Just Looking: Tantalization, Lolicon, and Virtual Girls

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Abstract

Using discourse analysis, I critically investigate the intertextuality of the Japanese subculture of Lolicon and Lolita representations; including the controversy around erotic anime called rorikon, and issues related to virtual child pornography. What was once culturally-bound to Japan, now influences popular culture in the United States and Europe. Inherent in the formation of *Lolicon* and rorikon are the discursive connections threading throughout the *Lolita* genre and the subculture of Loli-girls, which I argue serve to tantalize and further promote consumption of sexualized girl imagery.

Keywords: *Lolicon, Lolita, rorikon, virtual child pornography*

Introduction to Lolita and Loli-girls

In 1955, Russian born author and Cornell University professor Vladimir Nabokov introduced the world to the idea of Lolita in his novel by the same name. In the novel, which details the sexual relationship between a self-professed pedophile, Humbert, and his twelve-year-old step-daughter Dolores, Nabokov manages to do the impossible: he writes a story about the abuse of a minor that both eroticizes and blames the girl for her desirability (Bayma & Fine, 1996; Davies, 1958; Patnoe, 1995; Savage, 2009, 2011; Trilling, 1958; Wood, 2003). Much has been written since the novel's publication in 1958, and the Lolita phenomenon continues to vex writers and researchers (Bordo, 1998; Driscoll, 2002; Durham, 2009; Hollander, 1956; Kaufmann, 1989; Levin & Kilbourne; 2009). Lolita's bad girl reputation is culturally accepted despite the variety of critical analyses that try to dispel the label (Bayma & Fine, 1996; Bordo, 1999, 2003; Kauffman, 1989; Megerle, 2002; Patnoe, 1995; Savage, 2009, 2011). *Lolita* (1958) remains as controversial and contested as the day it was published, while the fictional girl lives on in multiple popular visual culture representations.

One of the more fascinating embodiments is the Japanese subculture called *Lolicon*, a complex world of fashion, teenaged and young adult women called *Loli-girls*, and ritual that rejects adulthood and embraces childhood innocence by dressing in elaborate ruffled or lace embellished outfits referent to Victorian or Edwardian children's dress (Gagne, 2008; Hinton, 2013; Kilbourne, 2006; Parker, 2004; Talmadge, 2008; Winge, 2008). These outfits often include baby bonnets, pacifiers, dolls or teddy bears, Mary Jane shoes, wigs or hair styled in ringlets or pigtails, and other signifiers of babyhood and childhood innocence. To outsiders, the world of *Lolicon* looks like costume or cosplay (costume play), but to the Japanese girls who participate, it is a reflection of a much deeper cultural response to constraints and expectations tied to gender (Hinton, 2013; Ramirez, 1998; Winge, 2008). The *Lolicon* subculture is a lifestyle, a community comprised of specific types of *Lolitas*, each having ritualized manners, uniformity of dress, and strict adherence to rules. Like modern day Geishas, *Loli-girls* have pale skin; submissive stances, movements, and posturing; and even employ a linguistic ladyspeak. Desexualizing the mature female body is central to the dress code (Gagne, 2008; Parker, 2004). *The Gothic and Lolita Bible* (GLB), a *"mook"*, or combination of magazine and book, is arbiter of all things *Lolicon*. Many *Lolicon* sub-types exist, including sweet, classic, gothic, and blood, a mix of types that is set apart by the addition of blood stains or hints of violence that effect the outfit (see Figure 1)[1]. Teens participating in the *Lolicon* subculture like to gather in the *Harajuku* shopping district in Tokyo to

1 All images shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3 are mixed media created by the author.

parade, or pose in doll-like stances, for one another (Winge, 2008). Men gather, too, just looking, some with with cameras clicking away, seemingly tantalized by these virtual dolls. Tantalize means to excite by exposing something desirable while keeping it out of reach, which describes some of the reasons behind the looking.[2] But is it really just looking?

