

LOLITA MYTHS AND THE NORMALIZATION  
OF EROTICIZED GIRLS IN POPULAR VISUAL CULTURE:  
THE OBJECT AND THE RESEARCHER TALK BACK

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation, a self-reflective autoethnography investigates, examines, analyzes, and critiques Lolita-like or eroticized girl representations in popular visual culture. Using a non-academic voice, I construct a novelistic research narrative that is critically grounded in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1958), and I format the dissertation to mirror the structure of his book. My study investigates sociocultural beliefs about gender, authority, and erotic narratives inscribed onto girls. I write reflexively from multiple positions: girl, artist, woman, wife, mother, teacher, and scholar. I weave in and out of my narrative with identity-based reflective commentary, journal excerpts, and artifacts I made showing that research is fluid, collaborative, and influenced by many things outside of collected data.

Central to my study is the belief that Dolores Haze, the 12-year-old girl known as Lolita, should be heard. I question those who have had authority over her story, offer alternative voices, trouble and disrupt tacit understandings, while arguing for a critical shift in her mythic reputation. By following the teleological development of the Lolita phenomenon, I locate and identify ruptures that assist in the acculturation of her myth. An interdisciplinary literature review focuses on the eroticization of prepubescent bodies in multiple sites; including teen magazines, advertising, fashion, Lolita porn, and art

photography. In creating artifacts, I critically dismantle, alter, and re-imagine Lolita-like popular culture representations. I posit that sexualizing girls in popular visual culture, a normalized and socioculturally accepted depiction, has broad social implications that should be recognized. Finally, I suggest visual culture curriculum that examines and critiques mythic or persuasive cultural narratives, while empowering student voices.

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## PUBLICATIONS

### Research Publication

1. Savage, S.L. (2006). Analyzing advertising: Using denotation and connotation to promote active seeing. In P. Duncum (Ed.), *Visual culture in the art class: Case studies* (pp. 172-177). Reston, VA: NAEA.

## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art Education

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## FOREWORD

### I: What I Intend to Do

This dissertation has two overarching goals: to provide an insider's view of the research process in an engaging and reflective format and, most important, to investigate, examine, analyze, and critique Lolita-like representations in popular visual culture. As objectives go, these two are challenging to meld into one document. I have decided the best framework for accomplishing my task is embedded in the narrative inquiry family, specifically self-reflective autoethnography. Drawing from Ellis & Bochner (2000), Eisner (1996), Goodall (2008), Richardson (1997, 2000), and Richardson & St. Pierre (2005), I conceive a narrative research story, which combines intertextual spaces for negotiating and illuminating ways of knowing. Using a non-academic voice, I construct a novelistic but research-supported exploration, which begins with Vladimir Nabokov's 1958 novel *Lolita*, but at the same time acknowledges my role in thinking and theorizing about Lolita-like representations. Situating myself as being intertwined within the research process, I reflexively write from multiple positions: girl, woman, wife, mother, teacher, artist, and academic. Journal excerpts, lived experiences, reflective commentary, past coursework, biased admissions, and visual artifacts weave in and out of my narrative to make clear that research is fluid, collaborative, and influenced by many things outside of collected data.

I am not using a traditional dissertation format. Instead, the usual dissertation sections mirror the format of Nabokov's novel, which contains a foreword, part one, part two, and author's notes.

At times this will be a "messy text," moving from now to then, and back again. Reflexively, it must; however, I note my shifts from research narrative to personal reflection with italicized passages. Additionally, each reflection is prefaced with my identity. For example, I reflect as a girl or mother, other times as an academic. My narrative is non-fiction, with a disclaimer, of course. No one person will remember, feel, relate, or understand a particular exchange, event, or happening in the same way. Framed as such, I will be authentic in voice: retelling as I recall, reacting and reflecting based on how I read or interpret what transpired.

The novel *Lolita* is the genesis for my investigation of the Lolita phenomenon in contemporary American culture. The book, its structure, and its main characters heavily influence my inquiry. A brief introduction and synopsis help to familiarize and clarify important contextual information that underpin my research study. *Lolita* is both the name of Nabokov's novel and the intimate pet name assigned to Dolores Haze by her stepfather, Humbert Humbert. The novel was originally structured in three parts: a foreword, part one, and part two. Later editions include an author's note in the closing pages, and some contain an introduction by a literary scholar or critic. Nabokov includes a foreword written by a fictional character, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., a psychologist hired to edit a manuscript called, *Lolita, or Confession of a White Widowed Male* (Nabokov, 1958, p.3). Nabokov's fictive foreword is written as if it is separate from the novel; it is not.

## II: Novel Synopsis: *Lolita* (1958)

**P**art One: Humbert Humbert, an émigré academic, writer, and admitted pedophile, travels to New England after a short stay in a mental institution.

Humbert has never gotten over Annabel Leigh, his childhood sweetheart who died of typhus before the thirteen-year-old couple could consummate their romance. Humbert, now thirty-seven, believes this tragic event is why he is sexually drawn to young girls between the ages of nine and fourteen, a condition he terms “nympholepsy.” He theorizes that certain girls unknowingly possess a “demonic” ability to bewitch. He calls these dangerous girls “nymphets” (p. 16-17). Humbert inquires about boarding at the home of Charlotte Haze, a widow and mother. The sight of her twelve-year-old daughter, Dolores, a girl he recognizes as a nymphet, instantly entralls him. Thus begins Humbert’s obsession with Dolores, upon whom he bestows a private name, Lolita. Humbert plans elaborate ways to spend time alone with Dolores, later writing in his journal about his disappointments and successes as he pursues her. The widow Charlotte is besotted by the charming European scholar, and she sends Dolores away to summer camp so that she can be alone with him. Charlotte gives Humbert a letter in which she declares her love, telling him he must marry her or move out of the house. He chooses marriage solely to maintain contact with Dolores. Humbert dislikes his new bride and incapacitates her with sleeping pills so that he can avoid sexual relations.

Curious about Humbert’s work as a writer, a snooping Charlotte discovers his journals and learns that he thinks she is “a big bitch,” and of his predilection for young girls, Dolores specifically. Furious and devastated, Charlotte confronts Humbert,

threatens to take the “the brat,” then writes a letter to a strict boarding school for Dolores. While trying to mail the letter, Charlotte is struck by a car and killed.

Humbert, shocked but delighted by his good fortune, immediately goes to emancipate Dolores from camp. He explains to her that her mother is seriously ill and that he has come to take her home. During a stopover at the Enchanted Hunters hotel, Humbert drugs his new stepdaughter in an attempt to fulfill his sexual fantasies. While waiting for the sleeping pills to work, he meets an odd man on the porch of the hotel who questions Humbert about his young companion. After Humbert explains that the companion is his daughter, he excuses himself and returns to the hotel room. After several frustrating attempts to engage sexually with a drowsy but conscious Dolores, he feigns sleep. In the morning, Humbert tells the reader, Dolores seduces him and they have intercourse. He also claims to be surprised that he is not her first lover. During the drive home, Dolores tells Humbert he has torn something inside her and calls him a “pervert.” When she demands to talk with her mother, Humbert tells Dolores her mother is dead. He is now her guardian, and if they return home she will be sent to live with distant relatives or to a wayward girls school. He tells her that these are her only options besides staying with him.

**P**art Two: Humbert and Dolores begin a lengthy cross-country trip, staying in motels and sightseeing, during which Humbert negotiates with Dolores, trading gifts for sex. After a time he realizes his nymphet stepdaughter is becoming a typical teen, sullen and moody. He becomes increasingly frustrated by her lack of interest in his continued daily sexual demands.

Eventually the two settle in Beardsley, the home of Beardsley College where Humbert hopes to teach, and Dolores enrolls school. She becomes perceptive about how to control her stepfather, extorting money from him for performing her sexual duties. Humbert, jealous of the boys her age, refuses to let Dolores participate in a school play. By manipulating him through sexual acts she obtains permission to try out for the play. Humbert is unaware that the playwright and director of the play is Clare Quilty, the odd man he met on the porch of the Enchanted Hunters hotel. Dolores spends too much time at play rehearsals and Humbert becomes suspicious. After a fight with Humbert she suddenly announces she wants to travel again. Delighted, Humbert agrees. Once on the road he worries that someone is following his car. As his paranoia escalates, Dolores becomes sick with a fever and he admits her to a hospital for care. On the day of her release Humbert arrives to pick her up from the hospital and is stunned when informed that her “uncle” (Quilty) already retrieved her, paying the bill in cash.

Despondent and heartbroken at her betrayal, Humbert retraces the path of their journey in an effort to learn the identity of the mysterious man. His search proves fruitless and he returns to New England. A few years pass and Humbert receives a letter from Dolores. She writes she is married, pregnant, and in need of money. He rushes to her aid, gun in pocket, ready to confront the man who took his Lolita from him. Humbert sees Lolita at last, but Dolores is now an enormously pregnant woman of seventeen, and his former nymphet seems impossibly worn.

Humbert learns that Dolores’s young husband and father of her baby, Richard Schiller, is not Quilty who originally stole her away. Dolores tells Humbert that she never loved him. She admits she loved Quilty, but left him when he tried to force her into

pornographic films with other children. Humbert begs Dolores to leave with him, and she refuses. He gives her four hundred dollars in cash and a check for three thousand six hundred dollars, the remainder of her mother's estate, and drives away mourning the loss of his Lolita.

Near the end of the novel, Humbert decides to find and confront Quilty, intending to make him confess to his crimes against children, and then kill him. The novel concludes with Humbert bloodied, standing on a hillside, listening to the voices of children playing in the distance as the police close in. He laments the absence of Lolita in the sounds as he considers his mortality. If readers recall the foreword, they may remember that "Mrs. Richard F. Schiller died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn daughter, on Christmas day, 1952" (p.4). Humbert dies of coronary thrombosis while awaiting trial for murdering Quilty.

### III: Who is Doing the Speaking?

I am a married White woman of economic privilege. Until five years ago, I was a stay-at-home mom to two children, a boy, now in college, and a girl, now a high school student. My husband is an executive in a Fortune 500 company.

Higher education is an institution in which I have had mixed results. My first attempt at a small liberal arts school in central Illinois was equal parts social success and academic failure. My WASP upbringing, conservative parents, sheltered home life, and reserved disposition left me unprepared for campus life. Unable to balance school and one particular boy, I left early, married the boy, and moved on. Eventually, after giving



birth to my first child, I enrolled at The Ohio State University to complete my undergraduate degree. This time I excelled academically. I also began to believe I was smart, capable, and worthy, a trifecta to my self-esteem. I graduated with honors and distinction in Art Education and promptly conceived my second child. After raising my family I returned to the university to earn a Master's degree.

I taught as a graduate associate, completing my Master's in two years, and then applied to the Ph.D. program. I was accepted and began pursuing my doctorate. Teaching as a graduate associate allows me free tuition and a small stipend; however, the idea of three dependants (me included) in college gives my husband heartburn, especially now in the scary economic climate of 2009. As I write this dissertation jobs in academe are difficult to find. Many faculty searches have been suspended, but I write with great hope that things will get better.

As I move through this narrative, I will reveal and examine places and events, especially as they relate to my research, which will help fill in missing pieces of my whole. Some pieces will remain missing, perhaps not important, or too personal to someone close to me to publically share. Gender, sexuality, motherhood, my struggle with self-worth, my health, my academic life, my family life, and my past, will be represented in my research journey because I believe all of these things influence and inform my work.

*Academic:*

*A large portion of the following introduction was written in an art-writing course. Each student wrote about their research and posted to a class blog. Classmates could read and*

*comment on postings, asking for clarification or suggesting improvements. The course instructor, Dr. Terry Barrett, also my dissertation advisor, thought this particular piece of writing could open or introduce my research. Ross and Toni, two blog readers, made insightful suggestions and offered encouraging commentary, thereby strengthening my voice.*

#### IV: How My Topic Found Me

One thing that bangs around in a new doctoral student's brain is this: What am I going to do for my dissertation? If someone does come into a Ph.D. program with a specific idea in mind, somewhere along the way it will change. If not in total, then at the very least the idea will have morphed to a degree, shifting with every new article read, every new methodology, every new professor. I am no different. I did know what to expect, though, because the same process took place during my Master's program. I came into the program with one idea and finished with another. Still, I needed something new, something bigger than before. So, as a Ph.D. student I was right back in the panicky state of trying to find something, anything relevant that I could stand long enough to research and write about for an undetermined amount of time. This topic, whatever it might be, needs to add to scholarship in a worthy way.

