

Kawaii fashion practitioners do not feel that their clothing is a form of cosplay, and Lolita fashion practitioners in particular appear the most sensitive about this matter. For example, Lolitina was exasperated that '[e]ven in Japan cosplay and Lolita fashion are mixed up' and the Vice President of the Lolita designer label I interviewed asserted that Lolita is '… definitely not cosplay'. The rejection of the cosplay category is likely due to the fact that participants want their outfits to be viewed as an 'authentic' expression of their *kawaii* self rather than 'just pretending'. This suggests that in the view of practitioners, cosplay is 'fake' whereas their fashion is 'real'. In this section, we will explore this idea of the 'pretend' and where this impression of cosplay might be coming from. This view that *kawaii* fashion practitioners hold could be challenged, as in this thesis we have explored the relativity of the performance of self in everyday life, and how easily we change 'masks' for audiences. It could be argued that the notion of the 'costume' confronts practitioners with the feeling of separateness from their 'not-me'. They want to believe that they have become the 'not-me', not that they are 'only pretending'. Goffman (1990) would argue that we are all 'just pretending' to be particular selves for particular audiences. In the midst of performance, however, we ourselves can become 'convinced of the self we express'.

The Vice President of the Lolita designer label who I interviewed offered some interesting insights into the difference between Lolita fashion and cosplay in her discussion of how the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has adopted *kawaii* fashion as part of their 'Cool Japan' Campaign.[130] Specifically, she describes a

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[129] For more information on Bodyline, see Bodyline (2018). For more information on COSPA, see COSPA (2018).

[130] The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also contributes financially to the 'Cool Japan' campaign, but primarily provides grants to applicants with specific business plans. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs is primarily responsible for outward facing tourism campaigns, which include the *Kawaii* Ambassador Program.

moment of the campaign involving an event conducted in Paris. Her account is as follows:

> Recently the government started the 'Cool Japan'; movement and a female minister participated in the event in Paris with Lolita-like fashion. But that was absolutely not Lolita [fashion]! It was cosplay-like or Bodyline-like … [*she sighs*] Very sad. The Government could have let us do everything.

'Cool Japan' refers to a tourism campaign launched by the Japanese government, which promotes Japanese popular culture. In this account a female government official wore, as part of the event, fashion which the Vice President describes as 'Lolita-like'. This likely means that the outfit was intended to represent Lolita fashion and promote the image of the 'Harajuku Girl' but did not adequately demonstrate the aesthetic rules of the genre. Here the Vice President rejects this particular outfit, describing it as 'cosplay' or 'Bodyline-like'. You may recall in Chapter Five, Alice's remark on how *kawaii* fashion practitioners respond to those wearing Bodyline and present themselves as fellow participants ('Yeah, they will think you are an idiot'). The Vice President expresses her disdain towards the performance the female minister carried out, interpreting it as a performance that conflates Lolita fashion with cosplay. She emphasises her dismay with 'very sad' and offers to 'help' correct the outfit. This suggestion reflects our earlier discussion of how participants might offer 'hints' to those performing a *kawaii* self that the observers cannot fully discern.

Another quality that the Vice President ascribes to cosplay in her interview was its outlandish and fictional nature. This is an interesting attribution, especially given that in Chapter Three it was established that *kawaii* fashion practitioners fantasise about the extraordinary and the 'not-me' (such as the extravagant princess) when creating their fashion style (which itself could be an engagement with the 'fictional'). In the example below, the Vice President attributes the key difference

between what she describes as the 'extraordinary' element of Lolita fashion and the outlandish nature of cosplay to the way in which the style is realised technically. In this anecdote, her business was invited to collaborate with a local Japanese council to design Lolita clothing using locally produced textiles. She relates the challenge of the task as follows:

> We were asked to design clothes, imagining princes from the Sengoku period wearing Lolita fashion … It [the concept] is OK on paper. But if we made these into real clothes, as we do for our own designs … [the commissioned designs] would easily become like a cosplay.

In this account, the Vice President describes a brief where princes from the Sengoku Period might belong to the Lolita world, wearing aristocratic-like fashion. How then can we interpret this series of observations and the differences between *Kawaii* fashion and cosplay that they reveal? A starting point would be to begin with the mention of 'Sengoku princes' which formed part of the brief presented to this designer label. The Sengoku Period translates as the 'age of the warring states' and refers to the period in Japan's history between 1467 and 1603. Here the Vice President uses 'princes' to refer to *kuge* (trans. court nobles), who during this period would have worn *kariginu*, which is a large sleeve robe with a high round collar. In formal settings a *sokutai* was also worn, which is a heavy robe colour coded to indicate rank. A tall cap called *tate-eboshi* was also worn. Nobles had more freedom in the colour and decorations of their attire in informal settings in wearing *nōshi* (a long sleeved, unlined garment) instead of a *kariginu.*[131] Compared to the stylistic features of *ōji*, a substyle of Lolita fashion that is inspired by men's princely and aristocratic dress in Europe, there are some key stylistic differences. Specifically, *ōji* style (as it is designed by the label I interviewed) has staple items such a waistcoat, billowing blouse, cravat and knickerbockers. In the above account

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[131] For more information, see Morrison and Prince (1997: 80-89) and The Kyoto Costume Museum (2018).

from the Vice President, reconciling the difference between the period costuming of Japan and Lolita fashion, which not only has assemblage of different designs throughout Europe's fashion history but also involves entirely new creations that do not pertain to any time period, was quite difficult. This is perhaps due to the fact that the design request was prompted by the outsiders from the local council, rather than something original that the designer label imagined themselves. This situation is unusual in the context of cosplay, as practitioners in this group usually choose characters that appeal to them rather than being assigned a brief. In this instance (as well as the one above regarding the Japanese Government), outside powers are directing the practice. Additionally when referring to the design existing 'on paper' the Vice President refers to the fictional creation of these distinct characters – Japanese princes wearing *kawaii* fashion – which are then sought to be represented through 'real' clothing. This process mirrors those associated with cosplay, whereby individuals seek to represent an existing illustration of a character through costuming.[132] This becomes particularly complicated given that the character the cosplay practitioner represents through fashion was originally a representation itself, actualised through the process of making the costume and wearing it. The Vice President defines this process as something that 'easily becomes like cosplay,' which designates cosplay as an undesirable outcome. What is desirable for the Vice President here is an outfit that feels authentic, as something informed by the individual's imagination and 'not-me'. In the case of this designer label, the Vice President prefers creations to be drawn from what the designers imagine and would like to wear themselves, which are then made available to other practitioners for purchase.

In summary, some outsiders may view *kawaii* fashion to be a form of cosplay. In part, this may be due to the spectacular nature of the presentation of self that *kawaii* fashion participants put forward. Their extraordinary appearance may result

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[132] For more information on this process see King (2016).

in outsiders defining the situation as someone getting 'dressed up' for a special event. Participants believe their activities are different from cosplay. They take the view that their fashion is an expression of what they are 'really' like, whereas cosplay involves pretending to be a character that is found in literature, manga, gaming, or anime. Of course this notion can be complicated and challenged, as *kawaii* fashion participants are performing a particular self for others that involves 'pretending' to be like the 'not-me' they admire.

Furthermore, studies such those conducted by Sharon Elkind (2018), Truong (2013) and Peirson-Smith (2013) have found that cosplay practitioners also view the characters they admire as a new – but familiar – potential for the self, which they can temporarily perform through cosplay. Cosplay can simply be viewed as a liminal performance of a particular aspect of self for a specific audience.[133] In this case, we could view the objection *kawaii* fashion participants have to their activities being labelled as cosplay as a statement about their intended audience. They are not intending to perform a self that states 'I am a cosplayer'. They view their performance of self as a statement that says 'I am myself'. Responding to the performance with 'are you wearing cosplay?' signals to participants the observer's disbelief in the self being performed. This temporarily reveals to *kawaii* fashion participants the fragility of their sense of self, and the original feeling of separateness they experienced towards their 'not-me'.

Finally, if we take on the observations offered by the Vice President of the designer label we interviewed, cosplay may not always be reconcilable with the *kawaii* 'not-me' that captivated the imagination of *kawaii* fashion participants. For instance, the Sengoku Prince design brief imposed a theme upon designers that did not appeal to them and was difficult for them to execute in a way they perceived to be authentic. In this instance however, it could be argued that the brief issued to the designer

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[133] For more information, see Elkind (2018: 115-116).

label is not in line with common cosplay practice, which involves cosplay practitioners dressing as characters they admire (their own 'not-mes'). As indicated by this brief discussion of *kawaii* fashion participants' views on their practice in relation to cosplay, this is a highly complex issue that requires further research to fully comprehend.