Figure 1. Excerpt from *Loli-girls*, 2015, mixed-media, 9 x 13 inches, Shari L. Savage

Lolicon, connoting the word "*Lolita*," brings forth notions of the innocent girl gone bad, and that innocence is a marker for desire. However, these are notions Japanese *Lolitas* firmly dismiss (Gagne, 2008; Hilton, 2013; Kilbourne, 2006). When asked about the book *Lolita* (1958), Japanese girls do not relate to the context or story, rather they point to Alice of Lewis Carroll's 1865 book *Alice in Wonderland* (Parker, 2004; Winge, 2008). Indeed, the original *Lolita*, Dolores Haze was not known for ruffles and lace, sweetness or manners, all part of the *Lolicon* culture. Japanese teens are aware, however, of the *Lolita Complex*, a universal term that refers to older men who are attracted to young girls (Durham, 2008; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008; Power, 1999; Trainer, 1966; Winge, 2008) and deny that their manner of dress is meant to attract. Instead, *Lolicon* is a rejection of sexual desirability and of sexual maturity and through that rejection comes empowerment. *Lolicon* culture represents innocence, modesty, and cuteness for the young women that participate. Although these young women dismiss ties to Nabokov's book *Lolita*, the issue of innocence and sexual purity is central to Dolores' appeal in Humbert's eyes. Running counter to the intent of *Lolicon* culture and dress is the misnomer that the *Loli-girls* rejection of sexual desirability serves to shield girls from being desired. I argue it does not shield and may be part of a much larger, more troubling phenomenon—normalizing the use of graphic virtual or anime-based pornography that features *Lolicon* girls as objects of desire. In this article, I use discourse analysis to look closely at Nabokov's *Lolita* (1958), *Lolicon*, and erotic and sexually graphic anime called *rorikon*, in an effort to understand the underlying cultural processes and ideologies present in the tantalizing effects of eroticizing innocence.

Schwandt (2007) writes that discourses are practices, "composed of ideas, ideologies, attitudes, courses of action, terms of reference, that systematically constitute the subjects and objects of which they speak" (p. 73). A Foucauldian (Foucault, 1972, 1977) analysis of the *Lolicon* representation takes into account the discursive formation to which, "a text or a practice belongs" (Hall, 2003, p. 51). Discourse produces knowledge relating to historical and social practices that hold influence, which can then be read as a system of representations (p. 44). Discourse analysis explores "how images construct specific views of the social world" (Rose, 2001, p. 140). Tonkiss (1998) furthers this view, and finds that discourse analysis is more concerned with "how images construct accounts of the social world" (as cited in Rose, 2001, p. 140).

Intertextuality is critical in discourse analysis because meaning is negotiated through multiple texts or images (Rose, 2001). Inherent in the formation of *Lolicon* and *rorikon* are the discursive connections threading throughout the *Lolita* genre and the subculture of *Loli-girls*. Discourse analysis allows for flexibility when looking at visual texts and multiple readings of *Lolita* representations, which encourages intertexuality in data analysis. Since *Lolicon* is complex and has roots in multiple locations, discourse analysis honors the need to look for conflicting themes and discursive interplay present in the ideas behind tantalization. Further connections are explored through author-created critical collages, or arts-based representations of visual culture related to *Lolicon* and anime (Figures 1, 2 and 3). Through artmaking, I discursively reveal the complex global intertextuality present in popular visual culture (Bresler, 2006; Eisner, 2006; Leavy,

2009).

Rorikon and *Lolicon*

Literature on the phenomenon of *Lolicon* culture points to a patriarchal society in which adult men work as primary breadwinner and adult women are expected to stay in the home. Japanese teens, under pressure to fulfill these adult roles, retreat into childhood to postpone adulthood. But within the last decade Japanese women have made significant gains in independence, and men, feeling challenged by female agency, are increasingly attracted to the submissive, doll-like *Loli-girls* (Durham, 2009; Kilbourne, 2006; Merskin, 2004; Talmadge, 2008). By the 1990s, advertising and popular culture image production began to use the young girl or *shōjo* as a dominant representation for consumptive pleasure (Otsuka, 1989). An important cultural distinction is that the *shōjo* represents a medium of youthfulness or "juvenation" for the Japanese consumer, thereby making the "child" and childhood innocence a marketing tool (Hartley, 1998, p. 48 as cited in Galbraith, 2011). While U.S. media also uses eroticized images of girls to market consumer products, the *shōjo* is more of a myth, or "something evanescent, something with no shape or actuality," rather it is the "illusion of beauty" (Honda, 2010, p. 32 as cited in Galbraith, 2011). The girl, then, is a concept not a reality. Her mythic position elevates her from mere "being" to a fantasy possessing special powers to attract consumers and build consumption.[3]