*Academic:*

*My Master's thesis topic and Ph.D. focus are, on the surface, unrelated; however, Dr. Barrett recently pointed out that they are more related than I think. He's right, as usual, an annoying but helpful trait I have come to rely on. My Master's thesis, Teaching to Learn: A Self-reflective Examination Using Narrative Writing as a Tool for Exploration and Inquiry (2006), looked deeply at my development as a newly hired college instructor and graduate student, my scholarly struggles and biases, and critical personal discoveries about myself as a woman, mother, wife, daughter, artist, and writer. Pretty much the same list of identities listed in this project.*

Now, a few years later and arguably wiser, I stand at the precipice of writing my dissertation. Getting to this point is not a series of checked-off courses or credits. The journey itself is part of the grand narrative of becoming an academic scholar; it is nothing short of academic hazing. As a Ph.D. student I am like the nervous fraternity or sorority pledge facing a hazing ritual, trying to recite the Greek alphabet before the lit match burns my fingers. Proceed too slowly and I am singed, too fast and the alphabet is all jumbled. Practice will help, of course, but until I stand alongside my fellow pledges and try to succeed, I have no clue how it feels to pass the test as the active sorority members watch from the darkened shadows. Are they mocking me, cheering me on, or laughing at my stumbling attempt? Chances are they are holding their collective breath, willing me to come through unscathed. It only looks scary from the pledge/Ph.D. side, and eventually I will be one of them, a full-fledged member of academia. First, the hazing must commence.

I practiced, recited correctly, bowed my head, and blew out the match. Now, in the absence of light I feel ungrounded, shaken by the open-endedness of my task, and worried if I have the mettle to join the scholarly sisterhood. Listening to the murmuring shadows I realize I have passed the test, at least this test, and am ready to move on. The bigger issue now becomes what I am moving on to. What will be the thing I have to offer in the way of scholarship, and how will I recognize it when it comes, if it comes?

In my case my topic found me. I think it might work in this mysterious way for many people and not in some random or chaotic fashion, either. All that I have done thus far in academia has served a purpose. At times it seemed impossible that the busy work or laboriously dense theoretical babble would miraculously gel, forming itself into a

light-bulb moment, brightly illuminating the topic I would research. The trick was in recognizing the light before it dimmed and capturing that brief glimmer of inquiry. I did not pay close attention the first time my topic appeared; luckily my topic was persistent, returning a few times as a fluttering idea and eventually taking hold. When it did take hold, grasping tightly to my curiosity, I could not shake it.

I teach undergraduate courses to general education populations, mostly sophomores, through the Department of Art Education. During my years in graduate school I have taught three different types of courses, all having a writing component and a visual media focus. I do not have expertise in composition or rhetoric, but I do think of myself as a writer, or someone who enjoys writing for various kinds of purposes. Many of my professors say I am a good writer, but not necessarily a great academic writer. I write in passive voice often, and cannot seem to recognize it in my own writing. I am sometimes embarrassed by my inability to vanquish my passive voice, but now understand it is not that unusual among female writers (Ely, 2007; McCracken, 2001). The same passivity and humility girls of my generation were encouraged to adopt has, in my case, been difficult to overcome. Indeed, an entire portion of my introduction was originally written with “you” instead of “I.” Dr. Barrett, nicely this time, pointed out where I was reverting to passivity (I say “nicely” because he is sometimes exasperated by my continued passivity). I write with purpose, usually an opinionated purpose, or with the purpose of moving my reader. As an instructor, I give my students permission to privilege their voices, telling them to use “I” and “my.” Many struggle to insert themselves into their writing. I struggle with inserting myself too strongly, albeit it passively.

I assign an in-class writing prompt meant to help students reflect upon a difficult topic. Invisibility is a theme I address when talking about being marginalized; in other words, what does it feel like to be the outsider, or an invisible member of society. I explain that we have all experienced this uncomfortable feeling at sometime in our lives. I ask them to identify a time they felt invisible and write about how it made them feel. The purpose is for the student to relive that emotion, describe the hurt, and hope they make a connection, an understanding, or develop empathy for those who live this existence daily. I make sure they understand I am looking for something deeper than not finding an accepting lunch table in seventh grade. Still, the depth of the hurt and anger surprises me, as does the sting of rejection so many have already experienced in their mostly White, middle class lives. I hurt with them. I write personal responses back to them, honoring what they share and encouraging them to understand that they are not alone.

Two consistent themes crop up each quarter I use this assignment: girls with serious negative body images or eating disorders, and sexual abuse. Over the course of nine quarters I have read too many stories about young women hating their own bodies, starving themselves to achieve what they see in popular media, discontent, self-hatred, and awful revelations of sexual abuse and rape. Two male students also wrote about disgust for certain parts of their own bodies. From the front of the classroom these students looked so normal, so well adjusted. Beneath the surface, terrible secrets and disturbing thoughts lingered. A few times students wrote about invisibility as being comforting, safe, and preferable.

I developed a unit on media images, specifically representations of women, as a counter action to current visual narratives in popular culture. I brought in Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly* documentary on advertising and women. We collected images from magazines that pissed us off, made us feel less than good about ourselves, and critiqued the messages we saw. Female students challenged male classmates who questioned what all the fuss was about. One day I introduced the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, a self-esteem-based ad campaign designed to address new ideas about beauty, and put up a collection of Dove ads featuring normal-sized women. Our class discussion was heated in the best way possible as my girls expressed the unreal expectations they feel are hoisted on them by popular media, and the boys admitted that the increase in perfect male bodies on men's magazines were affecting how they felt about themselves. I wrote for my graduate classes about this issue and the Dove Campaign, specifically. I thought this would be my work; I would continue Jean Kilbourne's crusade by working on curriculum that challenges media images and empowers women. I created PowerPoint presentations filled with images that spoke to these issues and was genuinely impassioned to speak out against visual narratives that limit and oppress girls and women.

As I collected ads, I began to see strange archetypes beyond the usual emaciated White model. In my daughter's teen magazines I found a preponderance of eroticized girls, some indecently young looking or prepubescent, and other girls who were depicted as very sexual, preening for the camera with seductive come-get-me expressions. Puzzled, I set these aside and returned to women's magazines. Again, eroticized pre-teen looking models were prevalent. I recalled that Kilbourne (2006) wrote about innocence

and the idea of virginity and purity as being presented as sexually desirable, and that girls are often represented as passive and submissive in advertising. I felt spark, a shiver of something sad, and then I returned to my original topic.

When “Invisibility” day rolled around my students wrote, and I collected their papers and went home to my office to read them. I read a paper written by a lovely brunette whose soft brown eyes stayed focused on me when I taught. She was shy, quiet, but listening always. What she wrote made me cry. For her, invisibility is when your uncle forces you to perform sex acts on him, when he rapes you from age nine to fifteen, and when you finally break down and tell your mother, she believes her brother’s denials over your reality. I sat stunned and teary-eyed for some time. I wanted to scream at this girl’s mother, inflict terrible pain on her uncle, and comfort the little girl who just wanted her mom to believe her. I wrote back to her, telling her how I hurt for her, that I believed her, and encouraged her to find someone professional to help her work through what is a horrific betrayal. Sitting on the floor of my office, I reached for the puzzling advertising images I had set aside and spread them out. A shiny paper fan of young girls looked back at me. Quiet, listening girls with soft eyes and vacant expressions. A light flickered, flared, and then brightened.

I knew the images I had collected represented a type of girl, a category of girls often labeled “Lolita’s.” The word “Lolita” is one of which I had a tacit knowledge. I understood it to mean a sexually precocious young girl who manipulates men. I knew the word came from the novel of the same name, *Lolita*. Curious, I bought the book and read it in one emotionally riveting weekend. I have since read it four or five times. My former

understanding of Lolita was wrong. I could not fathom how the girl in the book became the sexually manipulative visual representation now posturing in popular media. Many feminists writing recently about the novel *Lolita* interpret it as being about incest, rape and kidnapping (Bordo, 1998, 1999; Kauffman, 1989; Kennedy, 1997; Shelton, 1999; Watts, 2001). Early book reviews interpret the book as being about love, not sex (Girodias, 1957; Hicks, 1958; Hollander, 1956; Trilling, 1958). I could not reconcile how these disparate interpretations exist, and yet in the sociocultural world Lolita is complicit in her role as a seductress. Why is it no one remembers twelve-year-old Dolores?

Why did my student's mother feel it was easier to believe the adult man's version of her daughter's story, thereby silencing her own child's voice? Something was connected in these two stories. Something I wanted to drag out into the light and stare at until it revealed what was deeply hidden and hurtful. My research found me. I wanted to investigate the Lolita phenomena in our culture for Dolores, for my student, for my daughter, and for all the girls who find themselves cast in roles they do not deserve. What I did not realize was that I also needed to do this for me. That revelation came much later.

*Girl: Me at twelve*

*When I was twelve, I used to plop down on my stomach across my bed and gaze out the window. Six over six mullioned windows, individually sectioning the broad sycamore tree into squares of leaves and smooth two-toned bark. Nothing bad had happened to me, other than my sister, an annoying addition that came three years into my life, and that horse that almost tore off the end of my big toe. I would stare out across the gravel drive, over the hedges, daydreaming about where my life would take me. I don't remember wanting to be married or wanting to be a mom. Not then. I liked science in school, making dioramas for my flocked rabbit collection to sit in, writing stories, and drawing house plans. I think, most of all, I wanted to be an architect. I still like rabbits, and I still write stories. Twelve was an uneventful and invisible year. I could be me. I miss that kind of invisibility. Not every girl is invisible at twelve.*



## V: Inspirations

Clarity, or inspiration concerning dissertation formats, came from several places. During a graduate level experimental research-writing course taught by Dr. Candace Stout, an invited speaker shared his dissertation; a tour de force of visually stunning pages interspersed with text (Dias, 2006). Dr. Belidson Dias's pages were filled to the edges. It seemed like a dissertation one might pore over for hours, reading, looking, and feeling. It was also clear that he, the researcher, enjoyed doing research in this format. That he still felt such excitement when sharing his project convinced me I might want to consider making my own project visually interesting and verbally colorful. As part of the writing course, students were asked to journal on readings, research, guest speakers, or any other thoughts we felt like writing about. It was in this writing space that I originally began playing with non-traditional formats.

*Academic: My experimental writing course journal*

*This journal entry addresses our guest speaker, Dr. Dias, and his revolutionary dissertation format, journey, discovery, or whatever else one could assign to it. He flaunted the rules, disobeyed and re-imagined a new way of processing data, and argued for finding new ways of knowing. I want to get my hands on his dissertation and go over it in detail. It makes me wonder how many other dissertations would invite such interest. Like Dias, I want to approach my research, or better worded, curiosity, with a narrative processing of what I have discovered, then do the work of describing the phenomena, and finish with a discussion of what I understand about the phenomena, now that I'm done (note: done really doesn't apply to qualitative research, as it should always be evolving). Even better, visuals, newspaper clippings, e-mails would punctuate it—along with journal entries, and whatever else I envision might add to the discussion and understanding of the Lolita discourse. How could it not have a visual component? Why should it follow a narrowly prescribed pattern of dissertating? It could be so much simpler and easier to grasp, for everyone involved, if the research being done could be reproduced in a way that makes sense for the project.*

*What if...I introduce the thing I'm curious about, investigate the path of my discovery journey and write about it. One long narrative inquiry story told in an engaging, provocative manner, and decorated by visual supporting evidence. Theory? Only as it makes sense or serves the research. What would the rule-makers say? And who, exactly, are they? I ask these questions merely to play with the possibilities. I am a rules driven kind of girl. Always have been, and breaking from that is difficult and I am often resistant to change.*

Writing, the usual dissertation process, is only one way to describe and report research. For the art educator, creating or making and producing things, is another crucial method for understanding information (Barone, 2006; Eisner, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). Experimental research-writing is a type of arts-based inquiry, in that it is creative, artistic, and acknowledges a broader definition of what research can be or what it can look like. During my Ph.D. years I engaged in many hands-on activities that helped me extend, explore, and critically challenge the representations my research will consider. In the doing of creative work, multiple thought processes re-develop, helping deeper connections surface. I plan to use these artistic endeavors as visual supportive evidence, including them in the pages of my dissertation.