Some participants, however, were very thoughtful about how their fashion might appear to others, particularly in regard to views that they are wearing *kawaii* fashion to appeal to fans of anime. Alice offers a very interesting and balanced account of how *kawaii* fashion practitioners may appear attractive to fans of anime and manga (touching on our above discussion of cosplay):

> I don't think [*kawaii* fashion] people try to appeal to anime fans. But if I think objectively, it cannot be helped that normal people think so. Basically it [*kawaii* fashion] is beyond the reality. If a *kawaii* character from anime had long hair and big eyes and wore *kawaii* clothes, it would be so *kawaii,* right? And there are many Lolita girls who like anime. I mean many people like Lolita fashion and anime at the same time. There are three key aspects. Many Lolita girls like anime. They [Lolita fashion and anime] are both unrealistic. It is true that Lolita clothes suit anime characters. If I think about these three keys it can't be helped if people think it [*kawaii* fashion] is for anime fans. I know that Lolita people will deny it. But objectively speaking, I think it is impossible to deny it.

Essentially, Alice is saying here that while *kawaii* fashion practitioners do not intend to appeal to anime fans through their clothing style, the misreading of their style is inevitable. By drawing out the layers of meaning here, we will be able to see the tensions operating in her response between *kawaii* practitioner and anime fan as an observer. Alice is saying that because *kawaii* fashion engages in fantasies beyond reality, it is possible for an anime character to exist in the *kawaii* participant's

fantasies. With desirable attributes – big eyes and long hair – (reflecting our discussion of cosmetics in Chapter Four) Alice feels that participants would accept illustrations of Lolitas drawn in any style that is similar to anime or manga. Furthermore, some *kawaii* fashion participants are also fans of anime. This sets up the premise for there to be influences flowing between both communities, adapted and incorporated into the practices of participants and anime creators alike. Furthermore, Alice has even established three reasons why the aesthetics of Lolita fashion in particular and anime are similar: that there are Lolita fashion practitioners who enjoy anime (making it practical to appeal to them through dressing fictional characters in it); that both operate on fantasies and the imagination as the source of their creativity; and that there are aesthetic parallels between the style of anime and the construction techniques found in Lolita fashion. With this degree of crossover, Alice feels that 'it can't be helped' that outsiders misread Lolita fashion as part of anime fan culture, to the protest of other Lolita fashion practitioners.

Another concern raised by *kawaii* Fashion participants was that some outsiders viewed their presentation of self as one which was seeking to pander to a sexualised gaze. Other studies have sought to complicate this view, including Monden's (2014; 2015) writings on *Kawaii* fashion worn by performers in music videos and Gagne's (2008) writings on how Lolita fashion practitioners seek to use language to distance themselves from other fetish communities such as fans of the 'rorikon' genre.[134] *Kawaii* fashion practitioners interviewed here acknowledged that some outsiders view their outfits as a performance with sexual undertones, but asserted that this was a misreading. For example, the Vice President who was mentioned earlier acknowledged that some might misunderstand the intention of

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[134] The *'rorikon'* genre can involve an attraction to real young girls, but also refers to an appreciation of and a 'desire for' fictional girl characters (Galbraith 2014: 208). Galbraith (2014) differentiates between the two to establish that anime and manga *rorikon* fans are interested in the representational, not the real.

Lolita fashion practitioners due to Vladimir Nabokov's (1955) novel, *Lolita*. She offered the following response:

> I understand that this kind of point of view exists, but I don't agree with it … Lolita fashion excludes men's eyes. So 'fetish' is absolutely opposite to Lolita fashion … Lolita clothes are for women who don't care about men's opinions and who live their own lives.

In this response, the Vice President asserts that she does not agree to this reading, due to her belief that Lolita fashion 'excludes men's eyes'. Here she appears to be referring to the male gaze, which she associates with a look that sexualises women as objects.[135] Interestingly this view situates the issue of sexualisation within the context of heterosexual relationships without consideration that women or non-binary gendered individuals might find *kawaii* fashion sexually attractive (including the *kawaii* fashion practitioners themselves). The Vice President acknowledges that sexualisation can still occur, but her focus is on the intention of the wearer of *kawaii* fashion, rather than the interpretation of the viewer. Her response attempts to place the capacity to attribute meaning with the fashion practitioner. Here the attraction some have towards *kawaii* fashion can still exist, but not in a way that is conflated with the intent of the wearer. The Vice President also asserts that 'fetish is the absolute opposite of Lolita'. If we consider 'fetish' to refer to the linking of sexual desire to a particular object,[136] then her answer suggests that practitioners are not interested in wearing their clothes for outsiders who fetishise their appearance. By using 'so' the Vice President links these two statements together – that because they are not envisioning being looked at sexually, participants are not attempting to participate fetish practices.

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[135] For more information on the male gaze, see Mulvey (1975).

[136] For more information see Bass (2018), Steele (1996) and Lunning (2013).

Lolitina also supports the view that *Kawaii* fashion is not worn by participants to sexually attract observers. In the following response, she contrasts Lolita fashion practitioners with 'other' outsiders:

> Generally speaking, there are many other girls who want to attract boys and dress like the models in the magazines such as *CanCam* or who choose to wear revealing dresses. But I think … [*kawaii* fashion] girls tend to be more interested in themselves.

In this response the 'many other girls' Lolitina refers to here are outsiders of the *kawaii* fashion community. These outsiders consume materials different from what Lolitina believes *kawaii* fashion practitioners to be interested in – in this case *CanCam* magazine and revealing dresses. *CanCam* (1981-present) is a monthly magazine, which is associated with *Mote kei* and targeted at university students and entry level company employees. *Mote kei* is derived from the slang term *moteru,* which means sexually appealing. While the terminology '*kawaii*' might be used by *Mote kei* practitioners, the word has connotations that are different from how the participants interviewed here use '*kawaii*'. In particular, *kawaii* in this context refers to a presentation of self that does not involve 'displaying obvious sexual allure or individuality' but 'is designed to attract men' (Monden 2015: 79). Monden (2015: 79) differentiates *Mote kei* from styles found in *kawaii* fashion, arguing that the former engages in practices that signify 'the "uniform" qualities that are believed to attract desirable men' whereas the latter is more 'individualistic'. In other words, Monden views *kawaii* fashion to be more centred around the individual and their interests. Returning to Lolitina's account, *Cancam* readers in this description wear cute and 'revealing' clothing, and are primarily interested in using fashion to attract a sexual partner.[137] Lolitina contrasts this

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[137] While Lolitina paints a heteronormative account of *Mote Kei*, it could be argued that the style may appeal to a diversity of sexual preferences.

image with what she understands *kawaii* fashion to be, which is an outlet for individuals 'more interested in themselves'. Lolitina believes that *kawaii* fashion practitioners are not dressing to please potential sexual partners, but instead are playing with fashion so as to immerse themselves in imaginary worlds and explore their sense of self.

As this thesis has demonstrated, individuals can have differing affect-based experiences of objects. While a *kawaii* fashion practitioner might look upon a fellow participant wearing a *kawaii* dress and think they are adorable, others might consider the same performance sexually attractive. How then, can we decide the meaning of such a performance? In this scenario, attribution of meaning must be clearly placed with the viewer, not with the practitioner-as-object. The meaning derived from the experience of the object cannot always be conflated with intent. Monden (2015: 126) in his monograph extensively discusses the ways in which *kawaii* fashion seeks to subvert sexualised readings, arguing that it is not 'a device to intentionally or primarily render the wearer an exclusive object of the objectifying gaze'. This is echoed in Mackie's (2009: n.p) observation that Lolita fashion uses 'frills and decoration … [to] draw attention away from the body, obscuring rather than accentuating the shape of the body, and making the clothes into an especially dense border between the body and the outside world'. At the same time however, Monden (2015: 126) also writes that irrespective of the intentions of the wearer of *kawaii* fashion, their appearance may still present itself as erotically charged through the 'intricate layers' of the clothing which 'draws attention "away" from the [body as] object'. The 'hidden' body 'might merely serve as a promise, or titillation' (Monden 2015: 126). We can attempt to control how our performance of self is received by others, but this is entirely dependent on the information and perspectives of the observer. Goffman would argue that in order for a presentation of self to be received and understood as intended by the performer, sympathetic audiences must be selected. It appears that *kawaii* fashion practitioners do not intend their performance to be for those who are sexually

attracted to their appearance. As such we must consider the intended audience of a performance before we attribute meaning to it.

