

Lolita: Atemporal Class-Play

With tea and cakes

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

University of Tasmania

October 2012

Declaration of Originality

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Acknowledgements

It is a popular wisdom that academia is a somewhat cutthroat world. My experiences as an MA candidate could not have been further removed from that stereotype. I have been supported and encouraged every step of the way by senior academics, staff and my fellow students. In particular I want to thank Vera Mackie, who allowed me pre-publication access to her work on *Lolita* and took the time to discuss this project with me despite having no direct connection to it or me. Ralph Crane and Anna Johnston of *SEJEL* never showed any doubt in my ability to finish the thesis despite my move to Japan and the subsequent triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown. Without their confidence my own would surely have wavered. Likewise my supervisors Craig Norris, Michelle Phillipov and Barbara Hartley have been unfailingly patient and encouraging, even at times when I am sure I frustrated them horribly. I could not have been better supported.

My thanks to Katsuhiko Suganuma and Kazumi Nagaike of Oita University for reminding me why I started the project in the first place and to Patrick Galbraith for sage advice and memorable karaoke. My fellow students Emerald, Masafumi, Micah, Miriam, Lucy and Emily gave moral support and pastries. My parents, sisters and the redoubtable Nicola Norton were more help than they are likely to believe.

Of course, although these people have helped and supported me they should in no way be held accountable for the quality of my research or prose!

Last but most certainly not least, my thanks to the Lolitas who took the time to speak with me, and who shared pictures, magazines, novels and websites with me. May your skirts be ever puffy and your lace ever flutter.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
What is Lolita?.....	3
Research Questions, Methodology and Process.....	4
Chapter One: Literature Review.....	8
News Media.....	9
Insecure and Infantile.....	10
Rebellious.....	11
Academic Approaches.....	13
Urban Princesses.....	13
Global Princesses.....	14
Ritual Princesses.....	15
Virgin Princesses.....	17
The a-politicisation and re-politicisation of subcultural and media research.....	19
A Bifocal Approach.....	23
Chapter Two: Frames and Hems.....	27
Femme Infantile.....	28
Girl Power and Reviving Ophelia.....	32
The Subcultural Capital of Hem Stitching.....	37
The Myth.....	40
Chapter Three: More Bisque than Barbie.....	47
<i>Shimotsuma Monogatari</i>	51
Dolls.....	52
Australian Lolitas and Femininity.....	54
Maternity Petticoats.....	57
Chapter Four: Through the Looking-Class.....	63
Far Away From Dirty Work.....	66
Recasting Work as Play.....	70
Creating the Discerning Self.....	73
Conclusion.....	83
Appendix 1.....	87
Appendix 2.....	89
References.....	90

Introduction

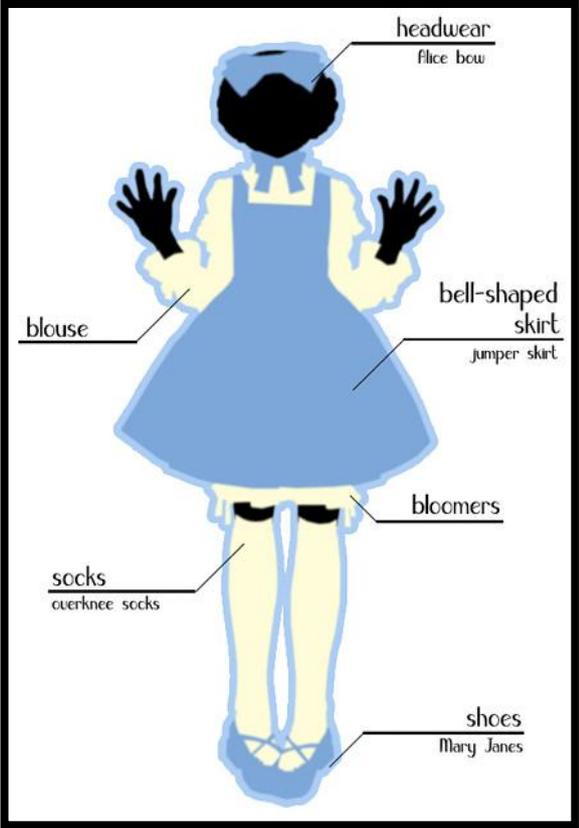


Figure 1

When Tokyopop released the first volume of its English language version of the Japanese collectable magazine *Gothic & Lolita Bible* in 2008, I predicted that it would not be widely accepted by Australian Lolitas. This thesis began as a media reception study in which I intended to explain why the magazine would fail to capture the imaginations of Lolitas. I assumed that the appeal of Lolita lay largely in an Orientalist fantasy of Japan and that Lolita was a subset of the Australian cosplay¹ community. I anticipated the magazine failing to attract a substantial following because its localisation techniques would jar against the prioritisation of ‘authentic’ Japanese exoticism within the community. I was interested by Arjun Appadurai’s (1986: 56) observation that “as commodities travel greater distances (institutional, special, temporal), knowledge about them tends to become partial, contradictory, and differentiated. But such differentiation may itself ... lead to the intensification of demand.” I conducted a number of interviews with Lolitas about their media usage (both production and consumption). Over the course of these interviews it became apparent that the questions I was asking were wrong; they were neither as interesting nor as important as the aspects Lolitas themselves emphasised in answering my more open-ended questions. Japan and Orientalism barely featured in their responses. Some were fans of Japanese animation and cosplayed, but they firmly articulated a separation between Lolita and cosplay. Some Lolitas were musicians who had discovered Lolita through Japanese bands like *Malice Mizer*. Other Lolitas had no interest in Japan whatsoever. As I talked with Lolitas, read the novels and websites they recommended and looked more closely at what has been written about Lolita communities, I saw an as-yet-unexplored but fascinating aspect of Lolita: playing with an identity of leisure. Roger Silverstone (1999: 60) writes that “to step into a space and a time to play is to move across a threshold, to leave something behind – one kind of order – and to grasp a different reality and a rationality defined by its own rules and terms or trade and action.”

¹ Costumed Role Play: Dressing up and role playing a character, usually (but not exclusively) a character from Japanese animations or video games.

Lolita is the expression of a desire for indulgence untempered by the un-aristocratic concerns of earning income.

What is Lolita?

Lolita is a subculture originating in Japan but now worldwide, based around a clothing style that borrows heavily from European dress between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly from French Rococo and British Victorian elements. According to Yuniya Kawamura (2010: 216) “the predominant image is that of a Victorian doll; it presents an exaggerated form of femininity, with pale skin, neat hair, knee- or mid-thigh-length Victorian dresses, pinafores, bloomers, stockings, and shoes or boots.” Lolitas in Australia gather for sewing bees, tea parties, picnics and other social occasions. Although it is spread around the world and quietly growing, it remains unknown by a substantial majority of those who share their societies with Lolitas. It is a curious mix of the spectacular and the hidden, the performative and the private. Above all, Lolita is a feminised community (in the sense of ‘by women, for women’) in which male participants are also expected to be feminine (I discuss femininity in greater detail from page 32 onward). For these and perhaps other reasons, Lolita has not attracted a great deal of media coverage and relatively little academic attention when it is found outside of Japan. While English-language writings come from different angles and make a range of assumptions and conclusions about Lolita practitioners, there are some over-arching trends. The most prominent is the framing of Lolitas as immature and/or insecure. They are depicted as clinging to childhood in fear or selfish refusal of adult social responsibilities.

I will argue that this way of framing girls who practice Lolita is not unusual but is part of a wider social understanding of contemporary girlhood. I use ‘girls’ here explicitly rather than as a generalisation, because male Lolitas are very rarely considered in popular representations. In this research I have also focused on

female Lolitas with only infrequent mentions of male Lolitas (Brolitas²/Boylitas). This is not intended to imply that Brolitas are unimportant; rather that their motivations for and experience of participation in Lolita communities are necessarily different from those of Lolitas and it is not within the scope of this research to unpack those complexities. Particularly important for this research is the distinction that “[b]oys’ identities may also be more likely to be taken at face value because of the notion- common across race and gender groups- that girls are more likely to be insecure” (Wilkins, 2008: 194). I also use ‘girls’ in favour of ‘women’ or ‘young women’ as a way of constant contextualisation. Catherine Driscoll (2002: 111) writes that for some Marxist (and often feminist) theorists “girls are systematically disenfranchised so that they will accept and desire a place as Woman.” Despite the quite wide age-range of Lolitas, they are consistently characterised by both academic and press authors as young, incomplete and as ‘becoming’ not ‘being’. These assumptions are captured in the term ‘girl’, a term that consequently has been subject to a number of reinterpretations (most famously by Riot Grrls).

Research Questions, Methodology and Process

Why do Australians participate in Lolita culture and what do they gain by their participation? In the English-speaking world Lolita is a small subculture. An article in *The Times* mentions a 2006 Lolita gathering in the UK of 1,500, but in Australia meet-ups rarely top twenty (Vine, 2006). Lolita is not taking Australia by storm nor is it likely to change the world in a dramatic way, so what can we learn from such a small group? How does Lolita contribute to our understanding of the interactions between gender, socio-economic status, media and identity?

It was logistically impossible to restart the interview processes to reflect the new focus of the project. Instead, where additional data was necessary I have

² Brolitas wear dresses and ‘pass’ as female, often using wigs and make-up to complete their appearance. Ideally a Brolita should be indistinguishable from any other Lolita.

looked to two online Lolita communities, LiveJournal.com and Lolita.org. These sources are Anglophone but not used exclusively by Australian Lolitas. Data sourced from interviews is clearly distinguished from data taken from these websites. Key word searches using the internal search features of the two websites were the primary method of data collection from online sources. The secondary method was following hyperlinks posted in one thread pointing to similar or related discussion topics. All of the material used is publically available to registered users of the sites, and registration is free and unrestricted. I did not monitor every new contribution to the sites nor read every post within a specific timeframe. Instead the sites were used as supplementary sources of information and context for specific topics raised during face-to-face interviews.

I conducted tape-recorded interviews with eleven Australian Lolitas in either Hobart or Melbourne. The interview data is presented with pseudonyms to retain anonymity and none of the Lolitas whose pictures are reproduced in this thesis participated in the interviews. Although this is a small sample size, as Andy Ruddock (2001: 133) points out, smaller samples “do not necessarily lead to weaker or less useful work.” These interviews typically lasted for forty-five minutes. In several cases Lolitas spent considerably more time with me, taking me to see their favourite shops and gathering places and sharing meals with me. At times I felt more like a novice being initiated into Lolita than a researcher. I learned that the treatment I received is commonplace for girls who express an interest in Lolita but are not sure if they are ready to *be* Lolitas: more experienced Lolitas meet with them to discuss their concerns and interests and introduce them to the community (one respondent had spent an entire year preparing herself to become a Lolita). One additional interview was a written response to a series of questions I sent by email. The primary interview questions are listed in Appendix 1. Where the answers to questions were open-ended, supplementary questions for clarification or to follow up on a new point of interest were asked as part of an ongoing conversation. The

final question in every interview was an invitation for Lolitas to discuss anything they felt was important but that I had not asked them about. Eleven of respondents were female, living in Tasmania or Victoria and aged in their mid to late twenties. Two respondents were teenagers and one was a Brolita. Interview participants were recruited in three ways: I placed an 'advertisement' in the LiveJournal 'EGL: The Elegant Gothic Lolita Community', I recruited in person at two alternative fashion events in Tasmania, and some respondents later referred their friends to me, representing a small element of snowball sampling. Thus I had three discrete lines of data and was able to cross check details between them. This data was subjected to content analysis within a qualitative, ethnographic, research framework.

The first chapter deals with access to representation and the power of media in anchoring social practices. The infantilisation³ of Lolitas by the media demonstrates the limitations of media frames in the case of girls and young women. However, the active engagement of Lolitas in 'misframing', that is, in perpetuating misunderstanding of their culture in order to maintain insider-outsider-boundaries, shows an awareness of young women's position in relation to commercial media and an active engagement in the spaces to which girls do have access. In the second chapter, the case of academic pathologising of Lolitas' presumed asexuality is highlighted through comparative textual analysis and examples of diverse Lolita lifestyles. In the final chapter the aspect of socio-economic disadvantage is highlighted by examining the atemporal class-play that is so central to Lolita. This aspect of Australia's Lolita community has been largely invisible in previous research. It will be argued that the attraction of Lolita is strongly connected to a rejection of the contemporary social system, which offers some girls little hope for class mobility while concurrently assigning personal blame for their failure to be upwardly mobile. These girls use Lolita to displace themselves temporally and also to link themselves to a global cosmopolitanism in which their refined, specific taste

³ I mean "infantile" not literally in the sense of infant development but in the pejorative sense, as in immature or puerile.

is a source of subcultural capital and their community prioritises a gift and praise economy. I argue that the current focus on the gendered semiotics of Lolita clothing prevents a deeper understanding of how gender influences other power dynamics, including social-economic status.

Chapter One: Literature Review



Figure 2

The increased popularity of Japanese inspired Lolita fashion communities around the world has not triggered moral panics or demonisation. Rather than fear and loathing, Lolitas have been met with patronising condescension. In the following review of publications about Lolita I survey journalistic writings about Lolita published in English between 2004 and 2009, with the aim of establishing overall trends in the tone and scope of reporting (for more detailed analysis in Chapter Two). Academic research is then examined, with a focus on the themes researchers have identified in Lolita. This chapter's purpose is to answer 'how' questions: how have Lolitas been represented and discussed; how have these ways of talking about Lolitas served to obscure Lolitas' broader social significance as a community and how does this obfuscation relate to recent trends in subculture and media research.

News Media

The following news articles were located via a keyword search (using the term "Lolita" appearing anywhere in the article text) conducted in March 2010. Although there was no restriction for the date range searched, no results appeared earlier than 2004. It seems that although Lolita style can be traced to the 1980s, it has only recently attracted a following outside Japan large enough to draw the attention of journalists and commentators publishing in English. Not every article located has been cited, due to widespread repetition and reproduction of the same material. Eric Talmadge's articles, for example, reappeared under various titles in half a dozen different newspapers around the world. Data searches based on keywords have been pejoratively termed "push-button analysis" (Deacon et al, 2007: 133). While the results of my search may not be comprehensive, the simplicity of the term used as a keyword and the thematic mode of analysis mitigate the problems relating to the use of keyword searches for quantitative modes of analysis (Deacon et al, 2007: 133-136). Although the scope and focus of the news reports vary, there are key similarities and thematic consistencies. Journalistic

writings on Lolita share a tone of bemusement, tending to come from a 'what's new in wacky Japan' starting point (c.f. Talmadge, 2008a). There was relatively little coverage of non-Japanese Lolitas. The articles focus in particular on the idea that Lolita is a style that does not aim to appeal to or attract men (and, therefore, Lolitas are rejecting men, see Talmadge, 2008b). This, in combination with the sexual ambiguity of the style, leads to infantilising Lolitas (Rothwell, 2009; Kirby, 2006) and the pathologising of them as insecure (Parker, 2004) and running away from the supposed pressures of sexuality (Monoyudis, 2008). Lolitas are, it is implied, troubled and in search of escapism. These themes, although inter-related, can be categorised into two dominant groupings: insecure and infantile women and rebellious women.

Insecure and Infantile

Japanese girls' cultures have been characterised as shallow, unoriginal and have been represented patronisingly by English language media for many years (Miller, 2004: 240), and even when reporting on the international Lolita community this tone dominates. Newspaper headlines such as "The Fashion Victims Who Refuse to Grow Up" (Kirby, 2006) demonstrate assumptions of immaturity in the English language press. A 2008 *New York Times* article which drew the ire of the LiveJournal Lolita community writes that Lolitas enjoy playing "hopscotch, jump rope and hide-and-seek" (Monoyudis, 2008), a passage which a number of Lolitas who commented on the article found patronising. Lolitas are, it is implied, troubled and in search of escapism. This diagnosis of Lolitas is widespread. Because Lolita clothing is read as child-like, the assumption that wearing Lolita represents escapism into an infantile state (implying a fear or rejection of sexuality and responsibility) fills not only press articles but also numerous blog postings and online forum discussions (c.f. Pro-Choice-Forum, 2004). One article reports that Lolita is "connected to a longing for childhood security" (Bond, 2007), while a *Wall Street Journal* article quotes psychologist Yo Yahata, who claims that "[d]ressing up

like this and having people stare at them makes them feel their existence is worth something” (Parker, 2004), suggesting that their sense of self-worth depends on attracting (what is often negative) attention from strangers. In *Kickboxing Geishas* Veronica Chambers (2007: 33) dismisses Japanese Lolitas as weak-willed and relates a theory that “what ails the Lolitas, along with many young women in Japan, is a sense of insecurity.” This is consistent a long standing attitude towards girls’ communities in works about Japan (c.f. Miller, 2004). According to fashion designer Naoto Hirooka (interviewed in Talmadge, 2008a), the insecurity of Japanese Lolitas is related to feeling racially inferior:

‘I think many Japanese women feel intimidated by high fashion in the West and feel that they can never live up to the refined beauty that they feel Western women strive for,’ he said. ‘So, instead, they shoot for a cute look, one that doesn't require tall, curvaceous bodies and instead emphasises girliness.’

