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Young Children and Consumer Media Cultures in Japan

Mothering, Peer Relationships, Social Identities and Consumption Practices

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, June 2015

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Preface

When my journey toward a PhD degree began in the Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB), I thought it would consist of three years research and living in Norway. It turned out to be long battle with literature, papers, language barriers, cultural differences and more, which I often felt like an emotional roller coaster. This thesis is my story of the long process.

The process of working on this thesis has been a valuable learning experience and I have enjoyed myself immensely (although I have occasionally also been very frustrated). The initial excitement and passion I felt when I first received the e-mail for this PhD position from NOSEB in 2008 has continued to stay with me throughout this long process.

This thesis could not have been finished without the openness and generosity of preschool teachers, children and mothers who participated in the research. I am grateful to the preschool teachers for including me in their everyday activities and providing me with opportunities to spend time and space with the children. Special thanks go to the children in the preschools who showed and shared with me the varying and diverse aspects of their childhood experiences. It was a trip down memory lane to my own childhood when I joined in singing children's songs, keeping secrets from the teachers and being part of pretend play. Without this close participation in and observation of children's everyday world, writing this thesis would have been monotonous. In addition to the people in the preschools, I am grateful to the mothers for sharing their child-rearing and mothering experiences with me.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my two supervisors, Professor David Buckingham and Professor Vebjørg Tingstad. David's generous support during my research and his insightful feedback to my thesis pushed me to be more critical and connect childhood studies and consumption studies, which has become the contribution of this thesis. He also encouraged me to publish articles and supported me with thorough readings and constructive comments. I have learned a lot from his broad and

comprehensive knowledge. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Vebjørg who has warmly watched over me and supported me in my struggles with my research and writing. It has been a privilege to have such engaged and patient supervisors.

A number of people and institutions have assisted me through seminars, conferences and informal discussions. Throughout the PhD period, my office has been located at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB): many thanks to NOSEB for providing a wonderful academic environment. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to my fellow PhD scholars for their endless encouragement, friendship and for giving me a 'home from home'.

I also would like to thank the scholars from the Pedagogy department at NTNU for offering many opportunities to improve my writing competence and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) for granting my writing scholarships.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family and friends who always supported me and stood by my side. To my friends in Japan, Norway and other countries, thank you for your unique "I have no idea what a PhD is, but I believe you can do it" encouragement. Finally, I have nothing but gratitude for my beloved parents. My father has been a main source of strength behind my achievements, and my mother has always filled me with care and confidence to go through the challenges during my PhD period. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

Trondheim, January 2015

Mayumi Takahashi

Summary of the Thesis

This thesis, entitled *Young Children and Consumer Media Cultures in Japan*, explores the role of consumption practices in the social interactions and everyday lives of young children and mothers in a suburban context in Japan. With its focus on young children (aged between 1 and 5) and mothers as primary care-givers, it analyses how they experience consumer media culture while using, creating, controlling, transforming and adapting commercial goods and knowledge, and the part this plays in their presentation of self and their construction of interpersonal relationships in the home and the preschool. My PhD research was affiliated with the research project at Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB), "Consuming Children: Commercialisation and the Changing Construction of Childhood", financed by the Norwegian Research Council from 2006-2009. The data were obtained through five months of fieldwork that involved ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviews and home visits.

The thesis is based on the perspectives of childhood studies, consumer culture theory and commercial enculturation. Following a discussion of theory and methods, it includes three analysis chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on mothers' ideological dilemmas and their construction of identity through caring consumption. I explore how mothers take responsibility for products, services and experiences on behalf of their young children, while reflecting on children's future becoming and present being. Chapter 6 focuses on young children's sense of belonging in peer consumer culture. I explore the significance of children's having and knowing in preschool settings and discuss how the meanings and values of certain possessions and forms of knowledge are consistently interpreted and transformed among peers. Chapter 7 focuses on flexible social identities, and in particular how children maintain different kinds of boundaries and transform cultural resources in play. I explore the ways in which consumption practices serve as tools for children's construction of social identities.

Ultimately, I argue that consumption is not a simple matter either of control or of free choice, and that researchers need to look beyond some of the dichotomies that have tended to characterise discussion of these issues. With this thesis I am hoping to make empirical, methodological, theoretical and disciplinary contributions to both childhood studies and consumption studies.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore children and consumption, particularly how young children and their mothers are involved in contemporary consumer culture in Japan. I explore the social interactions of children's everyday lives, where mothers as primary care-givers struggle and negotiate over the consumption of certain products, and where children actively look for commercial availability and popularity. The empirical focus is on how both mothers and young children aged between 1 and 5 experience this specific cultural environment and interact with each other through commercialised products and services, such as clothes, toys and 'edutainment' media.

In this chapter I will first provide an account of the background, aims and perspectives of the study. I will also offer a description of key concepts and themes that are used throughout the thesis in order to clarify this relatively new research field in social sciences. Lastly, I will present the research questions and structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background, aims and perspectives

Consumption is an integral part of people's lives. Since the second half of the 20th century, with extensive access to products, services and information in an ever-growing economy, children in Japan have been recognised as active and precious consumers. They not only participate in parents' purchase decision-making (see Schor, 2004) but also use commercial products and knowledge in their peer culture.

According to a report by the Yano Research Institute, the child-related business market in Japan in 2007 is worth an estimated 12 trillion yen ($100 billion[1]), an increase of 0.6% compared to the previous year (Matsushita, 2008). Like many other developed nations, Japan has a relatively low birth rate (1.39) (MHLW 2011), a high percentage of unmarried people and long life expectancy. One child is therefore considered to be

[1] 120 yen to a dollar.

surrounded by at least 10 adults with spare money (Matsushita, 2008). In addition to the parents and grandparents, there are other adults such as single uncles, aunts and parents' friends (see Rashinban, 2005). This means that as in most developed nations, more money is being spent on each child in Japan: "children are now becoming one of the most sought-after targets for 'niche marketing'" (Buckingham, 2000: 147).

A focal point in this study is the significance of consumer culture for mothering and children's peer relationships. I use the concept of *commercial enculturation*, which centres on how both children and adults encounter the associations between goods, meanings and social relations (Cook, 2010). My intention is to move beyond the dominating concept of consumer socialisation, which is generally understood as a matter of children's instrumental learning and acquisition of consumer skills, knowledge and attitudes (see Ward, 1974). Taking into account the concept of co-consumption (Cook, 2008), I take a close look at how contemporary consumer culture is an area for both mothers and young children to make meanings and values through everyday experiences and interactions. While mothers' responsibility and influence have a profound effect on young children's consumption, young children themselves negotiate with their mothers, and construct and reconstruct their own unique consumer culture with peers. Consumption needs to be understood as a set of practices that are embedded in dynamic and fluid social relations and contexts – it is not a simple formula of consumers purchasing whatever is offered by markers (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Warde, 2005). Keeping these perspectives in mind, I investigate the connection between children's consumption practices and their exploration of normative demands and expectations.

Before outlining the research problem and questions, I briefly introduce the themes of consumer culture and child consumers.

1.2. What is consumer culture?

Consumer culture is an economic and socio-cultural phenomenon in which the general interest and capacity of people is focused on consumption practices (beyond basic physical needs) rather than production. Consumer culture focuses on commodity

circulation – the circulation of products and services with the goal of gaining profit, which increases consumers' access to and choices of commodities and objects of personal gratification. Slater (1997: 8) identifies primary perspectives on consumer culture in his book, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*: "consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets." Lury (2011), a sociologist and the author of *Consumer Culture*, touches further upon symbolic and material resources by defining consumer culture as a type of material culture, a culture in which material objects are used as means of communicating or presenting meanings and values. Her understanding of consumer culture as an example of material culture makes it clear that consumption is a matter of "use" instead of merely "using up"; and this enables consumption to be explored in terms of *appropriation* and *transformation* (ibid.: 10). I agree with Lury's inclusion of objects along with the environments, worlds and spaces of consumer experience. In addition to objects, I place importance on consumer knowledge, information, experience and skills.

In Japan, consumer culture began to be widely celebrated in the 1970s with a spread of 'the three sacred treasures' – refrigerators, washing machines and black-and-white TVs – and later on with the 3Cs – colour TVs, coolers (air conditioners) and cars. This is when the Japanese economy boomed and when Japan was recognised as a strong economic state in the world. The people of Japan gradually started to pursue and enjoy more comfortable and convenient lives. Meanwhile, a large number of Japanese workers shifted from primary and secondary industries to tertiary industries: the economy went through a transition from a focus on heavy manufacturing industries to a focus on information and services, thus changing Japan from being an industrial society to a consumer society (Taga, 2010).

This economic transition has changed family lifestyles, relationships and roles. Urbanisation has led to a dilution of communal relationships and a household dispersion, in which parents and children have isolated relationships in contrast with the previous household structure of extended family members living close to each other. While in the

industrial society, children were a source of labour and their production capacity in the household was an index of their full-fledged family membership, children in contemporary society gain this recognition through consuming (Suwa, 2005; Uchida, 2007). Children are no longer economic contributors to the household but consumers who need to be invested in: in the process, families establish "*tomodachi oyako*[2]" (cf. Yamada, 1997), meaning that children have a say in household purchasing and enjoy a less hierarchical relationship with their parents. Children have become, so to speak, "economically useless but emotionally priceless" (Zelizer, 1994: 209) in the family. According to AIU (American International Underwriters Holdings)[3], raising a Japanese child costs at least 30 million yen ($250,000[4]) and can cost more than 60 million yen ($750,000[4]) until the age of 21[5], depending on the child's public or private educational path (AIU, 2005).

While consumption is central to consumer culture, its cultural reproduction is largely dependent on practices, individual choice and personal sovereignty in everyday life (Holt, 2002). The term "consumer culture" implies "an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects" that groups of people use and share in order to create a collective sense of their environment and to sustain their members' experiences and lives (Kozinets, 2001: 68). The meanings and values constructed, appropriated, transformed and reconstructed through consumption are embodied and negotiated by consumers in particular social circumstances, roles and relationships (ibid.). Thus, consumption practices are fundamental not only to personal desire, gratification and value-making, but they are also a measure of sociocultural identities and belonging. Lury (2011: 192) sums up by asserting that "[consumer culture] is a culture of exchange, mobility and circulation, of transnational movement and transformation of ideas, people and things. This is a notion of consumer culture that confirms that consumption must be understood as transformation rather than use."

[2] The direct translation of "*tomodachi oyako*" is friend parent-child.
[3] AIU is commonly known as Chartis, Inc., but in Japan the old brand name has remained.
[4] 120 yen to a dollar.
[5] Generally, parents pay the tuition fees for the university education in Japan, and at age 21 most university students graduate. The annual average tuition of national universities is 535,800 yen ($4,465) and that of private medical universities is 2,968,656 yen ($24,739) (Benesse Corporation, 2011).

Needless to say, consumer culture is not a homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life and values shared by its members; for example, it cannot be generalised that all Japanese people share a specific kind of consumer culture, nor that all Japanese children behave in certain ways due to consumer culture. My view of consumer culture draws upon *consumer culture theory* (CCT), which "explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 869). According to Arnould and Thompson (2005: 869), culture is the interplay of experiences, meanings and actions, which *frames* a certain pattern of behaving, feeling, thinking and interpreting, yet it *does not determine* individual or communal actions as outcomes. Therefore, consumer culture should be understood as a matter of the dynamics of plurality, fluidity and fragmentation of consumption practices and ways of life (see Chapter 2). In line with CCT's research principle, my emphasis is on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption that are not accessible in depth through surveys and experiments, such as consumer narratives, the meanings of possessions, knowledge and symbolic boundaries.

In addition to consumer culture, it is essential to illuminate who I mean by child consumers through this thesis. In the next section I first present the notion of the child and the consumer, and then I provide a brief overview of how child consumers have been discussed in consumption theory and in childhood studies.

1.3. Who are child consumers?

In this study, young children's consumption practices are the centre of the discussion and analysis. First of all, the word *child* should be defined. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child is "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (UN General, 1989). As social attitudes towards children differ in various cultures, childhood in Japan is generally considered to last till the age of 20[6], in line

[6] Individuals who turn 20 celebrate Adult Day in January.

with the legal exercise of voting, drinking and smoking rights[7]. Childhood is united by the universal biology of physical development and cognitive potential. However, at the same time, recent sociological studies stress the socially constructed and structured nature of this taken-for-granted notion of the child and childhood. The child is situated in a specific historical, political and social context, and expectations and assumptions about the child vary cross-culturally and temporally. Childhood researchers therefore stress the need to deconstruct the notion of a commonly shared notion of the child and childhood and to stress the significance of plurality and diverse constructions. The child and childhood can only be understood in connection with particular relationships and within a particular context.

Who is a consumer in contemporary consumer culture should be also defined. Every individual in developed nations, irrespective of age and gender, is interested in and searches for desire and pleasure, and experiences emotional and aesthetic satisfaction derived from consumption experiences. Consumption, as I mentioned earlier, is not limited to purchasing, rather it consists of plural and flexible practices (see Lury, 2011; Warde, 2005) such as using, influencing, deciding and approving (Rowley, 1997). On the one hand, when discussing young child consumers, the role of the parents, particularly the mothers, should be taken into account because their consumption practices are part of caring obligations to and ties with their children[8] (see Cook, 2010; NWEC 2006). The mothers' interests, concerns, expectations, desires and so forth are partly, sometimes greatly, reflected in young children's practices. Young children are not direct purchasers of products and services – the adults surrounding them, and particularly the mothers, are the main buyers and gatekeepers. Yet children use and present goods and information in a number of ways – sometimes in ways not envisioned by marketers. Moreover, they influence others' consuming desires and approve what commercial goods and knowledge are appropriate or not in their peer culture. Regardless of age, consumers are cultural reproducers – in line with Corsaro's (1992,

[7] The legal marriage age is 18 for men and 16 for women, but under the age of 20, parental consent is needed.

[8] The international research on the time spent on/with children and how fathers and mothers are involved in childrearing indicates that the mothers in Japan spend much more time with their children and take more responsibility for childrearing than the fathers, and the gap between the parents is more significant than that between the parents in Korea, Thailand, America, France and Sweden (NWEC 2006).

2005) concept of *interpretive reproduction* [9] – who make sense of commercialised goods and services in their own way and transform them creatively and uniquely into their local cultures: consumers do not necessarily adopt what is offered by the market or the media (see Dyson, 1997; Willett, 2004; Änggård, 2005).

Despite their presence and participation, children have been excluded from the theory of consumer culture for a long period. Highly influential scholars, such as Veblen (1899), Bourdieu (1984), Baudrillard (1998 [1970]), Campbell (1995) and Miller (1987, 1998), among others, have established social, historical, structural and cultural accounts of modern consumerism that hardly mention children or childhood. Only in 1990s did research and writing about children's consumer preferences, practices and cultures begin to develop in the fields of anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. While this movement correlates with the growing recognition and acknowledgement of children as social actors, few studies have used this paradigm to examine children's consumption practices (but see Marsh, 2005; Martens et al., 2004; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002; Wærdahl, 2003). Instead, mainstream approaches to studying children and consumption have focused primarily on consumer socialisation (Creighton, 1994; John, 1999; Ward, 1974) and consumption and media effects (Schor, 2004; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). This research examines the process by which children 'become' sensible consumers and how media – such as advertisements, computer games and TV – influence children's behaviour and decision-making. In this research, children are conceptualised as passive recipients of products and information who are moulded into becoming consumers and media users. While some researchers in childhood studies, who take sociocultural contexts and children's perspectives of the world into consideration, have attempted to challenge these mainstream approaches, many have avoided doing so. This is because, according to Cook (2008), childhood studies is founded on empowering children and listening to their voices, and this approach overlaps uncomfortably with that of marketers and advertisers, who use similar language for moral cover to protect themselves from charges of exploitation and manipulation. Most research conducted on children's consumption practices and media use, in fact, shows a dichotomy [10] –

[9] This concept is discussed further in Chapters 2 and 6.
[10] This dichotomy is further discussed in Chapter 2.

researchers fall into two theoretically conflicting groups: one sees children as passive subjects that can be manipulated for marketing exploitation and the other sees children as active and competent consumers (Buckingham, 2000; Cook, 2005).

In order to move beyond this 'either-or' position, childhood researchers need to pay careful attention to three points. First, since one is born into a culture of consumption and since it is impossible not to participate in it, the focal point of research should be how children participate in that world and what kind of consumer they can be and become. Second, the focus of consumption research needs to move away from individuals to include social ties and interactions: consumption is part of children's identities, social positions and sense of belonging (see Pugh, 2009). Third, child consumers need to be recognised as both social subjects and social objects – as subjects who have desire for and knowledge of commercial goods and information, and as objects of adults' concern, care and affection (Cook, 2008).

1.4. Research questions

This introduction has so far presented a quick overview of a relatively new research field of children and consumer culture. Much more detailed discussion is contained in the following chapters. In this section, I will outline the research questions.

This PhD research departed from the following research question:

How do young children and mothers experience consumer culture in their everyday life, and how are consumption practices enacted in the contexts of family and peer groups?

This main question opened up a wide range of empirical and theoretical themes and issues. A part of the cultural context for this study is the dominating social and cultural image of consumption practices. In public discourses, consumption is often associated with contrasting experiences such as pleasure and distress. These discourses focus on consumption as a fun and leisure-like experience for children, yet one that also exposes them to being targeted and exploited. This dichotomy illustrates that there is a considerable gap between public discourses – which are often taken up in the media –

and knowledge based on empirical research. In this thesis, I attempt to avoid taking either side of the dichotomy; rather, my aim is to present consumption as a contextual and relational practice from the perspectives of the children and the mothers themselves. The research has an interdisciplinary approach and draws from childhood studies and discourses about Japanese childhood and motherhood (see Chapters 2 and 3). The aim of my approach is to establish a link between these research fields by analysing mothers' and children's consumption practices, peer consumer culture[11] and flexible identity construction, with children and their contexts being the central focus of the discussion.

I will approach the main research question in three different ways. First, I will discuss it through an exploration of the ways in which young children are constructed as consumers in household and preschool environments. This perspective encompasses the answering of questions such as: how do mothers and young children experience market appeals? How do mothers perceive children's consumption practices? How are children treated in terms of spatial and temporal matters in the contexts of family and preschool?

Secondly, the question is approached with a focus on how children construct social relationships in and through consumer culture. To what extent, and in what ways, are commercial possessions and knowledge about consumption employed in children's peer culture? How do children transform and shape objects and knowledge in conversations and play? What kinds of concerns do mothers have regarding children's everyday activities?

Lastly, the research question is approached with a focus on how children's and mothers' consumption practices relate to their identity formation. How do mothers manage and negotiate their consumption practices for the sake of their children? How are motherhood and childhood constructed? How do children link their consumption practices to multiple forms of identity and (un-)belonging?

I approach the subjects of consumer culture and young children in an exploratory manner. Since young children's everyday lives in Japan take place both in home and

[11] This concept is discussed in Chapter 2.

preschool environments[12], it is important to gather information from a variety of contexts and relationships. In fact, home and preschool are both central arenas in young children's lives, and they can offer valuable insights concerning different consumption practices.

It is my hope that this research will contribute to knowledge about consumer culture and young children in Japan and generate both empirically grounded findings as well as new theoretical frameworks. Generalising about young children's and mothers' consumption practices is not my particular research aim: rather, I seek to fill the gap between public discourses and children's everyday lives by employing theoretical concepts and empirical knowledge. Focusing on these aspects, I intend to contribute to understanding of childhood and child consumers.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters, which are organised into three parts: introduction, theory and methodology, and discussion and analysis.

Chapter 2 presents my theoretical approach, and locates the study in relation to several academic frameworks. The chapter first presents literature reviews concerning dominant perspectives on children and childhood, and consumer and media culture. In this chapter, a shift in childhood and consumption studies is presented, and the construction of social identities through consumption practices is discussed. By so doing, I situate my own theoretical position in this study, which is founded on childhood studies and discourses surrounding children and consumption. In Chapter 2 I will theorise both children and adults as becomings and beings, emphasise the concepts of *consumer culture theory* (CCT) and *commercial enculturation*, and explore the reflexive construction of social identities.

Chapter 3 describes and discusses the particular situation of children and consumer culture in Japanese contexts. It aims to outline the unique socio-cultural and historical

[12] Many children under three year old stay home with the caretakers, who are usually their own mothers, but after the age of three, the enrollment rate in preschool increases (see Chapter 3).

characteristics of consumer culture in Japan – including media mixes, character culture and mothering ideology.

Chapter 4 presents methodological approaches and choices. The lack of literature in this field creates challenges but also encourages an exploratory perspective. I will make visible the dilemmas and considerations I encountered in the process of obtaining participants' 'voices' and 'perspectives'. I argue that fieldwork-based studies cannot be conducted systematically with a clear structure as some researchers hope. In this chapter I also discuss research ethics related to research with children.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present analyses of research data. These chapters are organised around three main topics: constructing motherhood through caring consumption (Chapter 5); possessions, knowledge and belonging in consumer peer culture (Chapter 6); and generating social identities through consumption practices (Chapter 7). In Chapter 5 I discuss several dilemmas regarding mothers' consumption practices, which emerged in home visits and interviews with mothers of young children. A part of this chapter was published in an article titled "Ideological Dilemmas: Constructing Caring Consumption in Japan" (Takahashi, 2014) in *Young Consumers*. Chapter 6 explores the significance of children's having and knowing, and analyses their sense of belonging as expressed in interactions with their peers. A part of this chapter was published in an article titled "Young Children's Character Culture in Japan: Possession, Knowledge and Belongingness" (Takahashi, 2013) in *Childhoods Today*. Chapter 7 discusses flexible social identities: how children maintain different kinds of boundaries and transform cultural resources in play.

Chapter 8 summarises and discusses the primary findings and describes how consumption practices provide the possibility for children and mothers to create and maintain interactions and relationships. In this chapter I also look back to the main intentions of the study and reflect on what knowledge the study has contributed. Reflecting on childhood, having wishes and concerns, sharing interests and establishing themselves as mothers are key features of mothers' consumption practices. Consumer culture is a social arrangement where young children find their position among peers through their possessions and knowledge about consumption, present their

competencies and construct a reflexive self – that is, they learn who they are, who others are, who others think they are. Their sense of belonging, generationing and gendering is performed through making sense of similarities and differences, which are crucial dimensions in constructing social identities. In this chapter I also discuss contemporary notions of child and childhood in terms of consumer and media culture and suggest areas of further research.

There are many Japanese terms in this thesis, and these are clarified in footnotes.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter, I described the research topic and outlined the primary research questions. In this chapter I present literature and perspectives that are useful for the purpose of my study. I also discuss key concepts and my theoretical framework. I first describe a broad shift in the social studies of children and childhood, and I also explore debates surrounding consumption and consumers. Secondly, I discuss a range of perspectives on the particular place of children in consumer media culture. Thirdly, I explore the issue of children's identity construction through consumption practices. I outline four key theoretical positions: children and adults as becomings and beings, consumer culture theory (CCT), commercial enculturation and reflexive social identities. In different ways, all these theoretical positions offer a challenge to traditional socialisation theory and the dichotomous approaches briefly outlined in my introduction.

2.1. Understanding Children and Childhood

2.1.1. Childhood studies

This thesis is theoretically positioned within the social studies of children and childhood. The traditions and perspectives of this research field have offered me a particular framework to explore my research questions, approach young children as informants and analyse the collected data. Specifically, I position myself within the field of childhood studies, which critically examines childhood and children.

Childhood studies emerged and was established as an academic discipline during the 1980s and 1990s, with a commitment to interdisciplinary approaches at its core and drawing on psychology, sociology, anthropology, geography, history, law, and other areas (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1992 [1982]; Qvortrup, 1994; Woodhead, 2008). Childhood or the child is not a new invention of childhood studies, of course; the concepts had been discussed and acknowledged long before the 1980s – especially by psychologists (e.g. Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1929; Vygotsky, 1978);

sociologists (e.g. Durkheim, 1956; Parsons, 1951); and anthropologists (e.g. Mead, 1928; Opie & Opie, 1959). In childhood studies, Jenks (1992 [1982]) was one of the leading researchers who asserted that the fundamental question "what is a child?" had yet to be asked and answered. Although childhood had been systematically recognised as a social category in its own right, children had not been analysed in terms of their way of being in the world or as social participants. Most researchers, by focusing on a taken-for-granted adult world, had in fact failed "to constitute the child as an ontology in its own right" (Jenks, 2005: 10).

Childhood studies, whose theoretical approach has been referred to as a paradigm shift, has a strong emphasis on the social construction of childhood/child. The field involves two primary research foci: acknowledging childhood as a sociocultural space and seeing children as social actors (James et al., 1998). The shift from the previous research on children and childhood is what James et al. (1998: 23) call an "epistemological break"; moving away from the concept of childhood premised on traditional theologies, romantic discourses and developmental theories to a constructionist understanding where the focus is on how discourses and categories construct and reconstruct concepts of children and childhood in particular times, places and cultures. Within this understanding, the research standpoint is to challenge dominant notions of socialising and developing children, and of natural and universal childhood. However, as Ryan (2008) argues, childhood studies have not turned their back completely on traditional theories and created a completely new paradigm: rather, the focus remains on the discourses around childhood and on presenting and discussing plural and diverse constructions depending on social, cultural and historical contexts (Montgomery & Woodhead, 2003; Tisdall & Punch, 2012; Woodhead, 2008). In the next section, I take a critical stance towards understandings of childhood in terms of socialisation – of childhood as a period of becoming and children as "adults-in-the-making" (Thorne, 1987: 93), an approach which has been supported by traditional developmental psychological and functionalist sociological perspectives.

2.1.2. Challenging mainstream discourses on children

As I have touched upon in the section above, childhood studies emerged with a critical stance towards how children and childhood had been understood and approached by mainstream social sciences. Critiques were particularly directed at the psychology of child development, which was firmly established during the early twentieth century as a dominant discipline for academic research on children as well as for professional care and education (Woodhead, 2008). The idea of children's natural, universal development – in particular Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development – had significant impact not only on academic work and professional practices but also on everyday common knowledge of children (Jenks, 1992 [1982]). Critiques were also directed at mainstream sociology which has employed the concept of socialisation, to refer to the process through which children learn to conform to social norms and cultural transmission from one generation to another takes place (James et al., 1998). Researchers in childhood studies have argued against these traditional perspectives, where childhood is addressed largely in terms of the efficacy of socialisation as well as in terms of biological and cognitive development through maturation and growth.

Developmental discourses are closely bound to future-oriented socialisation perspectives. This view of children as *becomings* and social reproducers had been the core of the "dominant framework" (James & Prout, 1997), depicting children as adults-in-the-making who need to be socialised to grow up towards the clear destination, to become complete, mature, stable and independent adults (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Lee, 2001; Qvortrup, 1994; Thorne, 1987). The research focus was on efficient cultural transformation, whereby children will acquire and develop universal skills and features of the adults that they will become. In this *becoming* model, children are embodiments of growth or markers through which transitions and changes of physical and psychological development are assessed and measured through stages.

Childhood studies has been critical of this traditional perspective on children as *becomings* (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1992 [1982]; Lee, 2001; Uprichard, 2008). In fact, the concept of children as *beings* is intrinsic to childhood studies, and it enables researchers to regard children as social actors in their own right,

who have voices, opinions and desires, who actively construct their own childhood, and who make sense of the world in which they are situated as children (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1997). Childhood researchers have departed from the traditional, dominant framework, by emphasising children's autonomy and competence and showing how children appropriate and act upon their surrounding world in their own unique ways (Lee, 2001; Prout, 2005). However, the problem, I argue, is that the more researchers attempt to contrast childhood and adulthood and yet also perceive children as *beings*, the more theoretically conflicting and limiting it has become to approach what it means to be a child.

My conceptual framework was inspired by childhood studies, in which children are seen as *beings.* I argue however that this view of children-as-beings, which stands in opposition to the dominant framework of children-as-becomings in almost every way, is in itself problematic. The sociology of childhood should be credited for presenting children as agents and competent actors in their own social worlds by taking their perspectives and voices into account. Yet, sociologists of childhood should not ignore children's own sense of growing-up and anticipation of the future, or pretend that there are no differences between children and adults by covering the concept of children and childhood with simple words, such as active, competent and independent *beings*. My theoretical position therefore rests in the assertion made by several sociologists (see Lee, 2001; Prout, 2005; Uprichard, 2008) that children and adults belong to a complex web of interdependencies and that they are not only beings, but *both* becomings *and* beings. This critical stance towards such dichotomous oppositions is important to the discussion on children and consumer culture, as will be seen later in this chapter and in the rest of the thesis.

Before theorising children and childhood in relation to consumer culture, I would like to discuss three key features of contemporary childhood studies in order to clarify issues surrounding children and childhood.

2.1.3. Key characteristics of perspectives in contemporary childhood studies

Despite having interdisciplinary approaches at its core, contemporary childhood studies set out particular research premises in terms of theorising and understanding children and childhood. First and foremost, children and childhood cannot be defined and analysed separately "because discourses of childhood impinge strongly on the experiences of those real 'children' who contribute to the construction of their childhoods" (Woodhead, 2008: 18). Woodhead (2008) identified three key features in contemporary childhood studies. The first feature is about childhood: childhood is seen as socially constructed, with implications for the ways it is theorised and studied. The second is about children: recognising their conditions and activities as the starting point for research, practice and policy-making. The third is about childhood and adulthood: acknowledging childhood in the context of intergenerational relationships. These key features overlap, but I find them useful as a way to position and clarify my theoretical stance within childhood studies.

2.1.3.1. Social construction of childhood

The first theme according to Woodhead (2008) is about social constructions of childhood. While rejecting the tendency to naturalise and universalise childhood within mainstream reductionist discourses, childhood studies acknowledges childhood as a sociocultural space where individual or collective experiences of what it means to be a child vary based on specific time and space (Alanen, 2001; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2002). As our childhood is different from that of our parents' generation, contemporary childhood is different from ours, and children do not experience the same childhood. This means that childhood cannot be discussed and analysed outside of its dynamic social structures and contexts. Childhood is understood "in a structural form" and "in a generational context" (Qvortrup, 2002: 46), in other words, in relational terms. Notions of childhood need to be discussed and conceptualised in relation to other social categories, for instance adulthood, in a specific sociocultural sphere.

> [Childhood] is conceptually comparable to the concept of class in the sense that it gains its defining characteristics by what the members of childhood are doing,

> so to speak, and through the position to which childhood is assigned by and in relation to other and more dominant groups in society (Qvortrup, 2002: 47).

Childhood is not just a socially constructed categorical group, but children live within it and construct their particular social group in relation to others, by interpreting the meanings and significances made by other social groups. It can be said that the preschool children I observed made sense of their world and peer culture by sharing and negotiating social and cultural behaviours, interests, thoughts and values. Childhood varies based on temporary, spatial and cultural contexts; each individual child or local group goes through different experiences. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that there is a plethora of individual or/and local *childhoods* within a singular macro childhood (James & Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2001; Qvortrup, 2008). In order to grasp children's childhoods, therefore, childhood should not only be the analytical subject, but empirical phenomena are also in need of analysis (Cook, 2008).

2.1.3.2. Recognising children's conditions and activities

The second key feature of contemporary childhood studies is that it takes into account the conditions and activities of children in research as well as in practice and policy, and yet also sees children's perspectives and voices as socially constructed (Woodhead 2008). One of the primary challenges in childhood studies is to reconcile dominant binary debates between structure and agency (James et al., 1998; Prout, 2005; Woodhead, 2008). Children have been long treated as products of socialisation through social forces and structures such as class, religious ideologies and the economy, yet childhood studies brings children's autonomy, competence and independence to the surface through exploring their voices and experiences. This type of binary approach has also been applied to consumer research in relation to children, as discussed later in this chapter. Yet a question arises as to what extent children are simply products of social forces, or to what extent they are able to make their own choices and decisions independently of their environment.

Giddens's theory of *structuration* (cf. Giddens, 1984) is frequently cited as a possible way to move beyond the dichotomy between structure and agency. Giddens suggests that structure and agency are mutually interdependent. Agency exists through structure,

and structure exists through agency: they coexist as two sides of the same coin. This balance is important in childhood studies as well as other fields in social sciences (also see Buckingham, 2011). This is similar to Corsaro's notion of *interpretive reproduction* (1992, 2005), where children are seen actively participate in the social environment both as individuals and as members of a collective group, and make meanings out of those constructed by others and produce their own meaningful cultural world (see Chapter 6). This concept adopts Giddens's notion of structuration from the level of children's cultural activities to the social structures that both constrain those activities and respond to them through reproduction and change (also see Alanen, 2000).

2.1.3.3. Childhood and adulthood

The third theme Woodhead (2008) mentions in childhood studies is childhood and adulthood. Studying children and childhood in isolation is of limited value because childhood is constructed through intergenerational relationships (Alanen, 2001; James & Prout, 1997; Johansson, 2011; Woodhead, 2008). Incorporating adulthood within the study of childhood helps deconstruct some of the boundaries between academic and professional constructions of adult-child relationships, such as those based on notions of maturity and immaturity, or teaching and learning. This deconstruction of taken-for-granted notions and ideas about two categories shows that individuals adopt multiple roles and identities in their everyday life and during a life course in the family, in school and at work. My understanding of childhood and adulthood primarily echoes Lee's (2001) sensitizing concept of *multiple becoming*, which is based on the idea of flexible adulthoods and ambiguous childhoods in an age of uncertainty. I also draw on Uprichard's (2008) work, which attempts to theorise children explicitly as *both* becomings *and* beings in complementary ways (also see Johansson, 2010). From this perspective, individuals are seen to have multiple and fluid roles and identities depending upon which aspects are more important in different situations.

In *Childhood in Society*, Lee (2001) challenges the dominant view of childhood as "becoming" by looking at changes in the historical and socio-economic places of adults and children, and revealing the ambiguous divisions between them. In the

Fordist/Toyotist[13] work situation, achieving socio-economic stability through life-long employment and marriage supported the dominant notion of childhood as a period of becoming – a process of developing competency, self-control and independence (also see Iwaki, 2004). However, the concept of standard adulthood is not applicable to either contemporary Japanese society or Western societies anymore (see Blatterer, 2007; Zeiher, 2001). The Fordist/Toyotist system has been replaced by a 'flexible' global marketplace (Lee, 2001), and the dominant principle of marriage has also started to fade. When adulthood itself is examined, it is impossible to draw a clear division between childhood and adulthood and to see them as opposites. There is no complete, stable or standard adulthood; adulthood is rather an incomplete and unstable period of human life; and in this regard, Lee (2001) regards both adults and children as constant multiple *becomings*. This is witnessed in phenomena such as the increasing number of 'NEETs[14]', 'Freeters[15]' and 'SNEP[16]' in Japan. These young adults prefer to avoid or cannot achieve the path to traditional adulthood that their parents followed. This, of course, cannot be explained without understanding their situated conditions, particularly the changing labour market; but the notion of standard adulthood is quite ambiguous and complex, and so is the boundary between childhood and adulthood. Following Lee's concept of flexible adulthoods and ambiguous childhoods, it could be said that in contemporary consumer societies, human life entails continuous *becomings* in different contexts without any journey's end (also see Blatterer, 2007).

While I agree with the approach offered by Lee (2001) which is based on multiple *becomings*, I am not in favour of his suggestion to dispose of the child-*being* concept. Lee suggests that sociologists of childhood have simply positioned children alongside adults in the same category of *being*, implying completion and stability. In my view, this is not the case. Their primary aim in pursuing the child-being concept is to convey hitherto silenced children's voices to a wider audience and take them into account in their own right. Considering childhood as *multiple being* is as important as seeing it as *multiple becoming* in temporal, relational and ethical terms (Qvortrup, 2002; Uprichard,

[13] The Toyota Production System
[14] Not currently engaged in Employment, Education or Training
[15] Workers who constantly quit or change their part-time job without seeking for life-time employment
[16] Solitary Non-Employed Persons

2008). Children live in their childhood and ideally move out of it, at least in the contexts of developed nations. As my empirical data suggest, children's experiences and perspectives of being younger, older or growing-up in relation to their peers, parents and teachers reflect that being a child is being "an actor in his or her own right, situated in the past, present and future" (Uprichard, 2008: 306).

Uprichard (2008) emphasises that children (and adults) are always both becomings and beings, and she draws on Prigogine's notion (1980) of time as an arrow and on theories of change in dynamic systems. In order to understand how a thing changes over time, Uprichard illustrates time in two kinds of ways: "as a 'marker' of time (the epistemology of change) and as an intrinsic internal feature of the thing itself (the ontology of change)" (Uprichard, 2008: 307). Her consideration of childhood as a marker of time as well as of ageing echoes Qvortrup's (2002) understandings of childhood in structural and generational terms (also see Alanen, 2001; Woodhead, 2008). It is important to acknowledge that the binary between childhood and adulthood is socially constructed and negotiated, and deconstruction of this binary contributes to better understanding of both individual and collective situated and interdependent practices (see Chapter 7).

The reason why I have presented these key theoretical debates within contemporary childhood studies is because much of the discussion on consumer culture in relation to children is closely tied to and easily falls into socialisation theory and these binary oppositions. Before going any further in this direction, however, I will take a step back from these debates to consider more theoretical approaches to the study of consumption and consumer culture.

2.2. Understanding Consumption and Consumer Culture

2.2.1. Pessimistic debates surrounding consumption

Like childhood, consumption has been an increasingly popular focus of research across a wide range of disciplines such as economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history and cultural studies. In the last century, consumption was considered an

important barometer of economic growth among developed nations, including Japan. In this century, due to the prolonged global depression since 2009, the consumer price index has been keeping scholars as well as marketers in suspense. Yet consumption is not only about indicators of growth or the recovery of the global and national economy; it is part of our everyday life. In this section, I will outline pessimistic accounts and debates related to consumption, before moving on to more optimistic accounts.

As Williams (1976) and others have pointed out, the earliest uses of the term 'consume' meant to use up, to destroy and to waste. In Japanese, *shōhi*, the written word is composed of two Chinese characters: one letter connotes to delete and to erase, and another letter to spend and to waste. Williams points out that the pessimistic connotations of the term steadily faded in the West during the nineteenth century, as the consumer emerged as a key figure in liberal economic theory. A similar condition took place in Japan when consumption was leading socio-economic development: the latest occurrence of this was during the economic bubble in the late 1980s (also see Francks, 2009). However, I would argue that the pejorative connotations of the term have never entirely disappeared. In both popular and academic debates in developed nations, a view of consumption as bad sits side-by-side with a more neutral usage (also see Buckingham, 2011). For example, the term 'consumer society' is sometimes used to describe a capitalist society where people enjoy the right to purchase and use the commodities supplied, but it is also widely used to identify a set of beliefs that are seen as fundamentally false. In Japan, since the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, consumption – especially energy-related consumption – has been criticised and blamed, and there is now a common debate about finding a way out of consumer society (see Nanbayashi, 2013). The term 'consumer society' is associated with passivity and irrationality, waste and objects being of more value than people (Abe, 2012). These pessimistic views of consumption or consumer society are not only popular prejudices, but they are also implicit in the academic discussion. Indeed, they form an atomistic vision typically proposed by economics (Sassatelli, 2007); what Lury (1996) calls the 'producer-led' critique. The argument has a long history and many variants and that is not my intention to go through, but it can be fairly summed up as follows.

Weber (1981) defined mature Western capitalism as a socio-economic system where basic material needs (for example, for food and shelter) are generally met through the capitalist mode. This is to say that a consumer society or a consumer culture is a world where daily needs are satisfied through the acquisition and use of commodities, and the system effectively achieves mass consumption through "the provision of affordable commodities, but also by creating a system of meanings and pleasures that motivate the purchasing and possession of goods" (Buckingham, 2011: 27). Through the means of advertising and marketing, modern capitalism is seen to create false needs, or confuse desires with needs. It encourages people to want and purchase more things they do not need, and it offers them magical solutions to problems that they did not even know they had (Buckingham, 2011). By exploiting and misleading people to pursue mass consumption, capitalism is believed to undermine human values and authentic social relationships, replacing them with a competitive and selfish form of individualism (Lury, 1996; Miura, 2012; Suwa, 2005). According to these critics, people's needs for identity, belonging and meaning can never be met in a lasting way by the mystical pleasure of consumption, which is increasingly coded as a form of leisure in its own right (Lury, 2011; Sassatelli, 2007).

The pessimistic view of consumerism often emerges in contemporary social theories without substantial empirical evidence. Buckingham (2011: 28-30) introduces two recent examples. Bauman, one of the leading modern theorists of consumption, writes in his book *Consuming Life* (2007) that consumption has taken over people's lives, and that the power of consumerism is inescapable and all-encompassing. People are trained and forced into conformity, obeying the rules of the market, believing that it sets them free. For Bauman, the power of consumerism is ultimately based on a set of dreams and fairy tales: it promises to satisfy people's needs, but it never can – because if it did, they would stop wanting and spending. Dreaming and spending was the national propaganda for Japan, as the country caught up with the advanced economies of the West for several decades during the post-war era. In order to promote commodity circulation, the market simultaneously stimulates desire and at the same time triggers fear of prospective exclusion: in other words, it offers only misery and indignity. People merely live in the moment, relentlessly searching for a replacement of what they have already obtained:

this "consumerist syndrome" has degraded durability and attachment but elevated transience, and it is all about "speed, excess and waste" (Bauman, 2007: 86). For Bauman, the "most closely guarded secret of consumerism" is that members of consumer society are themselves consumer commodities, and it is the quality of being a commodity in the marketplace that makes them true members of that society.

According to Buckingham (2011), Bauman is not alone in stressing the profound anxieties and contradictions of consumerism. Like Bauman, Barber (2007) shares the view of consumerism as a negative force. The pessimism is clearly summed up in his subtitle: *How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole.* Although Barber does not touch on children's consumption, he suggests that infantilisation is persistently invoked in a global market economy; the ethos of childishness sustains contemporary consumerism. According to Barber, the commercially induced infantilisation of modern (American) culture entails a preference for "easy over hard, simple over complex and fast over slow" (Barber, 2007: 83). Likewise, Sakakibara (2007) also talks about an infantilised Japanese society where complex and critical thinking is replaced by a black-and-white and simplified approach to actions and relationships. One feature of infantilisation which takes place not only in Japan but is also spreading globally is the power of cuteness (*kawaii*) (Hasegawa, 2002; Murakami, 2005). The notion of cuteness or prettiness was initially used only for children, but in contemporary Japan, it is now widely applied. It is not embarrassing or taboo anymore for adult women to wear maid costumes and school uniforms, which are seen as childlike or cute (also see Takeuchi, 2013). Both Barber (2007) and Sakakibara (2007) claim that the characteristics of infantilisation are embedded in television programmes, households, education, corporate ethics and politics. Contemporary consumer culture is portrayed as a world of "compulsory attention deficit disorder", where everything has become "shallow, superficial, forgettable, meaningless" (Barber, 2007: 102-103).

We cannot ignore the changing relationships between consumer culture and global and local events. The unexpected financial crises in 2009 impacted many developed nations and individual lives, and the Tōhoku earthquake in 2011, in which even people living

far away from the area lost friends and relatives, changed the attitudes of Japanese people towards consumption and consumer culture. The strength of the Japanese economy is often said to be back on track with the announcement of the slightly increasing consumer price index, but some Japanese scholars such as Mamada (2007) and Miura (2012) indicate that the consumption practices of Japanese people in the 21st century have shifted to a next stage which entails greater consideration about the environment and sustainability, and sharing and reciprocity.

Ultimately, however, these pessimistic views of consumption are based on the view that people (consumers) are psychologically manipulated dupes with a variety of syndromes and disorders. The current debate about children's consumption can be also understood in this context, and indeed the situation of children is seen to be worse than that of consumers in general due to the structural position of children (as discussed earlier in this chapter). The next section explores a theoretical challenge to this producer-led approach.

2.2.2. What about consumer agency?

While the pessimistic account of consumption and consumer culture is the dominant one in social and cultural theory, in recent years there has been the emergence of an alternative and more optimistic approach: Lury (1996) calls this the 'consumer-led' approach. It centres on the way in which consumers as social actors define, perceive and maintain their relationships with commodities. This approach is often identified with post-modernism, anthropology and cultural studies, but my intention is not to frame the discussion within the label (and in this respect, I share the view of Buckingham (2011), Cook (2005), Featherstone (2007) and Zelizer (2002)).

As in the 'producer-led' approach, consumption is considered here as an inescapable and fundamental aspect of contemporary life. However, far from being passive and exploited victims of the market, consumers here are seen as autonomous and rational actors who make multiple meanings of commodities. They consciously engage in a productive process of creating their own lifestyle, taste, identity and status through symbolic meanings that are constantly constructed and reconstructed by consumers

themselves (see Baudrillard, 1981; Bourdieu, 1984; Slater, 1997; Veblen, 1925). From this point of view, consumers appear to be competent and empowered to evade, subvert and oppose the control of what Fiske (2010) calls "the power bloc". Consumers select, use and re-evaluate commodities for their own interests and purposes. For Fiske, popular culture is therefore "made by the people, not produced by the culture industry" (Fiske, 2010: 19).

Global capitalism may pursue homogeneity, as is insisted by 'producer-led' approaches, but according to Fiske (2010) it cannot succeed. All it can do is to produce a repertoire of goods and services that consumers are free to use or reject. Consumption here is not seen to be the opposite of production, 'leisure'; rather, it is also a form of productive work, since it necessarily entails the creation of meanings. Fiske optimistically sums up:

> If a particular commodity is to be made part of popular culture, it must offer opportunities for resisting or evasive uses or readings, and these opportunities must be accepted. The production of these is beyond the control of the producers of the financial commodity: it lies instead in the popular creativities of the users of that commodity in the cultural economy (Fiske, 2010: 26).

This notion of the empowerment and liberation of consumers is presented through a variety of metaphors. Drawing on the work of de Certeau (1984), Fiske writes that consumers engage in a "semiotic guerrilla warfare" with producers and designers of goods, making their own meanings, often in ways that challenge or even subvert the intended ones. The consumer here is portrayed as an artist who appropriates commodities and turns them into authentic cultural products in an attempt to express her or his dreams and imaginations (also see Campbell, 1987), through a process of 'bricolage' (do-it-yourself work) (Levi-Strauss, 1966). The consumer is also described as a communicator who uses goods as symbolic means of classifying the world and as the tools for a form of non-verbal communication (Aldridge, 2003). Fiske (1989: 67) also terms this active participation in productive work "semiotic democracy".

In Japan, little academic literature adopts this optimistic and consumer-led position. However, the consumption of licensed and media-related characters, encompassing the whole age range from young children to elderly people – which will be discussed further in Chapter 3 – has been accepted in an optimistic manner (Kayama, 2001), even

though it was originally targeted at children. Like character consumption, Japanese "*kawaii*" (cute and pretty) culture, which is now spreading globally, has been approved particularly as a form of artistic representation and creative communication (Sakurai, 2009).

In these two sections, I have attempted to present a brief and necessarily schematic overview of how consumption has been approached in popular and academic debates, emphasising the polarisation between producer-led (structure-led) and consumer-led (agency-led) positions. This kind of polarisation tends to present simple either-or choices: either we value the power of consumers, or the power of the market; either consumers are rational and autonomous, or they are exploited and manipulated; either consumerism is the result of capitalist modernisation, or it is the emergence of a semiotic democracy; and so on. The problem here is that there may be the elements of truth in both positions, and that contemporary consumer culture may not be fully understood only from one side. In the next section, I intend to seek a way to balance the two positions by drawing upon consumer culture theory.

2.2.3. Consumer culture theory (CCT)

As I have touched upon in Chapter 1, consumer culture is both an economic and socio-cultural phenomenon, in which people's general interest and capacity leans towards consumption 'practices' (see Sassatelli, 2007; Warde, 2005). For many theorists, the problem here is balancing the power of the economic system (structure) with the power of the individual consumer (agency). In order to have a better understanding of consumption and consumer culture, I argue that we have to move beyond the aforementioned either-or discussions: everyday consumption should not be seen as a domain for domination of the masses nor as a matter of the freedom of the individual consumer (also see Lury, 2011; Mackay, 1997; Miller, 1997; Warde, 2005). The theoretical perspective on consumer culture in this thesis draws on *consumer culture theory* (CCT), an approach that attempts to balance the producer-led and consumer-led positions. It conceptualises consumer culture as an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts and objects that groups of people use – through overlapping and even conflicting practices, meanings and identities – in order to make

collective sense of their environments and to maintain their members' experiences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007).

The key focus of this thesis is therefore on the meanings and values that are embodied and negotiated by consumers (mothers and children) in particular situations, roles and relationships. As consumption is regarded as a set of "social practices", "the acts of consumption are informed by a variety of *different logics*" in which "each of these acts may contain more than one motivating factor", and "each can be lived and presented, read and justified differently according to context" (Sassatelli, 2007: 54 [emphasis in original]). In fact, the intention of CCT is not to study contexts themselves, rather to study consumption 'in' contexts in order to generate new theoretical insights and to extend existing theoretical models (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). From this standpoint, CCT cannot be regarded as a unified system of theoretical propositions, but rather as a more general approach.

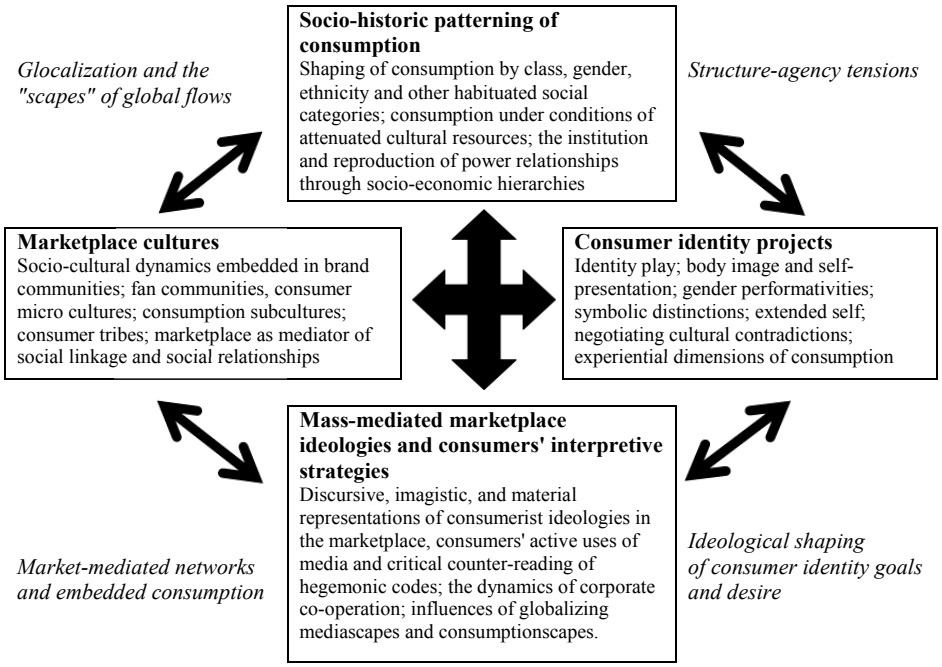
In order to link broader theoretical traditions, methodological orientations and research contexts, Arnould and Thompson (2005, 2007) illuminate four key dimensions of CCT research: (1) the socio-historic patterning of consumption; (2) consumer identity projects; (3) marketplace cultures; and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies. This is not to say that the discussion of consumer culture is limited within or categorised only in these four themes, but they are indicators to take into account, and they are mutually interrelated and implicative (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007). The first domain of CCT is the institutional and socio-historical structures that shape consumption in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and other social categories. Secondly, CCT sees consumers as identity seekers and makers, working with cultural scripts that align their identities with the structural imperatives of the marketplace. Thirdly, the study of marketplace cultures addresses consumers as cultural producers who rework, combine and invent cultural resources that are shared by group members. Finally, CCT examines marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies: consumers are seen as cultural interpreters and critical agents "whose meaning-creating activities range from those that tacitly embrace the dominant representations of consumer identity and lifestyle ideals portrayed in advertising and

mass media to those that consciously deviate from these ideological instructions" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 874).

2.2.3.1. Common structure of theoretical interest

Figure 1 (Arnould & Thompson, 2007) shows how the four structural categories are linked, and identifies theoretical concerns that are associated with the connecting arrows starting at the bottom and working through it counter-clockwise. The original figure has arrows that flow around the circuit, but I have inserted bidirectional arrows between domains in order to show the dynamism and complexity of the figure, instead of one domain impacting the other in one direction.

Figure 1: Consumer culture theory: common structure of theoretical interest (Arnould & Thompson, 2007: 10)



Ideological shaping of consumer identity goals and desires links marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies to consumer identity projects. This connection suggests a more complex and ambivalent dynamic in which consumers exercise agency and pursue identity goals through consumption practices, albeit within the cultural frame imposed by dominant ideologies. This is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Structure-agency tensions overlaps with the theory of *structuration* (Giddens, 1984), which also aims to move beyond the dichotomous opposition between social structure and individual agency. This linkage between consumer identity projects and socio-historic patterning of consumption highlights the continuing process of identification that is described more in depth later in this chapter and is also discussed in the presentation of empirical data: thus, chapter 5 focuses on mothers' identity construction through children's consumption practices, and chapter 7 analyses young children's identity construction in relation to peers and teachers in preschool contexts.

Glocalization and the "scapes" of global flows connects the socio-historic patterning of consumption and marketplace cultures. Glocalisation connotes the local interpretation of globalizing structures, which creates intersections between various socio-economic flows. This glocal meaning-making system is embedded in people's everyday lives, and in this thesis, this appears more in terms of the specific cultural context than as an explicit focus of discussion (for example in the analysis of Japanese 'media mixes' and their role in child rearing).

The last linkage, *Market-mediated networks and embedded consumption*, is intrinsic to many CCT studies, as Arnould and Thompson note. It focuses on a dynamic network of connections and social practices where actors' responses, preferences, choices and performances are shaped by local institutions. This link highlights the ways in which the network of consumption including material, symbolic and instrumental exchanges mediates social relationships, identities, experiences and practices. This is touched upon throughout the three analysis chapters.

