

5-2024

## The Unspoken Words of Fashion: Movements Behind Harajuku's Avant-Garde Fashion Trends

Alastair Leon  
a.friedrichs014@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/university\\_honors\\_program](https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/university_honors_program)

 Part of the [Asian Art and Architecture Commons](#)

Please take our feedback survey at: [https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

---

### Recommended Citation

Leon, Alastair, "The Unspoken Words of Fashion: Movements Behind Harajuku's Avant-Garde Fashion Trends" (2024). *Theses/Capstones/Creative Projects*. 280.  
[https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/university\\_honors\\_program/280](https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/university_honors_program/280)

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses/Capstones/Creative Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).

The Unspoken Words of Fashion:  
Movements Behind Harajuku's  
Avant-Garde Fashion Trends

Alastair Leon

ART4980: Honors and Art History Senior Capstone

Dr. Adrian Duran

May 13, 2024

Behind any artistic movement lies a combination of media that shape ideas and trends. Fashion is one of the ways that people have contributed to cultural movements and resistances. Whether it is to show status or make a statement, it has existed as a type of language to oppose societal norms. Solidarity forms within fashion groups because they often embody a social cause. Clothing can subvert societal norms and provide people with a way to express themselves when they cannot do so otherwise. It acts as a commentary on a person's society, and their expression represents their attitude towards it. Many societies embrace patriarchal values, heteronormative structures, and a harsh work culture that limits individuality. Japan is one such society, so subcultural groups unite under the common goal to reveal who they are, and they adopt a way to rebel against the dominant culture.

Fashion, along with other forms of expression, creates vibrant subcultures that exist across the world, which can turn into movements that spark rebellion. Places known as "fashion capitals" are where people congregate and share ideas on how to fight the status quo and push their expression beyond "normal" boundaries. Harajuku in Tokyo, Japan, is home to some unique styles that use a range of elements like accessories, colors, and motifs to stand out. The influence and culture of Harajuku is far-reaching, with enthusiasts participating and interacting with fashion in their own way. Harajuku is the central area for fashion in the Shibuya district; it is a small part of a larger commercial area. With iconic fashion designers, stores, and artists, the neighborhood has made a name for itself as a place of innovation and community. People are free to be themselves, take part in fashion events, and keep up with the latest trends while strolling through the main strip.

As with any fashion, popular styles in Harajuku exist as a mode of self-expression, community building, and revolution. People methodically curate their wardrobes; each clothing

item can be used as a means to change Japanese society, and in particular, address topics that are considered taboo or shameful. They include queer identity, treatment of women, mental health, and the value of the individual versus the collective. Many older Japanese citizens believe that giving more attention to taboo topics means a decline in the morals of Japan's youth culture.<sup>1</sup> By fostering a community of acceptance, people can engage in an assertion against the conformity of general societal expectations and the strict customs of Japanese society. Despite the threat of fast fashion and moving into a digitalized age, Harajuku enthusiasts aim to use their style by making a wordless but significant statement about their support of social movements that speak against the pressure of conformity. Five common subcultures found in the neighborhood are Decora, *Yami kawaii*, Visual *kei*, Lolita, and student street fashions; these styles all have dedicated followers that push for better conditions.

### **The History of Harajuku as a Fashion Center**

Before Harajuku became a place for young artists and fashionistas, it was a place for international affairs; an apartment complex called Washington Heights was created for foreigners (mainly Americans) in the military to live in.<sup>2</sup> Young Japanese teenagers would be inspired by their unfamiliar fashion.<sup>3</sup> Another apartment complex opened for American military staff near the bustling commercial street of *Omotesando*, and Japanese artists would rent out the extra rooms.<sup>4</sup> Since the apartments on *Omotesando* were affordable, people would set up boutiques and storefronts to sell their designs, products, and other art.<sup>5</sup> Artists were not the only

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Gagné, "Urban Princesses: Performance and 'Women's Language' in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 18.1 (June 2008): 131.

<sup>2</sup> Stefanie, "The History of: Harajuku," *The Comm* (April 19, 2022) <https://the-comm.online/blog/the-history-of-harajuku/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

entity influencing Harajuku's culture; *An An* and *Non-no*, both popular lifestyle magazines, would help paint Harajuku as a place for young creatives.<sup>6</sup> Around 1978, a section of *Omotesando* would start closing on Sundays, allowing for it to become *hotoken*, or a pedestrian paradise.<sup>7</sup> With the introduction of a safe and walkable area for younger people, youth culture flourished as more people challenged themselves to stand out.<sup>8</sup> A store called Boutique Takenoko opened shortly after the pedestrian paradise was established, and it brought in youth groups to show off their talent.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, *hotoken* came to an end in 1998 due to noise complaints, but it remains one of the reasons why Harajuku is a popular youth gathering place.<sup>10</sup>

Although the start of *hotoken* brought in many artists, performers, and other entrepreneurs, Harajuku cemented itself as a fashion hub after Laforet Harajuku department store opened its doors.<sup>11</sup> Laforet Harajuku started in 1978 as a place for artists and brand-name stores to gather and share ideas.<sup>12</sup> It is also a venue for events and advertisement, but it is a shopping outlet for everyone. The basement is home to many "alternative" brands, and it serves as a gathering place for Lolita, Visual *kei*, and Decora stylists.<sup>13</sup> Laforet can be referred to as a "living organism" with how stores are constantly evolving: once one moves out, another will take its place.<sup>14</sup> It would become the first fashion building to be dedicated to younger people and

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "June 28, 1998 'Last day of Harajuku Hokoten'," DON!, last modified June 28, 2010, [web.archive.org/web/20160305035412/www.ntv.co.jp/don/contents03/2010/06/1998628.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20160305035412/www.ntv.co.jp/don/contents03/2010/06/1998628.html).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "Laforet Harajuku," Mori Building Co., Ltd., <https://www.mori.co.jp/en/projects/laforet/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Philomena Keet, *Tokyo Fashion City: A Detailed Guide to Tokyo's Trendiest Fashion Districts* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2016), 42.