I would note, without getting caught up in a debate about Japanese Lolitas, that Hirooka has also said (interviewed in Steele, 2010: 97) that he cannot understand why women wear the clothes he designs; this makes him a curious source to cite on the topic. The idea that extravagant clothing indicates diminished intellectual capacity seems deeply ingrained in the unspoken assumptions informing these articles; it is an extension of the Cartesian mind-body split (Brydon, 1998: 12) which is applied to women much more than men. There is no masculine or gender-neutral equivalent for ‘bimbo’.

Rebellious

Lolitas are often seen as a symptom of a wider problem, whether it be the crushing oppression of individual expression in Japanese society (Talmadge, 2008a), spoiled children refusing to grow up and reluctance to enter the workforce (Rothwell, 2009) or any number of other social ills. A *Sydney Morning Herald* article mentions the opening of Lolita brand name stores in the US and the publication of the English

language *Gothic & Lolita Bible*, but peculiarly follows this information with the claim that Lolita cannot be exported because it is too Japanese; Lolita is “too fine-tuned to the frustrations of women in Japan, and their rebellion against them” (Talmadge, 2008b). A sub-style of Lolita, grotesque Lolita, is described by *The Courier Mail* as “featuring makeup or bandages to give a wounded or sickly look to symbolise their victimisation by society” (Talmadge, 2008a). Naoto Hirooka is quoted explaining that Lolita is “a fashion that is not intended to attract men ... women are creating their own world into which they can get away from the pressures of the larger society” (Talmadge, 2008a).

National boundaries are not always presented with clear demarcation in this research. The specific contributions to one region over another in the transnational style of Lolita became impossible to discuss in isolation as I wrote about Australian reactions to an American newspaper report on a Japanese fashion event. Lolitas in different geographical locations face different circumstances and surely react to those circumstances differently. It is not my intention to homogenise the world’s Lolitas by highlighting the transnationalism of the style, rather to contextualise Australian Lolitas’ experiences as being part of an international Lolita community. The social construction of girlhood differs between Japan and Australia, and (to a lesser extent) between Australia and America. However, there are continuities (such as Joanne Baker’s similar findings in Australia to Marnina Gonick’s American research) and shared influences. Lolita style is a product of *shōjo*⁴ culture, and that influence remains after the style is relocated to the Australian setting, for example. This research examines Australian Lolitas exclusively, with an awareness of their membership of an international community. The transnationalism of Lolita as a style is important to Australia Lolitas and is explored in Chapter Four.

⁴ Literally *shōjo* means young girl; however the figure of the *shōjo* has become infused with many layers of meaning and is an important field of research for scholars of Japanese culture.

Japanese media reactions to Lolita or the role of subcultures in Japanese society more broadly are peripheral to the Australian focus of this thesis. As no research has yet been published about Australian Lolitas, research about Lolitas in other countries is cited as the starting point of the research and as a basis for comparison. This international research is limited to publications available in English and which take Lolita as their dominant focus.

Academic Approaches

If this is how Lolitas have been presented in journalistic discourse, how have academic authors written about Lolita? The question is complicated by the fact that at this time, very few have written about Lolita in English at all. Four authors have published sizable articles on Lolita in English (Gagné, 2008; Mackie, 2009; Mackie, 2010; Monden, 2008; Winge, 2008). Vera Mackie is the only one of these authors who is not, or was not at the time of publishing, still undertaking doctoral candidature. Only Masafumi Monden undertook any ethnographic observation of English-speaking Lolitas. Isaac Gagné's work is also ethnographic, except that his fieldwork was conducted in Japan and his focus is on the linguistic strategies observed in Japanese media (both in reports on Lolita and in Lolitas' own online communities).

Urban Princesses

Isaac Gagné's 2008 'Urban Princesses: Performance and "Women's Language" in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture' examines the linguistic strategies used by Japanese Lolitas in the processes of identity formation and by Japanese journalists when reporting on Lolita. His research includes ethnographic material derived from online sources, interviews and observation. In his detailed study of Japanese Lolitas' language use Gagné (2008: 114) identifies techniques used by male interviewers for Japanese television to patronise Lolitas, such as repeating the answers of Lolita interviewees in a childish, less articulate wording, and displaying these paraphrased versions as text on the bottom of the screen. Although his

research is specific to Japan, the divide between self- and media-representations of Lolitas is also apparent in the Anglophone setting. The preceding section surveying English language media articles shows that many journalists writing in English replicate the assumptions of the Japanese media.

Early in this chapter I mentioned that Lolita has not caused a moral panic. Gagné (2008: 131) points out that Lolitas' polite language and demure aesthetics make for an uncomfortable fit with standard "youth gone wild" and "moral downfall of the nation" reporting styles. In the Japanese case, conservative reporters have instead adopted a style of representation which "infantilizes and delegitimizes" Lolitas by focusing on inarticulate or childish responses to interviewers and the "erasure of behaviors and individuals that present a positive or articulate image." (Gagné, 2008: 143)

Global Princesses

Masafumi Monden's 2008 'Transcultural Flow of Demure Aesthetics: Examining Cultural Globalisation through Gothic & Lolita Fashion' is based on ethnographic observation of 'The Gothic & Lolita Fashion Community' (part of the social networking website LiveJournal), which he observed for seven months. Monden focuses on the cross-cultural aspects of global Lolita, particularly debates about 'authenticity' and the role of Japan as an origin for the style. He uses the differences in the semiotic decoding of cuteness and childhood to highlight the localisation of the global subculture, pointing out that Japanese culture allows not only children but even young men and women to incorporate cuteness into their styles without much social objection, in contrast to the encouragement of young girls to dress in "mature, sexualised clothes" in countries like the United States (Monden, 2008: 29). The idea of childhood also has different connotations in different cultures. Japanese Lolitas, for example, "tend to endorse the egoism and cruelty associated with childhood rather than its innocence, naiveté or

submissiveness” (Monden, 2008: 28). Given the emphasis on childishness or refusal to grow up in many published reports on Lolita, Monden’s critical deconstruction of what “child” means in different social contexts is an important qualification.

Ritual Princesses

Despite the title of Theresa Winge’s ‘Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita’ (2008), her discussion includes consideration of the international spread of media featuring Lolita characters and aesthetic, particularly anime and manga. Winge (2008: 56) uses Victor Turner’s three phrases of ritual to argue that Lolita is an example of “performance as ritualized identity”. In this account, a Lolita separates herself from mainstream culture by adopting clothing and accessories that are outside of the socially accepted dress codes (Winge, 2008: 56). She enters the transition phase by seeking the approval of other Lolitas and perfecting her bricolage (Winge, 2008: 56). Finally, she enters the reincorporation phase, in which

she acknowledges and confirms her membership in the Lolita subculture as a Loli. Here it is important to recognize the performance spaces where she displays and visually communicates her aesthetic and identity, such as urban streets, stages, televisions, Web sites, films, and magazines. In these spaces Lolitas experience a sense of the carnivalesque. (Winge, 2008: 56)

With the exception of street and stage, all of the performance spaces identified above are media spaces. Winge does not include the fanzines and chat rooms (self produced media) Mackie (2009: 50) mentions, but it is nevertheless apparent that Lolita is a culture deeply rooted in the media spaces of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Winge (2008: 58) expands on the idea of the carnivalesque: “in these carnivalesque spaces Lolitas are free from the constraints of the dominant culture and free to display the Lolita aesthetic.”

As Mackie (2009) points out, however, the clothing that defines Lolita culture is itself inseparable from the transnational capitalist system; even homemade clothing relies on the purchase of fabrics and trimmings. Additionally, I find it difficult to imagine a space that is more constrained by “the dominant culture” than the “urban street”. Winge (2008: 58) sees Lolita not only as an escape from the dominant culture but also as directly opposed to it, writing: “the Lolita aesthetic provides subculture members with a way to visually and socially express their dissatisfaction with the dominant culture and their place within it.” Specifically, she cites *kawaii* as an example of Lolitas’ subversion of dominant cultural tropes, concluding that Lolita is

an identity that simultaneously also resists and subverts the dominant culture’s power structures and the way they disadvantage Japanese women. This is how Lolita performs and achieves power and agency through her appearance. (Winge, 2008: 60)

The distinction between performing and achieving power is not acknowledged in this account. As Paul Willis (1977) pointed out more than thirty years ago, the strategies of young working-class men (“lads”) that were advantageous in the short term (for example school truancy) could result in perpetuating their disadvantage in the long term (by restricting future employment opportunities). Winge also does not engage with the post-subcultural studies’ position that “the potential for style itself appears largely lost, with any ‘intrinsically’ subversive quality to subcultures exposed as an illusion” (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003: 5). Ultimately Winge (2008: 59) returns to the dominant interpretation of Lolita: “in essence, Lolitas are attempting to prolong childhood with the Lolita aesthetic via the use of *kawaii* [cuteness].” Despite the brevity of her exploration of questions of power, Winge does raise the possibility that Lolita is an aesthetic of resistance, suggesting additional avenues for investigation.

Virgin Princesses

In her 2009 piece 'Transnational Bricolage: Gothic Lolita and the Political Economy of Fashion', Vera Mackie describes Lolita both as a transnational spectacular subculture and as a clothing oriented fandom. As fans of Lolita clothing, Lolitas form a community based on shared performance of Lolita and consumption of Lolita related texts. Lolita is thus described as a commercially sustained culture. Mackie identifies the various transnational economies that support Lolita, from Japanese importation of British accessories like Vivienne Westwood shoes and Japanese Lolita boutiques opening in France to English language translations of the *Gothic & Lolita Bible*. The "multiple commodification[s]" of Lolita style include a variety of products and services, and a "host of industries have developed in order to produce, distribute, market and comment on these products and services" (Mackie, 2009: 51). She also describes the "shadow economies" of swapping and second-hand auctions, concluding that the "desires of the members of ... the Gothic Lolita fashion style can thus ultimately be linked to economic processes on a local, national, regional and global scale" (Mackie, 2009: 51).

While her treatment of the political economy aspects of Lolita is largely descriptive, Mackie takes a more analytic approach with the gender sections of her article. After acknowledging that the use of the name Lolita "suggests a complex relationship with positive and negative expectations about young women's sexuality", Mackie (2009: 24, 26) speculates that

both the Lolita fashion style and the middle-aged Lolita complex [the sexual attraction to young girls (c.f. Kinsella, 2006)] actually share common roots in an anxiety about adult female sexuality. For the wearers of the Lolita fashion style, their reaction to the conundrum of adult sexuality is to attempt to prolong their girlhood.

This opinion is supported by what Mackie (2009: 20, 27) perceives as a lack of amorous interest in men among female Lolitas, the way Lolita clothing obscures the contours of the body, making it “an especially dense border between the body and the outside world” and the close, relationship between Lolita and the broader *shōjo* culture of girlhood.

In *Reading Lolita in Japan*, which I examine in much greater detail in Chapter Three, Mackie (2010) takes these arguments even further. She uses textual analysis of Japanese novels to argue that Lolita is a reaction to disgust with the adult body and fear of sex. After analysing a passage from Novala Takemoto’s *Shimotsuna Monogatari* Mackie concludes that the main character of the novel, and through her other Lolitas, are in horror of adult female bodies. She writes:

This horror is directed at both the sexuality of the adult woman, and the potential for her body to become a maternal body. The agony of labor is fused with the ecstasy of sexual excitement, an image that brilliantly fuses the two elements of the young girl’s – the *shōjo*’s – fear of becoming an adult woman. (Mackie, 2010: 187)

This analysis of Lolita culture is consistent with the tone of the newspaper and other media reports discussed above. It is an analysis challenged by the results of my ethnographic research, as discussed in subsequent chapters. It is important to keep in mind the differences between our modes of analysis however; Mackie writes primarily from the perspective of literary analysis of a Japanese source text, while my research is focused on Australian practices of Lolita. Thus my ‘challenge’ is to the implication in her 2009 article that a textual analysis may be extrapolated to provide ‘real world’ insights, not to the analysis itself. ‘Transnational Bricolage’ is a wide-ranging piece that identifies a number of key aspects of transnational Lolita culture, focusing primarily on international economic exchanges, transtextuality and sexuality/gender. Being broad of focus and also relatively short, Mackie’s work

raises many points of interest rather than exploring any individual aspect in great depth. While Mackie provides an overview of some of the political-economy issues arising from Lolita's internationalisation, the socio-economic politics underpinning the desire to dress not just in nineteenth and eighteenth century inspired clothing, but in the clothing of the leisured class of those eras is something yet to be addressed in relation to the international scene (see Gagné's 2008 article for an excellent, although brief, discussion of the classed aspects of Japanese Lolita culture). Thinking about the historical inspirations of Lolita clothing also draws attention to the peculiarity of Australians dressing in a style widely classified as part of a Japanese youth culture, but derived from anachronistic reinterpretations of European clothing. Mackie's work de-emphasises the collective significance of Lolitas to focus on their imagined individual insecurities, while conversely choosing not to examine their specific socio-economic situations in favour of highlighting the transnational economics of Lolita-related industries.

The a-politicisation and re-politicisation of subcultural and media research

As detailed in the introduction to this thesis, it had originally been my intention to examine reception of the (then new) English Language *Gothic & Lolita Bible* in the context of 'Cool Japan' and globalisation. While conducting interviews with Australian Lolitas it became clear that the questions I was asking were not touching on what was interesting and important about Lolita, either from the point of view of the practitioners themselves or more broadly. In particular, issues of socio-economic status and the influence of gendered social expectations sat tantalisingly behind many of the Lolitas' replies. Subcultural research is a natural starting point to explore these issues. Mackie, Winge, Monden and Gagné all refer to Lolita as a subculture. Although I replicate this language, in the Anglophone context the community is so geographically dispersed that in practice English-speaking Lolitas are largely a web-based fan community focused on clothing. While not diminishing the usefulness of subcultural research as a methodological foundation

for approaching Lolita in a broad sense, I draw on clothing theory and research into online communities to contextualise specific practices of Lolitas where the expectations of a traditional image of subcultural activity does not adequately support interrogation of those practices. Subculture research and audience research have been interconnected since the 1970s, and are complimentary fields (Busse, 2011: 427).