Dr. Stout told me of another inspiring dissertation, that of James H. Rolling, Jr. (2003). She thought I might find a connection to James's writing style, and after reading it, I let her know she was right. As people, James and I have little in common on the outside. He's African-American and male. I am White and female. Inside, where the self negotiates daily through a multitude of minefields, we travel similar terrain. James's dissertation includes visual elements, poetry, and storytelling in vignette form, font changes, and line breaks. Formatted as such, it could easily read disjointedly; instead, it flows across thought, time, and space, pulling and pushing the reader along. In short, I

was mesmerized and jealous. James's artistic and academic styles meld seamlessly in ways I might never be able to make myself known. I found inspiration in his careful language, beautifully raw emotions, and his ability to engage the reader in a narrative that touches as much as it teaches. Knowing what is possible in a dissertation format, specifically when considering these two pieces of scholarship, excites me. It also humbles me. I feel certain whatever I produce will be unlike Dias's or Rolling's projects, but I do acknowledge that I am moved to try to approach my own research with my eye on possibilities. Dr. Barrett, my longtime advisor, has been supportive in encouraging me to stretch my qualitative legs. Dr. Stout's course helped me take my first tentative steps toward feeling steady.

## VI: Who Am I Speaking To?

**A**udience, or to whom I am writing, is something to which I have given much thought. My intention is to write about my research, the role of the researcher, and reflect on how they are interrelated. I also want to make my project accessible to those outside of academia. Dissertations, not normally found on best sellers lists, tend to gather dust or exist in databases where only the research savvy can decipher how to get to them. Devoting a generous chunk of my life to a project that rarely leaves the boundaries of higher education or professional academic journals does not interest me. What I write about, at least in my mind, is more useful to society in general, than something to be debated by theorists, but perhaps it can serve both. Finding a voice that bridges academic and non-academic readers is difficult. Explaining theory in a clear and

relatable way is possible, and some do it very well (Barrett, 2000, 2003; Goodall, 2008; Richardson, 1997). I will draw from sources that succeed in bridging the gap.

*Mother and Academic: From my candidacy exam journal*

*My research mess, spread around me in a horseshoe shape, is distracting me. I decide to pause and re-group, meaning clean up and re-organize my space. While I am doing this, my daughter's boyfriend is in the room next door studying for an upcoming college entrance exam. Listening to him has me thinking about conversation, personality, and voice. Multi-tasking, in this case cleaning and listening, is a skill most mothers develop and I am no exception.*

*Kyler, a constant visitor and food consumer, is talking to himself. When he completes a test page correctly he congratulates himself in teen vernacular. "Sweet."  
"That was bad ass..." or my personal favorite, "Genius..." To meet Kyler, an Abercrombie & Fitch type who is also a state championship lacrosse player, one might peg him as a dim-witted athlete. As if to uphold that image, he calls out to me, "What does 'alas' mean?" My husband and I like this kid. He is polite, respectful, friendly and caring towards our family, and most important, our daughter, Callie. As boyfriends go he's nearly perfect.*

*My husband, however, sees other less perfect qualities, like the testosterone-fueled attraction this boy has for his daughter, or the all too comfortable way he peruses our fridge—which my husband sees as an indicator of how the boy comfortably "peruses" our daughter. What you can't know from looking at Kyler is that he is smart. He doesn't talk like an intellect, but his ACT score says otherwise. Brown, Kenyon and Swarthmore are currently recruiting him for lacrosse and grades. Now that's "bad ass."*

*All this has me thinking. My proposal reads like an academic scholar wrote it. My exam follows this same protocol. As I re-read what I have done thus far, I notice my voice shifts abruptly when I begin defending my method as the right choice for my dissertation. I am suddenly present. My tone changes, my language is literary in feel, rather than scholarly. Do I sound smart? Am I too conversational? What should a scholar sound like? Professors who write dense theoretical articles, nearly impossible to get through without a dictionary, have always intrigued me. That same professor can then teach those same dense ideas to students without the fancy words. I ask Kyler to listen to a passage in my proposal. After listening he says, "Huh?" Okay, maybe I'm not writing for high school athletes (actually, I am, in a way), but I don't want anyone to read my work and say, "Huh?" Before I start writing again I plan to do some investigating on voice, identify writing that I would like to emulate, and consider my own writing style.*

Who am I writing for? Many people, I hope. I am writing for my committee, four established scholars who have agreed to read and evaluate my dissertation. I am writing for my peers who might be preparing for their own dissertations. I am writing for my daughter, who lives in a sociocultural world determined to speak about her and for her. I am writing for myself, a woman who fervently believes writing is healing and purposeful. I am writing for Dolores, a fictionalized girl whose story has been both silenced and mythologized.<sup>1</sup> I am also writing for educators to illuminate how and why eroticizing girls in Western popular culture is a topic and issue of importance. I am writing because writing is my method of inquiry. It is how I process and understand information.

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<sup>1</sup> I define myth as Barthes (1973) does, “Myth is a type of speech...conveyed by a discourse” p. 109. Myth is not an object, rather it is a sociocultural message about an object or thing.

## PART ONE

### I: Statement of the Problem

#### What am I Writing About?

The name Lolita conjures a multitude of meanings, understandings and images. Lolita-like images are iconic in visual culture, a representative category of subject positions tied to persuasion, desire and consumption throughout popular media. My interest in Lolita-like representations comes from observing how often the sexualized girl<sup>2</sup> is used in advertising. In collecting images of Lolita-like subjects for research purposes, curious patterns emerged within these visual representations, including many types of Lolitas used to sell products.

There are three Lolitas I refer to in this study: *Lolita* the book, Lolita the character in the book, and Lolita-like mythic representations. I understand Dolores Haze as being separate from Lolita: Dolores is the stepdaughter of Humbert; Lolita is Humbert's mythic creation. I contend that both girls are represented in popular media: Dolores as the "unknowing" innocent, and Lolita as the "knowing" seductress. I refer to each girl by name depending on the sociocultural context of her subject position.

Feminist and critical literary researchers question how twelve-year-old Dolores could be anything other than a victim of kidnapping and ritualized rape at the hands of

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<sup>2</sup> Humbert defines nymphet girls as being between the ages of nine and fourteen. In popular media sexualized girls encompass a greater range of ages.

her new stepfather and pedophile, Humbert (Bordo, 1998, 1999; Kauffman, 1989; Kennedy, 1997; Shelton, 1999; Watts, 2001). Pedophilia and incest are considered taboo practices by most people in American culture. Nabokov's text uses both "pedophilia" and "incest" repeatedly, but when I think about Lolita's sociocultural context, pedophilia and incest remain unspoken and invisible. If Dolores is correctly remembered as the twelve-year-old victim of an incestuous stepfather, it is unlikely her visual embodiment would be considered erotic or desirable for marketing to consumers; therefore a mythic version has been created.

Timothy McCracken (2001) argues the misuse of the name Lolita denies the victimization of Dolores and that the word "carries serious connotative baggage" (p. 129). I agree; the name Lolita and the resulting representation carry powerful and socially relevant interpretations, which are at odds with my understanding of the novel, and suggest a mythic quality. My study asks how Dolores came to carry "connotative baggage" and when did her story begin to change socioculturally. Michael Wood (2003) posits, "Lolita, the girl rather than the book, has become part of our language, the name of a condition. But do we know what that condition is?" (p. 181). The connotative baggage and condition linked to Lolita-like representations are a large part of what I examine in my research.

This study documents, analyzes and interprets Lolita's sociocultural development, from Nabokov's first "throb"<sup>3</sup> of a story, to the culturally familiar sexualized preteen selling to today's consumer. Tracing the shift from literary character to cultural phenomena could shed light on how and why popular media promotes eroticized girl

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<sup>3</sup> Nabokov, describing *Lolita's* genesis (Nabokov, 1958, p. 311).

representations. Part of my investigation involves identifying the visual signifiers inherited from the book, describing how culture commonly interprets these signs visually, and analyzing how Lolita-like representations socially construct consumptive and erotic desire. Documenting historical contexts, cultural practices, and Lolita-like subjects in popular media may clarify discursive transformations.

Visual culture pedagogy focuses on how images position gender, ethnicity, sexuality, identity, agency, and power. Lolita-like representations play a significant role in society's understanding of what it is to be a girl or woman. This role deserves critical examination given the prevalence of sexualized imagery in advertising and other media outlets (Blandy & Congdon, 1990; Durham, 2007, 2008; Dworkin, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Green, 2000; Wray & Steele, 2002). Art education is uniquely positioned to address how images become part of our cultural beliefs and values.

## II: General Research Questions

### What am I Asking?

**I**n this study I will look deeply at the Lolita phenomenon in popular visual media and examine how culture constructs mythic representations. The investigation of Lolita's development is threaded through with larger considerations including social and cultural contexts, gendered interpretations, meaning making, and visual production, which can be analyzed to locate historical shifts and mythic turns. In a genealogic sense, the Lolita phenomenon is born from Nabokov's novel, moves forward in history with boundless energy, and proliferates without much critical challenge



concerning its epistemology. What we know about Lolita, and how we came to know it, is at the heart of my inquiry. Ideologically, dismantling the Lolita myth is socially responsible and important to me.

I see the Lolita phenomenon as a discourse<sup>4</sup> through which meaning is constituted and a resulting authoritative knowledge is visually embodied (Hall, 1997). My question centers on the sociocultural development of the Lolita subject and asks how it came to take on current mythic representations. The purpose of my inquiry is to trace the teleological path of the Lolita phenomenon from its birth in the Nabokov novel to present day visual culture texts including advertising, art, fashion, film, music videos, pornography<sup>5</sup>, television, and other popular media outlets, thereby dismantling the cultural process of eroticizing girls. Relational questions include:

- 1) How did Lolita move from text to sociocultural myth?
- 2) How are Lolita-like representations visually constructed?
- 3) What do Lolita-like representations suggest to society?
- 4) What are the sociocultural implications concerning the normalized practice of eroticizing girls?
- 5) How can visual culture pedagogy encourage critical inquiry when looking at Lolita-like representations in popular media?

These questions offer potential insights into the cultural processes connected to the practice of sexualizing and eroticizing young female subjects in popular media (APA report, 2007; Bordo, 1999; Durham, 2008; Giroux, 2000; Kilbourne, 1999; Walkerdine,

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<sup>4</sup> Meaning “not merely bodies of ideas, ideologies, or other symbolic formulations, but...also working attitudes, modes of address, terms of reference, and courses of actions suffused into social practice” (Foucault, cited in Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, pp. 493-494).

<sup>5</sup> I will not define “pornography” for this study. I am referring to a specific sexual representation called “Lolita porn.”

1996, 1997). Lolita-like mythic representations continue to tell stories, communicating tacit understandings that limit and oppress girls. Janice Hocker-Rushing (2002) writes, “Becoming conscious of a myth’s allure...helps to break the spell. We can personalize it, use and discard what we want, make it our own” (p. 125). Breaking the spell cast by the Lolita phenomenon is the first step in reclaiming Dolores’s story.

### III: Significance

#### Why is My Research Important?

**T**he eroticized or sexualized girl is ubiquitous in contemporary American culture. “Lolitaism”<sup>6</sup> in popular visual culture has become so prevalent that the sexualization of young female bodies has become normalized (APA, 2007; Bordo, 1999; Durham, 2008; Giroux, 2000; Kilbourne, 1999; Walkerdine, 1996). Visual narratives that follow this archetype should not be the typical depiction of girls in our culture (APA, 2007; Kilbourne, 2006). Lolita-like representations are featured prominently in female-directed teen magazines, the fashion industry, music video narratives, in anime, and remain a mainstay of Internet pornography (Carnes, 2003; Durham, 2008; Leise, 2003; Merskin, 2004). In most of these representations the girl is silent, sexually objectified, and passively positioned.

