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**A RESEARCH UPON SCHOOL UNIFORMS AND PERSONAL STYLE**

Thoughts and Experiences of Japanese University Students

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The fascinating country of Japan and its culture has been my source of inspiration for some years now. Japan is a country of contrasts between its old traditions and rituals, but also with its modern high-tech society. This was the reason why I became interested in Japan and why I wanted to experience Japan in a more in-depth way than how tourists experience it during a few weeks' holiday. While I was in Japan I studied in an international university in Osaka and took courses which covered different aspects of Japanese society and culture. During one of these courses we talked about education and school uniforms, which then made me interested in this 'uniformed society', as McVeigh (2002) describes Japan.

For that course I interviewed Japanese university students about school uniforms in general, for example what kind of uniforms they had had and whether they liked them or not. Instead of this general picture, for this research I wanted to go a little deeper and learn more about how the students had experienced the 'uniformed' time and whether they felt that it had any deeper meanings in their lives. Also an interesting question about individuality and identity arose; had the students felt that they could be what they wanted to be and show their personality at school; was it even necessary? Therefore with this research my aim is to describe and understand the significance of school uniform in the process of creating personal style of clothing.

This research was conducted during my stay in Japan as an ethnographic fieldwork with a basis in phenomenology and the research of experiences. I interviewed several Japanese university students in order to gain more knowledge about my research topic through their personal experiences. There is no basis for making generalizations, but as it is known that Japanese society is group oriented, the results eventually show the similarities between the students.

This research is mainly ethnographic concerning the method of collecting the data and the fact that the data was collected during the nine months spent in Japan. The data was analysed on the basis of Perttula's idea of phenomenological research. With the two sections, each consisting of several points, the data was analysed thoroughly taking my own thoughts into consideration by doing phenomenological reduction. During analysis there were four to six categories created which followed the chronological pattern of the interviews and essays. I will present the results according to the order of the three research questions: 1) What kind of school uniforms did the students wear and what did they think about them? 2) What is the significance of school uniform upon the development of the student's personal style? 3) How have the students experienced the development of their personal style?

In the discussion part I will relate the results to my own observations and the theory about Japanese society, school uniforms, style, dress and identity. The Japanese society and culture as a whole is too complicated to be explained briefly, but with, for example, the ideas of McVeigh (2000; 2002), Miller (2004), Shimizu (2004) and Yoneyama (1999) the most significant points in this research are brought up and evaluated. With the help of Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological child development and Erikson's life-cycle theory I will go through the 'uniformed' (McVeigh, 2000) time period from the point of view of identity development. By adding Damhorst's (2005), Roach-Higgins & Eicher's (2004) research about dress, clothing and identity to the identity development, I hope to uncover some kind of basis for the development of style and identity of the students who participated in this research.

This research is part of the studies on clothing and style, school wear and psychology: identity development, and also part of studies on Japanese culture and education. There have been researches about school uniforms from a similar point of view, with the exception that the research subjects have been for example women who have grown up after World War II and how they felt about wearing school uniforms at that time, and also how they described the development of their identities. Many researchers have also done questionnaires about school uniforms and their usability, which are mainly quantitative and applying only to the thoughts about how satisfied the students are with the outer appearance of the uniforms. This research is slightly broader compared to the questionnaires for students and therefore is able to give more information about students' own thoughts about clothing and style during their school years.

## 2 JAPANESE SOCIETY AND SCHOOL UNIFORMS – IN A NUTSHELL

*‘Japan is the country of contrasts between tradition and the modern world. Popular images portray it as a land where ancient arts and colourful festivals flourish. Steeped in a venerable past, Japan is instinctively associated with tradition. It is a society where complex codes of etiquette are scrupulously observed and rich ceremonialism and quaint customs move solemnly to a rhythm of ritualism. Nevertheless, they at least hint at some salient characteristics of Japanese society, such as a predilection for order, predetermined patterns, and set procedures. Many have observed that life in Japan is highly ritualized, organized, and regimented.’ (McVeigh 1998, 1.)*

### 2.1 Japanese society and education – the unifying socialization process

One of the distinct features of Japanese society is verticality – the relationship between the upper and the lower level is very tight – and horizontality – on the same hierarchical step relationships are loose and there is not much cooperation. The system’s secret is based on focusing on efficiency and working together towards one goal. When the upper level is powerful and the lower level does not know its role, everybody works as a team to achieve the goal without depending on their specific job descriptions. (Jakobson & Sarvimäki 2001, 339) Also Nakane (1995, 1–8) has stated that teamwork is based on belief that the power of the group is the key to succeeding, and in networks of people individual investment is often ignored.

It has been emphasized that the contrast between individualistic western culture and the sociocentric orientation (collective) of non-western culture is noticeable. Japanese individuals have always been driven to achieve not only to meet his or her personal standard of excellence, but also to serve the collective obligation and responsibility of the relationship or social group which she belongs to. (Shimizu 2002, 231) Shimizu’s (2002) research points out



also that nowadays the Japanese adolescents show both sociocentric and individualistic sides, even if the Japanese society is heterogeneously considered sociocentric.

Education in Japan is designed to strengthen the old traditions of group orientation and increase diligence. Even though most descriptions of Japanese society have generally assumed that group behaviour and attitudes are learnt at home, Peak's (2002, 167) research shows that the Japanese families believe that it is the school's responsibility to socialize children especially in group behaviour. Japanese children start their school path at the age of seven and continue compulsory education until the age of 15. Primary school takes six years which is followed by three years in junior high school. There is also a possibility to go to high school for three years and then choose a two or a four year college degree. (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989, 119) But the transition from home to kindergarten is the first major step towards acculturation to group norms for individuals in Japan. This is explained by the term '*shudan seikatsu*' or 'life in group' which is emphasized with the use of school uniforms as one unifying aspect of the socialization process. (Peak 2002, 167 and Nakane 1995, 10)

The above described socialization by unifying individuals as one group in different ways is also described by McVeigh (2002, 251). McVeigh (2002, 251), states that there are three phases in uniformizing individuals in Japan. Uniformizing is a process of socialization where the children are socialized to the culture and its norms by the use of uniforms which carry with them many rules and regulations, but also an ideology. Also Spencer (2007, 227) notes that the society is more highly encouraging towards a group of a 'uniform identities' than a group of individuals. McVeigh's three phases of uniformizing are: *uniformizing*, *de-uniformizing* and *re-uniformizing*. A Japanese person's life is separated into periods according to these three phases. The first phase begins in kindergarten or at the primary school where the child has her first uniform and encounters social situations where learning group behaviour helps her to survive. This phase continues till the end of high school and the transition to the *de-uniformizing* begins when the student enters college and does not have a uniform anymore. *Re-uniformizing* begins when the student starts job hunting and is expected to wear a clean suit which matches the work she is going to do after college. (McVeigh 2000, 49, 103–104, 108–109)

## **2.2 On school uniforms**

According to Konheim-Kalkstein (2006, 25) schools have always had dress codes and school uniform is one of them. There are different reasons why schools have school uniforms. At one time the uniform was an attempt to reduce clothing costs for parents and to help curb social pressures. With so many school districts around the world adopting school uniforms it seems as though school uniforms are doing something to prevent violence, improve school climate, or help parents out financially. They also ease up competition over clothing as source of conflict. (Konheim-Kalkstein 2006, 25)

### **2.2.1 Generally on school uniforms – history and opinions**

While the school uniform has always been a conservative policy, rooted in conservative ideologies, yet it has morphed and altered its existence based on the ebb and flow of societal and cultural changes. (Davidson & Rae 1990, 10) School uniforms, as they are seen in contemporary public schools, have their roots in the confluence of secular and religious influences that contextualized the earliest universities in Germany, France and England. (Brunsma 2006, 3)

Brunsma (2006, 5) also states that the social stigma attached to the school uniform is not completely foreign given to the original reasons for European uniforms in the academies more generally, and uniforms in English schools early on more specifically: to encourage docility and obedience toward ‘rightful authority’. In the United States and Britain, the school uniform eventually has become solidly fixed as a status symbol for those who could afford private elite schools. So, uniforms as a mode of educational clothing were used at least in Britain as a marker of social status - first for the lowest classes and later as a symbol of elite tradition of excellence in education. (Brunsma 2006, 5)

Another use for the school uniform in England was as an instrument for controlling the masses and teaching them herd behaviour. Most of England was working class, and a powerfully rigid system of education was required as a trajectory into the hierarchy of the occupational world but also a powerful tonic against individuality and individual expression.

As can be seen in the history of the school uniforms, such requirements of standardized dress also include a symbolic rhetoric of legitimate authority, reservoir of institutional and organizational values of the school, and a method of social and cultural control over cohorts of students moving through the system. Those without a uniform would feel left out. Divergence from the uniform was akin to divergence from the values held by the institution and therefore punishable by a variety of sanctioning procedures. (Brunsma 2006, 5–6)

Even though school uniforms have stood the test of time, there have been changes to the regulations, particularly in the twentieth century, for material, political, cultural, and social reasons. As an illustration Brunsma (2006, 7) describes that during World War II, school uniforms in England were placed on the symbolic back burner for a period of time due to the cost and scarcity of fabric. Social movements akin to the Free Speech Movement in the US have also occurred in many other countries resulting in changes in regulations, definitions, and overall policy strategy concerning student dress and grooming. (Brunsma 2006, 7)

By the early 1960s, 50 per cent of Catholic schools had uniform policies, which had been unquestioned for much of the first half of the twentieth century. However, by the early 1960s or as early as the late 1950s, there were some protests and concerns among the Catholic laity regarding the requirement for school uniforms. The protests focused on such issues as 1) uniforms as an invasion of parental right and duties – that parents should be encouraged to fulfil their obligations and not defer to the long-standing *in loco parentis* dictated by private and parochial schools, as well as universities, and the uniform was indicative of waning parental rights; 2) the inherent statement that uniforms make of conformity and similarity – that these should be the goals of an educational organization was being questioned; 3) the school uniforms were actually not cheaper, at that time, for poorer families – a group that the Catholic Church was trying to serve; and 4) children will eventually find out social class boundaries, racial boundaries, gender boundaries, etc., upon entering the ‘real world’. (Myers 1963, 630–632)