The term subculture is itself a site of contested meaning. Andy Bennett (1999) uses Maffesoli's term 'neo-tribe' as an alternative term to 'subculture'. He argues that 'subculture' is an unworkable concept for the sociological study of youths' stylistic and taste preferences because rather than being linked to issues of class, these preferences "are in fact examples of the late modern lifestyles in which notions of identity are 'constructed' rather than 'given', and 'fluid' rather than 'fixed'" (Bennett, 1999: 599). He argues that groups themselves are fluid and impermanent, just as the identities of the individuals who move in and out of them are also fluid (Bennett, 1999: 605). Neo-tribalism better encapsulates this fluidity and change. Although sympathetic to "post-subculturalists", Derek Sweet (2005: 245) sees this emphasis on self-identity and individuality as too strong, arguing for more focus on "the simultaneous management and construction of both individual and collective subjectivities". He points out that group recognition of insider and outsider status is still essential despite moments of fluidity, writing that:

The subcultural self needs the response of the subcultural other, an other who is also engaged in the rhetorical performance of self, to Be. In other words, the rhetorical performance of the subcultural self is always a simultaneous hail and response. (Sweet, 2005: 262)

Unless other Goths recognise you as one of them and non-Goths recognise you as different, then self-identity as a Goth is endangered (Sweet, 2005: 262). Paul Hodkinson (2004) suggests that rather than abandon the term "subculture"

altogether it should be subject to some qualification and revision. He coins the term “(sub)cultural substance” in contrast to the fluidity emphasised by authors such as Bennett, arguing that although fluidity and diversity are important, more so is the tendency “for goths to blend in with one another and to stand out collectively from those outside the group” (Hodkinson, 2004: 143). Bennett does not specify the age range of ‘youth’, but is consistent in asserting that neo-tribalism is a framework for understanding youth practices. It may be the case that ‘neo-tribalism’ struggles to encompass taste groupings with large numbers of older participants (Steampunk) or intergenerational participation within families (Goth, Feral). It seems to be the case within the literature that, as with ‘scenes’, ‘neo-tribe’ is a more useful term for researchers focusing on music-based communities than for researchers who investigate groups based around spectacular styles, ethnicities or localities. In fact, because ‘scene’ is almost entirely contained to the study of music (see Hesmondhalgh, 2005: 27) I have not included it in this survey.

Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003: 14) suggested that if the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham “over-politicized youth formations, then the post-modernist and other post-subcultural positions have been equally guilty of under-politicizing them.” They cite Laclau and Mouffe’s 1985 *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* as an example of an approach to subculture research that moves

from an ‘inherently’ radical notion of subculture, coupled to a monolithic conception of the dominant culture, to a position that recognizes the differentiation and multiplicity of points of power in society and the way that various cultural formations and elements articulate within and across these constellations of power in complex and non-linear ways to produce contingent and modificatory outcomes. (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003: 13)

They argue that class, gender and ethnicity remain important influences on access to the ideas, goods and technologies that circulate in the global market, while also remaining “crucial in terms of the perceived legitimacy of the identities constructed from these resources” (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003: 19). In this context they suggest that recognising that it may be necessary for subcultural-related research “to shift its focus back on the macro-political level” (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003: 16).

Shane Blackman (2005: 12) criticises Bennett and other “post-modern” theorists for failing to “address or critique the relations of dominance and subordination exercised through social and cultural structures of society”. He is particularly critical of Bennett’s celebration of the individualising power of consumption for young people, pointing out the discrepancies in difference youths’ access to the economic stability required to fund such consumption (Blackman, 2005: 14). He suggests that the focus on individuals’ choices and fluidity actually reinscribes the dominance of neo-liberal free-market imperialism (Blackman, 2005: 15). Tracy Shildrick and Robert MacDonald (2006) make similar criticisms of “post-modern” alternatives to the term “subculture” (including the alternative terms “neo-tribes”, “scenes” and “lifestyles”), citing a range of recent ethnographic research which has highlighted the importance of class and the constraints race, gender and socio-economic status place on youths’ abilities to make choices freely. While acknowledging some limitations in his use of consumption, Bennett (2005: 256) responds that in Blackman’s writings “structurally embedded forms of inequality appear to act as dead weights on young people”, which is a gross underestimation of the “agency of youth in creatively resisting the circumstances of their everyday lives.” These debates are ongoing and are unlikely to be satisfactorily resolved in the near future.

A Bifocal Approach

Mackie (2009, 2010) and Winge (2008) agree that becoming a Lolita is a way of prolonging childhood. Mackie sees the motivation as sexual insecurity while for Winge it is in opposition to women's subordinated position within patriarchal society. Monden (2008) points out that childhood is a site of contested meanings, drawing attention to the assumptions underpinning the 'prolonging childhood' thesis, while Gagné (2008) sees the media as creating a childish image that Lolitas themselves do not intend. Clearly there are issues of power, inequality and identity tied up in Lolita in a way that is quite different from other groups. Patrick Murphy (2005) points out a trend in media studies similar to that highlighted by Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003) in post-subcultural positions, writing that the shift in the focus of media studies to subjective, insider accounts has served to obscure the power dimensions involved in negotiating meanings from transnational media.

Murphy (2005: 168) expresses concern that by "emphasizing the place of subjectivity and specificity in the negotiation of meaning ... the interrogation of ideology's relation to lived experience has often moved out of focus". He calls for a reconceptualising of "audiences" that allows for closer scrutiny of the contexts of media consumption, in reaction to what he perceives as the a-historical, unsituated approach of fan studies. The method he suggests is a reintroduction of ethnographic methodologies which can provide an approach that

would allow for an understanding of negotiation not only in terms of borrowing from the past and the pleasure that audiences get from particular aesthetics and genres but also how mediascapes help shape the practices of everyday life (organization of leisure, parenting, meals, clothing, dating, domestic and public rituals, etc.) and more important, emerge through naturalized, common sense expressions that tell us something about how cultural is changing and *in whose interest*. (Murphy, 2005: 177, emphasis in original).

What emerges quite strongly from the existing literature is the contrast between those articles that use ethnographic methodologies and those that do not. The lack of substantial engagement with broader social questions relating to Lolita in the latter (Winge is uncritically celebratory of Lolitas' symbolic resistance while Mackie's 'Transnational Bricolage' argues for sexual insecurity with unspecified social causes or ramifications) is, I argue, a consequence of the absence of data relating to any specific, living Lolita practitioner. In contrast Gagné identifies a gendered divide in the representational practices of the Japanese media and identifies access to this representational power as an issue for Lolitas. Monden raises a range of social issues facing girls from sexualisation and the role of the male gaze in their everyday lives to the processes of forging identity in a globalised context. This observation is in no way a criticism of any of these authors, all of whom write within clearly defined scopes and methodologies. My intention is to highlight the paucity of research into Lolita communities in the English speaking world and to highlight the gaps in knowledge which result from a limited volume of research derived from an eclectic mix of theoretical perspectives. It is my contention that media infantilisation and sexual pathologising are a result of the imbalance of power faced specifically by girls. Lolitas' hyper-feminine style sets them apart from even those girls' subcultures that have received academic attention.

There are numerous styles and groups available to girls, some of them very similar at first glance to Lolita. Why then do some choose Lolita? What does it 'do' for them that other styles or communities do not? What do they gain from (and perhaps jeopardise by) choosing Lolita? Do the answers to any of these questions tell us anything about our society more broadly? These are foundational questions that have yet to be asked. The focus on the hypothetical 'meta-Lolita' in the writings of Winge and Mackie does not ultimately tell us anything about actual Lolita communities, why we should think that they matter or what aspects of our social systems are implicated. In this last respect there is a connection to wider trends

both in research methodologies and in media content (as it relates to girls), which will be discussed further below. The representation of Lolitas both in press and academic writing is largely without social context, with the implication that the choice to wear Lolita indicates an individual character or psychological flaw (Mackie does suggest some broader social issues around sex, but does not expand on them). In audience and subculture/post-subculture research there is similar competition for dominance between differing frames of reference: individual or group, structures or fluidity, symbolic resistance or actionable change.

I use the term 'subculture' in the same mode as Hodkinson (2004) and with awareness of the limitations of the concept. Amy Wilkins' *Wannabes, Goths, and Christians* is about "the ways young people use elements of subcultures to create individual and collective identities, and then how they use those identities to solve problems" (2008: 3). This seems like an eminently sensible approach, which combines both individual affective specificities and awareness of the socio-economic and political issues facing young people. She writes:

In thinking about subcultures as projects, I do not mean to imply that young people consciously weigh their options, making rational choices about how different subcultural options will affect them. Instead, I think of the young people in this book as ... people who use cultural resources in creative, interesting, sometimes resistant ways to make their own lives more tolerable or more exciting, to push against the limits posed by the expectations of gender, race, and class, or to shore up their positions. But projects often have unintended or unseen effects, and, in the end, each of these projects also constrains its participants. (Wilkins, 2008: 4)

In the next chapter I unpack the consequences of the lack of social context. Both in media/cultural studies broadly and in subcultural research in particular there appears to be a need to recombine with greater cohesion the macro and micro foci.

It is the aim of this research to achieve such cohesion in the study of Lolita by combining an ethnographic examination of the micro-practices around Lolita clothing with a discussion of the macro-social forces shaping and shaped by the implications of those clothing practices.

Chapter Two: Frames and Hems

“Lolita grows up only to retreat into her youth as a model for what it means to be a woman.”

(Giroux, 1998: 277)



Figure 3

The previous chapter identified 'infantile and insecure' as the dominant mode of media representation of Lolitas. Media commentary was shown to frequently describe Lolitas as infantile, reluctant to accept adult roles in society (including expected sexualised and gendered behaviours) and as associated with ephhebophilia, hebephilia, or paedophilia. The element of gendered behaviours is also heavily focused on by the academic community, and is the subject of the next chapter. This chapter reviews the media representations of Lolita and deals with access to representation and the power of media in anchoring social practices. The rendering of Lolitas as childish by the media demonstrates the limitations of media frames in the case of girls and young women. However, the active engagement of Lolitas in 'misframing' their culture to maintain insider-outsider-boundaries shows an awareness of young women's position in relation to commercial media and an active engagement in the spaces to which girls do have access. This chapter connects the representation of Lolitas to wider trends in writing about girls, exploring what the media portrayal of Lolita reveals about the interactions between subcultures, media and the ordering of social practices. In particular I focus on the idea of Lolita as a regression to childhood, examining the wider social reasons for the media's prioritisation of that reading of Lolita. I argue that although clothing is of vital importance in understanding Lolita, an unsituated focus on semiotic decoding of Lolita clothing obscures wider social issues, including the influence of media framing on ways of understanding and articulating girls.

Femme Infantile

Mass media characterisations of Lolitas as insecure and infantile are part of a wider trend, visible since the 1970s, of young people being infantilised as a result of their disassociation from employment and financial independence (Caputo, 1995 cited in Reddington, 2003: 239). I argue that the emphasis in media representations on Lolitas' immaturity and insecurity represents a distillation of broader discourses of girlhood. These ways of conceptualising girlhood become condensed and

amplified when they collide with Lolita's ultra-girlish style. Martina Böse (2003: 173), writing about the hairstyle choices of Black British youths, points out that

the 'construction of complex appearances through the self-conscious act of stylistic bricolage' (Muggleton, 1997:191) will – for some people more than others – regularly include a consideration and resentment of stereo-types that are ascribed and stabilized by others.

This observation may also apply to Lolitas. Girls' bodies and how they are clothed is a centuries-old social (and at times legal) obsession, often linked to broader ideas of social morality. As Amy Wilkins (2008: 40) points out, the long-term consequences of youth subcultural strategies emerge not so much from the behaviours themselves, but rather from how they are interpreted by the 'gatekeepers' of wider society. This is what makes social reactions to Lolita so fascinating: in many ways Lolitas are conforming to social expectations and pressures, yet the exaggeration of individual elements renders the whole unpalatable to a great many 'gatekeepers'. Wilkins (2008: 251) also highlights the gendering of rebellion, in which being a 'bad boy' does not challenge a boy's essential masculinity but 'bad girls' are judged to be unfeminine. Lolitas confuse this double standard by being 'bad' in a hyper feminine way.

With its frilly skirts, lollypops, dolls and tea parties it is not difficult to see why Lolita appears to be a regression to childhood. The subtle shades of difference between what most people mean when they talk about "childish" and the practices of Lolita are tied up in divergent conceptualisations of childhood. Very few little girls regularly wear long dresses with puffy sleeves these days, for example. Contemporary children's fashion is all about miniaturised adult clothing.⁵ The *Nintendo DS* is seems more popular than tea parties. When commentators describe all of the "child-like" aspects of Lolita, they are not thinking about the reality of

⁵ www.witchery.com.au/witcherykids/w1/i5504355/ is an excellent example.

contemporary children's lives. To take another example, the dolls of Lolita culture are not the dolls of actual children. The doll of choice for Lolitas is the *Super Dollfie* (Figure 3), an anatomically correct, customisable doll for whom brands such as *Baby, the Stars Shine Bright* release miniature versions of their collections. They are not intended for children and are priced beyond childhood affordability. Just as there is something slightly unsettling or disturbing about Lolita style, Lolitas' dolls are unsettling. The *Super Dollfie* even has translucent skin with an almost organic feel to it.

A substantial feature of Lolita culture is tied up in a certain aspect of childishness, the "egoism and cruelty" to which Monden (2008: 28) refers. What critics mean by childish, however, is usually related to social roles. Perhaps because subcultural participation is widely accepted as a transitory phase in the process of growing up, Lolita is seen as something that should be grown out of quickly. The idea that running a Lolita-based business could be a long-term career and not an unhealthy attachment to an infantile pastime is a difficult concept for this framework. Girls of a certain age ought to be putting aside selfishness and self-indulgence to adopt the self-sacrificing identities of employees, wives and mothers. They should be spending less time thinking about ribbons and more time focusing on boys. Part of the transition of adolescence is a change in the focus of self-presentation; dressing becomes something external, something girls do 'for' boys. The cumulative effect of these two assumptions (that girls dress to attract boys and that Lolitas are dressing like children) is a suspicion of a suspect sexuality or a failure to mature according to normal patterns. The infantilisation of Lolitas based on their dress is similar to Judith Butler's (1993: 127) description of the common perception that "lesbianism is acquired by virtue of some failure in the heterosexual machinery"; so too Lolitas are seen as girls who have some failure in the mechanism that propels the male gaze into central importance in their lives. Either they are unwilling to adopt the expected behaviours or they are unable to perform them

adequately. Lolitas transgress the boundaries not only of expected gendered behaviours but often also those of the behaviours associated with their ages. The infantilisation that results from these transgressions is not a phenomenon restricted to Lolitas, of course. Driscoll (2002: 133) writes:

The women not encompassed by the maternalized white woman of mainstream feminism – including postmenopausal woman, racialized/ethnicized groups, third world women, or lesbians- are often aligned with immaturity through their inadequate identification with a generic woman.

In the widely reproduced newspaper article titled 'Lolita Subculture Thumbs Nose at Men', the idea that Lolita style is a specific rejection of men is continuously reinforced (Talmadge, 2008b). Interestingly, the cause of the Lolitas' discontent shifts around in the account. In the same interview fashion designer Hirooka Naoto is quoted as saying the Lolita is an escape from the narrow roles women are expected to play in Japanese patriarchal society and, as previously discussed, he suggests that Japanese women are intimidated by the curvaceous bodies of "Western women" (Talmadge, 2008b). This oscillation between attributing a socially rebellious statement to Lolitas and describing them as flawed or insecure individuals is common in the news media and popular press when discussing Anglophone Lolitas as well. The semiotic coding of Lolitas' appearance is evocative of 'child', although as I have suggested not of any particular lived aspect of childhood. Along with the modesty of the clothing this indicates to 'readers' of Lolita clothing that Lolitas are disinterested in heterosexual activity. Yet, the term 'Lolita' conjures images of delinquent sexuality. Although the common perception is an inaccurate reflection of Nabokov's novel, the association is often that of 'predatory young girl taking advantage of the sexual desires of an older man' (Graham Vickers' *Chasing Lolita* (2008) dedicates considerable space to popular misconstructions of the power dynamic depicted in the novel). The Lolita is either refusing sexualisation by adopting a child-like appearance or she is sexualising the child-like appearance.

Occasionally, unsure of which interpretation to favour, articles simply switch back and forth at will.

Girl Power and Reviving Ophelia

Marnina Gonick (2006) identifies two dominant discourses of girl-hood which she terms “Girl Power” and “Reviving Ophelia”. The girls of Girl Power can do anything they want to if they put their minds to it, while fragile Ophelias suffer a crisis of identity leading to disordered development. She writes that femininity is rearticulated “as comprising both powerful ambitions for autonomy and vulnerability so extreme as to threaten extinction” (Gonick, 2006: 19). Although these two ways of understanding girls seem contradictory, Gonick (2006: 15) sees them as interconnected, writing:

these discourses organize both different and similar formulations of the cultural ideals of personhood, individuality, and agency and do so with different consequences for girls depending on how they are positioned in relation to the dominant social group. As I previously suggested, while Girl Power represents the idealized form of the new neoliberal subjectivities, Reviving Ophelia personifies an anxiety about those who may not be successful in taking up these new forms of subjectification.