Feminist theorists question erotic girl representations (Bordo, 1999; Durham, 2008; Walkerdine, 1996, 1997), but few directly speak to the sociocultural development

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term “Lolitaism” in reference to the process of eroticizing or sexualizing young girls in ways that project desirability onto the subjects, either through body positioning, specific clothing or other signifying practices.

of the Lolita phenomenon. This study aims to discover how Lolita-like representations came to be and why they are deeply embedded in visual culture. The original Lolita, Dolores Haze, is essentially voiceless, and I hope to give her a platform to speak from by challenging her current role in sociocultural history. McCracken (2001) states, “While it may take a book-length study to chart how Lolita evolved from miss to myth, if Lolita is to ‘talk back’ from a subject position, the sources of her misinterpretations need to be located” (p. 129). Studying the Lolita phenomenon will work towards dismantling the cultural process of eroticizing girls, and may help articulate an empowering counter-narrative.

In a broader sense, researching how cultures create meaning and transfer it forward through time is important for understanding how myth becomes acculturated. Popular media, a site through which sociocultural meaning is constructed, creates “systems of representation” that organize complex concepts (Hall, 1997, p. 19). Lolita-like representations in popular media are also complex, and deconstructing systems that project desirability onto young girls is topical and socially relevant. Challenging Lolita’s mythic representation decenters both literary and visual texts, disassociating it from current sociocultural beliefs.

IV: Personal Significance  
Confronting the Unquieted

**A**s the mother of a teenage daughter, I am concerned with how the sexual objectification and eroticization of girls positions young females in roles they may not be prepared to understand, identify with, or defend against. Equally disturbing is the implication of guilt projected on Lolita subjects, a position that I challenge. My topic also holds personal significance. At thirteen, I was placed in the Lolita role when my school bus driver began sending sexually explicit letters to me. When those in authority questioned me, much of the inquiry centered on my actions, rather than the aggressor's. What had I done to encourage him? What had I said or worn? In my mind the message was clear; I possessed some kind of unknown power that caused an otherwise respectable family man to lose his ability to reason. I was puzzled by the reactions of schoolmates who agreed with the idea that I may have been responsible for what occurred.

Two years later I was date-raped by a high school classmate. I remained silent, fettered by my own complicities, thinking once again, that my unknown power had caused him to lose control. I did not “talk back” as McCracken (2001) wishes Dolores/Lolita<sup>7</sup> had, and through my research she is unburdened from her textual and current visual representations. My personal experiences inform my interpretations and invigorate my curiosity as to how sociocultural beliefs and values affect agency and

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<sup>7</sup> I speak of Dolores as if she is a real person. I realize she is Nabokov's fictional creation, but she quickly left the pages of the novel and began to live.

power. I share a bond with Dolores Haze in a miscast role that implies agreement or complicity in our situations. Because Nabokov, through his character Humbert, denies Dolores a chance to tell her side of the story, my study, and the scholarship I draw from, will offer new voices and new tellings, challenging present day cultural beliefs.

*Woman and Mother:*

*I wrestle with revealing these two personal events in my dissertation, a document no longer in my control once submitted. However, I understand these two experiences shadow my interpretations of my topic, and therefore, should be made known. A definition that describes what took place that night did not exist at the time. I was not aware that a person I knew, and willingly spent time with, could be a rapist. "Date rape" is a term that was coined much later. Several years ago I recall my brothers-in-law discussing a date rape that occurred on their campus. They were joking about the term, downplaying the act as being less damaging than a "stranger" rape, and questioning the girl's motive for coming forward. I became very upset, but was unable to speak for myself at the time, unwilling to admit I had been a victim of date rape. I regret my passivity and silence.*

*I had not thought about this until just now as I was typing, but when my daughter turned 14, I told her my date rape story as the proverbial cautionary tale. I wonder if she sees me differently now: wounded, stupid, or naïve. All things I felt at the time.*

V: Limitations

What am I Not Doing?

**M**y research identifies visual signifiers and Lolita categories prevalent in both legal and illegal sexualized representations in popular media. I am not examining unlawful child pornography, but I am considering the words used by self-identified promoters of these images and how language is employed to justify, explain, or promote pedophilic acts.

Images I examine from magazines, books, web pages, films, still video shots, and art photography number in the hundreds. Getting copyright approval is not an option given the scope of documents. Instead, I incorporate portions of visual data into arts-based products, which allow for inclusion in my dissertation. In repurposing Lolita-like representations, necessary changes to copyrighted materials are made.

## VI: Methodology

### How Will I Research and Why?

**M**ethods, an important function of the dissertation process, are something graduate students spend a lot of time trying to figure out. Indeed, we are required to take multiple courses that explore qualitative research methodologies, all in an effort to help us find one (or several) that will work for our projects. Methodology shopping is not as pleasurable as clothes or shoe shopping, but it does share many of the same components. Size, budget, selection, and degree of necessity all come into play. A method should fit the research question. It may need to work with other methods, and even if you desire it, it does not mean you need it. Like an overstuffed sale rack, methods seem exciting at first, until you select a few and realize they are on sale for a reason. I tried on several, finally settling on those that made sense for my question and fit my strengths as a researcher.

Writing is my first love, born out of my love of literature. Books are treasured friends, language my favorite medium. For these reasons, narrative inquiry is my style, and self-reflective autoethnography and writing as a method of inquiry are the perfect fit.

While other methods could work for my question, I believe the methods I have selected are best suited for what I am doing in my dissertation.

My research project does not fit the traditional sense of a study. My study involves papers, pictures, and things. I am more like an archeologist or archivist, rooting around in the past, cataloging, connecting to the present, and making inferences about the future. It's just me, and a whole bunch of stuff, alone in an office. I know this sounds lonely. I am not alone most of the time. There are ghosts around me. Dolores Haze is one. My memory of an ashamed and silent fifteen-year-old girl is another. My former student, the girl with the soft brown eyes, passes through at times. Non-apparitions pass through as well in the form of hungry kids, my husband, or our blind and deaf Welsh terrier, Tobie. She's an excellent foot warmer. But it's the ghosts that keep me writing.

I need to tell their stories. Honestly, poetically, and visually. There is a method that will help me accomplish my goals. It is theoretical, postmodern (honoring multiple ways of knowing), and practiced daily by researchers and non-researchers alike. Storytelling, also known by its methodological name "narrative inquiry," is how we make "sense of human life and experience" (Welikala, 2007, p.132). Narrative researchers "embrace the assumption that the story is one if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience" (Pinnegar & Daynes, p. 4, in Clandinin, 2007).

In the qualitative sense, narrative inquiry is not easily defined or stated; rather, it finds itself in multiple disciplines, serving multiple purposes. Thomas Schwandt (2007) attempts to simplify, defining narrative inquiry as:

A broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories (e.g. life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies) and reporting that kind of research. Narrative inquiry or research also includes examinations of the methodology and aim of research in the form of personal narrative and auto-ethnography. (p. 203-204)

In Schwandt's (2007) definition of narrative, I find a connection to how qualitative research approaches storytelling. He suggests that it can also relate to discourse, claiming, "A story form for research reporting, however, is typically diachronic (dealing with a phenomenon as it changes over time). It contains surprises, coincidences, embellishments, and other rhetorical devices that draw the reader in and hold attention in a different manner" (p. 201). It is this definition, added to inquiry, which most closely identifies what I aim to do in my dissertation. I would strike out the word "embellishment," however, and in its place use "personal commentary" or "reflection." Narrative inquiry is an umbrella-like term, sheltering a much larger body of methods. In the postmodern world of qualitative methodologies, narrative writing takes form in multiple variations with passionately argued rationales for research, many of which directly connect to my project.

Postmodern contexts changed how research can be approached, while poststructuralist theory challenges how language, subjectivity, social constructions, agency, and power relate to one another (Richardson, 2000). Some of the subgenres related to ethnographic<sup>8</sup> research include autoethnography, fiction-stories, drama, performance texts, polyvocal texts, visual presentations, conversations, layered accounts, creative analytic practices [CAP] ethnography, and mixed genres (p. 903). Other

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<sup>8</sup> Ethnography, a form of research reporting born out of anthropology, is the study of culture, which uses thickly described accounts of human experience to explore social life (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 40, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).



imaginative research texts will join the list as experimental writing methods become more readily accepted. Personally, these kinds of research texts are exactly the types I enjoy reading. And isn't getting your research read one of the main reasons we write?

Mary Lynn Hamilton, Laura Smith, and Kirsten Worthington (2008) describe and compare three narrative sub-genres: self-narrative, self-study, and autoethnography, all methods known to contribute to educational research. They define self-narrative as “a look at a story of self,” self-study as “a look at the self in action, usually within educational contexts,” and autoethnography as “a look at a self within a larger context” (p. 17). At first glance, I find commonalities in all three narrative methods. One method not considered by Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) is self-reflective autoethnography, which seems to be a hybrid of the three methods being discussed. I understand self-reflective autoethnography as being closely related to many of the tenets Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington describe.

I am using both inwardly and outwardly focused lenses for transparency. Furthermore, Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) confirm reflective research and collaborative practice as being crucial to narrative inquiry, stating, “...reflection happens in a variety of ways, including journaling, conversations with colleagues, graduate work, and thinking deeply about a teaching problem to search for solutions” (p. 24). I find myself embedded in several places when considering narrative inquiry as a methodology. I am an educator, I use storytelling as a pedagogical practice, and I am thinking deeply about a specific problem in our sociocultural world. While narrative inquiry is positioned as a preferred educational method for teaching practices, I also believe it can illuminate research practices.

An exemplar narrative that inspires me is James Lang's (2005) *Life on the Tenure Track*, a self-reflective autoethnographic text detailing his first year as an English professor. It should be required reading for Ph.D. students, serving as an honest evaluation of what our future profession may look like. Lang, contributor and columnist for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, acknowledges all aspects of his life as being intertwined with his teaching and research practices. These aspects include his gender, race, faith, biases, work relationships, health, and family life. Through his narrative questions arise, and are sometimes answered, while new questions foreground and complicate his life as an academic. Lang's (2005) text is both human and enlightening.

Likewise, my narrative inquiry may offer new researchers a human and enlightening view of what it entails to progress through a doctoral turnstile. While other research projects will not mirror the structure of mine, similar doubts, worries, and questions are issues for most graduate students. Why am I doing this? How will I do this? Who cares if I do this? These are all questions new researchers struggle with.

I have read many books related to research methods, issues, and topics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2003; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Rose, 2001; Schwandt, 1994), and one offering research strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). What I did not find in these texts is the real life telling of day-to-day research processes, the internal and external issues that confound and challenge scholarly endeavors. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman (2006) come close, using brief examples of student researchers in dialogue exchanges within their book; however, these are mostly academic discussions. Missing is the attention to balance, lack of balance, the excitement of discovery, collaborative synergy, or the heavy realization that the wrong path has been taken. Writing about the

highs, lows, and the trials in between, holds the promise of connecting the researcher and the research product to a larger context, thereby demystifying the process of research. As Candace Stout (2007) observes:

Writing, too, is an analytic, a tool that moves us in and out, fostering synergisms between the researcher and a complex of data. The writing process clusters, maps, meanders around, wedges between/among data, exposing gaps in content and coherence, categorizing, creating relationships. Writing within the data opens spaces, affording insights that might be obscured via conventional practices of data management... Writing illuminates what otherwise might be lost. (p. 228)

Stout reminds researchers that while a text should “suggest and reflect,” it should also endeavor to remain open-ended and “gently demanding” when communicating (p.228). Her call for self-consciousness is an important lesson for me.

In the narrative inquiry world, several major proponents continue to argue passionately for the writing of evocative research texts. Laurel Richardson (1997, 2000, 2006), a sociology professor, remains one of the most cited supporters of narrative styles. Her 1997 book, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*, broke new ground as she reflected with focused honesty about her academic life. In this text, Richardson holds nothing back; rather, she ruthlessly unloads while allowing her academic peers to nod in agreement, safe in the privacy of their own tenured offices. Writing becomes a way for her to revisit old texts and old wounds with renewed vigor, playful imaginings, and raw truths. As a woman, mother, wife, daughter, academic, and writer, her honest, sometimes painfully reflective language resonates within me.

Richardson’s chapter in Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argues for writing as a method of inquiry, stating, “Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis...form and content are inseparable” (p. 923). Instead of “writing up the

research,” the traditional way to approach data, she suggests that the act of writing opens the research to new knowledge formations. I strongly agree, having seen my own writing expand and contract through revisiting my data, rewriting my position, and through peer collaborations. Furthermore, Richardson claims poststructuralism allows qualitative writers to “understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times...it frees us from trying to write a single text in which we say everything at once to everyone” (p. 929). Creative analytic practices [CAP] ethnography, a concept she developed, constructs a framework for using writing as inquiry, which privileges the researcher’s voice, while loosening the bonds of traditional research formats.