The *Harajuku* shopping district and other areas at which *Loli-girls* gather are routinely patrolled by police and security to protect the teens from stalkers and predators (Parker, 2004; Winge, 2008). Middle-aged Japanese men (and male tourists) arrive with long lens cameras and take pictures without asking permission. Girls worry they may find their images on fetish websites, sexualized in ways they feel are antithesis to their intent in desexualizing their bodies (Gagne, 2008). They have good reason to worry, as *Lolicon* imagery is central to pornographic[4] themed anime called rorikon. This is in direct opposition to the representation *Lolitas* in Japan wish to express. Tantalizing men is not their intent and they reject any connection to erotic or sexualized rorikon (Winge, 2008).

Rorikon describes a range of *Lolita-like* anime or manga, including video games that imply "underage 'characters' in sexual and sometimes violent situations" (Galbraith, 2011, p. 83). Sexually explicit in nature and often depicting young girls in bondage and rape scenarios, *rorikon* is now the subject of Japanese legislation that questions its content, calling it "virtual child pornography" (Galbraith, 2011, p. 90). Debate regarding possible legislation is strong and varied, moving from the impossibil-

ity of censoring thoughts to the realities of child sex trades, to the assertion that "any expression of sexual interest in children communicated via any medium is in need of surveillance, censorship, and prosecution" (McLelland, 2005, p. 62). Galbraith (2011), however, argues that studies focused on consumers of rorikon anime find that readers/viewers understand these images to be fantasy and not real, and that consuming such images does not translate to actual child sexual abuse (Diamond & Uchiyama, 2010; Takatsuki, 2010). There does appear to be a disconnect in the world of *rorikon*, involving the shift from cartoon-like images to hyper-real images. When the popular anime magazine *Manga Burikko* used a mix of photographic images and drawings of sexualized girls, some readers complained, finding the photos to be psychologically upsetting and the editors listened, returning to illustrations (Galbraith, 2011). However, the magazine still has photographic images of sexualized girls in advertisements, which editors continue to use.

Despite the seemingly moralistic or psychological rejection of photographic imagery, rape fantasy is the most prevalent storyline in *rorikon*. Shigematsu (1999) writes that *rorikon* is often devoid of penises, in compliance with obscenity laws, and "the replacements of it are objects that do not feel pleasure" (as cited in Galbraith, 2011, p. 103). Often the face of the attacker is also hidden. These constructions allow the viewer to project onto the girl and empathize with her, not the rapist (Akagi, 1993). I find these explanations hard to reconcile, and yet see discursive connections to Nabokov's *Lolita* (1958), in that he intended the reader to empathize with Humbert and obscure Dolores, using her as an obsessive object of desire rather than a girl of twelve. It is the idea of objects of desire that further connects *Lolicon* culture and abuse. Child beauty pageants—events that now restrict access to include only family and coaches due to stalkers and predators—glamorize unreal, processed doll-like representations, which can be likened to *Lolicon*. Girls participating in pageants are highly stylized, with airbrushed skin, contact lenses that widen the iris, and super-frilly baby-like costuming coupled with unnatural patterns of body positioning (Kilbourne, 2006; Savage, 2009). The girls look like living dolls, which are precisely what *Loli-girls* perform when posing at the *Harajuku*, blank faced, passive, and stiff. Representations of passive young girls as desirable or erotic negates agency because, as Walkerdine (1997) reminds us, "Images cannot say 'no'" (p. 166). Like objects, not real or human, passive erotic images of girls are consumed and disposed (Durham, 2009; Kilbourne, 2006; Levin & Kilbourne, 2009).

According to McLelland (2005) looking at illustrations of young girls being used sexually, or featured in bondage and rape fantasy scenarios, does not hurt "since no actual child is harmed in any way as a result of the creation and dissemination of fictional images" (p. 64). Legally, this is correct, however, proving that consuming such imagery does not lead to or contribute to the abuse of an actual child by someone who finds these story narratives tantalizing is a different matter. Studies show that those who desire and consume images of sexualized girls often move into compulsive cycles that reach beyond the web into real life scenarios (Carnes, 2003; NSCEP, 2010; Paul, 2004). Legal *Lolita* pornography (search names include Lolita, barely legal, petite, and

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3 Indeed, consumerist spending on status or luxury items helps to propel Tokyo's capitalistic economy (Hinton, 2013; Wood, 2001; Wray & Steele, 2002).