Those who oppose mandatory school uniform policies use several arguments to make their points. First, they are concerned that schools and school boards should not have the right to dictate what children should wear – that, they argue, is a parental right and responsibility. Second, parents (and educators) in the anti-uniform movement also have concerns that this not only crosses into parental right but also squelches and undermines students’ right to free

speech and freedom of expression. Third, there is quite often an undercurrent in this camp of concern that administrators simply cannot ‘see the forest for the trees,’ that they are not looking at the bigger picture, the larger issues facing public education in the twenty-first century, that they rely on their common sense and utilize anecdote and personal opinion to make the claim that uniform policies, in their school/district, will raise test scores, create a positive educational/safety climate, etc. Fourth, there has been much parental concern over the widening gulf between the written policies of ‘opt-outs’ and the on-the-ground, practical ways in which administrators apply the policies regarding exemptions and opt-outs. Fifth, these anti-uniformists argue that the teachers have enough to do without policing dress code violations, and the teachers should be allowed to simply teach and forge relationships with students, parents and the community. Finally, these groups and individuals argue that, in the end, mandating a school uniform policy is akin to charging a fee for public education, and that, they argue, is against everything that for example the American public education stands for. (Brunsma 2006, 25–26)

### **2.2.2 A brief history of Japanese school uniform and its meanings**

School uniforms (*seifuku*) were first introduced in Japan to the *Gakushuin* (an educational institution for the children of the Japanese aristocracy and later also for wealthy commoners) during the Meiji-era in 1879, and by the mid-1880s other schools adopted uniforms modelled after European military uniforms. There is also one specific detail which has survived the uniform design changes; in 1885 a kind of satchel backpack (*rando-seru*) was introduced to the students of Gakushuin, and it is still carried today by elementary school students. (McVeigh 2000, 47)

At first the Japanese school uniform consisted of a simple kimono worn with a wraparound skirt, or a *hakama* (resembles a wide, pleated skirt). Later on the uniform was designed to follow the military uniforms, and boys were seen to wear Prussian style uniform while girls adopted the sailor style uniform, instead of the traditional kimono. (Kavanagh 2009)

In the 1950s, the “sailor uniform” (as seen in picture 1) with a skirt became standard at many schools (with different colours depending on one’s grade) and by the mid-1980s, the skirts of “sailor uniforms” became shorter (Mori 1985, 200–201 in McVeigh 2000, 66). As some of

the many changes: there was a switch from the stand-up collar of the male uniform to blazers (See picture 2) as well as a change from black to navy blue or grey. For female uniforms, there was a change from “sailor uniforms” to blazers, and a move away from navy blue to more colours and chequered patterns which afforded the students a more “cheerful” (akarui) appearance. (McVeigh 2000, 66)



PICTURE 1 Sailor uniform (junior high) PICTURE 2 Blazers – modern uniform style for boys and girls

According to McVeigh (2000, 66) the most common reason for changing uniforms in Japan was that “to improve the image of schools, start with uniforms”. Schools also carry out uniform changes in order to improve institutional solidarity, unity among the students, values which presumably aid administrators in maintaining order on campus. At some schools the opinions, concerns and ideas of students have been taken into account when redesigning and adopting the new uniforms. Attention has been given to the degree of comfort, whether students like the colour and design, whether uniforms were in tune with current fashion, whether they had a brand name, the degree of durability and the price. (McVeigh 2000, 66–67)

Nowadays some schools have even discontinued uniforms (e.g. some public junior high schools) and changed to the “privatization of clothing” and allowed the wearing of casual clothes (*jiyuu fuku*, free clothes). Other schools permit students to wear whatever they want on specific days (i.e. like ‘casual Friday’ at offices), these days allow students the choice of whether or not to wear uniforms. Some schools have also adopted *junseifuku* (‘semi-uniforms’), which can be mixed with casual clothing. (McVeigh 2000, 67)

The school uniform is the symbol of the school and therefore most nursery schools, kindergartens, primary, junior high and high schools have student uniforms (or at least regulations about attire). Uniforms are intended to provide order, discipline and solidarity within a school. School uniforms are an aspect of material culture that expresses “school spirit”, along with items such as school pins. (McVeigh 2000, 47) Also, it is reported that 97 per cent of 1125 public junior high schools in Japan have regulations on school uniforms. The ratio of prefectural high schools which have school uniforms is 100 per cent in many prefectures. Even the most relaxed area, Tokyo, reaches 55 per cent. (McVeigh 2000, 52–53)

According to McVeigh (2000, 48) school uniforms are more than just standardized clothing; they are symbolic lightning rods often implicated in debates and discussions about ethical issues and human rights (particularly those of women uniformed as “office ladies” and children uniformed as students) and their violation; the right of self-determination; school rules; ‘student management syndrome’; paternalism of and interference from schools and teachers; sexual discrimination; parental right to decide on educational matters; freedom (or lack thereof); responsibility; suffocation of self-expression; the ‘disappearance of individuality’; and school violence.

And, as moral communities, schools have a stake in how outside world (*soto*) perceives them. Students, as it were, are the “face” of any school, and due to this it is not surprising that school authorities show great concern for how they present themselves when commuting between home and school. If students from a particular school are seen with pierced ears, excessively long (or short) skirts etc., then the students from other schools and parents may think that this school is “not high school-like” (*koukou rashikunai*) and might regard it as a ‘school with problem’. (McVeigh 2000, 65)

Thus, being school-like (*gakkou rashii*) – along with the entire package of order, discipline and acceptance of official values – is a type of institutional face, an image that many schools use the symbolism of uniformed students to portray. Not just the students, but school authorities as well have an interest in the actual appearance and impression that uniforms make students more ‘high school student -like’ (*koukousei rashii*) to the outside world. (McVeigh 2000, 65)

### **3 IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE**

The common-sense cultural repertoire of self that is available in the western world describes persons having a true self, an identity that we possess and that can become known to us. Thus, our culture commonly takes identity to be expressed through forms of representation: that is, identity is an essence that can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. According to Barker (2002, 109), this statement is in direct contrast with the understanding of identity as it has developed within cultural studies, where subjectivity and identity are widely held to be contingent culturally specific productions. Identities are wholly social constructions and cannot ‘exist’ outside cultural representations that constitute rather than express identity. (Barker 2002, 109) The crucial part of identity development is adolescence which is often described with the chronological age and psychosocial tasks – the time from 11 to 18 years. (Kroger 2007, 34)

#### **3.1 Two theories on identity development**

There are various theories of identity formation in adolescence. All of them have a basic feature which includes some kind of development in one direction or another with the help of the environment around us. In this chapter I will mainly refer to two theories: ecological theory of children’s development by Bronfenbrenner (in Kroger, 2004) and the life cycle theory by Erikson (1963). Both of the theories indicate that there are various aspects in the development of identity during adolescence. The basic idea is that the child reacts in different ways towards her environment and each action determines which way the child’s identity develops.



Bronfenbrenner conceptualized children's development as being influenced by series of processes involving the child and the environment. In this theory it is considered that the environment is a set of layers, with the child as the centre. Erikson's theory of life-cycle and identity being one of the stages in the cycle is globally known. And on the other hand, Erikson portrays identity as the fifth stage in an eight-act sequence of life conflicts and encounters along the road from birth to death. Identity has a past and a future; both are full of actions which determine how the child's identity is developed. Erikson's stages all have a principle: each stage has its special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functional whole.

Bronfenbrenner refers to the child's actual environment as the microsystem. The microsystem consists of the actual interactions the child experiences. These experiences may be in the family, or with the child's peers or at school with the teachers. The child has a set of characteristics some of which are influenced by the child's biology and these characteristics influence how people in the environment interact with and treat the child, and this treatment then continues to affect the child's development. (Kroger 2004, 188) In Erikson's life-cycle theory, the polarity of each stage presents a crisis, a crucial turning point where development must make a move for better or for worse as one orientates to the physical environment, and social and historical context.

After the microsystem, the next layer in Bronfenbrenner's ecological system is the mesosystem. This refers to the interactions or connections among the various parts of the environment that affects the child. If parents, parents of peers, teachers and members of local community worked together to support the child's development, and shared similar values, this was likely to be beneficial to children. (Kroger, 2004, 189) This is also similar to Erikson's theory where each successive stage and crisis has a special relation to one of the basic elements of society, and this for the simple reason that the human life cycle and man's institutions have evolved together. (Erikson 1963, 250) There is in fact evidence that many aspects of children's lives outside the family do impact their development in significant ways, and it makes sense that it would benefit children to have peers, teachers and parents who are consistent in their influence. (Kroger 2004, 189)

The next layer of the ecological system is the exosystem. This refers to the experiences that the child does not take part in directly, but that may impact on the child indirectly. The

exosystem consists of parent's experiences which affect the child's development, such as the situation when a parent returns to work after their children are born. The layer after exosystem is macrosystem which refers to the general cultural context of development. This could be as small as social class in a particular country, or the entire culture of a group, a nation etc. The final part is the chronosystem, where chronological change occurs, either in the child or the environment. The cultural context might change, which means that the family might move to another neighbourhood, or a new child is born to the family and so on. One particularly important part of the chronosystem is the child's age and of course children have different experiences and are treated differently as they grow older. (Kroger 2004, 190)

The developmental possibilities of each stage in Erikson's life-cycle do not demand 'either-or' resolutions, but rather require some dynamic balance of 'more or less' between the poles. A stage represents a balance between positive and negative poles that determine an individual's characteristic mode of adapting to the environment. The fifth stage, which comes to the fore during adolescence, is described as that of identity versus role confusion. The young person is faced with the psychological dilemma of synthesizing yet transcending earlier identifications of childhood to realize aptitudes in social roles, while the community, in turn, provides its recognition and contribution to an individual's sense of self. (Erikson 1963, 253; Kroger 2004, 190)

### **3.2 Gender role and the development of identity**

Gender and identity development are generally linked together. Many different terms are used to refer to various aspects of gender development. There are terms such as 'gender identity', 'gender role' and 'sexual identity' to name a few. A general distinction is made among those terms as gender identity being the person's concept of herself as a female and gender role includes the behaviours and attitudes considered appropriate for females in a particular culture. (Golombok & Fivush 1994, 3) In this chapter it is necessary to use only the term 'gender role' which is determined by the culture and society which the person lives in.