Thus far, we have established that while *kawaii* fashion practitioners are aware that outsiders may interpret their clothing as a costume or as a strategy to pander to a sexualised gaze, they themselves do not perceive their practices as such. These participants privilege their own understanding of their fashion in determining whether their style is a costume or form of sexual expression over the interpretations offered by outsiders. For the remainder of this section, I will now return to the original question that opened Chapter One of this thesis: are *kawaii* fashion practitioners intending to 'dress like children' and perform the infantile? Below, I will consider responses offered by participants.

In Chapter One we discussed how some scholars view *kawaii* fashion as an expression of the infantile along with the view that participants seek to extend childhood through their clothing. Lolita fashion appears to have attracted this reading more than the other styles. For instance, Winge (2008: 59) argues that the objects used by Lolita fashion practitioners are intended to 'nonverbally communicate their childlike perspective toward the outside dominant culture'. Lunning (2011: 15) claims that Lolita fashion attempts to evoke 'the Victorian little girl'. More general critiques of *kawaii* fashion have also been offered. For instance, Kinsella (1995: 237) argues that *kawaii* culture involves 'behaving childlike' which in essence involves 'denying the existence of the wealth of insights, feelings, and humour that maturity brings with it'. Akita (2005: 44) describes her students wearing *kawaii* clothing to be playing with 'childish outfits' and performing 'infantile manners'. She considers this to be a symptom of a broader systemic problem in Japan where women are encouraged to be 'childish' and in turn submit to patriarchal oppression. This concern over the 'infantile' performance of *kawaii* fashion communities also feeds into broader anxieties around cuteness endorsing

asymmetrical gender relations in which women are depicted as submissive and immature (Koga 2009: 206-20; Akita 2005).

These views offered by scholars-as-outsiders appear to be informed by their interpretation of *kawaii* fashion from afar. In these instances, their reading of the presentation of *kawaii* fashion practitioners is conflated with the intent of the wearers. In other words, the scholar's definition of the situation may not correlate with the practitioner's understanding of the performance they are carrying out. The scholar in this instance is perhaps not the intended audience. In order to ascertain the views of *kawaii* fashion participants on this matter, I will consider responses offered by Kumamiki and 90884, both of whom use objects that carry nostalgic value to create their outfits.

Kumamiki incorporates toys into her fashion that she finds and feels are *kawaii*. In the below account she describes why she chooses these objects, with the awareness that they are 'meant for children':

> Megan: How do you pick the items for your outfits?
> Kumamiki: I like going to toy shops, such as Toys R Us. When I'm in toy
> shops I find many things I like and I think 'oh, I will use this even though it is
> for babies', or 'I like this because this is a pastel colour …'. I like pastel
> colours, so even if the item is not Fairy *kei*-like or Harajuku-like, I use them.
> Pastel colour is *kawaii* to me.

It is interesting to note Kumamiki's concession statement here – 'even though it [the object] is for babies'. This indicates that Kumamiki feels a connection with and is attached to the item despite the social pressure and stereotyping usually associated with its use if one is not a baby. Her use of 'even though' implies a sense of guilt or anticipation of social repercussions for her behaviour, but that she continues the behaviour (appropriating the object for her outfits) in spite of the

stigma. Interestingly her emphasis is on the fact she 'likes' the objects she chooses. To like something in this context implies a response that is more than an appreciative gaze, it represents the drive to then want to incorporate the object into one's own outfit as an externalisation of identity. She also acknowledges the potential difference in this behaviour compared to other participants when she states that the pastel object she has chosen might not be 'Fairy *kei*-like' or 'Harajuku-like'. She emphasises her individual experience of the pastel object in saying 'pastel is *kawaii* to *me'* (emphasis added).

Kumamiki immediately rebuts the suggestion that her outfit involves wanting to 'dress as a child'. Her answer is follows:

> I don't want to stay being a child. It is not what I want to. Do you know Peter Pan Syndrome? Is that a thing overseas, too? It is not that I want to stay as a child … When I was a child I thought it was not exciting to become an adult. I saw salarymen on the train who seemed disappointed … I didn't want to be that kind of adult and I wanted to stay as a child at the time. But after I've grown up I met many interesting adults. I found that those interesting adults have something childish in their mind. I mean, they can say freely what they think. They like what they like. So I've come to think that I want to realise a world where people can express any kind of feelings and where they can say what they like. So I'm saying that people should be free to wear anything they like to.

Here Kumamiki offers a very complex and nuanced response that acknowledges that during her childhood she did not wish to 'grow up', but that this desire was cast aside once she reached maturity. In the opening part of her response, Kumamiki cites Peter Pan Syndrome in trying to describe how she views the attribution that she might wish to 'stay being a child'. Peter Pan Syndrome is a diagnosis in pop-psychology for individuals who find themselves unable to grow

into maturity.[138] In this case she associates this issue with the desire to 'stay being a child' which she quite clearly states is not the case for her.

In explaining why she does not wish to prolong childhood into adulthood, Kumamiki describes the process of her maturation where, as a child, she was afraid of change and the entry into adult life which she perceived at the time to be disappointing. What informed her view at the time was the prevalence of solemn or depressed countenances of salarymen (a Japanese word used to refer to male company employees, written as *sarariiman*/サラリーマン) on public transport. In later parts of the passage where she describes aspects of adult life that she did not know about at the time, we can see that she had associated adulthood with the inability to 'say what one likes' or to 'like' whatever they please. She further describes her view of adulthood during the time she was a child to be without 'freedom'. In maturing, what Kumamiki came to realise through experience is that adults have the potential to exercise freedom and pursue their interests and express their opinions. Here she describes this discovery with a sense of wonder by calling these individuals 'interesting'. So now that she is an adult, with greater power than a child, Kumamiki wishes to encourage others to follow her lead in wearing what she likes.

If we return to the passage, we can see what else she ascribes to this freedom, we can see that as an adult she still partially associates this freedom with childhood. Firstly, we can see that she describes the interesting adults she has met in her adult life as having 'something childish in their mind'; and secondly, this quality is not present in all adults, for instance the disappointed salarymen on the train. This reveals that for Kumamiki the freedom to like, think and feel with abandon is something that is afforded to children, but not to adults. If we consider how *kawaii* fashion can be seen as a faux pas by outsiders, we can infer from this that the

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[138] For more information, see Kiley (1983) and Yeoman (1998).

prescribed 'adult' role is suppressed in front stage environments. That is to say that adults are expected to not to act and speak freely in front of others. Kumamiki, however, does not want to extend childhood, but she wants freedom to be afforded to both children *and* adults.

If we return to Winge's (2008) account of why *kawaii* fashion might seek to prolong childhood with Kumamiki's response in mind, we can see that Winge also views adulthood as something that is devoid of freedom. Particularly, Winge (2008: 59) describes the 'compassion and interest' that she perceives 'dominant culture' to offer in response to seeing *kawaii* fashion practitioners to indicate that 'dominant culture' collectively has 'nostalgia for a past era and a desire to escape adult responsibilities for the carefree days of youth'. Here, we can see that she attributes freedom from responsibility and the ability to be carefree with childhood, which she believes is expressed through the clothing of the *Kawaii* fashion practitioner. With reference to Kumamiki's above understanding of freedom and childhood, we can see that this account is not inaccurate. Kumamiki wants to use her outfits and designs to encourage other adults to be free. However, critically, Kumamiki does not want this embracing of freedom to be considered as an act of regression into childhood, but as an act of agency and power. While Winge's account is not incorrect in this sense, the issue lies in her inference that the outsider-as-observer plays a crucial role in the expression of this freedom akin to the indulgent adult watching their child play. For instance, in the same passage, Winge (2008: 59) describes the observers in 'dominant culture' as individuals who 'could be interpreted as playing the parental role'. Here *kawaii* fashion is perceived to be a performance in which the practitioner requires nurturing and care. In this child role, the practitioner is perceived to be submissive. If considered in conjunction with Koga's (2009) and Akita's (2005) reading of *kawaii* and women, it implies that the practitioner essentially denies her own agency as a woman. I would argue that while cuteness involves feelings of love and adoration, participants – as Lolitina described – dress for themselves, not for the gaze of a 'dominant culture'. By

transforming their fantasies into a fashion style that is then worn in their daily life, fashion manifests as an expression of self-love. In this sense this freedom is not 'childish' at all, but is a bold assertion in the face of the perceived futility of adult life.

To end this chapter, I shall return to a response from 90884, which was used in the opening of this thesis. 90884 offers the following account of the lifestyle of outsiders and of *kawaii* fashion participants:

> Ordinary Japanese people always think about work or study. They think they should do something or they must not do something. But here, there are many fun people whose way of thinking is different from others. Harajuku is different from other towns. Things sold here, the people who are walking here … their life style is different and strange. Different from the usual. I have come to like Harajuku because it is fun.