Many of the media representations of Lolita discussed above are writing within the Ophelia frame, characterising Lolitas as insecure or troubled. The focus on psychological accounts obscures the external social context within which Lolita has arisen. This tendency to focus on interior narratives is not particular to Lolita. Neoliberal subjects are taught to define their experiences as personal successes or failures through psychological narratives. Thus a secretary interviewed by Valerie Walkerdine (2003: 240) who was given impossible amounts of work by her managers and worked long hours of unpaid overtime in order to finish this work explained her situation as a result of her relationship with her father; exploitative work practices were not part of her understanding of her situation.

Gonick treats girlhood as an idea produced in specific contexts rather than as a universal, biologically predetermined condition. The categorisation of girl, as distinct from women, is a site of contradictory discourse. Lisa Soccio (1999: 8) writes that:

It was once considered politically necessary to assert the identity of adult females as 'women' and not 'girls' in order to resist the denigration of women as simple, childish, and feeble-minded, and in order to assert instead a mature sense of agency, capability, and sexuality. It has subsequently become necessary to further refine the complexities of female identity by reclaiming the empowering components of girliness.

While Riot Grrrls mixed elements of children's and adult dress (Driscoll, 2002: 275), Lolita clothing is consistently read as straightforwardly childish. A newspaper report (too recent to include in the literature review chapter) even has an 'expert' warning a teenaged British Lolita of the "disastrous consequences" of sexualising childhood (Arthurs, 2012). This combination of physically mature bodies in clothing that is perceived to be childish is more shocking than wearing a Hello Kitty backpack with Doc Martin boots. It leads, as we have seen, to observers assuming that the Lolita is trying to cling to her childhood beyond an acceptable age. As Roser (2010: 24) points out:

Dominant conceptions of childhood dictate that adults and children inhabit mutually exclusive worlds... Too close a connection between the child and the adult could result in the distinction between them becoming confused, with such a confusion resulting in the adult losing the power that is delegated to them through the adult/child binary.

The disturbance of Lolita clothing, and the link between this disturbance and associations with childhood, may also stem from the idea that young women should derive pleasure from having and dressing babies in those clothes, not themselves. A

number of Lolitas interviewed reported their parents referring to their Lolita dresses as 'baby clothes'. By dressing a baby girl in an immaculate white frilly dress a woman shows herself to be a 'good mother'. A well dressed child is a credit to her mother; a woman's pleasure ought more modestly to come from the secondary identification with the baby subsumed under her sanctioned pleasure in fulfilling her 'natural role' of motherhood (Kuhn, 1998: 289). A Lolita ignores this form of adulthood, taking the 'dressing', and perhaps the care and devotion it signifies, and directing it back towards herself.

I am focusing on Lolitas' clothing because it is the most distinctive and the most consistent element of the subculture, but also because of the deep significance the clothing has to Lolitas and in shaping the assumptions of those who write about Lolitas. For Malcolm Bernard (1996: 36), clothing does not merely mark out the wearers' social and cultural status. Rather, fashion and clothing "are used to construct and mark out that social and cultural reality in the first place ... it is through fashion and clothing that we are constituted as social and cultural beings, that we decode our social and cultural milieu" (Bernard, 1996: 36). Clothing then is not only a means of communication, but an actively utilised tool in the construction of collective identity (social and cultural) and individual identity (one's position in relation to society). Clothing is sometimes dismissed as a reflection of personal taste and therefore an apolitical, frivolous and essentially trivial aspect of daily life. Helen Reddington (2003: 249), for example, complains that the "media and simplistic historians equate young women with fashion, not ideas" as though the two were mutually exclusive; ignoring the possibility that clothing may express ideas. Considerable scholarship has been devoted to debunking the idea that 'taste' is something natural and apolitical (c.f. Bennett et al, 1999; Bourdieu, 1984; Entwistle, 2000; McKee, 2007). If, as Bernard (1996: 39) asserts, clothing and fashion create and distinguish us as social and cultural beings then they are ideological; they are

one of the ways in which relations of dominance and subservience are created, sustained and made to seem natural.

Clothing can, consequently, be used to challenge these relations. Spectacular subcultural styles in particular can confront assumptions so ingrained that they appear to be 'natural'. Bernard (1996: 41) describes Punk style as

an ideological assault on the aesthetic values of dominant classes... the fabrics, colours and designs are only cheap, vulgar and nasty to a particular group of people and, in employing them to construct a series of punk looks, punk may be seen as opposing the values of that particular group of people.

While Lolita is the antithesis of cheap, vulgar and nasty, it does wage its own demure assault on the aesthetic values that dominate women's appearance in Australia. The Lolita is more at home at the tea table than the beach. She relishes cake rather than dieting. She minimises her breasts and de-emphasises her curves. She does not make her body available for general scrutiny. For Bernard (1996: 43), punk draws attention to "the unnaturalness of the dominant class's conceptions of beauty"; Lolita highlights a different set of aesthetic values. Subcultural styles do not have to be created with the intention of being confronting or challenging to be a source of disturbance to those outside the subculture. Wearing a long frilly dress and a bonnet is a long way from dressing in bin-liners and chains, but Lolita fashion has nevertheless been met with belittlement and criticism. Joanne Entwistle's (2000: 8) linking of the body, dress and cultural meaning explains why Lolita fashion, with its lack of threatening accessories and demure appearance, is still met with such reactions. It is the conventions of dress, she argues, that make flesh into something recognisable and culturally meaningful; bodies that transgress cultural codes of dress may cause outrage, offense or scornful responses (Entwistle, 2000: 8).

One may not see a Lolita and feel fearful that she will exhibit violent behaviour, but their difference in and of itself is unsettling nevertheless. The clothing cannot be 'read' immediately; it is not part of the commonly recognisable convention of dress. Lolita clothing is not easily 'recognisable and meaningful' in part because its semiotic codes are so rich. As Vera Mackie (2009: 5) writes,

Fashion provides a particularly rich site for the analysis of the interaction between consumption, subculture and political economy. Clothing may also be seen as the boundary between body, self and society. Fashion is symptomatic of gender relations, too, for clothing is one of the major means of communicating one's relationship to societal expectations of gender—whether this be to affirm such expectations, negotiate with them, or resist them.

Lolita dresses are highly gendered. They are the object of subcultural fandom. They may be transnational commodities or hand-made on antique sewing machines. Paul Willis (1996: 85) links clothing as an area of identity play explicitly to subcultures, writing that clothing, style and fashion are key tools for young people to explore, create and express both individual and group identities and that they "remain amongst the most visible forms of symbolic cultural creativity and informal artistry in people's lives in our common culture." Lolita style may be bewildering to the casual observer but to a fellow Lolita who shares the common definition of beauty and a similar appreciation for workmanship, the encounter will be quite different. Malcolm Bernard (1996) suggests that membership of a cultural grouping is a result of communication through social interaction rather than group membership preceding such interaction. In terms of fashion and subculture then, it is "not the case that an individual is first a skinhead and then wears all the gear, but that the gear constitutes the individual as a skinhead" (Bernard, 1996: 30).

The Subcultural Capital of Hem Stitching

As Joanne Finkelstein (1991: 12) points out, the adoption of specific mannerisms and appearance

produce groups who recognize each other, who are, in effect, a community of practitioners. Such fashions in the habitus of living reinforce the playfulness of inventing our self. Popular culture thus functions as a toolkit for shaping identity.

Mandy Thomas (2000: 210) describes the use of Asian popular culture in Australia as an alternative source for fashioning identities, concluding that “the appeal of the cultural aesthetics of Asian societies is an affirmation of individuality.” When Australian young people turn to a form of Japanese popular culture which is in turn inspired by European traditions, this expansion of their toolkit reflects an interest in creating an identity which is global in its context. Just as Craig Norris (2003: 173) describes Australian anime fans as embarking on “global identity projects” involving self-perception as “global consumers of hybrid texts”, Henry Jenkins’ (2006: 155) pop cosmopolitans “embrace cultural difference, seeking to escape the gravitational pull of their local communities in order to enter a broader sphere of cultural experience.” It is the very hybridity of Lolita that makes it accessible and easily adaptable from a global style to a locally specific implementation. Sarah Thornton’s (1995) study of UK club culture shows that being different from an imagined static, homogenous “mainstream” culture is an important aspect of subcultural identity. This identity allows youths to “assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass” (Thornton, 1995: 10). Their status within their subculture is dependent on their possession of “subcultural capital”. Subcultural capital is a term coined by Thornton, who applies Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital to subcultures.

For Australia’s Lollitas, awareness of Lolita as a style with Japanese origins while also being knowledgeable about the Anglophone community’s rules and

definitions of Lolita is essential subcultural capital. This is comparable to what Paul Hodgkinson (2004: 114) found in his research into Western Goth culture:

Notably, there was a clear sense that this shared identity transcended the boundaries of place, with numerous respondents emphasizing a close sense of commonality with Goths they didn't know in faraway towns and countries. This translocal sense of identity often came out most strongly in the form of expressions of distinction from equally consistent conceptions of 'trendies', a perceived homogenous mainstream grouping.

This is apparent in the way international Lolitas are clearly an 'us' who discuss the difficulties and also the pleasures of living surrounded by everyone else. In this case nationality is of diminished significance; the 'us' is Lolitas from around the world who are united in their distinction from an equally international mainstream 'them'. For Australians, Lolita's Japanese origins (similar to anime and manga) may "offer new landscapes of the imagination where the dominant ideologies and fantasies operating in Australia can be negotiated or resisted" (Norris, 2003: 152). Lolita is not part of an Orientalist fantasy (see Chapter Four); rather it provides a new vocabulary to express desires that may otherwise remain amorphous and unarticulated. I suspect, although I do not have the requisite data to assert, that many Australian Lolitas are drawn to the style and community emotionally (perhaps intuitively) and then later form their explanations of what Lolita 'means' in response to subsequent outsiders' curiosity or confrontation. Many of the Lolitas I interviewed first answered my question about their initial attraction to Lolita by explaining that it is "beautiful" or "pretty". Every one of them then elaborated on the appeals of Lolita; assuming, I imagine, that their initial (and heartfelt) response was insufficiently 'deep'. Derek Sweet (2005: 262) points out that even if

subcultural acts of resistance may never result in actual change, the discursive and nondiscursive performance of said acts brings the dominant cultural

discourses to the fore; the performance of the subcultural self brings both subcultural ideologies and hegemonic cultural ideologies into sharper focus.

This effect is demonstrated in the debate springing from a post on the feminist blog 'Jezebel' in September 2008. After sharing a *New York Times* article in which several New York Lolitas give interviews, the blog's author poses the questions "is it a form of rebellion for a grown woman to dress like a little girl? And: By embracing Doll's House-style, are Lolitas a setback for women who want to be taken seriously?" (Stewart, 2008) Several pages of comments follow, most of which are derisive of Lolita and accuse them of being anti-feminist and of provoking paedophiles. One of the Lolitas featured in the original *New York Times* article emailed a long retort to the blog's author, who posted it as an article. She compares Lolita's celebration of food with the contemporary emphasis on female diet restricting; describes the Lolita community as a supportive female space which values collaboration and craftsmanship; and contrasts Lolitas' femininity to the hyper-sexualised representations of women in music videos. She writes:

[Lolita] takes these traditionally female signifiers like lace and bows and makes them ultra-visible in a deliberately subversive way... Something so unabashedly female is ultimately kind of scary—in fact, I consider it to be pretty confrontational. Dressing this way takes a certain kind of ownership of one's own sexuality that wearing expected or regular things just does not. It doesn't take a lot of moxie to put on a pencil skirt and flats. (Ellie, 2008)

In response to some of the accusations posted by the blog's readers, she continues

It is not a symptom of any cultural ill just because its aesthetic inspiration comes from a period when women were subordinate to men. Why should I be worried about sending the 'wrong messages' to men? Why is that my personal responsibility? Isn't that like saying 'she was asking for it'? Is the state of

feminism that precarious that my wearing a bow on my head is threatening and regressive? Where is the philosophical debate about men who wear short-shorts or sandals and how they make their gender look bad? (Ellie, 2008)

Her challenge highlights the assumptions informing the other posters' criticisms, which, as Sweet predicts, throws both dominant and resistant discourses of feminism into sharper focus.

The Myth

The frequent association of Lolita the subculture with paedophilia was discussed earlier in relation to the semiotic coding of Lolita clothing. By far the clearest culprit in this misunderstanding is, however, the name itself. "Please put away all your preconceptions, this Lolita has nothing to do with Nabokov" are some of the first words on 'Avant Gauche', a popular Lolita website (Pollock, 2003). Since English-speaking Lolita communities feel confident enough to create dress codes that are not always subservient to Japanese codes, there is no logical reason why the community could not dispense with the name 'Lolita' and all of the negative associations the word brings to the subculture. Instead, however, they have focused on elaborate explanations of what 'Lolita' really means.

An American Lolita wrote, in a school report she shared with me via email, that the fashion has nothing to do with the novel, asserting that, "Lolita is a diminutive form of Dolores, meaning sorrow or suffering in Spanish, which is fitting with the fashion's gothic origins." Of course, that doesn't indicate a lack of connection with Nabokov's Lolita at all, since the titular character's name in the novel is actually Dolores (Nobokov, 1955). Rather than clearing up confusion for the uninformed onlooker, these strategies of elaborate explanation instead increase the distinction between those in the know and everyone else.

Sarah Thornton points out the delight that members of dance club cultures express in the face of "parental incomprehension, negative newspaper coverage"

and argues that “undergrounds define themselves against the mass media” (Thornton, 1995: 117). In other words, “mass media misunderstanding is often a goal, not just an effect, of youth’s cultural pursuits” (Thornton, 1995: 120). Just as McRobbie and Thornton (1995: 568) observed with the Acid House scene, media representations of Lolita are also often discussed within Lolita spaces. Usually these discussions take the form of highlighting how ‘misunderstood’ Lolitas are, increasing the feeling of insider/outsider. However, as Thornton highlights and the example of the title ‘Lolita’ demonstrates, subcultures are often complicit in the mainstream’s misunderstanding. To understand how this occurs in Lolitas’ case, let us turn to Nick Couldry. Couldry (2003: 26) describes the process of framing, as it relates to media rituals, as comprised of three-steps:

- 1 The actions comprising rituals are structured around certain categories and/or boundaries.
- 2 Those categories suggest, or stand in for, an underlying value.
- 3 This ‘value’ captures our sense that the social is at stake in the ritual.

Both in the name “Lolita” and in their clothing, Lolitas know that they are ‘misframing’: misdirecting the expectations of others. Put crudely, it is as though they are shouting, “look over there” and then laughing at anyone who does so. They are aware enough to acknowledge these expectations, as the ‘Avant Gauche’ website illustrates. It seems probable, then, that for Lolitas misunderstanding is part of the attraction of the subculture.

Thornton (1995: 129) (somewhat cynically) proposes an explanation for why youths “resent approving mass mediation of their culture but relish the attention conferred by media condemnation. How else might one turn difference into defiance, lifestyle into social upheaval, leisure into revolt?” While Lolita is more playing at revolt (imaging an alternate social order), than active revolution (altering the existing social order), this perception of existing in opposition to a mass other is

certainly characteristic of Lolita. The myth of the 'mainstream' is essential to subculture; and that idea shares many of the characteristics of Couldry's mythical 'centre' of social normalcy. The idea that a homogenous mainstream exists at all is testament to the power of the myth of a 'centre'. Couldry develops the idea of the mythical mediated centre in *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (2003), along with the media rituals that naturalise it. The "myth" itself can be expressed simply as: "the belief, or assumption, that there is a centre to the social world, and that, in some sense, the media speaks 'for' that centre" (Couldry, 2003: 2). This assumption operates often un-noticed in everyday life, for example in accepting that issues current in news-media are more important than issues not reported on or that a celebrity's wedding is of interest to more people than the couple's family and friends.