<sup>14</sup> Eleonora Caruso, "Laforet Harajuku, Tokyo. A crisis of subculture," *Lampoon*, February 3, 2022, <https://lampoonmagazine.com/article/2022/02/03/laforet-harajuku-tokyo/>.

their emerging culture.<sup>15</sup> Young people love to browse stores here to gather inspiration, and it is the birthplace of some of the most prominent Harajuku fashions.<sup>16</sup> The building tries to strike a balance with the luxury businesses found in the neighborhood.<sup>17</sup> Paired with *hotoken* on Sundays, Laforet became the center for everything new and fashion-forward. Keet Philomena, author of *Tokyo Fashion City: A Detailed Guide to Tokyo's Trendiest Fashion Districts* articulates the culture of Harajuku perfectly: “Harajuku has a more irreverent sense of the magical and wondrous about it: its reputation as a melting pot for fashion, combining trends and throwing out radical outfits, precedes it both in Japan and around the world.”<sup>18</sup> Even though the city is not a part of the “big four” capitals, Harajuku more than makes up for it with constant innovation and varying levels of accessibility so anyone can get involved.

Unfortunately, despite Harajuku's reputation for many avant-garde looks, some believe that new ideas have declined due to fast fashion, social media, and rampant consumerism. Shoichi Aoki, creator and photographer for the fashion magazine *FRUiTS*, believes that Harajuku subcultures have fizzled out over the years he has been active.<sup>19</sup> From what he has seen, fast fashion has caused people’s style to be more conformist, and he discontinued *FRUiTS* after 233 issues because he had “no more fashionable kids to photograph.”<sup>20</sup> Social media allows people to get the quick likes they crave, and they can share ideas across a digital space. At the time of publishing his *VICE* article in 2017, Aoki witnessed a decline in Harajuku’s core values

---

<sup>15</sup> Tiffany Godoy, “Laforet,” in *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*, ed. Ivan Vartanian (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 77.

<sup>16</sup> “The heart of Harajuku fashion and culture,” GO TOKYO, last modified December 14, 2023, <https://www.gotokyo.org/en/spot/35/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Godoy, “Laforet,” 78.

<sup>18</sup> Keet, *Tokyo Fashion City*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Caruso, “Laforet Harajuku, Tokyo.”

<sup>20</sup> Jessica Heron-Langton, “Harajuku’s FRUiTS mag might return, thanks to Demna and Virgil,” *Dazed*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/47387/1/fruits-magazine-harajuku-shoichi-aoki-virgil-demna-relaunch-street-style-tokyo>.

in favor of consumerism.<sup>21</sup> Once *Omotosando* avenue fully reopened to traffic in 2004, Harajuku street fashion participants lost a space that allowed them to grow; Aoki wrote that “[i]f a road is dedicated to consumption, it’s okay that it is open to traffic[,] but the buds of creativity need space to grow.”<sup>22</sup>

However, in recent years, Harajuku has been revived by new designers and young people who have reminded themselves of what makes Harajuku fashion so alluring: each fashion is meant to be a statement against rigid societal rules dictating how people should act. Clothing is meant to be an experiment in expression, it is an identity set apart from social norms.<sup>23</sup> Aoki acknowledges that new designers are on the scene; Demna Gvasalia and Virgil Abloh have caught his eye, and they are moving away from consumerism.<sup>24</sup> Tourists are also matching the fashion energy in Harajuku, so Aoki believes he needs to try and adapt to this new digital age; he wishes to revive *FRUiTS* because digitization on Instagram does not “tell the whole story.”<sup>25</sup>

Today, Harajuku fashion can be found around the globe. With the existence of social media, more people who love Harajuku fashion advocate in favor of supporting new designers and educating others about why they dress the way they do. It is kept alive by people’s experimentation and community building. America’s anime convention scene is also popular for showcasing new looks and exposing people to Harajuku culture with ambassadors and social media creators. As Shoichi Aoki states, “the fashion scene of [modern day] Harajuku is similar to those days when I started *FRUiTS* magazine; no big fashion boom, fluid changes, and

---

<sup>21</sup> Shoichi Aoki, “Has Tokyo fashion lost its edge? Shoichi Aoki on Harajuku’s decline,” interview by Derek Blasberg, *Style*, CNN, May 10, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/fruits-street-style-photographer/index.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Caruso, “Laforet Harajuku, Tokyo.”

<sup>23</sup> Tiffany Godoy and Ivan Vartanian, “Harajuku Made Me Do It,” in *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*, ed. Ivan Vartanian (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Heron-Langton, “Harajuku’s FRUiTS mag.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

spending money in pursuit of fashion enjoyment.”<sup>26</sup> His opinion highlights how a thriving Harajuku has slower, fluid changes instead of jumping from trend to trend. People spend more time thinking about the elements of their outfits instead of relying on mass-produced clothing. There is a term known as *ryousangata*, which translates to “mass production” to refer to people who dress generically or participate in fleeting trends, which is what Harajuku style attempts to avoid.<sup>27</sup> It originated as a negative term to describe young women, so one should be careful when addressing the issue of fast fashion and trends because it should not target a group of women who prefer neutral clothing. Harajuku continues to be malleable, so its future is dependent on new designers and ideas flowing through the space at a reasonable pace. The neighborhood participates in cultural exchange, but there are a few Western influences that need to be dissected to understand the global boom of Harajuku styles.