This consumer culture theory model has aspects in common with the cultural studies approach. Research in this latter field has often sought to account for the interrelations between structure and agency by means of the "circuit of culture" (Buckingham, 2011: 63). The circuit of culture was first introduced by Johnson (1986), the director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, using a circular model of cultural analysis with four key dimensions: production, texts, readings and lived cultures. Johnson sees culture as a social process and argues that we can identify a series of 'moments' in that process that can be isolated for analysis (Buckingham, 2008a). By including social contexts and relations, Johnson proposes that broader social conditions do not wholly determine particular acts of reading or lived cultures: rather they may set certain constrains and provide possibilities. The crux of Johnson's circular approach and of CCT is that they include dynamics and complexities in contrast to the simplified 'sender-message-receiver' model in which the sender (marketer) transmits a message to the receiver (consumer) and not the other way round. The primary difference between the two is that in Johnson's approach the arrows flow in a circuit, linking each of the four dimensions in turn, while in CCT each domain reciprocally connects with the others. Buckingham (2008a) also emphasises the importance of considering bidirectional connections between elements in order to emphasise mutual determinations. I employ CCT in this thesis because consumption practices indeed entail a variety of intertwined elements. Even though the focus of this thesis is primarily consumers (young children and mothers), their practices cannot be studied in isolation from social conditions and relations such as family and peer relations, culturally embedded ideologies, and global and local markets.

By accounting for those four domains of consumer culture theory, I attempt to capture the richness and diversity of the contemporary consumption practices of mothers and their children in Japan. Yet, I am fully aware of the difficulty of covering such variety within one individual academic research study. While the analysis chapters of this thesis emphasise consumption as performing relational work in a small local area, I argue that it should not blind us to the fact that the external possibilities and constraints for engaging in different consumption practices may vary quite dramatically.

In the next section, I will move on to consider some of the debates surrounding children's consumption in particular.

2.3. Children and Consumer Media Culture

2.3.1. Children as consumers

Rowley (1997: 83) suggests five primary roles that are entailed in consumption practices: (1) users of the product or service; (2) influencers, particularly those with previous experiences of the product or service; (3) deciders, the decision makers in terms of use and purchase; (4) approvers, who authorise the decision within an institution; and (5) buyers, those with the formal authority to buy and act as gatekeepers for purchasing. Children, despite their financial limitation on purchasing, influence their family members and peers, and decide what is appropriate in their peer culture and what they want and even 'need'. As Cook argues, consumption "involves the knowing of and desiring of goods, as well as their purchase; the viewing and touching of things as much as their ownership" (Cook, 2010: 72). In presenting their goods and consumer knowledge, children share, negotiate and compete in terms of their competence, involvement and confidence.

As I mentioned before, research about children and childhood is easily categorised into either-or discussions – children are competent or incompetent, active or passive, independent or dependent. When discussing the participation of children in consumer culture and seeing children as consumers, these dichotomous positions are often starkly defined, and scholars tend to see children as either passive victims of commercial exploitation, or active consumers and media users (Buckingham, 2000).

The former concept views consumers in general, and child consumers particularly, as fools who are easily manipulated by marketers and advertisers into false desires and futile shopping. There is a great deal of writing of this kind, and many titles reflect this stance: *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Postman, 1982), *Out of the Garden* (Kline, 1995), *Consuming Kids: Protecting our Children from the Onslaught of Marketing and Advertising* (Linn, 2004) and *Born to Buy* (Schor, 2004). Many Japanese scholars have

also followed the notion of undesirable 'changes' in and 'disappearance' of childhood, and questioned the implications for children's well-being of an apparently media-saturated and consumer-oriented culture (see Hori, 1996; Nogami, 1998; Suwa, 2005; Takahashi, 2006). This literature implies a fixed idea or ideology about what children and childhood used to be and should be, instead of looking at multiple childhoods, or regarding childhood as a social construction. In Japan, *Gēmunō no Kyōfu (The Terror of Game Brain)* written by a physiologist, Mori (2002), has accelerated social anxiety about the effects of playing video and computer games in terms of issues such as loss of concentration, an inability to control emotions, and problems associating with others. This social fear was also strongly correlated with the increasing rate of cruel and unpredictable youth crimes and of children's behavioural problems. In spite of other neuroscientists' and brain specialists' criticisms about Mori's unreliable research methods and arbitrary data results, the 'game brain' theory has broadly spread in the public consciousness through media coverage: many parents, caretakers and educators are extremely concerned about children's over-exposure to any kinds of media that are seen to have detrimental effects on child development. Many popular scientific writings of this kind respond negatively to the growing market for children's products and services. This 'harmful effects' or 'cause-and-effect' approach is however not confined to popular hysteria or bad research: it is also a very common approach in a lot of academic research, especially in psychology (ex. Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2013; Dittmar et al., 2006; Kiyokawa & Utsumi, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). From this perspective, consumer culture is defined as enacting unilateral and inescapable damage on children.

By contrast, and in line with the opposing view discussed above, there is an account of children as active consumers and media users, which implies that they are competent, critical, social agents who have their own needs and wants as adults do. This perspective, based on qualitative studies, was first to a large extent developed by marketing researchers such as Guber and Berry (1993) and McNeal (1992). What is sometimes seen negatively as "pester power" or the "nag factor" (Schor, 2004: 61-63) is seen here as a consequence of children's increasing autonomy and say in shaping decision-making in family purchases. As pointed out by many marketing and consumer

researchers (cf. Gram, 2007; McDermott et al., 2006; Rose et al., 2002; Schor, 2011), children have a certain level of influence over the family purchase of food, clothes, electrical goods and holidays. Also, in terms of media and technology, children are seen as a digital generation, "born with a mouse in their hands and computer screen as their window on the world" (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003: 2). Childhood studies has also developed and supported the concept of the 'active' and 'competent' child, yet the difficulty here is that this view of child consumers as knowing and active beings in the here and now can easily and unintentionally align childhood studies researchers with marketers, advertisers and retailers whose main goal is to make profit out of children (Buckingham, 2007). As Cook argues, children's consumption practices and culture are challenging for childhood studies because "the coincidence of similarly imagined children does not fit well with the liberatory posture and agenda of many in childhood studies. The knowing, meaning-making child resembles the marketer's dream" (Cook, 2010: 63).

These two concepts of active/passive child consumers have a strong correlation with other binary oppositions stated earlier; such as structure/agency, production/consumption and children as becoming/being (see Buckingham, 2011; James et al., 1998; Lee, 2001; Lury, 1996). This polarisation of perspectives tends to lead to reductive, either/or debates. In the next section, I discuss some alternative views that help to move beyond these polarised discussions about children and consumer media culture.

2.3.2. Commercial enculturation

As I have stated above, traditional or mainstream research on children and consumer media culture has been dominated by consumer socialisation and effects studies. *Consumer socialisation* was first named by Ward (1974) as "[the] process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974: 2). Like general psychology's concept of socialisation, it simply regards "the child" as passive pre-social being who moves through developmental stages. Within the theory, children learn to *become* sensible consumers with age and acquire appropriate consumer skills and knowledge (John,

1999; Ward, 1974), and therefore adult caretakers are the target of the research: children's here-and-now experiences and perspectives are not taken into account. Effects studies are largely found in media research, and primarily focus on experimental, correlational and causal-correlational approaches, relying on surveys, content analysis and laboratory experiments (CcaM, 2014). These experimental and correlational research methods have been highly criticised by childhood researchers because children's everyday practices are not so simple to test in an isolated laboratory room or through surveys. This effects studies approach also tends to overlook social contexts and relations of the children.

Despite the academic attention paid to children's consumption practices and consumer culture in recent years, there are disjunctions between childhood studies and marketing/consumer studies. Buckingham (2000, 2011) critiques the binary views of children in contemporary consumer media culture and effects research, advocating that research needs to be focused on children's own perspectives and voices, the consequences and implications of children's activities and practices, and the dynamic processes and relationships that constitute consumer culture. His emphasis on sociological and cultural studies of children and consumption echoes my primary research framework as well as that of consumer culture theory (CCT). Like Buckingham, Cook (2008, 2009, 2010) also sees consumer media culture not as something that influences children from the outside but as implicated within their everyday lives. In order to develop this more holistic view of children's consumer media culture and to emphasise the various means and processes by which children come to participate in commercial life, Cook (2010) proposes the concept of *commercial enculturation*. His criticism is explicitly directed against the notion of *consumer socialisation* (Ward, 1974). Cook argues that consumer socialisation research does not fit well with the notion of active, knowing child consumers and suffers from a limited view of both childhood and consumption. In *Consumer Socialization Revisited*, Ekström (2011) attempts to advance the scope of inquiry beyond developmentalism, arguing that consumer socialisation is a lifelong process, which varies among different sociocultural groups and involves different experiences and contexts. Yet despite her call for children's participation and pluralism in methods and approach, Cook (2010)

sees that the foundational assumptions of consumer socialisation research cannot escape from its construction of "the child" and its normative, monolithic approach.

The concept of commercial enculturation proposed by Cook (2010) emphasises a variety of ways in which children participate in commercial life and their knowledge is used in everyday practice. As Cook argues:

> The term demands no *de facto* static endpoint where a child becomes a "complete" consumer and it does not require an *a priori* definition of the boundaries and behavioral dimensions of "consumption" and market activity. Commercial enculturation rather places attention on the *culture* in consumer culture as multiple, layered and overlapping webs of meaning which precede any individual child. The focus centers on how consumption and meaning, and thus culture, cannot be separated from each other but arise together through social contexts and processes of parenting and socializing with others. Children, in this view, are not so much socialized into becoming one specific kind of consumer as they are seen as entering into social relationships with and through goods and their associations (Cook, 2010: 70 [emphasis in original]).

In contrast with consumer socialisation theory, which sets out an unambiguous endpoint, the concept of commercial enculturation leaves space for the fluidity and dynamism of children's commercial knowledge and experiences. By addressing 'culture' more broadly, commercial enculturation draws attention not only to national and ethnic cultures but also to those engaged in specific localities and regions, and to social class, gender and generations. This approach allows for taking into account the varied ways in which adults and children engage with products, brands, services and advertisements as well as with people, and the constant process of meaning making, which is constructed and reconstructed through social relations.

In addition to the work of Buckingham and Cook, I also draw inspiration from Johansson's (2003, 2007, 2010) use of *actor-network theory* (ANT). In this thesis, I am not directly using ANT, which entails both a complex body of theory and a set of specific methods (see Callon & Latour, 1981). Rather, I use Johansson's approach to look at social life in terms of connections, networks and flows, where not only humans but also non-humans – in the case of this thesis, commercial goods, knowledge, meanings, even the notion of childhood – perform as actors (also see Lury, 2011). The theory assumes that a network of relations is both material and semiotic. This is also

termed *ontological enactment* by Woolgar – a process whereby "the existence, identity, and status of the entities involved, whether they be children or objects, emerge in the course of consumption rather than simply preceding consumption" (Woolgar, 2012: 39). In this perspective, the same object undergoes different interpretations as it moves through different settings. In order to understand young children's peer consumer culture in preschool, researchers need to be aware that the network of social relations entails not only interactions among children, but goods available in the market, household and classroom space, as well as children's ideas, knowledge and sense of belonging (see Chapters 6 and 7). Likewise, young children's consumption, particularly in Japan, needs to be analysed in relation to their mothers who filter children's consumption practices (see Chapters 3 and 5). The concept of the network thus implies that social relations only exist in processes and contexts, and through a simultaneous making and re-making of meanings.

2.3.3. Peer consumer culture

Many scholars have reported concerns about children's participation in consumer media culture, focusing particularly on ever-growing direct advertising appeals and marketing exploitation (Hori, 1996; Linn, 2004; Postman, 1982; Rashinban, 2005; Schor, 2004). Yet consumer media culture is well embedded in children's cultures, not only in that of teenagers and preteenagers but also of pre-schoolers. I therefore term children's culture a 'peer consumer culture'. In this respect, my perspective on consumer culture accords with consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007) and the notion of consumer enculturation (Cook, 2010) in that it explores "the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 869). Culture may frame a certain pattern of people's actions, yet it does not determine individual or communal actions as outcomes. Thus, consumer culture needs to be understood as a reciprocal and circular process where individuals are both the outcomes and the transformers of the social world.

My understanding of children's peer culture also echoes that of Corsaro (2003, 2005) who has conducted long-term observation of young children's culture and social

relationships in preschool settings. In taking an interpretive perspective on culture as public, collective and performative, Corsaro defines 'peers' as a group of children who spend time together on a daily basis and peer culture as "a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (Corsaro, 2005: 110). Through daily face-to-face interaction, preschool children produce and share a peer culture in relation to the wider cultures of other children and adults within which they are situated, and their local peer cultures are in turn part of, and contribute to, those wider cultures.

Children's peer culture exists within a wider contextual frame, which emerges through their engagement with the adult culture: Davies (1982) describes children's creative and fluid encounters as a 'double world' of childhood where children use varieties of goods, roles and activities that are considered part of the adult culture as a source of their own peer culture. Consumer activities – such as what you have bought; where you are going for the weekend; what kinds of TV shows you watch; in which store you buy your clothes and shoes – identify who you are and what social group you belong to. As Buckingham (2000) mentions, it is impossible to discuss children's peer culture without their consumer possessions and knowledge because those are the relational currency that give them status and position among peers through daily interactions.

My theoretical position in terms of peer consumer culture is based on the perspective of *interpretive reproduction* introduced by Corsaro (1992, 2005). This is grounded in the belief that children are competent social actors, both as individuals and as members of a collective group, who make meanings out of those constructed by others and produce their own meaningful cultural world with their peers in a creative manner. Thus, in terms of their participation in consumption practices, as consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and the notion of commercial enculturation (Cook, 2010) suggest, children (as well as adults) continuously learn in the sense that they collectively take in information from wider cultures and use it to address values, interests and concerns that are important to them as children and peers.

One extensively observed and analysed example of children's local peer cultures in connection with wider consumer media cultures is the Pokémon phenomenon, which

became a global craze around the turn of the century (Allison, 2006; Ito, 2005; Tobin, 2004b) (also see Chapter 3). *Pikachu's Global Adventure* edited by Tobin (2004b) cross-culturally examines the ways in which children interact with Pokémon products. The empirical studies collected here stress the children's agency in their creative play and the educational benefits of Pokémon. For example, interviews with children aged 6-14 conducted in Israel by Lemish and Bloch (2004) reveal how important it is for child informants as Pokémon 'trainers' to establish a personal relationship – almost like a friendship – with their Pokémon: winning battles is not everything. Also, their analysis of interviews points out that the Pokémon TV series, whose contents mostly originated in Japan, provided children with a meaningful site for sorting through moral struggles with dichotomies – such as good and evil, cuteness and strength, friendship and competition, and masculinity and femininity – and an opportunity to experiment with the meanings that might arise when these dichotomies become blurred.

Pokémon TV programmes, toys, clothes and games are still found in many countries, and Pikachu is considered as one of children's favourite characters, and yet the producers and marketers did not intend nor predict the quickly spread global craze of Pokémon in the first five years from its first production in Japan, nor its rapid fall. This unpredictable global rise and fall of the Pokémon phenomenon demonstrates some paradoxical aspects of children's popular peer culture in relation to consumption and media. While children as well as adults may be vulnerable to media persuasion and to subtle marketing techniques, many carefully orchestrated products fail to succeed. Tobin's claim that "children may be prone to consumer crazes, but they choose which crazes, and they decide when a craze is over" (2004a: 10) underlines not only children's fragility but also their competent, creative, collective and sometimes fickle production and reproduction of their peer consumer cultures, which to some extent counterbalances the power of marketing.

Children's peer consumer culture is closely linked to notions of friendship and belongingness: how children present their possessions, knowledge and experiences is critical in terms of their sharing and participation among peers. In the next section, I will discuss the concept of friendship particularly focusing on young children.

2.3.4. Friendship and belongingness

When learning about and discussing children's peer culture, understanding the concept of friendship is a fundamental element because social participation and sharing are the heart of peer culture: the experience of having and being friends plays a pivotal part in the process of constructing social identity and generating a sense of belonging (see Corsaro, 2003, 2005; James, 1993) (see Chapter 6). Like children's peer culture, children's friendships have most often been researched and discussed within an implicitly cognitive developmental model. Children's appreciation of the concept of friendship is assumed to develop through a series of stages, through which they progressively learn to adopt more adult-like friendships. This dominant perspective, however, often problematizes those children who fail to fit into the proper stage of the developmental ladder (James, 1993; James et al., 1998), and causes concern in parents about whether or not their children have 'appropriate' friends. For adults, the quality of friendship is largely based on 'durable' relationships, involving trust, intimacy and mutuality. Therefore, adults prefer when children have steady friends (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980). But what does a 'friend' mean to children like pre-schoolers? Are the 'friendships' they establish different from those of older children or adults? How is 'friendship' experienced in children's social worlds?

According to Corsaro's long term observation of pre-schoolers' social relationships in the US and Italy (1979, 2003, 2005), key elements of adults' friendship such as stable mutuality, commitment, reciprocity and intimacy are less likely to be found in young children's friendships. However, he claims that it does not necessarily mean that they are lacking the notion of friendship; rather they have a different approach to friendships with other children. Young children's notion of friendship is not like adults' relatively stable interpersonal relationships but more a 'here and now' relationship where the child you play or talk with at that moment is your friend, but that does not promise the same relationship for the next period of free play (also see Nilsen, 2005). The meta-analytic review on children's friendship relations conducted by Newcomb and Bagwell (1995) demonstrates age-related differences in the forms of friendship relations. Young children build their notions of friendship upon specific overt characteristics; shared

activities and opportunities are at the heart of friendships, and young children are more concerned with the activity itself, or the "interactive space" (Corsaro, 2005), where other children are encountered (also see Chapter 6 and 7).

Keeping age-related differences in friendship in mind, James (1993) found various forms of friendship relations among preschool children. Although Bigelow and LaGaipa (1980) argue that stability is not that significant in children's friendship until about the age of 16, James witnessed pre-schoolers making relatively stable, enduring groups and pairs (also see Kantor et al., 1998) and giving different comments and opinions about both their own positions and others' social standing. This reveals that developmental models of friendship focused on chronological age are ultimately unsatisfactory; and that the emergence of young children's interpersonal interactions and sense of belonging vary with cultural and contextual conditions.

My intention to examine children's friendship in peer consumer culture aims to shed light on the social significance of children's contemporary social relationships rather than making value judgments about the quality of their friendship by contrasting their friendships with those of adults. That is to say, instead of predefining what friendship is among children in their peer culture, I shall let this emerge and evolve through the descriptions of their social participation and interaction, where their having and being friends and their intense emotions take place. The time and space children spend with each other is also the time and space in which they discuss and negotiate the values, standards and norms of their actions, behaviour, material possessions and knowledge, and wonder if they are worthy of being together. Through observation of encounters between children, watching them creating, maintaining, accessing and protecting their conversations and play, my aim is to explore their understanding of "a tangled web of social relationships" (James, 1993: 201).

Through everyday consumption practices and social interactions, children as well as adults construct a variety of identities depending on people they are with, situations they are in, and what kind of goods and knowledge are under discussion. The next section discusses reflexive social identities.

2.4. Social Identities and Consumption Practices

2.4.1. Reflexive social identities

Identity is a key theme in the ever-growing world of consumer media culture. People look for who they are through consumption practices, and scholars in many social scientific fields aim to conceptualise how people understand themselves and others through the purchase, possession and exchange of materials. On the one hand, marketing and advertising industries have attempted to master how to sell consumers more products, or more varieties of products, by offering new identities with attractive slogans such as 'a new image' and 'my style': the diversity of images and styles seems to have enabled consumers to have a myriad of choices and possibilities. On the other hand, consumers have been left with more responsibilities for the careful observation and negotiation of their own consumption and identity projects, taking account of available forms of niche consumption and identity categories. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, in "the age of uncertainty" (that is, the reorientation of work style, family, gender roles and technological innovation) (Lee, 2001), people are less likely to be certain about themselves, and their future is no longer as predictable as seems to have been the case for earlier generations. Moreover, the figure of consumer culture theory (CCT) illustrated above reveals dynamic interconnections between consumer identity projects and wider socio-historic patterns of consumption, marketplace culture and cultural ideologies (also see Arnould & Thompson, 2007).

There have been many studies on consumption and identity formation (e.g. Bauman, 1988; Beck, 1992; Belk, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Warde, 1994), and in the context of Japan, the possession and use of characters and brand-name products that demonstrate a certain identity of the owners – '*jibunrashisa*' (the eccentric way of being me) – have been well documented (Aihara, 2007; Bandai Character, 2000; Clammer, 1997; Ishii, 2009; Tamaki, 2008). Those studies suggest that through consumption practices, children as well as mothers present and perform their identities. Yet, what is 'identity'? What is meant by the idea that people work on 'identity' or 'identities'?

Jenkins (2008), the author of *Social Identity*, argues:

> [I]dentity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know 'who's who (and hence 'what's what'). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on: a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities… It is a process – *identification* – not a 'thing'. It is not something that one can *have*, or not; it is something that one *does* (Jenkins, 2008: 5 [emphasis in original]).

As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, humans – both adults and children – are multiple becomings and beings. Identity should therefore not be seen so much as a fixed possession, but as a social process where constant, multi-dimensional identifications take place. In this process, individuals and their social world are inextricably linked. While individuals construct themselves in accordance with their social world, the social world is constituted through the actions of individuals: identity is a reflexive, fluid and contingent matter. Therefore, even though 'being me' or 'being myself' has been popularly claimed as a life slogan by marketers and individual consumers in contemporary consumer culture, this identification, which sounds independent and individual, cannot be separated from the people whom 'I' am with and the social situations where 'I' find 'myself'. Who I am (or who I think I am) is partly dependent on who others think I am. Individuals are by no means entirely free to choose how they are defined: "identity is developed by the individual, but it has to be *recognized* and *confirmed* by others" (Buckingham, 2008b: 3 [emphasis added]). This perspective is closely tied with "the reflexive project of the self" introduced by Giddens (1991). In his book, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, he examines the concept of *self-identity*, which refers to how the individual perceives the self through his/her personal biography and on-going story about the self in interplay with the external world.

One of the assumptions that social sciences have in common regarding the concept of identity is that there are different focus spheres (or levels) of abstraction, even if these are ultimately inextricable, as seen in ethnic identity, national identity, religious identity, institutional identity, gender identity, individual identity and so on. Identity consists of both a sense of uniqueness and a sense of affiliation. A certain kind of identity can be more revealing and dominating than others, but this depends on a certain relational and

contextual circumstance. For instance, some mothers might only buy organic food for their young children, but if their parents-in-law offer fast food to the child, they would prioritize their identity as a dutiful daughter-in-law over that of a dutiful mother (also see Chapter 5). As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 5, mothering through consumption is practiced not only for children's well-being, but also entails a web of relationships and situations, often connecting the present with the past and the future. In order to understand people's particular standpoint in the hybrid and mobile processes of identity construction, researchers first have to recognise that the self is composed of multiple identities and roles.

In *Stigma*, Goffman (1986) distinguishes between personal identity and social identity: while personal identity implies positive markers as well as the unique combination of life history items that comes to be attached to the individual with the help of these identity labels, social identity is based on categories established by the society and attributes that are taken to be natural by the members of each of these categories. In Goffman's discussion, personal identity is a matter of a unique self that distinguishes the individual from others, but in contrast, social identity entails similarities with others. This kind of classification of identity has been traditionally made by many social scientists: while psychologists tend to privilege the individual, sociologists and anthropologists tend to do the opposite (Buckingham, 2008b; Jenkins, 2008). I argue, following Jenkins's definition of identity, that treating those two kinds of identities – individual (personal) and collective (social) – as different phenomena is problematic because the individual and the collective are interrelated. All human identities are, by definition, "*social* identities" (Jenkins, 2008: 17 [emphasis in original]) and "[i]dentifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation" (ibid.: 17). Furthermore, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, the process of identification entails both similarity and difference. Neither makes sense without the other because to know who I am is to know who or what I am not, and at the same time, to know with whom I have things in common.

As this implies, identity construction is a contextual process; and for young children, this implies a relationship, not only to peers but also to mothers and to the institution of the preschool. While social identities imply a variety of identifications on the basis of gender, education, career, social class and ethnicity, my analysis of the interviews with mothers focuses on motherhood through caring consumption, partly including generational identification, or 'generationing' (see Chapters 3 and 5), while the analysis of the young children in the two preschools elaborates on generationing and gendering (see Chapters 6 and 7). In the following two sections, I will explore these two aspects briefly in more general terms.

2.4.2. Mothering as caring consumption

Some scholars have pointed out that mothers' consumption on behalf of their children is part of their caring work (Clarke, 2004, 2007; Miller, 1998; Pugh, 2005; Thompson, 1996; Zelizer, 2005). Gilligan (1982), a feminist scholar, suggests that "the ethics of care" is a way of living one's life and dealing with personal conflicts that is driven by feelings of responsibility for managing the well-being of others and a sensitivity to the consequences of one's actions and choices. While mothers seem to recognise their young children as independent social beings by respecting their wants and needs, many feel at the same time that young children are part of them, attached to them due to children's physical, social, economic, emotional dependences (Vereijken et al., 1997). Consumption practices and choices for their children relate to the children's future becoming as well as present being. Therefore, as primary caregivers, mothers have to obtain certain kind of abilities, resources and knowledge that children as care receivers do not have, and through their caregiving, the mothers also express, identify and constitute themselves (see Jennings & O'Malley, 2003). Mothers become part of their children, and therefore caring consumption points directly to interdependency, "connected lives" (Zelizer, 2005: 22).

Caring consumption, according to Thompson (1996: 394), is "motivated by concerns over maintaining the integrity of one's social networks. It is further proposed that this orientation offers a feminised form of utilitarianism that is pervaded by feelings of

interpersonal responsibility and a sense [of] connectedness to others."[17] In the data analysis in Chapter 5, I argue that mothers' caring consumption is characterised by ideological dilemmas: different qualities or aspects of mothering entail different kinds of cultural weight, stretch and embeddedness (also see Hochschild, 2003). For mothers, caring consumption and enhancing their children's well-being strongly resonate with a self-conception that involves feelings of personal satisfaction and accomplishment.

In *Bento Blogs: Japanese Women's Expression in Digital Food Culture,* Seddon (2011) illustrates Japanese mothers' expansive mode of identity expression and opportunities to explore outward connections through the creation of lunch-box blogs. By writing, reading and commenting, they share mothering experiences and validate each other's social position as caregivers. Generally speaking, the degree of cultural tolerance presented in Japanese mothering magazines can be seen as narrow and stereotypical compared to American ones (see Holloway, 2010; Shimoda, 2008). For example, a childrearing magazine may offer mothers detailed guidelines about how to enter a playground with their child and behave in a way that will gain acceptance from other mothers and their children. Although mothers may find comfort in the advice, they may also come to believe that any deviation from the advice can cause unfavourable consequences. Indeed, White (1995: 271) points out that the high reliance on "how-to" manuals in Japan has been linked to "manual syndrome", which involves a blend of "performance perfectionism, a curriculum of conformity, and high demands." Although a similar emphasis on mothers' commitment to their children exists in other countries, mothers in Japan tend to construct more interdependent relationships with their children (Kobayashi, 2001). As a good childhood equates with good motherhood, children's academic success is regarded as the fruit of mothers' commitment to childrearing. In this regard, the maternal role achieved through caring consumption is likely to define women's identity (also see Kazui, 1997).

[17] Referring to Epstein (1988), Thompson uses the term "feminine" to connote a socially constructed system of cultural practices, roles and interpersonal orientations that are historically associated with cultural conceptions of the female sex.

In addition to mothers' identities through caring consumption, I elaborate in this thesis on the institutional role of the preschool, which likewise cannot be separated from children's identity construction.

2.4.3. Roles of the preschool

A multitude of consumer media practices take place at preschool, and a particular form of children's identity is constructed in this institutionalised setting. There are several reasons why I used preschools as the site for my research. Firstly, the preschool is a specific context for the performance of age-based identities: peer culture takes a particular form in the preschool, which is different from outside school, and it is constructed in relation to adult (teacher) imperatives and constraints. Like in other developed nations, early childhood has been increasingly institutionalised in Japan. The attendance rate at preschool was over 96% for four-year-olds in 2011 (Cabinet Secretariat, 2011), and this rate is expected to rise especially for children under the age of three in the near future[18]. As such, most young children in Japan experience an institutionalised life and construct age-based identities before formal school age, and preschools are therefore an important part of contemporary childhood alongside the household environment.

Secondly, there is a form of consumer culture in the preschool even though this sphere is traditionally seen as relatively commercial free (see MHLW 2008). The preschool mediates consumer culture in particular ways: it excludes and regulates it, but consumer culture is there nonetheless, and there is another form of consumer culture operating in the form of *edutainment* – "a hybrid mix of education and entertainment" (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003: 8). Early childhood services, especially *hoikuen* (see Chapter 3) are connected to both care and education as officially prescribed in the government guidelines: one of their aims is to nurture children's rich humanity through an integration of care and education. Educational aspects have been emphasised recently in order to narrow differences between the two early childhood institutions, *yōchien* and

[18] There is a huge attendance gap of preschools between 2-years-olds (34.6%) and 3-years-olds (83.5%) (Cabinet Secretariat, 2011).

hoikuen[19]. Meanwhile, education is an arena that has been increasingly commercialised and marketed: 'edutainment' is partly educational but it is also commercial.

Thirdly, in the preschool setting in Japan, it is no exaggeration to say that young children develop strong sense of belonging to a group than those in preschools (see Burke, 2008). This can partly be explained by the number of children in each classroom and the much larger teacher-child ratio (see Chapter 4). Yet, I would argue that it is also the result of the strong collective ethos of Japanese preschools, the idea of 'groupism' and the use of duty-work routines that encourage children to take responsibility for others. Group-oriented activities with a plethora of sociocultural expectations seem to shape children's fundamental group feeling: I *must* do this because others are doing it. This also extends to children's consumption practices: they pay careful attention to others' possessions, knowledge and experiences in order to ensure that they share important information and can participate in the conversation and play (see Chapter 6). Groupism offers joy, spontaneity and a feeling of being part of a social circle. Group life is more than that everybody doing the same thing at the same time. It is "the experience of camaraderie, of fusion, of unity with something larger than the self" (Tobin et al., 1998: 274).

2.4.4. Performing generation (age) and gender

As I have argued earlier in this chapter with reference to Qvortrup (2002), childhood is a structural category. Approaching childhood as a structural category means that we need to locate children and childhood in the wider "generational order" – an ongoing structural and relational process in which children themselves are active participants in the construction of identities (James, 1993). According to Alanen (2001), the idea of 'generation' as conceptualised by Mannheim is a social and historical category that is collectively interpreted, shared, experienced and practiced among those who are situated in a common generational location. This common generational location implies not only

[19] There are primarily two kinds of early childhood institutions in Japan; *yōchien* (kindergarten) and *hoikuen* (day-care centre). There are now fewer differences between the two than before, yet they have different historical origins and development (see Burke, 2008). *Yōchien*, which are under control of the Ministry of Education (MEXT), generally have school oriented programmes. In contrast, *hoikuen*, which are under control of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHLW), have focused more on full-day care of infants and toddlers and served working mothers (Tobin et al., 2009).

being born in the same social and historical time period but also shared experiences of a specific range of social events and ideas. This shared notion of "actual generation" tends to lead to the formation of "generational units", characterised by face-to-face interaction among their members and similar ways of performing. Alanen's term "*generationing*" implies that the relations between generations – what it means to be a child (adult) or what childhood (adulthood) means – are defined in various manners in the context of particular institutional and social spheres, such as the preschool, the peer group, the family and the commercial market. In other words, like gender, children's identities are defined and *performed* in different ways, in different contexts, and with different intentions (cf. Butler, 1990; James, 1993; Wærdahl, 2003).

The concept of generationing is important in childhood studies because children's identity construction – recognising him/herself as a child, and a certain kind of child – is neither an external transformation of knowledge nor his/her own internal production of a category (Alanen, 2001; Mayall, 2002). Rather, it is constituted through both inter-generational and intra-generational interactions. This means that certain kinds of childhoods are historically and socially generated and acted out in relation to other generationally located groups and group members.

The commercial market provides particular definitions and accounts of what it means to be a child, a preschool-age child, or a boy or a girl, and so do parents and preschool teachers (see Chapter 4). Those cultural definitions or even ideologies are part of the implications that children use in constructing their sense of becoming and being. There are multiple definitions, images and expectations that may overlap and conflict with each other. However, children may not necessarily recognise themselves in the definitions that are provided for or targeted at them; or, even if they do, they can choose to reject or resist them. The children's market has historically used an age-based approach, and in contemporary marketing terms, the children I have observed can be categorised as 'toddlers' or 'pre-schoolers' with particular interests, needs and concerns. Like the market, parents and preschool teachers construct their own ideologies of childhood and being a child, which are not necessarily independent of the market or other factors surrounding them (see Chapters 4 and 5). Neither children's identity as a

child nor adults' identity as an adult can exist without the other, since being a child (or adult) or a particular child (or adult), is an ongoing, reflexive cultural process of constructing identities: each of them is dependent on its relation to each other (Alanen, 2001). From an inter-generational perspective, it is usually adults who draw a line between adults and children, but children's pursuit of their own categorisation as children, separating themselves from adults, needs to be also recognised and valued. Moreover, intra-generationally speaking, children generate their own generational, often age-based cohorts, as illuminated in Chapter 6.

Like performing generation, performing gender is not only socio-culturally determined but also individually experienced and collectively controlled and maintained by children in their own peer culture (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Chen, 2009; Davies, 2003a, 2003b; James, 1993; Thorne, 1993). A lot of research on children's gender identity has been conducted on different age groups, from preadolescents and adolescents (cf. Boyle et al., 2003; Johansson, 2007; Swain, 2005; Thorne, 1993) to younger children (cf. Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Blaise, 2005; Davies, 2003a; Davies & Kasama, 2004; Marsh, 2000; Martin, 2011; Nakamura, 2001). A common aspect of many studies, I would argue, is the strong focus on or even hypothetical presumption of gender polarisation. Studies on gender are often based on the assumption that gender is an either/or preposition – boy or girl – in which boys and girls are seen to be opposite and to live in two separate cultures (Thorne, 1993). The separate worlds of boys and girls are usually framed in a series of dualisms: boys' groups are larger than girls'; boys take a large public space while girls take up a smaller private space; boys tend to like more physical and rough play, but girls more sedate and communication centred play (ibid.). Some scholars report that these differences among young children are less significant than these among older children (Adler & Adler, 1998; Corsaro, 2005; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987), although others dispute this (Blaise, 2005). Meanwhile, other scholars suggest that there are also cross-cultural differences in this respect (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Corsaro, 2005). As I shall indicate, these differences were not strongly apparent among the children in my sample although they were invoked at various times (see Chapter 7). However, the focus of my discussion is not so much on the level of gender boundaries themselves but on young

children's understanding and interpretation of gender – which also includes gender integration and commonalities – in relation to people, goods and contexts.

Preschool-aged children, including the children in my study, do have a sense of gender in their peer relationships and daily encounters, but I would argue that doing gender is not only about detaching one's self from other gender groups and having a segregated world, but also about two gendered cultures overlapping, and being interdependent and complementary (see Thorne, 1993). Yet these two gendered cultures, which are often considered different, share the preschool world, which is also intersected and further shaped by a series of other socio-structural factors such as generation (age), physical appearance and learning competences[20]. This is not the case in my study, but class and ethnic issues in fact sometimes override gender matters – as discussed, for example, in studies of the literacy practices of primary school children in Australia (Davies, 2003b) and the superhero play of primary school children in England (Marsh, 2000). Even so, in my much more homogeneous sample, children's preferences for interacting with same-sex peers were not as significant as in other studies (see Chapter 7). The children in both preschools had known each other intimately for 2-3 years as classmates and they were already familiar with each other's interests and personalities, and therefore I argue that they might not have needed to rely much on gender in seeking to establish common interests (also see Aydt & Corsaro, 2003). In addition, the children at *hoikuen* might be more used to an environment with less gender dominated roles since both of their parents work (see 2.4.3.) and their fathers also seem to take care of household chores. An interesting aspect of gender among Japanese preschool children was found by Davies and Kasama (2004) who used a similar process in their 2003 study of Australia, which involved reading feminist stories to children and listening to their responses. Like the Australian children, Japanese children drew meaning from the stories based on dichotomous gender categories. However, their evaluation and projection of the

[20] I have intentionally excluded ethnicity/race and religion, which are widely discussed in the Western contexts. They were not the relevant issues in my study because all the children in my research had Japanese heritage, and religious variations/differences were not discussed or examined during my participant observation. At the point at which I conducted my research, the part of town in which the preschools were located remained ethnically homogeneous, and there had been hardly any inward migration.

characters in the stories was centred on moral imperatives – harmony, social rules and obedience to authority.

This discussion of social identities – such as mothering through caring consumption and performing generation and gender – indicates that identity is a multi-dimensional, reflexive and relational process of identification. The process consists of a variety of *practices* characterised by forms of action and by the involvement of objects (Johansson, 2007), which are fluid and sometimes ambiguous. In these practices, there is some sort of balance of power, which does not necessarily mean 'powering over' somebody but shaping, sharing and maintaining a certain level of control in individual and collective lives, depending on different contexts and purposes.

2.5. Summary

In this chapter I have presented some of the research and some broader theoretical challenges that childhood researchers have to take into consideration when considering the issue of children and consumer culture. This thesis is theoretically positioned in the field of childhood studies in that it critically examines the concepts of 'childhood' and 'children' and carefully takes children's perspectives and experiences into account. My analysis of children and consumer media culture intends to move beyond the dominant binary oppositions, such as structure versus agency, and children as exploited victims versus competent consumers. In order to do so, I have made use of Giddens's theory of structuration (1984), which suggests that structure (the children's market) and agency (children) coexist as two sides of the same coin; consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2007) which links broader theoretical traditions, methodological orientations and research contexts; and Cook's concept of commercial enculturation (2010), which emphasises the variety of ways in which children participate in commercial life by using goods and knowledge in their everyday practices. This theoretical stance prevents my analysis from falling into a form of socialisation theory where children 'learn' to 'become' appropriate members of a society, and binary views where children are simply categorised as either passive victims of commercial exploitation or active consumers and media users. In contemporary consumer culture, I argue that children (and adults) are both *becomings* and *beings* in their own right.

In relation to identity, I have argued that through everyday consumption practices, children as well as mothers construct a variety of identities based on their situated contexts, which Jenkins defines as *social identities* (2008). In this ongoing, reflexive process of constructing social identities, what others think about me (us) is no less significant than what I (we) think about myself (ourselves): mutual interdependence applies to all aspects of social life. This approach resonates with the ideas of mothering through caring consumption (Thompson, 1996) and children's performance of generationing (Alanen, 2001) and gendering.

The theories and concepts discussed in this chapter are further elaborated in the analysis chapters, Chapters 5-7. With these analytical frameworks as a point of departure, in the next chapter I will present further arguments and research about children and consumer media culture focusing on the specific contexts of Japan.

Chapter 3

Japanese Contexts: Children and Consumer Culture

In this chapter I discuss consumer culture with a focus on sociocultural contexts in Japan; what kinds of consumer culture children and mothers experience and what kinds of distinctive phenomena are found in consumption practices. This discussion cannot and should not be simplified and generalised: there is a variety of consumer cultures, and each individual experiences them differently. I also acknowledge that there can be similarities between mothers' and children's consumption practices in Japan and those in the US, Europe and other places. Even though I will mention similarities and differences drawing from my own experiences and other literature throughout this thesis, my intention is not to specifically underline cultural comparisons. Considering these aspects, I first explore historical and cultural contexts of childrearing and childhood, and then discuss previous studies on children and consumer media culture in Japan, which are closely linked with negative responses to children's participation in consumption practices. Secondly, I describe the children's market (*kodomo shijō*), which is more segmented than ever before, and in which cross-generational marketing has become increasingly important due to the low birth rate. When discussing the children's market in Japan, it is also especially important to address the role of character culture. Thirdly, I will explore notions of mothering in Japan, looking at mothers' caring consumption and their concerns and dilemmas, particularly in terms of children's development and education, in the context of diversified childrearing.

3.1. Childrearing and Childhood

Before discussing consumer culture in relation to young children and mothers in Japan, I first provide an overview of childrearing and childhood in Japan. As discussed later in this chapter, mothers are and have traditionally been the primary caregivers of young children: while mothers either take maternity leave or quit their job to stay at home with their baby, fathers can rarely do so because there is still a strong cultural expectation that mothers are supposed to have more responsibility for childrearing and household chores (Kazui, 1997). In fact, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

(MHLW) (2012), the rate of fathers' childcare leave is 1.89 % in contrast with 83.6% by mothers. Despite the governmental attempt and encouragement to reduce the participation gap in childrearing and household chores between fathers and mothers, many men feel it is impossible. Men (as well as women) are concerned about the consequences of taking leave, such as unfair termination, transfer and demotion[21]. Due to the working situation and these traditional views, mothers generally decide to stay at home in order to take more responsibility for childrearing and construct a closer relationship with their children (also see NWEC, 2006).

Since birth, children are expected to be physically and emotionally dependent on and attached to adults, primarily mothers. This dependency and attachment of children in Japan has been extensively examined by several scholars such as Kazui (1997), Lewis (1993) and Reischauer and Jensen (2003). Reischauer and Jensen (2003) note that in Western childrearing children are put on strict sleeping and eating routines, separated from the parents' bedroom to sleep alone from the early childhood, often handed over to babysitters and encouraged to have verbal interactions rather than body contacts. Conversely, as also pointed out by Reischauer and Jensen (2003) and observed by me, Japanese children are fed and put to bed more at will, constantly fondled by their mothers and often carried around on their back at home and outside. In childrearing in Japan, it is still quite common that children take a bath with their parents and sleep with them in the same room until they become quite old (early primary school age).

Historically children in Japan were seen to belong to the gods until the age of seven: their spirit was seen to easily move out of the body, causing sickness or death at worst, and therefore young children were considered to be incomplete humans possessing a spiritual force (Miyata, 1996). This view can be closely related to the high mortality rate of children in former times, but the belief is still widely embedded in contemporary child-related events: ritualistic events to mark children's healthy upbringing are

[21] According to Japanese consulting sites on the Internet, many Japanese women indeed experience unfair termination, transfer and demotion before, during or after their maternity leave even though the Childcare and Family Leave Law prohibits employers from doing this.

celebrated on Girls' Day[22], Boys' Day[23] and the Seven-Five-Three Festival[24]. Another historical manifestation of this is the Japanese saying, *mitsugo no tamashii hyakumade,* which literally means that the soul of a three-year-old remains the same until the age of 100. This implies that a child raised by his own mother until the age of three will have a stronger bond with the mother and will be healthy in body and mind (Kazui, 1997: 486). These claims have little scientific justification[25], but the majority of married women (85.9%) in Japan nevertheless still support the idea that "mothers of children under three should concentrate on childrearing and should not be distracted by work" (NIPSSR, 2008). The factor of governmental support cannot be and should not be ignored, but the huge attendance gap of preschools between 2-years-olds (34.6%) and 3-years-olds (83.5%) (Cabinet Secretariat, 2011) shows that children under the age of three are widely expected to stay at home, preferably with mothers.

Young children's everyday life before entering preschool is therefore mostly spent at home with their mothers, watching TV, playing with toys and reading picture books. Mothers and young children go out for daily grocery shopping, and sometimes to meet with other mothers and children of the same age in a park, a café or a child-friendly diner. These days it is more common among mothers (and parents) of young children to visit public indoor play rooms managed by a municipality and private play facilities located inside shopping malls, which is where I also met some mothers for interviews. Mothers' concerns about children's safety and security, and high quality physical activities unaffected by the weather seem to be fulfilled by these facilities (see Club YuKids, 2014; Fantasy Kids, 2014).

In this section, I have provided an historical and cultural overview of childrearing and childhood in Japan. Although the focus of my thesis is specifically on consumer media cultures and young children, this section gives readers a certain lens to understand

[22] *Hinamatsuri* (Girls' Day) is celebrated for girls' healthy growth each year on March 3 by displaying a set of ornamented dolls, *Hinaningyō.*
[23] *Tangonosekku* (Boys' Day) is celebrated for boys' healthy growth each year on May 5 by displaying ornamented weapons and dolls, and colorful carp banners.
[24] Seven-Five-Three Festival (*Shichigōsan*) is a traditional rite of passage and festival day for three-year-old and seven-year-old girls and five-year-old boys.
[25] In Western developmental psychology, attachment theory has been broadly discussed primarily by Ainsworth and Bowlby (see Bretherton 1992), but it is not my intention to go into the details of this here.

sociocultural values of children and childrearing in Japanese contexts. In the next section I discuss previous studies on children and consumer media culture in Japan.

3.2. Previous Studies

As pointed out in the previous chapter, child-centred empirical studies on consumer culture have been conducted primarily in Western contexts[26], except for the study of Japanese teens and material culture researched by White (1993). In Japan the dominant knowledge about children in relation to media and consumption is based on statistical research or neuroscience, and is linked to the concept of problematized childhood or children at risk. For example, Suwa (2005), a representative of the professional teacher association (*purokyōshino kai*) warns that contemporary consumer- and service-oriented culture, which offers children the same 'customer' position as adults, has created self-centred (*oresamaka*) individuals in a society where harmony, collectivity and modesty have traditionally been valued (also see Taga, 2010). He claims that the threat of classroom breakdown stems from the changes in attitudes of children (and their parents) as customers towards school authority: in a consumer society where profit and benefit are prioritised, customers – both children and parents – demand adequate educational 'services'.

In terms of TV viewing with young children, the proposal "Let's refrain from TV viewing for children under two years old!" made by the Japanese Pediatric Association (2004) and repeatedly emphasised by media and educational professionals was commonly mentioned by the mothers and teachers I interviewed. Kiyokawa, chairman of NPO ChildLine Japan and NPO Children and Media, who supports this proposal, warns that a media-saturated lifestyle – dominated by TV, mobile phones and computer games – physically and psychologically destroys children (Kiyokawa & Utsumi, 2009) and that children cannot even become 'humans' (Kiyokawa, 2003). Moreover, as pointed out in the previous chapter, in spite of its pseudoscientific claims, Mori's (2002) notion of *gēmunō* (game-dominated brain) has attracted widespread attention, and his claim that children's gaming causes behavioural problems and cruel, unpredictable

[26] There is a lot of work relating to Chinese contexts (ex. Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2006), but most of them are survey-based studies.

behaviour in youth has been a focus of serious discussion in current Japanese society (Sakamoto, 2004). These hypothetical and essentialist concerns regarding children as consumers and media users are widely acknowledged by the mothers of young children and have a certain level of impact on mothering, as mentioned later in this chapter and Chapter 5.

3.3. The Children's Market

Despite the fact that the low birth rate and the prolonged economic depression are announced every year, the children's market (*kodomo shijō*) has been relatively stable and even has room for growth. According to research by Estore (2012), bricks-and-mortar business has decreased while there is more demand for Internet shopping. In fact, sales for kids, babies and pregnant women increased in 2011 by 140% compared with the previous year. Estore suggests that the most important factors in the shift from bricks-and-mortar consumption to online consumption are an increase in double-income households and the attainment of high media literacy by parents. The more women continue to work till the due date in order to return to work after their maternity leave, the more maternity wear and goods are needed. Also, since the trend toward delaying marriage leads couples to have one or two children, more time and money is invested in children. Online shops also offer a large selection of goods. For the generation accustomed to Internet use, information about these products' design and function spread through users' word of mouth is crucial for purchase, and therefore online stores are more responsive to customers' needs and wants, as I discuss in Chapter 5. Estore insists that online stores, in contrast with bricks-and-mortar stores, are meeting a growing demand for media-savvy parents of young children who are too busy with their daily routines to physically go shopping.

Despite the growth of the children's market, in the prolonged economic depression, parents' wallets are relatively tight. In this circumstance, the children's market has targeted not only the parents but also other adults surrounding children. The grandparents – the generation that experienced the rapid economic growth of the country and is now affluent – are strong economic supporters for parents (Nissui, 2009). According to Nomura Holdings (2007), 84.6% of parents receive monetary support

from grandparents for their children and 45% receive material support of daily necessities, such as clothing, shoes and toys. The grandparents also tend to purchase more expensive goods for child-related events, such as Girls' Day, Boys' Day and the Seven-Five-Three Festival (Matsushita, 2008). More than 90% of married people claim that grandparental support is self-motivated (Asahi University, 2009). Demographic data in Japan in 2011 show that children from 0-14 years old account for 12.8% of the population (Policy on, 2011). As such, one child is considered to be surrounded by many adults aside from parents and grandparents, something Matsushita (2008) calls "ten pockets" or "ten wallets". The low marriage rate generates more single adults with spare money, such as single uncles, aunts and parents' friends, who contribute to the growth of this "kids market" (ibid.). Rashinban (2005) points out that some sectors of the children's market have opened up new business opportunities addressed to these single adults as well as parents who grew up in the time of individualisation and diversification of consumption practices. These sectors include brand-name clothes, toys imported from Europe and the US, educational materials and character goods.

The cultural tendency to focus on individualisation and diversification is linked to niche marketing. The apparel business, particularly Narumiya International, spread the trend of the age-based segmented market in the late 1990s: the child apparel market was categorised into babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers, kids, low-teens and high-teens in order to stimulate purchasing interests and cycles (cf. Cook, 2004; see Rashinban, 2005). This niche marketing is now applied not only to clothes but also toys, school supplies and educational services. This trend of marketing segmentation is tied in with shifts in social and economic environments surrounding children, such as in the education system, local safety, childrearing and more freedom of consumption choice.

The next section illustrates one of the significant characteristics of the culture as well as the market in Japan, namely media mixes, which are closely connected to character culture discussed later in this chapter and the analysis chapters.

3.4. Media Mixes and Cultural Production

Since the 1980s, *media mix* has been the most widely used term to describe the phenomenon of transmedia communication in Japan, particularly the development of media franchises across multiple media platforms, which is known as *media convergence* in North America (Steinberg, 2012). At the production level, the aim of marketers in using different media platforms has been to increase profit and extend commercial profitability. Yet, at the user level, Ito (2008) notes that media mixes have led people including children to actively participate in cultural production and distribution through creative writing, play, drawing and performing (also see Dyson, 1997; Marsh, 1999; Änggård, 2005). The wide range of media forms includes manga (Japanese comics), games, anime, movies and novels. In contemporary media mixes, the original authorship of stories, illustrations and characters is often unclear: this is a consumption system where a product does not necessarily ride on the coattails of its original work. This phenomenon first took place in Japan, according to Ōtsuka (2010), with *Bikkuriman Chocolates* (literally, surprise man chocolates) in the late 1980s. Earlier, the consumption system was decisively different: existing works such as anime and live-action TV series triggered spin-off products, as in cases like *Tetsuwan Atomu*[27] (Astro Boy) and *Kamen Rider*[28] (Masked Rider). The *Bikkuriman* premium stickers[29] were however not based on pre-existing manga narratives or TV series. The anime and comic versions of *Bikkuriman* were secondary commodities produced after its stickers became a hit (Ōtsuka, 2010). As I myself experienced the craze of collecting *Bikkuriman* stickers in my childhood, the commodity value was certainly directed to the stickers instead of the chocolate. Yet, why were the stickers so attractive to the children – including me?

According to Ōtsuka (2010), *Bikkuriman* stickers offered "narrative consumption" (*monogatari shōhi*) where consumers (fans) buy into a 'worldview' by consuming it in a

[27] *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy) first started with manga by Osamu Tezuka and was broadcast in 1963 (see Steinberg 2009).
[28] *Kamen Rider* (Masked Rider) is a meta-series of manga and live-action special effects (*tokusatsu*) TV programs broadcast in 1971 (see Ōtsuka & Steinberg 2010).
[29] One randomly assorted sticker was inserted into a waffle peanut and chocolate snack. There were 772 stickers in total.

fragmentary and piece-by-piece manner (also see Steinberg, 2012). Ōtsuka notes several mechanisms behind the *Bikkuriman* phenomenon where children actively engaged in collecting the stickers and creating their own world. First of all, every sticker contained a drawing of one character with a short description on the back. As children collected a number of stickers, particularly sets of angels, amulets and demons, the description of each sticker was connected to each other. Children could subtly see a "small narrative" emerging – the rivalry between demon characters A and B, the rescue of angel character C by amulet character D from demon character E, and so on. The accumulation of small narratives functioned as a trigger to accelerate children's sticker collection, in order to produce their own imaginary and creative world which Ōtsuka terms a "grand narrative".

Children's cultural production through this kind of 'unbounded' media mix is found globally as well as locally in other recent crazes such as *Pokémon* (Allison, 2006; Tobin, 2004b) and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* (Allison, 2006; Ito, 2005) where children collected, acquired, recombined and enacted narratives within their peer networks of trading cards, exchanging information and playing with figures (see Chapter 2). While the popularity of some anime characters, for example Pikachu, are often discussed within this "narrative consumption" or marketing approach, I argue that there are also unique cultural and historical aspects in Japan that cannot be ignored, particularly because Japanese people in general have long been appreciative of various kinds of animated illustrations and figures.

3.5. Character Culture as a Uniquely Japanese Phenomenon

'Character culture[30]' has historically been part of Japanese culture as a whole, encompassing the whole age range from young children to elderly people, and both males and females (Aihara, 2007; Bandai Character, 2000; Kayama, 2001; Yuzawa, 2003). Kayama (2001) reports that 87% of Japanese people show positive attitudes towards characters, and the ownership rate of character goods exceeds 80% (Bandai Character, 2000). Character-related products are found everywhere in Japan – not only

[30] The term 'character' (*kyarakutā* in Japanese) is a form of Japanese-English which is common in anime and manga. Since I did not find any appropriate term for *kyarakutā* in English, I decided to transfer the meaning of Japanese '*kyarakutā*' to 'character'. It is my intention to differentiate character culture from anime culture even though the implications of the two terms do overlap to some degree.

in private homes but also in the public sphere, such as on buses and airplanes. Although Japanese people understand that the association of these characters with products and services is a marketing strategy like branding that is used to increase profits, few seem to express strong resistance to character goods. The possession of and knowledge about particular characters are used for ease in communication as well as creating a sense of belonging in social groups. Character culture in general is positively accepted in contemporary Japanese society, and it is now spreading globally, as several Western anthropologists have discussed (see Allison, 2006; McVeigh, 2000; Tobin, 2004a).