4 In Japan, *rorikon* refers to sexually-themed anime that ranges from erotic to sexually graphic and/or disturbing depictions. Debate centers on whether or not illustrations can be considered pornographic.

teen) consists of women age 18 or over who have been styled to look as young as possible. Fake braces, pigtails, bare or hairless pubic areas, small breasts and hips are the norm (Carnes, 2003; Savage, 2009). Once these images diminish in the ability to cause intense arousal, Carnes (2003) found men move to art nudes—or legal images of actual children that have been deemed artistic or art photography—like photographs of nude children by photographers Sally Mann, David Hamilton and Jock Sturges (Brock, 1991; Mann, 1989, 1991; Woodward, 1992); images often found on the hard drives of sex offenders. Next, *Lolita* porn consumers begin searching illegal sites with images of child pornography, and finally, they look for the most disturbing sites with images and videos featuring pain, bondage, and rape (Carnes, 2003; NSCEP, 2010; Paul, 2004).

Carnes (2003) argues that this acceleration in searching for more graphic images often leads men who do not identify as being pedophiles into activities that will in fact be sexual, predatory, and pedophilic. But because such content is easily accessible on the web, many men are shocked that the images they engage with might qualify them for sexual predator status. The explosion of men caught downloading child porn that do not meet the usual FBI profile for pedophile status is surprising to investigators. Instead of White, middle-aged men, usually fifty and older, police are arresting men as young as eighteen (Carnes, 2003; NSCEP, 2010; Paul, 2004). The proliferation of eroticized girl imagery in visual culture, seen in anime, music videos, and other popular media outlets, further tantalizes and at the same time normalizes due to numerous available representations (Durham, 2009; Kilbourne, 2006; Levin & Kilbourne, 2009).

Lolicon Genealogy

Rorikon fans, like *Loli-girls*, reject that their fantasy worlds stimulate abnormal sexual desire. A look at the genealogy of *Lolicon* provides insight into its growing popularity and acceptance in Japanese culture. While Nabokov's novel certainly has tentacles in *Lolicon*, it was Russell Trainer's *The Lolita Complex* (1966) and its 1967 translation into Japanese that first generated discourse on nymphets in popular Japanese culture. Two years later *Nymphet: The Myth of the 12-year-old* (Shobo, 1969), a collection of nude photos was released (as cited in Takatsuki, 2010, p. 50). This was followed by another book, which featured nude photos inspired by the book *Alice in Wonderland* (Takatsuki, 2010). By the early 1980s, Japanese magazines catering to this genre produced issues with nude images of girls, essays about the desirability of young girls, and even "reader submissions" of girls' images taken illegally in "moments of unanticipated exposure" (Galbraith, 2011, p.95). These "reader submitted" images led to laws that slowed popularity of such magazines, ushering in the demand for anime depicting similar imagery. Loli-themed anime became more bold, as evidenced by Hideo's (1979) erotic "Little Red Riding Hood in Wonderland," in which "Red" is pleasured by an eel as she sits with her lower half exposed on the edge of a river bank (as cited in Galbraith, 2011, p. 96).

Significant developments in *Lolicon* anime followed with the trend of eroticizing cuteness or girl-ness (shōjo sei), garnering both male and female readers who enjoyed the images. Generally, as long as explicit images of genitalia were not part of *Lolicon* anime the genre remained unchallenged until 1993 when a young man named Miyazaki Tsutomu was arrested for the molestation and subsequent murder of four girls between the ages of four and seven (Galbraith, 2011). Tsutomu had over 5,700 videos of *rorikon* anime, and his consumption of such images became the catalyst for a nationwide push to "banish harmful anime" (Galbraith, 2011, p. 104). Restrictive laws meant to protect Japanese society became a "boost to the big business of sexual-fantasy making in Japan" according to Allison (2000, p. 150), as profitability became too difficult to negate. "Selling adult sexuality to children and youthful innocence to adults was far too profitable to abandon" argues Galbraith (2011, p. 105), and while *Lolicon* imagery remained popular the word *Lolicon* and its association with anime shifted. *Lolicon* now refers to the girls who participate in *Loli-culture* (Gagne, 2008). While "*Lolita-like*" depictions continue to populate anime and manga, narratives in 2015, are increasingly centered on cuteness fetishes, and the embracing of the unreal girl. Some argue this is far more dangerous, as it is a rejection of actual girls or desire for real girls (Allison, 2000; Shigematsu, 1999). While the ideas surrounding fantasy play in Japanese culture are too complex and layered to address here, it is notable for the ways in which it disturbs social structure, or as Kam (2008) fears, that extended engagements with fantasy will "trigger destabilization" of healthy sexual attractions (as cited in Galbraith, 2011, p. 108). The APA (2007) report on the sexualization of girls noted similar fears.