CAP ethnography asserts that the writing process and product are inseparable (Richardson, 2000). Autoethnographies, an evocative form of writing research, are “highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories...relating the personal to the cultural” (p. 931). “Writing-stories,” a narrative strategy born out of autoethnography, concerns situating the author’s writing into other contexts, including academia, home life, political and social life, community, and personal history, much like Richardson’s 1997 book, *Fields of Play*. I see self-reflective autoethnography, CAP ethnography, and writing-stories as all connecting through writing as a method of inquiry.

Richardson (2000) reports that graduate students find writing-stories purposeful when writing about research experiences, and some even use this strategy to replace the traditional methods chapter in their dissertations (p. 932). Because I find this assertion intriguing, I have been writing a research journal accompanying my proposal, candidacy exam, and dissertation-writing phase. My journaling serves multiple purposes beyond detailing the research process; it helps me develop a reflexive voice, acts as a sounding

board, and works as an open space to practice expressive writing. I begin or end research days with an entry, and revisit my entries before re-engaging with my work. I find it centers my thinking process, reinvigorates my inquiry, and strengthens my writing.

*Academic: From my experimental research-writing course journal*

*Another pass at editing this journal section has me thinking about the many ways writing helps us understand who we are and what we value. It also illuminates the dark corners of doubt, the nagging weight of finding a comfortable space to write in. Writing serves the purpose of letting me wade through the murky creek beds that define my research. If I bend down and peer into the dun-colored water, I see bits and pieces swirling along the current, occasionally tripped up by the odd rock or pile of sticks, and in those brief moments of recognition, a useful thought begins to form. If I succeed in capturing enough debris, a change in the current might occur, building new dams and pools of knowledge. Or the water will gather, pressuring the unstable jetty, disturbing my process and product. I think of the beaver-constructed piles of wood at the edge of the lakeshore by our summerhouse in Maine. It seems an unsightly mess from the outside, but inside a warm, welcoming space hides. Haphazard construction is not always doomed to fail; it may add up to a strong foundation for growth. Not unlike the piles of paper collected for my research, the ways in which my data fits together may build a solid argument for my dissertation.*

Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000, 2002), a husband and wife team who often write collaboratively about ethnography, are also champions of narrative writing research forms. Norman Denzin (2003) describes the subtle differences between how Ellis, Bochner, and Richardson, three researchers who value literary and aesthetic narrative inquiries, set criteria for judging narrative pieces. He finds that Ellis and Bochner, usually a writing team, have slightly different criteria than one another, but are closely related in their criteria needs. Richardson, he says, asks for more, and sets forth a list of criteria she feels need to be met. In comparing these three proponents of narrative writing styles, I tease out individual differences that support my purposes.

Ellis, Denzin reports, wants to be engaged by evocative texts that tell compelling stories about “social life, social process, the experience of others, the author’s experience, my own life...” (cited in Denzin, 2003, p. 253). She wants a good plot, a literary feel, which honors an authenticity of experience. Usefulness, compassion, and the promotion of dialogue matter to her. Bochner, while agreeing with Ellis on many points, asks that narrative inquiry research be written with a democracy of language, which allows readers to do more than relive the experience being reported; rather, they should be able to extract meaning from it. He also likes “structurally complex narratives, stories told in the curve of time, weaving past and present together in the non-linear spaces of memory work” (p. 254). I believe this quote is helpful for the kind of narrative writing-story I am writing, in that it is a reminder of what my research could offer.

Denzin (2003) describes Richardson’s five criteria for judging a narrative as being more fully developed than Ellis’s or Bochner’s. In my Master’s thesis, also a self-reflective autoethnography, I used Richardson’s criteria in terms of how I wished my narrative to be evaluated. Denzin improves on Richardson’s criteria, taking the best from all three scholars; adding Patricia Clough’s (1994) call for cultural criticism and theoretical reflection, and creates his own list for judging reading and writing performance texts. I will view my own narrative research through Denzin’s (2003) criteria, which follows:

1. Unsettle, criticize and challenge taken for granted, repressed meanings;
2. Invite moral and ethical dialogue, while reflexively clarifying their own moral position;
3. Engender resistance, and offer utopian thoughts about how things can be made different;
4. Demonstrate that they care, that they are kind;
5. Show, instead of tell, while using the rule “less is more;”

6. Exhibit interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy;
7. Are political, functional, collective and committed. (p. 257)

Denzin (2003) posits that narrative texts should be “sites of resistance... places where meanings, politics and identities are negotiated. They transform and challenge stereotypical forms of cultural representation...” (p. 257). My narrative looks to do the same, as my research purposes align with transforming and challenging stereotypical representations in popular culture. How meaning, identity, and resistance are negotiated is central to my study, and for me, the personal is political.

Rushing’s chapter in Ellis and Bochner’s (2002) book *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*, is another exemplar of narrative inquiry research I admire. It begins with remembrances from the author’s senior year in college, a series of events that she now understands as having had a profound effect on her life as a woman, academic, and writer. Rushing deftly weaves myth, women’s experience in the academy, and her own reflective thoughts into a compelling read that engages as much as it informs. She quotes Bochner, who says, “there is nothing as theoretical as a good story,” a statement well supported by her contribution to the book (p. 125).

In her chapter, Rushing invites readers in, holding their attention with personal struggles, while teaching about literary mythic figures and relating feminist research concerning patriarchal bias in U.S. universities. Rushing’s narrative reveals connections to my life as a woman in academia, including my complicated relationship with self-worth, allowing me to see myself through the experiences of others, an affirming and personally relevant exchange. It is this idea of narrative inquiry that first sparked the

notion of how I could approach my research writing. Myth, literary texts, feminist issues, and academia are represented in my work, too.

Rushing asks questions of her beliefs, of myth, and of the academy, carefully constructing a cultural text free of distancing theoretical jargon. That is not to say it is not scholarly, theoretical, or significant, because it is all these things. Her text works because it manages to be scholarly, theoretical, and significant, without feeling research-laden. Most important, Rushing's narrative represents the artistry possible in qualitative research writing, producing a rich story of multi-layered experiences that informs, invites introspection, and encourages personal reflection.

Voice, the conduit to enticing the audience, is a critical element in narrative research writing. The exemplar narratives I write about each have distinctive voices. I can conjure images of the author, and I can envision the worlds they write about. Ellis and Bochner (2000, 2002) invite me into their offices and their living room. Richardson (2002) takes me along to a wedding in Lebanon. Lang (2005) lets me sit in the back of his British literature course as he tries and fails to keep a discussion going. Rushing (2002) opens the diary to her past and allows me to peek over her shoulder. I feel I know these people; I trust them through their honest, forthright tellings. Each has taught me something about their lives, my life, and our world. They have done more than educate me on academic matters; they have summoned, captured, and willed me into acknowledging how we learn from sharing human experiences.



*Academic: From my experimental writing course journal*

*Back to research. After reading Cho & Trent I began to think more about how I will go about proposing my “method” ...a word that never seems right for the kind of writing I like to do. I am always struggling with language like “research participant” or “data control group.” My data are papers, documents, books, images ...no real life participants. Just me, my brain, and a bunch of things to think about. But it is about real life and real life social implications. So after reading Cho & Trent, I wondered where I could position myself. Is it a developmental or personal essay? On page 330 they state, “...towards reconstructing schemes or stages of development over time, developmental researchers are concerned with collecting rich archives reflecting historical events or happenings.” Could this be me? Or on page 331, it reads, “personal opinion that makes it possible to help the reader come to a new way of understanding a phenomenon or event under investigation.” This sounds good, too. Ah, and then validity...finally on page 334 a lovely graphic points arrows all over the place, listing words that feel familiar to what I am hoping to do. Transform. Empower. Truth seeking. Social change. Re-presented.*

*Next, I power on to Mahoney. As a big fan of narrative, I like residing in this world. I love the honest questioning about how researcher and the researched can be connected, intertwined and then again cleaved apart. I mull over the idea that he had to speak their “language,” using the proper words to communicate effectively despite the commonalities of English. This made me wonder how I will define the language needed for processing “Lolitaism.” How will I negotiate the then and now of her world and ours? Will it translate in the same way? How will my positionality play out? Do I have a right to speak for Dolores? I turn to the text, knowing Ellis & Bochner will continue to raise new questions, but hoping to also find new possibilities.*

*Rushing’s chapter is filled to the brim with mythic (literally) roles women find themselves in or playing. Academia simply adds another layer to our understandings of who we are, what others think they know about us, and how we cling to old paradigms, old patterns and old pictures of ourselves. Trying to see yourself as a whole person is maddeningly elusive. So we let others mirror back. Sometimes I prefer this, as I am particularly unkind to my reflection. This chapter brings threads of my life back to present and asks the question...why?*

*Similarly, I was truly engaged by the writer to editor, editor to writer, back and forth shown in Rushing & Bochner’s correspondence about Rushing’s chapter. I could relate to what it feels like (vulnerable, illuminating, scary...) when others read your work and comment. Even when critical feedback is right on, helpful or insightful—it still feels like your guts are spread out on the blacktop and the crows are circling. The editor/mentor process with Dr. Barrett was among the most valued of my thesis-writing period. As the writer, it is not at all possible to truly get the objective distance needed to “see” what it is you are not saying, doing, or honoring. Those who edit, revise, and comment must work carefully to balance on that beam of criticism. If the criticisms don’t cut deep enough, the writer isn’t compelled to flinch. Cut too deeply and the writer is wounded in*

*ways that permanently scar. Writers are unusually thin skinned, brooding (or bruising) over certain questions...and ignoring the positive commentary. Unless it's all positive and then we are resplendent with joy.*

## VII: Research Prep

### Getting ready

In my introduction I explained how my topic came to me. What to do with my topic and how to go about it is another matter entirely. Graduate study is the natural place to begin working out the details. In our department, most higher-level courses are geared toward helping you develop, strengthen, and critique the research you are engaging in. In this sense, I have been reading, thinking, and writing about Lolita in some way, shape or form, over the last two years. The gathering of data was accomplished over time as each course directed me to consider a particular way of approaching my topic. For example, in one course I got to explore the historical aspects of Lolita, from novel to present day, mapping out a timeline of pivotal shifts and disruptions. In another course, I examined the economics of consuming Lolita in the sociocultural sense. In my experimental research-writing course, I was encouraged to think and journal, intertextually moving from Lolita, to my life, to social spaces of collaborative acts, all serving to help me process my collected data in non-traditional writing formats. Additionally, I presented my research topic to several graduate classes and gave two presentations outside the department, furthering my skills in articulating my argument.

In July 2008, during a weeklong intensive workshop taught by Dr. Terry Barrett and Dr. Deborah Smith-Shank, I had the opportunity to re-visit and re-write *Lolita*, the novel, as a fairy tale. Using the general framework of *Little Red Riding Hood*, I created “The Secret Diary of Dolores Haze.” The work of hand making a scrapbook-type diary of Dolores’s cross country journey remains one of the more rewarding and critical functions thus far in my data analysis process. It took research to tell the story and art making to present the scholarship. My point is, although I am now sitting in my office surrounded by data, I have been actively engaging with my data for a long period. I have, in effect, been practicing discourse analysis all along. Now I am ready to write up my research analysis; however, instead of writing up, I will write *through* my research process, allowing my research narrative to do the telling, the knowing, and the discovering (Richardson, 2000). It is in the telling that the knowing surfaces.

Sara Worth (2005) draws from Noel Carroll, Donald Polkinghorne, and Jerome Bruner when proposing the idea that “narrative knowledge is a special form of reasoning,” one that moves past “knowing how” and “knowing that,” into a third realm—knowing what something is like (cited in Goodall, 2008, p.13-14). Storytelling allows for the third realm to produce a “distinctive form of knowledge that is rooted in empathy for other human beings and an enhanced capacity for both imagination and moral reasoning” (p. 14). H.L. Goodall (2008) explains that through writing and telling, new ways of knowing and understanding are created, and in this sense is akin to epistemology. He argues for what he calls a new ethnography, or “creative narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences” (p. 22). Reflexivity, according to Goodall, is a “powerful authoring tool” that

assists the reader in understanding how the writer develops his or her “unique point of view” (p. 41). In the following excerpt, which mirrors the foreword in Nabokov’s novel, I write as John Ray, Jr. in the preface to my Dolores Haze diary project.