### **Western Influences on Harajuku’s Popularity**

With Japanese pop culture steadily growing in popularity in America in the late 90s and early 2000s, Western celebrities incorporated their takes on Japanese media into their musical performances, Hollywood films, and television.<sup>28</sup> Manga, anime, and anime-style video games surged in popularity. One American artist, Gwen Stefani, took part in this craze and introduced more people from the West to Harajuku style with her “Harajuku Girls” song. She also hired backup dancers who would silently follow her around during this era of her career, which sparked controversy because of her misrepresentation of Harajuku fashions and encouraging

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "What is a mass-produced girl? Explaining the common characteristics of mass-produced loose-fitting girls' clothing and makeup," Rcwaii, last modified May 16, 2022, <https://www.rcwaii.com/blog/fashionyougocheck/16617>.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Wang II, "Why Japan Made Its “Cute Culture” Such a Hit," *The Argo: The Official Newspaper of the Boston Latin School*, April 17, 2022, <https://blsargo.org/2959/forum/why-japan-made-its-cute-culture-such-a-hit/>.



stereotypes of Japanese women. Her song is full of surface-level admiration for Harajuku, but it does come off as appropriation because certain lyrics oversimplify the complexity of subcultures that exist in Harajuku. Opinions vary from person to person, but there are a few points to note about her visuals. The way she portrayed Lolita style was meant for a global stage, and it was not accurate to the coords, or outfits, seen in Lolita circles; the outfits on her backup dancers are sexualized.<sup>29</sup> She also had a Harajuku kids clothing line as a way to profit off of a concept that was never hers to begin with. More recently, Stefani has defended her “Harajuku Girls” era by stating that she is Japanese after her visit to Japan; once again, she is watering down real-life issues and identities because she can rescind her statement and be shielded by her whiteness.<sup>30</sup> Although her backup dancers have said they were treated well in interviews, it was still a harmful image to push out to Western audiences.

In the same year as Stefani’s “Harajuku Girls” release, a film known as *Kamikaze Girls* (*Shimotsuma Monogatari*) also introduced Western audiences to Japanese fashion. This film featured a more accurate depiction of Lolita style through the main character in comparison to Stefani’s representations. The other main character of the film dresses in a “yankee” style, or in other words, she dresses like a delinquent. *Kamikaze Girls* features an unlikely friendship, and it explores the idea of fashion being a way to denote a person’s ideals.<sup>31</sup> The story captures the nuances of style, and it was a deep reflection on how complex identity can be.

---

<sup>29</sup> Theresa M. Winge, “Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita,” *Mechademia: Second Arc* 3.1 (2008): 49-50.

<sup>30</sup> Gwen Stefani, “Gwen Stefani: ‘I Said, My God, I’m Japanese,’” interview by Jesa Marie Calaor, *Allure*, January 10, 2023, [https://www.allure.com/story/gwen-stefani-japanese-harajuku-lovers-interview?fbclid=IwAR2NLbBqe-Ns1VZ0i4lsV0UatfshHQUEQCGwGvr\\_flc7awKtkxA9QRqMbw](https://www.allure.com/story/gwen-stefani-japanese-harajuku-lovers-interview?fbclid=IwAR2NLbBqe-Ns1VZ0i4lsV0UatfshHQUEQCGwGvr_flc7awKtkxA9QRqMbw).

<sup>31</sup> Masafumi Monden, “Ribbons and Lace: Girls, Decorative Femininity, and Androgyny,” in *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, ed. Joanne B. Eicher (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015), 119.

Referencing Lolita fashion in particular, Vladimir Nabokov's book of the same name comes up. The novel came out in 1955, which is before Lolita fashion started to surface in Harajuku. There is no solid evidence about where the term "Lolita" came from to label the fashion. The fashion is modest, and any connection to the book was not meant to be there.<sup>32</sup> It is common for people to think the book endorses pedophilia, but in reality, Nabokov has stated the book is not a love story. With that misinterpretation in mind, people who wear Lolita clothing do not want others to think that they are attempting to dress like young girls. The term in relation to Lolita fashion means "youthful."<sup>33</sup> Using the term Lolita to describe a non-sexual fashion does encourage a subversion of prior stereotypes; it might even be a chance to reclaim the word and disconnect it from sexual interpretations. The European dress that inspires Lolita clothing does connect skirt length to a girl's age, but Lolita focuses on "modern functionality" over old meanings.<sup>34</sup>

Western influence on Japanese fashion reveals how many similarities there are between movements and people's morals. There is common ground when it comes to artistic expression, freedom, and rebellion, which is why Harajuku styles persist even today. Regardless of the negative influences on these styles, people continue to educate others and dress how they desire.

### **Decora as a Fun Statement Against Uniformity**

Leading in with the heart and soul of Harajuku, Decora *kei*, or Decora style, is visually maximalist. With bright, colorful, and patterned clothing, Decora lovers create layered looks that are fun. Some may categorize it as child-like because of the use of cartoonish pop culture symbols and the abundance of accessories. Yet, people who participate in Decora are not hiding

---

<sup>32</sup> Tiffany Godoy, "Mana & Visual-kei," in *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*, ed. Ivan Vartanian (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 160.

<sup>33</sup> Monden, "Ribbons and Lace," 111.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

behind their styling: in fact, they are comfortable with being different. The act of decoration and covering oneself in accessories makes the person stand out against others, and it directly addresses Japan's "strict uniform culture."<sup>35</sup>

Decora became more well-known when it was featured in *FRUiTS* magazine, and it is one of Aoki's favorite styles to originate in Harajuku.<sup>36</sup> He contextualizes fashion with the world around him. Some of the first Decora outfits he captured were boldly colored with skirts layered over pants, and for accessories, they wore plastic necklaces and hair clips. It was the emergence of a new look. Over time, Decora became more popular, and people started including merchandise of popular characters (like Pikachu or Snoopy), covering themselves with unconventional accessories, and adding more layers to their outfits.<sup>37</sup> As time goes on, more people test their limits by experimenting with hair colors/wigs, "mismatched" clothing, and objects like stickers or stuffed animals. Anything a person can carry around has the potential to be "blinged" out or decorated (known as *decoden*).<sup>38</sup> These elements were a sharp contrast to the disciplinary and consistent look of youth school uniforms. All the pieces of one's outfit conveys self-expression and show who they truly are when others would discourage their "over-the-top" looks. A few of the people interviewed in a 2014 Harajuku documentary emphasized how their style was for fun, and it adds individuality into their lives.<sup>39</sup>

Despite other fashions being popular in Harajuku, Decora was a fresh idea that built upon the remnants of another style. The girls who started Decora in the late 1990s were participating

---

<sup>35</sup> Refinery29, "What Harajuku Girls Really Look Like | Style Out There | Refinery29," YouTube, November 5, 2014, documentary video, 1:26 to 4:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WblNctc3ys0&t=4s>.

<sup>36</sup> Aoki, interview.