Notions of cuteness fetishes seem to play well within the *Loli-girl* culture. In this sense, both the *Lolita* Complex (older men/young girls), and young men finding the unreal girl or doll-like *Loli-girls* as tantalizing and fetish-worthy, work as representations of desirability. Fantasy or cosplay (costume play) is rejected by *Loli-girls*. This is not fantasy or play for them; rather they embody their own representation. It is not mimicry, or dressing as someone else, it is instead "an expression of their 'true' selves" and an absolute rejection of the traditional role Japanese society has placed on young females (Gagne, 2008, p. 142). Furthermore, *Loli-girls* participate in a ritualized practice and even govern their own narratives through *The Gothic and Lolita Bible* (GLB). Strict rules abound, in both feminine language and community behavior. The essence of *Lolicon* culture is self-regulated, the girls shaming one another if there is a perceived breech of protocol. For example, *Loli-girls* use lady's speech, a form of polite interactions that may be used to correct another participant's aggressive stance or opinion, but in a respectful and indirect way (Gagne, 2008). *Lady Whisper*'s is a write-in section in GLB, in which readers can quietly express community issues or distinctions about *Lolicon* rules. Gothic Lolita's who use clothing referent to bondage have been an issue of contention, not because of the sexualized aspects of bondage but because it comes from U.S.-inspired Goth fashions, which are not sanctioned (Gagne, 2008).

Lady's speech is a more recent development, perhaps in part as a rejection of *rorikon* and fetish anime. Early *Lolicon* lexicon was babyish and high in tone—even handwriting was infantized. By adopting an upper class feminine and highly mannered speech pattern, *Loli-girls* removed the more childish aspects of their community lan-

guage. While the dress remains childish and doll-like, the *Lolicon* community seems to have its own agency when it comes to how they regulate the lifestyle connected to their culture. What they can't control is how they are perceived and consumed by outsiders, especially by males. And this consumption brings us back to present day Japan, *rorikon* and the continuing public "moral panic" regarding virtual pornography and *Lolita-like* graphic anime (Galbraith, 2011, p. 103).

Consuming Girls

It is the consumer who drives the market in eroticizing children and using children in sexual ways (Bordo, 2003; Durham, 2009; Giroux, 2002; Levin & Kilbourne, 2009; Kitzinger, 1988; Savage, 2009). This is as true in United States popular visual culture as it is in Japan. However, Japan is the "international hub for the production and trafficking of child pornography" (U.S. Department of State's human-rights report, 2013, p. 19). While pornography itself is difficult to define, and varies by culture and the laws in specific counties, child pornography is usually considered to be any image that shows or promotes depictions of children in sexual situations-"real, pseudo and virtual" (McClelland, 2005, as cited in Galbraith, 2011, p. 89). In 1996, the United Nations sanctioned Japan for it's "lax attitudes" towards those who produce child pornography, and new laws were enacted but they hold little power to change Japan's obsession with erotic or graphic anime (Galbraith, 2011, p. 105). The reasons are notably about the economic impact of *rorikon* comic books and the cultural preoccupation with youth and cuteness in popular media.

Images do hold the power to tantalize and move consumers to action. If images did not hold power and influence, and consumers could readily resist advertising, image-laden advertising would not be a billion dollar industry (Kilbourne, 2006; Wray & Steele, 2002). Sexual predators have also convinced children that sex with adults is normal, using the images in *rorikon* to say, "This is how you practice with adults" (Fujiwara as cited in Ripley, Whiteman, & Henry, 2014).