## Foreword

The *Secret Diary of Dolores Haze* is presented here as an important addendum to the infamous confessional journal “Lolita.” As was my previous task with the latter journal, I have been asked to edit and comment on this most recent discovery. In 1952, Humbert Humbert, European émigré and writer, died in captivity while awaiting trial for the murder of playwright Clare Quilty. *Lolita*, his first person account of his obsession with his stepdaughter, Dolores Haze, and their two-year journey across America, was found with his body. Humbert, a self-professed pedophile, left the psychiatric community a literary gem, which also serves as a case study in deviant sexual behavior. As such, it is published without much editing, except for necessary changes to the names of people still living. What has always been missing is young Dolores Haze’s voice. Little is known about her thoughts, and that which is known is only understood through her captor’s words. The discovery of Miss Haze’s private diary is a critical academic find, one that will upend research published about *Lolita* and will indeed make Russell Trainer’s 1966 treatise *The Lolita Complex* obsolete.

Miss Haze, age 12 at the start of her diary, had not the masterful vocabulary her stepfather employed to blur the more salient themes in his confession. Instead, as their journey progresses, her descriptions of their activities become graphic, hateful, and disturbing. Many of the unpalatable diary pages could not be published outright and are excluded from this volume. Now archived at the Kinsey Institute, these pages unmask the periphery damage to victims of incest and pedophilia. Just as *Lolita* serves society as a cautionary tale, this too serves to warn young girls of the very adult world waiting if similar situations are presented. For in this poignant personal study there lurks a general lesson. The *Secret Diary of Dolores Haze* should make all of us—parents, social workers, educators—apply ourselves with greater vigilance and vision to the task of bring up a better generation in a safer world.

Widworth, Mass.  
August 17, 1977

John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.

## PART TWO

### Section 1: Dissertation, or Confession of a White Academic Female

*And what is myth other than an extraordinary  
story with a very long shelf life?  
Janice Hocker Rushing<sup>9</sup>*

I want to tell you a story about a girl named Dolores and how I came to care about her. While I tell this story, I intend to let you inside my head, my life, and my research. The best place to start is at the beginning, and for me it all starts with the book, *Lolita*.

I picked up my now dog-eared copy of *Lolita* at the local Barnes and Noble bookstore. They had two kinds of paperback versions available; one cover image shows a close up of a pair of pale pink lips. The other one, the one I bought (Vintage Books, 1997), has a black and white photo of a young girl's legs shot in the pornographically popular "up the schoolgirl skirt" format: saddle shoes, cuffed white bobby socks, knock-kneed legs, with a dark wool skirt. The view—shoes at the bottom of the cover—travels up the legs and skirt and then is cut off at the hips. The cover blurb reads, "The only convincing love story of our century..." *Vanity Fair* (Vintage Books, 1997). From looking at the cover I surmised the following: *Lolita* is a love story. It is a convincing love story. Lolita goes to private school and wears a uniform. She's probably in high

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2002, p. 125.

school. Because I tacitly recall what the story is about, I think she seduces an older man, maybe a teacher—based on the uniform. It takes place in this century. The back cover states:

Awe and exhilaration—along with heartbreak and mordant wit—abound in *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov's most famous and controversial novel, which tells the story of the aging Humbert Humbert's obsessive, devouring, and doomed passion for the nymphet Dolores Haze. *Lolita* is also the story of a hyper civilized European colliding with the cheerful barbarianism of postwar America. Most of all, it is a mediation on love as outrage and hallucination, madness and transformation.

I think I chose this paperback version because of the font type spelling out the title *Lolita*. The font has a typewriter feel to it, subconsciously referring to the diary-like confession Humbert writes. If I had my way, this entire dissertation would be written in Garamond—**Lolita**—but the graduate school rules say I can't (actually, now that I see Garamond next to Times New Roman it hardly seems worth the bother). I paid \$13.95, minus my Barnes and Noble discount, and drove home. The next day I started reading Nabokov's *Lolita*, stopping several times to recheck the cover blurb and back cover statement. I kept reading, marveling over Nabokov's prose, enviable grasp of the English language, bold writing style, and his tantalizing, but progressively disturbing character, Humbert. There is definitely an erotic component to the narrative structure, mostly because the person telling (Humbert) is aroused by his own story. The story builds on his excitement as he schemes toward and finally culminates his sexual desire for Dolores. I had to keep reminding myself that his desire is pedophilic even though he reminds the reader he is *afflicted* (affliction being less creepy than sexual deviance or perversion) with "pederosis" innumerable times. Because I can only read Humbert's side of the story,

Dolores and her feelings about Humbert remain in the shadows. By the end of the book it was clear that this was no fairy tale, no happily ever after love story. All the main characters died.

I found the book gorgeously detailed, troubling, and haunting. I am haunted still. I was confused as to how *Lolita* could be described as, “The only convincing love story of our century” and questioned why the back cover synopsis failed to mention Dolores’s age (12) or that Humbert was her guardian and stepfather. I read the book again, this time looking for Dolores, trying to hear her voice in the spaces of Humbert’s telling. She was difficult to pin down, hard to like, and mostly beside the point, at least in Humbert’s telling. Dolores was just the shell, the vessel waiting to be filled. Humbert succeeded in hiding Dolores’s pain, brushing it aside like lint on his nicely pressed pants, while she climbed upon his lap. Each time I located a mention of her tears, anger, or resistance I marked the passage.

In the meantime, I did some online article searches on *Lolita* hoping to piece together where and how the whole “love” angle originated. Over 400 articles address Nabokov’s *Lolita*, and I spent days scrolling through abstracts to determine which needed printing (articles number in the thousands, but these were just my first searches). One long afternoon and two expensive black ink cartridges later, I decided to laser print the remaining articles from my jump drive at my campus office (free). Reading and scrolling onscreen is not my best option for engaging with information. I prefer paper copies, highlighted, chicken-scratched, pen-smudged, binder-bound data. Just grab a binder and

look for the right tab. It took weeks to review these articles, but eventually I knew enough to come up with some categories. Amazingly, these categories still hold up now. They are:

- Sociocultural beginnings (novel publication issues, early book reviews)
- Gender specific or feminist critical literary analyses
- Film reviews and analyses
- Popular visual culture representations
- Eroticized child-body
- My methods (qualitative, feminist, and visual)

Additionally, I have a large plastic container that holds all the visual data (magazine images, copies of art photographs, paper copies of digital Internet images) I've collected or had sent to me by others; peers, colleagues, parents, students, and anyone else who knows my topic and is kind enough to share. Four three-foot bookshelves hold my fat binders, collected books, and two film versions of *Lolita* (Kubrick, 1962, and Lyne, 1997). I affectionately call my office the Lolita Lair. All things Lolita are kept close, within an arm's length and a roll of my ergonomically designed chair. How and where I work is part of this story.

*Mother and Academic: From my candidacy exam journal*

*Day Two:*

*I get to work by 9:30 and wrap up at 5:30. It was almost like an actual workday, a 9-5 kind of pace. I feel mush-headed, though, and my eyes are dry and sand-papery. I think back to what I have accomplished, six more pages, and a whole lot of re-editing, moving passages around, and thinking about what it is I am learning about the research process as I write for my exam. I read the references of each article or chapter I am using and highlight articles that are cited often with my new favorite highlighter pen (retractable!). I add these to a running list of documents I will collect the next day. My original exam "question one" binder has doubled in size already. I worry that I will keep adding more*



*than I need and consider a cut-off number. That number is still undetermined, but at least I am thinking about limits. I manage to remember to back-up my exam and journal and vow to make a brightly colored sign to remind me each day. BACK UP EXAM!!*

*Day Three:*

*I have a sleepless night again, unnerved by the amount of time spent at my computer yesterday. My busy mind would not shut down, carving my sleep into 40-minute chunks. I sit today fueled by coffee, hazelnut flavored—a small treat for the researcher. My spouse is on the road, but both kids are home and are no longer playing by my exam rules. My son announces he has lost his driver's license, again (3<sup>rd</sup> time this year). I briefly wonder if he's running a fake ID scam. He interrupts me for money, of course, and then sends me looking for his birth certificate and social security card, apparently items only a uterus possessing person can locate. This takes some time and the next thing I know I'm sitting at the kitchen island paying bills before the mailman comes. I get back to my desk and start downloading articles from the list I made yesterday, only to be waylaid by other articles that could be useful for one of my other exam questions. It is now 12:45 p.m. and I have not had a bite to eat or written a single word for my exam. The phone rings and it is my sixteen-year-old daughter calling from the backyard where she is sitting out in the sun. Could I come talk with her? Boyfriend issues. I walk down to the back porch, listen with semi-genuine empathy, offer motherly advice, and then remind her I am supposed to be working on my exam. Have fun with that, she says.*

*Day Four:*

*This morning's entry will address "place," or more specifically how where I am writing plays into my process and product. My office is at the top of the stairs and connects to a large hall that all our bedrooms open to. The comings and goings of family life pass by, interrupt, and annoy me with frequency. My workspace is light-filled, usually organized, and white. For the purposes of writing my exam and dissertation, I recently replaced an attractive khaki slipper chair with a less attractive black industrial-like office chair. It swivels, glides on rollers over the hardwood floors, and has the ability to raise and lower. Art adorns the one expanse of open wall space, a three over three collection of treasured and framed images. White bookshelves line the wall behind me. I enjoy a lushly green backyard view from double windows over my desk; another window sits on my left between two over-stuffed, unorganized closets. Because the two closets are always closed, I can comfortably deny the mess within. Normally, visitors would say a compulsive neat freak occupies this space.*

*Not lately, however. My Mac laptop, also white, sits in the center of a maelstrom of documents, APA style manuals (yes, I have two), notepads, my "question one" binder, a stack of yellow Post-it notes and a large cup of lukewarm coffee. On the floor to my left sits a 16 x 16 inch wicker basket holding books related to research methodology. At eye level, directly behind me on the bookshelves, my collection of Lolita related books and movies. Above that sits four 3-inch binders filled with more data, each divided by already*

*determined subject areas. The bottom shelf holds a large plastic storage box dedicated to Lolita-collected images, newspaper clippings and other artifacts of popular culture. If my house were on fire, I'd grab that box and my jump drive. The rest I could replicate. It would suck, but I could locate most of my scholarly data. Right now a fire is the least of my issues. This unorganized mess needs to be dealt with.*

Two things have changed since I wrote my exam: the view is now semi-barren, trees lightly dusted with bright yellow maple leaves, and I have donated my tiny Mac laptop to my grateful daughter in favor of my new love, a 24 inch Mac desktop (and no, Apple is not subsidizing my research; I am truly nuts about my shiny, big tech toy). My bookshelves contain some new books related to qualitative methods, two on narrative inquiry specifically (Bruner, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Goodall, 2008). One, I remind myself, is due back to the OSU library soon. I should probably get cracking on that one; however, the 638 pages mock me at present. Another significant change in my work environment is the lack of kids milling about. During my summertime exam, with the ever-present crush of a ten-week deadline looming, my “home for the summer” kids were a major issue. Now, safely ensconced in fall, my days are relatively free of kid-produced interruptions. Unfortunately, the threat of a looming deadline is far more distant, and the notion of time is less crushing. I feel as if I am making progress, but am also toying with the idea of “fake” deadline goals to keep a certain amount of pressure nearby. A deadline, despite the darkly conceived word, does keep me moving along toward the finish line. I do have a self-imposed deadline, June of 2009, but in reality this dissertation will need to be completed far earlier for editing, committee reading, and the unavoidably scary oral defense. Now that I have officially increased my anxiety threefold, I press on.