Couldry (2003: 143) writes "media studies must face up to the long-term consequences of an entrenched politics of absence – most people's absence from the process of representing whatever worlds we share." In other words, at stake is the control of symbolic resources to which neither Australian nor other Lolitas have much access. The disjuncture between a widespread external opinion that Lolitas are a sexually stunted group of girls and the internal discourses of Lolita communities, which express a spectrum of sexual behaviours equivalent to those of other young people, is an example of this. Couldry (2003: 2) writes: "the myth I am attacking can be expressed... as the belief that the concentration of symbolic power in media institutions is legitimate." Lolitas in some respects reject this. They ignore the privileged representations of beauty, gendered behavioural codes and fashion presented by the mass media in favour of self-made media and anachronistic aesthetics. Media technologies enable Lolita to exist globally, but commercial media content is not central to this DIY, decentralised community. Some Lolitas have even taken advantage of technology to simulate their own television station, uploading 'programmes' to a shared YouTube channel. This is not to say that Lolitas live in a

self-contained bubble with no interactions with commercially produced media, however. As Simon Cottle (2006: 427) points out:

The study of mediatized rituals also encourages a more complex view of the interplay between elites and non-elites than is often envisaged. The forms and dynamics of mediatized rituals can sometimes permit the institutionally disenfranchised and challenger groups within societies to mobilize powerful symbols and sentiments to confront the routine strategic power of dominant institutions.

Lolitas' creation of their own media does not mean that they do not also consume and occasionally feature in mainstream media, as discussed earlier in relation to the *New York Times* and subsequent 'Jezebel' articles.

Couldry (2004: 115) proposes an approach to media studies that views media as practice, considering "the whole range of practices that are oriented towards media and the role of media in ordering other practices in the social world." Although later use implies that he means mass (perhaps commercial) media, the approach he proposes is certainly a useful one in looking at the role of user-generated media such as non-commercial websites and online communities. When posing the question: "do media practices have a privileged role in anchoring other types of practice because of the privileged circulation of media representations and images of the social world?" (Couldry, 2004: 127), he is presumably speaking of mass media. However, responses to questions and photographs posted to online communities such as LiveJournal do, it seems, impact on how members organise social events and how they dress and present themselves. Lolitas use electronic media to seek consensus on what they should wear, how to make the clothing they want and so on. In this sense user-generated electronic media have a very important role in ordering other, social, practices.

Lolita communities use commercial media to contrast themselves with the 'mainstream', but day-to-day self-made media play a more important role in the organisation of Lolita practices. These media are overwhelmingly electronic. Rhiannon Bury (2005: x, 17) writes about the "processes of identification, community-making and production of social space in the realm of the virtual" in the context of female online communities, which she describes as a heterotopia: "a space in which alternatives to the dominant social order can be gleaned". According to Bury (2005: 17), users of women-only online spaces "challenge the normative order simply by refusing to accept the fan practices engaged in by male fans and gathering in spaces of their own." Lolitas interact within a vibrant international social space online, creating and debating the parameters of community and collective identity. The community is sustained by constant sharing activities, which generate subcultural capital in a form of 'gift economy'.

Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins use Lewis Hyde's 1983 work *The Gift* to discuss the gift economy of 'viral' media sharing. They write:

Hyde sees commodity culture and the gift economy as alternative systems for measuring the merits of a transaction. He writes, 'A commodity has value.... A gift has worth'. By value, Hyde primarily means 'exchange value,' a rate at which goods and services can be exchanged for money. Such exchanges are measurable and quantifiable because they represent agreed upon standards and measurements. By worth, he means those qualities we associate with things on which 'you can't put a price.' Sometimes, we refer to what he is calling 'worth' as sentimental or symbolic value. It is not an estimate of what the thing costs but rather what it means to us. (Green and Jenkins, 2011: 119)

In the context of Lolita the gifts exchanged are not primarily physical objects but rather knowledge, access to information or shared labour. The worth of gifts a Lolita is able to contribute to her community is entirely distinct from the value it they may

have in the broader economy. While this is similar to Thornton's (1995) idea of subcultural capital, the community element of the gift economy sets it apart. While a Lolita may be admired and emulated because of her skilled accessorising or talent with a sewing machine, if she does not contribute to the community by sharing her skills and knowledge she is limited in the amount of subcultural capital she can accrue. Telling other Lolitas where you were able to find high quality lace at a low price or advising on which shoes better suit an outfit are 'gifts' to the community as a whole and enhance the subcultural capital of the 'giver' in the process. The emphasis on this gift economy is what really makes Lolitas a community. Nancy Baym (2011: 25) points out that when "gifts circulate in networks, social exchanges create communities."

The accumulation of subcultural capital relies on constant gifting activity; one cannot be a Lolita passively. Uploading advice to new Lolitas, sharing carefully selected pictures of oneself and sewing flawless outfits are all time consuming ways to accumulate Lolita capital. This requirement for participation in a range of gift-oriented activities is what lends Lolita its sense of community. Sewing is not a common skill in contemporary youth circles, but it is essential for a Lolita. So, Lolitas hold sewing bees; hosting parties where a community comes together to share skills, support creativity and add a social dimension to a repetitive task (the bell shaped skirt and amount of trimming on a Lolita outfit makes for a lot of uninspiring hem stitching). Citing Turner, Couldry (2003: 33) highlights the seriousness of play, describing it as: "the forms through which alternative forms of social order are imagined, even if they cannot be enacted". Or, as Roger Silverstone (1999: 60) defines it:

Play is a space in which meanings are constructed through participation within a shared and structured place, a place ritually demarcated as being distinct from, and other than, the ordinariness of everyday life, a place of modest security and

trust, in which players can safely leave real life and engage in an activity that is meaningful in its rule-governed excess.

Lolita is class-play, entering a world of self-indulgence and aesthetics in which daily financial struggles have no place. It is certainly an exploration of alternatives to the dominant social order, although it makes no significant impact on it. The way in which Lolitas are written about does, however, highlight the conceptual challenge that their community poses to ways of articulating girlhood (and womanhood) in contemporary society. Couldry (2004: 122) asks

[w]hat if one of the main things media do is anchor other practices through the 'authoritative' representations and enactments of key terms and categories that they provide. A question, then, if we theorise media as practice, is; how, where and for whom this anchoring role works and with what consequences for the organisation of social action as a whole?

Recall for a moment the idea of frames and framing discussed in relation to the title 'Lolita'. The myth of the mediated centre is sustained by media rituals. These rituals in turn rely on the afore-mentioned 'frames'. Within the media-sustained popular imagination there are certain frames for girlhood. Lolitas' failure to fit easily into one or another of these frames is, I argue, the reason for the ambivalent and occasionally contradictory approach to reporting on Lolita. The 'how' of Couldry's question is answered in this chapter's examination of the media infantilisation of Lolitas. The following chapter looks at the way academic responses to Lolita have accepted and reinforced the same frames, and the consequences of that framing in limiting our knowledge and understanding. Chapter Four focuses on that which has been neglected by media and academic framing, and the consequences for society beyond the Lolita community.

Chapter Three: More Bisque than Barbie



Figure 4

This chapter moves beyond the media framing of Lolitas as infantile and insecure to examine how the influence of the Ophelia discourse manifests in academic approaches to Lolitas and sexuality. Textual analyses and ethnographic data are compared with the dominant academic characterisation of Lolita culture. The contrast between the image of Lolitas presented in the academic works examined and that presented in writings by and for Lolitas raises two important questions. Why is the difference so marked, and what does that difference tell us? It may seem an overblown claim that the dominant academic view of Lolitas is one of sexual pathology, given that I am predominantly citing only one author. As shown in Chapter One, very few authors have published in English about Lolitas. Of these, only Vera Mackie is an established member of the academy. The other English language authors cited are, or were at the time of publication, still students (the exception is Mari Kotani's piece 'Doll Beauties' (2007b), which has been translated into English and is discussed below, but it is of limited scope and length). The lack of interest in Lolita shown by established academics explains the paucity of publications. Mackie is the only author with an extensive publishing history to have tackled the subject. While 'Reading Lolita in Japan' (2010) is clearly a textual analysis (and one specific to Japan), Mackie also projects her observations into the global Lolita scene in 'Transnational Bricolage' (2009).

Throughout this chapter, as in the preceding one, I discuss ideas surrounding adolescent girls. Lolita is usually discussed as a youth or teen phenomenon, with practitioners assumed to be school students or teenagers. In fact, only two of the Lolitas I interviewed in Australia were under twenty. Despite this discrepancy, the media response to Lolita (discussed in the previous chapter) and academic discussion (the focus of the current chapter) are both heavily influenced by the assumption that Lolitas are very young; and for that reason it is important to consider the ideological underpinnings of how girls are conceptualised. When it comes to Lolita, sexuality is glaringly in the fore. The combination of their gender,

the assumption that they are young and the belief that subcultural activity is a phase of adolescence leads to Lolitas being defined via their (hetero)sexuality. Gender is not the only consideration in the interaction between sex and girls, however. Class also impacts how girls perceive sex and how others perceive their sexuality. Valerie Walkerdine (1998: 263) highlights the influence of socio-economic status in differing reactions to a TV child talent program that was criticised in broadsheet newspapers for sexualising children but celebrated in the tabloids:

[T]he eroticized little girl presents a fantasy of otherness to the little working-class girl... from flower-girl to princess, so to speak. Such a transformation is necessarily no part of middle-class discourse, fantasy and aspiration. Rather, childhood for the middle class is a state to be preserved free from economic intrusion. (Walkerdine, 1998: 263)

Lolitas are assumed in key academic works to be 'becoming' rather than 'being', with their heterosexual experiences as key signposts along the road to womanhood and maternity (which, as I discuss below, Vera Mackie sees as incompatible with Lolita). Driscoll (2002: 141), discussing Freud, writes:

The virgin is both emblematic of the future and has no future of her own if the only possible future for a girl is sexual activity, ostensibly unavailable to virgins. The virgin incorporates and represents feminine adolescence as a moment rather than a process: defloration, annunciation, or the prolonged passive suspension before these arrivals frozen in the image of an ideal. Virginity minimizes the significance of feminine adolescence and designates girls' maturity as something gifted by men.

This idea of Lolita as a liminal state, and the role gender plays in that idea, are key concerns of this chapter.

Theresa Winge (2008: 57) writes that when a girl is accepted by the Lolita community and wears Lolita clothing in a public place, she ceases to be herself: “she is a Lolita.” Lolitas are then “free to pose for photographs, which provides them with agency by making them objects of desire” (Winge, 2008: 58). Two powerful messages are communicated by this statement: girls can be themselves or a Lolita but not both, and girls obtain power and agency via their desirability to others. We can see here the influence of the Ophelia frame, with the idea of a girl with a fractured self performing for the approval of others. Although she mentions the modesty of Lolita clothing, Winge discusses sex in the second paragraph of her article, writing that “perhaps this is but another form of sexual display” and elaborating that the Lolita “aesthetic creates a safe space to be sexy and strong behind the protection of the childhood patina” (2008: 48, 60).

In academic works which focus on the figure of the Lolita herself there is a fascination with sex. The sex Lolitas aren't having, the sex they should be having, and occasionally the sex other parties would like to have with Lolitas. In large part I believe this emphasis on Lolitas' supposed sexual abstinence is a continuation of the pervasive (although hotly contested) notion of the *shōjo* as sexless (c.f. Treat, 1993). Lolita, associated with girls and young women and a self-consciously homosocial culture (Brolitas are welcomed, but only if convincingly girlish), may be considered a subset of *shōjo* culture. In this research my focus is on the anglophone Lolita community, not the Japanese. Consequently, although *shōjo* culture is an influence on global Lolita, engaging more deeply with the ongoing debate over *shōjo* sexuality would not be illuminating. However, the broader discourse of girls' sexuality, which is not confined to Japan, is significant. As Driscoll (2002: 139) points out, “feminine adolescence has been overwhelmingly explicated as a sexualised mode of development, and studies of girls and girlhood have perpetuated an emphatic association between sex and girls.”

Shimotsuma Monogatari

Popular *shōjo* author Novala Takemoto (the pen name of Toshiaki Takemoto) published a short novel titled *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (*Tale of Shimotsuma*, published in English as *Kamikaze Girls*) in 2002. It was later made into a manga and a live action film, both with the same title. The main character and first-person narrator is a Lolita named Momoko who lives with her petty-criminal father in an uninspiring small rural town populated by *yanki* (boguns). The novel follows the blossoming of an unlikely friendship between Momoko and Ichigo, a member of an all-girl motorcycle gang. Both girls are high school students. The novel and film are highly regarded in Anglophone Lolita circles. Momoko speaks at length about what Lolita means to her, and for many Lolitas *Shimotsuma Monogatari* was their first exposure to Lolita as a subculture. Stills from the film are a popular choice for online avatars on both LiveJournal and Lolita forums. *Shimotsuma Monogatari* is deeply important to the Lolita community, and is the focus of Vera Mackie's 2010 work 'Reading Lolita in Japan'.

In Mackie's (2010: 187) interpretation Momoko is "infatuated" with Lolita, horrified by sex and "the potential for her body to become a maternal body" and afraid of becoming an adult. The use of such visceral language conveys that Momoko is phobic and developmentally stunted. She is failing to master her body in an appropriately heterosexual way (her disgust being directed, apparently, at both the male body and the maternal body. Mackie (2010: 187) writes about

the young woman's horror of the adult woman's body. This horror is directed at both the sexuality of the adult woman, and the potential for her body to become a maternal body. The agony of labor is fused with the ecstasy of sexual excitement, an image that brilliantly fuses the two elements of the young girl's – the *shōjo*'s – fear of becoming an adult woman.

This interpretation is later followed by the observation that “[t]he novel closes with neither Ichigo nor Momoko having been initiated into heterosexuality” (Mackie, 2010: 197). It is important to critically dissect the assumptions underlying this sentence. Here, sexuality is a product of sex: the girls cannot be heterosexual until “initiated” by a man. Heterosexuality is an inevitable end-point that the characters have not yet reached but eventually it is assumed that they will. Mackie (2010: 197) references a “possible escape from the girlscape”, quoting Momoko saying that growing up might not be so bad after all. Coming immediately after the initiation comment, this implies that ‘growing up’ requires ‘initiation’ through heterosexual intercourse. Womanhood, in other words, is a status conferred upon a girl only after her deflowering (Mackie, 2010: 199). Once this has happened the Lolita presumably hangs up her bonnet for good. As Driscoll (2002: 140) points out, the “hymen underscores the inscription of virginity on and as a feminine body, credited with social and psychological import as a border between girl and woman.” In order to remain a Lolita, an intact hymen is necessary. Therefore, in Mackie’s telling, the possibility of penetration is imminent and fearful for Lolitas. She writes:

The clinging to the innocence of the *shōjo*, then, is a rejection of the fate of defloration, of being reduced to a sexualized body, of the potential transformation into a maternal body. (Mackie, 2010: 199)

This phrasing suggests that the Lolita has no investment in or control over the sexualised body. She is given no space to own and enjoy her sexuality or to initiate sex. If she accepts a sexual role it will be passive: she will be deflowered, transformed and reduced by an unseen but apparently all-powerful phallus. She will become, to borrow Mari Kotani’s linkage, a ‘Stepford Wife’.

Dolls

In her analysis Kotani also sees Lolita style as being about sex, although unlike Mackie, Kotani sees Lolita style as being sexy not asexual. Kotani (2007b)

compares characters in two 2004 films: Momoko, from the film version of *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, and the titular *Stepford Wives* of Frank Oz's remake. She compares Momoko's Bisque Doll⁶ inspired self-presentation to the Barbie Doll-like appearance of the Stepford wives. Although Lolita clothing takes inspiration from fashions as old as Elizabethan and as recent as Edwardian, the dominant look is nineteenth century (thus the association with Bisque dolls). What is interesting about the emphasis on this period is that a major shift occurred between the eighteenth and nineteenth century in the gendering of European fashion. In the eighteenth century men used cosmetics, wore wigs and indulged in lace, embroideries and perfumes (Davis, 1992: 38). By the mid-nineteenth century male clothing had become highly restricted, signalling men's "privileged access to the source of economic and political power in industrial and postindustrial society, namely, occupational success and income and prestige deriving there-from" (Davis, 1992: 40). For a subculture in which clothing signals separateness from hard work and the daily grind (as I argue in Chapter Four), clothing that signifies not only non-employment because of class but also non-employment because of the gendering of work-wear⁷ is doubly significant.