According to Japanese lawmakers, *rorikon* anime, a multi-billion dollar industry, will not face legal sanctions until research shows that consuming such content leads to increases in child sex trades or other indicators point to increases in the exploitation of children (Fukada, as cited by Adelstein, 2014). Research does exist, however (APA, 2007; NCEMC, 2009; NSCEP, 2010; Young-jin, 2012; Yen, 2008), which ties child porn consumption to increases in the business of the child sex trade, and over 40% of those arrested for downloading child porn have enacted upon their desires with actual children (NSCEP, 2010).

Because we live in a culture saturated with a sexualized media, much of advertising is dependent on normalizing the eroticizing of girls, the promotion of innocence as a marker for desire (see Figure 2), and the continually moving line of indecency stretches further (APA, 2007; DeAngelis, 2007; Durham, 2009; Gill, 2012; Levin & Kilbourne, 2009). Magazines and videos of anime girls in rape or bondage scenarios,

legal and freely distributed, normalize situations that should be disturbing to any human (Adelstein, 2014). For those who argue freedom of speech or reject any type of censorship of visual culture representations, I offer this rubber meets the road scenario—if you knew your daughter's soccer coach read, collected, and watched *rorikon* anime about young girls in sexual situations—would you allow him to be alone with your child?

Figure 2. Excerpt from *Loli-girls*, 2015, mixed-media, 9 x 13 inches, Shari L. Savage

What about Japanese girls, who have grown up in a culture in which one in ten adult men admit to having viewed child pornography? (Adelstein, 2014). Or, that men look at erotic images of young girls on their phones, or flip through *rorikon* anime on the subway or in restaurants in full view of children and teens? How does this affect girls as they try to understand their own sexuality and agency? (APA, 2007; DeAngelis, 2007; Durham, 2009; Zurbriggen, Pearce, & Freyd, 2003). The APA (2007) report on the sexualization of girls found significant detrimental effects for girls trying to navigate a world that places adult sexuality on them, around them, and produces imagery normalizing the sexualization of young girls. Popular visual culture tells girls they are objects to be consumed, that their youth and innocence is sexually desirable, and in some cultures, obsession with young girls is not only acceptable but also encouraged. Discourse around sexualization itself is fraught with literature arguing that children are sexual beings and explore their own sexuality on a timetable not tied to a specific age (APA, 2007; Durham, 2009; Gill, 2012). I agree, children are sexual beings. For me, and many others, however, when an adult enters into a child's realm with the purpose of exerting their will, authority or influence over a child with the intent of exploitation, we should be vigilant and clear about legislation that seeks to protect.

Still Just Looking

Berger (1972) considers how we look at historical constructs such as European nude paintings of women, which support and direct the gaze, a gaze meant specifically to be male. Representations of women, he argues, are most often created with the male viewer in mind. "Men gaze at women and then determine how to treat them; through social instruction, women come to understand they are being visually consumed" (pp. 45-46). Berger (1972) claims:

> Every woman's presence regulates what is and is not 'permissible' within her presence. Every one of her actions—whatever its direct purpose or motivation—is also read as an indication of how she would like to be treated. ... Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. (p. 47)

Women, then, are represented as objects, an "unequal relationship ... so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women" (p. 63). Women are taught to survey themselves. These socially constructed ways of seeing are still working and are seen in all manner of visual culture representations. In this sense, *Lolita-like* representations are created for the male gaze, but women consume (survey) them as well, a consumption Bordo (1999) argues has significant effects. Critical to this discussion is the supposition that *Lolita-like* images teach what is permissible, and that they are an indication of how a girl wants to be treated. Indicators, or interpretations about *Lolitas*, are rooted in cultural beliefs, beliefs that make it permissible to use and consume the girl (Savage, 2009).