The term 'character' is generally used as a collective term for human figures, robots, anthropomorphic animals and plants, the heroes or heroines that appear in fairy tales, picture books, serialised manga in magazines and newspapers, films, animated cartoons, television shows and movies (Kyarakutā Māketingu 2002). In this thesis, what I mean by 'character' is different from the 'anime' of Western use but closely related to media and licensed illustrations, of which the best-known example is probably *Hello Kitty*. One of the licensed characters of Sanrio, *Hello Kitty* was first launched in 1974. Unlike *Bikkuriman*, *Hello Kitty* did not start with "narrative consumption"; rather it was integrated as a brand with a range of designs and merchandise. The popularity of *Hello Kitty* has broadened from young girls to teens and grown-up women, and this phenomenon can be now found globally.

Miyashita (2001), a marketing researcher, points out that there are cultural and historical roots to this tendency for Japanese people to create, adapt and utilise characters or character related goods, and identifies several aspects that have contributed to contemporary character culture. The first aspect is people's flexible belief and worship practices. In addition to worshipping statues and idols – such as Buddhist statues and the seven deities of good fortune – there are beliefs in supernatural beings as communicators which connect people with nature and guide their daily practices. The second aspect is people's tendency to not only display but also carry small charms and figures with them. Particular charms and figures, such as Chinese zodiac signs and animistic gods, are believed to offer the bearers protection and healing. These cultural and historical aspects introduced by Miyashita are indispensable in order to understand

personal and collective attachment to or relationship with different kinds of figures, statues, ornaments and accessories in Japan. It is argued that there are eight million deities and supernatural beings living close to or even within people's daily lives, and Japanese people are open to the coexistence of fictional creatures or beings. This cultural tolerance and knowledge has most likely contributed to their creation of creative and incomparable characters. The miniaturised statues, idols and charms that are carried by people or located in the important spots of houses, buildings and villages, are believed to bring good luck to bearers or owners on particular occasions, tasks or ordeals, and to ward off bad luck.

Understanding these cultural and historical aspects leads to better understanding of contemporary character culture in Japan. Keeping a certain good or character on one's self is not just for pleasure and fun: it also has symbolic functions. Personal identity is expressed through character goods, and these goods are seen to have healing and relaxing effects in return (Aihara, 2007; Allison, 2006; Bandai Character, 2000; Kayama, 2001; Miyashita, 2001). As I discuss throughout the analysis chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), these characters, their colours and facial expressions and the ways the bearer and owners display their character goods, accelerate people's communication, and the selection and decision to carry and wear certain characters helps to establish collective identity through a process of recognition and meaning-making (Miyashita, 2001). In this sense, characters are powerful communicative and relational tools.

In addition to these historical and cultural roots, contemporary character culture is closely linked to the development of digital media and communications. Ito (2008) points out that as digital, portable and networked media forms have become more accessible and pervasive in people's lives (including children's), consumers can select and engage with content in more mobile ways, as well as creating and sharing lateral networks of communication. Character culture is definitely founded on the "media mix", a term used widely in industry and popular discourse in Japan to describe the synergetic relationship between and across media formats, particularly anime series, comics, electronic games and trading card games. A major turning point for character culture in Japan came with the emergence of the television animation series *Tetsuwan Atomu*

(Astro Boy) in 1963, and the corresponding sticker-based marketing developed by its television sponsor (Kawakatsu, 2010; Steinberg, 2009). Steinberg (2009) notes however that it was not so much the TV series itself as the practice of inserting Atomu stickers as premiums in the chocolate packages which sparked the character merchandizing boom. "The key to the success of the stickers – along with the use of the already popular figure of Atomu – was their ability to be stuck anywhere, and seen anytime" (ibid.: 113). This anytime-anywhere potential of character goods – often independent of the original platform – has arguably led to the complex contemporary communicational and interactive environment that is apparent in mother-child relationships (Chapter 5), and children's peer culture and relationships (Chapters 6 and 7).

In addition to the significance of character culture in Japan, consumption for young children is closely tied to childrearing practices: providing educational products, services and experiences is of great concern for parents, especially mothers. The next section describes how childrearing has been made a focus of extensive advice and guidance, and at the same time segmented.

3.6. Young Children and Preschool: Groupism

According to Cabinet Secretariat (2011), the attendance rate of preschool children in Japan is 83.5% for 3-year-olds and 96.4% for 4-year-olds. This rate is expected to rise for younger children[31] with the growing labour force of women, due to economic issues in addition to women's economic and social independence. These children experience social institutions several years before they start compulsory education and are involved in the construction of their peer culture and their world by sharing knowledge and experiences with other children.

Like other social institutions, preschools have a particular role, which is characterised by collectivity, authority and curriculum. Jackson (2004: 98) indicates that "learning to live in a classroom" denotes "learning to live in a crowd": in the context of Japanese preschools, about 25 children with distinctive characteristics and interests typically learn to work and play together. When I shared this with childhood researchers in

[31] The attendance rate of preschool at 2-year-olds is 34.6% (Cabinet Secretariat, 2011).

Norway, they responded with surprise and curiosity about how the daily activities are organised and managed. They seemed to be concerned about children's wellbeing because they tend to think that the more children there are in a classroom, the more conflicts and disputes among children are likely to arise and the less likely it is that quiet children will receive attention. Yet this was not the case in either of the preschools involved in this study. From my experiences working in preschools in the US, England and Norway (see Chapter 4). Japanese preschool children seem to be more harmonious, cooperative and sensitive to their peers. These characteristics are also described in several studies on Japanese preschool children by non-Japanese researchers (Burke, 2008; Lewis, 2006; Tobin et al., 1989, 2009; White & LeVine, 1986).

One unique feature of Japanese preschools and other institutional domains in general, as I have mentioned above, is the notion of *groupism*, where children are seen to be responsible for and to care for each other. There are strong cultural values in Japan that "the self is nested in an interpersonal web, [and] the group is the most potent context for children's lives" (Shimahara, 1998: 224). The classroom with a high teacher-child ratio is seen as a crucial environment where children develop social mindedness, come to appreciate group life and learn group-living skills that enhance their participation in activities through shared routines; including greeting, singing, and reciprocal and ritualistic dialogues, all of which provide children opportunities for strengthening their sense of belonging and connection (Shimahara, 1998; Tobin et al., 2009). The concept of *groupism* is widely used in Japanese society, and a significant degree of isomorphism can be also found in the basic tenets of classroom management, particularly at the level of preschool and primary schools. Children's daily activities are often organised based on sub-groups, but the goal of a classroom with more than 20 children is to become a family-like environment as a whole.

While classroom teachers as authorised adults provide children with plentiful opportunities for encouraging and appreciating their work and behaviour, they also have to control and discipline – and punish to a certain degree – in order to regulate the large number of children. This power is generally demonstrated through preschool and classroom rules. The basic rules include following teacher's instructions, being quiet

while somebody is talking, and being kind to others. As part of classroom management in preschools in Western contexts which I have also experienced in the US and England (see Chapter 4), children are often given a time-out, being separated from the crowd after having received a couple of warnings. In Japan, this kind of classroom management is rare: each child's actions are rather monitored and corrected by the other members of the class or a small sub-group.

3.7. Childrearing Consumption

Historically speaking, children have been the key focus of educational concern in Japan, and this is recently illustrated by *juken sensō*[32], the entrance examination wars. Mothers invest in their child's education in a variety of ways and at an ever-earlier age – well before their compulsory education starts. There are several reasons behind this movement, but here I would like to particularly focus on the discourse about childrearing consumption, which echoes the tension between *unification* and *fragmentation* introduced by Giddens (1991).

With the emergence of the field of infant neuropsychology[33], it has been widely argued that since neural connections form rapidly in early life, the early childhood period is critical for development; and an enriched and stimulating environment is seen as essential for children's proper cognitive development (Nadesan, 2002). This sense of unlimited potential, widely popularised by media, has encouraged many mothers to engage in systematic forms of childrearing which follow each developmental stage and seek to create a stimulating environment. Childrearing magazines and books propose standardised behavioural norms based on specific chronological ages and identify distinctions between normality and abnormality in children's development. These scales promote 'normality' in children and alleviate mothers' anxiety about how their own child is doing compared to others. The most well-known 'manuals' among mothers in Japan are periodically published for expectant mothers by Benesse Corporation, which

[32] Since the end of last century, the entrance examination wars have been experienced not only by high school children seeking to enter a high-ranked university, but also by children from junior-high school, elementary school and even preschool in order to enter a school with better educational standards and environment.

[33] According to Nadesan (2002), neuropsychology combines neurology, developmental psychology and pediatric clinical psychology.

takes a market share of more than 65% (Benesse Corporation, 2008). The magazines consist of three different types: *Tamago Club* (egg club) supports pregnancy; *Hiyoko Club* (chick club) guides mothers of babies up to 1.5-year-old; while *Kokko Club* (chicken club) advises mothers of 1-3-year-old children (the *Kokko Club* publication was suspended in May 2011). As Nadesan (2002) mentions, readers are encouraged to use the media's frameworks as confessional guides for scrutinizing not only children's development but their endless potential, as something in which mothers are urged to invest.

In contrast with this homogenisation of childrearing through media, there is also a fragmentation of childrearing; that is, a recognition that there may be more than one possible way of childrearing. Mothers are wanting to know how other children and other mothers are doing through the work of various "cultural intermediaries" (Hochschild, 2003: 60) such as magazines, advice books, blogs and advertisements that lay out the current proposals for acceptable behaviour (also see Chapter 5). They are not however satisfied with the normative framework when it comes to their own child; their aim is to 'exceed' the norm. The attendance rate at extra-curricular courses among children aged 1-6 decreased by 10% in 2010 compared to that in 2005, but 47.4% of the young children still attend some extra-curricular lessons outside preschool, such as swimming, gymnastics, music, soccer, dancing, foreign languages, literacy and numeracy (Shogakukan-Shueisha, 2010). In line with the wide-spread norm of 'the earlier, the better', mothers tend to encourage their young children to try something even before the children show specific interest. As illustrated in this section, mothers are more responsible for childrearing consumption than fathers, particularly when the children are still young. The next section discusses further details about mothering and consumption, which I call *caring consumption*.

3.8. The Ideology of Mothering

As I have noted above, consumption is a large part of mothers' lives in Japan, especially for the mothers of young children. In Japan, 86.3% of women leave their job after

getting married or conceiving a child[34] (Unayama, 2011) and stay home for several years. Hays (1996: 131) argues that "mothers ultimately share a recognition of the ideology of intensive mothering", which prescribes how mothers should act and think, and their role in raising children who need considerable time, money, attention, emotion and intellect. In contemporary Japan where childrearing has become more shared between couples, this ideology of mothering is nonetheless highly demanding.

This culturally specific appropriation of mothering in Japan is well described in *Japanese Mothers and Bentōs: The Lunch-box as Ideological State Apparatus* by anthropologist Allison (1991). She describes how women's devotion to elaborate lunch-box making functions as a device for them to reproduce an ideological model of mothering. Their full-time caring work entails not only preparing balanced, nutritious, 'natural' food for their young children, but representing their social role as a proper mother through inventive and creative lunch-box making. Like their children at school, the mothers are watched by each other as well as by the teachers through the medium of the lunch-boxes. The concerns surrounding lunch making have little to do with family background or inequality in the household economy, in contrast to cases reported in the US (see Pugh, 2009): rather, they reflect mothers' effort and ability to cooperate with their young children (Allison, 1991). Allison, who sent her son to a Japanese nursery school, notes that if a child eats everything in a proper manner, a mother is complimented; if the child fails, a mother is blamed. This was quite common among the mothers in my study. Indeed, clothes, toys, food and anything young children consume more or less represents their mothers' taste and the quality of their mothering practices – or what can be called their "caring consumption". As I describe in the following section, children's education is a particular focus of mothers' concerns and responsibility long before children enter formal schooling, but there has been a shift from traditional school-based training to *edutainment* where children are seen to learn through play.

[34] According to Unayama (2011), this rate has not changed for 25 years. However, another report should be also taken into account: 86% of unemployed mothers of children under 18 years old hope for some kind of paid work, primarily in order to contribute to the family income (Policy on, 2012).

3.9. From Education to Edutainment

The educational system in Japan has repeatedly been reformed in the post-war period due to wider market and demographic forces. The system was required to shift from the mass-production of modern citizens, who would drive the nation to rapid industrialisation by associating their educational achievement with their life-long career, toward the multi-dimensional production of creative and specialised post-modern individuals, who would be able to survive in the rising global commercial market and intense international competition (Fujita, 1997). Post-war generations, including current parents of young children, studied hard to survive *juken sensō* – the entrance examination wars – but faith in educational achievement as a means to secure one's future success crumbled in the late twentieth century with the long economic depression. The latest educational reform, so called *yutori kyōiku*[35] (relaxed education), which started in 2002 and ended in 2013[36], particularly sparked a debate about the quality and significance of public education in Japan. According to a survey on caretakers of preschool and primary school children conducted in 2010, 44.3% of the caretakers reported dissatisfaction with public education (Shogakukan-Shueisha, 2010). In response to the ambiguity of educational policy, every year a certain number of children in the Tokyo metropolitan area take entrance examinations for private schools or public integrated lower and upper secondary schools that set a clear educational agenda, and the early-age cram-school market has been expanding (Nii, 2008); although some parents have been questioning how important school-based education can be for their children.

The most recent educational reforms have emphasised a more relaxed, less-pressured educational environment that fosters children's zest for living (*ikiru chikara*), and qualities such as autonomy and active problem-solving, rather than traditional school

[35] The guidelines included the reduction of school curriculum by around 30% and the implementation of a five-day school (Wada, 2003). New, so-called 'integrated learning' without textbooks was also introduced into the curriculum, whose intention was to encourage children to develop their own interests and think for themselves. The primary aim of the reforms is to move away from the traditional education that focused on an enormously elaborate, extensive memorizing and testing system (Goodman, 2003).

[36] *Yutori kyōiku* practically started in 2002 in both primary and lower secondary levels and in 2003 in upper secondary levels. However, it ended in 2011 in primary levels, 2012 in lower secondary levels and 2013 in upper secondary levels.

disciplines. Many parents, especially mothers, also want to develop their children's unique individuality and creativity both at home and in school, and the children's market offers a variety of products, services and experiences designed to achieve this. This all leads to a diversification of education and play, corresponding to mothers' anxieties and dilemmas. A key product the market offers and mothers are attracted to is *edutainment* – "a hybrid mix of education and entertainment" (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003: 8). Edutainment satisfies mothers' expectations about what accounts as 'valuable' and 'educational' and at the same time offers children pleasure and entertainment (see Chapter 5). The idea that young children can learn through play is an ideal concept for mothers as well as the marketers. There is a variety of edutainment toys and services in Japan, yet those based on characters are perhaps the most popular. On the Toys'R'Us website, *Anpanman*[37], the most popular character among young children (Bandai, 2010), has its own edutainment toy category (*chiiku gangu*)[38]; the number of *Anpanman* edutainment toys exceeds sixty, from blocks and literacy cards to a singing personal computer and a kids' tablet (see Toys'R'Us, 2013a). Toys such as literacy and numeracy cards that used to be regarded as 'educational' are now seen as 'edutainment' once adorned with character images. In terms of edutainment services, *Kodomo Challenge*[39] – a correspondence course – has received widespread support from mothers of young children due to its reasonable price, quality and selection of toys, which was guided by child development specialists[40], in addition to its mass marketing strategies based on direct mailing and the character *Shimajirō*. The primary reasons for the success of *Kodomo Challenge* could be because their topic-based materials and toys – picture books, edu-toys and DVDs – correspond with monthly goals. Also, for the mothers of

[37] *Anpanman* written by Takashi Yanase came out in children's books in 1970s and has been on TV since the late 1980s. Its stories and characters have been supported and favoured across generations in Japan due to the simple contents of each short story with rounded characters that express the importance of justice, kindness, cooperativeness, sympathy, and friendship. Anpanman, the name of the main character, means bean-jam pastry and is used as the generic name for the animation series as whole.

[38] Toys'R'Us has its own edutainment toy category, but it does not define what 'edutainment' means (*chiiku gangu*).

[39] *Kodomo* (children) *Challenge,* a correspondence course founded by Benesse Corporation for children from six months old to six years old, sends educational toys and materials every month. If one signs up for a year contract, the monthly fee is 1650 yen (about $14) (Benesse Corporation, 2013).

[40] This form of scientific expertise takes an influential role not only in mothers' choice of proper educational toys but also in training and interactions that are seen to bring enduring consequences in children's future.

young children who usually manage the household budget, the system of *Kodomo Challenge*, with its low monthly cost and no cancellation fee, is friendly on the wallet.

3.10. Summary

In this chapter I have presented the sociocultural contexts of contemporary consumer culture in Japan. While the children's market has not been growing dramatically for the last five years due to the prolonged economic depression and the low birth rate, there are some consumption practices surrounding children that continue to grow significantly. I have pointed out that online shops have reflected consumer needs that bricks-and-mortar stores have not, such as quick and easy shopping and a large selection of goods. In addition to the shift in parental consumption practices, it is also important to recognise that young children in contemporary Japan are supported by "ten wallets" – grandparents as well as other adults (relatives and friends of the parents) – who are monetary and gift suppliers for children.

Japanese consumer culture in relation to young children has several unique aspects. First of all, many products and services are associated with 'characters' – media and licensed illustrations. Even though consumers acknowledge that this marketing strategy is designed to make more profit, few express strong resistance to character goods, and this is due to the cultural and historical traditions in which many religious and animistic statues and idols have been worshiped and integrated into people's everyday lives (Miyashita, 2001). Secondly, the consumption practices of young children cannot be separated from childrearing consumption and mothering. Mothers as primary caregivers of young children are generally responsible for buying products, services and experiences for their children – a process which I call "caring consumption" (also see Thompson, 1996). Their concerns and dilemmas about children's development and education are discussed more fully in Chapter 5. While childrearing has been 'manualized', and offers extensive guidance to parents seeking to track normal and healthy development, their wish for their own children is not to be 'one of them'. Now that educational achievement does not necessarily guarantee children's future success, mothers' interest has shifted from education to having the child pursue what s/he desires and have her or him learn while having fun. In this sense, both the children's market

and mothers themselves stimulate the growth of “edutainment”, a phenomenon which will be further explored in Chapter 5. Before moving on to this, however, the next chapter presents the methodology and methods of my empirical research.

Chapter 4

Methods and Research Contexts

In this chapter I detail how I approached the empirical part of my study and how I collected and analysed the field data. I will outline methodological considerations and reflections about doing research 'at home', in my own culture, conducting participant observation in public institutions, researching on/with young children, and interviewing mothers. Instead of separating child research from research involving adults or seeing children and adults as different research subjects, I explore two questions: how should young children as informants be positioned, and what do researchers need to consider when children are involved in research? Doing research about/with young children does bring some particular challenges, which should not be underestimated. The lack of qualitative research literature about young children as consumers [41] encouraged an exploratory methodological approach. In order to make my research approach and contexts visible and transparent, I will present a detailed picture of the various stages of the research process. This chapter also gives an account of ethical considerations, issues to be aware of when analysing the collected data, possible limitations, and questions of representation.

4.1. Methodological Considerations

This thesis has an inductive approach in that the research analysis progresses from data rather than from a hypothesis that is tested. It is not developed from grand theory, either. Yet this is not to imply that theories are excluded from every stage of the study. I intended to gain knowledge about how young children and mothers as primary caregivers experience consumer culture, and as all researchers do, I entered the research processes wearing certain 'theoretical glasses', as outlined in Chapter 2. One of my prior understandings about children and consumption was a simple assumption: since consumption is part of people's everyday practice, it should be something meaningful to children in their peer culture and their identity construction. What this 'something'

[41] There is a large research literature, for instance about the effects of advertising on children and about the development of consumer socialisation (see Chapter 2).

might be was the point of departure. I regarded children and mothers as knowledgeable and experienced consumers. This research position requires and allows an open-minded approach. The research is inspired by consumer-focused ethnography as it pays close attention to people as consumers and media users rather than to the commercial market itself. Ethnography is a combination of methods and "a theory of description" (Nader, 2011: 211); doing ethnography involves an attempt to understand how the people who are studied see and understand their world (ibid.). Given this definition, ethnography entails some basic principles, such as:

- The researcher "being there" and "participant observing" (Nader, 2011: 211);
- The study of people (the other);
- An account of developing relationships between the researcher and the informants;
- Focusing not only on what informants say but also what they do;
- Connecting the field setting to wider social and cultural processes.

I took the principles above as a research approach that considers both children and mothers as subjects. In an ethnographic study, the researcher has to recognise that the study must involve reflexivity, and an awareness of how unfamiliarity (the other) can become familiar (us) and familiarity (us) can become unfamiliar (the other). In this process, nothing can be taken for granted. In the interaction, the researcher needs to be aware of the importance of focusing not only on people's narratives but also their actions or practices. Although the study draws on individuals' experiences and practices, it also intends to combine the micro level of everyday encounters with the wider social and cultural structure. The researcher in this sense can be compared with a *traveller* on a journey who explores and interprets cultural practices and knowledge in relation to local people in the field (Kvale, 1996: 48). According to Kvale, the journey the traveller takes leads to an understanding of the world where the potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated, unfold through the researcher's interpretations, and are thereby remoulded into new narratives. The researcher enters the field as a novice, and in the reflexive research journey his/her role becomes not only that of a participant observer, but s/he also becomes a part of the social world that is being studied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The detail of the research environment will be

discussed later in this chapter. In the next section, I will discuss what childhood researchers mean by research 'with' children.

4.2. Research about/with Children as Informants

The way researchers perceive childhood and children influences their choice of methods – how they approach, involve and represent children in research (Punch, 2002). As I discussed in Chapter 2, childhood studies, which takes a critical stance towards mainstream social research on children (such as that within developmental psychology), has established particular research premises in terms of approaching and theorising children and childhood. The key theoretical premises of childhood studies – the social construction of childhood; the recognition of children's conditions and activities; and the notion of children as both becomings and beings – point to the assumption that children are competent and knowledgeable agents in the social world (see Chapter 2). This theoretical position poses a methodological challenge in social research on childhood and children: it calls for "research with children". But how can children be involved in research? And to what extent can a researcher share his/her aims and methodological choices with children? How far is this possible with very young children?

Childhood studies emphasises research *with* children as opposed to research *about* or *on* children (Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Christensen & James, 2000b; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Fraser et al., 2004; Punch, 2002). When 'researching with' children, knowledge is developed not only from theories but also from empirical observation. As most researchers do, I had read a large amount of literature about consumption, children's peer culture, and methodological considerations before going into the field. However, without participant observation where I interacted with children in person, my understanding of their knowledge and perspectives could not have been developed. Research 'with' children for me is not only about being there with children but also being accepted into their relationships and being involved in their world.

Another aspect of research with children is that researchers generally attempt to share their research goals with participating children, and the children are encouraged to share

their ideas and perspectives with researchers. There has been a lot of discussion lately about how research with children should be conducted (e.g. Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Christensen & James, 2000b; Fraser et al., 2004), as involving children has implications for the whole research process: design, methods, ethics, participation and analysis (see Punch, 2002). While some childhood researchers insist that children can be involved as co-researchers at all stages of the research process from design to analysis, I included children as informants only during the data collection. As I will describe later in this chapter, the children in my study were informed of my research purpose and shared their ideas and perspectives with me. Yet, for very young children, it would have been challenging to understand the details of my research. The principle of children's participation is very important, but childhood researchers should also recognise that not all children can initiate and guide research. Furthermore, as I elaborate later in this chapter, the nature of children's lives in institutionalised settings tends to limit their decision about whether or not to participate in research. As such, my study did not exclusively adopt the methodological position of research 'with' children from start to end because it is also 'about' children – although I would argue that ultimately both approaches require a respect for the diversity of children's experiences, vocabularies and knowledge.

Due to children's different circumstances and the need for allowing them different voices (Hill, 2006; James, 2007), childhood researchers have developed a variety of innovative or adaptive techniques – such as use of drawings, photographs, stories, songs and play in order for children to engage in research and express themselves in familiar and comfortable ways (see Abebe, 2009; Clark et al., 2005; Punch, 2002). When I decided to conduct my fieldwork in preschools, I planned on including drawings and games about shopping, toys and media use, yet once I engaged in preschool life, I found it difficult to introduce these activities. The first reason for this was the class size: it was challenging to go into depth and follow up with images and short answers with more than 25 children at the same time. Since weekly schedules and goals are determined in advance by the teachers, I was limited in the kind of activities I could introduce and the amount of time I could take up for the research. In addition, teachers were reluctant to support the focus on toys and media for fear of provoking inequality and competition

among children. For these reasons, I chose not to include these activities as methods. Instead, I observed drawing, story-telling and play as daily organised preschool activities and explored how children's interests in consumption were manifested in those activities. For example, their interest in consumption practices emerged from a topic introduced by the teacher, that of the New Year's holiday. This gave me an opportunity to talk with a small number of children about their ideas, and at the same time, it relieved the teacher's concerns about the consequences of setting direct questions about consumption.

I place myself in a methodological position where any empirical or participatory research needs to negotiate an understanding of research aims and questions in terms that 'make sense' to the participants concerned (Fraser, 2004). From this standpoint, I critically reflected not only on my own role and my assumptions but also on the choice of methods and techniques, taking account of the social and cultural contexts children are situated in and their skills and familiar activities. I would argue that researchers, whether doing research with adults or children, need to be reflexive to develop and negotiate their methods 'with' the research subjects and those involved, but these methods and techniques have to be used and understood differently according to the research context. In this way, it can be said that childhood researchers need to develop not only "child-friendly" methods, but more broadly "participant-friendly" or "participant-centred" ones (also see Punch, 2002).

In this section, I have touched on theoretical positions and assumptions about children and childhood as they influence the research. The following section focuses on reflexivity in the research process, arguing that access, data collection, interpretation, and writing texts can never be independent of the researcher's meaning-making process (Gudmundsdottir, 1996).

4.3. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is generally recognised as a methodological necessity in studying children (Christensen & James, 2008; Nilsen, 2005). In the theoretical discipline of childhood studies, researchers intend to account for a variety of childhoods and children's active

construction of meaning-making and seek to represent their voices and opinions regarding their life world. In order to understand children's conditions, activities, relationships, knowledge and experiences from their own perspectives, researchers have especially employed ethnography as a research method. However, researchers have to be aware that the current rhetoric about 'giving voice' to children poses a number of conceptual and epistemological problems: in particular, about representation, issues of authenticity, the diversity of children's experiences, and children's participation in research (James, 2007).

The voices researchers listen to and address are mediated through relationships and interactions with the informants, their preconceptions, and broader theoretical frameworks. As Steier (1991: 1-2) claims, "the research process itself must be seen as socially constructing a world or worlds, with the researchers included in, rather than outside, the body of their own research." As such, the researcher always needs to keep reflexivity in mind and reflect how she or he influences the informants and other people in the field setting and how they influence the empirical data and outcomes. The researcher can never be separated from the collected data and analysis. In childhood studies, as in other social scientific research, since nearly all researchers are adults and many of their observations take place in institutions and organisations where an adult-child division is explicitly or implicitly appropriated by the members, it is important to consider how the presence and participation of a researcher with certain roles and characteristics shapes the children's behaviour. The researcher also has to be aware of the fact that children are active social participants who simultaneously make sense of their roles and positions in the settings in which they are situated and who construct their own meaningful world.

As reflexivity is required at every stage of the research, from the point of gaining access to analysing the data, this has implications for knowledge production. Knowledge production is not a linear process, but rather a constant circular exchange between the data sets relating to my informants (children, mothers and teachers), my theoretical position and discussions with fellow researchers. Not only the relationship between me and the informants, but my theoretical framework and discussions with fellow

researchers had a significant influence on my choice of research questions and the outcome of my analysis. When a researcher takes field-notes or writes, she or he cannot avoid relying on theoretical criteria that guide selection and inference. In studies of children and consumption, researchers have often paid attention to negative or positive effects of media and marketing campaigns on children's development and wellbeing in isolation from children's own experiences and voices in broader cultural and social processes (Barber, 2007; Linn, 2004; Papert, 1996; Postman, 1982; Schor, 2004; Tapscott, 1998). However, I paid more attention to children's interdependency and active participation in consumer culture in an attempt to integrate their practices and understanding. As my study also shows, children do not simply imitate the language and behaviour presented in media or marketing campaigns, rather they construct their own meanings out of their experiences.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 239), "[g]iven the reflexivity of social inquiry, it is vital to recognize that ethnographers construct the accounts of the social world to be found in ethnographic texts, rather than those accounts simply mirroring reality." Their claim is that ideally, ethnographic research needs to be produced not by focusing on what the informants have said and done, but by reflecting this back to the researcher him/herself who tells the tale. Gudmundsdottir (1996) introduces the "iceberg metaphor" to describe the two kinds of interpretation; the tip of the iceberg is explicit interpretation – that is, what the researcher writes in the report – while the largest part is informal interpretation that is out of sight and usually unexamined. As she suggests, good researchers are good storytellers as well as good fieldworkers and interpreters – the intention of ethnographers is not to present a social phenomenon as purely and realistically as possible, rather they shape the words, practices and behaviours of the informants and polish them to fit into a narrative that reflects their own meaning-making processes. In order to ensure reflexivity of my research, I was aware that "'children's perspectives,' 'the child's point of view,' 'hearing children's voices,' and 'listening to children' have to be regarded as standpoints, places from which any analysis sets out, rather than definitive descriptions of empirical phenomena embodied in the words that children speak" (James, 2007: 269 [emphasis in original]). In ethnographic research, it is important to announce whose voices are being

represented and by whom, and therefore, as seen later in this chapter, it is a prerequisite to describe the details of the informants, the settings and the research process as clearly as possible.

4.4. Doing Research 'at Home'

4.4.1. Insider-outsider positionality

A significant dimension of reflexivity that needs to be discussed is my own position in doing research 'at home' – that is, in my native culture. In this thesis I position myself as a 'more familiar' cultural insider: I conducted my fieldwork not only in Japan, but in my hometown where I grew up and received my education till upper secondary school. During my research I spoke Japanese, often with 'our' local dialect with the informants. Compared to foreign researchers conducting fieldwork in Japan as complete novices, I certainly obtained some advantages from my cultural insider-ness, and therefore I conducted "focused ethnography" (Knoblauch, 2005) as I explore more in detail below. While my thesis is based on doing research 'at home', there is also a need to raise questions about this insider-ness. Although I was to some extent a 'more familiar' cultural insider, as suggested above, how much of an 'insider' was I in relation to the informants of my study? Is there any clear insider/outsider positionality in this research? Ultimately, what does this distinction between insider and outsider research really mean?

The debate on insider/outsider positionality in qualitative research at home has raised issues about methodological and epistemological assets and liabilities (Chavez, 2008; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Jackson, 1987; Merriam et al., 2001, Messerschmidt, 1981; Narayan, 1993, Sherif, 2001). However, much of the debate seems to be based on dualistic and simplistic assumptions about the differences between the two positions. While insider researchers tend to possess easy access to the field, and deeper insights about the people, meta-communication and practices (Merriam et al., 2001; Munthali, 2001), they have been accused of being inherently biased in terms of ability to observe, interpret and analyse critically due to their cultural closeness and familiarity (Chavez, 2008; Merriam et al., 2001). As Merriam et al. (2001: 411) point out, "[t]he insider's

strengths become the outsider's weakness and vice-versa." Even though such advantages and disadvantages have been discussed in a lot of the literature, it is not easy to draw a line between the two positions, and researchers might well ask whether it is necessary to do this in any case. Before I discuss my positionality in research, the level of my insider-ness needs to be described.

In relation to the local culture of the field site, Fukuoka, where I grew up, I was acquainted with the dialect, customs and manners. I did not attend *hoikuen* (day-care centre), where I conducted my participant observation, but *yōchien* (kindergarten) in my childhood. I had known about the broad differences between the two kinds of early childcare institutions and how children in *hoikuen* spend their day and year before starting my fieldwork. Having grown up in Japan, I was also familiar with trends among children and social discussions related to children, family and education. However, in contrast to the cultural closeness identified above, I also have to mention a distance from my local culture. My family had been seen as 'outsiders' in my childhood because my parents were originally from Tokyo and behaved and spoke differently, according to the local people. My parents were not active members of the local community who involved themselves in events such as gatherings and festivals. Therefore, I always had a certain sense of alienation while growing up in Fukuoka. In addition, I have been away from my home town and country for almost half of my life. I obtained all my higher education in the US, England and Norway, and I have sometimes worked with young children in each country. In the US I volunteered to work with children aged 3-5 in a nursery school for several months; in England I conducted participant observation in a Year 1 classroom for my master thesis; and in Norway I worked with children aged 3-4 as a substitute assistant teacher. Despite these anecdotal experiences, I was not trained to become a teacher but as an anthropologist who observes people and their practices and seeks to deconstruct taken-for-granted assumptions. The reader might therefore wonder how much of a cultural 'insider' I really was in the research. Yet, the point of my argument is not about how much of an insider or outsider researchers should be in order to conduct fieldwork at home. Rather, we have to acknowledge that researchers as well as informants enact multiple identities and roles: I was both an

insider and an outsider at different levels and different times, despite the fact that I was apparently doing research 'at home'.

According to Merriam et al. (2001), the researcher's positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the people and the contexts. Most importantly, these positions can shift depending on power and interactional dynamics shaped by prevailing cultural values, gender, educational background, seniority and shared experiences (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam et al., 2001; Narayan, 1993). My gender and age, which were similar to that of the preschool teachers and mothers, might have made it easier for me to obtain access to the classroom and the home settings, yet in the process of research I experienced being in "the space between" insider and outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009: 60). As further described below, I was treated as a 'guest' and 'outsider' by my informants and I behaved accordingly; despite my conscious awareness of being a researcher during my study, I was often trapped into taking up a conflicting position as a helpful assistant, particularly during the fieldwork in preschools (see below); without having children myself, I worried if mothers would open their hearts and tell their childrearing experiences, although the knowledge I obtained from the preschool children became the medium through which I was able to discuss with mothers about their perspectives. In this regard, my positionality as a researcher might best be defined as that of an "insider-outsider"; a conjoined position with a hyphen (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009: 60).

4.4.2. Writing texts for non-Japanese readers

In terms of writing texts and analysing the data, I was always conscious about my readership because I was a researcher living in Norway and yet doing research in my home country of Japan and writing my thesis in English, primarily for non-Japanese readers who are unfamiliar with the culture. As Narayan (1993: 681) points out, "narratives are not transparent representations of what actually happened, but are told for particular purposes, from particular points of view: they are thus incipiently analytical, enacting theory." Since this thesis was written for non-Japanese readers, I have paid special attention to historical and sociocultural contexts that could be related to my informants' perspectives and practices. The purpose of doing this is not to

'exoticise' or 'orientalise' them – even though some cultural aspects might appear unfamiliar to non-Japanese readers – but to make my data analysis understandable and evoke a combined sense of familiarity and strangeness in the readers. As Corsaro (2005:189) points out, general tendencies and attributes of children and their peer cultures may be found universally, but researchers have to be cautious about "assuming that these processes work themselves out in the same fashion." Throughout this thesis readers might judge particular attributes of children's and mothers' practices to be particularly 'Japanese', but at the same time they might well recognise common attributes in their own or other cultures. As such, although I am not undertaking a comparative study, I do find it relevant to draw on literature written by European and North American scholars. In these respects, the analysis and writing provided me with a kind of cultural distance, "a chance to step away, reflect on, and reframe the riveting particulars of the story at hand" (Narayan, 1993: 681).

Despite the fact that my research focus is young children as consumers, I did not rely only on participant observation in preschools. Rather, the ethnographic approach enabled me to take a wider perspective and use a combination of multiple methods and research sites.

4.5. Combining Methods and Research Sites

In the field of childhood research, there have been arguments in favour a combination of multiple methods (Abebe, 2009; Clark, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2001; Darbyshire et al., 2005; Punch, 2002). Given the growing evidence of the central role that consumer culture plays in many young children's lives (Cook, 2004; Hori, 1996; Seiter, 1993), it is important to pay attention to children's own experiences and views, rather than simply considering how marketers and advertisers approach them and influence children's popular culture. My research focus was firstly on young children's accounts of their knowledge and experience of consumption practices within their peer culture. Since most of the young children spent their day in institutionalised settings in Japan (see Chapter 3), I decided to conduct participant observation in preschool classrooms in order to directly engage with children's consumption practices through everyday conversation and play. Secondly, for the overview of the preschool context, the

principals and the classroom teachers of the two preschools were also interviewed, and a survey was distributed to all the teachers. The advantage of using a preschool as a site was that as described in Chapter 2, I could capture "orchestrated multi voices" (Dyson, 2003: 351) – both common and different interests and perspectives of children in their communal life at preschool which could not have been observed in the home environment. While most of the children's consumption practices, such as shopping and media use, take place outside the preschool environment, children share their consumer knowledge and experiences and appropriate their symbolic meanings in the context of relationships with peers, through storytelling, information display, pretend play and singing at preschool (Dyson, 1997, 2003; Marsh, 1999, 2000). The knowledge I gained in this way also helped me to prepare for the interviews with mothers. The preschool as an institution sometimes limited and constrained my research activities by virtue of its pedagogical focus. It seemed odd to some teachers, who took for granted hierarchical relationships between adult teachers and children at preschool, that I as an adult 'guest' prioritised spending most of my time with the children and that I focused on the children's peer culture – an 'unofficial' sphere – rather than the 'official' sphere of preschool instruction (also see Dyson, 1999: 370). In my experience, it was not the research topic – young children and consumer culture – that provoked the teachers, but the way I conducted my research by centring on the children. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the primary reason why two preschools instead of one were chosen as research sites was because my participation was curtailed by the first preschool in the middle of my research.

In addition to the participant observation in preschools, I wanted to interview mothers of young children because in Japan mothers are the primary caregivers who choose, control and maintain children's consumption practices. My original plan was to interview the mothers of the pre-schoolers, but neither preschool supported me contacting the mothers through the preschool for fear of causing difficulties in terms of responsibility and privacy protection (my presence in the classroom was not announced to parents). Therefore, mother informants were separately recruited via a Japanese social network site, *mixi*. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in their home, in shopping malls, or in indoor play facilities for children. These sites often enabled the

mothers to have informal dialogues with me. In the shopping mall, for example, some mothers told me which parts of the mall had to be avoided because their children would find something they wanted and would refuse to move. Or, in the indoor play facility, the safety of children's play environment became a discussion. If home visits had been used as the only location for the interview, I feel that the interview or conversation would not have gone into such details: a private home visit in Japan would culturally define me as a formal guest (outsider) and the mother as a host (insider), and therefore boundaries would be marked between the two roles and speaking frankly would be harder (also see Bachnik, 1992). However, the home-visit interview was also a vital method. It allowed me not only to talk to the mothers, but also see the materials and spaces used by the children and to listen to mothers' intimate struggles and dilemmas (these are discussed in Chapter 5).

As several researchers have noted, a variety of methodological techniques and strategies allows one to capture a broad and deep range of children's perspectives and experiences in relation to particular relational and social settings. Using multiple methods – observation, interviews and home visits – and multiple research sites – preschools, homes, shopping malls and indoor play facilities – enabled me to explore how mothers as primary caregivers are engaged in children's consumption as well as what children say and do in connection to their own consumption practices. I assumed that this would provide me with a dynamic picture, although the data was not coherent – it had to be balanced in order to avoid the pitfall of having good parts of data chosen to support a pre-determined analysis. This meant exploring some of the contradictions, the dynamics, the transience and the uncertainty that characterised the participants' everyday lives. What the principals said about the preschool environment was sometimes quite different from what I saw through children's experiences; what mothers said about their mothering ideologies conflicted in practice when others' consumption came into the household; and children's commercial interests and concerns often shifted depending on different situations and interactions.

I moved between different methods and research sites, both in the period of data collection and analysis. The following section is a short overview of the various stages in the process of empirical data collection.

4.6. Overview of the Research Procedure

The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out over five months in my home town, Fukuoka, the sixth largest city in Japan with 1.3 million inhabitants. A five month ethnography can be considered relatively short in the anthropological tradition where researchers tend to spend a more prolonged period in the field. My fieldwork methodology is what is sometimes termed "focused ethnography" – a peculiar form of sociological ethnography that is different from the anthropological tradition in the sense that it is characterised by relatively short-term field visits (Knoblauch, 2005). I used focused ethnography because of its applicability for 'ethnography at home', where researchers have a vast implicit and explicit background knowledge of the field they are studying and focus on small elements of their own society instead of the culture of a completely unknown society (ibid.). The empirical data collection was divided into three periods: summer 2009, summer 2010 and winter 2010-2011. It proceeded as follows:

1. Participant observation at Tokiwa Preschool[42] in summer 2009. I stayed in Star class (3-5 year-olds) three afternoons a week for 1.5 months to observe children's conversation and play, and to refine my research topics. I wrote field-notes and took pictures of what children had shown to me.
2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 mothers whose children were between eight months and five years old in summer 2009. The mothers were recruited first from a social network site, *mixi*, and then through snowball sampling. E-mail contact was made before and after the interviews. The interviews were recorded on a tape recorder and transcribed by me.
3. Participant observation at Momiji Preschool in summer 2010. I stayed in Lilly class (5-year-olds) for eight hours, three days a week for 1.5 months. In contrast to the participant observation at Tokiwa Preschool, I was encouraged to spend a lot of time and interact with the children by the classroom teacher. I wrote field-notes, took some pictures of activities and also recorded their conversations.
4. Lilly class at Momiji Preschool was revisited in the winter 2010-2011 for 1.5 months. Also, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five mothers whose children were between six months and four years old in winter 2010. Four

[42] The preschool names have been changed.

mothers were revisited from the previous year, and one mother was newly added via *mixi*. One mother was interviewed in 2012 during a further short stay.

According to Silverman (2010), it is necessary to address the researcher's relationship with the people in his/her study as this is bound to affect his/her findings. In ethnographic studies, using participant observation and interviews, the researcher-researched relationship has been a continuing interest because this relationship helps to co-construct particular versions of 'reality' (ibid.: 272). In the following sections, I will first describe the preschool settings since some contextual characteristics have shaped the outcomes of the analysis.

4.7. Preschool Contexts: Tokiwa Preschool and Momiji Preschool

Between 2009 and 2011, I conducted participant observation in two local preschools, Tokiwa Preschool and Momiji Preschool. Children's peer culture obviously exists in particular cultural and social contexts. Since my intention is not to generalise or construct a representation of young children's everyday lives in Japan as a whole, it is necessary first to describe where and how my participant observation was conducted.

Both preschools – Tokiwa Preschool and Momiji Preschool – are *hoikuen* (day-care centres), meaning institutions for early childhood education and care for infants and toddlers. Both are highly structured, managed and controlled environments designed to support their physical and psychological development and social knowledge. Preschools offer an ordered temporal passage based on children's age like other schools in compulsory education; and, as Thorne (1993: 138-139) points out, "the age-grading of schools assumes that individuals of the same chronological age, who move together step by step through the institution, will remain similar in cognitive and physical development." Like other *hoikuen* in Japan, in both Tokiwa Preschool and Momiji Preschool, most children from three months to six years old spend the day there, usually from 8am to 5pm, or in some cases as long as 7am till 8pm. The preschools were selected on the basis of their geographical and historical contexts. Both preschools were established in the 1970s, when the new commuter town welcomed families with young children and developed in line with broader national economic growth. Both preschools are located in an ordinary residential area with a cluster of houses and tall residential

buildings of the kind that can be found in many other cities in Japan. The catchment area for both preschools is quite homogeneous: all the children are of Japanese ethnic heritage, and there were no ethnic differences within my sample. In terms of social class, the area is equally homogeneous: even though Japan has become a society with a widening income disparity between rich and poor (see Tamura, 2013; Yasuda, 2013), the income disparity is much less than in many other counties (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Since both of the preschools are non-selective, and recruit children from across the surrounding community, I assumed that they would provide me with relevant data about children's role as consumers and children's peer culture.

***Table 1*: Preschool descriptions**

Preschool name	Tokiwa	Momiji
Open hours	M-F: 7am-6pm Sat: 7am-4pm	M-F: 7am-5pm Sat: 7am-4pm
Extended hours	M-F: 6pm-8pm Sat: 4pm-6pm	M-F: 5pm-7pm
Number of children	200	150
Status	Private	Private
Age of children	3 months-6 years old	3 months-6 years old

Both preschools share common characteristics as *hoikuen* as the table above illustrates. The class size is relatively big compared to those in the Western contexts I have worked in (see Chapter 4) – about 25 children (both boys and girls) aged 3-5 spend the day with one teacher – and daily activities include greetings, group-based responsibilities, provided lunch, nap, indoor/outdoor activities and play time. Both preschools implement particular lessons, such as an English conversation lesson, given by an external teacher. Tokiwa Preschool has additional lessons such as *kanji*[43] education, writing and the tea ceremony. In both schools, extra-curricular lessons – piano, calligraphy, soccer and swimming – are offered for those who pay additional fees. The

[43] *Kanji* are the adopted logographic Chinese characters that are used in the modern Japanese writing system along with *hiragana* and *katakana*. Japanese children usually start learning them in primary school.

children in both preschools wear a uniform on the way to and from preschool and change into more comfortable clothes during the day.

As marketing campaigns directed at young children have increased, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, both preschools I attended have become very concerned about changes in childhood relating to commercialisation through media. The principal at Momiji Preschool mentioned that they used to show an educational-entertainment TV programme called *Okāsan to issho* (Together with Mother)[44] and read picture books featuring commercialised characters such as *Anpanman*[45] in the classroom, but over the past several years those activities have been stopped. She said that children have enough access to media and to picture books with popular characters at home. Now, the TV has been removed from the classrooms, the picture books with TV related cartoons or other commercialised characters have been eliminated from the book shelves, and traditional picture books and new books unrelated to merchandised characters are used[46]. Both preschools seem to create a space relatively free[47] from commercialisation, following 'traditional' notions of childhood where children can control their play and other activities using their own imagination and creativity, instead of toys and materials controlling and limiting their play and activities. For this reason, in both preschools, bringing personal toys or personal belongings that are deemed unnecessary for the preschool is prohibited. Despite the relatively commercial free environment, there were several character goods, for example relating to *Thomas and Friends* and *Anpanman*, and several animation songs that I recognised from my childhood, such as *Doraemon* and *My Neighbour Totoro*, which were used by the teachers in the singing activity. The common background features of these characters or animations are that they are generationally-shared (long-running), and seen to be educational and to convey good

[44] One of the popular TV programmes among preschool children shown in the morning (it is rerun in the late afternoon). It has been broadcast by NHK (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation) since 1959.
[45] *Anpanman* written by Takashi Yanase first came out in children's books in 1970s and has been on TV since 1988 (Soreike! Anmanpan 2010). In 2009, *Anpanman* became the verified Guinness World Record Holder for the highest number of characters in an animated franchise; by March 27 2009, 1768 characters had appeared in the first 980 episodes of the TV series and the first 20 Anpanman films (Anime News Network 2009). Anpanman characters have been highly merchandised, through toys, clothes, and food over the last ten years.
[46] Momiji Preschool had *Shimajirō* picture books donated by parents which are part of *Kodomo Challenge* – a correspondence course (see Chapter 3).
[47] As I have discussed in relation to character culture in Chapter 3, preschool teachers themselves are generally tolerant towards licensed characters and products.

values. While the preschool ethos and management seemed to stand against my aim to conduct research on children's consumption practices, one of my intentions was to observe how children develop their own peer consumer culture and negotiate with both explicit and implicit preschool rules: peer culture overlaps with preschool culture, which is constructed, shared and reworked through everyday interactions not only among children but also with teachers through routinized greeting, singing, free play, crafting, drawing, cleaning, taking a nap and eating lunch and snacks. Children's demonstration of products, knowledge and experiences are linked to their sense of belonging and to forms of pleasure, power and prestige. Elements of peer consumer culture are manifested during formal preschool activities such as story-telling, drawing, crafting and singing as well as during free play.

Despite commonalities between the two preschools, there were several differences between them. Firstly, unlike most preschools in Japan, including Momiji Preschool whose classes are divided based on children's age, Tokiwa Preschool uses a vertical intergrade system in the classroom: for example, Star class had 27 children from different age groups between 3 and 5 years old[48]. The children were divided into three sub-groups within the classroom on the basis of their age[49], and throughout everyday activities, their practices were often monitored and managed based on these subgroups with respect to where, how, and with whom they could spend their time. The oldest group (Bird group) primarily took the role of *tōban* (duty monitors) and was responsible for the younger groups (Fish group and Frog group): being the oldest therefore meant prestige to the children. This mixed-age interaction often strengthened a sense of belonging to one's own age group (see Chapter 6) as well as empathy and anticipation for the needs of younger ones (also see Tobin et al., 2009).

The second difference is that there were two Lilly classes of 5-year-old children at Momiji Preschool – the one I stayed with had 25 children and the other 20 – in two partly divided classrooms, and these 45 children in Lilly class did most of their daily activities together with the two classroom teachers. Unlike in Tokiwa Preschool, where

[48] There were 9 three-year-olds, 7 four-year-olds and 11 five-year-olds.
[49] The five-year-olds belonged to Bird group, the four-year-olds to Fish group and the three-year-olds to Frog group.

children were sub-grouped based on their age, the 45 children of the same age were divided into five mix-gendered subgroups[50] based on the teachers' careful observation, and the members of each group took a daily rotated turn as *tōban*. As illustrated in Chapter 3, the concept of *groupism* is the foundation of classroom management in preschools.

Thirdly, Tokiwa Preschool implements a particular educational method [51] whose philosophy eliminates stimulation from the media and consumer culture but promotes children's development of the senses and self-construction through method-based materials, toys and activities: literacy and numeracy are introduced earlier and practiced more intensively than in other ordinary preschools. In contrast to Momiji Preschool, outside play took place less often and free play sometimes involved teacher instruction. Moreover, the teachers at Tokiwa Preschool seemed to keep more distance from the children than those at Momiji Preschool. I witnessed more casual conversations and interactions between the classroom teacher and the children at Momiji Preschool. One might think that the educational method used at Tokiwa Preschool would make an enormous difference to the findings, although in fact half of the preschools in Japan, including both Momiji Preschool and Tokiwa Preschool, are private and follow a variety of unique educational philosophies and methods. Even though Tokiwa Preschool promoted a particular educational method, children's interest in certain products, media and technologies were quite similar to those of the children at Momiji Preschool. What was different was the teacher's reaction to my questions about these children's interests.

While I have discussed different perceptions of friendship among young children in Chapter 2, in the next section I will illustrate children's social relationships with the two preschools in my research.

[50] The sub-group making at Momiji Preschool was reviewed every half year. In summer 2010, there were five groups: Giraffe, Elephant, Rabbit, Lion and Frog, in winter 2010, there were new five groups: Lemon, Grapes, Peach, Orange and Melon.
[51] Since their educational method can become an indicator to identify the preschool, I have intentionally avoided mentioning the details of this. All the teachers hold an appropriate childcare certificate and learn the method when they start working.

4.8. Access to the Preschools

4.8.1. Negotiation with gatekeepers

The nature of children's lives in preschools means that they are hardly free to decide whether or not to participate in research. They are surrounded by adults who act as 'gatekeepers', controlling researchers' access and children's opportunities to express their perspectives (Masson, 2004). This makes field entry a crucial step in ethnographic research in this context. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 74), "seeking the permission of gatekeepers or the support of sponsors is often an unavoidable first step in gaining access to the data." The relationship and trust established with such people have important consequences in the course of the research.

As the aim of my fieldwork was to investigate young children's consumption practices through peer culture, I first contacted several preschools in Fukuoka to ask for permission to conduct participant observation by sending a letter from Norway half year in advance. The letter included my personal information and research interests, as well as references. Insiders' support and the fact that I was going to do research in my home town, which added to my insider status, helped me gain consent from the principals fairly easily. As many researchers on Japanese culture have noted (Bachnik, 1992; Burke, 2008; Peak, 1991) and I also mentioned above regarding interviews with mothers at their home, insider/outsider (*uchi/soto*) modes still matter a lot in Japanese culture when developing relationships.

In the absence of an official guideline for conducting research with children in Japan, the mutual and verbal negotiation between the principal and me was key to open the gate to the field site. As gaining access involves drawing on interpersonal resources and strategies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), there is however a question of how far research details should be told to the gatekeepers up-front and also what kind of prospective return or contribution is to be offered to the host institutions. In terms of the first question, I presumed from everyday media discussions that my research topic of children's consumption practices would make a negative impression on preschool teachers. This issue became clear when I first had a meeting with the principal at

Tokiwa Preschool: the principal rolled her eyes and said "Children have been so spoiled these days, and parents don't know how to discipline their children." As I look back now, I remember that I carefully showed my interest in what the preschool provides to the children as well as in what children say and do, attempting to gain trust by appealing to the professional pride of the preschool authorities. My presentation to the principal and the classroom teacher most likely encouraged their acceptance and trust in the course of my participant observation. However, I learned that access negotiation can involve a variety of views about what is free and open to investigation versus what is closed and even taboo. As for the second question about reciprocity, the offer of my 'help' in the classroom in exchange for co-operation became an obstacle. During my first participant observation at Momiji Preschool, I tended to lose my role as a 'researcher' because my 'help' in the two Lilly classrooms became taken for granted by the teachers. During my second visit, I brought this issue up and managed to spend as much time as possible with the children, while continuing to help the teachers during children's nap time. At Momiji Preschool, the teachers seemed to have valued the interaction between the children and me, and this enhanced good communication and relationships with the teachers.

As illustrated above, aligning with gatekeepers is crucial when negotiating access to children. Yet my cultural insider-ness or native-ness functioned both as advantage and disadvantage. While gaining access to the field was relatively uncomplicated, there was unspoken cultural pressure and expectation of me as a Japanese, female and guest, a form of so-called "tacit cultural knowledge" (Spradley, 1980) which I had to overcome through reflexivity (also see Kim, 2002). The next section describes the process of establishing relationships with the children in the two preschools.

4.8.2. Building rapport

As I am originally from Fukuoka and the implications of my gender (female) and age (in my early 30s) fit well in the preschool settings, this placed me in a privileged position to be accepted and supported by the gatekeepers – teachers and parents – as well as enabling me to be at ease with the children. Since all the adults working in the preschool are *sensei* (teachers) to the children, many called me 'Takahashi Mayumi

sensei', and some 'Ms. Guest'. By contrast, the preschool teachers never used the term *sensei* for me, preferring to call me 'Ms. Takahashi' and 'big sister' to identify me to the children. In order to develop cooperative and close relationships with children, I spent time with them by engaging in free play and daily activities, eating lunch together[52], and exchanging our interests. My primary intention was to avoid a preschool teacher role and adopt an atypical adult participant observer role (Corsaro, 2005; Mandell, 1991) that reduces the institutional power between me as an adult and the children. Meanwhile, I was careful to keep a balance between the gatekeepers (the classroom teachers) and the children, especially after my participant observation at Tokiwa Preschool was curtailed. Research with children presupposes good communication and understanding with the gatekeepers. Heavily child-focused observation might trigger gatekeepers' sense of exclusion or misunderstanding and imply disrespect to their institutional authority. Therefore, the aim throughout the research was "to maintain a more or less marginal position, thereby providing access to participant perspectives but at the same time minimizing the dangers of over-rapport" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 112).