## Section 2: Authority

### *Lolita* on a Timeline

I begin to answer my original inquiry, why is *Lolita* considered a “love” story, thanks to Dr. Christine Ballengee-Morris, in a class assignment through which I get to map out *Lolita* subjects from Nabokov to present day, or at least within the confines of a 15 page paper. I started with the early book reviews (Gordon, 1956; Girodias, 1957; Hicks, 1958; Hollander, 1956; Prescott, 1958, Trilling, 1958) and have since developed a much broader sense of how gender and sexual morality influences interpretations of *Lolita*. Because this is what I feel is the genesis of how *Lolita* is known in the sociocultural or tacit sense, I will devote a great deal of time to this section. First, some historical background helps to explain many of the obstacles the novel faced.

*Lolita's* birth was fraught with difficulties, but Nabokov remained committed to hearing her first breath. Nabokov tried to secure an American publisher for his manuscript as early as 1954. American publishers rejected Nabokov's novel, some sending scathing letters concerning his mental health, causing the author to consider using a pseudonym to protect his job as a professor at Cornell. Instead, Nabokov looked to Europe, but his novel was rejected there as well. Eventually, Olympia Press, a Parisian publisher of pornographic novels, agreed to release the novel in 1955. Nabokov, for his part, did not know what kinds of books Olympia usually published. The Green Traveler books, the name of Olympia's more prurient literature, referenced the color of the book covers and signified pornography to U.S. customs. The Traveler series books were regularly confiscated when brought into America (Appel, 1991; Vickers, 2008).

*Lolita* languished in Europe, selling only five thousand copies, until literary critic and writer Graham Greene proclaimed it one of the best novels of 1955 in *The London Sunday Times*. John Gordon, editor of *The Sunday Express*, responded to Greene's review, calling *Lolita* "sheer, unrestrained pornography" and the "filthiest book I have ever read" (Appel, 1991, p. 69). Subsequently, the novel was banned in the United Kingdom. Soon after, several other literary critics wrote favorably about the novel, agreeing with Greene, and declaring it literature, not pornography (Girodias, 1957; Hicks, 1958; Hollander, 1956), and the ban was lifted. Orville Prescott's 1958 review disagreed with the consensus, deeming *Lolita*, "highbrow pornography" (Prescott, 1958, p. 1).

Nabokov's book emerged in the United States in 1958, only a few years after the abduction of Sally Horner, a 15-year-old girl who was held captive by 52-year-old mechanic Frank LaSalle. Horner spent 21 months on the road as LaSalle's sex slave before escaping. Like Dolores, she was dead two years later. Newspaper accounts of Horner's ordeal were not salacious, but the public was fascinated by the story. Nabokov himself made notes about the case after it appeared in newspapers (Vickers, 2008). *Lolita*, published by Putnum, was an instant bestseller once it reached U.S. bookstores, and given the social context of the times it seemed predestined to succeed (Appel, 1991; Vickers, 2008).

The name *Lolita* first acculturated when Nabokov's novel appeared in reader's hands and became the label for a particular type of girl. *Lolita*'s precursor, however, arrived on the scene much earlier than Nabokov's novel in the form of beloved child star Shirley Temple. Graham Greene played a controversial, but significant role that foreground both Temple and Nabokov's place in sociocultural history. In 1937, Greene

reviewed nine-year-old Temple's movie *Wee Willie Winky* for entertainment weekly *Night and Day*, declaring, "Infancy with her is a disguise, her appeal is more secret and more adult. Already two years ago she was a fancy little piece...now in *Wee Willie Winky*, wearing short kilts, she is a complete totsy..." (cited in Wood, 1994, p. 32). Greene's description of Temple's appeal as "fancy little piece" and a "totsy" did not go unnoticed by the actress' employer, Twentieth Century-Fox, or her family. They sued Greene for libel and won (Vickers, 2008; Wood, 1994).

Libelous, but insightful, Greene merely reported on a formula Hollywood already knew as profitable. According to Bret Wood (1994), "carefully constructed representations of sexuality, particularly female...[were incarnated through] a masquerade of innocence" and were established as early as Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford (p. 32). Temple, age three when she started working in films, was encouraged to smile, wink, and shake her shoulders at the camera during her first screen test (Temple, cited in Wood, 1994, p. 33). Later, Temple wore black lingerie as she portrayed a baby-like version of a prostitute in *Polly Tix in Washington*.

Some of Temple's early films did stir controversy, especially during the Hays Production Code Administration.<sup>10</sup> Producers began to tone down the child-playing-at-adulthood theme and instead focused on innocence. Temple became the "post-Production Code sex kitten," bestowing affectionate, but desexualized hugs and kisses upon her adult leading men (Wood, 1994, p. 34). Greene described Temple as having far greater appeal with "middle-aged men and clergymen" than children (p. 34). While Temple can be

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<sup>10</sup> Will H. Hays, the first president of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association, set forth guidelines for what could be depicted in motion pictures. A Republican and former postmaster general, his rules were based in strict moral ideologies (Vickers, 2008, p.42).

credited with proving that female innocence combined with playful sexual undertones works well as a fetishized commodity, Nabokov's novel furthers the argument. Marianne Sinclair (1988) writes that Nabokov:

defined a myth: the nymphet. The nymphet had existed before *Lolita*, of course...but she had not yet been defined. She had not been identified, classified as a genre, as a literary, cultural, cinematic and sociological phenomenon, so instantly recognizable that *Lolita* came to life retrospectively as well as by anticipation. (p. 5)

If not for Greene, however, *Lolita* might not exist as a genre. Greene's thoughts on literary nymphets, eighteen years post-Temple, helped pave the way for the novel's successful 1958 American debut, but it was the literary reviews that followed which placed "love" into discussions about the novel. My analyses of *Lolita* reviews reveal many patterns and beliefs that exist in today's sociocultural understandings of *Lolita* myths. These authoritative voices speak a remarkably similar refrain when it comes to Dolores and Humbert—blame the girl.

Todd Bayma and Gary Fine's (1996) study of early critical literary reviews of *Lolita* found many of the same similarities I identify. Predominately male reviewers placed blame on *Lolita* (Dolores is rarely named), focusing alternately between her sexual past and lack of morals, both noted by Humbert and stated as fact by reviewers, rather than acknowledging her stepfather's role in her debasement. Howard Nemerov (1957) declares *Lolita* is, "thoroughly corrupted already"; Charles Rolo (1958) says she is, "utterly depraved"; while Dorothy Parker (1958), one of two female-authored reviews calls her "a dreadful creature, selfish, hard, vulgar and mean" (cited in Bayma & Fine, 1996, p. 170-171). Robertson Davies (1958) argues that *Lolita* is, "not the corruption of

an innocent child by a cunning adult, but the exploitation of a weak adult by a corrupt child” (Davies, *Saturday Night*, 1958). Lolita, thus described, is a very bad girl.

Through repetitive declarations about Lolita’s character, society forgets about twelve-year-old Dolores, her stepfather’s role in abducting, drugging and molesting her, and instead she is replaced by a cultural demon. Authoritative judgments rendered by early critical literary reviews “...lives on today in the stereotype that the reviewers’ Lolita has herself subsequently become” (Bayma & Fine, 1996, p. 174). The tones of early literary interpretations are precisely what Humbert (and Nabokov) rhetorically direct through his telling. Bayma and Fine (1996) assert the “image of the bad girl belonged to a cultural schema of beliefs and attitudes,” thereby contextualizing Lolita as deserving of her plight (p. 173):

Knowing Lolita through the image of the bad girl stereotype was not the only possible outcome of readers’ imaginative involvement with the narrative, but given the beliefs and anxieties prevalent at the time, it was not difficult for reviewers to arrive at this understanding of her character. (p. 175)

The idea of “deviant girlhood” is well established by Humbert, agreed to through literary interpretations, and discursively positioned to follow Lolita wherever she goes. In a sociocultural sense, she has yet to repair her reputation, and I believe this continues to silence Dolores and oppress girls. As Stuart Hall (2003) explains, cultural meanings have critical functions in our society, “they organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects” (p. 3). I am particularly interested in examining both influence and the “real effects” Lolita-like representations

have in our sociocultural world, but understanding more about the genesis of Lolita's reputation is critical as well. Who originally had authority over her story and how has her myth continued to grow?

*Academic:*

*I use the name Dolores whenever I discuss the young girl in Nabokov's novel. This is a purposeful act on my part. Because Dolores's voice is pushed out of Humbert's narrative I like to keep her at the forefront, reminding the reader that she came before Lolita. Dolores's voice, while muffled in most contexts, is underneath waiting to be excavated and remains a driving force in my investigation.*

#### Authorial and Authoritative Re-writings

**A**uthority over Dolores and Lolita is the main discursive theme threading through sociocultural contexts and the Lolita phenomenon. Nabokov, as the author of *Lolita*, exerts creative authority over Humbert and Dolores. Humbert, through whom the story is told, further complicates authorial control over how we come to know Dolores and her mythic embodiment as Lolita. Literary critics, predominantly male, heard Humbert's voice in the absence of Dolores's and declared the novel to be about love, rather than sex or perversion. Incest and pedophilia, both descriptors Humbert himself claims, were not given much attention in early reviews of the novel. Next, I examine the discursive shifts between Nabokov's novel and Lionel Trilling's (1958) often referred to review of *Lolita* in *Encounter*, and later the chorus of agreements that followed.



Trilling's (1958) eleven-page review, the longest and most thorough early review of *Lolita*, devotes three pages to rhetoric concerning the difference between passion-love and marital love before claiming Humbert and Lolita belong to the passion-love designation (p. 9-11). He defends the novel's "erotic charm," arguing that literature, which might promote arousal, is as important as any other emotion a writer intends a reader to feel. Trilling, clearly aroused by the novel's sexual theme, joins Humbert in listing all the literary couplings involving young girls as support for this relationship (p. 13). Lolita, he asserts, accepts Humbert's "sensuality with cool acquiescence, and even responds to it physically..." (p. 13). I immediately took issue with this statement in that it is in direct conflict with the novel. Humbert himself complains, "She was ready to turn away from it [sexual intercourse] with something akin to plain repulsion. Never did she vibrate under my touch..." (Nabokov, 1958, p.166). Passion-love, as Trilling calls it, only exists on Humbert's part, and passion-love for a child, if sexually enacted upon, is in my mind, pedophilia. Incest, as in Humbert's stepfather/guardian role, is left out of the review, with only a passing reference to natural paternal emotions of jealousy toward Dolores's same-age male suitors. When Trilling finally does acknowledge an act outside of what he has thus far deemed normal, he appears to blur his morality line, stating, "I was plainly not able to muster up the note of moral outrage," further explaining;

Perhaps his depravity is the easier to accept when we learn that he deals with a Lolita who is not innocent, and who seems to have very few emotions to be violated; I suppose we naturally incline to be lenient towards a rapist—legally and by intention H.H. is that—who eventually feels a deathless devotion to his victim. (Trilling, 1958, p. 14)

For me, Trilling's rhetoric, when examined closely, argues that violating a young girl is less troubling if she is not innocent, or if the violator cares for her. A few

paragraphs later, Trilling declares, “Lolita is about love...Lolita is not about sex, but about love. Almost every page sets forth some explicit erotic emotion or some overt erotic action and still it is not about sex. It is about love” (p.15). I believe this review, and others like it, work to absolve Humbert, dismiss the rape of a child, and proclaim love above all else. Also missing is any acknowledgment of the times Dolores is slapped or struck in anger by Humbert. Dolores, mentioned once by name in Trilling’s brief novel synopsis, is crushed out by this telling, leaving conniving seductress Lolita in her place.

*Academic:*

*Feminist critiques, attended to at length later, question Humbert’s vague descriptions concerning Dolores’s sexual experiences, his motives for painting her as already damaged. I also feel extreme agitation when reading Humbert’s view of what transpires in the privacy of their Enchanted Hunters hotel room. The “he said, she said” quality loses credibility when the “she” version is always his to tell. I have never been able to reconcile Humbert’s narrative with the absence of hearing Dolores’s feelings on the matter. In the whole of the narrative, however, there are examples of her non-acceptance of their relationship.*

#### Artifact Statement

**L**olita-inspired artifacts, collage or pastiche-like creations I made to accompany my dissertation, allow me to intergraphically<sup>11</sup> explore popular culture images of eroticized girls. My intent in making artifacts is to disrupt and play with Nabokov’s text, while countering many of the fetishized qualities found in current visual representations. I respond critically to the novel through arts-based inquiry and focus on

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<sup>11</sup> Intergraphicality refers to our ability to bring image references and associated meanings to a visual text. See Freedman (2003) for more on how we make conceptual links (p. 120-122).

some of the underlying aspects within the narrative. I acknowledge that my repurposed images problematically contain some of the erotic signifiers I wish to critique; however, I feel it is important to include them as examples of how girls are sexualized in our culture.