Lolicon subculture and the *Loli-girls* who embrace the lifestyle defend their world as a type of resistance against the dominant patriarchal Japanese culture. They feel they are redefining their societal roles, and to identify as a *Lolita* empowers them with a "safe space to escape everyday life" and gain agency (Winge, 2008, p. 62). Running counter to this safe space are discursive formations through which *Lolicon* culture and its particular aesthetic is misinterpreted and misappropriated for use in other visual realms, like *Lolita* porn and *rorikon* anime. In global mediated culture, *Lolicon* and erotic anime are crossing into U.S. iterations, first within the manga community, youth culture and music video interpretations. Singer Gwen Stefani embraced *Loli-girl* styles and infused her tour with Harajuku-inspired dancers, although more sexualized than the *Loli-culture* would sanction (Winge, 2008). More recently, singer Pharrell Williams caused controversy when he hired Japanese artist "Mr.," who uses *Lolicon* as inspiration for his work, to help produce images for his video for "It Girl." Viewers unfamiliar with *Lolicon* culture or *rorikon* reported being confused by the highly sexualized lyrics paired with cartoon girls. U.S. music critics were confused, too, unsure what to make of a voyeuristic Williams as a "cartoon avatar peeping through binoculars at a group of Lolitas frolicking in the surf" (Alt, 2015). Alt (2015) states:

> Even if one knows enough about the video's influences to feel more than a little uneasy with its implications, you have to hand it to the directors for transforming two million Americans into unwitting lolicon consumers, even only if for duration of a pop song. (para 13)

U.S. and European consumers have been looking at *Lolita-like* visual culture images for quite some time, ever since *Lolita* climbed up out of the pages of Nabokov's novel and into popular culture (Bordo, 1998; Durham, 2008; Kilbourne, 2009; Savage, 2009, 2011). *Lolita* was American first, a typical 12-year-old schoolgirl with scabbed knees, who loved candy and movie magazines. She was an avid consumer in her own right. For *Loli-girls*, the embracing of childhood and childish dress in order to reject gendered societal roles and adult sexuality may be an act of resistance and a way to gain agency over their own lives, even a "safe space" in an empowering community of like-minded girls. But, for men who are tantalized by young girls and fetishized cuteness, the *Lolicon* subculture offers fantasy worlds come to life.

Complicated by multiple incongruous representations of eroticized girls, *Lolicon* is both culturally bound to Humbert's obsession, and at the same time a space of resistance to adult sexualization and gender roles. The implications for those who participate in *Lolicon*, whether just looking or as the object being consumed, continues to be a contested space of cultural opposition. While *Loli-girls* should not feel the need to abandon their community, or the ability to express their true selves, they could speak out against the more salient discursive themes connected to their representations.

Finally, a new trend in *Loli-girl* fashion shows how *rorikon*'s cultural influence is cross-pollinating. Big eyes—contact lenses that mimic the eyes of female anime; give the wearer a wide-eyed cartoon look. The trend is called *living doll*. The result is

a bewildered, innocent expression … unreal and exaggerated in a way that embodies a "perpetual child-like state" (Lewis, 2015, p. 14). The *Loli-girl* now gazes back at the lookers, still tantalizing and seemingly more anime-like than ever before.