In this account, the outsiders ('ordinary Japanese people') think about the things that are associated with their social roles – for instance, that they must apply themselves as students or employees 'always think[ing] about work and study'. For 90884, participants in *Kawaii* fashion communities (which she connects to Harajuku as a place) do not think about or adhere to these prescribed roles alone. *Kawaii* fashion practitioners dream up new roles and situations, living their life in a way that is 'different'. The reinvention of prescribed roles in *kawaii* fashion communities may cause confusion or embarrassment for outsiders, who can only tolerate more traditional situations such as wearing mainstream fashion in public spaces, but for 90884, this 'strangeness' and freedom to reinvent the rules is exciting and fun.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how and why 'hostile' encounters between *kawaii* fashion practitioners and outsiders occur, using Goffman's concept of the faux pas and Huizinga's writings on the importance of order in play. In summary, perceived acts of hostility towards the participant cause unease and temporarily reminds them of the original separation they felt towards the *kawaii* 'not-me' objects they admired. In order to reduce this anxiety, some participants decide to spread awareness to outsiders of their fashion, in turn relinquishing some of the secrecy that surrounds the play in *kawaii* fashion communities. A limitation of this research is that we cannot know for sure the rationale behind the spectator's actions without consulting them. Further research into non-practitioner attitudes towards *kawaii* fashion is required.

To conclude this chapter, I also addressed three examples of misreadings of *kawaii* fashion style (which were introduced in Chapter One). These are that *kawaii* fashion is costume, that it is worn to attract a sexualised gaze, and that *kawaii* fashion practitioners are infantile and wish to prolong childhood. By using interview responses from participants in this research, I have determined that they themselves do not view their fashion practices as cosplay, an expression of a sexual fetish or as childish. This highlights the complex nature of the performance of self given that sometimes the performance is interpreted in ways that are different from the expectations or desires of the performer.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis we have sought to examine the role that emotion and imagination plays in the creation of *kawaii* outfits worn by individuals in Harajuku, Tokyo. This study sought to interpret *kawaii* fashion from the perspective of the practitioners themselves so as to understand the ways *kawaii* fashion acts as a process of meaning making and exploration of the self. This thesis aimed to determine how the self is expressed in *kawaii* fashion communities through the use of objects, and to understand the meaning making processes of *kawaii* fashion communities. Through the use of Winnicott's (2005) *Playing and Reality*, Goffman's (1990) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and Huizinga's (1950) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture,* this thesis also aimed to develop a sympathetic understanding of a group that is not expressly political in its self-understanding. This thesis sought to achieve these aims through close readings of qualitative interviews conducted during 2013 and 2014, with 20 participants and designers aged from 17 to 50. This thesis focusses on the answers of eight participants – 90884, Kumamiki, Doll Classica, Alice, Lolitina, Tiara, a Lolita designer label and Pink Hime – whose answers were generalisable across the sample size of this study but who also provide an in-depth account of the individual experience of *kawaii* fashion, which is nuanced for each participant.

In the process of exploring who *kawaii* fashion practitioners are in this thesis, we have primarily focussed on who they want to be. The key factor that shapes the creation of *kawaii* fashion outfits in this context is an experience of what Winnicott describes as the 'not-me'. Participants attempt to become this 'not-me' through what Goffman would identify as a performance of self. In doing so *kawaii* fashion practitioners play with feelings that Winnicott calls 'separation' and 'union'. Both Winnicott and Goffman's theories have been used as heuristic devices to explore the fluid nature of the self and its multifacted nature.

Kawaii fashion practitioners experience affect towards objects that they consider 'kawaii'. This experience of difference between the self and the object is exciting and affirming, but also marked with a sense of sadness. The difference between the individual and the object presents new potential for the self at the same time that it exposes a sense of lack. Participants admire and adore these *kawaii* objects and in turn wish that others might adore them as well. Underlying the process of making these outfits is an exploration of self and a longing to be admired and accepted by others.

Sociology offers new insights into this complex phenomenon through an exploration of the self and the social in *kawaii* fashion communities. By studying *kawaii* fashion communities through a sociological lens, we have learnt that *kawaii* as a concept is more complex than current research suggests. Its meaning is not singular, but is premised on the subjective experience of an object. *Kawaii* is not just an aesthetic category but an affective experience of bodies in relation to objects. In the context of *kawaii* fashion communities, *kawaii* objects enable participants to feel elated and excited. The encounter with the object inspires the imagination. *Kawaii* involves a process of play and experimentation with separation and union between the 'not-me' object and the individual. *Kawai*i is experienced in the imagination and in the process of making, purchasing and assembling outfits. *Kawaii* also involves affirmation from others along with the acknowledgement that one is worthy of adoration. It involves being seen and praised.

For Sociologists, *kawaii* fashion communities present an interesting opportunity to explore the emotional dimensions of experience, in particular those experiences that involve an attraction to some*thing* that is beyond ourselves. In their exploration of self through fashion, *Kawaii* fashion offers participants an opportunity to self-actualise and experience happiness. This is what Goffman describes as 'becoming our best self'. This experience, however, is also interwoven with feelings of lack, separation, difference and the limitations of reality. This thesis

also provides an alternative way to study groupings of people who seek to explore alternatives to their everyday lives, without assuming that strategies of resistance to mainstream cultures are the focal point of the group's practices and activities.

This thesis sought to explore the personal significance of objects chosen to be worn by *kawaii* fashion participants. I sought to understand what informs participants' choice of particular objects to incorporate into their style and to determine how *kawaii* objects reflect a practitioner's sense of self and identity. Through close readings of responses from *kawaii* fashion participants interviewed for this research, I have argued that participants are emotionally moved by objects which they call '*kawaii*'. These experiences – which I call affect – can involve physiological symptoms such as a 'fluttering heart' but also feelings of excitement, interest, fascination and wonder. Individuals might see in this object something of their past, like a pleasant memory of a leisurely breakfast, something surprising or novel in nature or something the participant wishes they could be. These individuals feel adoration towards these objects because they inspire a different sense of self. They present the individual with an instance of separation of the self from the world as a 'not-me' object. The object also presents new potential for the self as something that inspires the individual to become closer to it in spirit and reality. The *kawaii* object can thus eradicate the sense of separateness that it initially presents.

In order to explore what it might be like to become like this *kawaii* 'not-me' object, *kawaii* fashion practitioners engage in play through imagining, making, consuming and assembling things which combine the current self with the new. In doing so the individual takes on qualities of the 'not-me' whilst maintaining aspects of their previous self. Participants experience the power of potential, and exercise it in the creation of a new self. By incorporating these objects into their everyday lives, the individual is able to carry these feelings of potential with them. This new self is then presented to observers through the participant wearing their outfit in public.

The appearance of these *kawaii* fashion outfits is further modified by individuals who anticipate being observed by others. This modification is carried out to increase participants' chances of being affirmed by other participants as *kawaii*. Initially, the individual anticipates the expectations of an observer which then influences the performance of self. This performance includes behaviours such as an emphasis on the originality of their *kawaii* fashion outfits, modelling clothing in photography or using cosmetics to enhance their appearance. This presentation is modified through the communication of expectations and rules in the *kawaii* fashion community. These rules maintain order and to enable members to discern who is and who is not a participant. While participants may decide to not follow the rules and thus not participate in the play unfolding in the community, others will comply in order to be accepted.

This thesis has also sought to understand how *kawaii* fashion communities come into being and how participants come together. Primarily participants seek out others who share a love of *kawaii*, who then in turn validate and affirm their experiences. When an individual meets other participants, they expect to be affirmed as *kawaii* through praise. This establishes what Goffman describes as the definition of the situation between individuals. In turn, the observer is required to discern the performance, and then recognise that they are expected to affirm the performer. This creates what Huizinga calls the 'tension' of play in the group, as there is a chance that the individual might not present a sense of self that is discernibly *kawaii*. This is complicated by the fact that *kawaii* is a subjective experience, and individuals might have different ideas of what is and is not recognisably *kawaii*. As such, aesthetic rules in the community are formed to create a sense of order and facilitate the recognisability of participants. These are often realised through style categories, such as Lolita fashion, Fairy *kei,* Decora fashion and *Hime Deko*. While there is a tension that arises from trying to appear *kawaii* for others, participants are able to increase their chances of 'winning' by following these rules. If an individual does not follow the rules and continues to present a

288

flawed performance for other participants-as-observers, the audience might try to give the performer 'hints' as to how their performance could be improved. Participants are guided to adhere to the rules by strategies such as 'gatekeeping' or 'ejecting' the participant from the play as it unfolds. This reflects Huizinga's notion of play as an activity that forms social worlds through rules which guide the action.