<sup>37</sup> Theresa M. Winge, "Review: Molten Hot: Japanese Gal Subcultures and Fashions," *Mechademia: Second Arc* 4 (2009): 320.

<sup>38</sup> Keet, *Tokyo Fashion City*, 44.

<sup>39</sup> Refinery29, "What Harajuku Girls Really Look Like," 7:49.

in the D.I.Y. culture of the *Nagomu* Gal style that was popular in the 1980s.<sup>40</sup> When Aoki photographed them for *Street* magazine, it caused a “fashion boom” and led him to create the magazine *FRUiTS*.<sup>41</sup> His first issue featured Aki Kobayashi on the cover, an art student who later wrote a column for the magazine detailing how she created some of her signature looks.<sup>42</sup> Decora fashion became incredibly popular among teenagers to the point where they were creating enough accessories to start making a name for themselves. The pedestrian-safe street of *Takenokozoku* is where they would sell their creations (unless they were busted by the police).<sup>43</sup> Later on, a store called 6% Doki Doki, founded by Emiko Saito and Sebastian Masuda, became the headquarters of Decora fashion where people could buy “kitsch” accessories to fulfill their desired aesthetic.<sup>44</sup> Saito believes that after Decora’s conception, some people lost sight of what self-expression truly meant as they chased after the high of being a celebrity.<sup>45</sup> The store is still open today, and it continues to be a one-stop shop for anything Decora related. The fashion remains wildly popular, and the interviews from Refinery29 have shown that Decora returned to its roots even after Saito witnessed a short decline in the 2000s.<sup>46</sup> The people who were interviewed were dressing for themselves instead of pursuing a magazine feature; they shared their lives on social media to encourage others to join. Decora stylists dare to be creative in a way that is enjoyable to them; they refuse to conform to conventional dress codes.

---

<sup>40</sup> Izumi Evers and Patrick Macias, *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno: Tokyo Teen Fashion Subculture Handbook* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2010), 134.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>44</sup> Keet, *Tokyo Fashion City*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Evers and Macias, *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno*, 138.

<sup>46</sup> Refinery29, “What Harajuku Girls Really Look Like,” 7:49.

### *Yami Kawaii* and *Menhera-chan* as Mental Health Supporters

Fashion, for some, is a way to communicate their darker thoughts when they become too overwhelming. With mental health being a taboo subject in Japan, followers of *Yami kawaii* style incorporate morbid messages, medical wear, and cute characters into their outfits. Searching for comfort, community, and an outlet, the subculture sheds a light on suicide and mental illness through endearing iconography juxtaposed with the harsh reality of suffering in silence.

*Yami kawaii* (occasionally referred to as *menhera*) gained traction in the 2010s because of Bisuko Ezaki's comic, *Menhera-chan*. The comic normalizes mental health as a natural part of everyday life; it combats the demonization of mental illness. His work introduced the term *menhera* to a mainstream audience, and he is an advocate for *Yami kawaii*. It is relatively new compared to other fashions found in Harajuku. Nonetheless, the word *menhera* has existed since the early 2000s, way before the style was thought of. *Menhera* is a label to describe people who have mental health issues, or refer to "troublesome women."<sup>47</sup> A user on *menhera.jp* used digital archives of the forum website 2channel to trace the term back to its original form: *menheru*.<sup>48</sup> The website was home to a mental health discussion board where people could share their experiences and reach out for support. It is speculated that *menheru* is an abbreviation for "mental health board."<sup>49</sup> The users of this board were referred to as *menheru* because in 2001, there were no words outside of symptoms to describe people with mental illness.<sup>50</sup> The board still exists as *menhera.org*, and it is a resource for people who are struggling. Eventually, the word evolved into the *menhera* that people know today, however, according to psychiatrist Toru

---

<sup>47</sup> Akihiro Koyama, "What is 'Menhera'? Etymology, history, meaning, fashion, etc," *Menhera.jp*, last modified April 3, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210421074613/https://menhera.jp/5671#5671-6>.

<sup>48</sup> Mr. 090, "History of the word 'Menhera': How 'Menhera' was born on 2channel," *Menhera.jp*, last modified October 17, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210208124405/https://menhera.jp/975>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Koyama, "What is 'Menhera'?"

Kumashiro, *menhera* got associated with obsessive behavior and women's issues in the early 2000s.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, social media encouraged the stereotype that mental health issues are only a women's issue, and *menhera* still has negative connotations.<sup>52</sup>

When *menhera* became popular because of social media and the *Menhera-chan* comic, it ended up getting associated with *Yami kawaii*, and it was integrated into *kawaii* culture.<sup>53</sup> Since *Yami kawaii* revolves around being open about mental health, the word for people with mental illness stuck with it; therefore, it is not uncommon to see *Yami kawaii* and *menhera* being used interchangeably to refer to the fashion. It depends on what an individual is comfortable with using. There are actually two ways to write *Yami kawaii*: *yami* can mean dark, or if written with “病” in place of “ya,” it can mean sickly. In an analysis done by Yukari Seko and Minako Kikuchi about *menhera*, they believe, “the cutie *menhera* strategically disrupts traditionally innocuous *kawaii* culture through its encapsulation of mental angst and re-appropriation of self-injury.”<sup>54</sup> With *kawaii* meaning everything cute without negativity, *menhera* and *Yami kawaii* disturb the balance by being off-putting. *Yami kawaii*'s use of *kawaii* elements like soft colors and sweet-looking characters throws people for a loop, and they are forced to acknowledge the messages involved with the style.

It has been argued that the phrase *Yami kawaii* is an appropriation of mental health, or that it sanitizes the original meaning of *menhera*. While the style is playful, it does intend to take mental health seriously. It does not erase the original meaning behind *menhera* because the goal

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mr. 090, “The changing meaning of ‘Menhera’. How has the usage of ‘Menhera’ changed over the past 10 years?,” *Menhera.jp*, last modified October 18, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210507073456/https://menhera.jp/1095>

<sup>53</sup> Koyama, “What is ‘Menhera’?”