Since children's preschool life was very structured with many kinds of instructional activities, the amount of time I could freely interact with the children was limited, and was usually confined to free play, lunch time and transitions between activities. Even so, my stance was to respect children by not disturbing them unless they invited me or included me in the conversation or play. I sat with children during formal activities, played with them in free time, and conducted open-ended interviews following their on-going conversations. In order to build rapport with children, I focused primarily on learning about peer cultures, sharing aspects of the preschool context, and also introducing information about my own childhood play. The first several visits included a lot of questions from the children, which I now see as some sort of testing to see whether or not I was worth talking with or including (also see Chapter 6). Their questions or statements made me feel insecure and incompetent because despite being a 'childhood researcher', I often had no clue what they were talking about. My first few days of fieldwork were therefore spent learning about children's interests in order to

[52] In both preschools, the teachers ate at a separate table in the same room.

build rapport. I started watching their favourite TV programmes and learned the names of popular characters so that I could at least have a say in their conversation. In addition to learning about their interests, participating in the preschool context – singing songs of seasonal events, playing tag and keeping secrets – enabled me to do things together with them instead of just being there and watching. Moreover, I actively introduced my own childhood play to the children. Two action songs introduced by me became very popular among several children in one of the Lilly classes, and by the time of my second visit – five months later, everybody in both Lilly classes was able to sing these action songs. My role was therefore to become an 'adult-included-in-the-community', who took part in children's activities in ways that crossed the boundary of generational and power relations (also see Johansson, 2011). In order to build rapport with children, I did not rely so much on verbal conversation but on physical presence and appeal, so that they knew I was open for their approach. Objects, knowledge and activities often functioned as a medium of interaction where I could follow up and elaborate on their ideas and interests. Again, as a researcher doing research in my home town, I was afforded a privileged position to learn, share and introduce cultural contexts and establish relationships based on that. I will analyse instances of this in later chapters.

4.8.3. Ethical considerations

Several research-related obligations are contained in the ethical guidelines of the National Committee for Research Ethics in Norway (NESH) (2006) – *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities*. These include obligations to respect human dignity, integrity, freedom and participation; to prevent harm and suffering; to inform research subjects about the purpose of the study; to obtain free and informed consent; to respect children's right to protection; to respect individuals' privacy and close relationships; to ensure confidentiality; and to recognise the values and views of research subjects. As pointed out above, there are no such formal standardised guidelines for research ethics in Japan (see Steinhoff et al., 2003), particularly for children (Kurihara, 2007), and so my fieldwork was conducted based on NESH and two ethical approaches suggested by Alderson (2004: 98): the principles of respect and justice and rights-based research.

In terms of the principles of respect and justice, I avoided treating the people in the preschools as only data providers, but rather attempted to establish fair relationships based on respect and consideration. With this approach, I was relaxed in interactions with children: I did not chase them to ask questions or lead particular activities solely for the purpose of involving children in my research. As described above, I spent a lot of time 'hanging out' and being there in the classroom to make my least-adult presence as natural as possible for the children. Like the Japanese preschool children depicted in *Preschool in Three Cultures Revised* (Tobin et al., 2009), the children in my research were shy and hesitant to express their feelings, ideas and opinions in a formal question-answer situation. They often answered in a barely audible voice even in the everyday morning meeting where each *tōban* answered the teacher's simple questions, such as about breakfast and weekend activities (also see ibid.: 124). Therefore, my way of respecting children involved giving them a space and being careful about "observer effects" where "children learn to manage their feelings and emotional expressions to correspond with adult [preschool teacher] expectations" (Hatch, 1995: xiii). I had to slow down and wait until the children felt safe with me and were ready to take part in my research. In this manner, they could also choose whether or not they wanted to actively interact with me.

Secondly, I was aware of children's rights to protection and participation. In order to ensure confidentiality, the names of the preschools and participants have been changed. Also, children's conversations and interactions that could directly or indirectly expose the subjects to a problem were not disclosed. In terms of children's rights to participation, the children in my study were informed about the purpose of the research and their views were listened to and valued by me. They were informed by the teacher and by me of my role in the classroom and the intention of my research, but in a fairly limited way. In both preschools, the teachers told the children that I studied in a university in a foreign country and I was wanting to learn about their preschool life. The teachers emphasised that I would not take a teacher role but help with their activities. I also added that I would write a 'book' about them in the future.

When conducting research in an institutional setting, consent raises hard, often unresolvable questions (Alderson, 2004). In my research, the principal's permission enabled me to access children in both preschools. However, there are still questions whether or not the principal's permission was sufficient or whether I should have also asked every child and parent for consent. The principals themselves told me that this was not necessary; and they were concerned that informing the parents and requesting their consent would prompt anxiety especially if it meant asking them to sign a formal document. Steinhoff et al. (2003) point out that since interpersonal trust is often valued more than formal documents in Japan, written consent can be viewed with distrust: legalistic consent requirements "would call into question of the researcher's cultural understanding and trustworthiness" (ibid: 14). Therefore, the purpose of my presence in the classroom was left vague to the parents, and to this extent, I have to admit that 'informed consent' was limited. However, this does not mean that I avoided meeting the parents. Even though the preschools did not officially inform the parents of my presence, some children must have told their parents about me, probably referring to me as '*sensei*' (teacher) or 'Ms. Guest'. Some parents I greeted and talked with in the classrooms indeed knew that I was 'studying' the children's everyday life, and I assume that this was the children's explanation to their parents.

Kurihara (2007) states in her article *Ethics in Research involving Children* that in Japan ethics in research involving children have not been as extensively developed or discussed as they have in the US and Europe (also see Steinhoff et al., 2003). Without standardised guidelines for childhood researchers to conduct fieldwork in Japan, particularly in the setting of early educational institutions, I nevertheless took into account the ethical guidelines established by the Japan Society of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education (2007). Its research considerations include providing information about research purposes and contents to informants and collaborators. It states that if informants have difficulties in understanding and making an agreement with the researcher, it is necessary to obtain agreement with a person who is in a position to protect the informants and collaborators. In my research, the person who was in a position to protect the children (and the teachers) and took full responsibility for my participant observation in the classroom was the principal. According to Steinhoff et al.

(2003: 14), editors of *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*, "[t]he person providing an introduction is – in a very real cultural sense – accepting a role as social guarantor." As a researcher with a Japanese cultural background, I was careful to honour the "complex obligations to act responsibly and not misuse or damage the trust" (ibid.: 14) I obtained from the preschool principals. Therefore, even though I acknowledged the research ethics pursued in the US and Europe, particularly the issue of parental consent in terms of research involving children, I was not completely able to follow the ethical requirements which are taken for granted, for example in Norway.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I focused too much on children's views, interests and participation when I started my observation at Tokiwa Preschool. Following a particular educational method and being proud of their professional care, the principal and the classroom teacher, in response to my questions about children's consumption practices, seemed offended, as though I was criticising them. They are advocates of a commercial free environment, and saw my study as being in conflict with their educational philosophy. Even though it was children talking to me about character goods and toys, I, as an adult who had initiated the conversation, was ultimately seen as a contaminator or unwelcome guest. It became gradually obvious that the teachers wanted me to write about the 'positive' aspects of their educational method and focus on their perspectives rather than those of the children. As van Meijl (2005) notes from his anthropological studies, I was confronted with dilemmas posed by the differing expectations and interests of me as a researcher and of the principal and the teachers as gatekeepers.

The culturally embedded hierarchy and politeness interfered in our open communication and negotiation, and I could not accept their suggestions about what would be most beneficial for Tokiwa Preschool. After a month of my stay in Star class, the classroom teacher, not the principal, cut short my participant observation, saying: "The children are confused about the presence of another adult who is not a teacher." The preschool had a plan to receive student teachers from universities which would overlap with my presence in the classroom. In preschools in Japan, all the adults working in the

classroom are certified teachers[53], so she had a valid point about my ambiguous role there, particularly if student teachers would be also staying in the same classroom. However, I do not think the teacher cut short my observation period because of children's confusion, but I suspect, because of the unfavourable combination of research topic and target informant. The principal and the classroom teacher did not seem to have issues with my research topic – peer consumer culture – as long as their preschool's method-based activities and materials were valued. Yet I was not especially interested in their methods: my focus was more on children's conversations and interactions while they were doing the method-based activities and using the method-based materials. The preschool authorities did not seem to be pleased with my choice of target informants nor my research focus. Ultimately, I got the feeling that it was the classroom teacher who was confused about and uncomfortable with another adult spending time and space with the children in the classroom. This feeling of peculiarity and suspicion from adults was also encountered by Mandell (1991), who shared enthusiasm with children and was accepted by them. The children in my study, who were still willing to participate in my research, were told by the teacher that I just had to leave. Despite this, the data collected at Tokiwa Preschool are used in this thesis because the principal and the classroom teacher had agreed to me using the data at the outset. I did not ask about permission again on my last day at Tokiwa Preschool because I had no reason to think they would have changed their view, particularly since the names of the preschool and the children are kept anonymous.

Throughout these two sections, I have discussed preschool contexts, access to the preschools, building rapport and ethical considerations. While I value young children's practices and views, the role of the mothers in relation to children's consumption cannot be ignored: young children are dependent on them as primary caregivers in a variety of ways (see 2.4.2). The following section explores the interviews with mothers.

[53] Some future preschool teachers, who have taken a certain level of early childhood education, also work for a period as part of training.

4.9. Mothers of Young Children

As I discussed in relation to mothers' caring consumption in Chapter 2, their maintenance of relationships, responsibility for choices, and anticipation of the future through consumption for children is highly significant, especially for young children. The mothers of young children with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews were recruited separately from the preschools due to the ethical considerations of the preschools, as explained above. 12 mothers in total were recruited both through a social networking site, *mixi*[54], and snowball sampling. There was a local community on *mixi* where mothers of young children exchanged information and made friends, and I posted a note about my research interests, requesting interviews. My profile, including name, CV and pictures were available to them before replying to my message. Since this community is area-based, the members' intention is to look for public events and make friends in the same geographical area, in contrast with other topic-based communities such as those based on childrearing and education. As mothers of young children who usually stay at home, most of them seemed to be looking for an opportunity to spend time with somebody somewhere during the day time.

The informants were between early 30s and early 40s in age, and they had one or two children as shown in the table below. Their educational background was above upper secondary school level, and all of them had worked before getting married or conceiving a child. One mother was single and worked part-time, but the other 11 mothers were married and full-time house wives, while their husbands were working long hours. All the mothers preferred informal and verbal research consent, and going through a list of ethical considerations and signing a document was felt to be superfluous (also see Steinhoff et al., 2003).

[54] The Japanese social networking site *mixi* was founded in 2004. It functions like *Facebook*, and the users can create and join communities based on their interests and make new connections.

Table 2: List of mothers

	mother's name	child's name	sex	2009	2011	2012
1	Asuka	Akira	boy	4y7m		
2	Fumiko	Kai	boy	5y		
		Yutaka	boy	1y5m		
3	Mako	Yūka	girl	3y11m	4y	
		Rio	girl	1y1m	2y6m	
4	Namiko	Yūma	boy	3y		
5	Naoko	Aito	boy	1y		
6	Sumi	Kao	girl	2y3m		
		Koto	girl	3m		
7	Tae	Yuna	girl	2y7m	4y1m	
8	Tomoko	Ryūta	boy	2y10m	3y4m	
9	Toshiko	Saya	girl	8m	1y2m	2y3m
10	Uko	Saki	girl		3y6m	
		Mari	girl		6m	
11	Yōko	Koharu	girl	4y5m		
		Shintarō	boy	2y11m		
12	Yoshiko	Kōshin	boy	2y1m		

y: year(s)
m: month(s)

The interviews were conducted at their homes or in public settings and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. As elaborated in Chapter 2, the constructionist approach treats data as providing various stories or narratives through which people represent their own world. The claim of this approach is that "by abandoning the attempt to treat respondents' accounts as potentially 'true' pictures of 'reality', we open up for analysis the culturally rich methods through which interviewers and interviewees, in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world" (Silverman, 2010: 225 [emphasis in original]). In order to avoid a reductionist approach, I began with three relatively open research questions: What kinds of toys do the children have at home and how do they use them? What kinds of concerns do mothers have about children's everyday activities? How do the mothers negotiate with their own and children's consumption practices? In the process of the interviews, I reflected on the mothers' responses and asked specific questions based on what they showed interest in and concern about, such as character

goods, media and educational matters. As mentioned earlier, establishing a frank conversation between a guest (researcher) and a host (researched) in the context of the home was not simple, and in fact, the mothers often attempted to show the 'good' part of their mothering by displaying educational toys and avoiding talking about their personal experiences. In this kind of situation, the children often broke the ice by showing their favourite toys, and giving us an opportunity to expand our conversation in a more comfortable manner. I also have to admit that my knowledge gained from the participant observation at preschools helped me share the 'trends' among young children with the mothers, and that relaxed them and enabled them to talk more frankly about their dilemmas. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I spent time 'chatting' with them in several cases, which included observations in grocery stores, shopping malls and indoor play facilities for the children. This helped me to engage with their ideas and experiences in greater depth. Through the semi-structured interviews at home and in other places, I realised the importance of not only gaining information through 'listening' but also empathising – attempting to understand and share what the mothers would be experiencing, thinking and feeling. As I have discussed in relation to reflexivity, the mothers also reflected on my knowledge and experiences of their everyday practices, and accordingly we, in concert, generated "plausible accounts of the world" (Silverman, 2010: 225).

4.10. Data Collection

4.10.1. Field-notes

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 175) note that the writing of field-notes "constitute[s] a central research activity, and it should be carried out with as much care and self-conscious awareness as possible." They believe that taking field-notes – a traditional ethnographic method – is still an important way of obtaining rich information in ethnographic research. Yet, it is not a straightforward task: like any other intellectual craft, some care and attention to detail are prerequisite. "The standard injunction, 'write down what you see and hear', glosses over a number of important issues. Among other things, the fieldworker will want to ask *what* to write down, *how* to write it down, and *when* to write it down'" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 176 [emphasis in original]).

They assert that sufficient note-taking needs to be worked at and is a skill demanding continuous assessment of purposes and priorities. I employed two forms of taking notes. The first one was descriptive field-notes in which I sketched activities, events, conversations and interactions I observed in the preschools and the interviews with the mothers. During the observations and interviews, I jotted down important points in my note book. I wrote down a detailed description immediately after the observation and interview, by using the notes and my memory. The second one was reflective field-notes, in which I wrote down my own reflections on the activities, events, conversations and interactions I observed, and began to generate interpretations of them.

4.10.2. Audio recording and video recording

Audio and video recording offer various options for data collection and storage. Audio recording was mostly used during the interview with the mothers so that I could prevent any data losses and focus on the conversation and interaction with them instead of note-taking. By recording the data, I avoided disturbing the natural context of conversation between the mother and myself. A small audio recorder was placed to one side and this hardly seemed to create any discomfort. Video-recording was primarily used in the preschool in order to document the daily routines and interactions in the classroom: this allowed me to remember the atmosphere and the settings where children took part in activities. Since the overemphasis on audio-recordings and video-recordings can distort the researcher's "sense of 'the field', by focusing data collection on what can be recorded, and concentrating attention on the analysis of spoken action" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 187 [emphasis in original]), I did not rely too much on the recording equipment, but rather used this more as a supplementary method.

4.10.3. Photography

The use of photography is a well-established method in anthropology. I used photography to obtain images of informants and contexts and supplement the field-notes. Through photographs, I produced still visual images of the contexts where data was collected. The visual images also included objects, such as toys and materials used at home, and children's drawings, which I found difficult to describe in words. Like

video-recording, taking photos during interviews and activities distracted informants' attention and disturbed the setting, and therefore, this method was used only when the informants were prepared to have photos taken. In the process of building rapport with the preschool children, this photo-taking helped me create friendly relationships: they liked to see the images of their own drawings and origami-making in the camera. These photos are however not included in this thesis.

4.11. Data Transcription, Translation and Analysis

4.11.1. The process of analysis

I began the process of data analysis by scrutinizing and compiling the information gathered in the field-notes, audio- and video-recordings and photographs. Immediately after the observations and interviews, I enriched my descriptive field-notes by using jotted-down points and my memory, and wrote down my reflections on the activities, events, conversations and interactions. All the recorded data were first transcribed and then translated from Japanese into English by myself. For data analysis, I used thematic analysis: transcripts and typed field-notes were categorised into different ideas and themes through NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. The advantage of using NVivo was that I could efficiently organise the data by coding the text and breaking it down into more manageable chunks. It was easy to import Word documents and code these documents on the screen. Since coding stripes were visible in the margins of the documents, I could see at a glance which codes had been used where. Moreover, I could insert memos about particular parts of the texts, so preliminary analyses and comments were written as I read these documents. Categories were generated through open coding categorisation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) with points of departure in existing literature and also from the research data itself. A problem I had in this process was that I began by making too many codes and multiple synonyms. However, the initial codes that were identified were compared, and then overlapping ideas were gathered into broader thematic groups. This was relatively easy with NVivo, and would have been more time consuming, if, for example, I were cutting and pasting pieces of texts manually.

Despite its various functions, using software was not central to the data analysis process in my thesis: NVivo in fact only dealt with the administrative task of facilitating the data processing more efficiently (also see Welsh, 2002). Even though the data were coded and categorised, I went through the coded texts as well as my memos in order to explore how the data were linked together. Also, as coded extracts of data on NVivo could be decontextualised from the whole picture, I often went back to the entire data set instead of analysing only the coded extracts. In the process of linking the data, I made use of thematic reading and cross-case analysis: it was necessary to constantly triangulate my observation data by using other theoretical and empirical literature to increase the validity of the research. The difficulties in doing this included finding relevant theoretical frameworks to correspond with my interpretation of the data and to make sense of a big picture of what was happening. The analysis thus entailed a mixture of allowing the data to 'speak for themselves' and approaching the data in light of existing theoretical concepts (Welsh, 2002).

4.11.2. Data transcription

Data recorded with audio- and video- recorders were transcribed immediately after the observations and interviews in order to be organised and analysed. Some video-recordings were left as they were, only to remind me of the atmospheres and settings. A transcription machine with a foot pedal was used to transfer the oral texts into written electronic texts. The process demanded time, patience, concentration and energy. After transcribing a text, I replayed the recorder to check my transcription, and some other information such as voice tones, facial expressions and body postures were added. This process was aimed at transformation of voice data to written data without changes in content, meaning and structure.

4.11.3. Data translation

I translated the transcribed data and field-notes from Japanese – the language of the participants and myself – to English. Translation of conversational texts from one language to another is one of the challenges in ethnographic studies, as oral materials entail local and cultural terms, symbols, expressions and images, which might not be

easily transformed to English words. Sechrest et al. (1972: 41) state that "[e]quivalence in idiom and in grammar and syntax may be important, but equivalence in terms of experiences and concepts tapped is probably most important of all. Direct translation cannot be assumed to produce equivalent versions of verbal stimuli." With the aim of solving this challenge, I used the form of communicative translation presented by Newmark (1981) in an attempt to make translated texts acceptable and comprehensible to the non-Japanese readership. "Communicative translation addresses itself solely to the second reader who does not anticipate difficulties or obscurities, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture as well as his language where necessary" (Newmark, 1981: 39). My aim was to maintain the meaning and flavour of the original text, but some of the cultural nuances and quality of the original texts may nonetheless be lost. Some of the Japanese terms are therefore left in the original with definition and explanation in footnotes.

4.11.4. Data analysis

In the data analysis, I first worked on the data from participant observation at the two preschools: this attempt to grasp children's views and practices ultimately became Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 in this thesis. The mothers' interview data were analysed separately from the data with the preschool children in Chapter 5 because they did not have direct connections with the children or the preschool context. For data analysis, I used thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79).

After the careful reading of transcribed and translated data, I coded and categorised the data, as already mentioned, on NVivo. Coding the data disaggregated the field-notes or transcripts into series of fragments (ideas and instances), which were then regrouped under a series of thematic headings (Atkinson, 1992: 455). In this phase, I used mind-maps on a separate piece of paper to play around with organising them into theme piles. Some initial codes became main themes, whereas others became sub-themes, and still others were miscellaneous. For example, there were data of boys talking about superhero TV characters and girls talking about magical girl TV characters. They were first coded as 'character_recognition' on NVivo but later on recoded as 'possession' and

'knowledge'. Most of these coded extracts were also regrouped under two thematic headings of 'belonging' and 'gender_identity'. The larger themes such as 'belonging' and 'gender_identity' did not just 'emerge' from the data set: rather, I as a researcher played an active role in identifying patterns, selecting which were of interest and deciding which themes would be important to my research questions. The themes or patterns within data were identified in an inductive way: the themes identified were closely linked to the data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, I have to note that I was not free of my theoretical and epistemological assumptions: right from the start of my data collection, I acted as a kind of theme filter, often subconsciously choosing what data were important to record and what data were not. As Ryan and Bernard (2003: 100) suggest, "producing field notes is a process of identifying themes."

In the phase of reviewing the themes, I attempted to analyse the data from a constructionist perspective, going beyond the semantic or explicit content (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). I read relevant literature related to the identified themes and looked for similarities and differences in order to check if there were any consistencies and patterns, for example with regard to topics, terms, activities and conversations. Analytical concepts spontaneously emerged and were developed through *triangulation* of my empirical data with other theoretical and empirical literature. "The term 'triangulation' derives from a loose analogy with navigation and surveying" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 231 [emphasis in original]): it is a way to combine and cross-check one's research indicators with other research sources and to find landmarks on a map. While this interactive process of comparing allowed me to check the validity and reliability of my research findings, some of my interpretations were inconsistent or even directly conflicting. For example, when I looked at young children's relationships in the preschool, their temporary connectedness and belongingness conflicted with aspects associated with the general concept of "friendship" such as stable mutuality, commitment, reciprocity and intimacy. This pushed me into a more complex and context-respecting set of understandings and discussions and made my findings more trustworthy as well as unique. In the process of reading and interpreting the data, I often asked myself these following questions: What does this theme/concept mean? Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way? What kinds of conditions are likely to

have given rise to it? What is the overall story the different themes reveal? As Welsh (2002) points out, it is possible and legitimate that different researchers would weave different tapestries from the same available material, but being transparent about the researcher's background, questions and observation experiences enhances the quality and trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Finally, I should emphasise that this thesis contains different levels of theoretical analysis. The theoretical framework in Chapter 2 consists of macro theories that apply to large scale systems of social relations: this often involves tracing linkages across time and space (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In the three analysis chapters, by contrast, analytical frameworks with middle- and small-range theories were applied. This approach enabled me to analyse local forms of social organisation. For instance, in Chapter 2 I explored the broad concept of social identities through consumption practices, which was relevant to the data analysis of both preschool observation and interviews with mothers. However, in Chapter 7, this concept is elaborated through the data analysis by using middle-range concepts such as the internal-external dialectic of identification and smaller-scale concepts such as secondary adjustment and borderwork. This integration of macro and micro levels also enables me to show variation in the scope of cases in this study.

The next chapter introduces the first analysis of the empirical data, and explores mothers' ideological dilemmas through caring consumption.

Chapter 5

Constructing Motherhood through Caring Consumption[55]

Consumption of goods and services is a large part of mother's lives in Japan, especially for mothers of young children, as I illustrated in Chapter 3. Once the pregnancy enters a stable period, the proper crib, stroller, car seat, bottle and clothes are listed, scrutinised, selected, purchased, communicated to relatives and friends, and received as gifts. Even after birth, both brand-new and used clothes and toys are continuously provided to the young child, often on dates other than traditional gift-oriented celebrations such as birthdays and Christmas. This kind of consumption practice often involves the father, grandparents, extended family members and friends, but ideologically it is the mother who assumes most of the responsibility and decision making involved in rearing her young child on a daily basis[56] (see NWEC, 2006).

Consumption practices of mothers in relation to children are typically infused by feelings of compromise, love and guilt. These are cases where caregiving is replaced by the purchase of goods by women who spend little time with their children due to the increase in divorce rates (Haugen, 2007; Pugh, 2002), the characteristically unstable financial situation of single parenthood (Pugh, 2009) or career-oriented professionalism (Pugh, 2005; Thompson, 1996). In my study, the latter issues did not play a significant role, as all the mothers except for one were married and gravitated towards spending most of their time with their young children at home while their husbands were working overtime (see Chapter 4). Still, consumption practices in connection with young children were a great concern for them.

In this chapter, I will look at the ideological dilemmas mothers experience through practices of "caring consumption" (Thompson, 1996). This term refers to the situation where mothers as primary caregivers take responsibility for products, services and

[55] A part of this chapter was published in an article titled "Ideological Dilemmas: Constructing Caring Consumption in Japan" (Takahashi, 2014) in *Young Consumers*.

[56] International research on the time spent on/with children and how fathers and mothers are involved in childrearing indicates that mothers in Japan spend much more time with the children and take more responsibility for childrearing than the fathers, and the gap between the parents is more significant than that between the parents in Korea, Thailand, America, France and Sweden (NWEC, 2006).

experiences on behalf of their young children, while reflecting on children's future becoming and present being. Caring consumption is characterised by ideological dilemmas because there is certain quality or variability – even a degree of change – in mothering depending on the context. I will explore how mothers in Japan experience and interpret everyday consumption, and thereby construct not only their children's childhood but also their own motherhood.

5.1. Mothering in Japan

5.1.1. Ideological dilemmas

> On the weekend, we went to Aeon[57]. While I was doing the grocery shopping, Saya and my husband were walking around in the store. When I met them again near the cashier, I realised that Saya was holding this *Anpanman* candy. There are tons and tons of *Anpanman* things out there! Once you buy one, it's so endless! In addition to those candies and snacks, there are also medicines for young children that have *Anpanman* on the packages! They are usually 30-50% more expensive, but since Saya likes it and picks it, I buy it.

Toshiko described her latest shopping experience with her daughter (2y3m) in a tone of frustration. Most young children start accompanying their mothers on daily shopping trips in their early years. Before they can put their desires into words, they point at goods from the shopping cart in the aisles, and their mothers smile back at them saying "Sweetheart, we don't need this today, ok?" Soon a shopping trip becomes a struggle. Many mothers like Mako and Yōko described how they have to remind their children – before leaving home, in the car and even in the store entrance – that they are not buying anything the children may crave. Strategically, mothers seek to avoid 'troubling' sections in each floor, but children will manage to find something – a toy, a candy. "It's so endless!" was a comment uttered often by many mothers during the interviews. It was reported a long time ago that consumption in Japan had reached the point of oversaturation (Miura, 2012). "It's so endless!" the mothers cry out. But *what* is endless? To *whom* are they crying out? Are they complaining to the market, the gift-givers or the nagging children? Do they mean by "endless" a plethora of products and services, or are they referring to the constant conflicts they apparently cause between

[57] One of the large shopping malls in Fukuoka.

the mother and the child? As this chapter will show, mothers in Japan often struggle with their children's participation in consumption practices and negotiate over certain products and services on behalf of their children; and they do so in the name of love, care and devotion, always keeping in mind the considerations of their wider social network.

Consumption is part of "caring work" (de Vault, 1994), where a mother not only provides material and emotional support for her child, but also becomes a facilitator – connecting him/her to a wider social network (see Chapter 3). This is an ideological process as well as a material one. The expressions of frustration mentioned above are most likely directed at the ideological dilemmas of mothering. As Billig et al. (1988) suggest, ideologies are the living beliefs, values and practices of a given society. As such, ideologies can be characterised by inconsistency, fragmentation and contradiction – they do not necessarily offer clear and concise ways for people to act and think. Choosing whether or not to buy particular products (e.g. game consoles) for one's children in itself a dilemma because notions of what is culturally appropriate or not often shift and prove contradictory. The characteristic of a dilemma which makes it significant for analysis is that it is more than a simple choice or a matter of straightforward right or wrong. People act and justify their actions in complex and often contradictory ways: the maxims of common sense can be rhetorically opposed to each other (Billig, 1991).

Billig et al. (1988) made a vital contribution to a debate surrounding the nature of ideology by questioning the notion that ideologies are always constituted by integrated and coherent sets of ideas:

> Ideology is not seen as a complete, unified system of beliefs which tells the individual how to react, feel and think. Instead ideology, and indeed common sense, are seen to comprise contrary themes. Without contrary themes, individuals could neither puzzle over their social worlds nor experience dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988: 2).

The variability existing within an ideology creates a cultural space in which people seek to position themselves. An ideology can be dilemmatic in the sense that it is likely to contain contradictory themes. Therefore, it can be said that ideological dilemmas are

bound to arise in "a culture which produces more than one possible ideal world, more than one hierarchical arrangement of power, value and interest" (Billig et al., 1988: 163).

Therefore, when we speak of mothering, we refer not simply to this or that attitude towards (or on the part of) women in Japan but to certain ideologies – and ideological dilemmas – of mothering. Following Hochschild (2003), I argue that, like other aspects of culture, the ideology of mothering is infused with three dimensions:

> a) cultural weight: a sense of connection between the present and the past;
> b) cultural stretch: a connection to unknown others in one's culture;
> c) cultural embeddedness: a connection to others in one's immediate place in that culture (see Hochschild, 2003: 58).

Through stories, comments and ideas discussed during my interviews, the mothers positioned themselves along each of these dimensions. The ideology of mothering typically implies a great deal of *cultural weight* in its appeal to conventional judgments connected to a revered past (see Hochschild, 2003), for example in its deference to previous female generations and to a strict *mottainai*[58] spirit. The mothering ideology also entails a degree of *cultural stretch*. This implies awareness, tolerance and acceptance of a variety of cultural patterns and practices (see Hochschild, 2003). In a way, mothering is inevitably oriented both to the past and to the future: even if it is about continuity and the preservation of values and traditions, it also entails a recognition that the child is growing into a new world – a world different from the mother's own world. Furthermore, mothers of young children often face a plethora of possibilities and choices through a connection to unknown others in the form of "cultural intermediaries" (Hochschild, 2003: 60) – e.g., magazines, advice books, blogs and advertisements – that lay out current ideas about acceptable behaviour. This is cultural space within which mothers find themselves comparing and contrasting their actions with others in order to justify their own position and role.

Finally, the mothering ideology also implies a degree of *cultural embeddedness*, as the mother is implicitly expected to align her actions or her child's actions to those of

[58] *Mottainai* is a Japanese term meaning a sense of regret when something is wasted or discarded without deriving its value (Kōjien, 2008).

people close to them (see Hochschild, 2003). There is a sense that a mother's own power as a parent is always limited and contingent. Mothers may have to negotiate with the child's father, grandparents and even siblings over what 'good' mothering is all about. This negotiation is not constrained to those close in kin, for mothers must also negotiate with wider cultural expectations about what constitutes good mothering. Toshiko purchased the *Anpanman* candy in the end because her daughter liked it, but there is also another reason: "I used to look down on a mother who lets her child writhe and kick in the store. Now I have to deal with the situation, and I don't wanna be that mother [on whom others look down]!" As we shall see, the three dimensions stated above – weight, stretch and embeddedness – shape the dilemmas and compromises of mothering in Japan.

What are the components of mothering? The philosopher Ruddick (1989) uses the concept of *maternal practice* to describe the work of mothering. To be a mother is to be committed to meeting the demands of one's child and of the social world (ibid. 17). These demands include the presentation of the child, fostering the child's growth, and performing maternal work within the acceptable standards of one's social group. As illustrated later in this chapter, I witnessed mothers who see themselves as fighting for the preservation of their children in Japan's consumer-oriented culture via a number of measures. Mothers in Japan would attempt to protect their children from the ever-growing pressure of marketing; they would foster children's growth by nurturing them with adequate clothes, food and toys; and they would work on improving their children's social acceptability both by training them to live within their peer culture and by using educational materials and goods marketed via popular characters. In Ruddick's study, these tasks are seen to reflect the concerns of American white, middle-class mothers of healthy young children – mainly infants – and the cultural and historical specificity of the mother's ability and means to meet these demands. Nonetheless, Ruddick insists these demands possess a certain universality that originates from the children themselves – mothering in Japan being no exception to the scope of this universality. As a whole array of activities, roles and behaviours present themselves as part of mothering practices, products (purchased, given or borrowed) become the

fundamental means through which different types of mothering are constructed and negotiated (Clarke, 2004; Jennings & O'Malley, 2003).

Ideologies of mothering nevertheless provide a certain space for adaptation: they may reflect incompatible views and varying forms and degrees of cultural weight, stretch and embeddedness (see Hochschild, 2003). As a result, mothers are perpetually confronting dilemmas over their ideas, images and roles. This is the case particularly when they have to make a decision on behalf of their young children. The consumption practices of women as mothers are not merely the extension of gendered work. Rather, these consumption practices are inseparable from broader forms of caring work through which women 'make' their young children into proper children and themselves into proper mothers. In the following section I will illustrate mothers' dilemmas as they are manifested through "caring consumption", and show how consumption is practiced as part of mothering.

5.1.2. Mothers' dilemmas in caring consumption

Mothers seek particular goods, services and experiences for their children in their everyday interactions. I identify three dilemmatic characteristics of this caring consumption engaged in by the mothers in my study. These depend on the variety of contexts and social relationships through which they explore their motherhood and their children's childhood. The characteristics of caring consumption are:

a) mothers' maintenance of a network of relationships;
b) responsibility for mothers' choices;
c) anticipation of future consequences.

First, mothers' caring consumption is strongly tied to maintaining the network of relationships that composes young children's social networks. In line with what is sometimes called the 'ten-wallet' phenomenon, described in Chapter 3, consumption activities surrounding young children in Japan cannot be discussed without taking account of a wider social network of people – a network that extends beyond the household. Reflecting the cultural embeddedness of consumption practices, children's close others such as grandparents, parents' siblings (uncles and aunts) and friends are

important suppliers and advisors of commercial goods – particularly when the children are still young. Meanwhile, children's desires and wishes are also constructed through interaction with peers (see Pugh, 2009): consumption serves as a focus and vehicle for their peer group relationships (Pugh, 2003). The maintenance of all these relationships leads mothers to develop creative responses to constraints and potential trade-offs (Gilligan, 1982). Through creative acts of adjustment, negotiation, and in some cases personal sacrifice, mothers seek to generate a situation where conflicts are minimised while children's desires and interests are recognised. Needless to say, these creative responses can also result in the mothers' own desires and preferences being compromised and might well undermine their cultural ideals of mothering.

Secondly, caring consumption reflects mothers' responsibility for their own choices in accounting for the best interest of their young children. Once a woman becomes pregnant, she anticipates her child's childhood as well as her own motherhood (Banister & Hogg, 2006; Sevin & Ladwein, 2007), because what the child experiences in his/her childhood is partly in the hands of his/her mother. However, motherhood – what kind of mother she wants to be or will become, and what kind of interpersonal relationship will be constructed between herself as mother and the child – is a dynamic, life-long process. While unknown others provide many choices and possibilities ('cultural stretch'), the child also has a certain impact on the mother's caring consumption. When a child is still young and in need of constant help and support, the mother takes in particular the roles of caregiver, teacher, gatekeeper, facilitator and decision-maker. Through everyday interaction, she observes what her child can do or cannot do, and she notices the things on which the child bestows or fails to bestow interest, all the while feeling a strong responsibility to provide 'proper' materials and experiences for the child.

The third characteristic of mothers' caring consumption is the anticipation of future consequences. Mothers' choices and decisions are seen to be made in the name of care or love, but they are often driven by an anticipatory focus on their likely consequences. In light of popularised versions of developmentalism and neuroscience, mothers cling to the idea that important events happen in childhood: they come to believe that both positive and negative experiences have long-term consequences in a child's life. It was

quite common for the mothers I interviewed to express elaborated memories of their own childhood, even though their children were the focus of discussion. It seemed that their childhood memories were salient reference points from which they appraised their children's current living environment. The mothers were well aware that their actions were creating a course for their children's future life and would serve as the foundation of their children's future childhood memories. As this suggests, the 'cultural weight' of mothering connects the past, the present and future: the mothers' concerns are directed toward creating both a positive bequest of memories for their children and a future life that will not be marked by feelings of regret over the choices made.

In the following analysis, I will explore how this sense of 'proper' caring consumption is generated, compromised and understood by the mothers in my study, and how this relates to mothering ideologies that imply cultural weight, stretch and embeddedness. First, I begin with mothers' maintenance of social relationships through consumption.

5.2. Maintaining a Network of Relationships

5.2.1. Beyond mother-child relationships

As I have noted, mothers in Japan generally spend more time alone with their young children compared to those in Western nations (NWEC, 2006); they also take an important role in expanding and managing a social network for their offspring beyond the mother-child relationship. As my interviewees connected childrearing to commercial goods and services that are suggested and recommended by various cultural intermediaries, and often with gifts given away or purchased by close others, mothers' caring work is strongly tied to the maintenance of social relationships. While mothers as primary care-givers are considered to be the ones who actively search for and purchase clothes, toys and food for their children (Pugh, 2002, 2009; Seiter, 1993, 2006), many of my interviewees said with a sigh: "Things just come in, sometimes against my will." Mothers may keep these 'things' because they consider they could be appropriate and useful for the children. However, they may also choose to keep them because – as has been pointed out in much anthropological writing (Sherry, 1983) – the actions of giving and receiving are central to constructing a network of social relationships, not only

between the mothers and the close others, but also the children and the mothers' close others. There is an old saying in Japan, *ko wa takara*[59] (children are treasures). In a society where the low birth-rate is announced every year, children are emotionally precious for these close others as well as for parents.

In addition to managing relationships with existing close others, mothers also consider it their responsibility to take account of the child's own peer-group. Even though there may be certain childrearing manuals or methods they attempt to pursue, as soon as children start showing their preferences from the media world or/and their own peer culture, mothers realise these methods do not necessarily work. The salient issue mentioned by my interviewees was children's fascination with certain commercialised characters: while these might help children belong to their peer group (see Chapter 6), they could also cause a lot of conflict and struggle. This complex web of relationships and feelings entailed in consumption practices meant that the mothers had to negotiate these contradictions in different ways.

The networks of relationships that are mediated through consumption go beyond the sphere of relationships among people. They also include mothers' intentional implementation of commercialised products and services in their daily lives. By humanising objects such as stuffed animals and the TV – utilising them as a 'third person' or a children's friend – some mothers seek to avoid direct confrontation with their children, thus easing the emotional tension which is typically found in the closed household, absent-fathers scenario of contemporary Japan (also see Sakaki, 2012; White, 1993). Some mothers described with delight that external objects made the mother-child relationship easier. However, others spoke about this with feelings of guilt, as if it were not a proper way of caring for children – even though the children may initiate this and the mothers do not force it upon them. This experience of ambivalence – which is marked by a mixed feeling of frustration and guilt – points again to the dilemmatic nature of mothers' caring consumption. In fact, the distinction between doing something for themselves and doing something for their children is unclear in the context of a

[59] In earlier times, this saying used to entail a greater wish for the prosperity of descendants and household productivity.

relational self-concept (Gilligan, 1982). While the mothers are aware of mothering ideologies – for instance, limiting children's exposure to media or giving 'simple' toys instead of short-lived character toys – they are bound to display a degree of flexibility and accommodation in order to reduce and minimise potential conflicts.

In the next section I will illustrate mothers' negotiation and maintenance of relationships with close others through consumption practices that are mainly focused on their young children.

5.2.2. Most of them are given

It is common all over the world to celebrate the pending or recent birth of a baby via what is called a 'baby shower' or some form of 'women-only' social event centring on gift-giving. Fischer and Gainer (1993) point out that showering gifts upon a baby as a welcoming ritual serves as a form of financial and emotional support for the new mother. It also fosters particular mothering behaviours: the choice of gifts is considered to play a role in instructing the mother in the cultural ideology of caring for a baby, while at the same time associating the baby with contemporary consumer culture. In Japan, large social gatherings like baby showers do not take place, but it is common for close relatives and friends to visit the parents with gifts or for them to send gifts by mail while the children are still young. For the first two years after birth – sometimes even longer – those gifts and hand-me-downs cover the child's needs for clothes, toys and other equipment. Yoshiko, a mother of a 2-year-old boy in my sample, looked around the living room littered with toys and simply said "Most of them are given." Since the act of giving and receiving gifts cannot be separated from a complex web of relationships (Belk & Coon, 1993; Green & Alden, 1988; Lee, 2003), the task of the mother as the primary care-giver is to make the best use possible of whatever is given to the child. Yoshiko writes the giver's name and the date of arrival on the back of her son's toys in the hope that he will take care of those gifts, even though he neither recognises all close others nor understand the value of the goods. The living room was littered with small toys because her father-in-law, who lives in the same house, purchases a Happy Meal at McDonald's every Tuesday with the intention of bringing back a new toy for her son. Yoshiko's dilemma is that she prefers durable toys which

her son can use with others – such as Lego and wooden play house toys – yet she also understands the desire of her father-in-law to see his grandchild's joyful smile when being given a small gift. Even though her son plays with those Happy Meal toys for no more than a couple of hours, and even though some are broken, Yoshiko keeps them all in a special box. In reality, what she is keeping in the box is the personal connection that her father-in-law intends to construct with his grandson as well as her own respect for the feelings of her father-in-law towards her son. As this implies, receiving gifts is not just about getting goods – it is also about mediating social relationships and the feelings of the gift providers for the child.

The existence of a young child in the family enforces the bonds of kinship, especially female bonds of kinship (Fischer & Gainer, 1993), and increases contact amidst all three generations. In Japan, the grandmother on the maternal side is the most crucial supporter while the child is still young. In fact, according to Bright Way (2006), 51.4% of the women stay in their parents' home (*satogaeri*) for a certain period of time before and after the child's birth[60]. It is also common for the maternal grandmother to visit and stay with the mother and the child for childrearing and household support (Yaegashi et al., 2003). All my interviewees appreciated the help and support of their own mother. Even if some disagreements appear, "It's just easy to tell my mom what I think and want," says Naoko. However, as mentioned by many mothers, the relationship with their parents-in-law is a different matter. Naoko's parents stopped purchasing goods for her 1-year-old son at her request. Yet, she could not stop her parents-in-law: they kept giving him toys occasionally without asking her preferences.

> He [my son] is the first grandchild for both of our parents, so he gets a lot of toys from them. To be honest, I want simple toys like wooden blocks, but my parents-in-law buy toys with animation characters, especially *Anpanman*. I personally don't like *Anpanman* much, and he doesn't understand any animation characters yet either. To my parents, I've said that it would be great if they'd give me cash rather than toys they have picked. I want to give him simple toys. Large toys take a lot of space in our place, and what would we do if he does not play with them, you know? To my parents-in-law, I cannot tell them face to face, so I have asked my husband to tell them that I don't like *Anpanman*.

[60] According to Bright Way (2006), 36.1% mothers stayed in their parents' home for less than 2 months, 9.5% for 3 months and 5.8% for 4-5 months.

As illustrated in Chapter 3, *Anpanman* – a culturally accepted animation character – has a full line of children's products, but Naoko particularly expressed her scepticism about its mass-production. On the one hand, she understands that her parents-in-law automatically take it for granted that all young children and parents like *Anpanman* due to the line of available products. On the other hand, she wishes that they would take into consideration her childrearing practices – which they could do simply by asking first. In order to avoid disrespecting her parents-in-law by confronting them directly, Naoko strategizes: not only does she ask her husband to subtly point out her unwillingness (presenting it as his or even theirs) to his own parents, she also makes an agreement to keep the *Anpanman* and other undesired large toys at her parents' house.

As this implies, the maintenance of relationships leads mothers to take creative, often roundabout approaches to the consumption practices of close others when these are directed at their children. Both Yoshiko and Naoko were well aware of their position as a daughter-in-law in their extended family as well as mothers of their own young children. Their approach to handling ritualistic gift giving/receiving can be considered as the outcome of their dilemmatic adjustment, and is oriented to minimise conflicts with their close others.

In the next section I will illustrate mothers' concerns about their responsibility for maintaining children's network of relationships through consumption.

5.2.3. Being flexible to some extent

Until a woman conceives a child of her own, the child market is likely to be a blurry sphere in her life. In fact, my interviewees pointed out how shocking it was to find out about all the 'must-haves' for their young children through the media, the gifts they received, and conversations with other mothers. Mothers also actively search for proper childrearing and mothering information, especially when they are raising their first child. My interviewees report having bought and read the *Tamahiyo* magazines[61], which are

[61] The magazines consist of three different kinds called *Tamago Club* (egg club), *Hiyoko Club* (chick club), *Kokko Club* (chicken club) published by Benesse corporation. Each targets pregnant mothers, mothers of 0-1.5-year-old children and mothers of 1-3-year-old children (the *Kokko Club* publication was suspended in May 2011).

the most popular parenting magazines among the new mothers. When the children are still too young to show their own interests and desires, mothers' consumption is highly based on their own preferences. During the interviews, many mothers used the word 'simple' quite often. They would talk about 'simple' clothes instead of clothes with superhero or magical girl pictures, 'simple' wooden toys instead of electric toys or character-based toys. Wooden goods are especially favoured among mothers because of the material's traditional use, its natural firmness and its warmness to the touch – although this also reflects the current boom for wooden toys in early education (also see Seiter, 1993). All mothers reported struggling with how many of the mass-marketed goods they wanted to avoid but had to take in, as children entered a wider social network outside the family. Mothers have certain wishes and desires about what they want to provide to their children, yet most mothers followed Naoko's comment: "I want to be flexible to some extent by observing others."

This notion of flexibility reflects the different degrees of cultural weight, stretch and embeddedness discussed earlier in this chapter (also see Hochschild, 2003). Depending on what aspect or dimension of mothering practices is more valued, mothers may make different compromises. Even though Naoko, a mother of a 1-year-old boy, dislikes character toys and violent weapon toys, she also anticipates her child's peer relationships in the near future when he starts going to preschool: "I need to see how his friends are doing." Having themselves experienced the group-oriented school life and its unspoken peer pressure, mothers are concerned about putting their children into a rough situation – such as not being able to participate with the other children – and they are well aware that "toys and television give children a medium of communication" (Seiter, 2006: 272). Fumiko, a mother of two boys (5y and 1y5m), recognises from the children of her relatives and friends that a game console such as the DS is a must-have in primary school:

> I guess we have to buy game consoles and such when he [my son] enters primary school. At my sister's place, they made a promise that playing games is for a maximum of 30 minutes. That promise is never kept! If you also play a game, you cannot keep the promise, either!

Mothers acknowledge the consequences of their decisions. They "*know better*, but they still buy it anyway" (Pugh, 2003: 11 [emphasis altered]). This is part of their caring consumption, which cannot be exclusively determined by the mothers' own desire or expectation: they feel responsible for their children's network-making through consumption. Uko, a mother of a preschool girl (3y6m), was experiencing exactly this kind of dilemma. She has intentionally avoided showing children's TV programmes, especially *PreCure*[62], to her daughter: she felt their marketing strategy was obvious, and she did not want to deal with the possibility of her daughter developing a tendency to nag. However, her daughter Saki knew a lot about *PreCure* from her friends in preschool without ever having watched the programme herself, and shopping trips were becoming very difficult for Uko:

> Her friends in the preschool either know or watch *PreCure*, and she [my daughter] learned everything from them, like all the character names and weapon names… Even though she has never watched it on TV, she already knows that the new *PreCure* has started [on TV]. When we were at the toy store on the third floor of Aeon, she showed me the new one, saying "Mom, this is *Suite PreCure*!" I was shocked at how quickly she got to know about it. The peer culture is not something to be taken lightly.

Uko has never bought *PreCure* goods for her daughter even though she knows how much her daughter likes it and how important it could be for her standing among her friends to have these goods. However, the surprise gifts from her husband and parents – all of whom spend much less time with her daughter – have interfered with her effort to pursue a certain childrearing method. Cynically, Uko recalls her daughter's intense excitement and joyful smile: "I'm the one who has to live with her everyday 'please!'"

A similar case was found in the interview with Namiko, whose husband works long hours. She turns a blind eye to the occasional *Kamen Rider Decade* figures and weapon toys for the sake of father-son quality time. During the interview, Namiko asked her 3-year-old son, Yūma, to sit down on the floor and play with wooden letter bricks. He was walking around and kicking the bricks, holding the weapon toys which made electronic

[62] A "magical girl" TV series broadcast on Sunday mornings at 8:30 since 2004. When I interviewed Uko, it was the transitional time from *HeartCatch PreCure* to *Suite PreCure*. The series take over many features of *Sailor Moon*.

sounds. “When my husband is home, it’s his responsibility to play more physically with Yūma with these weapon toys and figures. It’s too much for me.”

As interviews with these four mothers illustrate, caring consumption often entails contradictions in ideologies of mothering. Despite their particular desires and expectations in terms of childrearing, mothers also have to be flexible to some extent in order to take into account cultural weight, stretch and embeddedness. Even though many mothers prefer traditional, simple wooden toys (*cultural weight*), there is a variety of acceptable options (*cultural stretch*), and they compromise in taking account of children’s social relationships (*cultural embeddedness*). In addition to showing concern about children’s peer relationships, some mothers introduce new relationships – some of which are with commercialised goods and services rather than people. In the next section I will explore mothers’ intentional inclusion of ‘a third person’ into the mother-child relationship.

5.2.4. “Minnie is watching you!”: using products and services as mediators

The mother-child relationship sometimes suffers from a vicious circle of emotional tension resulting from the absent-father, closed household situation (Sakaki, 2012). According to Cabinet Secretariat (2011), 65.4% of children under 3 years old do not attend any childcare institution. Although many mothers obtain some kind of support from their parents and in-laws, most of their days are spent alone with their young children. My interviewees admitted that this sometimes becomes too stressful and suffocating. As pointed out by Johansson (2003, 2007, 2010) (also see Chapter 2), commercial products and services can play a role in keeping a healthier emotional balance and some physical distance for both the mothers and the young children in this kind of situation. As illustrated in Chapter 3, the possession and use of characters are widely accepted in Japanese culture, and the mothers often use such external objects as mediators in childrearing. Uko, who is against the mass-commercialised *PreCure*, has actually been using the Disney stuffed animal *Minnie* for her daughter’s daily training.

> At the dinner table, she [my daughter] used to say “I cannot eat anymore.” I encouraged her to eat more by showing the *Minnie* stuffed animal and saying “*Minnie* is watching you eat! You can do it!” Then she actually said “Watch me,

> *Minnie*! I can eat everything!" and could finish her meal. There was also another occasion when she was having a problem changing clothes by herself and asked for my help. I said "*Minnie* is watching you!" pointing at the stuffed animal, and then she could manage to get changed.

This kind of positive experience involving characters was often mentioned by several mothers. The Bandai Character Laboratory (2000) reports that people in contemporary Japan mostly look to such characters as a source of comfort and relaxation. The mothers I interviewed intend to communicate indirectly by utilising a character as a mediator; at the same time, children are encouraged to handle challenging tasks by their close 'friend'. Tae – who enjoys purchasing *Anpanman* goods for her daughter, Yuna (4y1m) – recalls that toilet training was not as difficult as she expected because of the *Anpanman* underwear she purchased: "…she started going to the toilet by herself after an incident where her *Anpanman* underwear had gotten wet, and I told her that *Anpanman* could not be strong anymore in the dirty underwear." On the one hand, the mothers cannot ignore the negative side effects of characters, particularly the relationship between their mass-marketing and children's endless craving. Yet, it is clear from the interviews that mothers can use children's favourite characters to motivate children to try something that they rather would not do if their mother asked directly: the strategic use of characters can mediate mother-child communication and thereby allow their relationships to develop more smoothly.

Unlike the use of certain characters in childrearing, the use of TV is often seen more negatively. Mothers of young children in Japan tend to regard the relation between the media-saturated environment and young children as problematic (see Chapter 3). This commonly shared belief sometimes puts pressure on mothers, as if allowing the child to watch TV constituted bad mothering or demonstrated a lack of caring. While presenting a keen awareness of this tendency, some mothers looked guilty and ashamed when they talked about their children's frequent or even irregular TV viewing. As I have argued, the commonly shared view that long hours of TV viewing delay or even distort children's healthy development has been cited out of context (also see Miwa, 2005). In fact, a statement of protest issued by the Japanese Society of Child Neurology (2004) remarks that it is not scientifically evident that long hours of TV viewing are related to children's cognitive and behavioural deficiencies. In this regard, I would argue that

researchers should pay more attention to *how* TV viewing is used in the household than to the number of viewing hours.

Depending on the TV programmes watched, TV viewing can foster not only a relaxed mother-child relationship, but also children's exploration of the world and their learning. While acknowledging that making the TV babysit a child is not good mothering, the mothers also admitted that TV provides them with a peaceful, quiet time to do household chores – especially when there is nobody else at home. In order to limit viewing hours and avoid unpleasant programmes and commercials, many mothers choose to show animations on DVD. In addition to providing mothers with a quiet time, animation stories are seen to support children's practical learning and training. Asuka, for example, is very satisfied with her son's interest in *Anpanman*: the animation provided him an opportunity to learn and try out many kinds of food through characters in the animation series[63]. Mako thinks that the *Shimajirō*[64] DVDs helped a lot for her daughter's toilet-training and teeth-brushing training.

As I have shown, the need to maintain a network of relationships entails some mothering dilemmas, both because commercialised products and services cannot be separated from people's feelings and because ideological practices can be viewed differently in daily interactions. While certain kinds of products are preferred by some mothers, other mothers value *cultural weight* more. These mothers wish to prioritise respect to others' feelings and they express a sense of connection to their children by preserving given objects instead of adhering to their own ideas about the proper value of these objects. There is also *cultural stretch*, which implies the awareness, tolerance and acceptance of different cultural patterns and practices. Despite mothers' concerns about young children's excessive involvement in consumer media culture, some mothers actually use commercialised characters and TV in order to preserve an emotional balance and physical distance between themselves and their children. *Cultural embeddedness* – a connection to close others in their daily life, such as peers, fathers

[63] More than 1700 characters have appeared in the *Anpanman* animation. Their names consist of food, animals, toys, nature and fairy tales etc (Anime News, 2009).
[64] Shimajirō is a main character of Kodomo Challenge (correspondence course) created by Benesse Corporation.

and grandparents – also limits mothers' monitoring power, as many goods come into the household in the form of presents. In the next section I will focus particularly on mothers' responsibility for their own choices by looking at how they account for the best interest of their young children.