Through rules of play, the *kawaii* fashion participants are able to develop a sense of stylistic coherency as a group. 'Outsiders' are those who do not partake in this kind of play and who are unaware of the rules. They often threaten the stability of the play space and participants' sense of self by challenging their interpretation of the objects incorporated into *kawaii* style. Outsiders may act upon their understanding of the definition of the situation through behaviours such as giving compliments or praise. They might exercise what Goffman describes as 'tact' and perform a lack of awareness of the participant's presence. Or, they might seek to re-assert the definition of the situation they believe ought to be occurring through acts that could be described as 'hostile'. Hostile reactions from outsiders appeared to affect participants the most and provoke feelings of uneasiness. In so doing, participants are temporarily returned to their original sense of lack. Through the rejection of their performed sense of self, participants experience feelings of separation that were originally experienced towards the 'not-me' object they admired. As such, affirmation from other participants plays a key role in validating their *kawaii* sense of self.

Participants might also seek to promote understanding of *kawaii* fashion so as to increase their chances of being recognised and affirmed by outsiders. In particular, participants sought to correct misreadings of *kawaii* fashion such as those who think it is a form of cosplay, a sexualised form of appeal, or an attempt to regress into childhood. Concerns participants felt about these misreadings revealed that participants were keen for others to understand that their fashion was not a costume worn temporarily, but an everyday expression of their self; that they were

not intending to dress in a way that might appear sexually attractive for others; and that they were seeking to celebrate cuteness and creativity as adults, rather than to regress into childhood. The discrepancy that can emerge between the intention behind the performance of self that individuals carry out and the interpretation that observers form highlights how the observer's context and pre-existing knowledge can inform their views of the individual's presentation of self. As such, while we can say that the interpretations outsiders hold of *kawaii* fashion participants cannot be controlled, some reflexivity on the outsider's part is required when trying to form accurate or sympathetic views of the *kawaii* fashion practitioner's intent.

Consequently, it is important to consult kawaii fashion participants for an informed understanding of their choice in clothing. This thesis contributes to current scholarship on *kawaii* fashion by narrowing the gap between those accounts of the community from afar and the practitioners' own views. This reveals a disparity between the views that scholars as outsiders can form of *kawaii* fashion when studying the community from afar and the practitioners' view of themselves. While both accounts of the community can exist in their own right, one must be cautious not to conflate one's own readings of *kawaii* fashion with the intent of the wearer themselves. As Dorothy Smith (1990: 121) notes, in order to understand the intended meaning communicated by individuals and the texts they used, we need to refer to the 'interpretative practices and schemata' that the group itself uses.

This thesis offers some interesting implications for our understanding of femininity as a practice. We might recall Smith's observation that femininity is a text and that we must explore how it is engaged with and used by women themselves. In the case of *kawaii* fashion communities, there are interesting connections between their wish to be adored and the 'feminine' nature of some of the objects they choose to engage with. In particular, our analysis of dolls and princesses as objects in Chapter Three provided interesting sites of study with regard to how women can

pick and choose the aspects of femininity that appeal to them. The feminine aspects selected by participants in these texts were elements of glamour, pampering, luxury and leisure, but left behind other less favourable attributes such as the passivity and immobility of a doll. Likewise, with the use of cosmetics, participants were able to play and experiment creatively to transform the self. One of the implications of this study is that it is impossible to sever less favourable attributes from more favourable ones in the practice of femininity. For instance, in Chapter Four we explored how these feminine texts carry ideas of beauty with them, and that this results in the comparison between the body and the ideal image. As a result women objectify and critique their own bodies. As affirmation is central to *kawaii* fashion communities, these comparative behaviours may be amplified. That is to say, that the practitioner may not only compare their body to ideals of beauty, but also to the expectations of the community. This has the potential to have a negative impact on the self for participants if they lack the confidence to value the self beyond these ideals and expectations. However, it is important to note the agency of these women in creatively engaging with the texts, taking the good with the bad. Furthermore, there were other objects that appealed to participants that would not be considered particularly gendered, such as Kumamiki's memory of Sunday breakfast and 90884's interest in 1980s technology. Further research on *kawaii* fashion communities and their use of feminine texts and non-feminine texts would be required to explore this line of enquiry more fully.

Aside from the use of femininity as text, there are many other aspects of *kawaii* fashion communities that require further study to fully understand. For instance, it would be interesting to reflect on queer groupings who engage with *kawaii* fashion to experiment with gender performance. The style categories we have discussed in this thesis could be examined in this context as well as in others such a 'prince style'. There are many other styles of *kawaii* fashion that this thesis has not addressed, such as Cult Party *kei*, *Larme kei*, *Otome* Fashion, *Menhara* and more. New styles regularly appear in the Harajuku area, including fashion which does not

identify as *kawaii* such as *Shironuri* or Aristocrat Style.[139] More research into the diversity of fashion communities in the area is required. Furthermore, while Lolita Fashion has received notable attention in recent research, other styles such as Decora fashion, Fairy *kei* and *Hime Deko* require dedicated studies of their own to more fully understand the views and practices of participants. There are also *kawaii* fashion communities outside of Japan across the globe, and so it would be of interest to see the theoretical model established in this thesis applied to other cultural contexts. For instance, do these individuals also experience *kawaii* objects as different from their sense of self, and if so, what is the nature of that difference?

As Harajuku has become a popular area for tourism, the area is also becoming increasingly commercialised, so studies of how the cultural industry has affected the area would help us to further understand if the creative and social elements of *kawaii* fashion communities will be subject to change over the coming generations. Additionally, this thesis primarily focussed on individuals who wear *kawaii* fashion. There is a subset of individuals in the community who participate by making *kawaii* fashion for others to wear, but do not wear it themselves. It would be interesting to see how the act of making and selling clothing formulates into this thesis's discussion of the performance of self.

Finally, the reproducibility of the theoretical model this thesis puts forward ought to be tested through studies of other communities. This could include a re-examination of well-studied groupings such as Goth or Punk communities, but also could include other less-studied groupings such as doll artist and doll collector communities, craft circle meetings and more.

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[139] *Shironuri* refers to a fashion style that is part of the alternative live music scene, where white body paint is applied and an array of fashion styles are worn. Aristocrat Style refers to a subset of the Gothic fashion inspired by Victorian and Rococo fashion.

To conclude this thesis, I will now close with some final remarks on *kawaii* fashion communities and some thoughts for consideration. Primarily I wish to speak to the value of *kawaii* fashion for practitioners in their search for the self and their desire to belong.

Now that our investigation of how the self is explored in *kawaii* fashion communities has come to a close, we might consider whether the self can truly be found through this process of creativity. For the activities around *kawaii* fashion are premised on pursuing what we are not rather than accepting what we are. Winnicott (2005: 73) writes that while 'a successful artist may be universally acclaimed' for the merit of their work, they can still fail 'to find the self that he or she is looking for'. For Winnicott (2005: 73) the self is not found in 'products of body or mind'. Continuously experimenting with new potentials of self through play temporarily fulfils the individual but 'never heals the underlying lack of sense of self' (Winnicott 2005: 73). With this wisdom in mind, it can be argued that *kawaii* fashion participants may enjoy making and wearing outfits, but this process will never resolve the sense of lack they felt in the first instance. As a psychotherapist, Winnicott considers that this can only be achieved through therapy, but perhaps another perspective of how this could be achieved is through an increased awareness of other ways of finding the self. Furthermore through an increased awareness that one's sense of worth does not have to be determined by the approval of others, the self is able to emerge. In doing so, creativity can be enjoyed without the heavy investment of one's ego and worth.

This vulnerability and search for the self, however, is not unique to *kawaii* fashion practitioners, but is arguably part of us all. Goffman (1990: 151) writes that '[b]ehind the many masks and many characters' we all wear 'a single look, a naked unsocialized look' of one 'who is privately engaged in a difficult treacherous task'. Every day in our presentation of self to others, we put forward our best selves in the hope that our performance will be accepted by others. Sometimes we become

invested in the performance and believe this is our 'true self'. Beneath the performance, however, is the same vulnerability and the same struggles. Beneath the mask is an individual who agonises over who they are and who they could be or ought to be. In the case of *kawaii* fashion communities, their search for self is processed and performed through fashion.