### 3.3 Gender roles and femininity in Japan

In a way which can seem controversial to Western world, the gender roles in Japan are very traditional and considered often old-fashioned. The Japanese woman is often seen as ‘the silent and obedient housewife’ even though Japan has gone through modernization for over a hundred years. During the times of modernization Japanese women have been fighting for their independence and new status in society but the progress has been slow. These women want a change, but do not want to become career women, which would be an obvious method of enacting that change. Due to this silent resistance and traditions, Japanese girls are socialized from the beginning to eventually become obedient housewives, as Japanese boys are socialized into the ideal of a salary man as the only career option. (Jakobson & Sarvimäki 2001, 313)

Keskinen’s (2004, 221–226) research on Japanese children (age 4) and their preferences in toys show the early knowledge and understanding of their own gender stability. It can be observed that, as in Western countries, girls tend to choose toys which are considered feminine such as dolls, and similarly boys choose the toys which are considered masculine for example cars and tools. Also the children, especially girls, understood at an early age that their gender stayed the same even when they wore clothes considered masculine or boys’ clothes. Femininity is appreciated in Japanese society and children know what is an ‘appropriate’ toy for a girl and what for a boy.

On the other hand, in a more recent study Miller (2006, 38-39) points out that the representations of new beauty types have powerful currency because they symbolize a rejection of homogeneity, conformity, and mainstream values. The images have involved representations of women not as social beings, such as mothers, wives, and daughters, but as people with intentionally formed and decorated surfaces. The social, political, and economic changes in post-bubble Japan have allowed many young women to challenge or play with mainstream models of desirable femininity. Japan’s girl culture beauty rebellion is contained within a sociocultural context that affords little real social power. Even so, they are subverting gender norms, if only within the restricted level of the symbolic.

These disturbers of the cultural peace are upending tidy categories of race, ethnicity and gender. At the same time, this temporal hybridity, in which styles from different places, ethnic groups, and eras are seamlessly appropriated, is symbolic of Japanese affluence. A young woman may select from any style she wants, and any makeup, hairstyle, or beauty technology she wants is available to her inside the boundaries created by the society around. (Miller 2006, 34–35)

## **4 DRESS AND IDENTITY**

Clothes are one way of expressing one's personality, or identity, to others around us. As individuals we have the urge to state our differences compared to others, and therefore individualism is considered to be a basic philosophy in Western civilization in a variety of ways in different cultural and historical contexts. (Kaiser 1998, 473; Shimizu 2002, 229) It is possible to talk about identity with regard to either an individual or a group. Identity means a person's own perception of herself. A person's identity changes especially during adolescence and sometimes the changes may continue through life. And as Sulkunen (1999, 72) states: *'everybody has an identity and it would not be possible to create an identity without society's system of distinction.'*

### **4.1 Goal: Individuality through dress**

Dress is a distinctive characteristic of human existence. We express much through dress, including our personal identities, our relationships with others, and the types of situations in which we are involved. Dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and the supplements to the body. Therefore dress includes for example hair styles, skin colour, jewellery, accessories in addition to clothes. (Roach-Higgins & Eicher 1995, 7) At the same time a person modifies her self-image according to the social feedback given to her by society and her own observations about how she looks compared to others. (Kaiser 1990, 164) For example, in a high school context, it is indicated that conformity with the norms of one or more groups is more conducive to peer acceptance than individuality. (Kaiser 1998, 473; Crassweller, Gordon, and Tedford 1972)

Kaiser (1990, 216–219) views dress on two levels. Dress is concrete but also it is possible to express thoughts and ideas through it. The meanings of dress are conveyed in social situations when the meanings are expressing values, norms and personal feelings. Kaiser (1998, 147) states also that clothes are not only contiguous to the body in a physical sense, but they also may be close to the self in a psychological sense. Part of growing up is learning what society expects in terms of actions and appearances. Also Peak (2002, 167) agrees that cultural behaviour and attitudes are a product of socialization to a society.

Dress is also one of several modes of nonverbal communications that does not necessarily involve verbal expressions, physical movement and actions. Unlike many other modes of communication, dress often tends to be stable or unchanging for many hours of the day. (Damhorst 2005, 68; Barnard 1996, 26) Communication makes an individual into a member of a community whereas communication as ‘social interaction through messages’ constitutes an individual as a member of a group. (Barnard 1996, 29)

Postmodern consumers are prone to mix diverse brands and designers in one appearance and buy parts and pieces of an ensemble at an array of price levels. Buying separates and mixing them with diverse accessories is quite common. Consumers usually mix-and-match not just to save money, but also to have more freedom in putting unique looks together. Consumers actively put looks together to “produce identity”. (Damhorst 2005, 76)

## **4.2 Dress norms and dress codes**

According to Damhorst (2005, 67-71), the rules we use to put all of the dress components together on the body are loosely held guidelines for what is appropriate, fashionable, and attractive. The rules are a sort of grammar of dress. The grammar of dress is learnt through the media and through groups and families to which we belong. Any dress grammar rules can be broken; however, some rules are held seriously in some societies. For instance in Japan, the rules of what is appropriate at school or work are strictly regulated. For most of what is worn,

however, rules are not seriously enforced but are shaped by personal tastes, fashion trends, and group habits and conventions. (Damhorst 2005, 67–71)

Dress refers to or indicates qualities or meanings more abstract than the actual physical object of dress. Damhorst (2005, 75) states that dress makes visual proclamations. For example, “this person is female”, “the wearer is a business man”, “this person is Japanese”. Because dress remains fixed or unchangeable during most interactions, it tends to communicate stable characteristics of the wearer. However, many change their clothing and sometimes other aspects of their appearance every day or several times a day. The “stable” characteristics used for communication may be stable only for a few hours. On one day, a student might throw on a sloppy sweat suit to go to class because of a bad day and does not want to pay attention to his or her appearance. Another student might dress in sweat suits every day; this attire might indicate personal attitudes about school, self or dress. These meanings can be complex and surface-level interpretations do not always accurately tap the meanings of dress. (Damhorst 2005, 75)

Questioning of traditions and rules seem to be a given during the current times. There can be seen fashionable combinations of masculine and feminine symbols, casual combined with formal, and interesting mixes of fabrics that challenge old rules about not mixing patterns in one look. During the time when traditional aspects of culture, such as gender roles, sexuality, bases of economic power distribution, and ethnic hegemony, are questioned, it is no wonder that questioning of traditional rules for dress should occur. With so many mixing and matching, breaking old rules, and borrowing across cultures and times, it becomes increasingly difficult to read appearances clearly (and it may take greater time to make decisions while getting dressed in the morning). And, therefore the statement Damhorst (2005, 76–77) lastly points out: ‘Communicating through dress is complex.’ is ought to be true.

### **4.3 Dressing up around the world**

Humans are born into a social configuration of beliefs and values, at a certain time in history, in a specific geographic area. In addition to cultural and historical context, an individual has

little control over attributes assigned at birth: sex, age, family structure and socioeconomic class, and ethnicity. Both Kaiser (1998, 471) and Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1995, 12) state that dress can both 'unite' members of the same group and 'segregate' them from members of other groups.

In addition to cultural ideology stressing individuality for purposes of personal freedom and creativity, there are physical and psychological forces that promote the basic human need to strive for some degree of uniqueness. In terms of psychological uniqueness, there are many contexts (for some individuals, more than others) in which there may be a desire to appear and feel different. (Kaiser 1998, 473) Honkavaara's (2003, 285) research concludes that values are an important part of appearance and clothing. The results show that people observe others' values and look for whether they are similar or different compared to their own values. In other words this means that by clothing and appearance people criticize other people's values and put them in a hierarchy. Also Sulkunen (1999, 73) points out that there is always an urge to be more like those people who are appreciated than those whose values do not match our own. People do not only make distinctions between their own group and others. It is important to make a distinction between the other group members in a best possible way.

#### **4.4 Dressing up in Japan**

While older Japanese styles denoted a woman's degree of commitment to modernity or tradition, recent styles more readily express a displacement of identity onto the body surface. It is clear that there is not only one form of femininity reproduction. Miller (2006) has studied the changes in post-war Japanese society that have allowed the creation of multiple styles that may be used to define generational, class, regional, or subcultural identities. According to Miller (2006, 20), some contemporary concepts of female beauty have deep and enduring roots, while others are radically divergent from past ideals. Also, the circulation of global beauty imagery results in adoption of various mixed forms that may draw inspiration from diverse cultures or historical eras. Although this type of hybrid beauty reflects domestically creolized innovation, critics often wrongly interpret it as an attempt to mimic Euro-American appearance.



Even within one social group, standards of beauty vary over time, even between two generations. It is easy to assume that facial features and fashion styles sought in contemporary Japan root from post-war Americanization and that one of the primary “imports” during this time was a hegemonic white American concept of beauty. Miller (2006, 21–23), states that the influence from Western fashion was seen in makeup and hairstyles more broadly than in clothing styles. In the 1930s, even women who still wore kimonos usually had adopted modern cosmetics and hairstyles.

There is a distinct split between depictions of healthy, cute, wholesome Japanese women on the one hand, and sensual and sexy white women on the other. Until the 1960s, images of Japanese women mainly illustrated purified versions of the professional housewife ideal or modest young women and “troops of preparatory housewives” (Ochiai 1997, 165). It is only during the era of high cuteness in the late 1970s and 1980s that we see a distancing from the Euroamerican standard of beauty. (Miller 2006, 24–25.)

The out-dated imprints of the cute aesthetic are still around, but in the 1990s a new beauty ideology arose, which promoted a more mature-looking female body. Many Lolita look-alikes became “body-conscious girls” (*bodiikon gyaru*), young women who worked hard at creating a sexy and fit body. The body-conscious look is often described as “a hybrid of Japanese comic book siren and Raquel Welch circa One Million BC” that is intended to intimidate men through a combination of style, sass, and sexual showiness. Since the early 1990s, there has been an expansion in the beauty types available to women as models for emulation. In addition to the cute nymph style and the body-conscious style, there are more innovative looks that younger women are creating and emulating. Different parts of the body are subject to shifting concerns not shared by all members of Japanese society. People from different class, regional, and generational backgrounds also have variant ideas. (Miller 2006, 26.)