<sup>54</sup> Yukari Seko and Minako Kikuchi, “Mentally Ill and Cute as Hell: Menhera Girls and Portrayals of Self-Injury in Japanese Popular Culture,” *Frontiers in Communication* 7 (March 11, 2022).

of supporting those who are struggling persists. In a *Yami kawaii* documentary, Ezaki explained that the term captures the duality of “sickly cute,” and it makes the topic of mental health more approachable because of the incorporation of *kawaii* culture.<sup>55</sup> He reasons that there is a “demand for the things people are avoiding,” and his comic *Menhera-chan* humanizes people who struggle with mental health.<sup>56</sup> Often, people with mental health issues are looked down upon, or they are seen as burdensome (as seen with *menhera*’s evolution as a term). For Ezaki, his comic and style are outlets, or a form of therapy to vent about his abuse and frustrations.<sup>57</sup> His comic is linked with *kawaii* fashion as one of the symbols of *Yami kawaii*, and that inspires people to create spaces for companionship and healing. The documentary featured a model named Hanayo; she has struggled with suicide ideation her entire life. Her story is one of thousands; her fashion ended up being an outlet for her emotions, and that created an online support system for her, similar to the mental health boards in the early 2000s. She wanted her fans to “see the consequences of her failed [suicide] attempt and reconsider,”<sup>58</sup> which is what Ezaki was trying to prove; *Yami kawaii* is an acknowledgement that every person should be able to find the support that they need.

Among the other interviewees was Professor Joshua Paul Dale, who studies *kawaii* culture, and he claims that “when you express *kawaii*, you are expressing a desire to appeal to other people, to get closer to other people, and expressing a desire for healing. So, maybe that can help people with those dark and more difficult issues that [cannot] be openly expressed in

---

<sup>55</sup> Refinery29, “The Dark Side Of Harajuku Style You Haven't Seen Yet | Style Out There | Refinery29,” YouTube, February 24, 2018, documentary video, 10:47-10:58, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Wsk3Oa\\_3F8&rco=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Wsk3Oa_3F8&rco=1).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:30-5:55.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:04-9:08.

Japanese society.”<sup>59</sup> Fashion is linked to different forms of expression, and in the case of *Yami kawaii*, it is one that can be life-saving; people find happiness in the way they present themselves.

### **Visual Kei, Gender Expression, and Rock ‘N’ Roll Spirit**

Visual *kei*, or *vkei* for short, originated in Osaka before moving to Tokyo.<sup>60</sup> Tokyo was originally more conservative in dress, opting for monochromatic clothing with a subtle pop of color.<sup>61</sup> The style was meant for onstage performances, and it was a parallel to *Kabuki* theater; since Visual *kei* groups were typically all male, the “roles” of both masculine and feminine dress would be performed by men.<sup>62</sup> Eye-catching stage costumes gave Visual *kei* the “visual” part of its name. It is impossible to separate the style from the music genre; musical acts enhance the presentation of the fashion by reaching a wider audience.

Around the 1980s, Visual *kei* bands such as X Japan and Buck-Tick formed, and the music’s popularity spread among younger people. As a music genre, it is varied; although, the sounds of Visual *kei* lean towards alternative scenes in the West (like heavy metal or punk).<sup>63</sup> Their flashy outfits are reminiscent of Glam Rock, and Visual *kei* music addresses both political and social topics. These groups have a defiant attitude and forego strict gender binaries, much like famous goth, glam, and “Los Angeles ‘hair’ styles of rock and metal.”<sup>64</sup> Going into alternative music is a stark contrast to traditional office work in Japan, and on top of that, the performers create a platform for queerness. Visual *kei* as a subculture motivates listeners to dress

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 9:48-10:04.

<sup>60</sup> Mariko Suzuki, “Gothic, Lolita, Visual-kei,” in *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*, ed. by Ivan Vartanian (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 134.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>63</sup> Yasser Mattar, “Miso Soup for the Ears: Contemporary Japanese Popular Music and its Relation to the Genres Familiar to the Anglophonic Audience,” *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 1 (February 2008): 117.

<sup>64</sup> Adrienne R. Johnson, “Josō or ‘gender free’? Playfully queer ‘lives’ in visual *kei*,” *Asian Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (June 8, 2020): 122.



up in a similar manner to show rebellion.<sup>65</sup> Queerness on stage embodies Judith Butler's theory about gender as a performance, and during live concerts, it "[opens] up a space for gender and sexuality to be both ambiguous and unstable, and thus [challenges] the normative order in both hetero- and homo-based narratives."<sup>66</sup>

By creating a platform, more people can openly be themselves and find labels that fit them, if they are comfortable with being labeled. Fans and band members bring awareness to the LGBTQ+ community that exists in Japan, and in return, there has been some improvement in attitudes toward queer people. It is important to note that systemic discrimination of queer people in Japan continues to this day; protection laws are limited, and it seems like people tolerate queerness as long as it is separate from the heteronormative majority.<sup>67</sup> The visibility that Visual *kei* provides is a step in the right direction.

One modern era figure-head for Visual *kei* (and Gothic Lolita) is Mana-sama, who is currently the lead guitarist and songwriter of Moi dix Mois. Previously, he was a part of a group called Malice Mizer, a band that gained popularity among Western audiences. Despite Mana-sama's music being in the Visual *kei* genre, he dresses as a Gothic Lolita, and he popularized the terms EGA (Elegant Gothic Aristocrat) and EGL (Elegant Gothic Lolita) because of his avatars.<sup>68</sup> His looks translate over to a modern representation of Visual *kei* where band members are free to dress in any style. The defining factor is that their outfits are considered their personas. Looking at the band Awake as an example, the once "dark and severe" look of Visual

---

<sup>65</sup> Suzuki, "Gothic, Lolita, Visual-kei," 135.

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, "Josō or 'gender free'," 133-134.

<sup>67</sup> Ioana Fotache, "Japanese 'LGBT Boom' Discourse and its Discontents," in *Sexuality and Translation in World Politics*, ed. by Caroline Cottet and Manuela L. Picq (Bristol, England: E-International Relations Publishing, 2019), 28.

<sup>68</sup> Tiffany Godoy, "Mana & Visual-kei," in *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*, ed. by Ivan Vartanian (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 159.