Kawaii fashion communities are also valuable for participants as they provide a space in which individuals can feel accepted, even if this is part of the performance. While some aspects of the community, such as the pressure to conform to rules, might interfere with the creativity of the individual, there is something special about sharing creative experiences with others. Huizinga (1950: 12) writes of the experiential value of play between individuals, even after it ceases. It enables individuals to take away 'the feeling of being "apart together" through the fact they were able to come together and share "something important"' (Huzinga 1950: 12). This feeling of belonging retains its 'magic' beyond the duration of the individual game (Huzinga 1950: 12). In *kawaii* fashion practitioners' search for self through their fashion, they have found each other. The social world they build together through play enables them, in some way at least, to feel that they are worthy of adoration. On this note of the creation of social worlds, I will conclude with a comment from Pink Hime:

> Megan: Why do you want to be *kawaii*?
> Pink Hime: Maybe … we cannot find the world that glitters, although it seems that it exists somewhere. I would like to create something like that. Not so many people belong to that world. So I wanted to make it by myself.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Lolita Fashion, Decora Fashion, Fairy *Kei* and *Hime Deko*

This appendix provides an overview of the four styles discussed in this study – Lolita fashion, Decora fashion, Fairy *kei* and *Hime Deko*. This thesis explores how fashions are formed individually by *kawaii* fashion participants (Chapters Two to Four) but also how these styles are modified due to social expectations that participants appear in a way that is discernible (Chapter Five). This requirement of discernibility in the community results in individual fashion choices aggregating into specific style categories. To facilitate a clear understanding of what each style is, the below descriptions present a generalised aggregate picture of the styles, rather than focussing on the individual participant's views of these styles which are the main focus of this thesis.

Lolita fashion is a mode of dress characterised by a bell-shaped skirt, blouse, round-toed shoes and headdress. Designers such as BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT, Angelic Pretty and Innocent World produce garments with new textile prints each month with motifs such as Alice in Wonderland, sweets, vampires, antique toys and even those taken from English Literature such as Lord Alfred Tennyson's (1894; originally published 1832) Lady of Shalott. Despite this diversity in print motifs, the garments exhibit a similar form. Consequently, a range of distinct Lolita 'genres' such as Gothic, Sweet and Classic have emerged. Gothic Lolita was the 'original' Lolita fashion look, and is still characterised by a dark colour palette, in particular blacks, reds and blues, and features textile prints with themes such as Gothic architecture, dark fairy-tales, or roses. Sweet Lolita is characterised by pastel colours and motifs such as desserts, animals, chocolates, carousels, and moons and

stars. Classic Lolita style uses colours that are much quieter, calmer and more demure than Gothic or Sweet and sometimes feature motifs of old world books, antique toys and dolls, and muted florals.

It is a common misconception for Westerners to look at the name 'Lolita' and compare it to Vladimir Nabokov's (1955) book, *Lolita*. This text tells the story of Humbert Humbert (an older man) and his attraction to a prepubescent girl called Dolores, whom he nicknames 'Lolita'. The term used in the novel for those prepubescent girls Humbert Humbert finds attractive is 'nymphet'. Returning to Lolita fashion, some argue that participants are attempting to perform the role of Nabokov's nymphet, even though the majority of the participants do not identify with this role (Kawamura 2012; Nguyen 2016; Younker 2011). One must consider that the character, Dolores, in Nabokov's novel is a tomboy and would not have enjoyed wearing the spectacular fashion of Lolita, and also that the unreliable narration throughout the book makes it unclear if Dolores is responsive to Humbert Humbert's advances.[140] Moreover, since 2000 at least two non-standard ways of writing the word have been used to distinguish it from related fetishes (Gagnè 2008: 120-150).

One important figure to consider is Novala Takemoto. Takemoto's (2004) novel *Rorīta* (trans. Lolita) depicts a male narrator who vehemently opposes the conflation of Lolita fashion with the *rorikon* (trans. Lolita complex; designates an attraction to prepubescent girls) only to find himself falling in love with a primary school girl. On one hand, *Rorīta*, appears to challenge the idea that Lolita fashion is not a performance for the male gaze. Certainly, it is important to acknowledge that Takemoto's writings and his interest in Lolita fashion represent one perspective, one that is heavily shaped by a veneration and worship of the 'perfect Lolita' he seeks to capture in his novels and essays. Takemoto has also contributed to the

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[140] For more information on current debates around Dolores' characterisation in *Lolita* (1955) see Rabinowitz (2007).

Gothic and Lolita Bible as an essayist and wrote *Shimotsuma Monogatari*
(Takemoto 2002), a text which he subsequently claims allowed Lolita fashion to
enter into the popular imagination (Takemoto 2017: 120). Takemoto describes
himself as a 'producer of Lolita fashion' and is currently working on a book on the
fashion's history (Takemoto 2017: 120). Takemoto (2017: 118) identifies as a
heterosexual man who wears Lolita fashion himself.

Younker (2011: 107) in her study of Lolita fashion notes the role that 'middle-aged
men' have played in shaping the Lolita fashion cultural industry. She cites not only
Takemoto, but also Isobe Akinori, director of BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT and
Sakamura the CEO and designer of Mary Magdelene. Younker (2011: 107) writes
that her participants were surprised to learn that Takemoto was a 'straight, middle-
aged man' however this should not take away from Takemoto's contribution to
Lolita fashion through his writings.[141]

Most of the participants interviewed for this research were unaware of Nabokov's
novel and did not identify with the claim that they performed the role of nymphet.
Many participants indicated that they simply thought the sound of the word 'Lolita'
was cute and did not incorporate the nymphet into their definition of the style. For
instance, the Vice President of the Designer label interviewed for this study
describes Lolita fashion as 'something extraordinary in ordinary life' and Doll
Classica describes it as something that made her life 'twinkle' with delight.

While the origins of the Lolita fashion's name are unclear, there are some theories,
the most common being that the name was adopted as *wasei-eigo* (trans. a
Japanese word or phrase that is made from English words) magazine spreads for
the publication *Zipper* (1993-2018), which contributed to the popularisation of

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[141] It could be argued that Takemoto's writings are an attempt to play with his own 'not-me' through fiction (a concept explored in
Chapter Three), but in turn involves an objectification of other Lolita fashion practitioners themselves as tools for his own artistic
experimentation. Further research into this role of 'middle-aged men' in Lolita fashion is required.

pastel fashion in Harajuku. One observation I would make is that the etymology of the name 'Dolores' means 'lady of sorrows'[142] which reflects the dark themes of Lolita fashion's origins in the Romantic Gothic community in Osaka and Tokyo over the 1980s and 1990s. The name may also have been chosen because it contributed to the original 'edgy' look of Lolita which formed part of the Goth clubbing and Visual *kei* music scenes in the 1990s.

In contrast to Lolita fashion styles, Fairy *kei* and Decora fashion to date have very few design houses (examples being 6% DOKI DOKI, Nile Perch, Spank!).[143] As both styles have some key similarities and origins, they are sometimes difficult to distinguish. Both styles rely on a tradition of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and upcycling activities. These upcycling activities involve converting found objects into accessories, for instance attaching a vintage Barbie Doll's head to a chain and wearing it as a necklace, or gluing a tiny plastic frog toy decorated with ribbons to a ring to wear. Outfits are formed from a combination of new and second-hand clothing sourced from department stores, or the few existing boutiques or second-hand stores such as *Kinji* in Harajuku. Popular items include oversized vintage t-shirts and sweaters, bright American sports jackets from the 1980s, striped socks and platform shoes.

Decora fashion and Fairy *kei* both emerged from the 1990s DIY culture associated with Harajuku, which was documented by *FRUiTS* magazine (developed in 1997 and led by photographer Shoichi Aoki). These styles also stem from *Hade-ko* style (trans. loud kids) which is characterised by mismatching bright colours, layers of accessories, coloured hair and hand-made and thrifted items. Decora fashion and Fairy *kei* possess similar elements such as the use of hand-made accessories and

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[142] See Hanks, Hardcastle and Hodges (2006).

[143] For more information, see 6% DOKI DOKI (2018), Nile Perch (2018) and Spank! (2018).

the sourcing of second hand clothing but are distinguished from *Hade-ko* Fashion by the use of short tutu skirts, called 'panniers'.

The key differences between Decora fashion and Fairy *kei* are the length of panniers, motifs and colour palettes. Fairy *kei* panniers tend to be knee length, whereas Decora fashion's tutus stop mid-thigh. While Decora fashion retained *Hade-ko* Fashion's use of vivid colour, Fairy *kei* uses softer palettes and has a greater focus on thrifting 1980s American childhood paraphernalia (in particular Carebears, My Little Pony and Barbie). Decora style is affiliated with Sebastian Masuda's Harajuku boutique 6% DOKI DOKI, founded in 1995, whereas Fairy *kei*'s look was primarily solidified through the formation in 2004 of Sayuri Tabuchi's thrift and hand-made goods store Spank! which sells vintage clothing sourced from America. Fairy *kei* has been further shaped by Nile Perch which sells new clothing such as baby doll dresses, oversized knitwear, oversized t-shirts and hand-made accessories, all in pastel tones.