The displacement of identity onto the body surface and the concurrent increase in consumer products necessary for the attainment of these new body styles have overshadowed attributes formerly considered essential to the construction of female selves, particularly family status, abilities, and character. The images found in magazines and in beauty industry promotional materials are not just images of stereotypical fashions and styles. What Miller (2006, 27) says

is that they provide a visible representation of values and meanings circulating in youth culture, which are often recreated, and reintroduced to a wider audience by the media. Being modern, traditional, international, and Japanese may be simultaneously imprinted onto the body.

## 5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research is to describe and try to understand the thoughts and experiences of the Japanese university students regarding school uniforms and the development of personal style. There are three research questions to help me organize the research material into reasonable results.

1. What kind of school uniforms did the students wear and what did they think about them?
2. What is the significance of school uniform upon the development of the student's personal style?
3. How have the students experienced the development of their personal style?

The first question tries to explain briefly what kind of school uniforms the students had and what kind of thoughts they have about them: did they feel positively or negatively toward the uniforms and why they felt that way. With the second research question I try to find out what kind of influence the school uniform has had on the students' own style: did the students feel, for example, that the uniform policies suppressed their own freedom of choice? The third question tries to show the students' ideas and feelings about the process of the development of their personal style and the feelings they have had during that process: is it possible to show changes of your personal style while wearing a uniform and how the students did it if they felt that their style changed during the 'uniformed' time?

## **6 METHODOLOGY, DATA, METHODS AND RESEARCH SETTING**

This research is a qualitative research and it can be said that the qualitative research process is the researcher's 'learning process'. (Heikkinen, Huttunen & Moilanen 1999, 74) The term 'qualitative' also implies to the involvement of processes and meanings that are not examined, or measured, in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative research emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality, the close relationship between the researcher and what is studied. It seeks the answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and how it gets its meaning. (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, 11–12)

### **6.1 A qualitative research**

In this research qualitative means that I have gone through and analysed the data from the point of view of the students who participated in this research, while utilizing my interest in Japanese society and the students' experiences; trying to understand the data in its context is the goal for this research. This research is phenomenological and at the same time ethnographic. I have used phenomenology as the basis for the research because it is a way of thinking, not a specific way to treat the data. This gives me more freedom as a researcher to build my research as it fits my thoughts upon the topic and opens up the possibility of my learning while doing the research. Ethnography in this research works as a directing strategy, mainly because the research was conducted during my stay in Japan when I had the chance to live in the society and observe the daily lives of its members.

### **6.1.1 Phenomenology and the research of experiences**

According to Laine (2001, 26–27), in empirical research it is important the researcher is interested in other things than his own life. In anthropology that interest includes other people's lives, and in phenomenology the interest is especially in their experiences. The empiricism in phenomenology means the research of others' experiences. Experiences are real to the subjects even if the researcher is not interested in them. (Laine 2001, 27) The researcher does not create the subject but instead only the understanding of the subject can be the creation of the researcher. The basic idea is to observe the difference between the researcher's own experiences and the understanding of the subject's experiences, of which the researcher completes the research. (Perttula 2005, 134–135)

Perttula (2005, 134–135) also says that in phenomenology empiric knowledge and theoretical components are included. In phenomenology the empiric part is separated from the understanding of the research subject. The theoretical parts before empiric are mainly about the questions about reality, the basic essence of human beings and the structure of the experience. Phenomenological research differentiates from this traditional view where the empiric and analysis parts are put together in different stages of the research. (Perttula 2005, 135)

According to Perttula (2005, 116–117) phenomenology sees experience as a relation: the experience includes the subject, his conscious actions and the direction of the action. Therefore it is natural to call experience as a relation of meanings. This relation links the subject and object as one. Due to this phenomenology is cautious about any research which concentrates on only the subject who experiences or the experienced object. Phenomenology assumes that all the relations between meanings are first psychologically unconscious. Those relations of meanings which do not evolve to experiences are, from the phenomenological point of view, unconscious experiences. Phenomenology is interested in both conscious and unconscious experiences. Experience is understanding and meaningful relation between the subject and the situation. (Moustakas 1994, 27; Perttula 2005, 133–134)

Usually the researcher has to get to know his own experiences in order to see a contrast between the experiences in relation to the research subjects' experiences. This is done by

phenomenological reduction. (Moustakas 1994, 33–34) In this way the researcher gives himself the chance to understand new information before the research is performed. In phenomenological research the sensitivity of the researcher to the subject of the research is important. The construction of general perception about the human being is not the primary mission of phenomenology. Though on the other hand the researcher cannot afford to leave this out because the idea is to understand how consciousness is part of human being and how special that reality is. (Perttula 2005, 135)

### **6.1.2 Ethnography – an anthropological perspective to the research**

The research strategy used in this research is ethnography which is the most basic form of social studies. (Hammersley & Atkinson 1992, 2) With the ethnographic research strategy it is possible to approach different groups or cultures from the native's perspective. Ethnography consists of the words which are originated from Greek: 'ethno' and 'graphy' where 'ethno' means people and 'graphy' means writing. The ethnographer participates in the daily life of the research subject and aims to describe and understand it. The participation of the researcher and the importance of cultural context are important specifications for the ethnographic research. Also the fact that normally ethnographic researches are long-term researches, deeply participating in the routines of the research subject, makes this research ethnographic.

The ethnographer writes about the routine, daily lives of people. The more predictable patterns of human thought and behaviour are the focus of inquiry. (Fetterman 1998, 1) A good ethnographer is interested primarily in the daily life and routines of the society, not in the exciting and exotic events. (Silverman 2006, 69) According to Eskola and Suoranta (1998, 86) the researcher puts herself to the position of the research subjects and learns by experiencing, listening and asking questions about the society. The idea is to form a general construction of the situation without losing the important details.

## **6.2 Collecting, analysing and interpreting research material**

This research is a qualitative field research. From the beginning the idea was to participate in the society and observe the research subjects in their own social situations. This fieldwork period lasted for nine months (September 2009 till May 2010) during which I lived among the Japanese people in a small city in Osaka prefecture and experienced their daily routines from the point of view of a foreigner. I also had the chance to interview local university students during the year in Japan. Data collection continued after the fieldwork period with the participating students writing essays till December 2010. The total number of students who participated in this research is 16. All of the participants were female aged 18 to 22 who studied, or still study, in a university in Osaka prefecture or in Tokyo. Four of the students had moved from countryside towns to Osaka or Tokyo to study in a university.

### **6.2.1 Ethnographic data collection: Fieldwork, interviews and essays**

This research was conducted by two different methods of collecting data. The data for this research consists of open interviews and essays. Interviews were done in spring of 2010 in Japan and essays were collected during 2010. Instructions for the interviews and essays were simple: 'tell me as much as possible regarding uniforms starting from the earliest possible memory till present day'. During the interviews it was possible for me to ask for details if for example I did not understand something or I wanted more information about the topic. Even though it was an interview the students were able to explain everything in their own words and had the ability to focus on the things they felt to be most important, therefore the data can be considered very objective and the researcher did not have much influence on what the students said and how they expressed their thoughts.

The same students who were interviewed also wrote essays about the same topic as in the interview, school uniforms, but also about the development of their personal style of clothing. Some students who wanted to participate in this research but who could not come to the interview also wrote essays about the same topics as the students who did the interview. The amount of interviews is eight (8), essays about school uniforms nine (9) and essays about personal style nine (9). In total there are eight interviews and 18 essays. All of the essays were

at least two full pages, with some as long as five pages. In total there were 45 pages of essays and interviews in written form consisted of 40 pages.

Before beginning this research I had not had much information about my research topic. I had previously studied clothing and textiles which made me research the Japanese crafts culture a little deeper. According to Grönfors (2007, 154–155), when the researcher does not know much about the phenomenon, it is justifiable to do field research to get more specific and detailed information about the topic and subjects. In this way the first impressions are fortified and it is easier to create the research questions according to the present situation. Therefore during the fieldwork period I participated by observing and attending all the possible events the students took me to. I also had conversations about the research topic with the students and eventually interviewed them and asked them to write essays concerning the same topics which we had talked about. In this way the general view of the research topic fulfilled itself.

As ethnographic research methods, fieldwork and interviews are the most common ways to do research. Many differentiate between ethnographic (in-depth) interviewing and participant observations. The two still go hand in hand, and many of the data gathered in participant observation come from informal interviewing in the field. Interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways to try to understand other human beings. Interviewing becomes both the tool and the object: both parties behave as though they are of equal status for its durations, whether or not this is actually so. (Benney & Hughes 1956, 142; Denzin & Lincoln 1998, 47) The interview brings up all the possible thoughts and experiences the participant might have concerning the topic and the participant also has time to go through memories which have been significant in her life.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, 277; Denzin & Lincoln 1998, 110) distinguish documents and records on the basis of whether the text was prepared to attest some formal transaction. Thus records include certificates, licenses and contracts. Documents, on the other hand, are prepared for personal rather than official reasons and include diaries, memos, letters and essays etc. Documents, closer to speech, require more contextualized interpretation. With this in my mind I started analysing the data.



### 6.2.2 Phenomenological analysis

An "emic" account is a description of behaviour or a belief in terms meaningful (consciously or unconsciously) to the actor; that is, an emic account comes from a person within the culture. Almost anything from within a culture can provide an emic account. According to Fetterman (1998, 20) the emic perspective – the insider's or native's perspective of reality – is at the heart of most ethnographic research. The insider's perception of reality is instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviours. Native perceptions may not conform to an "objective" reality, but they help the fieldworker understand why members of the social group do what they do. An emic perspective compels the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities. Documenting multiple perspectives of reality in a given study is crucial to an understanding of why people think and act in the different ways they do. (Fetterman 1998, 20–21)

For in-depth analysis of the experiences described in the interviews and essays the traditional step-by-step analysis of phenomenology is used. In phenomenology there are various ways to begin the analysis process and in this research the analysis method by Perttula (figure 1) (in Lehtomaa 2005, 180–181; Perttula 1996; Perttula 2000) seemed to be the most suitable one for this research. Perttula's analysis method is based on Giorgi's (1985) method of phenomenological psychology. The possibility to modify the method to be more suitable for the phenomenon is more of an obligation than permission to the researcher (Lehtomaa 2005, 181). The advantage of Perttula's method, according to Lehtomaa (2005, 181–182), is the fact that it can be modified according to the needs of the research; the possibility of modifying the method to be more suitable for the phenomenon is more of an obligation than permission to the researcher. Also the systematic view of the method helps the researcher to follow the phases of analysis and in phenomenological analysis it is important to find the details but also see the larger picture.