*kei* has given way to themed personas.<sup>69</sup> Eru, a member of Awake, calls himself the “Harajuku Decora King,” and his fashion incorporates stuffed animals and other children’s toys as unusual accessories. His fellow band members also have public personas; most notably, Hiroya, the bassist, presents himself as a demon character. Their comebacks are “themed,” yet still retain the spirit of older Visual *kei* bands. There have been worries about the decline of Visual *kei* as older band members pass away or leave, but new bands like Awake want to keep the genre alive. With fans dedicating entire wardrobes to their favorite musicians,<sup>70</sup> it might be able to bounce back.

### **Lolita, *Kawaii*, and the Expectations of Femininity**

As one of Harajuku’s most diverse styles, Lolita fashion gained a recognizable following in the 1970s-1980s, although there is no definite time when it emerged.<sup>71</sup> It is described as “a yearning for something romantic overseas, [and] was born in western Japan, Kansai, then moved up to Tokyo where it came of age.”<sup>72</sup> Like with a few other styles, Lolita reached a global stage and rose to popularity since it was influential in Harajuku. In short, it replicates the aristocratic styles in European Victorian and Rococo periods while being *kawaii*.<sup>73</sup> The fashion has many subgenres that can suit anyone’s tastes, but it is recognizable through distinct silhouettes and “dainty” clothing made of frills, lace, and finer materials. It is constantly evolving because of other aesthetics; people tend to adopt an air of nobility to combine it with their other style preferences. The most common is Gothic Lolita, but other variations include Classic Lolita, Sweet Lolita, *Ouji* (prince) Lolita, and *Hime* (princess) Lolita; the list is endless. Since Lolita

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>71</sup> Monden, “Ribbons and Lace,” 110.

<sup>72</sup> Suzuki, “Gothic, Lolita, and Visual-kei,” 137.

<sup>73</sup> Monden, “Ribbons and Lace,” 113-114.

fashion is mutable, elaborate coords, or outfits, and elegance are what visually sets Lolita stylists apart from others.<sup>74</sup>

Any person can dress in Lolita styles; it is a space for people who believe in embracing femininity and fighting against heteronormativity. Lolitas “present themselves anachronistically in order to escape the trappings of adult life and with it the culture[‘s] dominant ideologies,”<sup>75</sup> which includes patriarchal values that plague most contemporary societies. In Japan, women are harassed to the point of needing “women-only” train cars, and they are pressured to pursue a stable, married life.<sup>76</sup> Lolita clothing can help shield the wearer from sexualization by being formless. It helps a person reclaim their confidence and power. With garments drawing inspiration from European clothing, royal wear, and children’s toys, “[Lolitas] adopt past modes associated with the oppression of women...to declare their independence from contemporary regimes of heteronormative hegemony.”<sup>77</sup> By taking back a space that was once oppressive toward women, Lolitas are making a statement that femininity is not weak or shameful, but emanates strength and diversity.

Playing with gender dynamics, Mana-sama, a representative for Gothic Lolita, has said that the style ““is either male or female but it is also neither male nor female...[it is] [t]he pursuit of a middle ground.””<sup>78</sup> Fashion is meant for everyone to enjoy, and the use of traditionally feminine clothing in Lolita challenges the gender binary by being available to anyone who wishes to express themselves in a grand way. The clothing downplays the individual’s physical

---

<sup>74</sup> Michelle Carriger, “‘Maiden’s Armor’: Global Gothic Lolita Fashion Communities and Technologies of Girly Counteridentity,” *Theatre Survey* 60.1 (2019): 122.

<sup>75</sup> Winge, “Undressing and Dressing Loli,” 48.

<sup>76</sup> Terasa Younker “Lolita: Dreaming, Despairing, Defying,” *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 100.

<sup>77</sup> Carriger, “‘Maiden’s Armor’: Global Gothic Lolita,” 128.

<sup>78</sup> Godoy, “Mana & Visual-kei,” 159.

body since women and feminine figures are commonly sexualized; it was meant to subvert men's expectations of what women "should" wear.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, Lolitas do still face some sexualization abroad because they are associated with the novel, *Lolita*.<sup>80</sup> This is why Lolita fashion, specifically Gothic Lolita, "spectacularity makes visible a web of competing and indeed often irreconcilable interpellative societal demands made upon young women (and others)."<sup>81</sup> One can see the contradictions in the expectations of being a woman or gender-nonconforming while being involved in Lolita subculture. Lolita and the freedom of *kawaii* go hand in hand; for some, the style is a return to their childhood to escape from subservience.<sup>82</sup> *Kawaii* culture also "indulges commercialization,"<sup>83</sup> which is an act that can kill off subcultures, but Lolita thrives and does not lose the elements that make it special.

### **Street Fashion for the New and Upcoming**

Although street fashion is an umbrella term for the subcultures found in Harajuku and beyond, in this context, it will refer to the designs of artists and fashion students. As mentioned before, Aoki has stated that the energy in Harajuku is not the same as it was in the 1990s; however, he sees that tourists and new designers are possibly breathing new life into the shopping district. At its core, Harajuku fashion subcultures have been spurred by younger people who are responding to issues that they see in Japanese society, and they enjoy experimenting with their clothes. They seek to push the boundaries of what can be considered wearable, and by doing so, they receive reactions from people outside of their circles. Fashion students and professional designers are often featured on Instagram pages like Tokyofashion or independent

---

<sup>79</sup> Winge, "Undressing and Dressing Loli," 52.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Carriger, "'Maiden's Armor': Global Gothic Lolita," 128.

<sup>82</sup> Younker, "Lolita: Dreaming," 101.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

photography pages; these pages act as archives for street fashion, and they document styles as they change over time. Despite Tokyo having *Rakuten* fashion week,<sup>84</sup> Japan, like many other countries, is not included as one of the “big four” locations for fashion weeks.<sup>85</sup> With teens who were once at the forefront of stylistic movements entering professional spaces, they are influenced by contemporary design and Harajuku’s past energy. Their ideas are in-line with what could place a designer on the global stage of fashion (competing with the fashion weeks in Milan, New York, Paris, and London). There are a wide range of designers who cater to both the common person and richer clientele.