While the concept of doll-like women is filled with interesting implications, the similarities between Lolitas and the Stepford wives are scant. Bisque Dolls are delicate, expensive, rare and treasured across generations. Barbie Dolls are mass-produced, cheap and swiftly destroyed by a single generation of children with scissors and coloured pens. Furthermore, Momoko chooses a Lolita appearance to represent her inner nature, going to extreme lengths to obtain the clothing she needs for the style. In contrast, the Stepford wives are successful women who have effectively been murdered by their petulant husbands and had their bodies

⁶ Bisque Dolls are a kind of porcelain or china doll particularly popular in the nineteenth century and now a valuable collector's item.

⁷ While there were a great number of women employed outside the home during the nineteenth century, the fashions that are appropriated by Lolitas are those of the upper classes rather than working or lower middle-class women.

reconstructed as robots, equipped to fulfil male desires. Barbie is famous as one of the first dolls to sport an adult figure (however anatomically unrealistic), including large breasts and feet permanently pressed into the shape of high-heeled shoes. The Stepford wives, like Barbie, are sexualised in form. Bisque Dolls and Lolitas, on the other hand, are pre-pubescent or pubescent in appearance. As Driscoll (2002: 156) points out, there is a pervasive presumption that girls' sexuality "be constituted for girls as an object of masculine desire." The world of Lolita culture is not subject to the proscriptions of male desires; it is a feminine realm.

Australian Lolitas and Femininity

I make this assertion based on the ways in which the Australian Lolitas I interviewed discussed their femininity in relation to Lolita. In response to the question, "Do you consider yourself to be 'girly' or feminine outside of Lolita?" a number of respondents simply answered "Yes". Others elaborated or qualified their answers. Imogen, a sixteen year-old High School student, responded:

In a way, Lolita helps me to remind people that, although I adhere to the rules and don't speak my mind very often, I'm not a clone: I've made a choice to dress this way and dressing this way makes me happy. When I wear Lolita, I'm definitely expressing an aspect of my personality that is always present but sometimes hidden (my independence), as well as an aspect of my personality that is always present and rarely hidden (my femininity and love of beautiful things).

Viola, a twenty-four year-old Lolita who worked in a warehouse insisted that "any male doing Lolita, they're supposed to try and ... be indistinguishable from the females that they're around." For others, Lolita was the only time they presented a feminine image, as exemplified by the following exchange with Miranda, a twenty-two year-old Lolita who worked in a supermarket:

Miranda: I like fashion in general and I like clothes and I like frills basically; and ribbons and lace and pretty things.

Interviewer: So would you describe yourself as being girly when you're not being a Lolita?

Miranda: [Laughs] No. Nooooooooo. Unfortunately, no, quite the opposite.

Interviewer: Why unfortunately?

Miranda: Aw, 'cause I get a lot of shit about being too masculine so it, it's pretty funny.

Portia (a twenty-seven year-old who owned a Lolita clothing business) saw Lolita as an umbrella under which woman and girls feel free to enjoy pastimes that may otherwise be belittled because of their associations with femininity:

[The] longer one has been wearing Lolita, the more interested in the arts they usually become, such as learning to sew, learning to draw, or playing a musical instrument, baking, going to college or uni and studying fashion, jewellery making, cross stitch even! However I think a lot of people have been drawn to the fashion because they have done one or more of those things in the past or when they were young and want to revisit it; others because they feel Lolita helps them justify these activities.

Femininity has a complex relationship with the pleasures and self-identity of these Lolitas. One thing that did not feature at all, in a single response, was men. There is no mention of what men may think of Lolita; no desire expressed to either attract or scare off men; even the Brolita talks about being indistinguishable from the women around him. Although femininity is often defined negatively (as unmasculine), these Lolitas are not "thumbing their noses at men" (Talmadge, 2008b), nor "appealing to a pedophile's standard of beauty" (Stewart, 2008: comments page). Men are simply irrelevant. The scope of the ethnographic data I

collected in the early stages of this research is too modest to provide the foundation for claims about what does and does not comprise Lolita identity. Furthermore, I would argue that Lolitas are too diverse and geographically dispersed to be included under a single totalising identity. While I argue that neither childishness nor sexuality is particularly important for Australian Lolitas one of my interviewees (Cordelia, a twenty-two year-old waitress) did comment that

when a person is dressed in Lolita fashion they disown their sexual identity as sexually mature adult, and the innocence and beauty within this is an alluring factor.

However, with the inclusion of additional information from Lolita media, both print and electronic, there is substantial evidence to suggest that Mackie's analysis of the characteristics and motivations of the fictional Lolita character Momoko, despite providing a valuable starting point for investigation, is not broadly transferable to Australian Lolitas. Nor are Mackie's (2009: 26) broader speculations about the relationship between Lolita and sexual insecurity applicable in the Anglophone setting. This is not intended as a criticism; Mackie is not addressing Australian Lolita practices or societal reactions to Lolitas. Her focus of analysis is different to mine. She explores a different set of questions within a different disciplinary perspective to my own research. As outlined earlier, her research provides a starting point for the examination of Lolita behaviours in Australia. The way motherhood is perceived within Lolita media is a salient example of the differences between the conclusions Mackie draws from her Japan-focused textual analysis and what is ethnographically observable in the international Lolita community.

Maternity Petticoats



Figure 5

The general acceptance of the idea of Lolitas as mothers within the Lolita community is demonstrated by the decision to include a (fiction) story about a Lolita's discovery of her mother's Lolita past in the very first English-language *Gothic & Lolita Bible* (Ootsuki, 2008: 78). The story's narrator is embarrassed by her mother suddenly dressing in Lolita, especially when the street-snap reporters from *The Gothic & Lolita Bible* photograph the mother and daughter in identical outfits. She has always fantasised about being photographed with her boyfriend for the magazine (Lolitas can, it seems, have boyfriends). When she later learns that her boyfriend will spend the most romantic night of the year with another Lolita the narrator lashes out at her parents, only to discover that they had given up their own youthful identities (as a famous Lolita and star of the local rock scene, respectively) when they became parents. Facing a cancer scare, her mother is reviving her Lolita passion. The family is brought together through Lolita, and the story ends with the protagonist helping her father recreate his rock-star persona with a long-haired wig. Although the mother in the story stopped wearing Lolita after the birth of her

daughter, both the *Gothic & Lolita Bible* journalists, Lolitas in the shop where she buys her outfit and ultimately her daughter welcome her as a Lolita as soon as she decides to dress as one again. The image of the thirty-eight-year-old Lolita housewife carrying her bag of groceries back from *Jusco*⁸ is clearly incompatible with the explanation of Lolita as a strategy to delay adulthood by young girls who are disgusted by fertile bodies and phobic about sex.

Mackie (2009) and Kotani (2007b) are both analysing Momoko, and to some limited extent actual Lolitas through her, as a text. I want to move now to consider some non-fictional Lolitas. By far the most commonly cited resource for Lolitas by my interviewees was LiveJournal's 'EGL: The Gothic and Lolita Community'. A few searches through posts to the site show how ungrounded in reality the idea of Lolita as a rejection of sexual maturity is. For example, searching the term "boyfriend" showed 370 results. In many of those threads Lolitas share pictures of themselves with their boyfriends and discuss the impact of Lolita on their relationships. The community is not restricted to heterosexual relationship discussion, of course. In fact, two sub-communities that are particularly notable are 'Lolita Pride' (Pride, 2007), a site with 446 members for Lolitas of all sexual orientations (with links to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and asexuality information sites appearing on the information page); and 'Lolita Love Letters' (Love, 2011), a Lesbian Lolita hook-up site with 51 members.

Regarding the putative loathing of sexual, maternal bodies, there are several pages of Lolitas asking for advice on Lolita maternity clothing. A number of posters share their experiences of modifying Lolita outfits to accommodate their changing bodies, and all of the responses are positive and encouraging (EGL). One poster comments "Lolita is a celebration of femininity and what could be more feminine than being pregnant? I say go for it, I think it's an adorable idea!" (the next post initiates a discussion on the differences between female biology and femininity). In

⁸ A discount department store, similar to K-Mart.

a thread discussing raising children without giving up Lolita a woman who shares a picture of herself with her son writes “one of the most important lessons you can teach a child is that it's ok to be yourself. Even if others think you're a little weird.” (EGL)



Figure 6

The same thread points to an entire community dedicated to older Lolitas, many with children (Onesama, 2008). Having a baby may not seem particularly unusual for a group I have characterised as rejecting ‘mainstream’ normalcy. However, motherhood is heavily socially prescribed and women who do not comply with the dominant image of ‘mother’ are stigmatised and their parenting may even be subjected to legal scrutiny. Maintaining a subcultural lifestyle after becoming a mother, particularly one as flamboyant and focused on self-gratification as Lolita, is an instance of resisting the behaviours society expects.

In the case of Lolita, socio-economic status and other macro-frames are obscured by the micro focus. Momoko fears the transformation of her body through pregnancy in Mackie’s account because she is afraid of adulthood, not because teen pregnancy would trap her in Shimotsuma, in poverty and the society of the working-class neighbours she despises. Her embroidery skills are not the basis for a vocation, allowing access into a class above that of her fraternal family; instead they

become an intertextual link to another sex-phobic girl (Danzai's *Joseito*), further reinforcing the claim of Momoko's sexual immaturity (Mackie, 2010: 192). This is not to dismiss Mackie's analysis of *Shimotsuma Monogatari* or to suggest that one reading is more valid than another. What I want to highlight is how the focus on personal, individual flaws blinkers us to broader social issues facing Lolitas. As Joanne Baker (2009: 20) argues in 'Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability', there is an assumption in Australian society that gender equality has been achieved, with awareness of entrenched disadvantage replaced by

discourses of limitless possibility and the rewards of individual effort and personal transformation [that] are expressed by young women and cut across parenting status and educational attainment as well as race and class resulting in the pervasive, unforgiving and frequently anxiety-ridden obligation to account for the circumstances of their lives in individualised terms – regardless of how difficult they might be.

By individualising Lolitas as Ophelias, insecure and with personality traits indicating disordered development (phobic reactions to sexuality and mature bodies), any collective significance they may have in contemporary society is obscured. The potential for collective significance is revealed in the response of Perdita (a twenty-seven-year-old library technician) to my question about whether she felt feminine or girlie outside of Lolita:

The point of traditional femininity is it's about being a doll or object, about showing you don't have to do certain things because you can't while you are dressed like this. It's about looking fragile, like you need to be rescued. This element doesn't appeal to me. I'd rather be doing the rescuing. Femininity is largely an illusion imposed by society anyway. I think you need to be true to yourself. Society seems to have its way of deciding where along the femininity scale you fall. If you know how, you can emphasise that side of your look or you

can de-emphasise it, changing day-to-day or choosing one and sticking to it. I change day-to-day but I'm rarely overly feminine looking. Not because I think it's unattractive but because it's often uncomfortable, impractical and doesn't overly suit me. There are biological differences between men and women, of course, but rather too much is made of them by many people. However, before the days of the French Revolution, such fashions used to be a mark of status. Both men and women of the upper classes would wear elaborate and pale coloured clothes to make it clear they had no work that would threaten the integrity of their delicate fashions, no dirty work. So sometimes it's nice to pretend to be glamorous and decorative and far away from work. This is where the overtly feminine fashion and I meet. To me it's a mask you can wear, or not, as you feel at the time. It should never be expected or imposed but it can be enjoyed and appreciated like any other mask.

Her words reveal an extremely complex relationship in her mind between Lolita fashion and self identity, class, gender and the roles of work and play in her life. While I am not suggesting that all Australian Lolitas share her concerns or would agree with her interpretation of their community, the interplay of issues and themes in her response shows that Lolita resonates on many levels and in many ways with Australia girls. Why this is the case, how Lolita satisfies their needs and what this implies for society as a whole are questions that are not currently being addressed.

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which a focus on individual pathology (specifically in this instance sexual pathology) obscures structural disadvantage and inequitable access to power, including the power to produce authoritative and definitional representations through media and academic publications. In other words a convergence of class, age and gender determine the ways we talk about Lolitas. The differences between Mackie's reading and the ethnographic data relating to sexuality and motherhood reveal that there is a

conversation which is currently not occurring about the role of girls in contemporary society and the way the language of empowerment has individualised their failures by obscuring the barriers that stand in the way of their achievements. Lolas lose individual personhood and are reduced to bodies and fears about bodies. Their definitive characteristic becomes the stubborn presence of an imagined hymen.

Chapter Four: Through the Looking-Class



Figure 7

In this chapter we delve deeper into dimensions of Australia's Lolita culture that previous chapters have argued are obscured by the currently dominant focus on emotional immaturity and sexuality. In the previous chapters I asserted that the primary attraction of Lolita is not, for a majority of Anglophone participants, a clinging to a pre-sexual child-like state. In this chapter I outline some of the attractions the clothing and community hold for the Lolitas who agreed to be interviewed for this research. It is essential to again state that my sample group is not statistically representative or large. The information obtained from the interviews I conducted suggests productive avenues for further research rather than conclusively answering the questions I have raised in previous chapters. I argue that becoming a Lolita represents an act of temporally dislocated class play; and I suggest a number of socio-economic factors that make this act attractive to Australian girls.

The asexual style of Lolita clothing has been focused on by many authors, while the significance of its *impracticality* has been largely unexplored. In Lolita everything is impractical because of its *excess*, which has connotations of complete self-indulgence. What does indulgence mean for girls and subcultures of resistance? At the outset of this research I was interested in Lolita as a site of cross-cultural borrowing that highlighted the complexities of contemporary identity formation (in other words, why young Australians felt that the best external representation of their 'true selves' was a Japanese re-imagining of European clothing from previous centuries). The significance of all the ruffles and lace was not something I had considered; in fact it is something that emerged only through the interview process. Amy Wilkins (2008: 7) writes of American women that:

The rise in families headed by single women has not been matched by an over-all rise in women's earning power, creating a concentration of poverty among women and children... The increasing investment of women in paid labor has been countered by an intensification of both mothering (Hays, 1996) and beauty

standards (Wolf, 1991), and not, overall, by an increasing investment of men in domestic responsibilities. Thus, while young women are taught to expect more equality and personal fulfilment, they also learn to expect greater poverty, more work, and less help (e.g. Sidel, 1990).

Contrary to my expectations, based on the cost of Lolita brand name clothing, most of my interviewees were from working or lower-middle class income brackets and expressed little hope for upward mobility. Rather than being an expression of a rejection of adult social roles or sex or motherhood, my interview responses suggest that an as yet undiscussed factor is at play in the Australia Lolita community: socio-economic disadvantage. Many of the Lolitas I interviewed experienced a convergence of disadvantages including gender and restricted opportunities for education and employment because of a rural family home and commitments that required them to stay in the family home. Although 'class' is a somewhat problematic term, it retains analytical usefulness. As Walkerdine (2003: 239) argues, class is still the only discourse we have to discuss the subjectivity of socio-economic inequalities (even though the circumstances of oppression and exploitation have changed). The convergence of disadvantage in the situations of the Lolitas I interviewed is more complex than class alone, and I use the term class very much in the sense Daphne Habibis and Maggie Walter (2009: 33) classify as "new wave", in which class is seen as relevant but existing within social and cultural contexts.

Gender is an extremely important factor. According to Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow (1999: 116) in "contemporary Australian culture the body is gendered before it is anything else." Young Australian women are faced with a situation in which women are more likely to be enrolled in full time study but less likely to find full time employment than men (Schneiders, 2010). Women make up forty-five point three per cent of the Australian workforce but only two per cent of ASX200 companies are chaired by women (EOWA, 2011; Jeffereys, 2005). The

average weekly earnings of young men are about 20 per cent higher than those of young women, and according to a report commissioned by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, “although women are now more likely than men to be university graduates, they earn \$2000 a year less when they start work and continue to fall behind in wages and superannuation” (Schneiders, 2010). In fact, the average superannuation payout for women in Australia is one third that of men’s (Tegan, 2008). For many of the Lolitas I interviewed, their socio-economic backgrounds, family histories, gender and educational attainment all factor in limiting their future opportunities. Furthermore, the discourse of empowerment referred to in Chapter Two blames them for their circumstances. As Sheila Jeffreys (2005: 22) writes, it is common to talk about women as though the “material forces involved in structuring women’s subordination have fallen away to leave liberation a project of individual willpower.” Wilkins (2008: 8) puts this phenomenon succinctly: “for ‘at-risk’ girls, new expectations that they be confident and career-oriented increase the grounds on which they can fail.”