Perttula's analysis method in brief:

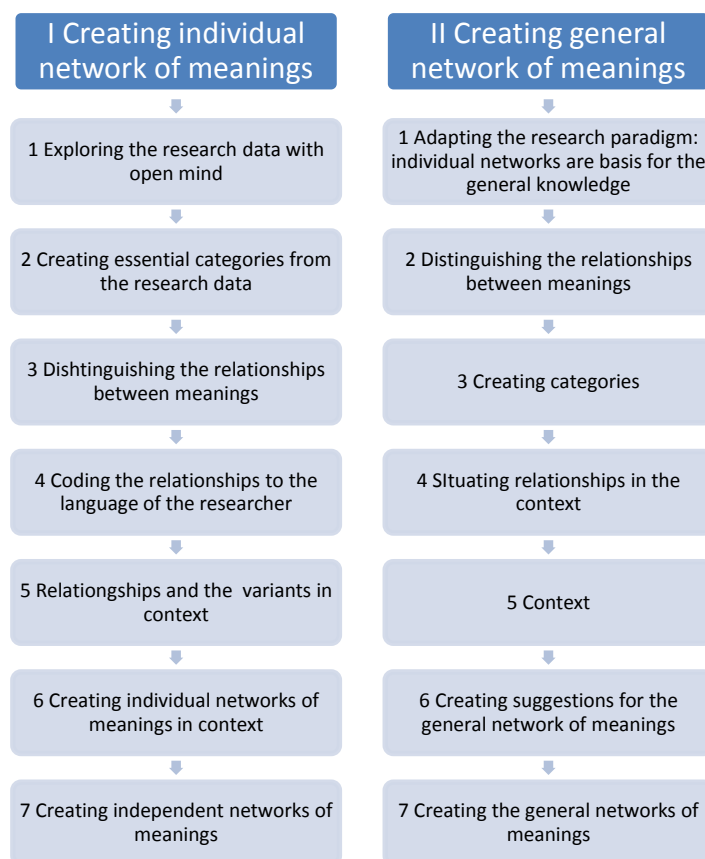
### I Constructing the individual network of meanings

Getting to know the data and finding the different networks of meanings

### II Constructing the general network of meanings

Aims towards to construction of the general idea between the different networks of meanings

FIGURE 1 Perttula's analysis method



As mentioned above the main idea of Perttula's phenomenological analysis method is to find the networks of meanings and constructing the general idea between the different networks. I started working with the data by reading it through a few times briefly and then few times making notes of the general ideas of each student. In phenomenological research the analysis

is not based on the theory, therefore it is important for the researcher to go through her own thoughts and presumptions by phenomenological reduction. I did this by writing down my own answers to the research questions which helps me eventually understand what are my own thoughts and what are the thoughts of the students. In this way it is possible to stay loyal to the data and the research subjects.

Reading through the material, though first separating the essays and interviews, and dividing it into categories helped me to find the networks of meanings inside the texts. This was mainly the first part of the analysis method which settled upon the two materials and their own networks of meanings. In the second part I took both the essays and interviews as one material and tried to find links between the categories made in the first part. The analysis gave me the individual networks of meanings which it was then possible to merge, creating the general idea of the phenomenon. There were eventually six categories for thoughts and meanings of school uniform and four categories for the development of personal style. Some categories had subcategories separating for example positive, neutral and negative feelings on the same topic. To maintain students' anonymity and to help organizing the data, I coded the students with *N* and a number and some with '*c*' meaning the students' have moved from the countryside; this also helps with understanding the possible differences in students' reactions toward the same topic.

The results are presented in a chronological order which include visible sections concerning the categories created during the analysis. This chronological order consisted of three phases which present the development of the student's own personal style. The first phase is located in the time period when the student noticed her urge to find her own style and when she began her journey towards a more stable style. This phase often began in junior high school or the first years of high school. This time period can also be seen as the time of puberty. Second phase includes the period of time when the student tried out several styles and made mistakes considering her own likings. The third phase can be called either 'steady style' or 'current style' which might be still evolving but the student feels more comfortable in this style than in the previous ones. It is possible that the students are between the second and the third phase, or going back to second phase when noticing an error in her current style.

### **6.2.3 Interpretation and trustworthiness**

Although common agreement on how to assess qualitative research has not been achieved, there are various suggestions on how to evaluate the trustworthiness of the results. (Flick 2002, 218) While one is to apply to classic criteria like validity and reliability, another is to develop 'methodical-appropriate criteria' for qualitative research. Reliability, according to Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2009, 213), which assesses the capacity of the research to produce non-random results, is useful as far as qualitative research is an assessment of how well the research methods measured what they are chosen to measure. Also triangulation is one possibility to increase validity and in this research I decided to use fieldwork reports with essays and interviews to culminate as the best possible description and interpretation of the research results.

A more 'methodic-appropriate' measure, such criteria as trustworthiness, credibility and dependability are increasingly used to assess qualitative research (Flick, 2002, 228). The trustworthiness of this research increased by giving a precise account on how the research was conducted, covering all of its phases from beginning till the end. This means that I have written an accurate, as possible, summary of how the data was produced, how the categories were created, and on what ground I, the researcher, have made the interpretation.

### **6.2.4 Research setting: Critical comments**

With ethnography while approaching the research subject the researcher must pay attention to confidentiality and research ethics. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 109) In case of long-term research, it is crucial to achieve the subjects' confidence. (Roth 2005, 107–108). The research subject should feel free to participate and to discontinue the participation in the research. It is important that the subject feels that she is genuinely volunteering and not participating because of environmental pressure. The subject might feel she is not able to refuse, even if she might not want to participate. (Roth 2005, 105–106).

During my own research I sometimes felt the Asian politeness, refusing by agreeing, and especially the Japanese obligation to help, which both are mentioned in Jakobson &

Sarvimäki's (2001, 358–360) research, slightly disturbing my data collection and objectivity. Therefore it was important for me to have the genuine feeling that the students wanted to participate of their free will rather than feeling pressured to do so. Doing research in a foreign culture is challenging and makes the researcher go through a huge amount of work to achieve the goals of the research. I feel that it would have been impossible to get such personal essays and interviews if the students had not been confident about my sincerity.

The amount of data collected was eventually satisfying after there were slight doubts that the language barrier between the researcher and the subjects might be too high. According to Anttila (1996, 306), when the researcher and the subject have only one connecting language it might be easy to make mistakes in interpretation of the situation. Therefore it was important to also have data collected by essays where the students could express themselves taking their time and thinking of how to put the words on the paper. Open interviews normally are long and therefore will make up many pages of text already on their own. It is normal in an ethnographic research that there is more material than might be needed, but from that material the researcher picks the part which will be analysed later. (Anttila 1996, 306)

The analysis was conducted according to Perttula's (in Lehtomaa 2002) analysis method. This method lets the researcher modify the analysis to be more suitable for her own research. Going through the material many times and trying to find the networks between meanings and creating the general categories was eventually achieved. Trying to be loyal to the data and the research subjects by phenomenological reduction where I tested my own presumptions increases the validity of the results. And, when it comes to the amount of data, it seems that it reached the point of theoretical saturation (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, 87) because after a while analysing it the categories became clearer and the generic features of the findings consistently replicated earlier ones throughout the essays and interviews.

## **7 RESULTS**

Even though the group of participants in this research were individuals and each had their own stories and memories, it seems beyond doubt that the collective nature of the Japanese society has been a great part of the students' lives. The answers support each other and form a steady network of meanings which is then easy to unravel as the answers for each of the research questions. The results of the analysis have been assessed as thoroughly as possible making truthful interpretations which lean on the essays and interviews. Results are presented in the order of the research questions.

### **7.1 School uniforms and thoughts about them**

After preschool, the wearing, carrying and caring for of uniforms continues into elementary school. Normally a student gets to wear at least three (3) sets of uniforms during his or her school time, though mainly only junior high and high school have uniforms. Most nurseries, kindergartens and elementary schools do not have official uniforms, but instead they have specific clothes for outdoor activities and PE (physical education) classes, and of course indoor slippers which are found in every level of education up till high school. Some of the students have had uniforms in kindergarten and the typical uniform is presented in picture 4.

PICTURE 4 Kindergarten uniforms



In elementary schools children normally wear their own clothes with the exception of PE uniforms and indoor slippers. It is possible that some the elementary school has assigned school uniforms for those pupils and their families who would prefer the uniform. The typical elementary school uniform, which already resembles the official school uniform, can be seen in picture 5. Even though elementary school children prefer not to have uniforms, they are identified often by the satchel like backpack they carry and a hat/cap (which is different in colour according to the school's colours).

PICTURE 5 A typical girls' elementary school uniform



When entering junior high school, students get to wear their first official school uniform. Normally junior high school uniforms are simple, and therefore often navy or black in colour. The reason for this simplicity, according to the students who I interviewed, is that junior high schools do not have to compete with other schools to get students, so the uniforms can be simple and therefore price often is lower.

High school uniforms are often more detailed, and schools pay even more attention to the designs. Some schools make the school uniform the first reason why the student would pick that high school. Normally the students choose the high school which matches their level of knowledge, not because the uniform is good looking. But nowadays when the birth rate in Japan has decreased, many schools are competing to get more students to enrol and one way to do it is by changing the uniform design to match the current fashion. (Yoneyama 1999, 95)

Due to this change, high school uniforms have become more colourful and the fit is better. A typical high school uniform is normally two-coloured; trousers and skirt are chequered grey, blue or red and jacket (*gakuran* or blazer) is traditional navy or black. Compared to junior high school uniform, the skirt length is different too; high school uniforms skirt is shorter, knee high while junior high school uniform skirt is below the knee.