Hime Deko style emerged in the early 2000s and is characterised by an overload of pink, sparkling accessories. The dress style of this fashion is diverse in terms of cut and length, and as such the key staple to the style is the excessive adornment of glittering hand embellished accessories, covered in pink lace and crystals. Due to its association with Shibuya's *Hime Gyaru* (princess girl) style, it has links not only to the aforementioned *kawaii* boutiques of Harajuku, but also to the *Gyaru* style, in Shibuya that has changed its 'look' every generation since the 1970s (Arai 2009).

Appendix 2: Introducing the Key Participants in this Thesis

While 20 qualitative interviews were conducted for this thesis project, there are eight key participants whose responses have been interwoven throughout the analytical discussion in this thesis. This appendix provides an overview of these participants (who chose their own pseudonyms) in terms of their relation to the *kawaii* fashion community and a consideration of the particular *kawaii* style genre they identify with.

Lolitina is a model who wears Lolita fashion in her personal time and in her professional life. With experience as a model for tourist campaigns initiated by Japan, Lolitina aspires to be an ambassador of Lolita fashion who connects with practitioners from all over the world. While Lolitina originally encountered the fashion through her line of work, she has come to love the style and wears it as part of her daily life.

Doll Classica is also a model who wears Lolita fashion in her personal time as well as for her profession. Inspired by images of Lolitina in print media, Doll Classica decided to experiment with Lolita fashion due to her personal interest in 'old world' aesthetics found in, for example, the manga *Berusaiyu no Bara* (Ikeda 1972-1974) and other Occidental paraphernalia including French bisque dolls. Doll Classica has appeared in specialist *kawaii* magazines, *KERA* and the *Gothic and Lolita Bible*, and has also published cosmetic style manuals for *kawaii* fashion practitioners.

Lolita Designer is a Lolita fashion designer with stores open across Japan. Originally opening as a casual *kawaii* brand in Shinjuku targeting 'working women' in the 80s, this designer reconceptualised itself as a Lolita brand so its in-house designers could to experiment with more extravagant styles. Today this designer is influential in the community due to its number of stores, and its tendency to experiment with a Lolita aesthetic that is 'elegant' and 'princessy.' This Lolita Designer also employs

Lolitina and Doll Classica as models for print media advertisements. For this thesis, an interview with the current Vice President has been used. The Vice President has been involved with the designer label since its establishment, and plays a key role in overseeing a small design team, branding (such as photoshoots for print materials) and day to day operations. While the Vice President does not wear Lolita fashion, she herself has designed her own textile prints for dresses sold by the label.

Alice wears Lolita fashion, but does not participate in the cultural industry as the above three participants do. As a wearer of Lolita fashion, Alice assembles her own *kawaii* fashion ensembles as part of her daily life, and has a particular leaning towards Gothic and Punk trends. At the time of her interview in 2014, Alice was 16 years old.

90884 is a fashion model and identifies as a 'Decora Girl'. 90884 is also an illustrator and has been involved in designing her own clothing lines and collaborating with fashion designers. 90884 has been a participant of *kawaii* fashion communities since the age of 16, and since then has appeared in *kawaii* print media, and has also modelled for a range of *kawaii* fashion brands. Recently 90884 has taken on the role as lead singer of an emerging Japanese Pop band.

Kumamiki is a young artist involved in various projects including the production of hand-made accessories, producing her own kimono line. She currently provides professional content for a *kawaii* YouTube channel. She resists identifying with any one style genre, but has primarily experimented with what is known as Fairy *kei*.

Pink Hime is an accessory designer, who hand decorates necklaces, bracelets, rings, hair bows, shoes and bags (as well as home goods) with pink lace, pink plastic charms and Swarovski crystals. Her goods are sold in various boutiques in Tokyo, however she feels a particular affinity to Harajuku, having frequented there since

her teenage years (working in a local restaurant). Pink Hime is the oldest participant interviewed, and as such is one of the most experienced and sophisticated in the assemblage of her *kawaii* fashion style. Her creations have been very influential for the *Hime Deko* style genre.

Tiara is a fashion designer who has recently opened her own boutique in Shinjuku. Tiara also resists classification in any one genre, but through her friendship with Pink Hime, she incorporates *Hime Deko* elements into her style. Tiara's look is very closely aligned with *Hime Deko*, as her designs are predominantly pink, extravagant with princess-like elements, and involve the excessive layering of glittering accessories. One unique trait of Tiara's style is the incorporation of the traditional kimono into her collections, worn interchangeably with *robe à la française* style dresses which she sews by hand. Tiara has also performed with Japanese Pop bands.

Appendix 3: Sample Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Can you describe your outfit today?

Can you describe how you put this outfit together?

Where did you find the things used for your outfit?

How do you pick the items for your outfits?

What inspires your fashion style?

Why do you wear *kawaii* fashion?

What does *kawaii* mean to you?

What is your involvement in the *kawaii* fashion community?

What is the importance of *kawaii* fashion communities?

Appendix 4: Words Used by Participants to Refer to Themselves and Others in the *Kawaii* Fashion Community:

Studies such as those conducted by Gagne (2008) and Nguyen (2016) have revealed the significance of how *kawaii* fashion practitioners linguistically refer to themselves and their peers. Gagne found that the participants in his study were using *gosurori* to distinguish Lolita fashion from *loli-kon* (trans. Lolita Complex; involves sexualisation of prepubescent girls) and Nguyen found that participants identified more as *otome* than *shōjo*. In order to contribute to this discussion, I would like to present the terminology used by participants in this research to refer to themselves and non-participants. In particular, I would like to highlight the different uses of girl, person, and *shōjo*. Participants did not refer to themselves as 'women' (for instance by using *onna no hito*). More research on the use of language in the community is required.

Terminology Used by Kawaii Fashion Practitioners Who Participated in this Research

Terminology	Romaji Version	English Translation	Notes
ロリータの女の子	*Rorīta no onna no ko*	Lolita Girl	
ロリータファッション	*Rorīta fasshon*	Lolita fashion	
ロリータ	*Rorīta*	Lolita	Used as an abbreviation for Lolita fashion.
ロリータちゃん	*Rorīta- chan*	Miss Lolita	Connotation of endearment.
ロリータさん	*Rorīta-san*	Ms Lolita	Connotation of respect.

ロリータの人	*Rorīta no hito*	Lolita people	
少女っぽい	*Shōjo ppoi*	Girly or 'Girl-like'	
一般の女の子	*Ippan no onna no ko*	Girls in general	Used to refer to women who are non-participants.
デコラファッション	*Dekora fasshon*	Decora fashion	
デコラ	*Dekora*	Decora	Used as an abbreviation for Decora fashion.
フェアリーっぽかったり	*Fearī ppokattari*	Fairy-like	
フェアリーファッション	*Fearī Fasshon*	*Fearī fasshon*	
フェアリー系	*Fearī kei*	Fairy style	
原宿っぽいファッション	*Harajuku ppoi fasshon*	Harajuku-like fashion	
原宿ファッション	*Harajuku fasshon*	Harajuku fashion	
ヒメデコ	*Himedeko*	Princess decoration	
人	*Hito*	Person	Used to refer to participants and non-participants, interchangeably with 'girls'.

Appendix 5: Research Outputs Related to this Thesis

The following article draws upon parts of Chapter Two.

The publication details are as follows: *Rose, M (2018)* 'My heart fluttered: affect and emotion in *kawaii* fashion communities', *TAASA REVIEW*, 27 (1)

'MY HEART FLUTTERED': AFFECT AND EMOTION IN *KAWAII* FASHION COMMUNITIES

Megan Catherine Rose

Kawaii (cute) fashion communities in Tokyo offer a unique opportunity to explore the role that affect and emotion play in the creation of unique fashion styles. 'Kawaii fashion communities' is a term I use to describe individuals who engage in creative style making in order to explore cuteness. The style is more widely known as Harajuku fashion after an upmarket suburb where the fashion emerged in the 1970s, although its adherents have drifted away from this specific geographical area in Tokyo.

To date, *kawaii* fashion has been studied for its aesthetic value from the perspective of the researcher-as-outsider. This perspective tends to neglect the way Harajuku girls create their identities and experience emotion as a central component of their style. Many studies of cuteness focus on formal design properties through textual readings of the cute object. These discussions seek to understand how cute objects induce caregiving behaviours, thereby creating a power discrepancy between object and subject (Sherman and Haidt 2011; Ngai 2012; Dale, J, Goggin, J, Leyda, J et al. 2017).