5.3. Responsibility for Choice

5.3.1. Proper choices?

This section will explore how mothers deal with the responsibility for choosing the right commercial goods and services based on their children's interests and desires. In the process, they are constantly confronted with a spiral of choices and decisions. Despite the fact that Japan has become a society with a widening income disparity between rich and poor[65] (see Tamura, 2013; Yasuda, 2013), all my interviewees – all of whom lived in single income households at that time – agreed that they wanted to provide as much support for their children as possible. As one mother, Toshiko, explained, this was the time when parents should invest in their children, since children are indeed "emotionally priceless" (Zelizer, 1994: 209). On behalf of their children, mothers constantly attempt to learn what kind of consumer practices – from the infinite range of possibilities and availabilities presented by close others and cultural intermediaries – are considered appropriate and acceptable forms of mothering or childrearing. For women for whom mothering is a full-time endeavour, their children's wellbeing often seems to determine their own social and existential value (Allison, 1991; also see Buchli & Lucas, 2000): providing a good childhood contributes to a good motherhood. However, their dilemma is that there is no absolute way of caring for children – there is only an increasing range of options and openness in ideological behaviours and values. They often get lost in a flood of information about trends and new products.

Buckingham (2000) argues that contemporary consumer media culture is characterised by increasing choice and diversity, but it also promotes integration and convergence. On the one hand, mothers are caught up in a variety of differing encounters and situations,

[65] The word *kakusa shakai (the income gap society)* was awarded as one of the top ten winners in the keywords-of-the-year for 2006. However, the income disparity in Japan is much less than in many other countries (see Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

each of which may call for different forms of appropriate consumer behaviour, but on the other hand, they also recognise trends shared by other mothers. As my interviewees mentioned, childrearing information is mostly shared through word of mouth, both via direct face-to-face conversation with close others but also through magazines, blogs and websites. "The process of consensus through which certain items, such as the *right* baby monitor, an *ethical* toy or a *pretty* dress, are identified is an entirely social process through which mothers are made in relation to each other, as much as individuals in relation to their infants" (Clarke, 2004: 71 [emphasis altered]). For mothers, 'proper choices' are contextually made in relation to close others as well as their children.

5.3.2. 'Kodomo Challenge' and mothers' challenge

When children are still young, one of the mothers' preoccupations is what kind of toys to purchase. As some of my interviewees pointed out when discussing children's fickleness, toys given as gifts or handed over by others often do not keep children's attention and concentration for a long time. Another problem is that some toys are too noisy to bear or too big to maintain in the household space. For these reasons, my interviewees hoped to choose something that would last for a long time and enable children not only to have fun, but also to think, concentrate and learn skills and values that are acceptable within their own social milieu through play. Toshiko signed up for a year contract with *Kodomo Challenge*, a correspondence course, when her daughter turned 6 months:

> My mom first offered to purchase books and toys for Saya, but there are many kinds out there and they could cost a lot, so I told her about *Kodomo Challenge*, which Mako[66] has been already using, and then she said it would be a great idea. I thought children do not need to have many toys or books, but Saya gets tired of toys so quickly. She always needs something new, and if she does not get it, she easily gets cranky. It is expensive to buy new toys all the time, so I think *Kodomo Challenge* is great. She started it at six months and receives something every month based on the developmental stages. They [Benesse] know what babies are interested in and pay attention to. You can wash the toys, so I can use them for our next child or pass them to my sister's child.

[66] Mako and Toshiko had been friends for many years. Mako started *Kodomo Challenge* for her first daughter and recommended the service to Toshiko when her daughter, Saya was born.

Toshiko, like other mothers, of course purchased other toys and books in addition to *Kodomo Challenge*. One and a half years after the first interview, her daughter was two, and there was a French-made wooden kitchen with a clock in the living room, and a big *Anpanman* jungle gym attached to a slide in her daughter's room. Toshiko made choices by carefully observing her daughter's interests and skills. As I explore in the following section, mothers such as Toshiko hold "lay theories" (Seiter, 1999: 59) drawn from popularised developmentalist ideas that focus on developmental stages and the idea that the early acquisition of skills and knowledge has long-term consequences. Toshiko's challenge now is how to expand her daughter's interests and skills through the toys she has purchased. Caring consumption does not stop at the provision of goods; rather the mother's responsibility continues in the process of motivating the child to use them, often by showing and doing activities together: goods and services do not just do everything to entertain or train the child. In fact, Toshiko says with a sigh:

> *Kodomo Challenge* is great, but Saya often urges me to look for the toys that correspond with the DVD she is watching. Her toys are everywhere, so it just brings me more stress and frustration even though I do want to support what she wants to do. Also, once she starts playing kitchen, I have to be in her play all day, ordering food and asking what time it is!!!

Mothers feel responsible for nurturing and training their children in a way that accounts not only for their own expectations and hopes but also for children's needs and wants. Yet, some mothers like Fumiko seem to become ashamed and disappointed in themselves for not doing good mothering, as compared to unknown others. Her main reference point for 'good mothering' came from blogs written by mothers who practice early education at home. While Fumiko was very concerned about the endless availability of educational toys and the increasing amount of them she had at home, her challenge was how to utilise them for her 5-year-old son. She proudly showed me a magnetic easel with many colourful shapes on it, picture books, jigsaw puzzles, flash cards and CDs which were recommended by other mothers on their blogs and purchased through internet auctions. Her description of each item revealed a mixed feeling of hope and incompetence, as she kept saying "I wanted him to..., but he didn't like it." "I was supposed to..., but I didn't." She seemed to be proud of herself for having purchased all the expensive educational toys and materials at a much cheaper price through internet

auctions, but at the same time, she criticised herself: "I purchased those toys and materials with so much expectation of my son from reading blogs, but in the end, I just got hung up on collecting." Fumiko's desire and expectation were first directed towards her son's wellbeing, yet purchasing those educational toys and materials soon became her primary motivation.

Mothers' identity construction is certainly mediated through children's behaviour (Allison, 1991; Rice, 2001), but it is also important to note how commercial goods and services highlight mothers' devotion and commitment in mothering. In a consumer society, care giving is often inseparable from buying (Pugh, 2005), and the action itself convinces mothers that they are indeed good mothers. What women consume for the sake of their children defines what kind of mother they are; and commercial goods and services legitimated by educational expertise can be powerful facilitators of such role-making (also see Sevin & Ladwein, 2007).

In this section I have illustrated how toys and materials advertised to entertain, motivate and teach children actually challenge mothers on a day-to-day basis to expand their children's interests and curiosity. In the next section I will discuss childhood wonder: that is, how mothers negotiate with their desire to please children and fulfil their sense of good mothering.

5.3.3. Negotiating with "childhood wonder" purchase

"Childhood wonder" – children's response to goods of sheer delight mixed with awe – is a motivator for many adults for giving and buying presents for children (Cross, 2004; Pugh, 2002). The pivotal point of childhood wonder is providing what they like – what they want, and most importantly what they do not expect (ibid.). Through everyday interaction, children including the children in my study seem to learn that their mothers will not purchase their yearned-for things easily: in fact, the childhood wonder purchase is usually instigated by close others besides mothers, such as fathers and grandparents, as illustrated in the previous section regarding the network of relationships. When the children are happy, the gift-givers are also happy (also see Johns & Gyimothy, 2002). "Other people just buy something because it's just entertaining and because they want

to see Saya's smile and unprecedented joy. *There is no responsibility*, I guess. They think pretty much just about Saya's joy and delight," said Toshiko, who struggles with her daughter's constant nagging and her own ambivalence about saying "no".

The recognition of children's desires and the meeting of their needs and wants are part of mothering work in contemporary Japan. The dilemma many mothers experience is that, while they do recognise their children's wants, they are sometimes unwilling to deliver the 'wonder' because "the child's transition from wonder to expectation to cynicism can lead to a constant ratcheting up of how much will be enough to evoke awe" (Pugh, 2002: 8). My interviewees attested "it's endless, giving endlessly." Their primary concerns are that the children will take for granted the occasional fulfilling of their desires and that this will actually undermine their sense of gratification and appreciation, and their spirit of *mottainai*. Like other buyers, mothers are tempted to consume in order to evoke their child's pleasure because if the child feels wondrous delight about a 'surprise', some of that feeling will surely feed into them as mothers. Yet, on the other hand, they feel responsible for training their child to be a conscientious consumer who can think carefully about the price, value and fast pace of trends in contemporary consumer culture, instead of asking for something immediately after s/he has seen it on TV, at friend's house or in stores. As the mediators and facilitators, mothers are caught between wanting to please children and making responsible consumer decisions for them (also see Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006).

During my interviews with the mothers – who were often accompanied by their children – I noticed a gap between the toys the mothers *thought* their children liked and the toys the children actually liked. I realised that one of the most important ideas mothers hold on to about the proper choice of toys is the child's lasting engagement[67]: if the child plays with a toy often and continuously, it becomes a good choice and his/her favourite in the eyes of the mothers. Yet, the toys the children wanted to show me as their favourites were not the ones the mothers thought their children liked. Those toys, usually with recognisable characters on, seemed to have been kept in a box for a while, and in fact, two mothers said with a surprised voice, "You hardly play with them!"

[67] This is also about the value of money, another aspect of 'good/proper consumption'.

What the mother thinks is 'proper' or 'right' may be different from what the child thinks. Childhood wonder – which is usually seen as a temporary delight – could be kept hidden inside the object itself without the mother recognising this, and the object might not necessarily be used by or seen with the child every day.

In the next section, I will focus on mothers' attempts at co-consumption (Cook, 2008) and children's participation in consumer choices.

5.3.4. Children's participation in consumption activities

"If s/he really wants it, I will buy it" is the mothers' honest response to children's craving. Even if it is an undesirable character product or gender-based object, mothers said they would buy something as long as their child uses it. In order to make sure that the child's desire is not here-today-gone-tomorrow, they set some time aside to ask their children's wishes several times. Tomoko purchased a *Tomica*[68] *World Byunbyun Big Tower Circuit* for her son (3y4m) as a Christmas gift after he had been staring at the Toys'R'Us catalogue and kept saying that he wanted it. When I visited them in January, he was playing with die-cast cars on the highway attached to the *Super Auto Tomica Building*, which he had already had before that Christmas. Tomoko was happy not only to see his joyful smile at Christmas when he opened the gift but also his lasting engagement with the toys.

In contrast with Tomoko, however, Fumiko did not purchase a *Byunbyun Big Tower Circuit* for her 5-year-old son even though she knew how much he wanted it for Christmas. "If we buy that, he might ask for other *Tomica* related toys and that becomes endless pleases and nos," Fumiko sighed. Unlike Fumiko, who intentionally turned down her son's prospective wonder, Mako recalls her regrets over a Christmas gift purchase while simultaneously feeling proud of her 4-year-old daughter's learning process:

[68] Tomica produces die-cast mini cars for young children. According to the company, Tomica product ownership among boys aged 2-7 is 79.2% and the parental brand recognition of boys aged 2-7 is 99.7% (Tomica, 2010).

> My husband and I purchased a *Fresh PreCure* toy last Christmas. Yūka was so excited and happy to jump around the house when she opened it. But then, in February its TV series ended, and the new *PreCure*, *HeartCatch PreCure*, started. She of course lost her interest in her Christmas gift right away and now wants to have a new *PreCure* toy. At that time, we did not know that *PreCure* series ended after Christmas. I have told her how the marketing strategies work, which she also experienced by herself. Now Yūka keeps reminding herself, saying "I know it's gonna change again, so I should not be wanting." I know she would be happy to receive it as a gift, but it's just *mottainai*.

Mothers do not just say no to children's desires, rather they want to explain to them how marketers and advertisers make children want products. When I did my participant observation in preschools in January the following year, some girls in fact announced that the TV programme *HeartCatch PreCure* would be over soon, and the new one, *Suite PreCure* was starting in February. They did not forget to mention, "Everything about *HeartCatch PreCure*, clothes and shoes, are on sale!" giving other girls a hint that they should not purchase outdated or on-sale products (see Chapter 6). Childhood wonder definitely triggers adults' purchasing and gift-giving motivation, yet as Toshiko observed, others do not think about their responsibility after having given a gift to a young child and witnessed his/her joyful smile. Mothers have to deal with more than the momentary wondrous delight of their child: they also have to take responsibility for his/her learning and coping skills as a consumer through gradual participation in consumption activities where his/her choices are both encouraged and compromised. We have all witnessed children's nagging and screaming in order to persuade their mother to purchase something in stores, as some scholars describe stereotypically (see Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003; Schor, 2004). However, my empirical analysis shows that mothers' caring consumption is not practiced as a one-way process of either the mother's self-approval or the child's pester power, but rather as a process of interactive communication between the child and the mother – where the latter often encourages the child's participation (also see Buckingham, 2011; Gram, 2007). The mother's role as taste supervisor, gatekeeper and guardian through caring consumption is crucial to the construction of childhood as well as motherhood.

In the following section I will discuss mothers' anticipation of the future in relation to their consumer choices and decision-making.

5.4. Anticipating Future Consequences

5.4.1. Creating an "edutaining" environment

As I have touched upon briefly in previous sections, caring consumption is often linked with the anticipation of future consequences, especially in relation to children's learning. While childhood wonder – joy, delight, elation and freedom through consumption – is highly valued in Japan, there is also a set of hopes and concerns regarding children's future, a future parents consider needs to be a better future than the one parents now have. With the growth and media popularisation of developmental psychology and neuroscience, a new marketing niche and a new approach to selling and consuming products and services has emerged (see Voice Intelligence, 2012). *Edutainment* – "a hybrid mix of education and entertainment" (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003: 8) – is seen to fulfil mothers' expectations about children's learning and at the same time to offer children fun (also see Chapter 3). Yet, why is it so important to combine caring consumption with children's learning and education? Creighton (1994) notes:

> The cultural legitimacy of education stems in part from the very high value placed on education found in Japan's Confucian heritage, but also from highly pragmatic concerns, given that educational achievement is viewed as the route to security and success in Japan (Creighton, 1994: 46).

Mothers' dilemma here is that, from their own experience of the *juken sensō* (education war), they do not want to focus too much on children's cognitive development and education, yet they feel obligated to make sure that their child is not left behind. Some good empirical examples are found in mothers' reading of the *Tamahiyo* magazines (see Chapter 3 and 5.2.3 in this chapter) and using *Kodomo Challenge* (see Chapter 3 and 5.3.2 in this chapter), both offered by the Benesse Corporation. While these publications appear to satisfy mothers' desire to know how other children and other mothers are doing, their satisfaction does not stay with the normative framework when it comes to their own child: their aim is to 'exceed' the norm, thus making their own child special and unique.

All my interviewees strongly agreed that they would provide for their child as best as they could in order to identify and bring out his/her possible talent or skills. In order to

do so, the environment in which the child is situated, especially the things the child plays with, are crucial. Tae, who occasionally purchases small toys for her daughter, insisted:

> Children's sense of interest and curiosity is stimulated by the environment. They don't show interest in letters and numbers immediately, but first and foremost, they have to be surrounded by those opportunities. If you compare children who have had as many opportunities as possible with those who have not, there should be differences when it comes to formal leaning.

Mothers also said that proper goods and services for children should offer opportunities to 'learn' through play and to have fun – a claim that certainly echoes the concept of 'edutainment' used by marketers. To mothers, creating an 'edutaining' environment is not necessarily linked to providing their child with mass-advertised and mass-produced goods and services sold, for example, in Toys'R'Us. None of my respondents said that they would purchase something simply because the package says 'fun', 'intellectual' and 'educational': rather, they would carefully see how their child could use and play with the product. Sumi described her experience with an 'edutaining' clock purchased for her daughter, Kao (2y2m) in a local Toys'R'Us store: "The clock was an educational 'material' rather than a toy. Educational aspects are important, but it needs to be a toy instead of a material, which has nice colours and cute designs and which children can have fun with!"

What mothers want children to *learn* through play varies a lot – ranging from more school-oriented subjects such as numeracy, literary and computing to more personal skills such as playing instruments and sports. These things are not only based on mothers' assertive expectations and hopes but also on children's own interests. Yet, I would argue that what every mother seems to wish for her child is to 'get ahead' of others (even if only a little), and for the child to be more than just 'one of them' – at least in something s/he enjoys doing and will more likely continue to pursue.

5.4.2. Useful for the future

Today's mothers of young children are the generation that has experienced a drastic technological transition – from home phones to mobile phones, hand-writing to typing

on the computer and the mobile phone, and the expansion of internet access from diversified devices other than PCs. Children's toys have also increasingly become electronic toys, and this has also been the case with 'edutainment' toys. Babies'R'Us for example offers several kinds of mobile-phone/smart-phone toys for babies and toddlers, which not only make basic phone sounds but also 'support' them to learn basic English conversation while playing (Babies'R'Us, 2013). For preschool children, Toys'R'Us offers tablets and character laptops with which children can 'study' literacy, numeracy and the alphabet through games (Toys'R'Us, 2013b). The mothers in my interviews said that a mobile-phone toy is a must-have since toddlers show strong interest in parents' mobile phones, TV controllers and anything with buttons. In my first interview with Toshiko, she said with a sigh as her 8-month-old daughter took my mobile phone out of my bag and began pressing the buttons; "Nothing is better than a real one though." There is definitely a need for those toys among mothers to distract children from breaking the real ones, as Toshiko suggests, but mothers are also aware of the importance of up-to-date technology.

Like all mothers, Tae insisted during the interview that she was not interested in education-based toys. However, when we started talking about the *Anpanman* computer her daughter, Yuna (2y7m) was playing with, Tae suddenly said that the computer could be an educational toy.

> Oh! This could be educational!! When you say 'educational,' it sounds serious! Educational toys could be something that would be useful and beneficial in the future, like this computer! Also, by having these educational toys, children can expand their interests, I guess.

Since Yuna liked *Anpanman*, Tae bought many things with *Anpanman* characters. The character was the most important factor when she chose toys for her daughter. Tae found out about the computer in the commercial break during the *Anpanman* TV programme. It was not cheap, but she assumed that her daughter would enjoy it, and she also added: "I just thought it could be useful for her future when she starts learning how to use a real computer." Yuna did not seem to show interest in the letters written on the keyboard, but as Tae pointed out in the previous section when discussing the importance of the environment for children, many mothers tend to believe and

anticipate that an 'early start' – for example, providing opportunities and experiences with latest technology like a PC – will be useful and beneficial for children's future. This mothering ideology implies *cultural stretch* – an awareness of possible future cultural patterns. A significant aspect here is that mothers consistently centre on children's enjoyment and self-motivation; yet, there is also a sense of competition in mothers' hopes and expectations about their children.

5.4.3. Better speak Chinese rather than English: finding children's talents

Despite the fact that an education-conscious, competitive society is a manifestation of the last Japanese economic boom, educational achievement is still considered key for children's successful future, and mothers feel more or less responsible for that. After successive educational reforms, the introduction of *yutori kyōiku* (relaxed education) in 2002 led to the reduction of the school curriculum by around 30%, the implementation of a five-day school and 'integrated learning'. The primary aim of the reform was to move away from the traditional education that focused on an enormously elaborate, extensive memorising and testing system[69] (Goodman, 2003). Yet, this seems to have fuelled mothers' concerns over public education and fomented the idea of persuading their child to enter a private school or attend cram schools called *juku*. Meanwhile, the teaching of English language – which used to start in junior high school – was officially introduced to all the elementary schools in 2011. While the Benesse Corporation (2010) reports the declining rate of young children's learning English as an extra-curricular lesson from 14.2% in 2005 to 9.1% in 2010, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, styles of learning English have shifted and diversified. In fact, according to Yano Research Institute (2014), the English-based preschool business in 2014 shows an estimated increase of 7.4% over the previous year. For most Japanese mothers, who can hardly communicate in English even after six years of studying the language, such an early start and the use of conversation-focused learning represents an unknown, unpredictable world. Therefore, they may be more inclined to project their wishes and dreams, which did not come true in their own life, onto their child's future.

[69] *Yutori kyōiku* ended in 2011 in primary levels, 2012 in lower secondary levels and 2013 in upper secondary levels, after several years of guideline reviews.

Even though none of my interviewees were those extreme *kyōiku mama* (education mothers) who execute their responsibility to oversee and manage the education of their child with excessive vigour (Allison, 1991), all were interested in what Sumi called "killing two birds with one stone" in order to develop their child's unique potential. In addition to providing 'edutaining' toys, many of the mothers tried to accustom their child to an English-speaking environment from an early age. This partly reflected a strong belief that, as Toshiko put it:

> When a baby is born, she has a capability to speak any kinds of languages spoken in the world. As she grows up, this potential fades away. But then, if you give her a chance to learn several languages, she might be able to acquire them naturally! Isn't that incredible?

My interviewees believed that the early start is easier and more natural for children because they *learn* things in their leisure time without knowing that they are actually learning. As long as children are having fun, "it's nothing harmful, but rather beneficial," Tae adds. The foundation of the mothers' anticipation about the future certainly stems from their own experiences in childhood (Thompson, 1996). The mothers are pleased to see their child using computers, dancing hip-hop, constructing complicated blocks or singing songs in English – all things which the mothers themselves could not have achieved in their own childhood. Yet, if the child's talent or skill is just ordinary, like that of other children, it may not be so delightful to the mothers. Sumi, a mother of a daughter with delayed speech, having heard other children speak English in addition to Japanese, expressed her dilemma:

> I do feel frustrated when others say their children speak English and such. If everybody speaks English though, it's nothing special anymore unless they have some other skills, you know? If so, it might be better to learn Chinese instead?

According to Thompson (1996), mothers are aware that their caring actions create a course for their own future lives and will simultaneously serve as the basis of childhood memories for their own children. In this regard, what the children do in childhood is a salient reference point for what it means to be a mother. While Sumi feels pressed and irritated by other children's achievement, her cautious anticipation emphasises the importance of cultural capital – knowledge, tastes and skills which assure social prestige

or economic advantage (see Bourdieu, 1984; Seiter, 2008). Yet in accounting for social circumstances and divisions, Sumi also acknowledges that there are different modes and patterns of cultural consumption (*cultural stretch*). In the next section I will continue discussing mothers' careful approach to children's future.

5.4.4. "That's it?": mothers' ambivalence

When the mothers talk about caring consumption and their child's future pathways, their tension is rather limited. Even though so much time, effort and money is invested for the child to have a variety of edutaining toys and activities, to attend English lessons and to take eurythmic or right brain courses, the mothers seem to take these caring practices for granted. However, mothering is not only about love and care in accounting for the child's developmental wellbeing: it is also about "emulation" (Campbell, 1987; Seiter, 1993) in relation to other mothers and children. Emulation involves a double movement: a feeling of 'keeping up,' yet at the same time a feeling of 'being better'. The issue here is that 'betterness' *cannot be* and *should not be* as obvious as the mothers hope.

While children's potential is enormous, the mothers acknowledge, from interactions with other mothers, that it is their doting that makes own child special; the sense of 'betterness' the mothers feel for their child therefore *cannot be* necessarily obvious to others. Their dilemma is that they live in uncertainty over how the potential they perceive in their child will eventually turn out. The child's potential can be ordinary, like everybody else's, and like those the mother herself has experienced from her own childhood. Toshiko, whose weekdays and weekends in her childhood were filled with extra-curricular lessons including English conversation, painting, swimming, piano playing, girl scouting and *juku* (cram school) analyses her current situation, "What I remember is I never had a chance to play with my friends. After having been in those lessons for many years I don't even speak English!" Toshiko appropriates her mother's wishes and hopes as a mother herself but emphasises that she would not want to repeat her own childhood with her daughter; instead, she would respect her daughter's desires and wants. Mothers' sense of emulation through caring consumption does not always

promise betterness in the child's future: sometimes it just generates disappointment and more uncertainty.

The reason why I argue that the 'betterness' of children *should not be* obvious among mothers is because, in Japan, there is a cultural expectation that people should not talk about their effort or achievement in front of others: in line with the saying "the nail that sticks out gets banged down", one should not stand out in the group to which one belongs. This is an ideological dilemma for mothers. Even though her own child is special for every mother, she often values the cultural weight of a modest attitude towards others: she therefore has to search for an indirect manner of talking about her own child's superiority. In this regard, mothers can be very careful when they discuss their own caring consumption, even with me. Not only do they mention that they respect their child's interests and wants, they also try to talk about their own conduct modestly by adding "I'm not doing enough…" "Other mothers are more serious, but I…" Sumi is a mother who was very concerned about making her daughter, Kao (2y3m), special and different from other children. At the age of eight months, Sumi started to provide her daughter with the *Shichida Method Right Brain Education* which claims to draw out children's strong will and potential and foster their development in order to make a difference in their lives (Shichida, 2012). Sumi learned this educational method from her friends whose children have been successful in school after having experienced it. On the basis of their exciting story, she believes in the idea of 'the earlier, the better', even though the effect might not be clear now. Her purchase of materials in relation to right brain education is frequent, and in fact, she tries whatever is recommended by the school such as dot cards, flash cards and puzzles. Even so, during the interview she did not forget to claim "I'm so unfamiliar with early education…" Sumi is the mother who was most interested in early start learning and most dutifully obeyed expert advice among my interviewees, but at the same time, she was also intimidated by expertise and criticism from others. The intention or even fear hidden behind mothers' modesty comes from the possibility of others' criticism of their dedication to their children's futures. Sumi hesitantly said, "I don't want others to judge like '*that's it?'* when they see my child who takes this special right brain education. Nobody does." As Buchli and Lucas (2000: 132) state, "women's identities and futures

[are] mediated through children." Since motherhood in Japan tends to be particularly interdependent on children's childhood experiences, everything regarding one's own child reflects on the quality of mothering.

5.5. Summary

This chapter has examined how mothers of young children as primary caregivers experience ideological dilemmas and construct motherhood through caring consumption. My discussion of the concept of mothering has emphasised the diverse and potentially contradictory demands of cultural weight, stretch and embeddedness (also see Hochschild, 2003). These have implications for the mother's sense of identity and their practice: mothering is something women 'do' based on a variety of social contexts and relationships, rather than something women 'are'. I have argued through this chapter that mothers' consumption is part of their caring work, and their caring consumption is a key means through which both motherhood and childhood are constituted. I have also discussed how ideologies surrounding mothering are enforced and enacted (also see Clarke, 2004). As I have shown, mothers experience a myriad of dilemmas in this arena, in terms of maintaining a social network, taking responsibility for choices and anticipating future consequences. Mothers project their own hopes, expectations and desires upon their child by accounting for his/her wants and needs in their efforts to provide a 'good' childhood and to ensure their child's future success. Yet, there are struggles and negotiations here, because mothers' ideas about consumption are also related to their own childhood as well as their broader notions of what childhood should be about (Sparrman, 2009). Mothering cannot be discussed without taking account of its interdependency or connectedness with children themselves. Through buying, receiving and preserving things in their social network, mothers construct motherhood as well as childhood; and in the process, caring consumption necessarily includes the past, present and future.

Chapter 6

Possession, Knowledge, Belonging in Peer Consumer Culture[70]

Once this one [Anpanman fork case] gets broken, I'm getting a Shinkenger[71] one!
Taito (boy, 4)

Young children are actively and consistently assessing what is commercially available and popular in their situated local culture (Blaise, 2005, Marsh 2005). I heard a lot of claims of current having and future getting, like the boy's announcement quoted above – they were often a conversational gambit in the peer group. At first I was not sure how to respond to their declarations because in my daily interactions, at least with adults, nobody comes to me and suddenly says "You know what? I'm getting…." Yet, at the same time, their ways of approaching others and maintaining the relationships through consumption practices – as an aspect of their production and reproduction of peer consumer culture – inevitably captured my research interest.

In this chapter I will expand on the concept of an "economy of dignity" – a sense of belonging and status (Pugh, 2009) – by considering how children undertake 'face-work' in their deployment of commercial knowledge and commodities within their peer consumer culture. I will identify five face-work strategies – claiming, monitoring, cooperating, contesting and concealing[72] to explain how children establish and manage their public self-image in order to allow a sense of connectedness among peers: how they incorporate their consumption practices into their peer culture; and how their strategic representation of possession and knowledge may compromise their visibility among peers. I will show how, in their efforts to join with and feel connected to others, young children constantly, and often creatively, shape and reshape the meanings and values of goods and knowledge.

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[70] A part of this chapter was published in an article titled "Young Children's Character Culture in Japan: Possession, Knowledge and Belongingness" (Takahashi, 2013) in *Childhoods Today*.
[71] *Samurai Sentai Shinkenger*, one of the superhero series, was broadcast from February 2009 to January 2010 on TV Asahi.
[72] Pugh (2009: 67-71) uses categories of bridging labor, claiming, patrolling and concealing as face-work strategies, but my use of these five strategies is slightly different (see 6.1.3.).

6.1. Creating a Sense of Belonging

6.1.1. Friendship: peer interaction and relationship

My perceptions of young children's friendships in the two preschools correspond with those of Corsaro (2005) and Newcomb and Bagwell (1995): my research outcomes suggest that young children's interpersonal relationships are mostly produced here and now through interactive space, temporarily rather than durably (see Chapter 2).

In both preschools, the classroom teachers often used the term 'friend' (*otomodachi*) to remind the children to show kindness, care and affection to each other. The term applied to all the children in the classroom or even in the whole preschool, and the nature of 'friendship' was employed through the symbolic power of language to equalise the children and value the harmony of the cohort regardless of age, gender, abilities and social differences (also see Hendry, 2013). Teachers paid careful attention to the children's grouping and pairing during organised activities in order not to leave any of them out. In this regard, particular temporal and spatial routines made every child 'a friend' – regardless of whether or not s/he liked or got along with certain peers. While friendship was verbally announced and children were reminded of its importance by teachers on daily basis, children's verbal assertions of friendship, such as asking "We're friends, right?" and "Are you my friend?" were rarely evident. In contrast with Corsaro's (2003) and James's (1993) findings in their studies of young children's peer relationships, I hardly heard the children in my study mention or talk about their friendship, best friend, or likes or dislikes among their peers. I argue that this difference stems from the fact that the Japanese term 'friend' (*otomodachi*) refers to an obligatory, equal and public relationship in the preschool context. However, this does not mean that the children in my study did not have complex interpersonal relationships. Although the classroom teachers often reminded the young children of the need for equalised and harmonious relationships through emphasising the notion of 'friend', the peer interactions and relationships of each individual child were different, and the children also seemed to be well aware of this. In fact, their relational contexts echo classroom contexts:

> For each pupil within a cohort, in other words, classroom contexts are both the same and yet are different. They are the same in that pupils may well all be present at identical times, adjust to similar expectations and often engage in similar curricular activities. However, they are different because each child experiences the classroom in the light of their particular structural position, learning stance, interests, strategies, identity and cultural background (Pollard & Filer, 1996: 281).

The relational contexts of pre-schoolers are comparable in the way that children are present at identical times and in identical spaces, and adjust to shared expectations of equality and harmony in the name of 'friend' (*otomodachi*) (also see Hendry, 2013). Yet, each individual child seems to establish his/her own relationships based on conformity and a sense of belonging within and through their peer culture. In fact, the children in the both preschools acknowledged personal and interactional differences, having desires to be connected to specific peers and to belong to particular peer groups. In my participant observation, instead of their verbal definitions and explanations, non-verbal cues – exchanging a reciprocal smile; playing side by side; or even ignoring others' calls – and other indirect verbal approaches often revealed their desires to be or not to be connected to others. Friendship is not a simple and naturally arising relationship of affectivity, as James (1993: 215 [emphasis in original]) argues: "It must be affirmed, confirmed and reaffirmed through social action. This explains how the emphasis upon 'sameness' and conformity in children's social relationships …. works to mitigate the significance which any differences might have." In other words, friendship needs to be worked and reworked through children's strategic use of particular cultural styles of performance.

6.1.2. The economy of dignity: making themselves visible

In order to establish a sense of connectedness and belonging among peers, children seem to adopt a variety of strategies. Children claim, challenge, monitor and share whatever enables them to participate in play or conversation among their peers in the preschool classroom. This system of social meaning-making, where children make themselves visible and audible, present and therefore important to their peers, is what Allison Pugh (2009) calls the "economy of dignity". In her book, *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children and Consumer Culture,* she defines 'dignity' as the

quality or state of being "worthy of belonging": "[w]ith dignity, children are visible to their peers, and granted the aural space, the very right to speak in their own community's conversation" (ibid.: 7). Relying on mostly discursive rules governing their talk, children negotiate values not only in relation to their consumer activities but also to personal facts – in my study for example, from possessions of character goods to whether or not they can eat green pepper; from whether or not they have siblings to knowledge about electronic devices. Despite her attention to the social inequality of children's households, across her field sites Pugh found that the conversational negotiations of low-income children and affluent children were very similar in tone and style:

> Children talk. They assert, they mumble, they brag, they beg, they encourage, they sympathize, they argue. Through talk, children, like adults, mold and shape the relationships that form their environment. Children use talk to establish, if only momentarily, who is part of their world; their conversations are like a country pond into which they dive…. (Pugh, 2009: 50).

The concept of "economy of dignity" enables us to focus more on children's willingness to belong to their peer world, rather than adopting the more traditional view of consumers' competitive status-seeking practices. According to the traditional view, people buy and desire to buy goods that they believe will confer a higher and better status, in order to win the esteem and envy of others. This view is apparent in Veblen's account of the "conspicuous consumption" of the American "leisure class" (Veblen, 1899), written more than one hundred years ago. Evoking jealousy and envy is certainly part of the emotional encounters that characterise children's consumer practices, but to a large extent – particularly when discussing young children's peer consumer culture (see Chapter 2) – Pugh's notion of 'dignity' seems more appropriate. As she puts it, this term refers less to 'envy' than to "the 'esteem' of others, the goal of joining the circle rather than one of bettering it" (Pugh, 2009: 7 [emphasis in original]). I heard a lot of claims about current having and future getting like the boy's announcement quoted above: "Once this one [*Anpanman* fork case] gets broken, I'm getting a *Shinkenger* one!" I would argue that his conversational entry is not so much about his intention to flaunt his purchasing power or strive for a superior status; rather it seeks connectedness through the cultural repertoire of popular TV animation characters shared among his peers.

As children collectively shape their "economy of dignity" in peer interaction, particular goods and knowledge are transformed into relational currencies, tokens of value filled with meanings. Particular economies of dignity vary across children's situated environments, such as in the preschool, in the neighbourhood and in extra-curricular lessons – where different relational currencies become more salient depending on the peer group members. Even within an everyday preschool classroom, they are constantly challenged and negotiated in the contextual landscape, and in order to join in the conversation or play and make themselves worthy of belonging among peers, each child works on his/her face, "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 61).

The concept of "face" was first introduced into social theory by the sociologist Erving Goffman (1955) with his article *On Face-work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction*[73]. The term "face-work" was coined to describe the actions taken by people to make up for omissions or threats – how people manage their self-image in front of the audience in order to counteract incidents that threaten their status and sense of belonging. According to Goffman (1955), since people are emotionally attached to their faces, they feel great when their faces are well maintained, but conversely, losing face leads to emotional damage and pain: "face" is thus a synonym for dignity and prestige. Goffman's concept of face was expanded by social anthropologists Brown and Levinson (1987) in their politeness theory, which accounts for people's use of conversational strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts in interpersonal relationships. The concept of face or face-work used by these social scientists focuses primarily on *conversation*: it suggests that, in talk, people are constantly seeking to *save face* (avoid loss/damage of self-image), and that face-threatening situations carry the risk of *losing face*. My use of the term differs to some extent from theirs but supports Pugh's understanding of face-work, "the impression management that involves the presentation of an honorable self – in order to gather dignity in public" (Pugh, 2009: 52). Building on Pugh's insights into children's experiences, I also focus on the people, the *children* doing face-work, rather than on the *conversation*, whose norms face-work maintains (see ibid.: 53). As she suggests, in their economies of dignity, children do face-work not

[73] Reprinted in (Goffman, 1967)

only to *save face* – to rescue their public self-image, and to provide a sense of their visibility and belonging – but also to establish their public self-image in the first place (Pugh, 2009). In their everyday conversations and free play in the preschool, they seem to seek attention and connectedness – a process that is well expressed in the Japanese idiom, "selling face", which signifies gaining influence[74] (Carr, 1992).

6.1.3. Dignity strategies

In exploring how children use particular goods, knowledge and experiences as relational currencies in their everyday interactions, I identify five kinds of face-work strategies employed by the children (often simultaneously), depending on the complex and dynamic contexts of the preschool environment. These different strategies are claiming, monitoring, cooperating, contesting and concealing, and each of them will be exemplified later in this chapter. Pugh (2009: 67-71) also illustrates four such strategies – bridging labour, claiming, patrolling and concealing. She uses the four strategies primarily to analyse children's management of socio-economic differences in the US. Her discussion focuses on class, race and social inequality in the everyday consumption practices of parents and children, broadly contrasting the working class with the middle class. While my analysis obviously draws on her approach, my way of using the five face-work strategies is slightly different from hers, not least because the children's socioeconomic backgrounds in my study are comparatively homogeneous. I describe further in relation to each strategy below.

Claiming

Claiming is a strategy employed most often by preschool children. While children's participation is automatically guaranteed in classroom activities organised by the teacher, their daily interactions and conversations with peers – especially during lunch and free play – are full of uncertainty about their inclusion and participation in the peer group. Their claims, such as declaring their past, current and future possessions and experiences, reflect the attempt to gain publicity, to draw attention or to participate as a socially competent self. My way of using this strategy is different from Pugh's (2009)

[74] This analysis of "face" (prestige; honour; pride; status; dignity in Chinese) is socio-linguistically elaborated in Japanese and English by Carr (1992).

because her focus is on children's claiming ownership or possession of things they do *not* have or own. In her study, children in the working class and middle class engage in claiming or suggesting their fictional possessions, sometimes based upon their fantasies. Also, the children in her study claim "the rights to beg, borrow, or steal particular items" they yearn for (Pugh, 2009: 68). By contrast, the children's use of claiming in my study is also a matter of telling their peers about their actual (or planned) possessions, knowledge and experiences.

Monitoring

The children in my study carefully monitored their peers' claims, conversations and behaviours in order to negotiate their social standing and construct a common frame of reference. This strategy seems similar to Pugh's "patrolling" (2009: 69), but her use is strongly related to children's affirmation of the accuracy of peers' claims. In her study, the children critically evaluate, correct and challenge other's claims through patrolling. My way of using 'monitoring' is more to do with how children observe others' possessions and knowledge in order to find a connection, without necessarily seeking to verify their claims. Despite the fact that Japan is a nation with little income inequality compared to the US (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), children's access to consumer goods varies. Some obtain a lot of commercial products and knowledge, but others receive limited kinds; and there are also personal and interactional differences. Their observations provide a reflexive view of self and other: they establish whether I am worthy of joining in or s/he is worthy of joining in.

Cooperating

Pugh (2009) uses "bridging labor" as one of children's face-work strategies, but this is different from my use of cooperating. In her study, this strategy is used by children with less access to consumer goods. These children use what Pugh calls 'aura' – something admirable – in order to surmount a perceived deficit in possession and experiences: for example, one working class girl described her father's blue-collar occupation as a driver to her affluent peers by connecting with popular musicians and sport players. In my study, the focus of 'cooperating' is on children finding 'sameness' and sharing this sense of 'sameness' with their peers in attempting to find a connection. In general, the

'face-work' practices I observed were more about establishing sameness than about emphasising differences. By cooperating with each other, such as making claims about shared possessions and broadening a conversation based on a claim, or even singing-along and copying certain phrases, the children generate moments of sharing which lead to a sense of being together, belonging and friendship. As Wærdahl (2003) has pointed out, the significant frames of reference for such claims are learned and appropriated through 'participation' in peer interactions; and so this strategy contributes to making each other visible and present in the space.

Contesting

Contesting in my study overlaps to some extent with Pugh's notion of "patrolling" (2009), although it does not necessarily entail challenging the accuracy of claims. When the children in my study contest, they challenge another child's social prestige both as a consumer and as a peer, which is manifested not only in his/her possessions and knowledge but also his/her ways of representation. Even though they focus mostly on sameness, this is the moment when they distance themselves by showing off whatever they think more valuable, or sometimes by downplaying another child's performance in order to sustain their own dignity. I do not see this strategy as necessarily a matter of children's exertion of power or domination over others, but more as a further expression of the children's desire to be recognised as a full member in their peer world.

Concealing

Concealing is a strategy where children engage in "shame work" (Pugh, 2009; Thorne, 2008), avoiding the risk of somebody catching out their inappropriate possessions and knowledge. The term as used by Pugh and Thorne is profoundly associated with children's social and personal differences, particularly ethnic and income distinctions, but my analysis focuses more on interactional differences which arise in children's performances. Some children in my study conceal their lack of possessions, knowledge and experiences, from disapproving others by keeping silent, because having nothing to say is akin to invisibility in the communicational space, and this silence can also function as disinterest. On the other hand, other children carefully monitor the peers'

conversational flow and seek to join in, which triggers a chance for the moment of sharing and gaining new knowledge.

These five different strategies are woven in and appear at different points in the analysis (flagged by the use of italics). However, the chapter is organised more in terms of broader themes and concepts rather than in terms of these strategies. Nevertheless, I will revisit this framework more directly towards the end, in seeking to pull together my findings about the different strategies the children adopt. In the following analyses, I will explore how the children's sense of connectedness and belonging is produced, negotiated and maintained in and through cultural performances that relate to consumer possessions and knowledge. First, I begin with children's having.

6.2. Having

6.2.1. Must have recognisable characters

As Japanese culture itself places a strong and positive emphasis on character goods (see Chapter 3), young children's peer culture cannot be discussed without recognising and acknowledging the importance of merchandised characters (Bandai, 2010). From the first day of my fieldwork in the preschool, many children were eager to show me their preschool supplies – their lunch boxes, water bottles, hand towels, shirts, even underwear by flipping their skirts or pulling down their pants. Without knowing the children's intentions and expectations in doing this, I usually gave positive comments on all the goods, saying things like "That's great!" or "That's nice." It did not take a long time to realise one crucial aspect of these presentations: what they wanted to show me above all were the characters attached to all their belongings. In fact, they emphasised specific character names when showing the actual goods to me, saying "Look! I have *Decade*!" or "Look! *PreCure*!" They sometimes seemed to expect me to know what characters were attached to their belongings by simply saying "Look!" while pointing at an object. In order to learn about young children's culture, I had to make a conscious effort to familiarise myself with popular character names and to find out where they came from. Many of them came from TV animation programmes – especially those in the children's television block provided by TV Asahi on Sunday

mornings, which includes superhero series and magical girl series – and some were licensed characters found in various kinds of products targeted particularly at young children.

Soon after I noticed children's fascination with certain characters, I glanced over their belongings nicely stored in each locker, and wrote down the names of the characters attached to the things children bring from home. Most of the children had more than one kind, and the characters were even on their tooth brush, chopsticks, pyjamas and underwear. The number of characters I roughly noted was 23 for boys and 30 for girls, while 13 characters were used by both boys and girls.

Table 3: Character list

	boys	**girls**
1	Anpanman	
2	Shimajiro	
3	Doraemon	
4	Mickey Mouse	
5	Yatterman	
6	Miffy	
7	Stitch	
8	Shinkansen	
9	Winnie the Pooh	
10	Snoopy	
11	Hello Kitty	
12	Cinnamoroll	
13	Ultraman	
14	Dragon Ball	Yes! PreCure 5 GoGo!
15	Goseiger	Fresh Pretty Cure!
16	Thomas and Friends	HeartCatch PreCure!
17	Shinkenger	Usahana
18	Blue Dragon	Tinkerbell
19	Usavich	Dokin-chan
20	One Piece	Gekirenger
21	Sesame Street	My Melody
22	Cars	Kirarin Revolution
23	SpongeBob	Miss Bunny
24		Rilakkuma
25		Marie
26		Minnie
27		Disney Princesses
28		Sugar Bunny
29		Peco-chan
30		Gachapin

Even though preschool teachers are concerned about the marketing-led expansion of character goods and toys in children's daily lives and try to create a neutral and relatively commercial-free environment in preschool, they think they have less control over the goods the children bring from home. The classroom teachers at Momiji Preschool, Shinjō-sensei and Miyakawa-sensei agreed with each other: "We are actually not against those character goods the children bring to preschool. We had our own favourite characters in our childhood, and well, we still do. In most of the cases, children go shopping with their mothers and pick something that is needed for preschool together. It's nice that they have something they like!" The interviews with the mothers revealed that they wanted to avoid purchasing character products related to the latest craze, especially the Sunday TV animation series, if possible, because "The programmes change quite often and they [products] don't last long!" However, from their own childhood experiences, many mothers understood that it is important for the children to have their belongings adorned with recognisable as well as favourite characters.

For the children in my study, there are two primary functions of preschool supplies with characters brought from home. First of all, those character names and pictures often play a role as identification markers, and secondly, their visual appeal makes it easy to establish 'sameness' among peers. Unlike older children who often attempt to be different from and unique among their peers (Wærdahl, 2003), for young children including the children in my study, finding something 'same' and 'compatible' automatically seems to generate conformity and to establish a connection with others, however temporary. Therefore, they tend to choose their preschool supplies adorned with recognisable, 'fitting-in' characters.

6.2.2. Characters as identification and social markers

On the first day of swimming lessons for the summer at Momiji Preschool, the children were already aware of what kinds of swimming suits they had brought. I was writing my field-note near the children's lockers when they came to pick up their swimming bags, Saori (girl, 5) came to me with her swimming suit pulled out of her bag, and soon other children joined this show-and-tell.

Saori (g): Look! I have *HeartCatch PreCure*! (showing her pink swimming suit.)
(Other children come up to me with their swimming bags.)
Takuma (b): Look at mine! I have *Beyblade*! (pulling out his swimming suit.)
Kōki (b): Look! Look! Mine is *Shinkenger*! (pointing at his suit in the bag.)
Kaede (g): Look at mine! (pointing at her suit in the bag. She has *My Melody*[75].)

After having *claimed* character names and showed their swimming suits and bags to me, the children carefully observed their friends' in the changing area, stating who has what character, finding out who has the same one, and asking where those were purchased. In the classroom, where more than twenty children are required to bring the same goods, characters become clues to discover the owners – at least for the children – and the recognition of the character is closely related to the recognition and visibility of the child's standing or position in the collective.

Even though many 3-5 year-old children in my study were able to read 48 *hiragana* characters (which represent each syllable and are the first written letters children learn in Japanese), they tended to recognise and identify their belongings and others' belongings based on character pictures instead of the names written on them. One afternoon, Shinjō-sensei picked up a shirt lying on the floor and automatically looked for the name that was supposed to be written on the tag or the back of the shirt. Because the name was not found anywhere, she asked the children while holding up the shirt. The children could immediately tell its owner by looking at the character picture on the shirt. "Oh! That shirt, *Dragon Ball*! I think Tomoki had it." "Yūki has that *Dragon Ball* shirt, too! I've seen it before!" Even though the teachers relied on the children's names written on their preschool supplies in terms of lost and missing goods, it was quite easy for the children to identify the owner by looking at the character pictures and exchanging their knowledge with each other. Familiar characters, more than colours and shapes, were definitive markers to identify others' belongings.

This was clearer when the children on duty were trying to figure out the matching mattresses and blankets for 45 children[76] during nap time. Both futon mattress and blanket are brought from home, and each folded mattress with its blanket is usually piled up in a certain area of the classroom. Yet, since all the mattresses had been washed

[75] One of the Sanrio characters.
[76] In many activities such as free play and nap time, two classes were put together.

over the weekend, the blankets were piled up separately in the original place. The nine children on duty could manage to match two thirds of the mattresses and blankets by asking each other and using their memory. Those that were matched quickly had, in fact, designs of well-known characters. In spite of unfinished matching by the duty children, Shinjō-sensei asked all the children to sit and wait on their own laid-out mattress, and then Sakura (girl, 5) came to me to complain that her blanket was missing while Mayu (girl, 5), one of the duty children, tried to help her.

Sakura: Mayumi-sensei[77], I don't have my blanket!
Me: Do you have your name on it?
Sakura: I don't know…
Me: Do you know what kind of picture it has?
Sakura: Ummm… (looking around to find something.)
Mayu: Do you have something on your blanket?
(Sakura goes to her locker to take out her water bottle and shows its picture to me.)
Me: Ah! Snoopy!
(Mayu looks at me and then the picture on Sakura's water bottle.)
Mayu: Snoopy, right?
Sakura: Yeah, Snoopy!
(Mayu goes to the place where the rest of the blankets are piled up and brings the Snoopy blanket for Sakura.)

The focus of my discussion here is not on a situation where I deliberately or unconsciously provided character knowledge to Sakura and Mayu, but on the way children recognised and managed to find their belongings based on this. This matching incident during nap time, where blankets with no characters or less well-known characters were left out, illustrates an instance of children's recognition and knowledge about these characters, and their use as markers to identify owners. Sakura's blanket was left on the pile by the nine duty children, and neither Mayu nor Sakura knew about Snoopy. On this basis it can be said that children 'recognise' only certain kinds of characters: Snoopy was not one of the well-known or widely acknowledged characters among the children at least in the two classrooms at Momiji Preschool. Through daily interactions, they learn, *monitor* and evaluate which media and licensed characters are available for them, and through evaluation they come to understand which characters are or should be the standard and appropriate tastes. Some are known by all the children, but others are not.

[77] Even though the children knew that I was not a teacher, they added the title, *sensei* (teacher) after my first name (see Chapter 4).

6.2.3. "So what?": drawing attention from peers

As I have discussed above, some characters are not recognised by children. The empirical example of Snoopy is a case where two girls figured out the name of the picture with my help and solved a matching and identifying problem. Yet, how would children react if the characters or pictures do not have specific names or do not fit into commonly shared character categorisations? When I was writing down the character names on children's water bottles while the children were drinking water at each group table in Tokiwa Preschool, I found one water bottle with a lot of animal pictures – definitely not related to TV animation characters – in the spot Shō (boy, 5) was sitting. With an interest in his description, I decided to ask Shō what kind of water bottle he had.

> Me: Hi Shō! Can I see your water bottle?
> Shō: Yeah!
> Me: What kind of water bottle do you have?
> (Shō stares at his water bottle for a second with a puzzled look on his face.)
> Shō: Ummm… There are a lot of animals… you know… Here is Miss Rabbit, this is Mr. Mouse, this is Miss Bear, this is Miss Elephant… (pointing at each animal on the water bottle)
> Kōki (boy, 5) is listening to our conversation at the same table and also looking at Shō's water bottle, but once Shō starts mentioning common nouns on his water bottle, Kōki suddenly leaves the table saying "So what?"

I wonder if Kōki would have had the same reaction, leaving the table and as if *contesting* Shō, saying "So what?", if Shō had been talking about popular or at least well-known characters. One interesting strategy Shō took in the conversation with me is that he personified those animals by adding the suffix (prefix in English) of 'Miss (*san*)' and 'Mr. (*kun*)'. The tendency to attach the suffix to animals and even to inanimate objects is quite common among young children in Japan, but his switching suffixes between 'Miss' and 'Mr.' may indicate his intention of familiarising the monotonous animals in order to draw more attention from the listeners. In fact, Shō's eyes uneasily *monitored* Kōki's reactions more than mine. Generally, the children in my study expressed their willingness to join a conversation when its topic was interesting to them, especially when we were talking about the latest animation characters. Their fascination with merchandised characters was evident in their responses to my questions when I asked them what kind of object they had. Their descriptions were not particularly

associated with the shape, colour or texture of the objects – instead, they would focus on character names. Having recognisable characters is crucial for preschool children to attract attention from others or stay 'in tune' with peers. Having and knowing about something all your peers know about, especially popular characters, is an important key to gaining dignity and recognition of ownership. In the process, this particular possession and knowledge becomes a silent visual appeal and representation of the self.

6.2.4. Looking for sameness: cooperating with peers

> A sense of sameness is important for children, providing them a feeling of belonging, a way in which to smooth over the potential which any personal diversity or deviation might have to rupture the social relations that exist between one child and another (Christensen & James, 2000a: 169).

The children in my study were experts when it came to finding 'sameness' – having the same character goods, going to the same shopping mall, watching the same TV animations – because it automatically brought conformity and a sense of sharing. Having the same popular media and licensed character goods especially evoked immediate connection and intimacy. As stated by Christensen & James (2000a) and revealed by my study, 'sameness' attracts children, although this similarity-attraction paradigm (see Byrne, 1971) is hardly a recent recognition: it was Aristotle who asserted that "We like those who resemble us, and are engaged in the same pursuits … We like those who desire the same things as we" (quoted in Byrne, 1971: 24). This would imply that children are attracted to those who like the 'same' character goods and characters with a 'similar' categorical value because there is a speculation that they also have similar attitudes and experiences. Dittmar explains the association between material possessions and social interactions as follows:

> Material goods are used to make inferences about others' identities – about their social class, lifestyle, occupation, personal qualities and values – because judging others in material terms fulfills an important function in orienting people in their social worlds so that they can anticipate what kind of interaction to enter into (Dittmar, 1992: 92).

It can be argued that children including the children in my study tend to build relationships quickly, not least by making connections through shared possessions. In

the absence of relatively stable and sustained commitments, their friendships consist of sets of momentary 'samenesses', and their search for and *cooperating* to establish something 'same' – is one strategic approach in the process of making and maintaining friendships. The following conversation between two girls, Saori (girl, 5) and Kiyona (girl, 5), illustrates an interesting aspect surrounding this sameness:

> Children are changing into their pyjamas for nap time, and Saori shows me her shirt once she has taken off her smock.
>
> Saori: Look! Since I don't have my smock on, you can see a *HeartCatch PreCure* T-shirt! (pulling the bottom of the shirt so I can see the picture well)
> Me: The girls are cute! Who are these two girls?
> Saori: Pink is *Cure Blossom* and blue is *Cure Marine*!
> Me: Which one do you like better?
> Saori: *Cure Blossom*…
> (Kiyona who is changing her clothes next to Saori joins our conversation.)
> Kiyona: I… I like… I like Marine better! She is cuter! (looking carefully at Saori's shirt) Heey! I have the <u>same</u> T-shirt!
> Saori: Really? Can you put it on tomorrow?
> Kiyona: Yeah! You should wear the <u>same</u> one, too!!
> Saori: But… but this one needs to be washed… So, after tomorrow!