Young people who attend college for design are motivated to think outside of mass-produced clothing cycles to find their personal style. Running their own boutiques and storefronts in Harajuku (and throughout Shibuya), they hope to establish a name and following for themselves. In Tokyo, there are a plethora of colleges to choose from, but two of them stand out: Bunka Fashion College and Coconogacco. Bunka Fashion College is more conventional in their teaching, but they lay the foundation for what students will need to know to succeed. It is “one of the most revered fashion institutions in the world,” and a handful of alumni have left their mark on fashion in Japan.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, Coconogacco prides itself on being an institution that fosters personal growth and individuality.<sup>87</sup> The founder, Yoshikazu Yamagata, “believes fashion companies want creative designers, and encourages his students to think freely and more

---

<sup>84</sup> "About JFW Organization," Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://rakutenfashionweektokyo.com/en/aboutus/>.

<sup>85</sup> "Fashion Weeks around the world," FashionUnited, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://fashionunited.com/landing/fashionweeks-around-the-world-list>.

<sup>86</sup> Alex Kessler, "At Bunka Fashion College in Tokyo, Students Show Off Their Personal Style," *Vogue*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.vogue.com/article/bunka-fashion-college-tokyo-student-street-style>.

<sup>87</sup> Kati Chitrakorn, "The Japanese Fashion School That Could Birth the Next Rei Kawakubo," *The Business of Fashion*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/news-analysis/coconogacco-tokyo-japan-fashion-school-next-rei-kawakubo/>.

adventurously in terms of [idea] generation and experimentation.”<sup>88</sup> His methods release students from the standards of “normal” fashion. Japan has strong schools that keep the fashion culture there alive.

There is also Ura-Hara, known as the backstreets of Harajuku, where male designers go to cater to hip-hop, skater, and other “masculine” subcultures.<sup>89</sup> Hiroshi Fujiwara was essential to the development of Ura-hara because he brought back information about cultural movements like punk, hip-hop, graffiti art, and sneaker craze in the West.<sup>90</sup> Other designers would follow his lead, and Ura-Hara flourished with underground styles.<sup>91</sup> Students can be found here or on *Omotesando*; they do not limit where they can find inspiration. Street style is constantly adapting to new outside influences, and people enjoy learning about foreign subcultures. Ura-Hara and *Omotesando* collaborate to create the Harajuku people know today.

### **The Future of Harajuku**

Based on Aoki’s observations, fast fashion and social media have caused concern regarding Harajuku’s “fresh” fashion ecosystem. Fast fashion pushes people to overconsume, and they focus more on looks instead of the meaning behind subcultures. Social media has seen a boom of users leaning into aesthetics and misrepresenting subcultures, mainly because of TikTok. The suffix “-core” is added to words now to describe aesthetics, and people can now search aesthetic terms to find clothing. It is all carefully curated to stimulate consumerism. With the click of a few buttons, a person could curate an entirely new wardrobe instead of building it

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Tetsuya Suzuki, “Ura-Hara, Hip Hop, Punk, D.I.Y.: Underground Takes Overground,” in *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*, ed. by Ivan Vartanian (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 166.

<sup>90</sup> Tiffany Godoy, “Hiroshi Fujiwara,” in *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*, ed. by Ivan Vartanian (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 171.

<sup>91</sup> Suzuki, “Ura-Hara,” 167.

up slowly over a number of years. These types of clothes are also mass-produced, which is what Aoki worries about; kids are chasing after an aesthetic to fit in, rather than find clothes that they enjoy and feel comfortable wearing. Fast fashion culture can be found everywhere. Companies like SHEIN, Romwe, Forever 21, and even H&M, were the main offenders, but now, any big-name store in the mall supplies clothes that have been unethically produced. They know that people will still buy clothing even if the quality drop is noticeable.

Regarding social media, there are pros and cons. Social media encourages influencer lifestyles, where normal people try to chase after likes, follows, and brand deals. Influencer lifestyles play into overconsumption by advertising items that their followers do not need. Microtrends also surface on platforms like TikTok as everyone reaches for one defining factor that sets them apart from the crowd. Globally, hyper-individualism has reached a point that is damaging; in the fashion world, subcultures are watered down to styles alone, and people lose sight of the movements. This is why it is commonly said that subcultures are dead. On the flip side, social media can be a powerful tool to keep subcultures active. By utilizing proper education and de-influencing wardrobes, subcultures, especially Harajuku subcultures, can return to their original purpose. Without social media, it would be more difficult to see examples of what other artists are doing. If used responsibly and in moderation, social media can preserve fashion culture. Harajuku is seeing an influx of new designers, so there is still hope. Even if the original energy of Harajuku never returns, change is necessary; the energy will return. It will simply be different and dwelling on the past only sours the new vigor that people bring.

### **Conclusion**

No matter what happens to Harajuku, fans will fight tooth and nail to preserve its culture. The influence of Harajuku has reached across the world. It has been a source of community,

rebellion, and self-expression. Harajuku fashion lovers will continue to embrace their style and advocate for the voices that fall on deaf ears. As Harajuku continues to ebb and flow, the future may seem uncertain, but the fashions that made the neighborhood popular will not die out so quickly. The messages and movements behind them are strong enough to overcome the issues of fast fashion and overconsumption. Youth culture will not allow people to be silenced on Japan's societal issues. The dedication to Harajuku is infectious, and the future of new designers and youth participants is promising.