My own study in this area rather privileges an interpretation of *kawaii* style from the participant's perspective, with an emphasis on their emotional experiences of their fashion style. It explores the emotional significance of *kawaii* for Harajuku girls, and how their fashion style provides space for them to experiment creatively with that which is both soothingly familiar and distant and exotic. In order to investigate this, I engaged in open-ended qualitative interviews in Tokyo during 2013 and 2014 with 20 participants who wear some of the different *kawaii* styles such as Lolita fashion, *Decora*, Fairy *Kei* and *Hime Deco*.

The distinctly colourful style of Harajuku manifested in late 70s through the creativity of the *Takenozoku* (Bamboo Shoot Tribe) who were renowned for their colourful loose-fitting clothes and complex dance routines performed in the streets (Steele 2010: 15). The soft, floaty, pastel elements of *kawaii* fashion were popularised in Harajuku through boutiques such as Milk (founded by Hitomi Okawa in 1970), Pink House (founded by Isao Kaneko in 1972) and Shirley Temple (founded by Rei Yanagikawa in 1974) which were inspired by Junichi Nakahara (1913-88) an illustrator and fashion designer for Japanese girls' magazines (Monden 2014: 81). Nakahara

depicted occidental fantasies in his European figures adorned with abundant frills and billowing skirts. The four styles focussed on in this study- Lolita, Decora, Fairy *Kei* and *Hime Deco*- all diverge from this common history and have distinctly difference appearances.

Lolita fashion (not to be confused with Nabokov's 1955 novel) is characterised by a bell-shaped skirt, blouse, round-toed shoes and headdress. While the form of the design remains the same, a number of designers such as Baby the Stars Shine Bright, Angelic Pretty and Innocent World produce new and interesting prints monthly which has resulted in a range of Lolita 'genres' such as Gothic, Sweet and Classic. What informs this distinct iteration of *kawaii* fashion is its connection to the Romantic Gothic scenes of the 80s, the Lolita-look crystallising in 1999 through Kazuko Ogawa's designs for Visual Kei guitarist, Mana (Keet 2007).

Hime Deco emerged in the early 00s and is characterised by sweeping dresses and the excessive adornment of the body with glittering hand-embellished accessories, covered in pink lace and crystals (Steele 2010: 44). Due to its association with Shibuya's *Hime Gyaru* style, it has links not only to the aforementioned *kawaii* boutiques of Harajuku, but also to the *gyaru* movement, a rebellious teen girl community central to Shibuya that has changed its 'look' every generation since the 1970s.

Decora and Fairy *Kei* both emerged from the 90s DIY culture associated with Harajuku, which was documented by FRUITS magazine (developed in 1997 and led by photographer Shoichi Aoki). *Hadeko* – characterised by mismatching bright colours, layers of accessories, coloured hair, as well as handmade and thrifted items – is particularly influential. *Decora* and Fairy *Kei*, emerging as trajectories of this style in the early 00s, possess similar elements but are distinguished by the use of short 'panniers' (tutu skirts). Fairy *Kei*'s pastel look solidified in 2004 through the formation of Sayuri Tabuchi's store SPANK! and focusses on thrifting 80s American childhood paraphernalia. *Decora* style remains closer to *Hadeko*'s 'loud' colourful elements, with broader thematic interests and is also affiliated with Sebastian Masuda's Harajuku boutique 6%DOKIDOKI founded in 1995.

While my broader study acknowledges the significance of aesthetics, it was immediately apparent to me that participants were in fact emotionally moved by the *kawaii* objects they incorporated into their fashion style. Consequently, I recognise the significance of caregiving behaviours for *kawaii*, which echoes Yano's observations of kinship bonds between mother and daughter in Japan through *kawaii* objects (2013). In my own study, however, I extend this discussion by examining other feelings associated with *kawaii* such as joy, excitement, love, fascination and wonder.

In order to come to a better understanding of how *kawaii* objects are incorporated into the style of *kawaii* fashion communities, I rely on Donald Winnicott's theories of creativity. For Winnicott the significance lies '… not so much (on) the object used as the **use** of the object' (2005: xvi, emphasis added). This insight is important when coming to understand the significance of materials used to create *kawaii* fashion. Here the emphasis is not on the object itself and its cultural significance in semiotic or aesthetic terms, but on the way it causes the user to feel, think or imagine.

My interviews with participants indicated that *kawaii* fashion community members experience a set of physiological responses towards objects they call *kawaii*. For example Tiara, a Japanese woman and designer in this community, explained that *kawaii* makes her feel 'excited and positive'. Specifically she cites some physiological responses in her very vivid account of her love of dolls, which she immediately associates with *kawaii* and incorporates into her fashion style:

> My heart fluttered when I first saw a Barbie. It was something like a shock, or inspiration … It was a feeling as if I had fallen in love for the first time.

In this description we can see a list of physiological responses that can be associated with *kawaii* – an increase in heart rate, a sense of breathlessness, and a sudden shock akin to Barthes' (1984) idea of punctum. Like the punctum, this first moment with Barbie 'strikes' or 'pierces' Tiara emotionally as a salient moment in her life. This moment is described almost as if it were a moment of revelation through the sudden unlocking of emotion. The presence of the object touches her in a profound way, and manifests in her creative practice as a form of 'inspiration'. Whether embellished or a literal interpretation of an event from her youth, it is clear that 'Barbie' left an impression on Tiara. Through this example, we can see that *kawaii* can also be used to describe a kind of feeling of joy, excitement and love.

In *kawaii* fashion communities, the objects that make up a complete style or look have sentimental meaning that is unique to the wearer. In this sense, *kawaii* fashion is a form of play that allows wearers to incorporate these feelings into their everyday lives. Winnicott writes that play is the '… precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects' (2005: 64). Personal psychic reality refers to the individual's experiences of *kawaii* objects which evoke profound feelings and stimulate their imagination and dream worlds. Having these special objects on their bodies allows them to carry these worlds with them in their everyday life like totems.

The 'precariousness' that arises from this interaction, however, is the tension between that which we have and the longing for the fantastic and the impossible. No matter how it manifests in reality through fashion style, the artistic journey to make our dreams a reality is never-ending. Winnicott describes this as the tension between 'me' and 'not-me' that plays out from our original separation in infancy and unfolds in life-long creative experimentation and play with objects that help us feel whole or at peace with our place in the world.

The objects we choose to experiment with symbolise '… the union of two now separate things' and through play we are able to feel closer to that which we dream of and lack (Winnicott 2005: 130). *Kawaii* practitioners are drawn to two types of experience – that which is soothing and that which is fascinating. In Tiara's account above, we can see that the incorporation of Barbie-inspired motifs into

her fashion style allows her to access soothing memories of the joy she experienced in childhood.

However, this moment is also intertwined with her original sense of fascination and wonder that arose in this first encounter. There would be the difference between the toys she owned and the new doll before her; the reality of the human flesh and the impossibility of the plastic body; the young girl and mature woman, and the intermingling of East and West. As such, other modes of experience felt by *kawaii* participants are feelings, imaginations and dream worlds that incorporate a sense of the Other or 'not-me'.

We can explore this sense of otherness and the 'not-me' through an interview extract from a *Decora* participant. She explains her interest in 80s fashion as follows:

I like it so much. I like it so much that I, by myself, always look for something old on the internet. It seems kind of strange. In the 80s the internet did not exist nor did mobile phones. But the forms and colours are very eccentric and strange.

Here it is interesting to note that her account does not describe her personal journey but is focussed on a complete Other that is 'strange' and 'eccentric'. This participant was born at the very end of the 80s fashion era, so her fantasy of this time preceding her life allows her to explore possibilities such as a world without the internet, or a world where unique designs of the 80s are still part of the everyday. By finding *kawaii* objects from this time that resonate with her, the participant can imagine their origins and story. She is compelled by the sheer difference between forms and colours of the past compared to the reality of her everyday life. Here her account weaves in and out of a fascination with aesthetics and highlights her affectual experience of them. It is this experience that leads her to feel that they are *kawaii* and worthy play objects. Her love takes the form of an intellectual devotion rather than stemming from an innate desire to nurture, as current studies of cuteness would suggest.

Kawaii fashion communities have complex and powerful connections to the objects they incorporate into their fashion style. My research explains this connection as an affectual experience whereby participants feel excitement, joy and love in response to *kawaii* objects that move them. Their incorporation of objects into their style is akin to Winnicott's notion of play and helps them to navigate tensions between me and not-me, the real and the imaginary.

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