The way Kiyona joins our conversation is very smooth and natural even without her having looked at Saori's shirt. The most effective strategy for children to enter a conversation or a play scenario is based on how smoothly they can sell their face – gaining attention while taking part in and fitting into the flow through *monitoring*. In order to be successful in joining in, they have to be confident in demonstrating their cultural knowledge in an appropriate communicative manner. Their statement needs to be within the 'same' contextual repertoire, in this case, *HeartCatch PreCure*. Therefore, while Kiyona picks a different favourite character from Saori's, this difference does not seem to matter too much to them; rather, naming their own favourite reveals a tacit understanding between the two girls that they both like *HeartCatch PreCure*. Sharing the same social and cultural world makes an immediate connection between them. Their interpersonal relationship becomes more intimate when Kiyona finds out that she actually has the 'same' shirt as Saori. They agree to wear the 'same' shirt on the 'same' day, although in fact I never saw them wear it on that arranged day or afterwards. From this empirical evidence, I argue that the moment of *cooperation* – sharing and

maintaining a relationship through asserting 'sameness' – is more important to them than the sustained future relationship involving promises and commitments.

Young children's friendship is affirmed and reaffirmed mostly through these manifestations of 'sameness' and 'compatibleness' (also see James, 1993). It is usually associated with the actual existence of a material possession in the classroom but children also used their past sharing of sameness to *cooperate* to establish their present connectedness. During one lunch time at Tokiwa Preschool, Hinata (girl, 4) suddenly told me that her chopsticks were the same as Yume's (girl, 4). Since the ones Hinata was holding were *Hello Kitty* and Yume's were *Sugar Bunny*, I asked Hinata about her declaration of 'sameness'. Hinata said: "They are home today," and Yume nodded "Yeah, we have the same ones, right?" with a friendly smile to Hinata. Preschool children have a desire to find a relational connectedness through 'same' things (mostly 'same' characters) but also are very concerned about differences – what others have and what I do not have: this 'sameness' could exclude the self from others.

The following example shows Kiyona's concern about what she does not have or know through her careful *monitoring*. One lunch time at Momiji Preschool, Kiyona (girl, 5) and Kotoha (girl, 5) were taking out their lunch boxes and fork cases from their school bags and putting them on the table:

> Kiyona points at Kotoha's lunch box while she is away and asks me hesitantly.
> Kiyona: Do you know this character?
> Me: No… (It says *Miss Bunny* but I am not familiar with the picture.)
> Kiyona: I don't know it either, but it must be popular because Seri, Saya and Hana have the <u>same</u> one…

The way Kiyona asks me, not Kotoha, a question about an unfamiliar character on the lunch box in the absence of its owner signifies Kiyona's face-work – *concealing*: it offers a means of saving her dignity. Her uncertainty is to do with her social standing – the possibility that she might not belong to the circle of 'sameness' the three girls share, not only due to her lack of possession of the same character goods but also her lack of knowledge. Kiyona is a girl who was generally confident in leading both conversation and play among peers by proclaiming her ideas and sharing broad consumer/media knowledge – as is illustrated in the way she smoothly joined the conversation about

HeartCatch PreCure and its T-shirt between Saori and me described above. However, she might have been threatened by her unfamiliarity with a character that seems to be popular since at least three girls own the same one. As this implies, it is not only owning the same things but also sharing knowledge about material objects that provides the members of peer culture with a sense of conformity and belonging. In the next section I will focus specifically on children's knowing.

6.3. Knowing

6.3.1. Know-how: living in a double world

There have been many studies of the significant associations between object possessions and identity construction, which suggest that the meanings of products serve both as symbols for personal qualities, attitudes and values and as markers of social position and belonging (Dittmar, 1992). The focus of this research has been primarily on possessions: how people 'speak' not only with things but also through the medium of things by owning, displaying and using certain material objects (see Barthes, 1973; Baudrillard, 1981; Levi-Strauss, 1966). The discussion of the role of consumer *knowledge* in developing and maintaining social relationships – how people employ knowledge surrounding consumer products, not only about products themselves but also about advertising, shopping, pricing and experiencing – has been less well developed, except for studies primarily by marketing researchers of the relationship between consumer knowledge and choices (e.g., Bettman & Park, 1980; Ratchford, 2001). Consumer knowledge, defined as the extent of experience and familiarity with products (Bettman & Park, 1980), is as significant as the possessions themselves with respect to making sense of the situated world and establishing social relationships. This is because consumer knowledge, which is socially constructed, is interwoven with the product, and the knowledge commonly shared by individuals in a group shapes and manifests the product's symbolic dimensions. As this implies, material possessions and knowledge should be seen as interdependent in terms of the construction of symbolic meanings and values.

As Davies (1982) suggests, children's peer culture emerges through their engagement with the wider adult culture, creating a double world of childhood, in which children actively take varieties of objects, roles and practices from the adult culture into their own. She argues that children combine their knowledge about the adult world – of which they are partially members – with their knowledge about their own world – of which they are full members (ibid.: 170). This intricately interwoven knowledge contributes to their creative, fluid and often intersecting peer consumer culture. As my data show, one significant aspect of young children's participation in consumer culture is that they are not only interested in 'getting' and 'having' things, but also in 'knowing how' to do so – they are interested in the *process* of getting and using things. By experiencing a wide range of marketing strategies through mass media and observing adults' daily consumer practices within their family, children obtain information, knowledge and ideas about how consumer practices are processed and how products and services work. What can be or should be more studied is how these forms of information, knowledge and ideas are also obtained and exchanged in peer interactions – as is discussed by Quart (2003) in her study of the emergence of the peer-to-peer marketing among older children. This commonly shared 'know how' contributes to make certain products more meaningful and valuable than others, and more importantly, it is a confirmation to children that they belong to a certain peer culture.

6.3.2. "HeartCatch will end soon!": warning peers

Following Cook (2008), children's consumption practices typically entail forms of "co-consumption" with parents and peers. As I have noted, both peers and some mothers deliberately inform their children of a possible decline in character values following the end of a broadcast. It is routine for the children's television block provided by TV Asahi on Sunday mornings to have each animation series end and new one start at a certain time every year. In the case of magical girl series, the end of the series broadcast is in January and starting date is in February. While I was doing my observation at Momiji Preschool in the winter of 2009-2010, there was a transition from *HeartCatch PreCure* to *Suite PreCure*. At the beginning of January, I heard some girls constantly claiming

and sharing their knowledge about the end of *HeartCatch PreCure*, as in the following conversation:

Kotoha: You know what, Takahashi Mayumi-sensei? *PreCure* will end soon. Isn't it right? (asking Mayu for agreement)
Mayu: Yeah!
Me: How do you know that? Why do you know that it will end?
Kotoha: Because my mom told me!
Me: Did she say that?
Kotoha: But the new *PreCure* will start.

As if it were an advertisement saying "Don't worry! The new *PreCure* will start soon!", many girls talked about the broadcast of new series with a joyful smile. As TV Asahi started announcing the broadcast of *Suite PreCure* during the commercial break of *HeartCatch PreCure*, adults will probably have explained to the preschool girls what this 'new broadcast' means in terms of the related products, just like Mako explained to her daughter in Chapter 5. Yet, at the same time, the girls had got this know-how under their belt. Behind the girls' delighted claiming and sharing of knowledge, they were also offering a warning to their peers or almost *contesting* their peers. The girls learned that new broadcasts lead to new goods, as Kotoha later said: "Well, the new *PreCure* starts, and new *PreCure* things will come out!" Before the former programme ended, it became a common understanding among the girls that buying *HeartCatch PreCure* products would not be worthwhile anymore.

The decline in the positive meanings and values of *HeartCatch PreCure* became obvious once the programme was over and the new programme started. This is accounted for by the change in *PreCure*'s broad commercial availability, as discussed by Kaede (girl, 5) and Saori (girl, 5):

Kaede: You know what? *HeartCatch PreCure* socks are now cheaper because it [the TV programme] is over.
Me: Are they?
(Saori joins.)
Saori: Now *Suite PreCure* is on TV! I like it a lot!
Kaede: Everything about *HeartCatch*, like clothes and shoes are on sale now!
Saori: I'm getting *Suite PreCure* though!
Me: You have a lot of *HeartCatch*, don't you, Saori?
Saori: (giggles) But I want *Suite PreCure* now!

The conversation made by Kaede and Saori reminds us of the perspective of "commercial enculturation" proposed by Cook (2010), which emphasises how consumption practices and meanings arise together through the social contexts and processes of peer consumer culture. In the case of *HeartCatch PreCure*, no matter how cheap the products became, the girls wanted the latest *PreCure* things. Living in a double world as consumers, they seem to apprehend how the media and the market cooperate to sell products. Some researchers might take this as evidence that children are 'manipulated' by marketing strategies, since they unquestioningly follow anything new offered by the media and the market. However, my observation suggests that it is not that simple.

First of all, the *HeartCatch PreCure* products young girls turn their back on before the end of the broadcast must have become dead stocks for the stores. No matter how much cheaper they become, girls do not yearn for them anymore (also see Hori, 1996). By claiming and sharing their know-how, the children in my study warn each other and *cooperate* to construct new meanings and values in their peer consumer culture. Like Saori, many children certainly want the latest things which might allow them to sell their face and have prestige among peers. It is however a different matter whether the new broadcast directly links to the purchase of the new products, because children's consumption implies wider social relationships and contexts outside preschool, as illustrated in Chapter 5. Above all, in the preschool classroom, despite the fact that the main attention was drawn to the latest character products, those from previous series coexisted with them; and, needless to say, knowing could often override actual having in terms of peer connections. In the next section I explore how this kind of consumer knowledge creates a sense of connectedness.

6.3.3. "You have to make everything L!": constructing know-how

At the time of my participant observation at Momiji Preschool, the Happy Meal toys (*Pocket Monster* balls) and food straps (cell-phone straps) at McDonald's were very popular among pre-schoolers. The primary reasons seemed to be their collectability at the individual level and their conspicuousness at the public level. Their feature of

collectability, within a limited available period[78], increased children's desire to get as many different kinds as possible before the stock ran out. Because the precise kind of toys cannot be chosen by the customers at McDonald's, this randomness made some children both frustrated and eager collectors. In addition, the Happy Meal toys and food straps available at that time functioned as key chains, so that the children could easily bring these toy-like objects to preschool without breaking the rules[79], by hanging them on their school bags. The children in my study quickly recognised those McDonald's 'key chains' hanging visibly outside each other's school bags: the more children who displayed a particular kind of toy, the more significant and definite social markers the key chains became. As this implies, the display of these toys served not only to connect the self with others through the 'same' consumer possession and experience, but also to indicate one's own social and cultural prestige as a consumer. As consumers, I would argue that children are eager to learn about the implications surrounding consumer objects, to present their acquired knowledge, and to share information with their peers, because these forms of know-how themselves can convey symbolic values. This is especially the case when the acquisition and use of objects is complex or difficult, or when objects are not directly intended for children but for adults.

Before a nap time, Ren (boy, 5) waits in front of his locker while the children on duty are laying out the mattresses. He holds a hamburger key chain hanging from his school bag stored in the locker and opens his mouth as if he were going to bite it. When he notices my glance, he smiles at me as he lets go of the key chain.

Me:	Your hamburger looks very tasty, Ren!
Ren:	I got this at Mc [Donald's]! [It came with] a Happy Meal!
Me:	You got it with a Happy Meal?
Ren:	Yeah! Saori has Latte one. There are six kinds, like fries and Mc house…
	This is Hamburger. (pointing at his key chain)
	You have to make everything L [large] to get this! (spoken confidently)

[78] The Happy Meal toys, Pocket Monster balls, were available from December 17, 2010 until the beginning of January 2011. The balls had four types: talking type, crystal type, projector type and stamper type. Each type had six different colors and characters, and therefore 24 kinds in total were produced (http://www.mcd-holdings.co.jp/news/2010/promotion/promo1210.html). The food strap campaigns took place twice in the summer and in the winter 2010, and six kinds of McDonald's straps were available each time (http://www.mcd-holdings.co.jp/news/index_2010.html).

[79] Children are not allowed to bring toys to preschool (see Chapter 4).

Me: Oh… I have to make everything L?
Ren: Yeah… fries, drink and hamburger, too! Even [the slice of] tomato is larger!
Me: I have to make everything large… I'm afraid that I cannot eat it all.
Ren: I have two more [key chains] at home. Fries and [Mc] house…

Ren's knowledge is an indication of living in the "double world" (Davies, 1982): he takes his knowledge of the adult world (food straps) into his familiar context (the Happy Meal). From their previous experience, many children tended to think that any toys given at McDonald's came with the Happy Meal because – according to their interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 1992) – toys are for them, for children. However, the food straps did not come with the Happy Meal; only the *Pocket Monster* balls did. Unlike the *Pocket Monster* balls that came automatically with the Happy Meal, obtaining the food straps required a large size meal: the drink and the fries needed to be large instead of the medium size. Since those meals are not originally targeted at young children, many parents seemed to have sized up and paid extra to receive a food strap for the sake of their children. From the marketers' side, this is definitely a strategy to make more profit, although Ren seems to enjoy collecting them, and seems to be proud of himself for knowing and explaining how the system works. In fact, his knowledge of these food straps is extremely broad. He knows not only where he has got each one, but also how many kinds are available, who has the same straps, and how they are obtained. The process of obtaining them in itself had obviously added more value to his little hamburger key chain and thus made it more meaningful to him. In this sense, it can be argued that his food strap is a symbol of his consumer knowledge. Soon, Saya (girl, 5) sitting next to Ren joined our conversation:

Saya: What happened to *Pokémon* ones?
Ren: I didn't bring it today. I had it yesterday. It's at home... Its batteries are running low, so it does not light up anymore...
Me: Saya and Ren, what are you talking about?
Ren: [We are talking] about the key chain that came with the Happy Meal. It's a round *Pokémon* toy. When you open the cover, it lights up.
Me: Oh! Is that the one that Yūsei has?
Ren: Ummm… It's different. Yūsei's has a sound, but mine lights up.
Me: Is it different? Does yours light up?
Ren: Yeah. Mine lights up, but it does not work anymore since its batteries are running low.

Saya: There is also *Chibi Maruko-chan*[80]!
Me: *Chibi Maruko-chan*?
Saya: Yeah! When you buy a Happy Meal, it comes with it.
Ren: Yeah! You can press it like this! (holds fingers together as if he were stamping)
Saya: That's right! Stamps!
Ren: Stamps! And… and… things come out!
Me: Things come out?
Ren: Yeah! When you spin the *Chibi Maruko-chan* toy, things come out.
Saya: Such as songs, right?
Ren: Right!

Here, with Saya's entrance in the conversation, we can clearly see how consumer knowledge works as form of social currency (Willett, 2004). The *Pocket Monster* balls were especially popular among boys, and in fact none of the girls, including Saya, had a ball in their bags. However, Saya was able to use her knowledge about the Happy Meal toys to join our conversation smoothly. Her first short question, "What happened to *Pokémon* ones?" indicates her confidence in knowing the conversational repertoire and which questions it is appropriate to ask. Also, in mentioning the previously available Happy Meal *Chibi Maruko-chan* toys and aligning her know-how with Ren's, she *cooperates* to establish both Ren's and her own approved social positions.

6.3.4. "I'm making a computer!": claiming and contesting knowledge

As members of a so-called KGOY (Kids Getting Older Younger) generation that is exposed to more information, more entertainment, more communication and more brands at a much younger age (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003), the preschool children in my study see a variety of consumer products that are intended for older children or even adults. They understand to some extent what kinds of products, services and experiences are available for '*otona*[81]' (adults) but not for them. Their interest and attention seem to be drawn more to such products, particularly electronic devices – mobile phones, DS, Wii, personal computers, 3D TV, digital cameras – which are consistently used by '*otona*' (adults) but less likely to be available to them. When it

[80] The Happy Meal toys, *Chibi Maruko-chan* key chains were available in October 2010. There were five types: lighted ribbon type, singing type, stamper type, sticker type and happy story type. Each type had four different colors and facial expressions of *Chibi Maruko-chan*, and therefore 20 kinds in total were produced (http://www.mcd-holdings.co.jp/news/2010/promotion/promo0903.html).
[81] I used the Japanese term here in order to imply children's own understanding of other people. To young children all those who are older than them are in general considered 'adults'.

comes to electronic devices, some adults might consider it too early or even unnecessary for young children to know about such things. Yet, those objects are found in many households or advertised through corporate marketing in contemporary Japan, and children's curiosity and ideas about what such 'adult' things are like are reflected in their everyday interactions. Nevertheless, it was very seldom that their declaration of statements about electronic devices evoked further conversational exchanges and collective play among the children in my study[82]. Instead, it was more as if they were tossing out news of their individual possessions, knowledge and experiences, like stones that are thrown into a pond, whose wake invites further news (more stones) that would have similar categorical values. What are the children doing with these declarative assertions? On the one hand, they are making sense of those products themselves by re-making them and observing others' reactions after they make announcements about them. On the other hand, they seem to broadcast their knowledge and explore who is eligible to share it.

> Before nap time, the children who have changed into pyjamas sit on the floor quietly reading picture books. Sato (girl, 5) brings one ordinary picture book from the shelves and sits down near a group of peers. Once she opens a book, she announces that it is a 3D TV by holding the book vertically towards the other children. Yoshino (girl, 5) immediately reacts to Sato's statement and keeps moving her face back and forth against the book, saying "Wow, you are right! It's 3D!" A couple more children come close to Sato's book and say "3D!! God, the pictures come out!" "Wow! 3D! It's so real!" while Sato flips its pages. Soon, Shinjō-sensei asks the children to put away the books and to get ready for nap time.

This short conversational exchange or play scenario functions as a form of collective cultural reproduction, as the children around Sato respond appropriately to her declaration. Yoshino's behavioural reaction of moving her face with an exclamatory expression certainly draws others' attention. They enter this space not only by repeating the word '3D', but by presenting their extra knowledge such as "the pictures come out" and "it's so real", to show that they are in the know about this specific consumer object, which is owned in hardly any of their households. While Sato's sudden declaration was expanded into a creative interaction by several of her peers (*cooperation*), children's

[82] When I was involved in their play, the interactions through those electronic devices were more elaborate (see Chapter 7).

claims do not guarantee similar reactions and social interaction all the time, as the following illustrates:

> One morning play time, Akira (boy, 5) is making a computer with Japanese letter blocks by putting them horizontally and vertically alongside several children who are constructing a tower with the same letter blocks. Showing my back to Akira, I sit and watch the tower making: while some children call it a multilevel parking tower, others name it after a local building called the Fukuoka tower. "I'm making a computer!" Akira suddenly announces. Nobody pays attention to his 'computer' or gives a comment on his announcement, but rather the children carefully keep putting letter blocks on the tower. Akira taps on my back. "Look, Takahashi Mayumi-sensei! Computer!" I repeat his statement as a question. "Computer?" "Yeah!" Akira shows his typing at the 'keyboard', the horizontally constructed letter blocks. I ask him what he is doing with the computer. "I'm watching [*Kamen Rider*] *OOO*[83]!" He proudly points at the 'screen', the vertically constructed letter blocks. Until this point, no children join our conversation, although I notice some covert glances. "*OOO*?" I ask. "Yeah! When I plug this in, I can watch *OOO*"; he plugs two blocks into the side of the 'keyboard'. "That looks fun!" I give him a short comment, and then Akira repeats the popular animation character name again, "See, you can watch *OOO*!!", looking at the 'computer screen' and then at the children making the tower besides him. After having noticed that they are busy and are not paying attention to him, Akira spits out "Well… I don't need this anymore! I'm gonna destroy it!" as he slaps the computer screen with his hand and leaves the place where he has been sitting.

Although Akira seems to be personally satisfied with his own construction of a computer that plays *Kamen Rider OOO*, others' lack of interest appears to disappoint him. He throws two valuable tokens to his peers – a computer, whose aura seems to draw attention by just saying it, and *OOO*, which is definitely of interest among boys. Even when talking with me, he does not forget to *monitor* other children's reactions. What he really sought and wanted, I infer, is the affirmation of his presence from the children who were collectively making a tower. Any glance with curiosity or reflexive comments from them would have rendered Akira's social standing and solitary play more visible among peers, but instead, their collective indifference *contests* his position, rendering him more lonesome. When he destroyed the computer with *OOO*, he also destroyed symbolically the valuable tokens whose meanings were intended to be displayed for the benefit of the peers around him and shared with them.

Children's claims – such as those concerning character possessions, knowledge of McDonald's toys and experiences with electronic devices – are used to redeem, even if

[83] *Kamen Rider OOO*, a superhero drama with special effects (*tokusatsu*), broadcast from September 2010 to August 2011 on TV Asahi.

momentarily, their uncertain position in a peer group. In claiming, they ask themselves if they have any friends who care about what they have said and done. Seemingly, other children tactically respond to or even ignore the claim sender, in ways that reflect their own social standing. In doing so, they scrutinise keenly whether the claim sender can be worthy of their friendship. When they keep tossing their statements out to each other, the nature of the discourse may almost resemble a laundry list, as the children on the first swimming day at Momiji Preschool revealed during their character-naming ritual. Yet, this laundry list does not consist of random things or names: it signifies children's face – their dignity and their ability to participate in this moment of social sharing. When the list does not flow – namely when the claims are not considered to be within the common peer-cultural repertoire by others – a certain loss of face may be apparent. In this regard, their ritualistic performances mark boundaries of inclusion and exclusion:

> At one lunch time at Tokiwa Preschool, I sit with Aika (girl, 5), Taito (boy, 5) and Hinata (girl, 4) at the table. They take out their lunch boxes from the bag and sit quietly. The following conversation bursts out once the classroom teacher goes out of the room to pick up the children's lunch downstairs.
>
> Aika: I have *Ariel* water bottle and *Hello Kitty* lunch box!
> Taito: I've got a new *Stitch* water bottle!
> Hinata: Today [this morning], I played *PreCure Collection* in the DS.
> Aika: I have the chocolate!
> Hinata: I'm talking about a DS! What chocolate are you talking about? (laughs with disdain)

In this conversational exchange, Aika and Taito invoke the valuable tokens among their possessions. As if *contesting* their knowledge, Hinata brings out an alternative symbolic value, her experience with a DS – specifically the *PreCure* software on the DS – which she probably knows few children can follow up. In fact, Aika misreads Hinata's claim by saying that she has a *PreCure* chocolate. Hinata's comment on the chocolate and disdainful laughter seems to demonstrate her conscious intention to challenge Aika's face. As this implies, when children talk, they are not exchanging nonsense conversation, rather "[t]he content is chosen for the sake of the rhythms of interaction" (Collins, 2004: 78). Through their talk about things they consider important and valuable to their lives, children including the children in my study search for a network

of connections to each other while at the same time seeking to make themselves visible among peers.

What happens if children do not know certain things with which many others are familiar and therefore fail to be capable to join a social circle? This question will be explored in the next section.

6.4. Not Belonging

6.4.1. Not knowing

As a researcher doing fieldwork in preschools in her native culture, I was privileged to recognise some of the characters the children discussed from my childhood, and this knowledge helped me a lot when it came to joining the children's conversation and play. Some researchers would think that a novice in the culture should always start with simple questions, such as what they have, where they got certain things from, how they use toys, and how they play. Yet those preschool children looked disturbed and irritated when I continued to ask such questions since, I suppose, they expected me to have a certain level of knowledge about their culture if I wanted to join them. During one lunch time after several of my visits at Tokiwa Preschool, Ryūsei (boy, 5) and Hiroto (boy, 5) called me to come to their table and attempted to find out my knowledge:

Ryūsei: Do you know *Decade*[84]?
Me: What? *Jicade*?
Hiroto: Not 'Ji'!! 'De'!! *'De'cade*! (sounds irritated.)
Ryūsei: Look! This is *Decade*! (showing his chopstick case.)
Hiroto: What about *Go-onger*[85]? Do you know it? (showing Ryūsei's plastic cup.)
Me: *Go*… What??
(Hiroto rolls his eyes.)
Hiroto: *GO-ONGER*! This is *Go-on Red*, this is *Go-on Blue*, this is *Go-on Green*, *Go-on Yellow*, *Go-on Black*!! (pointing at each character illustrated on Ryūsei's cup.)

At this time, Ryūsei and Hiroto were kind and patient enough to tell me – the novice – what *Decade* is and what *Go-onger* is by showing me their chopstick case and plastic cup. I could learn later on at home through an internet search that *Decade* was a

[84] Kamen Rider Decade
[85] Engine Sentai Go-onger

character in the boy's favourite TV animation programme, *Kamen Rider Decade*, and *Go-onger* had been on TV before *Shinkenger* which was on TV at that time. These so-called action hero series were very popular among young boys, and getting familiar with the programme names as well as the character names was prerequisite for me to be included in children's conversations. The following shows what happened when I got lost in the conversation between Shō (boy, 5) and Ryōma (boy, 5) and was excluded by them most likely due to my lack of knowledge:

> Shō: Yesterday, in *Kamen Rider*, I got *Ryūga*! (excitedly talking to me.)
> Me: *Ryūga*? Who is that?
> Shō: *Ganbaride*, you know, right? (asking agreement from Ryōma.)
> Ryōma: Right!
> Me: Is *Ganbaride* a TV programme or something?
> Shō: Nooooo! (unenthusiastically stares at me.)
> (Shō turns around to Ryōma and starts to talk to each other about how it works.)
> Shō: We need to put 100 yen, choose Hikari-mode or Single-mode…
> Ryōma: Then, we pick a card, right?
> Shō: Right! Then, we can fight, right?
> Asano-sensei draws children's attention for the circle time (*kaerinokai*[86]), so they stop the conversation.

Shō and Ryōma continued to talk in a way that excluded me from their conversation in order to maintain their excitement, as the discussion about how to play became more heated. Later on at home, I searched for *Ganbaride*[87] on the internet and found out that it was not a TV programme, but a digital card game machine that is often found in shopping centres. I did not understand why '*Ryūga*' excited Shō so much, but once I searched for its card status, I learned the reason. Compared to other cards, '*Ryūga*' hardly appears in the machine because of its high battle points. After having obtained this knowledge, I understood his disappointment at me – someone who was unable to share his excitement and who knew nothing about the game or collectible cards. Meanwhile, even as an adult researcher temporarily attempting to join children's culture, I felt left out and invisible while those two boys were sharing their knowledge and experiences. In the conversation with Shō and Hiroto, I was lacking in knowledge of the two key symbolic elements needed to sustain our cultural work, one of the strong *Kamen Riders* – *Ryūga* – and the digital card game machine – *Ganbaride*. From a study

[86] Before children go home, there is a short meeting to give them important announcements and greetings for the end of the day.
[87] http://www.ganbaride.com/cardlist/card.php?search=true

of *Pokémon* in the French setting, Brougére (2004: 193) points out that "[t]he sharing of common knowledge is crucial to children's peer groups. That is why the spoken word is so important." In order to be a member of the peer group conversation and share that enthusiasm and momentary sense of unity, I should not have intervened in the construction of our cultural work by asking "Who is that?" "What is that?" Rather, I needed to show my inspiration, or go one better, for example by naming one or two characters related to *Kamen Rider*. These words – *Ryūga* and *Ganbaride* – were obligatory shared references if we were to be visible to each other, at least in the conversation with the two boys. I wondered what it would be like if I were one of the preschool children who had nothing to say at that moment. It is hard, strategic work to belong to a peer group and be part of the conversation – not just a matter of talk.

The children in my study have a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. While some watch many TV programmes, play games such as DS and Wii, receive a lot of toys and bring goods emblazoned with images of new and popular characters, others only watch limited kinds of TV programmes or DVDs, have no game consoles, receive toys only on special occasions like birthdays and Christmas, and bring goods whose characters are not determined by a short term popularity. Children's talk, such as saying the names of certain characters and signature lines, is a kind of ritualistic passage that draws boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Such conversations entailing lists of names, which often do not make sense to adults, form the thrust of their "economy of dignity" (Pugh, 2009). The variety and complexity of character worlds make for rich conversations and provide a lot of opportunities for the children in my study to achieve and sustain their social positions. By engaging in forms of face-work such as *claiming*, *monitoring*, *cooperating* and *contesting*, they share information with others and show off their knowledge – even if this knowledge is largely restricted to the logic of saying proper nouns. Simply by saying the names, they demonstrate that they are in the know, which increases their status in public, and thereby provides so much pleasure and excitement.

6.4.2. Engaging in shame-work: concealing from peers

Bandai (2010) reports that *Anpanman* has been the most favoured character among children from 1-5 years old in Japan. As the toy chain Toys'R'Us sells more than 100 kinds of *Anpanman* toys, the characters from the programme are something all Japanese children know – many owning at least one or two *Anpanman* products. The primary yellow colour background and the range of more than 1500 characters based on familiar food and daily objects enable its products to appear more child-friendly than many others (see Yuzawa, 2003). In the stories of *Anpanman* there are, on the one hand, good characters, such as *Anpanman* and his friends, and on the other hand, bad characters like *Baikinman (Meanyman)*. At Tokiwa Preschool, *Anpanman* stickers were used for children's register books. When they came to school in the morning, they put one *Anpanman* character sticker on the date. Each sticker sheet had different kinds of individual characters including *Anpanman*, his friends and *Baikinman*, and the children did not seem to care too much about which character to pick. However, one controversial dilemma was brought up in a group of children while Asano-sensei was handing out *Anpanman* stickers for the origami windmills they had made in the circle on the floor:

> Hikari (girl, 5) has received a *Tulip-san* (one of *Anpanman*'s friends) sticker for her windmill and employs face-work to advance her social position by suddenly announcing a statement with a character name: "*Baikinman (Meanyman)* is always mean! We shouldn't get its sticker! *Baikinman* is *kakkowarui* (not cool)!" Rui (girl, 5), not having received a sticker yet and sitting next to Hikari, glances at her but pretends that she did not hear this, helping instead with other children's origami windmills. In contrast, Mana (girl, 3), who has received a *Baikinman* sticker, stares at Hikari and looks down at the sticker on her windmill. All the children are showing the stickers they have received and making comments on them. Rui also receives a *Tulip-san* sticker and shows it to Hikari, saying "We have the same one! *Tulip-san*!" Reon (boy, 3) holds up his origami windmill with a loud voice: "I've got *Anpanman*! Who else's got *Anpanman*?" In the cheerful conversation among the children, Mana covers her windmill with her hand and avoids talking with the other children.

Unlike the face-work engaged by Hikari, who *claimed* what was inappropriate in the *Anpanman* character categories, Mana had to employ a form of shame-work to sustain a sense of dignity (Thorne, 2008), *concealing* from others the possibility of catching her unfitting character sticker and therefore precluding others' possible disapproval of her social position. It is a momentary dilemma, but for children, it is a painful, sad and

hopeless moment in which they lack a voice and do not belong with others. By good fortune, Mana could at least keep her dignity by virtue of the fact that nobody saw her inferior sticker or noticed her bearing a marginal position. The properly acquired characters-to-be are often announced among children as Hikari and Reon did, but in so doing, they also present a relevant boundary of improper characters-to-be. Even though all the children use *Anpanman* character stickers for their register books every morning, *Baikinman (Meanyman)* – categorised as an evil character in Yuzawa's (2003) study with 3-6-year-old children – has more risk of causing a 'difference' from others, depending on the context. *Anpanman* might offer a variety of characters which are accepted by both boys and girls, and by different age groups in the preschools, yet there are still implicit rules and frames of reference that children acknowledge and share through their daily interactions, and which teachers do not necessarily recognise.

6.4.3. "Anpanman for babies!": seeking proper belonging

My study suggests that children's meaning-making and their construction of symbolic values are fluid and dynamic processes situated in different contexts. The issue considered in the previous section was the categorisation of *Anpanman* characters. Yet, *Anpanman* itself can become not-cool or even inappropriate depending on different social contexts. The evaluation of characters based on children's age groups was witnessed more frequently in Tokiwa Preschool. Here, one class consisted of different age groups of children, aged 3-5 years old: Frog group (3-year-olds), Fish group (4-year-olds) and Bird group (5-year-olds). In the following extract, Rui (girl, 5), who had happily shown a *Tulip-san* sticker to Hikari in the above section, makes a comment on Reon's (boy, 3) preschool supplies aligned with *Anpanman*:

Me:	You have a lot of *Anpanman* goods, Reon! (pointing at his belongings.)
Rui:	Because he is still in Frog group! It's for babies!
Me:	Fish group and Bird group do not use *Anpanman* then?
Rui:	Ummm… we do… (giggles) Our register books have *Anpanman*!
Reon:	I love *Anpanman*! *Currypanman*, too!
Hinata:	I love *Dokin-chan (Sparkle)*!

Rui seems to make an obvious attempt to exaggerate her pride at being the oldest in the classroom by dismissing Reon, her younger peer, and *Anpanman*. According to

company figures, while the popularity of *Anpanman* lies around 65.6% among children from 0-2 years old, it drops to 20.8% among children from 3-5 years old, despite the fact that it is still selected as the most popular character (Bandai, 2010). *Anpanman* is generally targeted at children aged 0-6 in Japan, yet it is children who process, produce and understand what character is acceptable and 'proper' in their peer culture based on their situated contexts – thus determining who is privileged within the communicational space and how possessions and knowledge are to be presented.

Johansson's approach (2003, 2007, 2010), using actor-network theory, and Woolgar's concept of *ontological enactment* (2012) suggest that the same object or knowledge may undergo different interpretations as it moves through different contexts (see Chapter 2). Here, the value of *Anpanman* and other characters is interpreted and shifted in accordance with the intentions of the children in the conversation. *Anpanman* is probably the character that the children in my study have seen the most since their birth, due to its full line of baby products – from diapers, plastic dishes, strollers, clothes, toys, snacks, bath goods and comforter sets to clothes. In addition, as it is to a large extent targeted at babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers, both parents and preschool teachers use *Anpanman* products regardless of age or gender. However, this great sense of familiarity from birth is appropriated differently among young children. The older children like Rui recognise that *Anpanman* is still there for them, and in her case, may even express excitement towards its products in certain situations. Yet, and at the same time, Rui also defines *Anpanman* as being for younger children – thus separating herself from others and declaring that she belongs to something 'older'. Conversely, younger children like Reon and Hinata not only see *Anpanman* as being there for them, but they also feel comfortable announcing their favourite characters without hesitation.

6.4.4. Ways to find out, ways to belong

In my research children's efforts to maintain their "economy of dignity" entail a range of processes, from possessing certain goods, mentioning popular character names including both old and latest ones, and talking about their shopping trips and vacations with their family, to announcing the receiving of gifts. Much depends upon when and how children display these possessions, knowledge and experiences, and how they deal

with unknown and unfamiliar territory in the peer group. Some children manage to get through an awkward and embarrassing moment by listening or even pretending that they are 'in the know' with smiles and nods (*concealing*), but others attempt to find out more directly what their peers are talking about. It is of course better to 'know' than to 'pretend to know', but the action of 'finding out' provides a chance for the novice to be included in the conversation, in addition to acquiring new knowledge. Yet, children's strategy is obviously not to say aloud that they are not in the know – which would announce their own shame and difference from others – but rather to make a calm and timely approach toward whichever peer is less likely to create a problem.

Rina (girl, 5), like most of the preschool girls, was very much fond of *HeartCatch PreCure*. It features a group of ordinary junior high school girls transforming into soldiers with cute costumes and accessories. The programme includes themes of friendship, interpersonal connectedness and love; magic-like attack strategies; commercial products – especially toys, that are followed by story lines; and seasonal retooling (Allison, 2006). Rina had her preschool supplies emblazoned with images of *HeartCatch PreCure* and seemed to be confident about her knowledge of the programme. However, one day at the lunch table she saw Kiyona's (girl, 5) fork case with girl characters similar to *HeartCatch PreCure*. They were actually from *Fresh Pretty Cure* (2008-2009) which was broadcast one year before *HeartCatch PreCure* (2010-2011). The following extract shows the tactics Rina used to obtain knowledge of something she had no idea about, after having stared at Kiyona's fork case for a while at the lunch table:

Rina: Kiyona, which one do you wanna transform to? (pointing at Kiyona's fork case)
Kiyona: This one. (pointing at a girl with purple hair, with her chopsticks) What about you?
Rina: Ummm… this, no no! This one! (pointing at a girl with orange hair first but then changes to a girl with yellow hair)
Kiyona: Nice.
Rina: What is this one called? (pointing at a small white animal-like figure around the *Pretty Cure* girls)
Kiyona: This is *Chiffon*.
(Rina glances at Kiyona's face, as if she were checking that she does not seem to care too much about Rina's question.)
Rina: What about this? (pointing at a *Pretty Cure* girl with purple hair)

Kiyona: *Cure Berry*.
Rina: And this? (pointing at a girl with yellow hair)
Kiyona: *Cure Peach*. This is *Cure Pine*, and this is *Chiffon*. (pointing at each character with her chopsticks)

In the interactions and conversations I observed, it is quite unusual for the children to ask direct questions in a straightforward fashion; such as "What is this/that?" Rather, many children carefully observe an object under discussion (if there is one), and pay attention to others' conversational gambits and emotional expressions. Rina uses a range of strategic face-work tactics in the conversation. First, she must have speculated what those magical girls on the fork case could be, based on her knowledge of *HeartCatch PreCure*, and based on this, she asks a question about which one Kiyona wants to transform into. This approach leads Kiyona to answer naturally without sensing Rina's lack of knowledge, but Rina is not able to get the other names or further information. So, again, she chooses to take another way to find out by asking the name of a minor character instead of the main girl characters. Rina's glance at Kiyona, whose calm expression must have made her feel secure, becomes a turning point to finally touch upon her main concern: finding out exactly who those girls are.

It is more difficult for a child to find a way to get to know something s/he does not know, especially when members of a peer group are sharing their knowledge in an enthusiastic conversation. At a table of five boys (all aged 5) during snack time, Kōki suddenly brought up the latest character, *Usavich*, which was only broadcast on cable TV and also found on DVDs. Besides having been broadcast since 2008 on cable TV, the popularity of *Usavich* has been gradually highlighted through spin-off products that, for example, served as a trigger for me to get to know its characters. In the following conversation, all the boys except for Mitsuki show that they know *Usavich*, making themselves present in the conversation by contributing comments about it. Like Rina who asked a question in a tactical way, it is interesting to see how Mitsuki ensures that he is included in the group conversation with a question about its availability on TV, after having listened to his peers' conversation for a while:

Kōki: Who knows *Usavich*?
H, T & S: I doooooo!
Kōki: The pink one is stronger. *Usavich* dances like this!! (holding his elbows with each hand and swinging his body like Cossack dance)
Shō: The green one is funny!
Me: Green one? Is there also a green one? I thought there were pink and white rabbits.
Shō: There is a green one!
Kōki: The one that wears a green T-shirt!
Me: Oh ok! I don't remember the colour of their clothes!
Kōki: Have you watched *Usavich*, too?
Me: Yeah! After you told me about *Usavich*, I searched for it.
Tenta: *Usavich* is very funny!
Kōki: There are also an ugly chick and a frog! The chick has a blue moustache!
(Mitsuki looks at Hiroto sitting next to him and asks in a quiet voice.)
Mitsuki: What day is that on TV, Hiroto?
Hiroto: Ummm… it's not on TV…
Kōki: I rent the DVDs! You can watch *Usavich* on DVD!
Shō: Yeah, you gotta rent it!

Characters in Japan are not always associated with TV programmes, yet they are supported by flexible interrelationships between products, or what are termed "media mixes", involving comics, computer/mobile games and a wide range of licensed products (Ito, 2006) (also see Chapters 2 and 3). Mitsuki does not speak out to a peer group, but rather keeps silent (*concealing*) while all his peers at the table are commenting about *Usavich*. Yet, I witnessed him trying to find the chance to talk to Hiroto, sitting next to him, a couple of times. Mitsuki's approach toward Hiroto, finally asking what day *Usavich* appears on TV, is a reflection of his careful observation of his peers (*monitoring*) – particularly of Kōki, who more or less leads the conversation. Mitsuki might have wondered where he would be able to find *Usavich* from Kōki's question about whether I had 'watched' it. Mitsuki's strategic way of asking a question enables him to gain further information about the animation, instead of underlining his lack of inclusion stemming from his unfamiliarity with *Usavich*.

The children in my study often seek to be invisible to others or pretend in order to 'look like' they are a member, and hence a part of the interactional sphere. However, sometimes they have to 'act like' a member (Kantor et al., 1998), showing a broad mastery of conversational/play themes and performances accepted by other peers in order to demonstrate their full membership. The face-work undertaken by Rina and Mitsuki illustrates that children both desire and struggle to be part of their peer culture

not only by *looking like* a member, but also by *acting like* one through their careful monitoring and observation of others and by asking relevant questions that flow with the ongoing conversation. These attempts – to find out what others have, what others know, where and how those objects and knowledge are obtained – allow an individual child to overcome his/her emotional uncertainty through participation as well as to overcome his/her invisibility among peers.

6.5. Summary

This chapter has focused on how young children construct a sense of belonging in their peer culture, particularly through possession of and knowledge about products and media-related licensed characters. In daily interactions and conversations, the children in my study engage in face-work in their efforts to be visible, audible and therefore present in their peer group, but at the same time strive to conceal any lack of possessions and knowledge. Their "economies of dignity" entail a system of social meaning-making where children make themselves visible, and therefore matter to their peers (Pugh, 2009). An important point here is that children, objects and knowledge exist "in contexts" (Johansson, 2003). These contexts – who participates, which object or knowledge is under discussion, what kind of tension or investment the members have, etc. – determine children's sense of belonging. In this regard, they adopt various strategies in order to be included within and to be visible among the group of peers.

In order to gain public acceptance, they adopt the five different strategies of face-work I have identified: *claiming*, *monitoring*, *cooperating*, *contesting* and *concealing*. These different strategies have been apparent at various points throughout my discussion of the broader themes and concepts in this chapter. By *claiming* their possessions and knowledge, the children in my study sell their face and thereby seek to gain attention from their peers. This can sound like them just arbitrarily throwing out the names of popular characters or electronic devices. However, their claims need to be acceptable in terms of the cultural repertoires among their peers: therefore, they were inclined to mention recognisable character names, such as *OOO* and *PreCure* instead of unknown character names such as Snoopy. In order to join in and belong, the children *monitor* what their peers are interested in: this includes their careful observation of others'

conversation, as we have seen in several instances in the above sections. A good example is Hiroto's case where he carefully observed his peers talking about *Usavich* and waited for a good time to join in. Through *cooperating*, the children share their possessions and knowledge and make a connection with each other: this strategy was particularly apparent in their search to establish 'sameness'. The conversation about the *Precure* T-shirt between the two girls – Saori and Kiyoya – was a good example. By contrast, when *contesting*, the children often challenge their peers to see if they are worthy of belonging: they sometimes distance themselves from certain peers and downplay them in order to keep their own dignity, as when Hinata laughed with disdain at Aika who misread her claim about the DS. The last strategy is *concealing*, where the children seek to avoid possible disapproval from their peers: some children 'pretend' to be part of their peer group despite their marginality, although others carefully try to find out about a topic in discussion in order to gain new knowledge as well as to be included. By employing these five strategies, the children in my study strive to get access to another peer or peers and to be part of the social circle.

My approach to children's "economies of dignity" overlaps with Pugh at some level, but one difference is that these children's socioeconomic backgrounds are comparatively homogeneous. In my study children's "economies of dignity" do not just entail the attempt or desire to be similar to their peers. Rather, they involve an elaborate form of identity work which requires constructions of both similarity and difference, as well as socially-negotiated identifications of self and others (Jenkins, 2008). As my empirical data indicates, on the one hand, children make claims about their possessions, knowledge and experiences in order to create and connect themselves to a 'we' network, while excluding 'others'; while on the other hand, children who are excluded have to first recognise that they are different – they are 'others'. Such children seem to take a careful, often strategic approach, in order to be included in their peer group – asking relevant questions or making comments based on material and symbolic meanings under discussion which may not only minimise their marginality but also provide further useful information.

As my analysis shows, children's making and re-making of the meanings of commercial goods and knowledge include dynamic, negotiable and flexible associations that are characteristic of their peer consumer culture. While certain forms of possession or knowledge work as relational currency for a certain period, their meanings and values are never static. As the case of *Anpanman* has illustrated, meanings are consistently and creatively transformed and interpreted through their social relations. Young children's presentations of consumer practices in their peer culture reflect the multiple trajectories of their participation in the culture of products and meanings, and contribute to their understanding of interpersonal relationships, and not least, of their position within the broader commercial world.

Chapter 7

Generating Social Identities through Consumption Practices

My older sister… she also watches PreCure even though she is a 6th grader!
Mayu (girl, 5)

It is usually adults who judge what is appropriate for children and what is not. A commonly used phrase "This is not for you (children), but for us (adults)" draws a line between two categorical groups; children and adults. Young children's daily lives in contemporary Japanese society are more or less structured by institutions in terms of time, space and materials (see Chapter 4). In regard to children's identity construction, the young children I observed in Tokiwa Preschool and Momiji Preschool were constantly reminded of their institutional identities. In the case of Momiji Preschool, the children I observed were first of all Momiji pre-schoolers, members of Lilly class with only 5-year-old children, and belonged to different gender-mixed groups in the class: Giraffe, Elephant, Rabbit, Lion and Frog[88]. As James (1993: 168) points out, "childhood sets the broad limits and boundaries to children's culture", and most studies have centred around the process of how children *come to* understand adults' sense of boundaries, often in the name of socialisation. However, my approach in this chapter will pay more attention to children's own meaning-making and management of these boundaries through identity construction. Like adults, children themselves certainly set limits and boundaries between childhood and adulthood, even within their peer interactions. The quotation stated above from Mayu, a 5-year-old girl, is in fact one valuable example of how young children see people surrounding them. She implicitly suggests that the Sunday morning magical girl series on TV, *HeartCatch PreCure*, is not appropriate for her 7-year-older sister. For Mayu, there is no problem with the fact that she and her girlfriends in the class watch the series, whereas she thinks that boys or 6th grader girls are not supposed to watch it. In accounting for her experience of consumer culture, she is also constructing a definition and interpretation of the self and others. Following from this, my main goal in this chapter is to explore how young

[88] The grouping at Momiji Preschool, both names of the groups and each group members, was changed in the winter time: Lemon, Grapes, Peach, Orange and Melon.

children experience and interpret their social interactions, as well as how they construct their social identities through their everyday consumption practices.

7.1. Constructing Flexible Social Identities through Consumption Practices

7.1.1. The internal-external dialectic of identification

In Chapter 2, I explored a fluid, reflexive notion of "social identity" (Jenkins, 2008), seen as a process of identification which entails both similarity and difference. Yet a key question is how we can understand children's identities in their messy, complex everyday practices. For example, how do children construct a sense of 'us' or 'others'? In order to analyse preschool children's experiences and construction of their world, I find it useful to take into account Jenkins's analysis of the ongoing, reflexive process of social identities – what he describes as "the *internal-external dialectic of identification*" (Jenkins, 2008: 40 [emphasis in original]). This model indicates that, since what others think about me is no less significant than what I think about myself, what other collectives think about us is no less significant than what we think about ourselves. This mutual interdependency certainly echoes Giddens's concepts of self-identity (1991) and structuration (1984) which I mentioned in Chapter 2. Individuals perceive the self through constructing an on-going story about the self in interplay with the external world. The notion of 'us' exists through 'others', and the notion of 'others' exists through 'us'. This perspective is rooted in American pragmatism: George H. Mead (1934) focuses both on the interaction between individual actors and the social world as a dynamic process and on the individual's capacity to interpret and reflect the social world through their actions and behaviour. Likewise, Cooley (1967) presents the concept of the "*looking glass self*" which argues that identification comes into being only through interactions and perceptions of others. Each child defines (internal) him/herself while at the same time encountering (external) definitions and evaluations of him/her offered by others. Something significant – albeit not new – in this chapter is that I adopt an approach where individual and collective identifications are seen as routinely entangled, and interacting with one another (also see Jenkins, 2008).

From this perspective, the process of identification consists of perpetual social strategies and actions (Frønes, 1995: 63), forms of negotiation and management (Goffman, 1986) between internal and external boundaries or gaps. A message intentionally or unintentionally sent by an individual (or a collective) needs to be correctly accepted by significant others before identity is said to be taken on: this means that the message can be received differently or even rejected by those significant others (also see Warde, 2005). Despite having a certain degree of control over the messages, signals or images we send, we are all at a disadvantage insofar as we cannot ensure others' 'correct' reception or interpretation, nor can we know for sure how these messages are received or interpreted. A question thus arises: what kinds of 'messages' are sent, interpreted and evaluated?

In line with Goffman's (1959) famous account of "the presentation of self" during interaction, I also analysed preschool children's sense of belonging and dignity strategies in Chapter 6. As I suggested, the messages, signals or images sent by individuals to significant others more or less contain the hope for positive affirmation and evaluation of the sender's self. From the perspective of the "internal-external dialectic of identification", a positive social evaluation is closely tied to a positive self-evaluation. Each individual seeks to present their proper social and cultural practices in different types of contexts: "social identity is both literally taken on and acted out" (James, 1993: 137).

In the next section, I will describe what kind of social and cultural practices preschool children look at and utilise in this ongoing process of identification or identity construction.

7.1.2. Consumption as practices

Following Chapter 6, which presented consumption as primarily a matter of 'having' and 'knowing', this chapter deals more directly with practice; peer consumer culture is not only about the things children possess and know, but also something children 'do' (also see Buckingham, 2003). By 'practices' I mean using, creating, controlling,

transforming and adjusting commercial goods and knowledge as well as the presentation of self. Reckwitz (2002) notes that:

> A 'practice' (Praktik) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002: 249).

Consumption consists of a set of interactional and cultural-specific practices where children seek to understand and present themselves in a positive light based on contexts and activities. 'Practices' imply children's collective production and sharing of social knowledge and activities in their use of cultural resources through interaction – and for the children in my study, those resources take the form of popular TV animation programmes, licenced characters and media technologies. In order to work on the boundaries generated through institutional expectations and through peer interactions, they employ different kinds of social and cultural practices. As I have explained in my discussion of reflexive social identities in Chapter 2, children's practices entail forms of self-reflection and the capacity to take others' perspective, and thereby achieve self-objectification (see Jenkins, 2008).

Consumption practices in peer consumer culture require children to be active not only as audiences/readers, but also as producers/reproducers and distributers of cultural resources and economic activities (Zelizer, 2002). This has been discussed cross-culturally. In her work on primary school children's writing in the US, Dyson (1997, 1999) examines how children use elements of media texts, for example superheroes and sports teams, to reconstruct cultural storylines about power, gender and other social categories according to their cultural repertoires. Also, Änggård's study (2005) on narratives made by preschool children in Sweden points out their unique and creative reinterpretations of existing stories and gender roles picked up from different media, both traditional fairy tales and popular cultural products. Her informants mostly select gender-specific elements for their stories, such as Barbie princesses and dinosaur dragons, yet these narrative contents are often reworked and reshaped collectively to fit into their own interests (also see Rogers & Evans, 2008). Dyson's and Änggård's

analyses of their ethnographic data about children's narratives are relevant to my study because they illustrate how children appropriate media texts in order to explore and negotiate social identities that are suited to their specific local-cultural contexts.

Children's practices in relation to consumption and media have been documented locally and cross-culturally in *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, edited by Tobin (2004b). Bromley's analysis of kindergarteners' narratives of *Pokémon* in the UK (2004) particularly pays attention to children's transformation of objects and knowledge. She argues that children's negotiation of narratives and transformation of cultural resources involves the art of new meaning construction (also see Bruner, 1986). Drawing upon Dyson's narrative study (1997), Bromley illustrates that a "more skilled performer" not only demonstrates his/her *Pokémon* knowledge, but also invites other children to his/her story world in an exciting and significant way, by announcing popular character names, using tag lines such as "I choose you" and yet also following local cultural practices – e.g., drinking tea, having a birthday party or even using a traditional school-based literacy practice. Constructing an assemblage of bits and pieces of different texts – a form of bricolage (see Chapter 2) – in this way allows children to obtain a password to enter a secret patchwork world and become insiders in what is both a literal and a social network. Children's social and cultural production and reproduction of narratives is not only a matter of positioning *Pokémon* characters in the story, but also positioning themselves amongst others and finding their identities through peer interactions.

Needless to say, the construction of social identities entails fluid, dynamic and contingent consumption practices – a particular presentation is required for children to enter conversations and activities, find their own place in a collective, and build a sense of conformity and self-esteem (also see Chapter 6). But what kinds of identities are generated, interpreted and challenged among peers in preschools? How do children present themselves through their consumption practices, and their accounts of those practices? In the next three sections I will examine several aspects of the construction of children's social identities in peer consumer culture. In the first section I will explore collective peer identities by focusing on *secondary adjustments* – forms of collaborative

sharing and control that work against the institutional rules and expectations (Corsaro, 2005). In the second section I discuss pre-schoolers' boundary making through the concept of *borderwork* (Thorne, 1993). In the third section, I focus on preschoolers' creative production and reproduction of identities in play.

7.2. Constructing Collective Identities through Secondary Adjustments

7.2.1. Sharing and controlling peer consumer culture

As I have illustrated in my discussion of the preschool's daily routine and management in Chapter 4, children's everyday activities and behaviours in Japan are highly systematised by the teachers. The adults working as '*sensei*' (teachers) draw a line between themselves and the children in a structural and institutional manner connected to the use of space, time, materials and language. The teachers continuously remind the children of where they are supposed to be, what they should be doing, and how they should behave as part of the everyday routine. Of course, in line with the notion of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 1992, 2005), which stresses children's collective actions, shared values, and participation in cultural production, the children in my sturdy do not precisely follow everything they are told and expected to do by the teachers. Rather, they make sense of institutional rules in their own way and reflect on their individual/collective actions based on the circumstance within which they are situated. Therefore, interpretive reproduction implies both adaptation and resistance (also see Nilsen, 2005): it refers not only to children's capacity to follow and adapt to adults' expectations and values, but also to their attempts to gain a certain amount of control over their lives by finding loopholes or even evading regulations.