Far Away From Dirty Work

Very few academic sources contain ethnographic data derived from actual (as opposed to fictional or hypothetical) Anglophone Lolitas. Since online discussion focuses on sewing tips and debating colour choices, it is not surprising that a sense of socio-economic disadvantage is not immediately apparent in these discussions (and of course, being online in the first place requires access to a certain level of infrastructure). Although few of my interviewees explicitly mentioned class, it came through very strongly in their descriptions of Lolita’s appeal that the identity they associate with Lolita is neither infantile nor asexual but rather one of leisure and privilege. The following comment from Perdita, quoted more fully in the previous chapter, most clearly articulates this attraction:

Fashions used to be a mark of status. Both men and women of the upper classes would wear elaborate and pale coloured clothes to make it clear they had no

work that would threaten the integrity of their delicate fashions, no dirty work. So sometimes it's nice to pretend to be glamorous and decorative and far away from work.

This statement has greater emotional significance than the written word expresses. Many of the Lolitas I interviewed were in situations of serious financial hardship. For example, Hermia was working extremely hard making Lolita accessories for sale to try and save the family home from repossession after her sole parent had been made redundant. She had tried to find work but the cost of petrol travelling from her isolated rural home to the nearest town off-set the value of the minimum wage jobs she was able to find. Her world away from work, Lolita, had become her last resort for work. While she and many other Lolitas describe their attraction to the aesthetic as a love of lace, ribbons and pretty things, I suspect that the difference between these soft, gentle and indulgent things and their circumstances, which often require them to be hard-nosed, aggressive and self-controlled, is a substantial attraction. Returning to my use of "girl" to describe Lolitas, the challenges faced by girls (particularly from lower socio-economic backgrounds) as discussed above are quite particular. Driscoll (2002: 111) takes this even further:

Class demonstrably affects both puberty and adolescence as an experience of social placement and transformation, and feminine adolescence must thus be specific to whatever constitutes class formations. But given that the prolonged dependence of adolescent lives has clear economic and ideological functions, might this added ideological burden attributed to girlhood distinguish girls as a class position?

While I think there is some danger of neglecting to recognise the considerable differences between various experiences of girlhood, it is certainly helpful to recognise the specific "ideological burden" of girlhood.

What I am proposing is not a return to the heroic resistance model of subculture research. Rather, I am suggesting that the way Lolitas use clothing in the construction and expression of self-identity is multifaceted (and perhaps even counter-productive). The emphasis on claims of sexual abnormality, insecurity and immaturity is an extension of the 'Ophelia frame' through which girls who are not apparently managing to perform appropriately as neo-liberal subjects are viewed. The individual pathologising of these girls obscures anything we may otherwise be able to learn from them as a collective. For many Australian Lolitas, the clothing (and the community surrounding it) is a way of resolving tensions between what they perceive as their true selves and the way they are valued in wider society. For at least some, these tensions are primarily economic in origin. The exaggerated gendering of Lolita clothing along with its connotations of wealth and leisure suggest a deep intertwining of gender and class, which has not been touched upon in existing research.

An example of this intertwining is sewing. Although the Lolita in the above example has extended her production of Lolita items to include hats and accessories made for sale, she started out making such things for her own use. For Lolitas without access to a significant disposable income, homemade clothing and accessories are essential. Sewing is a highly valued skill in Lolita communities, but outside it may be seen as a hangover from pre-feminist life. There seems to be an almost guilty quality to girls when admitting that they enjoy sewing. As discussed in the previous chapter, one respondent even characterised sewing and other 'feminine' pastimes as one of the attractions of Lolita. Handmade outfits garner the most respect and typically the biggest prizes in competitions. Because Lolita is 'subcultural' it is safe to practise vilified forms of femininity without being singled out as 'girl power' failures. The subculture tag turns sewing from 'daggy' to 'edgy'. Questions such as, "Can sewing and baking be feminist?" are taken very seriously within Lolita communities and a number of high profile Lolita blogs deal with

questions of being a feminist in petticoats. Underneath these more existential ponderings on identity and politics is practical consideration however. Most Australian Lolitas cannot afford to populate their wardrobes entirely with brand name imports. Almost all of the Lolitas I interviewed relied either on their own sewing or on relatively cheap outfits purchased from other Lolitas with better dressmaking abilities for a majority of their Lolita clothing. For particularly skilled Lolitas, dressmaking became not only an affordable way of dressing themselves but also a way to expand their incomes.

A number of interviewees described the process of looking at brand-name websites or reading *The Gothic & Lolita Bible* for inspiration before making their own versions within tighter budgets. Simon Jones (1996: 94) observes a link between homemade clothing and self-esteem:

There are [sic] a significant minority of young people who sew and knit their own clothes for reasons that are partly to do with pleasure in their own symbolic work and creativity as well as financial... There is a symbolic as well as practical pleasure and sense of fulfilment for young people in being able to use their own manual skills and resources to make their own clothes.

Even those Lolitas who cannot begin to imagine making a new item of clothing from scratch regularly participate in 'guerilla lolification', modifying 'normal' clothing and accessories to make them Lolita. Charity second-hand clothing shops are a favourite source for the base materials. As Jones (1996: 96) found when researching the clothing practices of unemployed youth, "buying secondhand clothes is clearly part of a whole active process of symbolic work and creativity to do with producing appearance." To summarise: Participation in the subculture requires wearing certain clothes. The girls have to sew because they cannot afford to buy the clothes they desire. Sewing is associated with unliberated women and has negative

connotations. Participation in a subculture that values sewing and elevates it to a source of subcultural (and financial) capital allows guilt-free sewing.

Recasting Work as Play

This complicated relationship between clothing, productive labour and fantasies about leisure is also an over-riding theme in *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, which Anne McKnight (2010) reads in the context of the interaction between Rococo excess and revolutionary consciousness. McKnight's interpretation highlights what dreaming of a life of indulgence may mean for girls and the construction of their subcultures. For McKnight, *Shimotsuma Monogatari* is fundamentally a story of the marketplace. She writes: "every sort of relationship in the novel and the film – except the bonds of the biker gang and Momoko's care for her elderly grandmother- is entirely enabled and resolved through the market" (McKnight, 2010: 119). Lolita fashion, she argues, reprises the "logic" of the "consumer revolution", which enabled women's entry into the market place, during the shift from feudal to bourgeois societies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (McKnight, 2010: 119).

Gender and class are deeply intertwined of course, and the bourgeois age came with its own systems of patriarchy. Mari Kotani (2007b: 57) argues that the culture of *shōjo* is rooted in the combination of class consciousness, economic prosperity and a "cult of cultivation", writing that the *shōjo* arose only through dependency on the patriarchal system, making it classed from the very beginning. The *shōjo* culture admired by intellectuals was, however, aggressive in a way that, while formed within the patriarchal system of girls' schooling, "ended up paradoxically possessing an aesthetic and sexual magic that shook the system" (Kotani, 2007b: 57).

Part of the nurturing of these *shōjo* was distancing them from economic concerns. The *shōjo* is protected by a boundary of economic stability (Kotani, 2007a:

55). Her life is concerned with pleasure and play. This is the life of which Australian Lolitas dream. Rather than being part of a transnational *shōjo* culture, I see them as outsiders looking in with envy. The ugly realities of financial strife are partially obscured behind lace and ribbons, but never entirely erased from sight. *Shimotsuma Monogatari's* Momoko is also an outsider to the nurtured life of Kotani's pre-war *shōjo*. Her poverty is the foundational tension of the novel/film. The resolution achieved at the end depends on “feminizing the crossover of media forms to make work compatible with play” (McKnight, 2010: 136). This method of resolution is essential because “the longing for class mobility sends Momoko straight to work” despite her belief that “for one who lives with the rococo spirit, productive labor is to be avoided at all costs” (McKnight, 2010: 135). For girls who are not protected by the bourgeois cocoon of *shōjo* culture, this seems an impossible dream. Only if work is recast as play, production as pleasure, can the dream be realised. In *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, “the happy ending in which the story culminates is all about being able to turn the frivolous, aristocratic hobby of embroidery into a vocation, to transform hobby into work” (McKnight, 2010: 135).

In fact, the ending is not as neat a resolution as McKnight suggests. Momoko agonises over whether working to help produce Lolita clothes will ruin her enjoyment of them, and although the novel suggests that she will accept the job offer that comes at the end of the story, it is left open (Takemoto, 2008). For Australian Lolitas who work within Lolita related industries, there are benefits beyond being able to turn a hobby into vocation or work into play. Working in a Lolita-infused environment allows a much deeper retreat from aspects of society they find distasteful. The recasting of work as leisure is something Angela McRobbie (1999: 27) identified in her research into young working-class people who are self-employed in creative industries:

The majority of the young fashion designers I have interviewed would earn more as temps or secretaries but their commitment to notions of personal creativity

provides them with a utopian idea of breaking down the distinction between dull work and enjoyable leisure. If paid employment is no longer secure, then self-employed but 'creative' insecurity is often more appealing than uncreative job insecurity in a large company or corporation.

In the following comments Portia, who owns a business, expresses frustration at the influence of her appearance over the way people respond to her and describes using Lolita to take ownership of her appearance:

Although I am 27, I look perhaps 16-18 in average clothing. Often, people are condescending and assume I have no life experience whereas I have lived away from home since I was 18, done a bachelor's degree in accounting, marketing and Thai and have worked for small business, nationals and multinationals in accounting, media monitoring and market research client-side and operations in professional junior to mid level roles in the last 10 years prior to opening my store. It is frustrating When I mention I have a business to non-Lolitas, many people take it upon themselves to lecture me as to how I should run it even though they have no experience in running a business, dealing with accountants, lawyers, customers and have no knowledge of the market or marketing. I find it arrogant. Therefore, I feel more comfortable liaising with people who do not think age determines how one should be treated; this is positive ... in Lolita, looking young is an asset rather than a liability.

Commentator and author Usagi Nakamura, cited in 'Branded: Bad Girls Go Shopping' (Bardsley and Hirakawa, 2005: 118), claims that "every woman is treated unequally because of her gender, class and nationality." Therefore, if buying brand name handbags or other designer goods "helps us *feel*, even momentarily, like a winner in this not so fair world, then why not make use of it?" (Bardsley and Hirakawa, 2005: 118) The Australian Lolitas I interviewed were not in financial situations conducive to buying brand name goods. Nevertheless, I believe that the

concept of feeling like a winner is an important one. It is interesting is that rather than buying fake brand name goods or in other ways attempting to replicate a higher socioeconomic lifestyle, Lolitas are ignoring the contemporary social order and replacing it with an alternate set of values. There are a number of possible explanations for this, including the social stigma of 'getting above yourself' versus the (internal) emotional support of participating in a taste community. There is also a risk of failing to 'pass' as a member of a more privileged group. As Carla Jones and Ann Marie Leshkovich (2003: 23) point out, whether one can achieve a more privileged identity by altering one's dress depends on the acceptance by others of one's performance; this, in turn, depends upon how one has previously been classified.

The common explanation of Lolita as an external expression of the 'true' inner-self suggests that 'faking' membership of a higher socio-economic bracket would be a much less satisfying experience and one that would be difficult to fit into a narrative of taste and self-expression. Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 252) highlights the difference between "being" and "seeming", pointing to the long history of sumptuary laws, laws restricting the wearing of certain uniforms and countless social repressions that regulate the distinction. Lolitas control the systems of classifying their own community. They define what it means to 'be' a Lolita.

Creating the Discerning Self

In this new system, being poor is less of a social barrier than misjudging the compatibility of one's accessories. The ability to sew a complete outfit is valued more highly than the ability to afford a brand name outfit. Mary Bucholtz (2002: 541), writing about musical cultures, observes that they are

better understood as founded on a politics of distinction, in which musical taste is tied not only to pleasure or social identity but also to forms of power. This is a very different kind of oppositionality than is implied by the concept of resistance,

for it is based not on a rejection of a powerless structural position but rather on a rejection of an undiscerning mainstream culture.

The urge to reject the perceived characteristics of mainstream taste is derived from the desire for distinction in one's self-identity. As Thornton (1995: 10) points out, "distinctions are never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of *others*." For young Australians struggling for various reasons, the ability to distinguish themselves from an inferior group based on taste, a characteristic commonly held to be innate, is an important tool. An interesting point raised by Jeffrey Brown (1997: 28) is that the "shadow economy" of subcultural capital (although he does not use the term) mimics the rules of "official culture". Subcultural capital is simply more achievable than economic or, in some cases, social capital. In Wilkins' (2008: 11) words:

young people develop oppositional identities with alternative ... ways of feeling good about themselves that rely on criteria at which they can be competitive, rather than on institutional criteria at which they are likely to fail.

These alternate criteria only have value within the Lolita community of course, and many Lolitas describe being jeered when they wear Lolita in public and being accused of being anti-feminist or perverted. Even within the community not everything is soft and fluffy. There is infighting, gossip and bullying. One of the Lolitas I interviewed had been ridiculed in a LiveJournal community called 'Lolita Fucks',⁹ dedicated to sharing and mocking pictures of Lolitas whose outfits contravene the 'rules' or who are considered too fat, ugly or otherwise unworthy of Lolitahood. Another of my interviewees was an administrator of the 'Lolita Fucks' Community, and told me that it routinely changes its name each time it gets

⁹ The group is regularly shut down by administrators but always re-surfaces under a different name. At the time I first heard about the group it was called 'Lolita Fucks', but has since changed names at least twice.

reported to LiveJournal administrators and shut down. Christine Griffin (2011: 255) points out that

contemporary discourses of individual freedom, self-expression and authenticity demand that we live our lives as if this was part of a biographical project of self-realisation in a society in which we all have 'free' choice to consume whatever we want and to become whoever we want to be. This authentic and fully realised self should be subject to continual (self-)surveillance, transformation and improvement, in a process that has long formed a central element of normative femininity, but is now being intensified and extended to affect masculinity as well.

The internal surveillance of Lolitas by other Lolitas that 'Lolita Fucks' represents shows that participation in Lolita does not mean an escape from the pressures of the continual self-creation of neo-liberal subjectivity; simply a change in the criteria by which successful selfhood is defined. Nevertheless, Lolita's participants for the most part characterise the Australian community as nurturing and supportive.

For Australian Lolitas, awareness that the style is international is also an important factor in the creation of a discriminating self. Henry Jenkins (2006: 152) defines the pop cosmopolitan as "someone whose embrace of global popular media represents an escape route out of the parochialism of her local community." This is certainly applicable to Lolitas, as the lively interaction on LiveJournal between Lolitas from countries including the USA, UK, Finland, Netherlands, Australia, Singapore and more (Monden, 2008: 31, footnote 41) suggests. Australian Lolitas post complaints to an understanding and sympathetic international community about the perceived ignorance and unoriginality of those around them. Mandy Thomas (2000: 210, 212) describes the use of Asian popular culture in Australia as an alternative source for fashioning identities, concluding that "the appeal of the cultural aesthetics of Asian societies is an affirmation of individuality."

It is the very hybridity of Gothic and Lolita which makes it accessible and easily adaptable from a global style to a locally specific implementation. The Lolitas interviewed for this research had become interested in Gothic and Lolita through a number of different (and occasionally oppositional) directions. For some, Lolita fashion originates in an interest in cosplay and anime. For others, the Steam Punk aesthetic popularised through science fiction and role playing is a lead into the similarly Victorian inspired fashion of Lolita. Some Western style Goths see Gothic Lolita as a way of returning Goth to its gentler romantic phase in reaction to what they see as a current emphasis on the more fetishist Cyber-Goth style. One respondent was a musician who had initially been attracted to Japanese Visual Kei bands and had developed an interest in Gothic and Lolita from that angle. Although it is bound by strictly peer-enforced rules, Lolita is an umbrella style adaptable enough to accommodate all of these interests.