Presently, the typical male student uniform might consist of *gakuran*, a set of black or blue trousers and a jacket with a “stand-up collar” (*tsume-eri*). This type of uniform, which has conservative connotations, is formal in appearance and reportedly not as comfortable as other uniforms consisting of a blazer and tie. (McVeigh 2000, 61) Many schools have changed from *gakuran* to blazer, because dark blue blazer allows lighter coloured trousers. Normally *gakuran* is combined with same colour trousers, usually black, and therefore it is considered too dark, though extremely sophisticated looking. Even though *gakuran* seems to be at least junior high schools’ main style of male uniform, high schools normally have the blazer and chequered trousers combination with a matching necktie.

The stereotypical, though not the most common, female student uniform, sailor uniforms (*se-ra fuku*) might consist of a navy blue pleated skirt and a middy blouse, and the stripes on the collar is specially designed for every school. If the *gakuran* and the stand-up collar typify and symbolize the male uniform, then the “sailor uniform” and its collar typify and symbolize the female uniform. (McVeigh 2000, 62)



When it comes to the PE uniform (picture 6, it is different in colour depending on the year of entrance to the school, but the uniform design is somewhat the same in every school: shorts and a t-shirt for summer use and long pants, t-shirt and a college shirt for winter use.) PE uniform is not usually worn outside PE lessons because the uniform is specially designed for PE use only; the official school uniform is to be worn at all other times. The same rules and regulations apply to girls' uniforms as boys'. Though again the girls' uniform's bottom part is shorter, short shorts or as in the official uniform, short skirt.

PICTURE 6 A type of high school PE uniform: red shorts and white shirts



The design of the uniforms differs depending on the school, gender of the wearer and occasion when it is worn. Male and female uniforms have some differences, though mainly they match by colours and amount of pieces (shirt, trousers/skirt, necktie/ribbon etc.). Even though there are different uniforms for summer and winter, the girls' uniforms and especially the length of skirt stays short even in the winter because it seems that staying fashionable and sexy all winter long is more important than staying warm.

### 7.1.1 Thoughts on school uniforms

As was mentioned in the theory chapter, school uniforms play an important role in the lives of the Japanese people. (McVeigh 2000, 135) Also one of the students phrased the general meaning of the school uniform in a simple way: *'School uniform is the symbol of a student in Japan'* (NIO). And, from the beginning of their school life, at the age of seven, the Japanese students wear a uniform or at least a part of a uniform such as the yellow hat, which then begins the socialization process towards more ideal group behaviour. This socialization into certain group behaviour was recognized by the students and many mentioned it in this way: *'Japanese tend to be harmonious, group is more important than individual'*. McVeigh (1998, 216) mentioned this this 'harmony' as one aspect of the Japanese identity, therefore it seems natural that the students mention it as one general point of school uniforms. The uniformed, or 'uniformized' as McVeigh (2000, 138) phrases it, period ends when the student enters university at the age of 18 and lasts till the student graduates and enters the job market. Due to this there is only two to four years, depending on the degree, of de-uniformized time when the students have the chance to wear whatever they want and find their personal style.

Starting chronologically it seems that all of the students participating in this research have gone to a primary school where they did not have an official school uniform. All of the students said that it is normal that there is no uniform in primary school, but usually all will have a yellow (or other colour depending on the school colours) hat and a satchel backpack (randoseru) which still are considered part of a uniform. There also is a separate PE uniform consisting of shorts, a t-shirt (with student's name printed on it) and a sweater. PE uniforms differed in colour depending on the class on which the student was, similarly to the colour/class co-ordinated indoor slippers.

Almost all of the students said that it is good for the children to have some things in common such as the yellow hats for safety reasons: people will notice the small children on the street when the hat is bright coloured, and therefore also during school trips it is easier to find the group/missing student when the colourful hat can be seen far away. This definitely matches Shimizu's (2002, 231) and Peak's (2002, 167) idea of unifying individuals to a certain group

which then becomes a safety net for the student. Randoseru, which is usually worn by primary school students, brought up opinions that differed in whether the backpack was practical or not. Most students expressed that the randoseru is a tradition and therefore it is important to keep it. It was also mentioned that the backpack is big enough for all the necessary items the students need during the school day. Some students disagreed and claimed that randoseru is uncomfortable (made of hard leather to keep its shape) and too big for a small child to carry.

In contrast to the non-uniformed primary schools, the junior high schools the students went to usually had a uniform. The uniforms follow a certain pattern depending on the sex of the student. Boys have mainly two options for the jacket: gakuran or a plain blazer. The boys' uniform seems to be similar in every school with only the difference in the colour of the pants and the tie. Girls on the other hand have multiple choices of uniform styles, though not all are available in every school. Usually the school chooses the uniform style: a blazer or the sailor uniform (*se-ra fuku*) with long (below knee) or short skirt (knee high). Though sometimes the schools ask the students what kind of uniform they would prefer. *'Our school did a questionnaire about what kind of uniform we would like to have'* (N8).

Only two of the students participating in this research said that they had a sailor uniform even though it is considered as 'cute' and traditional by almost all of the students. This result disagrees with McVeigh's (2000, 156) statement of sailor uniform being most popular type. McVeigh's research was done over ten years before this one, so here it can be also seen that Japan has gone forward and styles have changed. Even though school uniforms vary and different schools have different uniforms, no one complained about their school's uniforms because the students thought that it is something they have to wear and it is a tradition and therefore complaining about it would be meaningless. The reason was also given that after junior high school it is possible to choose a high school which has a uniform suitable for the student's own preferences.

In high school the uniforms stayed the same, but now students started to notice the flaws in their uniforms: the skirts were too long, older students made younger students wear uniforms in a self-lowering way or teenage self-esteem made the students conscious about the flaws in their bodies which the one fit uniform could not hide. *'The older students usually force the*

*younger students to wear their uniform in a different way. Normally it means that younger students have longer skirts which aren't considered cute*' (N9), *'I felt ashamed because I was fat and I still had to wear the uniform the way my friends did'* (N13). This peer pressure that the students felt is also mentioned in both Bronfenbrenner's (in Kroger 2004, 188–198) and Erikson's (1963, 250) theories when they describe how identity forms during adolescence in the midst of their peer groups.

For the students high school was slightly different to what junior high school was because the students were now able to choose the high school they wanted to go to. Many times, according to about half of the students, the school is chosen not only by which is nearest, but which has the best looking, or the cutest, uniform. Some of the students even described a 'cute' uniform: *'Cute uniforms have pleated skirts, good colour (not brown or black) and a bow'* (N8). Due to this it can be said that the school uniform has an impact on the school's popularity and the schools clearly compete with the cuteness of their uniforms compared to other schools' uniforms.

The rules and regulations for the use of school uniform and how to behave when wearing one are often strict. The normal rules and regulations in almost every school are: no piercings, no unnatural hair colour, no nail polish and no make-up. These rules were accepted by almost all of the students without hesitation even though all said that *'there are some unfair aspects about them'* (N9) which meant normally the transition period between changing uniforms from summer to winter and vice versa, and the fact that some thought that *'school uniforms suppress our identities'* (N5). These statements seem to be in line with the results of Brunsmas's (2006, 25) research: the school uniform 'suffocates' students' freedom of expression.

School uniforms brought up various thoughts and opinions. Mainly there could be seen three different types of thoughts: positive, neutral and negative. All types had same amount of thoughts listed, and there were all types included in all students' thoughts. It seems that the school uniform on the whole is a controversial topic even among the Japanese. Even though it might be controversial, the pressure from the group made the students accept their uniforms and if some students did not accept they were considered *'- - to be loud-personality and to*

*care too much about how they look. They seem to be frustrated because they wanted to express themselves - -'* (N10).

The general idea which arose from the students' writings and interviews was that school uniforms were easy '*School uniforms are easy and make life much enjoyable - -'* (N3) and made it possible to concentrate on studying instead of worrying about their appearance and thinking about what to wear every day. '*The school uniform forces you to study without caring how you look*' (N12c) and '*We don't have to consume time to choose clothes in the morning*' appeared in every student's thoughts, which also is in line with Damhorst's (2005, 76) statements. School uniforms were also praised because of them being '*-- not too fancy, so I can wear it anytime*'. (N10) The fact that '*-- everyone was the same*' made it easy to wear the uniform and therefore it was natural to put on the school uniform to various events. Though as later will be seen, this was also the reason why the students wanted to find their own personal style and be different compared to others.

The students were also very considerate towards their parents '*for parents it's easy when they don't have to buy clothes so often*' (N5) though at the same time students worried about how troublesome the uniforms were to their parents '*it's not easy to wash them and dry them at home*'. (N6) It was mentioned in Myers' (1963, 630) study that one reason for having the school uniform is that the family could afford the clothing for their child, but it was not mentioned how much money cleaning the uniforms would eventually take. This 'saving' money with uniforms also meant that the uniforms were washed once in two months and over half of the students said that they felt unclean '*I didn't feel clean since we washed those only once every few months*'. (N6) Feeling unclean made the students also feel ashamed of their appearance. It did not help that the transition periods, when summer uniforms are changed to warmer winter uniforms or vice versa, were very strict: '*you had to change your uniform when they said and often the weather was too warm for wearing a jacket.. - -'* and '*during winter the school uniform is cold*'. (N9)

Even though the students seemed to like their uniforms, many altered it to suit their own style better. Alterations were not accepted by the school rules but there were exceptions which were considered acceptable such as shortening the skirt by rolling it on the waist. They were '*-- OK. Because you could always roll your skirt back to the normal length*' (N11). Cutting or sewing the hem line was prohibited because they are permanent alterations. If a student did

cut her uniform she (her family) was made to purchase new one and the student would not be able to come to school before she had the new uniform.

The students mentioned often that during their school time they wore the school uniform also outside school. They said that the school uniform is the official dress for outside school events too. Due to this school uniforms are worn also at funerals, weddings and other ceremonial events. Many of the students said that if they went to *juku* (cram school) after school or at weekends, they wore the uniform there too, because it was considered as a place similar to school and where you should wear your official uniform to show from which school you come from. This was often seen as a good thing but students also thought that wearing the uniform to happier events such as weddings was unfair and it would have been nicer to wear something more festive and bright coloured.