Enculturation Post-script

While *Lolicon* culture has made in-roads in popular culture, like many trends *Lolicon* culture begins within large West coast and East coast U.S. cities. In the Midwest, things tend to lag behind when it comes to popular trends. But on April 26, 2015 *Lolicon* and maid parties arrived in Columbus, Ohio. A woman claiming to be a college student arranged to rent out a popular restaurant for a non-profit event. When the owner of the establishment arrived to pick up the rental check, she was shocked to find middle-school aged girls and older teens dressed in skimpy maid outfits, *Loli-girl* style, and several older men, who had paid a fee to attend this event, called *Jouyou Maid Café*. When one of the young girls expressed concern with the older men's attention, the owner called off the event and sent everyone away. A Facebook page attached to *Jouyou Maid Café* showed 37 men planned to attend. The local newspaper's investigation found that the renter was not a college student and was using an assumed name (Reinhart, 2015). Shortly after, the Facebook page was removed. The reporter's attempts to describe *Lolicon* and maid cafes were valiant, but off-base, referring to young boys who are obsessed with anime featuring innocent wide-eyed girls, but in Ohio, the men who paid to attend were middle-aged or older, which mirrors the maid café trend in Japan. Reinhart (2015) was *dead on*, however, when he says the subservient maids are like the "new geisha." Older Japanese men enjoy maid cafes, and having scripted out scenarios involving subservient Japanese girls enacted for their pleasure (Lewis, 2015). Young men, or *otaku*, prefer the company of 2D girls, and this is one of the more interesting developments to come from *Lolicon* culture. The more real a girl is, the less *otaku* are interested in engaging with her (Galbraith, 2011). More research is needed to understand the implications of two-dimensional preference of *Lolicon* girls. The discourse surrounding *Lolicon* culture offers insights regarding the impact of enculturation and *Lolita*'s continued tantalizing effects (Figure 3).
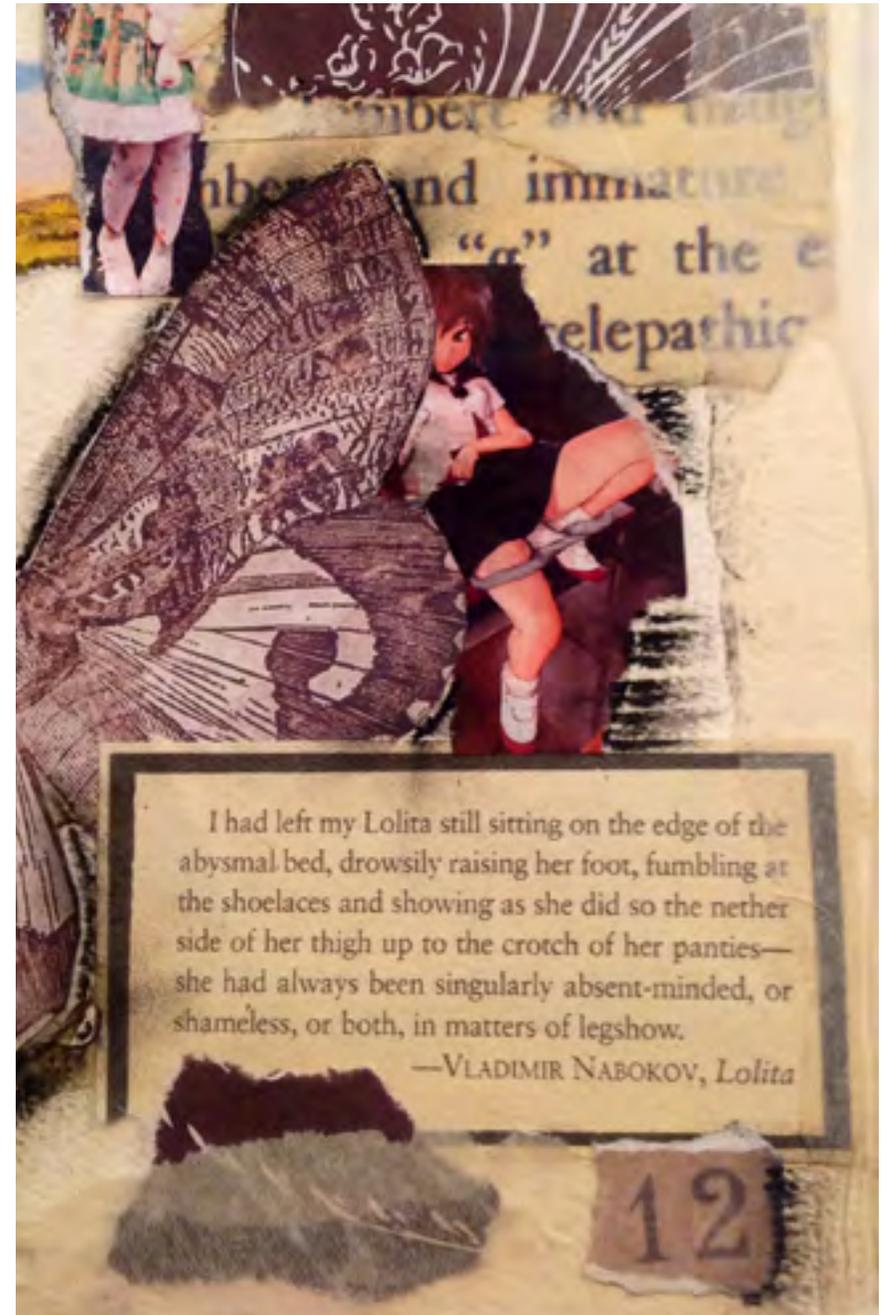

Figure 3. Excerpt from *Loli-girls*, 2015, mixed-media, 9 x 13 inches, Shari L. Savage

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