On the one hand, the children in my study collectively adapt and employ adult-initiated 'institutional' rules and regulations among peers in order to monitor and control each other's actions and behaviours. By comparison with my own experience of working in the US, England and Norway I have found that this constant, careful self-monitoring on the part of preschool children is more clearly evident and frequent in my research. I argue that this practice reflects the strong collective ethos of Japanese preschools, and the importance of 'groupism' and duty-work routines in which the young children take a

responsibility for others (see Chapter 2 and 4). This adaptation, however, should be understood as more than simply a manifestation of children's subordination to adults. In fact, in the absence of the teacher, I often witnessed the children in my study making a verbal announcement or warning; such as "You are not supposed to…" or "You shouldn't…" in both Tokiwa Preschool and Momiji Preschool. It was clear to me that they were intentionally saying it aloud in order to involve other children on the spot for backup and support or to draw the teacher's attention. It was not just about targeting the particular individual(s) in order to warn them of the violation itself. In these kinds of ways, the children continually enact institutional rules and expectations.

Yet, on the other hand, when I observed the children in the preschools carefully, they seemed to choose their actions based on situations; such as what kind of violation is found, who is involved, and what kind of pressure others may be feeling. They did not report every single violation to other peers or the teachers; instead, they often secretly shared it with giggles and whispers. As part of interpretive reproduction – where children choose a context for their actions – committing a violation and sharing it with peers, which Corsaro (2005: 42) calls a "secondary adjustment", takes an important role in the process of constructing social identities. It helps define who I am and who we are by countering the person others think I am (or we are) supposed to be. At the collective level, I would argue that secondary adjustments allow the children in my study to gain control over their lives by distancing themselves from the adult world, but at the peer-interactional level, they provide a way to present their collective peer identity – the identity not required by the teachers but shared among the peers. This implies a capacity to interpret adults' rules, but also to evade them intentionally, and to create their own (often-unspoken) peer rules.

The concept of secondary adjustments was originally propagated by Goffman (1961), who believed that the individual's tendency to both embrace and resist institutional rules and expectations is a central feature of personal identity or the self. While I draw upon Goffman's contribution to analysing people's conduct and negotiation of power relations on the individual level, my focus here aligns with Corsaro's approach and therefore lies more on the interactive and collective level. There are two significant

points about the relationship between children's secondary adjustments and their representations that I will emphasise in this section. First, my analysis offers evidence that the preschool children share a basic understanding of adult social rules. Secondly, secondary adjustments provide a space within which the children can elaborate their own peer consumer culture – their own set of social interpretations, understandings and representations. By engaging in a wide variety of secondary adjustments, they develop their selfhood and construct their sense of collectivity, in ways that enable them to *control* their world and *share* that control with each other (Corsaro, 1990).

The preschool children I observed had certainly established a clear distinction between adults (*otona*) and children (*kodomo*), which will be elaborated later in this chapter. Even though children's misbehaviours – such as asking for a permission to go to the toilet during an activity or running around indoors – are often regarded by the teachers as a manifestation of children's tendency to forget or as lack of ability to understand the rules, these 'misbehaviours' could sometimes be intentional. Just like adults, the children would demarcate a border between themselves and the adults (teachers) in order to maintain their peer culture and to maintain a sense of 'us'. This has been discussed cross-culturally. In Corsaro's analysis of empirical data of pre-schoolers in the US and Italy (1990), he describes secondary adjustments as a form of "underlife" which involves both the co-operation of several children and a greater sharing of control with others. This stands in contrast to the view of individuals fighting against institutional power stressed by Goffman (1961). In my empirical data, when one child actively committed a violation – singing or making funny sounds during nap time in the absence of the teacher, for example – there were other children who laughed or even copied the same action because the risk of breaking rules seemed to bring them a common excitement. When the teacher came back to the classroom and asked what had been going on, sensing the tension among the children, no children reported either who was doing what or even that something was happening: they all pretended to sleep. As this implies, secondary adjustments are not necessarily intended to challenge institutional rules directly; often they are concerned with seeking a forbidden satisfaction within a collective.

Children's collective peer identity entails sharing and controlling of their own peer consumer culture. In the next section I will explore their maintenance of secrets – 'forbidden' commercial goods.

7.2.2. Sneaky objects and children's tactics: sharing 'secrets'

> In one morning play time at Momiji Preschool, Akira (boy, 5) pulls my hand to his locker and takes out a plastic figure from the pocket of his school bag. I ask him what the figure is, and then he answers "*Kamen Rider*!" with a proud smile. Before other children notice, Akira puts the figure back into the bag and runs away from his locker.

In a nursery school in the US, in a primary school in England and in a preschool in Norway where I worked for a short period (see Chapter 4), children were allowed to bring in certain kinds of personal objects to share with their peers or present them in a show-and-tell[89] (also see Jones et al., 2011). However, in Japanese preschools bringing something unrelated to preschool activities is generally forbidden. The teachers in the two preschools mentioned various reasons for this rule. First of all, these personal objects are likely to cause disputes among children because the owners are less likely to share them with others. Secondly, the teachers are afraid of these personal objects getting lost or broken. Therefore, if children happen to bring one, they are required to keep it in a bag till the end of the day. Above all, the preschools' goal is to provide materials and experiences that children cannot have at home. Teachers feel responsible for offering more traditional, collaborative and educational activities that employ simple, often hand-made materials rather than the temporarily popular, over-stimulating commercialised objects that many children usually have at home. The teachers in both preschools appeared to be confident that they were providing all the materials and toys children would need.

In contrast with these rules, one of the routine secondary adjustments pursued by the children was bringing small personal objects into the classroom, as illustrated by the episode with Akira. These small objects might be figures, stickers and advertisement

[89] I worked in a nursery school in the US in 2003, in a primary school in England in 2005 and in a preschool in Norway in 2010. As the study of Jones et al. (2011) shows, certain popular cultural objects were frowned upon and excluded in these schools, but balls, skis and bicycles (for example) were widely accepted.

papers, which the children could easily conceal in their school bags or smock pockets. The most explicit function of these personal objects was probably to catch the attention of their peers. Therefore, they should not be random objects but objects that had been recently purchased, particularly those related to media or licensed characters. Since this routine secondary adjustment is not only a matter of concealing a personal object in the bag or pocket but also of sharing the 'secret' with peers, it demonstrates the complex dynamic processes of children's social interactions and representations. The following is a case where my incidental mistake reveals children's widely shared 'secret': *Henna ojisan*[90] (strange man) in the preschool.

> At one lunch time, I witness Rina (girl, 5) showing a plastic figure to some children while they are taking out their lunch boxes from their school bag at each table. Rina takes the figure out of her bag pocket and tells them "This is *Henna ojisan* (strange man)!" When the teacher walks by, she puts it back into the bag pocket. Later that day, when the children are lining up with their school bags for the circle time (*kaerinokai*[91]), I ask Rina if she still has *Hennna ojisan*. She takes the plastic figure out of her bag and tells me with a cheerful voice, "I've brought this because everybody wanted to see it and asked me to bring it!" The children around Rina tell me, "This is *Henna ojisan*! Do you know him, too?" Next day, I mistakenly ask Kaede (girl, 5), not Rina, if she has brought *Hennna ojisan* again. Kaede is bewildered by my question, but soon she says "Are you talking about *Hennna ojisan* that Rina has? It's hers."

From the existence of *Henna ojisan* (strange man) in my childhood, I easily recognised the figure and his name. To my surprise, quite a few children were sharing and maintaining this 'secret' hidden in Rina's school bag. The TV show in which *Henna ojisan* appears is not something parents are generally willing to show to their children even though they themselves might have enjoyed watching it in their own childhood. Therefore, I suspect that few children would have seen the actual show; although they would probably have got to know about him by seeing other children emulate him and hearing the tag lines.

This case of the forbidden figure of *Henna ojisan* gives an interesting glimpse into children's construction of collective peer identity through consumption practices. First of all, Rina's tactic of showing the figure to her peers during the teacher's busiest and

[90] *Henna Ojisan* (strange man) was created in a Japanese comedy show in the late 1980s. His comical and dirty look and tag line have caught children's attention since then.
[91] Before children go home, there is a short meeting to give them important announcements and to exchange greetings for the end of the day.

most occupied time – lunch time – reduces the risk of getting caught. Since it is the time when the school bags are brought to the table, showing and hiding can be conducted easily and quickly. Secondly, other children also have to be careful not to make a fuss over Rina's violation but share it as a secret. For the children, this set of actions is a matter of controlling their secret and sharing it among their peers. Therefore, it is not a major issue whether or not the peers have watched the actual show or even known about *Henna ojisan* before, as long as they share the tension deriving from his being in school and in Rina's school bag. In line with Corsaro's description of children's secondary adjustments as 'underlife' (1990), I – a participant observer who had spent quite some time with the children in the classroom – had no idea when and where Rina had agreed with her peers to bring the figure, nor did I know how so many children came to share the secret. After that day, *Henna ojisan* never came back to the preschool with Rina. Right after having mistakenly asked Kaede about the figure and found out it was Rina's, I asked Rina if *Henna ojisan* had come to school with her on that day. She said to me with a cheerful smile, "*Henna ojisan* is staying home today." Other children added, "He *should* stay home!"

As this suggests, one of the most interesting features of children's collective "secondary adjustments" is their reflexivity. On the day when *Henna ojisan* (strange man) was in preschool, there seemed to be a premise that the children would share the existence of the forbidden object. Nobody told the teacher about Rina, nor did anyone intend to make a fuss about her violation. Yet next day, while still sharing the secret of *Henna ojisan* having been in preschool, they invoked the institutional rule by saying "He *should* stay home!" Their communal sharing and maintenance through secondary adjustments – deciding how to present forbidden objects, how to react to them, how to keep secrets from the teachers – are all related to their collective peer identities. Preschool children collectively choose to resist and employ institutionally expected rules to generate and maintain their "underlife", where their degree of control brings excitement, tension and satisfaction. The next section illustrates the construction of children's collective identities through communal frustration about the preschool rules and their unique forms of adjustment.

7.2.3. What's ok to bring from home?: children's communal adjustment

As I have described in Chapter 4, Tokiwa Preschool – which employed a particular educational method – showed more resistance towards children's interest in popular characters than Momiji Preschool. Since the teacher-child relationship was stricter and more hierarchical in Tokiwa Preschool, the children hardly shared their commercial interests with their classroom teacher, Asano-sensei. I witnessed some children talking to her about what toys they have got or what they have watched on TV, but her facial expression appeared rather monotonous to me. In contrast with Shinjō-sensei and Miyakawa-sensei at Momiji Preschool, Asano-sensei hardly asked further questions about the children's reports, limiting herself to the reply "That's good for you." Yet despite the fact that the preschool environment was different from that of Momiji Preschool, the children at Tokiwa Preschool talked a lot about characters, TV programmes and electronic devices among peers and with me. Bringing small secrets was also found in this classroom. One significant difference from Momiji Preschool was that children were allowed to bring several 'materials' from home. I found out this rule from the children during my observation. During play time, children were divided into small groups based on activities, such as origami, drawing and doing jigsaw puzzles. Hiroto (boy, 5) brought a *Pokémon* colouring book and sat at a table alone while I was sitting with Aoi (girl, 5) and Aika (girl, 5) at a table next to him. Since I did not know at that time that children were allowed to bring things from home for play time, I whispered the following question to Hiroto:

Me: Hiroto, whose is it? (whispering)
Hiroto: Mine.
Me: Can you bring a colouring book?
Aoi and Aika: Yeah, we can!
Me: What else can you bring?
Aika: No toys!
Aoi: Drawing books are ok.
Hiroto: Colouring books, too.
Aika: And origami papers.
Me: What about jigsaw puzzles?
Aika: Noooooo!

From this conversation, it is clear that children define drawing books and colouring books as not toys, so it is acceptable to bring them from home. Yet, what about a colouring book with certain characters?

There was some unclear negotiation and unspoken adjustment between Asano-sensei and the children in terms of the kind of drawing and colouring books that were seen as appropriate to bring. At Tokiwa Preschool, colouring was highly encouraged since it was seen to develop children's concentration and hand dexterity. In fact, black-and-white copies of *Pokémon* characters were placed in a small box. I deliberately asked Asano-sensei why she used *Pokémon* characters instead of character-free images for colouring. She snapped at me with irritation[92]: "Because children like it." Since characters appeared to stimulate children's motivation for colouring, Asano-sensei might have tolerated colouring books with characters brought from home. Alternatively, one could argue that the children made adjustments by taking advantage of institutional interests while sharing and maintaining their consumer peer culture. The kind of colouring books children brought from home were never 'character-free' materials: gaining attention from peers through bringing well-known characters and sharing them was their primary intention. They had their own rule to take turns, usually by *janken* (rock-paper-scissors): it seemed that Asano-sensei turned a blind eye to the character aspect as long as children pursued the institutional interest and there was no conflict among them.

However, conflict took place one day among three girls over a *Fresh Pretty Cure* colouring book. The girls – Rui (5), Hikari (5) and Yukiko (4) disagreed about who would keep the book till next play time. It was Yukiko who had brought the book and offered it to Hikari, but Rui also wanted to keep it. Hikari put Yukiko's *Fresh Pretty Cure* colouring book into her bag. When they noticed Asano-sensei coming closer, they stepped back from each other with an uncomfortable look. Asano-sensei quickly asked who owned the book and whether there was an argument over it among the three girls. Before the two girls had answered Asano-sensei, Rui said urgently: "I can wait, Hikari!"

[92] Asano-sensei did not like me to ask about children's consumer peer culture. As described in Chapter 4, the principal and Asano-sensei wanted me to write about their educational method.

Hikari also said: "Maybe Yukiko should keep it." But it was too late to turn back. Asano-sensei told Yukiko not to bring the colouring book to preschool again. One interesting aspect of the three girls' actions is that they collectively adjusted themselves and teamed up by unspoken agreement, as if their reconciliation had been aimed to prove to Asano-sensei that no conflict over the colouring book was taking place. With the involvement of a figure of institutional authority such as Asano-sensei, their concerns suddenly shifted from a peer conflict – who is keeping the *Fresh Pretty Cure* colouring book – to a secondary adjustment – how to control and maintain their collective interest. Asano-sensei did not announce this new rule to the whole class, but there was uncertainty and frustration not only among the three girls but also among the children watching the incident: what were they allowed to bring from home now?

Several days later, I found something brought from home again; this time it was ripped papers with *hiragana*[93]. Two girls, Rui (5) and Aoi (5) were colouring character-free images printed below the *hiragana* practice. I never asked Asano-sensei the exact rules in the classroom, but the children's understanding was following:

Me:	Who wrote these letters?
Aoi:	Aika and I did this morning!
Me:	I thought you were not supposed to bring colouring books!
Rui:	Ripped ones are ok to bring!
Me:	Who brought the papers?
Rui:	Aoi.
Me:	Didn't Asano-sensei tell you not to bring colouring books the other day?
Rui:	We cannot bring books!
Aoi:	This is ripped one, so it's ok!

I found their actions and responses highly strategic. I did not see the verbal negotiation between Asano-sensei and the children, but I would argue that the children here have most likely taken advantage of institutional interests – practicing letters – in order to convince the teacher that it is still acceptable to bring something from home. When Asano-sensei weighed letter practicing against banning ripped papers from home, the former must have been prioritised in her mind – thus convincing her to tolerate something brought from home. In fact, as if resting on common consent, the two girls kept telling me that ripped papers are OK to bring, but not a book. Also, as if

[93] *Hiragana* represent single syllables and are the first written letters children learn in Japanese.

convincing Asano-sensei, they practiced the letters first and then asked her if they could colour the pictures. In this context, something brought from home contains significant meanings among children in terms of control as well as providing opportunities to share their own taste. Their secondary adjustments above entail taking a double perspective. While the children account for Asano-sensei's prospective actions based on institutional rules and expectations, they also maintain their social and cultural space by finding loopholes in those explicit rules through specific practices – using different objects (books and ripped papers), transforming institutional values (colouring and writing letters) into their practice, and creating new rules. Their collective peer identification is founded on constant internal and external perspective-taking, which echoes Jenkins's (2008) concept of social identity.

The next section illustrates how peer identities are constructed through feelings of helplessness and sympathy shared among the children.

7.2.4. Caring for peers: "He watched the Ultraman Zero movie!"

In preschool settings where teachers often use seasonal events as a basis for children's daily activities in Japan, the children are encouraged to demonstrate their experiences in drawing, painting or crafting. Even though these activities are for the children's sake, the teachers seem to follow certain institutional guidelines for children's development. The children in the two preschools were often reminded by the teacher of details they were supposed to know, such as "A hand has how many fingers?" "This person only has a face, what else does he need? Body, doesn't he?" The teachers ask the children these questions in order to offer them opportunities to be 'consciously aware' of the details of self and others, and the surroundings. Therefore, children's visual representations are expected to be recognisable by other people, especially the teachers. In Momiji Preschool, drawing was often used as a classroom activity. When I was present at their drawing activity for the first time, the theme was the *Tanabata* Festival[94]. The 22 children sitting nicely in line on the floor were about to draw on the white paper, and

[94] Tanabata (July 7) is a Japanese star festival that celebrates the meeting of the deities *Orihime* (Vega) and *Hikoboshi* (Altair). For Tanabata, preschool children in Japan hang their *tanzaku* (a small piece of paper with their wish written on it) on the bamboo trees and often demonstrate dances and the *Tanabata* songs to parents.

what struck me was that all the children held the flesh colour[95] crayon, drew a circle and filled in a face without the teacher telling them to do so. I assume this was the way the children had learned to draw in Momiji Preschool.

On the first preschool day after the New Year's holidays at Momiji Preschool, another drawing activity took place. After having told others what they had done during the holidays in the morning circle time (see Chapter 4), the children got ready for drawing. They lined up in groups with crayons and white paper on the floor, and many started with a flesh colour crayon as usual. Tomoki (boy, 5), who had seen a movie, *Ultraman Zero*, seemed to have some difficulty in drawing, and eventually drew a large rectangle in the middle of the white paper, followed by two people, and started filling in with the black crayon. When another teacher from the main office came into the classroom, she took a look at the children's drawings, praising them, and then asked Tomoki if his drawing was about an evening since the white paper was mostly filled in black. He did not answer but looked down at his drawing with the black crayon in his hand. Yūsei (boy, 5), sitting diagonally behind Tomoki, answered instead: "No, no! It's a movie theatre!! He watched the *Ultraman Zero* movie!"

The teacher's question must have triggered a sense of dejection, which can be analysed from Tomoki's silence and lack of confidence. His attempt was not to draw an evening but the movie – *Ultraman Zero* – which he enjoyed a lot and about which other boys were also excited to talk. To him, this black rectangle was the *Ultraman Zero* movie, but he just did not know how to draw in order for others to understand this. It was Yūsei who broke this silence and showed his sympathy for Tomoki by telling the teacher what his black rectangle was. Yūsei's response in place of Tomoki might not be considered as an obvious resistance to the adults' rules or expectations – at least not verbally. Yet, by demonstrating his acknowledgement of Tomoki's intention, which the adults did not see or understand, Yūsei created a boundary between the children and the teachers, while at the same time, he showed understanding of Tomoki's disconsolate mood. In

[95] In addition to orange, white and brown, the flesh colour (which is actually whiter than Asian skin colour) has been commonly used as the skin colour for drawing in Japan. Even though the primary crayon companies have officially changed *hadairo* (flesh colour) to a different name such as pale orange due to its implications for racial discrimination, it is still common that people (children) call it *hadairo* (flesh colour).

contrast to his sympathy for Tomoki, Yūsei seemed to anticipate that his drawing would not satisfy the teachers. In fact, when Tomoki took his work to the classroom teacher but came back with another sheet of paper, Yūsei leaned forward and asked him if he was told to draw another one. Tomoki only nodded. Later, Yūsei was also told to draw again because his drawing of a family gathering was not well illustrated. It can be argued that Yūsei understood Tomoki's feeling better than other children because he himself was not confident in his capacity to draw in a way that would satisfy the teacher's expectations. Although acquiring institutional (adults') rules or expectations is important to the preschool children in relation to their social identities, their developing sense of who they are is also strengthened by distancing themselves from those expectations (also see Corsaro, 1990, 2005). In this regard, it can be argued that secondary adjustments – developing a certain level of control and maintenance of peer consumer culture through common understanding or collaborative resistance to institutional regulations – also encourages children's careful emotional sharing and caring among peers. This is the case particularly when the institutional evaluation of children's behaviours and skills appears to be irrational or inconsistent. It should be taken into account that in the everyday preschool environment, children's resistance can be an expression of support towards their peers for something the teachers are unlikely to approve. Despite the triviality of their resistance, their sharing and caring through secondary adjustments alleviates their feeling of helplessness and mitigates the institutional irrationality the children experience.

In this section I have explored children as a collegial group constructing their own cultural and social space through secondary adjustments – evading or finding loopholes in the institutional power of the preschool and supporting their peers. Children's social identities are constructed partly by means of participation in adults' worlds but also by collaborative, surreptitious infringements against their authoritative power. Their sense of 'us' seems more clear in peer groups that are sequestered together for periods of time, dealing with common experiences of isolation, homogeneity of conditions and mutual dependence (Sutton-Smith, 1997). In the next section I will discuss children's ideas and experiences of reflexive identification, particularly focusing on age and gender, using the concept of borderwork.

7.3. Borderwork: Children's Boundary-making

7.3.1. Gendering and generationing: interactional boundaries

The preschool children in my study identify and categorise themselves in a variety of ways. While they see themselves as children, preschool children, members of their class or group, and members of a certain age-cohort, they also call themselves boys or girls – sometimes 'big' boys or 'big' girls. Even though these categorisations can be externally given, children themselves appropriate them and use them as their social or structural space. As Jenkins (2008) emphasises, knowing who I am and who others are is a complex and dynamic process, which implies constant and multi-dimensional identifications. In this regard, there is no specific 'me' or 'us' independent of others, yet the sense of 'me' or 'us' always shifts relationally and contextually depending on whom I am with and in what situation I am in. Although the process of identification entails both similarity and difference, children sometimes focus more on differences because what they are is partly defined by what they are 'not'. From this standpoint, the notions of *borderwork* (Thorne, 1993) or *category-maintenance work* (Davies, 2003a) provide ways of conceptualising children's emphasis on categorical boundaries within social interactions. Whereas both concepts are specifically used in the discussion of children's maintenance of gender boundaries, I argue that they are also applicable to other kinds of interactional boundaries, such as generational categories.

It is usually adults (parents and teachers) who decide and claim what is 'for children' and what is not in children's everyday life. Childhood is an essentially *generational* phenomenon (Alanen, 2001; James et al., 1998) (Also see Chapter 2). According to Alanen (2001), generation – which is a social and macro-level structure – distinguishes and separates children from other social groups to a large extent, while also constituting them as a social category. The structural notion of generation is not widely employed in childhood studies except for in comparative research on living conditions and circumstances across generational categories (Alanen, 2001). My use of generational structure here is specifically focused on the more micro level of children's ideas, experiences and knowledge, and how these are manifested through their relationships with the social world, particularly the adult world. Even though children's peer cultures

closely align and partly overlap with adult cultures, children including the children in my study certainly mark a border between '*kodomo*' (children) and '*otona*' (adults)[96]. Adults judge that certain things are not for children and so do children themselves, including when they interact with adults – albeit sometimes with a wry grin.

As in generational matters, children also mark a boundary between two gender categories (Davies & Kasama, 2004; Marsh, 2000; Nakamura, 2001; Thorne, 1993; Änggård, 2005). In both Tokiwa Preschool and Momiji Preschool, the teachers never verbalised expectations for gender based behaviours, nor did they organise the classroom activities based on sex. The children themselves generally seemed comfortable interacting with children of the opposite sex. Even though they did have peer preferences, these were not because of gender; rather, they were mostly due to shared personal interests in objects or activities. In fact, lining up, making small groups for activities and lunch, playing and using the washing and toilet facilities always involved a mix of genders without the teacher's instruction. In spite of this de-gendered environment in the preschools, and also despite parental intentions to provide relatively gender-free child-rearing at home, as my data show and as James (1993) also points out in her studies, gender remains a prominent signifier of children's sense of self in consumer marketing, shaping choices in clothes, toys, sports, media and books. Obviously, preschool children use this classificatory power to structure their peer relationships, particularly in the use of commercialised character goods: superhero character goods hardly belong to girls, nor do magical girl character goods belong to boys, as is illustrated in the character list in Chapter 6. Yet, the children do not simply respond to the ready-made identity of *otoko* (boy) and *onna* (girl)[97]. Rather, identifying self and others in terms of two gender categories is "more a process of *discovering*, *confronting* and *experimenting* with the gender stereotypes embedded within particular cultural practices" (James, 1993: 185 [emphasis added]) (also see Chapter 2).

[96] I intentionally used the Japanese words for children and adults in order to highlight children's own understanding of generational categories. Those words were in fact mentioned by them during my observation.
[97] Direct translation of *otoko* is man/men and *onna* is woman/women. The children usually used those Japanese words to identify themselves as either boy or girl or to categorise gender-related objects.

In the next three sections I discuss children's borderwork both in terms of generation – between adults and children – and gender – between boys and girls.

7.3.2. "Only children can have them!"

As stated in Chapter 3 and 6, character goods play a strong and positive role in Japanese culture more broadly. It is common for not only children but also for adults – including elderly people – to possess certain character products. Preschool teachers are no exception[98]. The preschool children in my study often made comments on teachers' cute socks, aprons, pen cases, and small bags featuring a variety of colours and characters. Yet, there seems to be an implicit assumption that certain characters are only for children. Before a morning meeting in the classroom, Saori (girl, 5) came to me and pointed at her bare foot, saying "Look!"

Me:	Saori, you have a *HeartCatch PreCure* sticker on your toe nail! It's fading out a little bit though!
Saori:	Yeah. But it's OK because I've got more from my mom. She bought more nail stickers [for me].
Me:	That's nice. I want them, too! Maybe I should get some!
Saori:	Whaat? Only *kodomo* (children) can have them! (with a wry grin)

Her presentation of the nail sticker is interesting in several ways. First of all, she would definitely not have shown it to the classroom teachers since the nail sticker has nothing to do with preschool activities – and they were in fact prohibited in preschool. Yet, she most likely knew that I, despite taking an 'adult' observer's role, would understand its value. As if talking to her peers, she informed me that she has more stickers, which her mother has bought. She seemed very satisfied with my praise, but once I say that I want to get the same one, Saori draws a line between us with a derisive tone. I had participated in many conversations about *PreCure* with Saori and joined some girls' *PreCure* stories before, but there was a certain point where the girls seemed to look uncomfortable. On the one hand, children often seemed enthusiastic to discover my knowledge of their favourite TV programmes or movies, but on the other hand, when I actively tried to engage in their conversations – by saying I had watched it or by picking

[98] There are of course some preschools that restrict those character products as an institutional regulation. In that case, the teachers also avoid using them inside the classroom.

my own favourite characters – the children stared at each other awkwardly as if they had shared an 'I-don't-know-how-to-react-to-that' moment. Unlike their peer relationships where being 'in tune' is the crux, being in tune with my adult position itself was somehow just 'out of tune'. It is noteworthy that it was not me who revealed my adult position, rather it was the children. Moreover, this borderwork did not take place all the time when I tried to join them, but only under certain circumstances – for example, it was not apparent when they acknowledged that I was already part of their activities without giving them any instructions or when they had intentions to invite me or include me in a game or conversation.

Young children's notion of generation definitely becomes strengthened by their preschool experiences – where everyday activities and peer interactions are organised based on their age-groups, equal status and public relationships – in contrast with household experiences, where parent-child relationships are more private and intimate. As members of their peer culture, the preschool children often exclude adults, including their own parents, from certain activities. Even though they enjoy sharing their interests with their parents, such as watching *PreCure* or *Kamen Rider OOO* together, they tend to hesitate to make this public. In fact, whenever I asked the children if their parents had also watched or played games with them, they paused before answering. While "Noooo!" was often loudly announced, some hesitantly replied "Well… yeah…" with a shrug of their shoulders. Many parents engage with their children's habit of watching TV or other activities targeted at children, yet this does not seem to cause any generational issues within the context of the household. Yet, in the preschool context, where their own peer culture is more significant, they seem to be uncertain about their parents' involvement in such practices.

In addition to generational matters, young children are also concerned about borderwork regarding gender. In the next section I will discuss their sense of and use of '*otoko*' (boys) and '*onna*' (girl).

7.3.3. Otoko (boys) or onna (girls)

During my participation in the preschools, I hardly witnessed any institutionally organised practices or activities based on gender. In the English speaking preschool environment, labelling children in terms of gender – verbal praise such as "good boy/girl", daily greetings such as "Hi boys/girls", and even categorising like "You boys/girls…" – are commonly used by the teachers (Thorne, 1993; Wierzbicka, 2004). Yet, I did not hear the teachers in Japan categorise the children into gender groups, nor did I see them limiting their actions and behaviour based on considerations of gender (also see MHLW 2008: 101). Age was more commonly mentioned when it came to appropriate behaviour. Even at play time, both boys and girls played together using the same toys, including plastic kitchen equipment, Lego, blocks and play-dough. One day they were constructors making a parking tower or a train truck, another day they opened cake or flower shops, and still there was no discussion about boy things or girl things. This integrated and relaxed interaction across gender, however, seemed to come into question once media-related actions or characters, particularly of children's Sunday TV programmes – namely superhero series and magical girl series – were discussed. There, the children in my study clearly drew a border between *otoko* (boys) and o*nna* (girls).

One lunch time, Rina (girl, 5) who was sitting with five boys (5) at a table, asked me to join her table. The five boys were talking about *Kamen Rider OOO* and *Ganbaride*[99]. Kōki explained to me that it was very hard to get a good (strong) card. When I asked them where they could play *Ganbaride*, Shu told me that they could play in big shopping centres, and everybody agreed saying "Yeah, he is right! At big shopping centers!" Kōki suggested that the person who finished eating first would be able to play *Ganbaride*. The five boys got excited. Until then, Rina had been quiet.

Koki:	You can watch [*Kamen Rider*] *OOO* on TV! (he starts talking to me, who has been listening to their conversation.)
Boys:	Yeah, he is right! You can watch it on TV!
Me:	Really? (In order to see Rina's reaction and opinion) Do you also watch *OOO*, Rina?
Rina:	No! It's for *otoko* (boys). I don't watch it! [Because] it is *kimoi* (ugly)!
Me:	What do you watch then?

[99] A *Kamen Rider* card game machine often found in shopping centers.

Rina: For *onna* (girls)!
Me: For *onna*?
Rina: Like *Fresh PreCure* and *HeartCatch PreCure*[100].
Me: Are they for *onna*?
Rina: Yeah.
Shu: That's why I don't watch *PreCure*! I only watch *OOO*!
Me: You don't watch *PreCure* at all, Shu?
Boys: Do you? (with a disdainful laugh)
Shu: No way!

It was quite usual among the children to emphasise their gender identification by despising the opposite gender through the employment of the word '*kimoi*' which can be translated as ugly, disgusting and gross. Until I asked Rina – the only girl at the table – about her viewing of *OOO*, she had not said a word or showed any interest in the boys' conversation. I would argue that keeping a distance, not joining in, is also a form of borderwork: in a sense, it is nonverbal communication. In line with Jenkins's observation that "identification and interests are not easily distinguished" (2008: 7), Rina's disinterest in the boys' topic of conversation shows her own exclusion from the category. Later she clarifies that the TV programme *OOO* is for boys and she only watches programmes for girls. As if provoked by Rina's boy/girl distinction, the boys also consolidate the border, saying they do not watch *PreCure* because it is for girls. My question to Shu concerning whether he does not watch *PreCure* at all disturbs the definite boundary generated in the conversation. Indeed, the four boys' "Do you?" to Shu certainly contests his gender identification or teases him on that basis. As Thorne (1993: 65) suggests, "although contact sometimes undermines and reduces an active sense of difference, groups may also interact with one another in ways that strengthen their borders."

Even though gender differentiation becomes strengthened when it comes to media-related characters, the border between *otoko* and *onna* is not completely fixed. Indeed, the next conversation illustrates a more complex view. During snack time at Tokiwa Preschool, Aika (girl, 5) showed me her hand towel, and Bunta (boy, 3) made a comment on it:

[100] *Fresh PreCure* (*Fresh Pretty Cure)* was broadcast from February 2009 to January 2010, and *HeartCatch PreCure* from February 2010 to January 2011 on TV Asahi.

Aika: Look! *Fresh PreCure*!
Bunta: *Kimoi* (ugly)!
Me: Is it?
Aika: All *otoko* (boys) say *PreCure* is ugly!
Bunta: There are *onna* (girls) in *Shinkenger*.
Aika: Yellow and pink.
Bunta: Red, green and blue are *otoko* (boys).
Aika: And black!

The border between boy things and girl things was definitely more flexible for girls. While the boys in general showed a strong dislike for talking about *PreCure*, the girls sometimes admitted that they had watched superhero series on TV and even mentioned their favourite characters. This is partly, as Aika says, because there are girls in the hero teams, unlike in magical girl series which do not have boys as main characters. Even so, the sense of boundary is more relaxed for girls, even if their motivations to watch or have boys' things may be due to their brothers or other male siblings. Unlike girls, boys find it more difficult to cross the border even if they have sisters. As a matter of fact, under no circumstances would boys announce their viewing of *PreCure*, nor would they sing its song along with girls. Siegel et al.'s (2004: 40) claim concerning tween behaviours that "boys will be boys, and girls will be boys, but boys won't be girls" is also applicable here for younger children.

There are gender boundaries between boys and girls, of which some may be more significant than other boundaries. Yet my aim in exploring them here is not to focus on 'why' but on 'how'. In the next section I analyse children's negotiation over these boundaries and how a collective sense of gender emerged through interaction.

7.3.4. Ambiguities of gender relationships: "Goseiger is stronger than PreCure!"

There is a tendency in popular debate to reduce children's actions and behaviours to mere media influence, as if children absorb everything they see and listen to (see Kline, 1995; Mori, 2002; Sakamoto, 2004; Schor, 2004). However, their perspectives and ideas also reflect their own interpretation of the world and their negotiation with other people. One lunch time at Momiji Preschool, Ren (boy, 5), Saori (girl, 5) and Seri (girl, 5) were sitting at the same table. Once Miyakawa-sensei left the classroom to pick up the children's lunch, Ren claimed that he would be a monster, walking slowly with his

arms and legs high up near his chair[101]. Saori and Seri then started shooting out their arms towards Ren, saying "Bang! Bang!" Ren reacted to the two girls, also saying "Baaaaang!" I went closer to them and asked what they were doing.

Me: What's going on?
Saori: We are in a battle!
Me: Battle?
Saori: Yeah! We're *PreCure*! We are in a battle with *otoko* (boy)! *Otoko* are villains! Bang!! (stretching her arm towards Ren)
Me: What's Ren?
(Ren also stretches his arm towards Saori and Seri, saying "Bang!")
Saori: Ren is a monster! We are fighting against the monster to save the earth!
Me: What's Seri?
Seri: I'm *PreCure,* too! (slaps Ren's body, saying "Bang!")
Me: Are you a monster, Ren?
Ren: Yeah! (runs after Seri and slaps her body, saying "Bang! Bang!")
Saori: *PreCure* are stronger!
Seri: Yeah! We are stronger than you, Monster!
Ren: Wait, wait! I'm *Goseiger*[102] now! I'm stronger than *PreCure*!
Me: *Goseiger* is stronger?
Saori: Yeah! *Goseiger* is stronger!
Seri: *Goseiger* is stronger than *PreCure*… *PreCure* is weak!
Miyakawa-sensei comes into the classroom, and then the three children sit down on their own chairs as if nothing were happening.

This excerpt indicates that children's shared ideas and perspectives on gender are constructed through their own interpretation and negotiation. Even though these TV programmes are used as cultural resources, media do not install or determine their views of gender. The verbal interaction among the three children clearly indicates Jenkins's (2008: 40) internal-external dialectic of identification, as well as Giddens's (1990) idea of ongoing and reflexive identities and Frønes' (1995: 184) social decentration. The interaction is part of a never-ending process and strategy of seeking to discover 'who others think I am'. If Ren did not agree with Saori's perspective on a possible boy identity as a villain or monster that was weaker than *PreCure*, this play interaction would not have continued. Likewise, there was also a negotiation among them when Ren took a new role as *Goseiger* and claimed that he was then stronger than *PreCure*. Their idea about strength or power is collaboratively created and interpreted through on-going interactions: *Goseiger* and *PreCure* never actually battle each other on TV. Yet,

[101] Children were supposed to be sitting quietly and nicely at the table at lunch time.
[102] *Tensou Sentai Goseiger*, one of the superhero series, was broadcast from February 2010 to February 2011 on TV Asahi.

one should question whether their play interaction is primarily about gender or whether their actual focus was that superheroes (boys) are stronger than magical girls (girls). It can be argued that their improvisational storyline of combining two irreconcilable TV characters is a way to undermine the gender boundary provided by the media in order to allow them to play together. In fact, taking these character roles allows the three children, both boys and girls, to be physically aggressive as part of play through unspoken mutual consent.

Even within the social sciences, gender is predominantly discussed with the premises of boys-against-girls; boys and girls are seen to be fundamentally different (See Chapter 2). Yet Thorne (1993) argues that within-gender variation can be greater than differences between boys and girls categorised as groups. She also argues that gender boundaries become more fluid when the level of analysis shifts from individuals to groups and situations. In fact, the above excerpt illustrates that, while the children choose gender stereotyped characters, both boys and girls play aggressively by crossing the gender opposition. This phenomenon is also described in Marsh's study on girls and superhero play in a primary school in the UK (Marsh, 2000). When analysing gender, borderwork or category maintenance work should be understood as only part of the process of identification. I would agree with Thorne's suggestion that researchers should try to begin with "a sense of the whole rather than with an assumption of gender as separation and difference" (Thorne, 1993: 108 [emphasis altered]). This analytic perspective enables us to address the diversities, overlaps and ambiguities in gender relations. There is no rigid sense of dichotomy; instead, gender relations consist of differences and similarities. In addition, as social identity entails multiple becomings and multiple beings, the salience of gender may vary from one context to another. Sometimes other social boundaries – such as age, physical appearance and formal learning competence – can be more salient depending on the context.

As I have touched upon above, children's ideas about social identities are revealed more vividly in their play interactions. In the next section I will focus particularly on identities in play, where the children work on their presentation by using, controlling,

transforming and adjusting not only themselves but also commercial goods and knowledge.

7.4. Among Peers in Play

7.4.1. Playing roles as playing rules

Children have their own unique peer cultures that, on the one hand, interact with adult cultures (see Chapter 6), but also, on the other hand, attempt to be independent of adult control and authority. In these peer cultures, the children are the ones who organise and maintain their practices "through their own interactions, metacommunications, and framings, such as play and games" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 115): these complex and flexible meta-communicational performances are fundamental to children's identities in play. My empirical data particularly reveals the significance of reflection or so-called double perspective taking – that is, assuming others' perspectives and attaining self-objectification – which also echoes Jenkins's view of the ongoing construction of reflexive identities in the "internal-external dialectic of identification" (Jenkins, 2008: 40).

Children's play offers researchers tremendous opportunities to observe different aspects of children's lives and perspectives. There is obviously a large body of work on children's play in psychology, child development and pedagogy. Researchers have sought to find the meanings and functions of play, but the field is primarily dominated by what Sutton-Smith calls the rhetoric of progress or the rhetoric of developmental stages (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Here, my focus of children's play is not on cognitive progress or developmental stages. Instead, I will focus on the interactional and meta-communicational part of play, which is concerned with the control, management, negotiation, and reworking of cultural resources with and among peers. The study of play offers a variety of definitions and forms which I will not discuss in any further detail in this section. By 'children's play' I mean *playful forms of activity* where children demonstrate "the variety and complexity of playful transformations" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 46). The complexity of playful transformation, so called pretend play or role-play – which includes the transformation of objects, ideas, place and persons – is

based on the participants' agreement to share imaginary and creative actions, their flexibility and their collaboration.

While children's play is often examined in terms of creativity and freedom, Vygotsky (1978) is critical of this view and emphasises the importance of rules in the imaginary context. He argues that far from being free and limitless, children's play is closely rule-governed. He also argues that, instead of being spontaneously created, the contents of play including roles and rules derive from everyday activities – such as, in this case, consumption – engaged in and observed by children. In this sense, playing roles is playing rules. The rules discussed by Vygotsky (1978), especially those of socio-dramatic play, stress the appropriate enactment of the role in the context of the activity and the correct display of the specific characteristics inherent in a role. However, I argue that the rules in play entail more than role- or object-related rules: interactional rules, which are cultural and contextual, also emerge throughout play. Interactional rules constantly challenge children – for example, whether they present a substitute object to others with appropriate gestures, whether participants agree on each other's roles, whether ideas and suggestions are motivating and interesting enough for others to want to stay in and extend the play, and so on. Since the interactional rules in play are rarely made explicit and are also unpredictable, children have to construct and negotiate the process of each play situation; and in doing so, they may actively recreate and reconstruct cultural resources, and present a creative reworking of them. Children's play entails excitement, pleasure and joy, but it is also the site of an intense negotiation over coexisting voices and ideas, and their corresponding values and views of the world.

With interactional and meta-communicational rules in mind, in the next three sections I will explore children's social and cultural representations among peers in play.

7.4.2. Playful transformations

Children's peer consumer culture is full of playful transformations. Therefore, their meta-communicational performances are the key for a positive evaluation from their peers, which in turn feeds into their own positive self-evaluation and self-image (Frønes, 1995): who my peers think I am is part of who I think I am. For the pre-schoolers in my

study, on one level, as a preschool child, achieving institutional requirements is one factor in peer evaluation. Thus, some children are often proud to announce their abilities to use chopsticks properly and sing songs vigorously and sit quietly – as the teachers also praise those qualities. Yet I argue that, among peers, the kind of representation that is taken positively is slightly different. It is important that one can experiment with the available, acceptable and sharable cultural repertoires in creative and humorous ways as well as being capable of predicting what the peers will find funny or fun. These creative and humorous transformations, like the following short interaction in play, can often be seen as silly or non-sense by the teachers:

> Yūsei: Konjac is... Konjac is squishy!
> Kōki: Squishy like boobs!
> Takuma: Yeah! We are eating boobs!
> (The three boys laugh.)

One of the unique aspects of children's transformations is the reciprocal immediacy pointed out by Frønes (1995).

> Relations between children have a quality of *reciprocal immediacy*, as illustrated by the fact that small children so often laugh when they play. The laughter of small children is more laughing *with* than laughing *at*; laughter is a direct way of signaling that one is on the same wavelength, and that laughter is also an essential part of communication between children (Frønes, 1995: 172 [emphasis added]).

The kind of interaction among the three boys I observed in the play-kitchen area above hardly ever takes place in front of the teachers, but only among children: the shared laughter offers a positive evaluation to each other. It is not so much about laughing *at* the action of eating boobs, but laughing *with* peers who share their creative and humorous transformations of objects and ideas. These nonsense actions, or at least so they seem to the adults, provide further interactions and are highly valued among peers. One of the strategies children have to consider is how others will react and reflect to such supposed-to-be funny transformations. The following playful excerpt at lunch time was started by me but expanded by three children:

I sit with five children at a lunch table. They talk a lot and cannot finish eating on time. Shinjō-sensei usually warns the children, but I also feel bad since I am also asking questions and keeping up a conversation with them. In order to make the children focus on eating, I tell them that Tomoki (boy, 5), who is eating banana as a dessert, is turning into a monkey by eating it. Other children get excited by the idea about turning into a monkey. As they watch Tomoki eating banana, others increase the speed of eating to reach their own banana and turn into a monkey. The children ask me to talk more about monkey stories when they start eating a banana. Shu is already finished with his lunch and putting his lunch box into his school bag. I tell others that Shu has turned into a gorilla by finishing his banana and they also will when they finish their lunch. Shu looks proud of himself and beats his chest with his fists, and others hurry up to finish their lunch box and side dishes in order to eat a banana.

Tomoki: Shu is already a gorilla!!
Shu: I'm *Donkey Kong* because I'm gorilla!
Sakura: Mayumi-sensei, I'm starting my banana! What am I?
Me: Sakura-monkey!
(Everybody laughs.)
Shu: I wanna be *Diddy*!
Me: *Diddy*? Is it also a gorilla?
Shu: No… It's a monkey… but call me *Diddy* instead of *Donkey Kong*!
Tomoki: I'm *Donkey Kong* because I just finished [eating banana]! I'm the second!!
Sakura: What's my name, Mayumi-sensei?
Me: You can decide by yourself!
Sakura: OK… Eh… I wanna be Ukiuki-ukkiii! (the funny version of monkey sounds in Japanese)
(Everybody laughs.)

If one is familiar with the Donkey Kong game series, the children's playful transformation of self above is far from non-sense, but a good example of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 1992, 2005). They integrate actual animals with the media world: in fact, *Donkey Kong* is a gorilla character and *Diddy* is a monkey character in the game. Among peers, this improvisational play is not based on free imagination but corresponds with their cultural repertoires: playing roles is playing rules. Even though Sakura does not seem to be familiar with the Donkey Kong game characters, her high-toned monkey sound still makes her peers laugh. A pretend identity in play is performed as part of children's identification, and the action of 'laughing *with*' confirms each other's practices.

Unlike the laughter and joy shared among the children above, play activities can become unsatisfying and may even break down with deteriorating motivation and a loss of interest. As children's play consists of complex rules of meta-communication, it can

also bring indirect rejection, uneasiness and a feeling of alienation if the rules are violated or not followed by the participants, as I shall discuss in the following section.

7.4.3. What if pretend identity is challenged or rejected?

Children's play inexorably presents challenges for their meta-communicational performance. Children interpret their situated contexts and use appropriate tactics from their cultural repertoire in order to explore a variety of identities and themes. In institutionally organised activities, preschool children in Japan are treated equally, and therefore, competition is less likely to be encouraged, in contrast to the situation in later compulsory education. My field data show that preschool children's sense of competition, such as eating or finishing the required activities faster than others, is often corrected by the teachers who focus on the quality of activities; they are concerned with the individual's concentration and satisfaction, rather than with their speed or placing in relation to others. Yet despite the institutional attempt to equalise children, the children themselves arrange hierarchical relationships. In order to protect their own social territory – or what Corsaro (2005) calls "interactive space" – children are more concerned with their ongoing activities and their control of the interaction. In the context of the communal life of the preschool, adults in general tend to regard these behaviours as wilful and selfish. Yet Corsaro argues that children are afraid of the possible interruption or destruction of their ongoing play or conversation. For those children whose pretend identity is challenged or rejected, even if in a playful manner, it can be a painful and uneasy moment because a refusal of the role or idea in play leads directly to a negative evaluation of the self and a loss of status among peers.

The following episode indicates children's creative transformations of objects, persons and scenes, as well as a rejection of a child's role in play. During one afternoon play-time, I sat close to the children who were playing with letter blocks. Soon, Kaede (girl, 5) came to me and gave me a palm-sized block and said "Here you are. This is your mobile phone!" I thanked Kaede but showed more interest in Ito's (girl, 5) construction work with letter blocks. Kaede walked away but stared at me from a short distance, along with Hana (girl, 5). Kaede called my name and then made a phone ringing sound

by putting her letter blocks on her ear. When I looked at her, she told me to answer the phone.

Me: Hello?
Kaede: What are you doing? I know where you are! You are in a hotel!
Me: Eh… what? Am I in a hotel? (I had no idea what storyline Kaede was going to make.)
Kaede: I know everything! EVERYTHING! I also have pictures to prove it!
(Hana is just looking and listening to the conversation between Kaede and me.)
Me: You have pictures to prove what?? What have I done?
Kaede: You are playing with Ito. I've called the police, so you are going to be arrested.
Me: Am I?
(Kaede and Hana run up to me and hang on my arms saying "You are arrested!!" Ito tries to rescue me but Kaede prevents Ito from coming close to me.)
Kaede: Ito, she is arrested!

In line with Corsaro's (2005) studies of preschool children in the US and Italy, the children in the above excerpt do not use verbal approval for a play scene. Instead, they carefully observe what is going on and then create a possible role or situation. When I first heard Kaede's storyline on the 'mobile phone', it reminded me of a typical daytime melodrama in Japan. As "[s]torytelling is a way of creating possible worlds, and possible courses of action" (Strandell, 2000: 150), I was suddenly pulled into Kaede's melodramatic play and away from the observation of Ito's construction. It is interesting to note the actions of two other children: Hana, who was only physically present, took a police role with Kaede, while Ito acted as a rescuer in what Corsaro (2005) calls a "nonverbal entry". Without any approval from Kaede, both Hana and Ito make their own pretend identities in Kaede's play, by carefully observing and reflecting on their possible actions. In this play, Ito's role is rejected by Kaede. What makes a rejected child miserable is that refusal of his/her role or idea leads to a disapproval of his/her participation in the on-going interaction. In fact, Ito quietly went back to her own construction with letter blocks, despite being physically close by. After this police play, I tried to calm Kaede and Hana down, since the noise level was getting high, and they were excited to run after me while other children were sitting and playing with blocks and Lego. Kaede then held her 'mobile phone' again and asked me if I wanted to play

Mobage (mobile game)[103]. I said "Yes". She pretended that she had been setting up something by pressing her letter block, and then gave it to me.

Kaede: Now, you can play games!
Me: Oh… is it free?
Kaede: Yes, I've just sent an e-mail, so it's free!
(She takes her 'mobile phone' and presses on it with her thumbs.)
Kaede: I can play with you, too!
(Kaede makes electric sounds, and Hana also looks at her 'mobile phone' and pretends to play a game by pressing it with her thumbs.)
Kaede: Yeey! I won!!
Me: You did? I'm not really familiar with mobile games…
(Kaede takes the 'mobile phone' from my hand and puts it into her smock pocket.)
Kaede: This is an iPod.
(She pretends as if she were pulling out earphones from the iPod and putting them into my ears.)
Kaede: This is an iPod. What music do you like to listen to?
Me: Oh… Now I have an iPod?
Kaede: Yeah! What music do you want to listen to?
Me: Eh… what music does my iPod have?
Kaede: It has… has… *PreCure*, Christmas songs…
Me: Ok, then, I wanna listen to a Christmas song.
(Kaede starts singing and Hana joins in. Within ten seconds, Kaede stops singing and so does Hana.)
Kaede: Next?
Me: What about *PreCure* then?
(Kaede and Hana start singing the *PreCure* song but finish it right away, too. Adusa, who has been watching our play from a short distance, comes to me.)
Adusa: Takahashi Mayumi sensei, here this is an iPod, too!!! What music do you wanna listen to?
Kaede: Adusa, your iPod is not working! Hey, you need easier one, an iPod for babies. Hana's iPod is an easier one, so let me get it for you! Hana, give me your iPod!!
Hana: What?
Kaede: Adusa needs your iPod because yours is a baby one.
Hana: No… it is not! (holding her 'iPod' in her hand.)
Adusa: My iPod works… Why are you being so mean? Takahashi Mayumi sensei can listen to my iPod!

At the end, I took Adusa's 'iPod earphones' and requested nice music. She started singing *PreCure*, but then Kaede immediately gave Adusa the cold shoulder, spitting out in a small voice that it had already been played. In order to include the three girls in the play, I suggested the *Anpanman* song. Adusa, Hana and Kaede started singing it out loud, and the children playing blocks around us, including Ito, also joined in singing.

[103] *Mobage* (mobile game) founded by DeNA Co., Ltd is a powerful mobile gaming platform as well as the largest mobile social networking system with 30 million users in Japan (see http://trendy.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/column/20111012/1038272/?P=2).

This long play excerpt clearly illustrates Kaede's leading position in the play. Kantor et al. (1998) emphasise the importance of children's play strategies for introducing and expanding play themes, for coordinating their ideas with others, and for producing contextually appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviours (also see Bromley, 2004; Monighan-Nourot et al., 1987). Kaede confidently or even aggressively draws upon her broad cultural repertoire by transforming objects (letter blocks) into different play materials (mobile phone and iPod), and transforming one situation into another in line with the latest cultural trends, such as TV melodrama, mobile games and portable music players. On the side, Hana coordinates with Kaede even though she is not verbally active like Kaede. Above all, the most sophisticated part of the interaction among the three girls is their negotiation of each other's transformations or new pretend identities.

The strategies relating to pretend identities taken by Hana and Adusa clearly indicate that participation in play hinges on meta-communication – how one situates him/herself in a proper role and presents available cultural resources in a preferred manner. On the one hand, Hana's subordinate actions are compatible with Kaede's willingness to dominate the play and protect her "interactional space" (Corsaro, 2005). In fact, Hana's pretend identity is more or less accepted without Kaede's particular propositions. On the other hand, Adusa copies Kaede's previous assertions, the iPod and the *PreCure* song, as her strategy to be part of the play. Obviously, Kaede neither seems happy about Adusa's copying of her ideas nor does she approve of Adusa's participation, as she repeats negative comments about Adusa's utterances. Kaede's rough strategy of downplaying Hana's 'iPod' in order to challenge Adusa's role leads to the corruption of the play itself at the very end. Until Hana and Adusa questioning of Kaede's leading position, Kaede's attempt to control the play had been part of her pretend identity, camouflaged in the name of 'playful' interactions. Yet, Adusa's "Why are you being so mean?" suddenly threatens Kaede. This signals an institutionally expected identity – playing nicely with peers – and reminds her that it is not about the play anymore. As Jenkins (2008) repeatedly points out, the flexible and open-ended processes of identification, social evaluation and self-evaluation are extremely complex and dynamic. Ultimately, after my suggestion to play the *Anpanman* song, not only those three girls

but also the children sitting around us started singing, and the play time finished with collective singing and laughter.

In the next section I will elaborate on the children's exploration of identities in their surrounding environment through play. As I intend to show, children are creative and unique in their construction of a particular space to share their experiences, concerns and fantasies, and in their appropriation of the surrounding world.

7.4.4. Exploring available identities

In their peer consumer culture, children actively implement their current interests into their conversation or play – in my study for example, this was apparent in children's references to catchy TV commercials, signature lines from TV programmes or other experiences they have found enjoyable in their everyday lives. Childhood researchers can sometimes be fortunate to witness a new emerging play routine which spreads quickly among peers. The time and space in which children play – 'freely' and 'imaginatively' in adults' terms – are the time and space in which children actively *work on* available identities, through what Jenkins calls "multi-dimensional classification or mapping" (Jenkins, 2008: 5). By engaging in and sharing particular framings of their cultural world through play, the children in my study explore, learn about and negotiate not only who they are and who their peers are, but also who other people in their surrounding environment are.