## Bibliography

- "About JFW Organization." Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo. Accessed April 29, 2024.  
<https://rakutenfashionweektokyo.com/en/aboutus/>.
- Aoki, Shoichi. "Has Tokyo fashion lost its edge? Shoichi Aoki on Harajuku's decline." Interview by Derek Blasberg. *Style*, CNN, May 10, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/fruits-street-style-photographer/index.html>.
- Carriger, Michelle Liu. "'Maiden's Armor': Global Gothic Lolita Fashion Communities and Technologies of Girly Counteridentity." *Theatre Survey* 60.1 (2019): 122–46.  
 doi:10.1017/S0040557418000522.
- Caruso, Eleonora. "Laforet Harajuku, Tokyo. A crisis of subculture." *Lampoon*, February 3, 2022.  
<https://lampoonmagazine.com/article/2022/02/03/laforet-harajuku-tokyo/>.
- Chitrakorn, Kati. "The Japanese Fashion School That Could Birth the Next Rei Kawakubo." *The Business of Fashion*, May 15, 2018. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/news-analysis/coconogacco-tokyo-japan-fashion-school-next-rei-kawakubo/>.
- Evers, Izumi and Patrick Macias. *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno: Tokyo Teen Fashion Subculture Handbook*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007.
- "Fashion Weeks around the world." FashionUnited. Accessed April 30, 2024.  
<https://fashionunited.com/landing/fashionweeks-around-the-world-list>.
- Fotache, Ioana. "Japanese 'LGBT Boom' Discourse and its Discontents." In *Sexuality and Translation in World Politics*. Edited by Caroline Cottet and Manuela L. Picq, 27-41. Bristol, England: E-International Relations Publishing, 2019.
- Gagné, Isaac. "Urban Princesses: Performance and 'Women's Language' in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 18.1 (2008): 130–50.

- Godoy, Tiffany. *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion, Tokyo*. Edited by Ivan Vartanian. San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007.
- Heron-Langton, Jessica. "Harajuku's FRUiTS mag might return, thanks to Demna and Virgil." *Dazed*, January 8, 2020. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/47387/1/fruits-magazine-harajuku-shoichi-aoki-virgil-demna-relaunch-street-style-tokyo>.
- Johnson, Adrienne R. "Josō or 'gender free'? Playfully queer 'lives' in visual *kei*." *Asian Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (June 8, 2020): 119-42.  
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2020.1756076>.
- "June 28, 1998 'Last day of Harajuku Hokoten'." DON!. Last modified June 28, 2010.  
[web.archive.org/web/20160305035412/www.ntv.co.jp/don/contents03/2010/06/1998628.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20160305035412/www.ntv.co.jp/don/contents03/2010/06/1998628.html).
- Keet, Philomena. *Tokyo Fashion City: A Detailed Guide to Tokyo's Trendiest Fashion Districts*. North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2016.
- Kessler, Alex. "At Bunka Fashion College in Tokyo, Students Show Off Their Personal Style." *Vogue*, December 1, 2020. <https://www.vogue.com/article/bunka-fashion-college-tokyo-student-street-style>.
- Koizumi, Kyoko. "Popular Music, Gender and High School Pupils in Japan: Personal Music in School and Leisure Sites." *Popular Music* 21.1 (2002): 107–25.
- Koyama, Akihiro. "What is 'Menhera'? Etymology, history, meaning, fashion, etc." Menhera.jp. Last modified April 3, 2018.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210421074613/https://menhera.jp/5671#5671-6>.
- "Laforet Harajuku." Mori Building Co., Ltd.. <https://www.mori.co.jp/en/projects/laforet/>.

- Mattar, Yasser. "Miso Soup for the Ears: Contemporary Japanese Popular Music and its Relation to the Genres Familiar to the Anglophonic Audience." *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 1 (February 2008): 113-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760701718724>.
- Monden, Masafumi. "Ribbons and Lace: Girls, Decorative Femininity, and Androgyny." In *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, edited by Joanne B. Eicher, 107-34. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015.
- Mr. 090. "History of the word 'Menhera': How 'Menhera' was born on 2channel." Menhera.jp. Last modified October 17, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210208124405/https://menhera.jp/975>.
- Mr. 090. "The changing meaning of 'Menhera'. How has the usage of 'Menhera' changed over the past 10 years?." Menhera.jp. Last modified October 18, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210507073456/https://menhera.jp/1095>
- Refinery29. "The Dark Side Of Harajuku Style You Haven't Seen Yet | Style Out There | Refinery29." YouTube Video, 12:12, February 24, 2018. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Wsk3Oa\\_3F8&rco=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Wsk3Oa_3F8&rco=1).
- Refinery29. "What Harajuku Girls Really Look Like | Style Out There | Refinery29." YouTube Video, 7:49. November 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WblNctc3ys0&t=4s>.
- Seko, Yukari, and Minako Kikuchi. "Mentally Ill and Cute as Hell: Menhera Girls and Portrayals of Self-Injury in Japanese Popular Culture." *Frontiers in Communication* 7 (March 11, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.737761>.
- Stefani, Gwen. "Gwen Stefani: 'I Said, My God, I'm Japanese.'" Interview by Jesa Marie Calaor. *Allure*, January 10, 2023. <https://www.allure.com/story/gwen-stefani-japanese-harajuku->

lovers-interview?fbclid=IwAR2NLbBqe-

Ns1VZ0i4lsV0UatfshHQUEQCGwGvr\_flg7awKtkxA9QRqMbwz

Stefanie. "The History of: Harajuku." *The Comm*, April 19, 2022. <https://the-comm.online/blog/the-history-of-harajuku/>.

"The heart of Harajuku fashion and culture." GO TOKYO. Last modified December 14, 2023. <https://www.gotokyo.org/en/spot/35/index.html>.

Tsai, Eva and Hyunjoon Shin. "Strumming a Place of One's Own: Gender, Independence and the East Asian Pop-Rock Screen." *Popular Music* 32.1 (2013): 7–22.

Wang II, Catherine. "Why Japan Made Its "Cute Culture" Such a Hit." *The Argo: The Official Newspaper of the Boston Latin School* (Boston, MA), April 17, 2022. <https://blsargo.org/2959/forum/why-japan-made-its-cute-culture-such-a-hit/>.

"What is a mass-produced girl? Explaining the common characteristics of mass-produced loose-fitting girls' clothing and makeup." Rcwaii. Last modified May 16, 2022. <https://www.rcwaii.com/blog/fashionyougocheck/16617>.

Winge, Theresa M. "Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita." *Mechademia: Second Arc* 3.1 (2008): 47–63.

Winge, Theresa M. "Molten Hot: Japanese Gal Subcultures and Fashions." *Mechademia: Second Arc* 4.1 (2009): 318–21.

Yunker, Terasa. "Lolita: Dreaming, Despairing, Defying." *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 97-110.