As a conclusion it can be said that the school uniform has its positive and negative aspects but it is part of the Japanese society and it is an old tradition which should be kept alive. Japan has been modernizing the uniform which is a step forward and the students are glad that the younger students are able to have good looking uniforms, though the rules and regulations are still too stiff and should be redefined soon. The school uniform is a big part of the students' lives and it is a good memory of the precious school years.

### **7.1.2 Thoughts on rules and regulations**

School uniforms are one way of regulating the students. With the school uniform there come many other rules instructing students on how to wear it and how to behave when wearing a school uniform. Certain of these rules and regulations are applied starting from the kindergartens and nursery schools, and when moving to upper classes the rules might tighten or loosen depending on the school's decision. A young student who wears a uniform does not necessarily learn to wear a specific type of uniform later in life (certainly not a school uniform), but he or she does learn about a general sense of dress uniformity and its social significance of conformity and standardization during the basic education (grades 1-12). (McVeigh 2000, 51)

For most, the first exposure and experience with uniformed dress begins at the preschool level (nursery school, kindergartens or both). Some preschool authorities say that uniforms are convenient because pre-schoolers come to school with clothes not suited to play or with expensive ordinary clothes (*shifuku*) that are not considered necessary and cause competition. Moreover, ordinary clothes are more difficult to wash and it is tiresome for a parent to put their child's name on so many different outfits. (McVeigh 2000, 53) So, the regulation of students begins at a very early level and seems to also be targeted at parents.

'Student regulations' no doubt help in creating feelings of unity (*rentaikan*) and solidarity (*danketsu*), and such rules may dictate rules about bodily management, uniforms, cleaning, eating habits, money usage, avoiding bad students, part-time jobs, returning home early and other daily activities as mentioned also by Brunnsma (2006, 25) At some schools, such rules are listed in small books that have a few words written on dress uniformity and how the clothing is to be carried by the students. At other schools, in addition to being told to wear and not to wear certain clothing, students are prohibited from carrying on their person toys, mirrors, cosmetics, accessories, cameras, comic books, magazines, cash and expensive items. (McVeigh 2000, 51)

Japanese schools tend to have control over the students during school time and outside school. The regulations for school uniform and outer appearance of the student have had the following rules for decades: No one should have a permanent wave or dye in his or her hair, nor should ribbons or other hair accessories be worn. The school badge should be worn all the time, in its correct position. School bag strap should be situated on your right shoulder when going to school, and on left shoulder when returning home and so on. (Yoneyama 1999, 119)

Yoneyama (1999, 120–123) and the students eventually point out, not many school's regulations are that detailed but there are always rules which have no sense at all. For students many of these rules are not understandable because for example curly hair does not seem to cause any problems at school, though it is still banned. Even though some rules are slightly senseless, there are well constructed reasons why there are such regulations. The example of regulating student's non-Asian hairstyles (traditional Asian hairstyle is straight and black without any treatments) makes the hairstyle issue a non-issue which seems to be only good for keeping up appearances, though this seems to be the crudest form of deprivation of student individuality.

Schools can be very sensitive to their perceived image: a public high school “recalled school festival posters depicting a young girl with hair dyed brown and wearing blue nail polish, claiming that such a portrayal would damage the school’s reputation”. (McVeigh 2000, 65) In this matter it seems that the students participating in this research have the same idea: they said that if a school has many *gyaru* (Japanese girls’ flashy fashion style) looking girls as students, the school’s ranking level is one of the bottom ones. This kind of regulation is accused of being harmful to the students’ self-presentation because unlike school uniforms, hairstyle cannot be changed after school; it binds students at all times. The students seem to sense the loss of selfhood more the longer they stay in these strict schools. Japanese schools have become a place which threaten and subvert the students’ sense of their existence as human beings. (Yoneyama 1999, 123)

Occasionally, there are special scenes and situations within the school, such as entrance ceremony, graduation and other school functions, in which spaces temporarily become stages on which students, more carefully uniformed than usual, present selves upon which the education-bureaucratic gaze is even more intensified. During such ceremonies, bodies are highly uniformed and ritualized. (McVeigh 2000, 52–53) These ceremonies are part of traditions and therefore the students feel that it is an obligation to dress neatly and wear their uniform proudly.

## **7.2 Meanings of school uniform in the development of personal style**

As mentioned before, the school uniform has its importance in the lives of the Japanese people. Uniforms unite and they are a living tradition which has its good sides and bad sides. The idea of wearing a school uniform almost every day in any occasion might sound unpleasant and depressing to a western person who has always been free to choose what to wear. To a Japanese person the uniforms are ‘*a relief because I do not have to care about appearance in the terms of clothing*’ (N6). Due to this the first impression might be that the Japanese people do not need to feel different or look different.



The Japanese society is based on ‘team spirit’ and unity, where things are done together and to show the group feeling the people wear similar kinds of clothing, certain uniforms. (Shimizu 2006; Peak 2006) Some of the students mentioned about a ‘*shared stigma*’ (N8) and how ‘-- *it made me feel like I belonged somewhere*’. It is important to belong to at least one group, though this was making some students follow the lead without having the chance to be themselves and different. ‘*I wore the uniform the same way as my friends even though I didn’t feel comfortable in a short skirt*’ (N6) and ‘*I wore clothes that some of my friends seemed to like. I liked what everyone else liked*’ (N4) are good examples of how the students felt about the need to belong to a group and how important it was to please friends: ‘*Girls sometimes wore the same coloured clothes with close friends because it shows that they have a really good relationship*’ (N4).

Even though it was almost impossible, due to rules and regulations and peer pressure, to show personality through clothing, the students often found a way to make small differences which made them feel special. ‘*I changed colours of sweater or vest*’ (N14) and ‘*I changed the shoestrings to different one*’ (N10) and ‘*I chose a pink bag instead of the traditional navy blue*’ (N12c) are examples of the small things students thought would make enough difference compared to other students. As stated that many considered these changes as ‘small’ but the impact on feeling special was noticeable and almost all of the students said that this triggered the urge to ‘*establish my own style*’ (N5).

### **7.3 Experiences upon the development of personal style**

For this part there were three phases which stood out in the interviews and essays. The phases are: beginning (what triggered the idea of wanting to change, be different), middle = finding myself (how changes were made and what thoughts, influences, and experiences were involved in this phase.) and present (current style = my style, thoughts about getting to this point/ the process after experiencing it, and how experiences the world around now). Now every phase will be covered in this section as separate phases and then concluded as a general chapter about how the development of personal style took part in the students’ lives.

### 7.3.1 Beginning – urge to find my own style

According to the students in the beginning of their search for their own clothing style many have felt the urge to be special and different, which according to Kaiser (1998, 437) is something people always feel, some stronger and some slightly lighter. After following friends' taste and likings for years the students are ready to become individuals in the uniformed society: *'I wanted to wear what I liked!'* (N4) This is a clear part of the identity development process, described by both Bronfenbrenner (in Kroger 2004, 188–190) and Erikson (1963, 250) where the child eventually wants to become an individual and differentiate herself from the group. Almost all could point out that the first steps towards finding their own style occurred during the years in high school. One of the possible reasons was the fact that *'the kids are already tired of wearing the same clothes with everybody else and sure they want to dress up differently'* (N9). Around the time everything in life changes because of puberty. *'My friends became more and more fashionable..'* and therefore *'I got more and more interested in fashion and I started to read fashion magazines.'* was the most common statement why the students started to think more about how they looked in the eyes of others.

The simpler reasons often included the wish to look pretty, cute or fashionable. Besides the wish to be special and cute, the other reasons or goals for the change were quite personal: *'I did not want to be seen as a weak girl'* (N6) or *'I wished to be seen as a brave girl'* (N14) and *'I did not want to be seen as a lazy person by appearance'*. (N5) The students always seemed to think about what others think about them and how they see them: *'my family was against my style.'* (N13c), *'I started caring how boys see me as a girl'* (N12c) and *'I thought I could not be seen as a girl (cute girl)'* (N6) Keskinen's (2004, 221–223) research pointed out that in Japanese society, and many others, there are certain patterns how the society socializes girls to become feminine and girly, and this feeling of wanting to become more as the traditional representation of a feminine woman is probably a clear evidence of how well the socialization process has eventually worked out.

### 7.3.2 Finding myself – the ever changing styles

As the time goes by, the thoughts and feelings change as the styles changed too. It is noticeable that the students have matured and found out that ‘*everybody does not care what you wear*’ (N7). This transition period from a high school student wearing a school uniform to a university student choosing her own clothes is an important phase. So far, it seems that the students have not really cared of what to wear on free time and therefore when entering university many was wondering ‘-- *why they (other university students) have to be so fashionable when going to school to study?*’ (N12c). Time before entering university was mainly spent with peers who wore the same uniforms and therefore the group-life determined how the student thought about their appearance. At university this peer group changed and all the new peers looked different, and made the students think about how they could look different too and how they would like to look like. As seen in Bronfenbrenner’s (in Kroger 2004, 188) theory, change of environment has a great influence to the development of child’s identity and therefore as Erikson states, it is necessary to encounter these changes even if they might be more negative than positive: balance between the poles is the key to a healthy identity.

Less than half of the students had moved to a different city, mainly from countryside, and noticed all the possibilities which all the different shops offered but also they thought that when they moved the peer pressure and old habits were gone: ‘*When I moved away, my expression started to flourish because there were no obstacles such as my mom, my family and the environment*’ (N13c) Even though life seemed freer and the options of what to wear were limitless, the students learnt that ‘appearance can tell peoples personality and is one significant message of who you are’ and therefore many began to think again about how they looked in others’ eyes and how that could be changed. At this point some said that they did not have confidence and they thought a lot what kind of people they want to be like and how others see them, sometimes this caused problems: ‘*sometimes I felt ashamed about myself and my appearance, -- I felt my looks suck*’ (N6). Due to these fairly negative thoughts about themselves the students started to read more fashion magazines and spent more and more money on clothes. All of them wanted to ‘*dress up nicely*’ and ‘*establish*’ their own style.