It was the first preschool day after the New Year's holiday in Momiji Preschool when the play of pretending to be sales clerks started. In the classroom activity, the children were drawing their New Year's holiday, and those who had finished were asked to read picture books in the corner, out of the way of the children who were still drawing. It was Kōki (boy, 5) who took out a book and started saying "Roll up, roll up! Everything is cheap! Everything is cheap![104]" as sales clerks do. At that time, two boys and two girls soon joined Kōki. Even though the scanning of the books and the money exchanges were pretended, they did not mention the details of the products they were selling or

[104] The cry "Irasshai, irasshai! yasuiyo yasuiyo! (Roll-up, roll up! Everything is cheap! Everything is cheap!)" is used and heard the most during the end-of-year shopping as well as in some vibrant market districts.

purchasing. Within a week however, this 'roll-up' play evolved with more details of the products and with more pretend identities. The routine started with picture books as usual and the call "Roll up, roll up!" First, Kōki brought a picture book, sat on the floor and opened a page showing bread:

Kōki: Roll up, roll up! Delicious bread here!
(Hiroto and Tenta bring picture books and sit next to Kōki. Hiroto opens a sushi page and Tenta opens a vegetable page.)
Hiroto: Roll up, roll up! Delicious sushi is right here!
Tenta: Roll up, roll up! Everything is cheap here!
(When I start sitting in front of the three boys, Kōki, Hiroto and Tenta put up their picture books, still saying "Roll up, roll up!")
Me: What are you selling?
Kōki: I'm a baker! There are many kinds of bread! What kind do you want?
Me: You should put the picture book down. I cannot see what kinds you have!
(Kōki puts the picture book down, and I point at one kind of bread. He turns around and puts his hand on the table behind him.)
Kōki: Beep! 35 yen back to you! (holding out his hand to me)
Me: Eh… I think I need to give you money first!
Kōki: Oh yeah!
(I hold out my hand to Kōki to pretend to pay money to him. He turns around and puts his hand on the table behind him.)
Kōki: Here you are! 35 yen back to you! Thank you very much!
(Hiroto, sitting next to Kōki, leans towards me to say something.)
Hiroto: I'm a sushi chef! Very cheap!
Me: What kind of sushi do you sell?
Hiroto: There are… tuna, octopus, shellfish…
Tenta: I sell a lot of vegetables!!
(I decide to purchase first from Hiroto.)
Me: Do you have squid, Hiroto?
Hiroto: Squid? Eh… yes! Here you are! 110 yen back to you. Thank you very much!
Me: Tenta, what kinds of vegetables do you have?
(Tenta puts his picture book down on the floor to show the vegetable pictures.)
Me: Well, I want an eggplant, please!
(Two girls bring books and sit next to Tenta to make a 'shopping street'.)
Tenta: Eggplant! Here you are! Thank you very much!!!

While sharing the play theme, each boy chooses a different categorised sales clerk role: baker, sushi chef and greengrocer. Even though it might be seen as taken for granted, I would argue that this is an intentional strategy to avoid conflict with their peers while at the same time appealing to customers – a role played by me in the excerpt above. When contrasting the above interactional flow to the play excerpt of the three girls in the previous section – where Kaede was dominantly leading the play – one can easily see how each boy equally collaborates to expand the play theme and create pretend

identities. Being in the play is not an easy or natural task. Some children get lost in their own role[105], and others experience their access to play being ignored or suggestions are rejected due to a variety of reasons. What is remarkable in the above excerpt is their careful observation and acting-out of actual sales clerks: calling out, throwing attractive words to their peers (customers), scanning products, and giving back the change. I discussed this emerging play with the teachers, but Miyakawa-sensei's and Shinjō-sensei's comments were that children's play is some sort of 'imitation' of the adult world, and this kind of play is appropriate for their age. Except for those comments, they did not show particular interest in the play content or process.

Sutton-Smith (1997) notes that play skills are the basis of enduring social relationships and offer a way of becoming involved with other children. I argue that being in play is not only about having fun or just copying the adult world, but is also about interactional and meta-communicational skills – skills that are needed in order to be evaluated positively by others, and at the same time, to evaluate others. When I was about to leave the five 'sales clerks', Hiroto suddenly announced: "Roll up, roll up! '*We*' also have a take-away! Do you wanna have a bread and sushi take-away, Mayumi-sensei?" Hiroto now paired up with Kōki and expanded the play by offering a more attractive deal – 'take-away'.

When I started jotting down the play interaction at the table, Kaede (girl, 5) came to me, and instead of asking me what I was doing, said "I bought sushi… octopus, egg, tuna, urchin… also bread for 'take-away'!" I asked her in a playful manner with whom she was going to eat. She replied "You and me!!" with a cheerful smile, and also sat at the table. Unless she understood what play scenario was being acted out, this kind of interaction would have been dubious. In this sense, play can be interpreted as the medium through which individual children learn about various identities in their surrounding environment as well as about themselves – who they are, who others are, who others think they are in a particular peer consumer culture – all through negotiation

[105] I witnessed one girl pretending to be a baby and having nothing to do or say while other children pretending to be a mother, father, sister and brother were busy constructing a bathroom with Lego during play time at Momiji preschool. At Tokiwa Preschool, a boy pretending to be father wandered around in the classroom with his 'mobile phone' while girls were busy preparing for dinner and bath.

of each other's interests. This whole play excerpt includes me, an adult participant observer, and my way of responding should definitely be taken into account since, if the play had been conducted only by the children, the play trajectory would probably have been different. Yet, it is also important to point out that the children were willing to include me and to extend their play themes and pretend identities to me and with me. Being among peers in play consists of complex and dynamic interactional rules which constantly challenge children's transformations of persons, objects and themes. In order to expand the play, pretend identities and ideas need to be negotiated and approved among peers.

Children's improvisational identities in play evidently indicate the ongoing social strategies and actions (Frønes, 1995: 63), and the forms of negotiation and management (Goffman, 1986) that I pointed out earlier in this chapter. Also, and in line with Buckingham's (2003) observation that consumption is something children 'do', children including the children in my study creatively and uniquely use both media products and familiar objects as resources in their peer culture (also see Bromley, 2004).

7.5. Summary

In this chapter I have discussed how consumer media culture inflects the construction of children's identities – a process that I have described as multiple, contingent and flexible, in line with Jenkins's (2008) concept of the "internal-external dialectic of identification". This approach suggests that one's identity is not a fixed possession, but a process of identification – not something one *has* or not, but something one *does*, and something that always entails an interplay with the external world and a need for others' recognition and confirmation. In this sense, the construction of identity is a "reflexive project" (Giddens, 1991); and since who I am cannot be separated from who others think I am, all human identities should be defined as inherently *social* identities. The preschool children I observed constructed a variety of identities through their consumption practices. In this chapter, I defined consumption practices as not only possessions and knowledge, but also as an overall practice, which includes activities such as presenting, transforming and classifying objects, ideas and people. Children's consumption practices cannot be separated from the contexts and relationships in which

they are located – "the collective development of modes of appropriate conduct in everyday life" (Lury, 2011: 211).

In the analysis I illustrated how consumer media culture serves as a significant resource in the process of identification. The first section dealt with the ways in which children seek to control and maintain a sense of 'us' as a collective through adult-child interactions by engaging in secondary adjustments. It showed how groups of children assert their selfhood and generate their own social and cultural spaces in order to control their world and share the control with each other (Corsaro, 2005). In Corsaro's studies in the US and Italy, children's collaborative infringements against authoritative power as well as teachers' selective enforcement of school rules are seen to be at the centre of secondary adjustment. However, my observation reveals that children also seek to extend control in their lives by distancing themselves from adult regulation through the use of their own unique cultural repertoire.

In the second analysis section I focused on children's "borderwork" (Thorne, 1993) or "category maintenance work" (Davies, 2003a); that is, how children work on generational and gender boundaries – particularly child (*kodomo*)/adult (*otona*) and boy (*otoko*)/girl (*onna*) – by using resources from media and consumer culture. Each categorical world aligns and partly overlaps with others, and therefore, researchers should be careful to take account of similarities as well as differences; although the children certainly demarcate boundaries of their own through using their own set of social interpretations, understandings and representations.

In the last section on children's identities, play was carefully examined. Generally speaking, play is often discussed in terms of freedom and creativity. However, as the excerpts illustrated, play activities are not only fun and exciting. Children deliberately work on roles and rules, and negotiate transformations of objects, ideas and people in order to construct pretend identities and situations.

As I have shown, children's social identities associated with consumer media culture are always reflexive and fluid. Because their identification process entails relational and contextual aspects, children often struggle to present themselves in a positive and

expected manner that others will accept and approve. There are categorical classifications (for example, of gender and generation) in children's peer consumer culture, but their meanings are constantly being reconstructed and reinterpreted, and the boundaries are always moving and blurring. Finding oneself and one's position in a collective depends on this dynamic and reflexive synthesis of relationships, circumstances and intentions: the construction of social identity is a continuous practice, a matter of doing, performing and reflecting.

Chapter 8

Concluding Summary and Discussion

Like other developed nations, Japan has actively participated in the global market and contributed to international economic growth. At the same time, the ever-expanding consumer media culture has offered people a wide range of opportunities and experiences that they would not have enjoyed in earlier times. Children's lives are by no means an exception. In this study I have argued that consumption practices are part of the everyday life of young children and mothers. Consumption results not only in personal pleasure, fulfilment and prestige, but also in struggles, anxieties and conflicts. In this final chapter I summarise the data, linking back to the main intentions of the study and discussing some key findings. I will also make some suggestions for further research.

My main aim in this study has been to explore contemporary consumer media culture in Japan – and in particular, how young children and mothers experience and engage with particular cultural, social and economic "practices" (cf. Warde, 2005). I have attempted to capture the nature of consumption as a contextual and relational practice from the perspectives of both the children and the mothers. The limitation of earlier studies presented in Chapters 1 and 2 challenge us to find ways of moving beyond dichotomised views of children – which see children either as exploited victims of marketers or as competent consumers. By contrast, I have tried to be careful not to fall on either 'side' of this dichotomy. Instead, by bringing forward critical arguments, using approaches from childhood studies, consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), and the notion of commercial enculturation (Cook, 2010), I have sought to value children's own perspectives and voices, and to generate an account which assesses the consequences and implications of children's activities and practices, while also taking into account the dynamic processes and relationships within the culture (cf. Buckingham, 2000, 2011).

Moreover, since not only humans – mothers, other adults and peers – but also non-humans – commercial goods, knowledge and meanings – play a role (cf. Lury, 2011) in

young children's consumption practices, I have analysed the interdependent network of relations and contexts which frame both individual and collective practices. From the outset, I have argued for a rethinking of mainstream discourses both of children and childhood and of consumption and consumer culture, in order to attempt to move beyond polarised views.

The research questions identified in Chapter 1 have been explored through a qualitative study. As described in Chapter 4, I conducted focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005) which included participant observation in two preschools for five months and interviews with 12 mothers. I spent three days a week with children aged between 3 and 5 in the two preschools, taking an "observer-as-participant" role (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) in the process. The interviews with the mothers were combined with home visits and shopping trips. The qualitative data written in field notes or audio-visually recorded were carefully translated and transcribed by myself, and subsequently coded, categorised and compared through NVivo – a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. In the analysis process, it was important to triangulate my observation data with existing theoretical and empirical literature to increase the validity and the transparency of the research.

In Chapters 2-4, I outlined the main theoretical frameworks, cultural contexts and methodological approaches of the study, and explained how the data material was analysed. Issues surrounding children's consumption were then explored in the following data analysis chapters, from different angles – mothers' descriptions, teachers' comments, and children's conversations and interactions. The first analysis chapter focuses on mothers' dilemmas surrounding their caring consumption for their young children, reflecting notions of what mothering is and should be. The second and the third analysis chapters focus on preschool children's consumption practices and their role in creating a sense of belonging and in their flexible identity construction. Before discussing the crux of my research contribution, I will summarise the key findings of the analysis, chapter by chapter, using some new headings.

8.1. Presentation of the Analysis Chapters

Chapter 5: Projecting childhood on motherhood

In Chapter 5, I focus on mothers' ideological dilemmas and their construction of identity through caring consumption. Mothers as primary care-givers of young children take responsibility for products, services and experiences on behalf of their young children, by reflecting on children's future becoming and present being. The analysis indicates that the ideology of mothering is infused with three dimensions: cultural weight, stretch and embeddedness (cf. Hochschild, 2003). As pointed out by Billig et al. (1988), there is more than one possible ideal world, and the variability existing within ideology creates a cultural space for reflection. In this regard, what is seen as 'proper' caring consumption shifts in accordance with a variety of social contexts and relationships. The core of caring consumption is offering the best possible opportunities to one's children. On the one hand, mothers often project their own good childhood experiences on to their children by drawing on traditional values such as respect for parents-in-law, the use of hand-made and home-made goods, and socially-conscious consumption. On the other hand, they also carefully look for up-to-date information about childrearing that might (for example) entail the use of head-start methods, edutainment and character goods. The more effort and time they invest in their children, the more mothers seem to obtain maternal satisfaction, despite the fact that their own lives might seem to be more limited or even sacrificed as a result. I agree with Thompson's (1996) idea that mothers' consumption is part of their caring work. At the same time I argue that their caring consumption is a key means through which motherhood is constituted as well as a way in which ideologies surrounding mothering are enforced and enacted (also see Clarke, 2004). This is exemplified throughout Chapter 5 by looking at mothers' experiences of a myriad of dilemmas that include maintaining a social network, taking responsibility for choices and anticipating future consequences.

Chapter 6: Worthy enough to belong

Preschool children's sense of belonging in peer consumer culture is the focus of Chapter 6. I first speculate that children's entry into conversations and activities – which often entails a statement involving consumer possessions, knowledge and experiences – has a certain intention and meaning in their relationships and interactions. More precisely, I explore what kind of role their consumption practices play in generating and maintaining a sense of belonging in their everyday preschool lives. In this chapter I expand on the concept of "economy of dignity" (Pugh, 2009) by considering how children undertake 'face-work' in their deployment of commodities and commercial knowledge within their peer consumer culture; and I explore this by focusing on five face-work strategies: claiming, monitoring, cooperating, contesting and concealing. The analysis shows that in their efforts to join and feel connected to others, the children constantly – and often creatively – shape and reshape the meanings and values of consumer goods and knowledge. For example, they often make *claims* about their current and future having, and by *monitoring* they also pay attention to others' consumption practices. Their sense of belonging depends mostly on the experience of momentary 'sameness', established by *cooperating*; and their search for something that is the 'same' is one common approach in the process of making and maintaining friendships. Initially, I had expected to see ownership of the same goods – for example, featuring popular licensed characters – operating as an important relational currency with which to make oneself visible and audible among one's peers. However, as the empirical data in Chapter 6 revealed, what matters to children is not only owning the same things but also sharing knowledge about these commercial goods and services: both provide the members of the peer group with a feeling of conformity and security. By throwing out key words, which could be character names, electronic devices and catch phrases, they fill their space with excitement, joy and laughter, although at the same time they might *contest* their peers to see whether or not they are worthy enough to belong. Meanwhile, I also wondered how those who do not share this relational currency overcome their marginality and make themselves appear worthy to their peers. The analysis demonstrates that they have ways of managing their public self-image, for example through forms of shame-work where some children *conceal* and stay quiet in

order to get through an awkward and embarrassing moment, while others carefully *monitor* and observe their peers and ask relevant questions in order to obtain new information and knowledge. I emphasise that the meanings and values of certain possessions and forms of knowledge are consistently interpreted and transformed among peers. In this contingent social space, children maintain their dignity through claiming prestige; monitoring and contesting their peers; cooperating with others; and concealing their lack of involvement.

Chapter 7: Mirroring self

Chapter 7 analyses the ways in which consumption practices serve as tools for pre-schoolers' construction of social identities. I consider the construction of social identity to be a fluid and reflexive process of identification which entails both similarity and difference: identity is not something one has but instead something one does, and it is constructed by individuals and collectives in a constant interplay with the external world (cf. Jenkins, 2008). I approached the data with questions about how identities are constructed and reconstructed through consumer practices. In this chapter I argue that identification processes are not static but flexible, and that they are manifested through consumption practices such as using, creating, controlling, transforming and adjusting commercial goods and knowledge as well as the presentation of self. This is exemplified by children's secondary adjustments (Corsaro, 2005), borderwork (Thorne, 1993) and pretend play, where their definition of a certain category/position is relationally and contextually constructed and negotiated instead of being straightforwardly determined either by others or themselves.

As my study shows, in highly regulated institutional settings like preschools, children often enforce their collective peer identity by distancing themselves from adults through forms of mutual understanding and collaborative resistance to institutional regulation. In doing so, they also share and acknowledge the value of their cultural repertoires. In addition to working on generational boundaries, gender boundaries are also of concern to the children in my study – particularly when media-related characters and programmes are involved. My findings indicate that girls seem to feel less inhibited in crossing this boundary than boys. However, I argue that it is naïve to take children's

category-making – their fixed notions of what is for boys and what is for girls – at face value, because this is multi-dimensional and constantly shifting. For example, age, physical appearance or other qualities could become a larger issue for them, and these gender resources can be transformed in many different ways in line with other cultural resources. Above all, it needs to be acknowledged that within-gender variation can be greater than differences between boys and girls. In Chapter 7, preschool children's construction of different identities is well observed in their pretend play. Their play offers diverse opportunities to explore their perspectives through analysing their representation, creativity and processes of transformation. I analyse the flexibility and multiplicity of their identification as a product of a 'mirroring self' – that is, the idea that every individual defines him or herself at the same time as taking account of perceptions and evaluations of him/her offered by others.

8.2. Revisiting the Research Questions

I have summarised the key themes of the analysis chapters above. This section intends to look across the chapters in order to answer the research questions more directly. I have approached the main research question through addressing three different empirical dimensions. However, the research questions are interconnected and overlapping in the analyses, as the analyses approach similar issues from slightly different angles. In the following sections, I discuss the research questions more directly by drawing out central elements of the analysis chapters.

8.2.1. Constructions of children as consumers

In this section I focus on the two research questions and discuss how the analysis chapters correspond to them and connect to each other. The first research question is:

- **In what ways do young children construct themselves as consumers, and how are they constructed as consumers in household and preschool environments?**

This question has been explored in household and preschool settings, with a focus on comments and conversations made by mothers, teachers and children. It is not only about how parents and teachers construct children as consumers but also how children

construct themselves. All the chapters respond to this question from different angles and highlight different aspects.

Chapter 5 explores mothers' ideological dilemmas as they engage in caring consumption for their young children in the household environment. As discussed in Chapter 3, the ideology of mothering – which involves love, care and responsibility for children on a daily basis – is historically and socio-culturally significant in Japan. The household is therefore depicted as a key arena where mothers are expected to identify young children's possible interests and abilities, monitor their proper development, and provide them with the best opportunities, in order to fill their early childhood with joy and laughter, while at the same time maximising their chances for the future. With this background context, in Chapter 5 I explore interviews and conversations with mothers regarding children's consumption practices, and their own consumption on children's behalf. The analysis illustrates that explanations and descriptions mothers give of their children as consumers are nuanced and intertwined with their own consumption practices. By taking the role of taste supervisor, gatekeeper and guardian in order to frame and guide their children's practices, mothers show that they are consistently concerned about children's consumer-being and consumer-becoming. On the one hand, young children's ideas, wants and desires are more valued in the household than before, and many mothers encourage them in their consumption practices. On the other hand, mothers seem to consider that this is a critical period for children's proper development – including whatever possibility the children may have of getting ahead of others, even if only a little (cf. Campbell, 1987; Nadesan, 2002; Seiter, 1993). These contradictory views of children are especially apparent in the widespread consumption of "edutainment" – products that promise to provide a mixture of learning and having fun (cf. Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003). I also discuss how mothers critically regard children's use of edutainment and their reflections on their choices and responsibilities. In so doing, my analysis shows that children's co-consumption practices in household settings entail mutual influences between children and mothers, as well as other family members (cf. Rowley, 1997).

The domestic settings considered in Chapter 5 are different in several ways from the preschool settings in Chapters 6 and 7. From the institutional point of view, children's active participation in consumer culture is less encouraged. The teachers want to maintain preschool as a relatively neutral space which 'protects' children from consumer competition and inequality as well as materialistic values. The teachers' focus is on offering care for children's healthy development and assisting them in having harmonious and cooperative relationships. This perspective is rooted in developmental discourses. Understanding children with reference to age and stages is not only significant in the preschool settings, but is also common in households, in the market, and in the wider society (cf. Buckingham, 2011; James & James, 2012; James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Lee, 2001; Tobin et al., 2009). The teachers' reflections on children's peer culture in Chapters 6 and 7 illustrate their negotiation and toleration of children's everyday consumer activities to some extent – particularly in terms of children's belongings which are brought for preschool purposes. I argue that, while some teachers show little interest in children's peer consumer cultures, others show a certain level of respect to children's own worlds as they were once part of them in their own childhoods.

The ways young children construct themselves as consumers are apparent in the forms of cultural production and reproduction they employ in the preschool settings. In Chapters 6 and 7, based on the analysis of children in the two preschools, I emphasise that young children do not necessarily absorb everything just as provided by the market and the media; rather, they employ goods, knowledge and information as cultural resources. In this manner, both chapters point to the significance of children's interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 1992, 2005) – where they, as individuals and as members of a collective group, interpret cultural resources and transform them in order to produce their own meaningful world in a creative manner. In fact, particular licensed characters, electronic devices and marketing appeals present particular meanings to the children in my study and play the role of relational currency. I critically argue that what matters in peer consumer cultures is the manner in which children represent their cultural repertoires to peers and how they participate in 'not-yet-known' consumption practices: just having something or knowing something is sometimes acknowledged to

be not good enough as they seek to mould relationships and take part in peer consumer culture. For example, children's conversation about the marketing strategies of *PreCure* and their deliberate consumption practices illustrated in Chapter 7 might certainly demolish some mainstream views of children as innocent, passive and dependent consumer-becomings (cf. Linn, 2004; Postman, 1982; Schor, 2004). Even so, it is important to avoid exaggerating children's competency and independence here, as consumption practices are relation- and context-bound, as I shall argue more fully below.

Throughout the analysis presented in these three chapters, I explore different constructions of children as consumers. One of the unique contributions of my work is that its approach relies not only on interviews and conversations with adults – mothers and preschool teachers – but also on conversations, observations and interactions with children. The children in my study might not see themselves as consumers (perhaps neither would their mothers or teachers), but I argue that children's practices clearly reveal their participation in consumer cultures: they construct their own unique peer cultures entailing cultural resources targeted not only at children but also at adults.

8.2.2. Relationships, continuity and change in consumption practices

The second research question focuses primarily on children's relationships with others:

- **What roles do consumption practices play in the shaping of children's relationships with others?**

As I have noted in the previous section, consumption practices cannot be discussed without accounting for relationships and contexts. This research question focuses on children's relationships with others, and I explore this by looking at dimensions of continuity and change in consumption practices. Again, I elaborate on this here by considering the three analysis chapters, Chapters 5-7.

Children's consumption practices in household settings have been discussed in the previous section. It is usually mothers who control the coming-in of goods and services on behalf of their young children. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, their choices and

decisions do not only depend on mother-child relationships, but children's direct or indirect relationships with others also play a key role. These others include family members, relatives and parents' own friends. Mothers may keep some of the unpleasant goods given by them – for example, toys with electronic sounds and poorly-made materials – in order to show respect to them and to encourage children to see the value of their connections to them, which are expressed through the gifting of goods. Moreover, children's peer relationships are a crucial factor that mothers cannot ignore. Having been a child themselves, the mothers know how important it is for children to share cultural resources – such as character goods and TV programmes – with peers. This may lead them to allow their children to engage with these practices, contrary to their own preferences and wishes. This highlights the fact that mothers' consumption practices perform as mediators of various relationships for their children. Mothers' own childhood experiences influence the ways in which they mediate children's consumption practices, representing a form of continuity. This aspect of continuity is also found among preschool teachers in Chapter 6, even though preschools as institutions attempt to create a space relatively free from commercialisation. Meanwhile, some consumption practices, particularly the use of character- and TV-related commodities, are commonly appropriated and transformed both in household and preschool settings, as children's favourite characters are implemented in daily training at home (see Chapter 5) and long-running animation songs and characters are used in preschools (see Chapters 4 and 7).

There are also co-existing changes in consumption practices for children. In Chapter 5 I argue that close others and cultural intermediaries (cf. Hochschild, 2003) – which increasingly remind mothers of fashionable childrearing methods such as edutaining toys and extra-curricular lessons – also shape children's relationships with other children. Children's cognitive and physical development, skills and even talents are consistently monitored and compared to others. Mothers feel encouraged and even pressured to follow this quickly-changing childrearing information. Preschool authorities' responses to the ever-growing marketing to young children also influence mothers' daily practices. As depicted in Chapter 4, they are now more careful and sensitive about materials and toys children use in classroom activities. While the daily

activities attempt to convey particular values to children as well as the importance of traditional events and hand-made materials, there seems to be a gap in the relationships between teachers and children due to the teachers' unfamiliarity with children's consumer peer culture. The teachers often gave a confused expression to children who talked about media-related information and knowledge; and this lack of familiarity sometimes made children's descriptions of drawings and activities appear nonsensical to the teachers.

In both Chapters 6 and 7, peer consumer culture is explored as the sphere where fluid and dynamic peer-to-peer relationships are moulded and shaped through consumption practices. With the expansion of media mixes (cf. Ito, 2008) – where products do not ride on the coat-tails of the original work – children creatively use a variety of media forms as cultural resources in order to find a sense of connectedness. In my study, even though a major continuity is seen in children's interests in superhero and magical girl TV series and forms of adult-targeted knowledge, their own presentations of their consumption practices are much more complex and contingent. Their possessions, knowledge and experiences are strategically used among peers to share and control each other's participation. Based on the analysis of preschool children's tossing out of news about their consumption practices, I argue that young children's sense of participation or togetherness depends upon establishing a momentary sameness. This momentary sharing, which evokes pleasure and excitement, is however too fragile to sustain a stable relationship. Therefore, they constantly work on their participation and connection in the peer group by claiming, monitoring, contesting, cooperating and concealing (see Chapter 6). This relational uncertainty is saliently revealed in children's interactive space (cf. Corsaro, 2005) where on-going activities and interactions are controlled. In this space, children's attractive claims can be ignored and turned down in a cruel manner, and those who stay outside of the circle may have to deal with their emotional exclusion as well as their physical position.

In all the three analysis chapters I explore children's relationships with others in household and preschool settings. The analysis of consumption practices from different angles contributes to a better understanding of the dynamic network of children's

relationships. I argue that it is too naïve to say that mothers' consumption practices take place solely in the name of love and care for their children, or that children only look for attention and popularity by possessing something. As the web of relationships is contingent on spatial, temporal and contextual continuities and changes in consumption practices, there are inescapable dilemmas, strategies and forms of helplessness.

8.2.3. Reflexive and multiple identities

In this section, I discuss the analysis chapters with regard to the last research question, which centres on the reflexive and multiple social identities of mothers and children:

- **How do children's and mothers' consumption practices relate to their identity formation?**

Even though children's relationships with others are discussed separately above, it needs to be acknowledged that identities can never be discussed without relationships and vice versa (also see Cooley, 1967; Jenkins, 2008). By drawing on Jenkins's notion of the internal-external dialectic of identification (Jenkins, 2008), I elaborate on this question in Chapters 5 and 7. I first illustrate mothers' social identity formation through consumption practices.

For women whose caring for young children is a full-time job, their identity seems to consist mostly of mothering. In line with the view of social identities as a process of identification (Jenkins, 2008), mothers' search for 'what kind' of mother they are or will become is an endless process. This is a reflexive search, which makes use of cultural intermediaries (cf. Hochschild, 2003), cultural traditions and local knowledge. Of course, mothers' identities can be analysed from a feminist point of view, since mothering includes cultural expectations and ideologies to do with gender. However, I intentionally do not employ these perspectives because my analysis focuses not on women per se but on mothering and consumption in relation to children. One significant contribution regarding mothers' identities – drawing on the ideology of mothering discussed in Chapter 3 – is that mothers' self-satisfaction and fulfilment is largely grounded on their children's well-being and well-becoming. In this context, I interpret

'well' as a matter of uniqueness, betterness and special skills that are considered practically useful and constantly evaluated in relation to others. As such, motherhood is not only about looking at the present but also towards the future and the outcome of their choices and decisions. While some mothers display a critical view of contemporary meritocratic society, my analysis reveals that their consumption often looks ahead in order to anticipate children's future. Through their dilemmatic and strategic forms of caring consumption, mothers' identities are constructed in relation to children's well-being and not-yet-seen well-becoming. Meanwhile, mothers are also going through the process of their own being and becoming. What kind of mother they are depends on where and with whom they situate themselves. At the same time, we also have to acknowledge that mothers hold multiple identities in addition to that of being a 'mother'.

In Chapter 7 I focus particularly on the reflexive and multiple identities of children. I primarily explore preschool children's generationing (Alanen, 2001), gendering and play through consumption practices in the preschool setting. With regard to generationing and gendering, the chapter pays close attention to children's boundary making. In institutional settings, children are usually categorised by adults (teachers) in terms of multiple identifications, such as the preschool name, class name and sub-group name. Yet the children themselves also appropriate these terms and use them to frame their social and structural space. My enquiry concerns the manner in which they work on generation (age) and gender identifications through their engagements with commercial goods, knowledge and experiences. One interesting contribution in relation to this research question is that, within their peer culture, children negotiate generation/gender boundaries based on relationships and contexts. They also claim their 'rights' to own certain things, knowledge and activities by distancing themselves from 'others'. Therefore, while one day I was 'naturally' involved in their play or conversations in a way that went beyond generational or gender distinctions, on another day, my taken-for-granted involvement was turned down by the children because I was identified as adult or female. This boundary-making also happens among children themselves. Some licensed characters – for example, *Anpanman* – which are usually categorised as appropriate for all preschool children can be re-defined as appropriate

only for 'babies', as illustrated in Chapter 6. These adult/child and male/female categories are constantly challenged, claimed and negotiated among children.

In Chapter 7 I also elaborate on a slightly different aspect of reflexive identities, namely improvisational identities in play. As suggested in Chapter 6, children live in a double world, and they often reproduce adult-targeted knowledge and activities in their peer consumer culture. The challenge they face is not only that of adapting certain identities to themselves, and thereby fitting into a proper context, but also aligning with others' identities. It is too simple to discuss children's improvisational identities in terms of imagination and freedom. Rather, I argue that constructing identities in play requires a certain level of negotiation and management among children (cf. Goffman, 1986) – one in which the negotiation of rules and perpetual reflection take place. Individuals live with more than one identity through consumption practices: as identities are reflexive and multiple in relation to others, we are continuously constructed, reconstructed, and co-existing based on whom we are with and where we are positioned.

In this section I have elaborated on the three research questions by cross-analysing the chapters. As this thesis has had certain limits in its analysis of children's consumption practices, it is important to identify my unique contribution, and to point to the need for further possible research.

8.3. Research Contributions

With this thesis I believe I have made empirical, methodological, theoretical and finally disciplinary contributions. This thesis has investigated how young children and mothers experience consumer media culture. My broad aim has been to produce more knowledge about children's perspectives and practices by moving beyond popular dichotomous views of children as either manipulated victims of the market or empowered social actors. I have argued that consumption is not a simple matter of control or free choice. In order to move beyond this oversimplified polarisation, I have sought to reframe the whole issue of children's consumption. This is partly a matter of regarding consumption as a practice that takes place in social contexts. I have located the growth of the children's market within a broader sociocultural and historical context,

primarily focusing on significant shifts in family life. In so doing, I have argued that children's consumption practices, as well as adults', need to be seen and researched by extension not in an individualistic way, but as embedded within relationships with parents, peers, teachers, and with their wider community.

8.3.1. Empirical contributions

One of the empirical contributions is simply that of adding a very different context from the West – that of Japan – to the debate about consumption, media and children. Much of the international academic debate in this area has been dominated by US-based research (cf: Chin, 2001; Linn, 2004; Pugh, 2009; Schor, 2004). This thesis has brought a new breadth, leading to a 'de-Westernisation' or globalisation of the debate. Another contribution is highlighting a unique socio-cultural and historical phenomenon in Japan, that of character culture. I differentiate character culture from *anime* culture which is often discussed in non-Japanese contexts (cf. Allison, 2006; Ito, 2006; Thorne, 2008; Tobin, 2004b). Licensed characters – like animistic gods and Buddhist statues – are embedded in the everyday lives of Japanese children and adults. The displaying and carrying of licensed characters not only comforts the owners but also communicates certain values and meanings to others. Another empirical novelty is the focus on peer cultures of very young children: not much research on this age group has been conducted (but see Davies, 2003a; Davies & Kasama, 2004; Marsh, 2000). Accounting for young children's perspectives and practices is a substantial contribution since they have been less explored outside developmental and pedagogical research.

This empirical approach has contributed to the wider critical exploration of young children's consumption practices. By discussing and analysing consumer peer cultures from the children's points of view, the empirical data on children's everyday lives have challenged the reductive assumptions of 'cause-and-effect' research. Popularised theories like that of the "game brain" (Mori, 2002) in Japan and the whole tradition of 'media effects' research – for example, as conducted by Center for Research on Children, Adolescents and the Media (CcaM, 2014) (see Chapter 2) – seem to fuel exaggerated social anxieties about the harmful influence of media. By contrast, I have sought to provide a much more nuanced approach, which by no means ignores the

influence of media in children's everyday lives, but also gives due space to children's agency, competence and creativity.

8.3.2. Methodological contributions

This thesis has also contributed on a methodological level. I have been in a relatively novel situation, as a researcher living in Norway and yet doing research in her home country, Japan, and writing her thesis in English primarily for non-Japanese readers who are unfamiliar with her home culture. This has offered challenges and also some advantages. Since I was also part of the research, it was necessary to explain my role and position as a cultural insider, which inevitably impacted on the research process, not only in my relationships with the informants, but also in data collection and data analysis. In this thesis, I have carefully presented cultural and linguistic aspects and terms which cannot be easily translated directly to English. Some terms, such as characters and groupism, are expanded in the body of the work, while other information is added in footnotes, so that non-Japanese readers can understand the contextual background and follow my discussion.

In addition to the novel approach of doing research in a home culture with a certain level of etic perspective, the combination of multiple methods (interviews, participant observation and home visits), research sites (homes, preschools and shopping malls), and informants (young children, mothers and preschool teachers), has enabled me to develop a dynamic and complex overview of consumer media culture. This combination of multiple methods, research sites and informants reflects the combination of two main theoretical approaches: childhood studies – which values children's activities and points of view – and consumer culture theory – which demands a broader analytical framework (see Chapter 2). In order to access the micro-social level of young children's consumption practices, conducting participant observation at preschools was fruitful insofar as I could witness children's creation of a unique peer consumer culture and their negotiation of institutional control. Meanwhile, it was also crucial for the research to acknowledge that consumer media culture is a phenomenon that extends beyond the lived experience of individual children. The multiple methods, research sites and informants led me to "include an account of the institutional thought styles at stake in a

particular field, well beyond the experienced lifeworld of the consumer" (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011: 388) as well as to focus on children's everyday consumer practices. These methodological insights have helped to show that children's consumption practices cannot be discussed and analysed in isolation, but only within broader contexts and relationships.

8.3.3. Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contribution of this thesis consists in its employment of three perspectives – childhood studies, consumer culture theory and commercial enculturation. Drawing on childhood studies, I took account of characteristics such as the social construction of childhood, children's own conditions and activities, and inter-generational relationships (see Chapter 2). This allowed me to challenge mainstream discourses on childhood. These mainstream discourses have viewed children as social *becomings* and cultural reproducers who need to be 'socialised' as they grow up if they are to become complete, mature, stable and independent adults. However, I have argued throughout this thesis for the importance of considering children as both becomings and beings. In so doing, I have revealed the significance of their here-and-now experiences as well as a certain level of autonomy and competence in their practices and knowledge.

Even though children's activities and views have been tremendously valued in childhood studies, childhood researchers have been reluctant to conduct studies on children's consumption practices and media use. This is perhaps because the researchers' view of children as competent and knowledgeable somehow corresponds to that of marketers, and this has placed researchers in a controversial position. In order to avoid the dichotomous discussion of children as either competent/empowered consumers or incompetent/exploited consumers, and to open up a new research sphere which has been relatively overlooked, I employed the concept of commercial enculturation (Cook, 2010). Unlike consumer socialisation, commercial enculturation focuses broadly on culture, taking account of the various ways in which adults and children engage with products, brands, services and advertisements as well as with people, through constant meaning-making. This meaning-making is constructed and reconstructed through social relations. Within this concept, children (and adults) are

considered as both becomings and beings (cf. Johansson, 2010; Uprichard, 2008). This perspective also echoes one of the key characteristics of childhood studies, that of paying attention to generational relationships.

A theoretical novelty of this thesis is to develop an interdisciplinary link between childhood studies and consumption studies. Indeed, with a few exceptions, "scholars have not made a point of situating children's consumption and the consumer culture of childhood in relation to 'consumption' in general and consumption theory specifically" (Cook, 2008: 220-221 [emphasis in original]). By starting from the assumption that children, especially those living in developed nations like Japan, are to a large extent born into a world of consumer media culture, I have tried to challenge mainstream perspectives on children and consumption and produced new knowledge about children's everyday consumption practices. Rather than focusing merely on the direct relationship between children and the commercial market, this approach takes a broader view of socio-cultural change through history. These changes include the expansion of capitalist markets, changing relationships within the household, technological advances and the movement towards privatisation. Young children's consumption practices and media use reflect the multiple trajectories of their participation in the wider culture of products and meanings. Taking this broader approach contributes to understanding differences and connections among them, and their broader commercial relationships beyond peer culture.

In order to provide a theoretical solidity and strength in researching young children in the context of consumer media culture, my inclusion of consumer culture theory (see the figure in Chapter 2) was certainly relevant. I have attempted to link its four domains of theoretical interest in order to indicate the diversity of children's consumption practices: mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies; consumer identity projects; the socio-historic patterning of consumption; and marketplace cultures (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007). The CCT framework is broad by design, but it can be applied in a variety of flexible ways that encompass a wide range of theoretical questions and concerns. The key to this flexibility, according to Arnould and Thompson (2007), is that this mapping framework is not restricted to any specific listing of topical

concerns or methodological orientations. Therefore, no topic or method is excluded, nor is any one topic or method privileged: the four domains are interrelated and mutually implicative (ibid.: 9).

One of the challenges I faced throughout the data analysis in combining consumer culture theory with childhood studies concerned how narrow or wide a range of relationships should be included in the analysis. As a childhood researcher, it was my intention to centre the research on children's everyday experiences through participant observation. At the same time, I was aware that there would be a strong risk of losing sight of broader dimensions of consumer culture and focusing merely on individual child consumers (also see Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Even if cultural and social dynamics were not immediately apparent in informants' utterances and practices, I constantly acknowledged that a larger context of experience was important for the analysis. I have attempted to fill some of these 'gaps' by bringing in different levels of theoretical analysis. For instance, Chapter 2 introduces macro theories of consumer culture and Chapter 3 explores the social, cultural and historic backgrounds of consumption in Japan: both chapters acknowledge large scale systems of social relations. By contrast, analytical frameworks with middle- and small-range theories were applied to the analysis of empirical data in the three analysis chapters. In so doing, I have contributed to revealing mutuality, interconnectedness and negotiation among the four domains of the CCT framework in relation to young children. The linkage between childhood studies and consumption studies in this thesis has particularly contributed to the study of consumption and co-consumption as relational practices by including the primary care-givers of young children – namely mothers.

While paying attention to a variety of contexts in consumer media culture, I have taken some sort of 'non-human agency' into account as well, by considering how non-humans – such as goods and knowledge – become mediators of relationships and construct consumption practices (cf. Johansson, 2003, 2007, 2010; Lury, 2011). This means that values and meanings inserted in goods, knowledge and experiences are shareable and transferrable among people; yet these messages can be appropriated differently or even altered between the sender and the receiver.

8.4. Further Research

The qualitative research in this thesis has been conducted by one researcher at a relatively micro level, and I admit that there are several issues I have not touched upon but might be beneficial to explore in further research. Equally, I believe the knowledge produced in this thesis will provide a basis for developing broader critical perspectives on young children and consumer media culture.

One substantial issue or challenge I would like to mention first is that the field of children's consumption or consumer media culture has been largely missing both in childhood studies and consumption studies. While childhood studies has struggled with a contradictory debate about how to link competent/empowered children to consumption practices (cf. Cook, 2010), theories of consumption have lacked explicit recognition and inclusion of children (cf. Cook, 2008). Askegaard and Linnet (2011: 384) call for more contextually oriented consumption studies in consumer culture theory research since "the majority of studies within CCT continue to focus on the individual consumer's meaning and identity projects." However, the CCT tradition has simply overlooked or undervalued children and childhood despite its attempt to include social categories such as class and gender. This criticism is not just a question of the quantity of attention but also of the conceptual positioning and orientation of the researchers (also see Cook, 2008).

In accordance with this issue, linking theories of childhood studies and consumption studies should be a priority in further research. First, I would suggest that we need more research on young children's consumption practices, focusing on their production and reproduction of peer consumer cultures in relation to the growing range and extent of marketing strategies directed towards toddlers and pre-schoolers. Further qualitative research on young children should perceive consumption as a social and cultural practice and it is obligated to fill the gap between debates made at the macro level and the micro level of children's actual practices. In order to do so, using the broad model of consumer culture theory illustrated in Chapter 2 (Arnould & Thompson, 2007) is certainly beneficial, not least because it links people's consumption practices to local consumer media culture, glocal market strategies and wider socio-historical contexts.

A theoretical challenge that both contemporary childhood studies and consumption studies will have to face in further research is – according to Cook (2008: 221 [emphasis in original]) – how to combine "insights about children's lives and worlds with the larger concerns about the nature, boundaries and exigencies of those multitudinous practices often gathered under the rubric of 'consumption'" (also see Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Cook (2008) argues that recognising and acknowledging children both as economic subjects and significant objects for consumption contributes to disrupting individualistic assumptions about consumption practices by bringing care-givers and peers into the picture. This emphasises the relational and collaborative nature of having, displaying and sharing both goods and knowledge. By considering such broad interconnections, further qualitative research should focus not only on children's consumption practices per se, but also account for the various relational aspects of these practices. Also, as the notion of commercial enculturation suggests, the goal of further research should be to challenge cultural generalisation, and to leave a space for the diversity and dynamism of cultural practices. By operating within this complex constellation of plural theoretical linkages, further research needs to develop thick descriptions of children's lived experiences as well as their living conditions (also see Askegaard & Linnet, 2011).

One obvious topic for further research concerning young children's consumption practices is media and technology. There is a significant gap here between public debates and children's actual practices. During and after the period of my research, technological developments – such as smartphones, tablets and Nintendo DS – became widespread in households at a remarkable speed in Japan. Young children both in Japan and other developed nations are no exception when it comes to seeing and using such devices in their everyday lives. This thesis has also showed children's great interest in computers, digital card game machines, 3D TVs, smartphones, mobile games and iPods: this is an area where they are increasingly keen to share and expand their consumer knowledge with their peers. It will be interesting to explore globally and locally further the ways in which young children employ these technologies to communicate with others and establish relationships. Further research surrounding these new technologies needs to address questions about how they are appropriated and used within household

settings – for example within inter-generational relationships and childrearing. As always, children's relation to media and technology will take a central place in the debate among parents, educators and not least policy makers. At present, the key question in the debate is how to make these technologies 'safe' for young children and who will take responsibility for the consequences of their use (cf. Livingstone & Bovill, 2013). This on-going concern was locally discussed in Fukuoka, Japan at a forum held by NPO Children and Media in 2014 – "Smartphones and Children: Risks and Potentials" (NPO Children, 2014). Smartphones have played an increasing part in the everyday lives of young generations in the last five years in Japan. This is particularly clear in the employment of applications for parenting and for communication among secondary school children. The forum therefore drew attention to childrearing practices, educational programmes and smartphone literacy. Yet there is a tendency and even an expectation in this kind of forum to focus on the ways in which new media and technology have changed people's lives, instead of focusing on the ways people have adopted and employed them in their lives. This 'effects' perspective is more extreme in relation to children.

In line with what I have attempted in this thesis, one suggestion for research on children, media and technology would be to discard preconceived notions of 'protection' and 'safety', but instead to explore both children's and adults' practices by taking account of the concepts of consumer culture theory and commercial enculturation. As I have emphasised throughout this thesis, individuals – regardless of whether they are children and adults – are both consumer-becomings and consumer-beings who continuously learn about new goods, services and environments. Their appropriation and transformation of consumer culture shifts relationally and contextually. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further research by including more participant observation in peer cultures, in addition to interviews with children and the adults surrounding them. In so doing, researchers can elaborate on what children actually do as well as what they say and think, before discussing how childhood should be preserved and how children should be protected. This will also help fill a generational divide – a gap between adults and children, which as I have mentioned in Chapter 4 is especially apparent between adult authorities and preschool children. In preschools, teachers tend to express fears

and anxieties towards the mysterious 'effects' of peer consumer cultures they know little about. On the contrary, children tend to distance themselves from these adults who do not even try to learn from them. Further research will contribute to adults' realisation of their need to understand the peer consumer cultures which coexist with preschool cultures. Moreover, institutions will benefit from further research to support children's critical understanding and use of technological devices such as smartphones.

Taking a broader view of consumer media culture, further research also has to recognise the fact that a consumption-oriented system is bound to result in increasing inequality among households with children (cf. Hasegawa, 2014; Tamura, 2013). This thesis, in addition to other relevant literature (see Clarke, 2007; Pugh, 2002, 2005, 2009) has showed that –regardless of household income – a large amount of time and money is invested in "emotionally priceless" children (Zelizer, 1994). This issue has to be taken into account: even though Japan as a nation is considered to remain an overwhelmingly middle-class society (cf. Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), recent reports reveal the increasing number of children living in poverty – especially those living in single-parent households and non-regularly employed households (Abe, 2008; Yamano, 2008). In my research, these inequalities were not so visible during my interviews and participant observation. Yet, I have been deeply preoccupied with mothers' comments concerning the 'endless' consumption that is often connected with emulation (see Chapter 5): there can be a fine line between emulation and inequality. While increasing inequality is connected mostly to employment and family earnings instead of to the market itself, marketing strategies have apparently moved from 'mass' to 'niche' businesses where the most valuable and profitable customers are increasingly defined and analysed. In this situation, children from less affluent households – who are less valuable to marketers – are bound to be offered less and served less well. These inequalities lead to large differences in how children receive care and education, as well as in the way they participate in consumer media culture. In addition, they may generate inequalities and competition within peer relations, as was a concern for some of the preschool teachers in my study. Meanwhile, affluent households are not exempt from these inequalities and forms of competition either, as there is always someone above them to catch up with:

they also struggle in terms of the decisions they make in order to ensure the quality of childhood and children's future.

In Japanese contexts, qualitative research on inequality among children could be conducted, for example, by comparing two kinds of early childhood institutions, *yōchien* (kindergarten) and *hoikuen* (day-care centre). There are fewer differences between these two institutions than before, yet they have different historical origins and patterns of development, and some of the differences remain (cf. Burke, 2008). *Yōchien*, which are under control of the Ministry of Education (MEXT), generally have school oriented programmes and offer shorter stay-hours. In contrast, *hoikuen*, where I conducted my participant observation, are under control of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHLW) and have focused more on full-day care of infants and toddlers and supported working mothers (cf. Tobin et al., 2009). The children who attend *yōchien* generally come from wealthy households since their mothers are obligated to stay home and to be more committed to extra-curricular lessons and frequent *yōchien* events and meetings. On the contrary, the children attending *hoikuen* come from households with a wide range of incomes where mothers either have to work to support the family economy or want to work to keep their career and independence. Future research will be therefore beneficial for policy makers as well as childhood researchers in order to understand how inequality in households shapes children's consumption practices and how children perceive the household economy.

As illustrated above, there are several key research areas on young children and consumption practices which are in need of more exploration, such as media and technology, generational divides, and inequality and emulation. I would argue that positioning this work theoretically within childhood studies and consumer culture theory – as I have done with my own research here – will produce more knowledge and insight about young children's consumption practices and thereby contribute more effectively to the future development of children's care and education, and to their welfare.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide for mothers

- Children's Participation in Consumer Culture in General

1. Where and how do you and your child usually spend weekdays?
2. Where and how do you and your child usually spend weekends or free time (some parents don't have weekends)?
3. Have you ever participated in events in the theme parks or in the shopping mall? Why or why not? How did you and your child like it?
4. When you go shopping with your child, what does s/he do? Anything you come up with?
5. When you buy something for your child, do you ask him/her what or what kinds s/he wants? Why and why not?

- Everyday toys

1. What kinds of toys does your child usually play with? Where and with whom?
2. Who primarily purchases toys? What kinds of toys?
3. Do you buy or receive toys on dates other than traditional gift-oriented celebrations, such as birthday and Christmas? What kinds? From whom?
4. What do you think "toys" are for children?
5. What do you think about the quality and quantity of toys now compared to your own childhood?
6. Do you have any certain toys you want to have for your child at the moment? What kinds of toys?

- Children's preference

1. What are your child's favourite toys? How does s/he play with them?
2. Are there any toys, clothes and snacks your child yearns for when you go shopping together? Why do you think your child wants it?
3. Does your child have any favourite characters? If so, what kinds?
4. What TV programmes and DVDs are your child's favourites?
5. What did your child wish for Christmas, if any? And what did you buy?
6. What kinds of presents did your child receive from others? What does your child do with them?
7. What will your child or you do with *otoshidama* (New Year's money)?

- Mothers' preference

1. When you buy toys, on what aspects do you place importance? (character, age, gender, safety, intellectual etc)
2. If I say gender specific toys, what toys do you think of? What do you think about them?
3. When you purchase a toy, how important is its targeted age?
4. When I say weapon toys, what toys do you think of? What do you think about them?
5. What kinds of toys do you want to give to your child?

6. What kinds of toys do you not want to give to your child?
7. Where did you purchase a toy last time for your child? What happened?
8. What kinds of TV programmes and DVDs do you allow your child to watch?
9. Have you ever received any unpleasant toys? If so, what kinds?

- Character goods

1. What do you think about character goods?
2. What kinds of character products have you purchased before?
3. What happened when you last time purchased a character good?
4. What kinds of character products have you received? What did you think about them?
5. What do you consider when you purchase character products for your child?
6. Do you think characters influence children's desire for certain products? In what aspects do you think so? Any experience examples?

- Educational toys

1. When I say educational toys, what kinds of toys do you think of?
2. Are you interested in those educational toys you have mentioned? In what aspects?
3. What kinds of educational toys have you ever purchased or received?
4. Is your child taking any lessons or correspondence courses now, or do you have anything you want your child to do? Why and why not?

Appendix 2

Letter to preschools

_____御中

平成　年　月　日

初めまして。
現在、北欧の国の１つであるノルウェーで大学院の博士課程に所属する高橋　真弓と申します。

去年の9月から「消費社会と子ども」というプロジェクトの中で、幼児の学習と娯楽の２つの要素を併せ持つエデュテイメントを中心とした研究を行っています。
今年の夏に、福岡に帰る予定でして、ぜひ_____で現地調査をと思いメールを差し上げました。

私自身、福岡育ちで、高校まで福岡で暮らしておりました。自分が育った地域で、今子ども達がどのような暮らしをしているのかにとても興味を持っています。

私の所属する子ども研究所では、子どもの視点と理解を中心とした研究に重点を置いており、
私も子ども達との交流の中で様々な情報を得たいと思っています。
この研究はノルウェーでの博士論文の一部となりますが、園を特定するような情報（場所や園名など）は公開いたしませんし、子ども達の名前や写真その他、個人を特定する情報はすべて匿名または非公開とします。ここでの研究者がすべてそうであるように、子ども達のプライバシーを最大限に尊重しながらの研究を考えております。

予定としては6月1日から8月までの週2-3日の参与観察を考えており、できるだけ子ども達の活動に参加できればと思っています。
大学院、研究所の情報は下記のリンクで確認できますが、すべて英語となっています。
http://www.ntnu.no/noseb/english

もし、前向きなお返事が頂けるようでしたら、下記のメールアドレスまたはFAXでお知らせください。
研究に関するご質問や懸念事項などがあれば、ぜひご連絡ください。

高橋　真弓

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Appendix 3

Survey to preschool teachers

① 保育園では、普段どのような遊び環境、玩具作りや選択に重点を置いていますか？

② 保育園内外で、幼児の発達を含め、遊びの中で与えたい玩具はどんなものですか？
それはなぜですか？

③ 保育園内外で個人的に子どもに与えたくない玩具はどのようなものですか？それはなぜですか？

④ 子どもは一般的にどのような玩具に惹かれると思いますか？

⑤ 家庭訪問などで、子ども達の家庭での玩具を目にする事があると思いますが、幼児の遊び、玩具、絵本の質や量に変化を感じますか？どのような点ですか？

⑥ 現在、大人向け商品にも様々なキャラクターが使われていますが、幼児のキャラクター玩具や日用品についてどう思われますか？
プラス面：
マイナス面：

⑦ 知育玩具（エデュトイ）と言えば、どのような玩具を思いつきますか？
またそれらについてどう思われますか？

⑧ どのようなテレビ番組や映画を幼児に見せたいですか、また見せたくないですか？
それはなぜですか？
見せたい：
見せたくない：

☺ ☺ ☺ ご協力をありがとうございました。 ☺ ☺ ☺

Appendix 4

TV Animations and Characters

Anpanman and his friends (Courtesy of Anpanman Digital LLP; Forecast Communications Inc.; Takashi Yanase; Froebel-Kan Co.,Ltd.; TMS Entertainment Co.,Ltd.)

Usavich (Courtesy of Kanaban Graphics)

Engine Sentai Go-onger broadcast from February 2008 to January 2009 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)

Samurai Sentai Shinkenger broadcast from February 2009 to January 2010 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)

Tensou Sentai Goseiger broadcast from February 2010 to February 2011 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)

Fresh Pretty Cure broadcast from February 2009 to January 2010 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)

Heart Catch PreCure broadcast from February 2010 to January 2011 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)

Suite PreCure broadcast from February 2011 to January 2012 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)

Kamen Rider Decade broadcast from January to August 2009 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)

Kamen Rider OOO broadcast from September 2010 to August 2011 (Courtesy of Tōei Company Ltd.)