To describe Gothic and Lolita as a global hybrid is neither to suggest that it is simply the product of previously distinct cultures colliding nor that the style is a symptom of global homogenisation of youth culture. Monden (2008: 38) uses the example of Lolita to support the contention that transcultural flow is “a complex and overlapping process that flows in multiple ways”, not only pointing out the European-Japanese-American cultural hybridity of Gothic and Lolita but also problematising the idea of a pure “original” culture by highlighting historical intercultural borrowings. Jan Pieterse (2006: 676) rightly points out that cultures have always been hybrids, rendering the idea of hybridisation “a tautology: contemporary accelerated globalization means the hybridization of hybrid cultures.” Furthermore, Monden (2008: 32) argues that out that,

participants clearly distinguish it [Lolita] from the Western Goth subculture. Moreover, they have selected GothLoli not because they were forced to, but because it suits them for a variety of reasons. This illustrates the possibility that transnational culture and local culture can co-exist without homogenisation.

Far from being an uncontested melting pot of international influences, however, the distinctions between different interpretations of Lolita (and in particular the differences between Japanese and Western Lolita) are a source of continual debate in Lolita communities.

The original online post quoted from below had, at the time of writing, received one-hundred and thirteen direct replies, triggered thirty-one tangential debates (many of which also had several replies) and has been referenced and linked to by other LiveJournal communities in their discussions. In the paragraphs quoted below, three concerns dominate: distinguishing Western Lolita culture from Japanese Lolita; criticising the developing hierarchy in the community; and concerns about commercialisation. The latter two are concerns common to many subcultures. The insistence on the irrelevance of Japan is a concern more particular to Lolita. It is difficult to imagine Australian punks being concerned that they may be imitating their British counterparts too slavishly, for example. The author, Valkyrie_chan, is not writing from a position of disinterest in Japan; in fact, she begins the post by mentioning her time as an exchange student in Nagoya. Her experience of both Japanese and American Lolita allows her to write from a position of greater authority in the debate over the importance of Japanese Lolita for Western Lolita:

So I'm sure you get my point by now: Japan isn't some lolita paradise where Mana [lead guitarist of the band Malice Mizer and founder of Lolita clothing label, Moi-même-Moitié] comes down from heaven and passes out burando [brand-name clothing] to anyone who strives to be lolita. It's not days and days of Kera [the fashion magazine from which the *Gothic & Lolita Bible* is an off-shoot] photoshoots and Angelic Pretty [a Lolita clothing brand] tea parties. Just like in the international lolita scene, there are people who will be rude to you or may not like you.

But I'll argue that what Japanese lolitas do or don't do doesn't even matter. Being an international lolita may not be becoming less expensive, but as brands start shipping overseas and the Gothic Lolita Bible is currently being translated and distributed by a major company, it is becoming much more accessible.

I'm not going to pretend that this accessibility is without benefits, but part of me hates the fact that there are now lolita experts and celebrities within our little community. I feel as if this fashion movement, that was once so counterculture and DIY, will be taken over and redefined by businesses that have no interest in us. We need to stop picking each other apart and define Lolita more clearly for ourselves. We need to help fellow members of the community and contribute ourselves. We need to think and write about what Lolita means for us and why it's significant in our culture, rather than glancing abroad for Japanese lolitas to define it for us. (EGL C)

Valkyrie_chan's call for Western Lolitas to articulate their significance within their own culture(s) makes explicit the social and historical specificity of Lolita's meaning. Lolitas across the globe are differentiating themselves from the "mainstream" by adopting Lolita clothing. What the mainstream they are rejecting is, however, differs from situation to situation. Consequently, the behaviours and styles of Lolita differ. Thomas (2000: 203) writes, for example, that "Asian cultural aesthetics and practices ... often still carry an aura of unacceptability and transgression" in Australia.

Portia, a respondent who runs a Lolita clothing business, explains how Australian Lolitas negotiate the international variations of Lolita style:

The Japanese fashion houses and publications set the standard ... However Australian Lolitas are happy to buy non-Japanese clothing, shoes and accessories as long as it [sic] matches the aesthetic approved by the various Australian and the EGL Lolita communities. As the EGL community is in English and is the main

hub of activity for English language speakers, discussion, social approval and influence on decision making by girls as to what to buy mainly takes place there.

The prioritisation of Western rather than Japanese interpretations of Lolita style suggests that Australian Lolitas are doing something more than simply imitating a foreign culture. Monden's (2008: 36) observation of the LiveJournal EGL Community reinforces the idea that attraction to Lolita on the part of non-Japanese is not related to an orientalist imagining of Japan, writing "only a few of them, if any, mention its exotic 'Japaneseness' as a main attraction. Thus, most Western participants do not seem to define their own identity by 'othering' Japan."

This does not mean that Japan does not play an important role, nor that orientalising does not occur. The pilgrimage to Japan is an ambition of many Western Lolitas, an interest clearly identified by the American editors of the *English Language Gothic & Lolita Bible*, who dedicated several articles in the inaugural issue to Japan travel stories and guides. Australian Lolitas may pay large amounts of money for Japanese brand-name clothing but they wear it according to their own set of rules. This simultaneous acknowledgement of Japanese origins and rejection of a Japanese monopoly on authenticity illustrates the complex identity of Australian Lolitas.

Australian Lolitas, particularly Lolitas who are still in the school system, use the style's Japanese origins to differentiate themselves from their peers. Desdemona (a twenty-six year-old University student) makes this differentiation explicitly cultural:

I hate the way that everybody has this uniform of tight jeans and cutesy t-shirts and thongs and I think that as a society at the moment we've robbed ourselves of the cultural richness and the language of costuming that used to be around, you know?

Titania (a twenty-seven year-old University student) enjoyed the global hybridity of Lolita:

Throughout history we've had so much of an influence of Europe on fashion, and so that sort of made these ripples all the way out to the East, and then now Korean fashion, Japanese fashion, is really really really popular and it's making ripples and sending that all the way back across to Europe. So yeah, I don't know, it really suits me down to the ground because it means we have European inspired Japanese fashion, Japanese inspired European fashion, it means that little me here in Tassie, who's never been to either Asia or Europe and might never get the chance, that I can stick my brush in every paint that I like, the colours I choose.

Imogen saw the international aspect of Lolita as giving her access to wider horizons:

Lolita has helped me make friends, form different opinions; it has exposed me to a wide variety of people all over the world whom I never would have met before.

Portia characterised Lolita as a facilitator of inter-cultural understanding:

I think Lolita is an excellent way for people from different nationalities to come together and talk about something they have in common.

It is not only making clothing and accessories that matters, it is making them in a global context.

Lolita is not only intercultural class play. It is temporal class play. Rather than carrying fake Louis Vuitton handbags, Lolitas are removing themselves from the framework in which success and failure are judged according to such criteria and are creating their own criteria, willing themselves into an imagined time and class for whom wealth was inherent, resulting neither from talent nor effort, and indulgence and pleasure were consuming interests. Lolitas are referencing social inequalities with their dress, but rather than challenging the validity of a society in which we claim equality despite measurable stratification, Lolitas' allusion to the hereditary

class system is simply saying 'I want it to be me on top'. Judith Butler describes Harlem drag-ball "real" competitions¹⁰ (for more detail see Harper, 1994) as being "the phantasmatic constitution of a subject, a subject who repeats and mimes the legitimizing norms by which it itself has been degraded" (Butler, 1993: 131). It is tempting to apply the same observation to Lolita. The thing that makes Lolita stand apart is its anachronism. They are not miming the norms that have contributed to their situations of disadvantage. They are taking those norms an exaggerated step further, or perhaps, it is taking a step back to the origins of pervasive social beliefs. Wearing Lolita is not an act of heroic resistance, nor is it consciousness raising or a strategy for effecting lasting change to one's material circumstances. It is about self identity and expression, rather than changing the world. I have argued that Lolita is a way of offsetting or rejecting the problems of hidden disadvantage emotionally, although without making any significant difference to the systems that create the situation. Lolitas create criteria against which they are more likely to succeed. Femininity and youth, two areas that contribute to disadvantage, are re-invested with positive meaning. While many authors have been drawn to investigate the sexual ramifications of Lolita globally, I argue that in the Australian context sexuality is not a dominant issue for Lolitas. Far more important are questions of financial freedoms and alternative hierarchies. Beneath the frills and lace is a story about forging a self-identity through dress, an identity at odds with one's material circumstances and social expectations about how to conceptualise those circumstances. Citing Turner, Couldry (2003: 33) highlights the seriousness of play, describing it as: "the forms through which alternative forms of social order are imagined, even if they cannot be enacted". Lolita is temporally dislocated class-play, entering a world of self-indulgence and aesthetics in which daily financial struggles have no place. It is an exploration of alternatives to the dominant social order, although it makes no

¹⁰ In these competitions men subject to multiple forms of disadvantage (race, sexuality, socio-economic) compete to present the most convincing imitation of social success, from business men or Ivy League students through to pilots or generals.

significant impact on it. I have not suggested that Lolitas are heroically resisting their subordination, raising consciousness or achieving a material change in their circumstances. Rather, by forming closed hetero-social communities with strongly patrolled boundaries, they are abdicating themselves from the social order. The way Lolitas are written about highlights the conceptual challenge that their community poses to ways of articulating girlhood in contemporary society. The dominant discourses about girls and girlhood lead to an unhelpful focus on insecurity, immaturity, sexuality and the individualisation of successes and failures. While the underlying assumption that girls are insecure and fragile encourages infantilisation and disenfranchisement, the concurrent belief in the individual's uninhibited ability to achieve anything obscures that disenfranchisement. Ethnographic data suggests that Anglophone Lolita communities are more complexly intertwined with wider social issues, particularly in Australia with the self-identities of girls who are not highly valued in our current conception of successful girlhood.

Conclusion



Figure 8

Referring to the research of Marnina Gonick (2006) I have highlighted some of the implicit assumptions inherent in the framing of girls. In particular, I have argued that writings about Lolita provide an excellent example of the 'at risk' or 'Ophelia' frame. This frame characterises girls who fail to embody the 'girl power' ideal as being troubled and insecure. As Joanne Baker (2009) points out, such a characterisation of these girls both blames them for aspects of their lives they have little control over and obscures these aspects in the process. In Chapter Two I argued that the way in which Lolitas are written about highlights the challenge that their community poses to the frames we currently use to define and articulate girlhood. The Lolita community in Australia is complex and filled with what seem, at first glance, to be contradictions. Lolitas do not make themselves easy to fit into either of the dominant frames of the perky can-do consumers of 'Girl Power' nor the fragmented and damaged selves of 'Ophelia'. Lolitas' own use of media further draws draw attention to the role played by both micro and mass media in the ordering of social practices through defining the frames of reference we use to make sense of the world.

In currently published academic writing the dominant mode of analysis (indeed, frame of reference) is one of sexual identity. The more prominent authors to have published in English on Lolita quickly link Lolita to immaturity either because of the asexualised style of clothing or conversely because of the assumption that the clothes are intended to appeal to male sensibilities. The focus on sexuality leads right back into the same framing of girlhood as the media and popular press writings. Or, one could equally argue, that framing ensures that any analysis of girls is concerned with sexuality. Because of their gender and the assumption that they are young, Lolitas are defined via their (hetero)sexuality. In Chapter Three I argued that gender and class disadvantage converge in the way Lolitas' sexuality is written about. They are identified as 'becoming' not 'being', with their heterosexual experiences as key signposts along the road to womanhood and maternity (which

are presupposed to be incompatible with Lolita life). These assumptions are problematised by real life examples provided in the chapter and two reasons for this difference are suggested: the obfuscation of collective disadvantage by individual pathologising and the classed differences in conceptualising sex.

Authors including Mackie (2009, 2010) and Kotani (2007b) have used literary analysis to discuss the semiotics of Lolita clothing. This technique can draw assumptions about Lolitas and Lolita culture, as is the case in Mackie's *Intersections* article. This kind of research provides a context for the ethnographic research I have conducted. The sexual mode of analysis is an important one, but it does have a number of limitations. When it comes to a deeper exploration of Lolitas and their living culture, focusing of sexual identity not only fails to provide a framework for understanding the range of identities Lolita encompasses, it in fact obfuscates the issues Lolitas see as central to their understanding of their community. In fact, preliminary ethnographic research suggests that socio-economic factors, and in the particular the interactions between gender, self-identity, social status and current and future earning capacities, are of deep importance in explaining the attractions and benefits of participation in Lolita. The framing of girls as 'Ophelias' is both a contributing factor to the struggles girls have with these issues and also discourages closer examination of them.

This preliminary research suggests that Australian Lolitas are attracted by the alternative values, gift economy and atemporal cosmopolitan identity of leisure and indulgence that Lolita offers. These features of Lolita are particularly attractive to Lolitas of low socio-economic backgrounds, who made up a majority of the Lolitas who participated in my research. In Chapter Four I argued that Lolita is a way of emotionally off-setting or rejecting the problems of hidden disadvantage, although without making any significant difference to the systems which create the situation. Lolitas create criteria against which they are more likely to succeed. Femininity and youth, two areas which contribute to disadvantage, are re-invested

with positive meaning. While many authors have been drawn to investigate the sexual ramifications of Lolita globally, I argue that in the Australian context sexuality is not a dominant issue for most Lolitas. Far more important are questions of financial freedoms and alternative hierarchies. The dominant discourses about girls and girlhood lead to an unhelpful focus on insecurity, immaturity, sexuality and the individualisation of successes and failures. While the underlying assumption that girls are insecure and fragile encourages infantilisation and disenfranchisement, the concurrent belief in the individual's uninhibited ability to achieve anything obscures that disenfranchisement.

The Lolita community is a compelling example of what a thorough job the frames perpetuated and normalised by mass media are doing of hiding collective issues behind a facade of individual flaws; it also shows us some of the ways girls are trying to deal with the complex issues facing them. Ethnographic data suggests that Lolita has a lot still to reveal about broader society. Although limited in scope, the interviews presented in this thesis demonstrate that Anglophone Lolita communities are complexly intertwined, particularly in Australia, with wider social issues around the self-identities of girls who are not highly valued in our current conception of successful girlhood. Beneath the frills and lace is a story about forging a self-identity through dress, an identity at odds with one's material circumstances and social expectations about how to conceptualise those circumstances.

Appendix 1

Primary Interview Questions

When and where did you first see or hear about Gothic and Lolita?

What did you think of it?

What terms do you use to describe it (ie, Fruits fashion, EGL etc)

Do many people ask why the name “Lolita” is used, or assume a sexual connotation?

Do you read the Gothic and Lolita Bible?

If so, do you read the English or the Japanese version? Or the Japanese version in fan scans?

Where do you access the magazine? (ie, borrow from friends, order online)

What do you think of the English language version, if you have read it?

Are there other magazines or books you read related to Gothic and Lolita? Or fashion in general?

If you wanted to find out something about Gothic and Lolita, where would you look for information?

Have you ever written about Gothic and Lolita, for example in a blog or zine?

How often do you wear Gothic and Lolita? Or partial variations on these fashions?

On what sorts of occasions do you usually dress in Gothic and Lolita?

How do others, outside of the subculture, react to your clothes?

Do you make much by hand?

When you shop for Gothic and Lolita, how much do you buy locally versus online?

Have you ever followed a “how to” article on Gothic and Lolita aspects other than sewing (ie hair style, cooking)?

Do you alter your behaviour when in Gothic and Lolita to fit a more “lady-like” persona?

Outside of Gothic and Lolita fashion, would you describe yourself as girly or very feminine?

Do you cosplay, or have you in the past?

Are you or have you been involved in non-Japanese gothic styles?

What is the prime appeal of Gothic and Lolita for you?

When you wear Gothic and Lolita, do you become someone new or are you expressing an aspect of your personality that is always present but perhaps hidden?

Is there anything I haven't asked about that you think is important? Or any anecdotes you would like to share with me?

Appendix 2

Image Credits

Figure 1: <http://www.lolita-fashion.org/anatomy.php>

Figure 2: Personal Communication

Figure 3: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/niomi/150950642/in/photostream>

Figure 4: Personal Communication

Figure 5: <http://kalamarikastle.com/?p=429>

Figure 6: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/indrasarrow/371820315/sizes/l/in/set-72157594143769925/>

Figure 7: <http://cache.gawkerassets.com/assets/images/39/2008/09/LOLita2.jpg>

Figure 8: Personal Communication

Note:

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