The ways of finding their own style and trying to be different vary a lot. One significant change among half of the students was about the shoes: *'I wore shoes with heels, no more sneakers'* (N10). The reason for changing sneakers to high heels was simple: *'I tried to be more like a woman than a girl'*. (N5, N10, N12c and N14) One part of finding their own style consisted of becoming a woman, growing up and becoming an adult, which is part of the development of identity and the socialization process. This was due to the fact that they could not wear the school uniform anymore and as mentioned before, a school uniform is the symbol of compulsory education and thus childhood.

### 7.3.3 Current time – a steady style?

The current situation with almost all of the students is the same, they have found their own style and they are quite satisfied with the results. *'I used to change my style often but this last year my style has been steady'* (N12c) and *'I don't think I'm unique at all, but I'm pretty happy about who I am and how I dress'* (N9) Some of the students say that they are still looking for their style or that they do not consider that they need a steady style: changing appearance according to current mood and preferences is enough. According to Damhorst (2005, 75) nowadays appearance can change many times and it is acceptable throughout the world, therefore the students will not have a need to find one specific style for next decades, though for some it is their 'goal'. Due to this many of the students had created policies which they wanted to achieve and which they want to hold on to: *'My policy is to be always fashionable'* (N12c), *'The idea of being special and different has been my policy of my style'* (N10) and *'I should wear clothes that I want and like'*.

Also the thoughts about other people have changed in some ways after finding their own style and all seem to be on the same side with this one thing: *'I have realized that there are various people who wear what they want'* and *'There are many people who are all different and they are expressing their own personality'* (N1c). After some realized this they also noticed that there are *'people around who do not judge people by appearance'* (N2c and N7). It was also a surprise to some that those people who do not judge can bring more confidence: *'The fact that I could make friends brings me confidence'* (N6).

The students also see themselves in a different light compared to the beginning. They are definitely more confident about themselves and they seem to know their preferences better. It is clear that the students' identity formation is past the most unstable phase and adolescence changes to adulthood. (Kroger 2004, 189; Erikson 1963, 251) Knowing what is best for you makes the students see themselves as individuals and special. They all share a thought '*knowing yourself is the shortest way for finding your own style*' (N14). This generally means that you should get to know your preferences and body in order to find your own style which then will make your personality shine through.

Even though the students say that they are happy with the current situation, almost all miss the school uniform and the easy life without worries of appearance. The most common reason for wanting the school uniform back is the fact that '*I have to choose different clothes every day, it's tiring!*'. (N7) Also life without uniform means more responsibility of your own life and it is seen as a frightening transition from a child to an adult. But all think that it is important that there is the time when students can wear their own clothes because '*It would be a good experience and practice to take care of your own clothes etc. before you get a job*' (N5). In this phrase it is noticeable how the students know that after university, when they get a job they will have to wear a uniform again. It will be a different kind of uniform, a business suit, which will again unify the workers as one group and make life easier when there is no need to choose new clothes every morning.

## 8 DISCUSSION

As outlined previously, the results show that the school uniform raises thoughts from positive to negative, but it still has a strong role in the society and its traditions. Also it can be seen that the development of personal style includes various aspects: individual, social and environmental. In this chapter the results are viewed in a slight comparison to my own observations collected during the fieldwork period in Japan. I am also reflecting the results with the theory about uniformed society, identity and dress to support my own analysis and conclusions.

School uniforms as daily clothing and part of the student's morning routines are remarkable: students feel that life and studying is easier when there is no need for thinking about appearance. The uniform neutralizes the atmosphere at school when students are not caught up in comparing their own looks to other students'. But the fact that school uniforms do not let the personality shine through clothes makes the students feel that their personalities are suppressed. Even though uniforms are tied to strict rules and regulations which are considered to be suppressing the student's personality, the students adapt and accept the situation. The reason for easy adaptation and acceptance is probably the pressure coming from the group-oriented society and the traditions it holds. There is a rare occasion when the students are able to 'rebel' against the rules of the society and that is in the de-uniformizing period at university when the students do not have a uniform and some do not live with their families anymore.

School uniforms unite the students and make them feel that they are part of a group which then creates a sense of security. Even if school uniforms mainly unite, they also create peer pressure about how to wear the uniform in a fashionable way; for example shortening the skirt and wearing loose socks. As Shimizu (2002, 231) and Kelly (2002, 195) stated, group identity is more important in a sociocentric society than individuality is and therefore for example peer pressure is much heavier than could be expected from a Western perspective. There is a

basic need to be different but in this kind of society the feeling of belonging to a group is more important and students admitted that they notice it eventually but cannot do much about it until the time of de-uniformizing at university.

The students would now be happy to have the uniform but it is still generally seen that the university students should not have a uniform because at that point of their lives students want to be free and find themselves and their own styles. It seems that even if there is a feeling of wanting to belong to a certain group, it is important to be an individual. Also students want to take distance from their families and show that they are now capable of doing things alone, which is remarkable when it is remembered that Japanese society is very family-oriented and there is hierarchical system of respect which binds also families.

### **8.1 Differences – group vs. individual**

The results showed many interesting differences between the students while they all seemed to think very similarly about school uniforms and the process of finding their own style. There was this general idea of ‘being special’, which eventually urged the students to become different and unique, as Damhorst’s (2005, 75) study proved. But some students did not think that they were special, or that there was no need to be. These students thought that even while feeling special and different, you might still be the same as others. The difference seen between these two types of students was the fact that the ‘special’ ones did not mention any style idols, they only referred to fashion magazines on the whole and said that they look for inspiration but will not copy the styles. Those students who thought that they were not unique mentioned that they have style idols such as musicians or actresses who’s styles they admit to copy and imitate.

The idea of the transformation from a girl to a woman is very strongly presented in the results and is very predictable when based on the theories about identity and gender development. It is still interesting how effective the high heeled shoes are in this transformation: it immediately makes the girl feel more feminine and like a grown-up woman. It seems that in every culture and society there are different ways to show the change from a child/adolescent

to an adult as Kaiser (1998, 473) points out. Also changing clothes to a more formal style is one way to show that they have matured and are not children anymore. This transformation also led to more brand oriented shopping and the students noticed how brand conscious they have become when they look for more specific styled clothes. Price seems to matter depending on the life situation: those who work part-time feel the urge to buy more expensive and better quality clothes, but those who concentrate on studying feel that price has to be reasonable and that cheaper is better.

One of the results was more outstanding than those previously mentioned. Almost all of the students mentioned that they did not notice other people until they went to university. It might be because when wearing a uniform and going to school, they concentrated on studying and what friends thought about them, leaving out other people. The idea that students saw that other people are different, dress differently and show personality this late is quite unique point in the Japanese culture. Though this is not very surprising when thought about in relation to the Japanese education path and the uniforming socialization process which both emphasize that school is *shudan seikatsu* (group, daily life), or in other words group -oriented. (Peak 2002, 168) Therefore the student does not have an opportunity for individual thoughts, or at least is not able to bring them up at school. Due to this, almost all of the students were relieved to notice that they can be different and there are people who do not judge by appearance. Many got more confidence and felt 'free' when they met new people and got new friends. It seems that the environment has a great impact on how students see themselves and how they see the world around them.

## **8.2 Comments on the research**

At this point it is clear to me that researching and analysing peoples' thoughts, experiences and feelings is not the easiest to do. This research opened my mind to see the variety of aspects about school uniforms and cultural studies. It is not easy to be open-minded and honest to your data while analysing it from the point of view of different moral and value basis. I took this research as a challenge to understand the Japanese way of 'uniformizing' its children and I think that now I am less prejudices towards uniforms. For me uniforms have



always been the sign of military and I have been against them when it comes to taking away the freedom to express your identity. But, there is also a completely different way of looking at the matter; how to make individuals a group of unified support system for each of the members.

As mentioned earlier in chapter 6, while doing a research by observing another culture it is possible to make many mistakes by not achieving the participant's full confidence (Roth 2005, 105). The Asian politeness was an issue during the interviews but what comes to the essays: the students were much more open and wrote their positive, negative and neutral feelings without hesitation: it seemed that I eventually had achieved their confidence. The amount of data collected from the students was satisfying and the variety of experiences eventually saturated into a cohesive pack of thoughts which then was possible to analyse without too many obstacles.

With the cohesiveness of the data, the analysis method for this research fitted my reasoning very well. For me it was necessary to modify the analysis towards the research questions and my own thinking and that was made possible by Perttula's phenomenological analysis method. But as criticism, it has to be said that the openness of the analysis method could cause problems if the researcher is not motivated for a full analysis with broad instructions. This is because there are not concrete instructions how to proceed with the analysis and what to do during the different phases; all of this is in the hands of the researcher and the last decision is made only by the researcher herself.

On the whole with this research I achieved my goal of learning more about how the Japanese students see the development of their identity and personal style in this 'uniformed' society and in what context this development occurs. There are still matters which make me ponder about their fairness but I feel that I now understand what was possible in the boundaries of this research and the limited time spent in the country and culture observed.

### **8.3 Future research topics**

As this research is now finished it has been arousing thoughts about what topics it could not cover because of the need to limit the topic to a reasonable amount of work. One specific topic which would be interesting to research more is the materials of school uniform. The reason for material based research is the fact that the students in this research complained about how the uniform was difficult to wash, the material did not breathe and therefore it was too hot or cold depending on the season. These problems could be fixed by changing the materials and with the study it would be possible to find out which materials would be better but which would not increase the costs of school uniforms.

Second research idea would be changing the research subjects to Finnish students and asking them about adapting school uniforms to the Finnish education system. This topic has been controversial in Finland because of the feeling that it would suppress the individuality of a student and also because we have four seasons which differ from each other. It would be interesting to first let the Finnish students know about how the Japanese students feel about their uniforms; the reasons for and against uniforms, because it might make the Finnish students think more broadly about the benefits too.

With this research I gained more knowledge upon school clothing and material technology regarding the design of especially school uniforms. There are many topics on the field of school uniform research and it is important to continue the studies in order to make the uniforms better for the students and make their time at school more comfortable.

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