Each artifact is grounded by the novel's text, literally. I layer images over text scanned from the pages of *Lolita*. I cut words, move, and replace text. The butterfly, adult and nymph stage, are also recurrent themes. Nabokov, a butterfly collector, writes of the nymph or nymphet as the pupa, the child before the woman. The butterfly, elusive and short-lived, is a poignant metaphor for Dolores Haze. Nabokov, who alludes to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* throughout his novel, might be surprised to see how often I found connections to Alice and Dolores in current popular culture representations. Given the history of Carroll's alleged pedophilic photographs, I could not ignore the similarities to Humbert's obsession with young girls, or photographer Sally Mann's images of children.

Sepia in tone and bound by disintegrating cloth borders, my collages reflect the patina of time, as if a scrapbook of secret memories is found moldering in an attic trunk, brittle, faded, and old. Later, I discuss how the process of making my collages informed my dissertation and describe my personal reactions to the imagery I created.

*Artifact 1*

Nymph

*Shari L. Savage, 2008*

*The following artifact is inspired by Nabokov's butterfly motif and contains multiple positions in the cycle of the insect's life. The images are layered on the novel's text—just before Humbert liberates Dolores from summer camp, his mind and heart fluttering over various points of his evening plans for his stepdaughter at the Enchanted Hunter's hotel. While waiting in the camp office for Dolores, he mentions seeing a butterfly, still alive, pinned to the wall, underneath it the words "nature study."*

Vladimir Nabokov

By then it was six in the morning, and it suddenly occurred to me it might be a good thing to arrive at the camp earlier than I had said. From the night before I had still a hundred miles to go, and there would be more than that to the Hazy Hills and Brice-

Oh, let me... frail little sleeper

...they insisted on merciful night falling as soon as possible upon my im-  
kind of...  
give her... of some... telephone call to Ramsdale. However, at about 9:30 A.M. I attempted to start, I was confronted with a... I left...

Enchanted

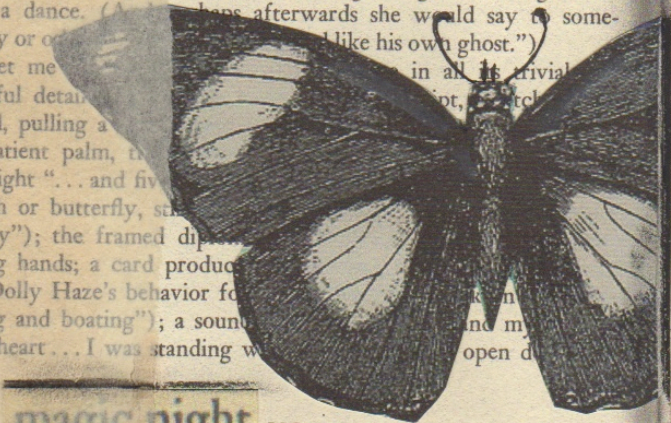
I reached my destination around half past two; parked my car in a pine... a green-shirted, redheaded impish lad stood throwing his shoes in sullen solitude; was laconically directed by him to an office in a stucco cottage; in a dying state, had to endure for several minutes the inquisitive commiseration of the camp matron, a sluttish worn out female with rusty hair. Dolly she said was all packed and ready to go. She knew her mother was not critically. Would Mr. Haze, I mean Mr. Hazebert, care to

and immature girl?

the cabins where the creature? Or visit the Lodge? Or should Charlie be sent over to fetch her? The girls were just finishing fixing the Dining Room for a dance. (And perhaps afterwards she would say to somebody or other "I like his own ghost.")

Let me... in all its trivial... fateful detail... in all its trivial... head, pulling a... impatient palm, the... a bright "... and five... moth or butterfly, still... study"); the framed dip... bling hands; a card produc... of Dolly Haze's behavior fo... ming and boating"); a sound... and my... ing heart... I was standing w... open d...

magic night 110



Artifact 1

In the four years that follow the *Lolita*'s debut in America, tacit knowledge regarding *Lolita* centers on her sexual manipulation of an older man. Dolores's age, twelve, and the detail that the older man is her stepfather has been distilled or set aside. I have argued that sociocultural understandings concerning Lolita's role in the novel's sexual relationship has been recast through a series of authoritative voices: Nabokov, Humbert, and male-authored early critical reviews. Continuing along my chronological thread, I move now to film director Stanley Kubrick, the next authoritative voice to further disrupt Dolores's story in his 1962 cinematic version of *Lolita*.

#### Authoritative Conversions

**N**abokov's novel moved from book form to screen in four years time. Kubrick asked Nabokov to write the screenplay, an adaptation of *Lolita* so lengthy it was estimated it would take seven hours to watch. Unpalatable subject matter, explicit sexual content, socially conservative morals, and censorship codes, all issues Nabokov originally dealt with, were now Kubrick's problems. In the end, Kubrick used very little of Nabokov's screenplay, but one major change was agreed on: Lolita cannot be twelve (Vickers, 2008; Watts, 2001). Reading about a twelve-year-old girl having sex with her stepfather was one thing, seeing it played out on the silver screen was, at the time, unimaginable (Appel, 1970, 1991).

Hollywood, still under the thumb of the Hays Production code, was an unlikely possibility, so Kubrick moved film production to England. Finding an actress to play Lolita, an older, less objectionable Lolita, proved difficult. Over 800 young actresses

were seen, and in spite of the numbers, a poor choice was made (Appel, 1970; Santas, 2000; Sinclair, 1988). Fifteen-year-old Sue Lyon was cast as Lolita, James Mason took on the role of Humbert, and Shelly Winters became the shrill Charlotte Haze. Movie reviews after the 1962 film release tend to focus on Lyon, repeatedly commenting on her womanly body, seductive mannerisms, and that she appears more starlet to leading man when seen with Mason. Any allusions to pedophilia or incest, both recurrent themes in the novel, are erased when seeing Lyon engage with Mason on screen, and replaced by a tease manipulating a dirty old man (Kauffman, 1962).

Kubrick's movie poster with its French caption is also mentioned in many reviews. Kubrick is specifically questioned by reviewers for using the caption, "How did they make a movie about *Lolita*?" which is then inevitably followed by the statement, "They didn't" (Croce, 1962; Crowther, 1962). The poster, a hazy close-up of Lolita peering over red heart-shaped sunglasses, features the now iconic red lips sucking on a red lollipop. Kubrick's poster image has become so recognizably connected to *Lolita* that Orion publishing chose to feature the poster image on the cover of a compilation of the most famous literary characters in contemporary fiction (Daniel, 2007). Later, director Adrian Lyne incorporates similar imagery in his 1997 version of *Lolita*.<sup>12</sup> For many, it is Kubrick's fully developed, manipulative version of Lolita that stands in for long-forgotten 12-year-old Dolores Haze. These particular deviations, the increase in her age and body maturity, from Nabokov's novel are some of the pivotal junctures in Dolores's former story.

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<sup>12</sup> Lyne's 1997 *Lolita* will be discussed and analyzed in Section 3.

Kubrick found himself handcuffed by the Hays Code, the actual content of the book, and further challenged by trying to tell a story no one believed could translate to film. He chose instead to focus on the satirical aspects of Nabokov's novel, leaving out the more salient themes, thereby reducing Humbert to a hapless clown. Gone is the clever prose, the single-minded obsession which Humbert propels forward on, and most important, Dolores Haze. Advancing Dolores's age from twelve to fifteen is significant in that it downgrades sexual perversion to unseemly behavior. Likewise, dropping the name Dolores and allowing all to address her primarily as Lolita, signifies a critical shift from the book. Humbert's use of the nymph name Lolita in place of Dolores is essential; it signifies his sexual authority over her. Without solipsizing Dolores from Lolita, Humbert is left to defend nothing. His impassioned justification for lusting after the mythic nymph fails when he pursues a fully sexualized teen whose name is not secret (Croce, 1962; Crowther, 1962).

The erotic, disturbingly forbidden qualities in the novel are nowhere to be found in Kubrick's version. It is devoid of any sexual interaction between Lolita and her stepfather, and therefore, devoid of much controversy. Yet, it cannot escape comparisons to the novel, and the anticipation Kubrick promises in the movie trailer (and on the poster) remains unfulfilled. It is unlikely for anyone to match Nabokov's command of the English language; his densely lyrical text does not transfer convincingly in Kubrick's use of voiceovers (Watts, 2001). When comparing the novel to the movie it inspired, and considering the moral principles of the times, Kubrick's attempt to capture *Lolita* reads as farce.

The cinematic *Lolita* is, however, how most people know Lolita, the girl. Through examining Nabokov's descriptions of Dolores Haze and Kubrick's representation, I begin to see how Lyon's physical characteristics re-inscribe and then obliterate the girl, thus establishing specific traits now culturally understood as Lolita-ish. First, Nabokov purposefully describes Dolores in pieces, carefully doling out parts instead of allowing her to be known in whole. The pieces, when joined, do not create anything like Lyon. When Humbert first spies his 12-year-old nymphet, he describes her as having, "frail, honey-hued shoulders...silky supple bare back...chestnut hair...puerile hips" (Nabokov, 1958, p. 39). Humbert, through several pages of longing, writes of "schoolgirl thighs...a stippled armpit...pale gray vacant eyes, five asymmetrical freckles on her bobbed nose...the blond down of her brown limbs...lips as red as licked red candy...gooseberry fuzz of her shin...monkeyish feet...my hot downy darling" (p.42-55). Her awkward limbs, juvenile speech, boyish clothes, breast buds, her "brown fragrance," and thin knobby wrists are also mentioned in his descriptions. Humbert, a self-admitted pedophile, is sexually drawn to young girls, desiring all the things that make a girl young. He despises womanly attributes (Nabokov, 1958, p. 76).

Kubrick's *Lolita* is everything Dolores is not. She is curvy, has breasts, and wears grown-up clothes, high heels and stockings, has styled blonde hair and walks like a woman, not a child. Her mannerisms are teenaged and aware. Occasionally, Kubrick throws in a nod to childhood, using bubble-gum blowing, candy hoarding, hula-hooping, tantrum-throwing episodes; however, these come off as a teen's childish behavior rather than the behavior of a child. In one scene, Lyon sucks greedily on a pop bottle, removing



potato chips from a bag with her tongue, and then inexplicably stops to stare seductively at her stepfather (Kubrick, 1962). It is the latter activity that rings true.

In Nabokov's novel, Humbert fixates on Dolores's socks, remarking often about where they lay, how soiled they are, when one is on and the other off, loose, cuffed, any manner of things to do with white bobby socks. In the novel references to socks serve as constant reminders of childhood, not so in the movie. In Kubrick's version, a soiled sock on the back of a chair is left for Charlotte to pick up and apologize for when giving Humbert his initial house tour. From then on socks are of little consequence. In fairness, Kubrick is dealing with a much older version of Lolita, and resorting to pigtails, bobby socks, and gingham frocks would have been silly and too suggestive of the controversial aspects of the novel. Nevertheless, he boldly asks, "How did they make a movie about Lolita?" and his critics (Croce, 1962; Crowther, 1962), myself included, conclude he did not. What he does is bring a visual embodiment of Lolita to the public, his altered version of Lolita. Between the visual representation and the filmic narrative, he creates new understandings about Lolita, many of which still resonate. Kubrick effectively reauthorizes Nabokov's Dolores.

#### Intertextual Authority

A four-year gap exists between Nabokov's 1958 novel and Kubrick's 1962 film adaptation. Another four years, and Lolita becomes a sociocultural phenomenon. Russell Trainer (1966) publishes a book entitled *The Lolita Complex*, a collection of psychiatric case studies concerning "man-child relationships." Trainer

describes Lolitas, Humberts, and nymphets, explaining that he will be using these names as representatives of specific categories (p. 10). Nabokov, Trainer reminds us, is credited for bringing these types of relationships to public awareness. He spends the first chapter detailing historical supportive evidence that man-child love is not new, a position Humbert has already argued (p. 11-25). Trainer's concern relates to what he sees as a sudden increase in abnormal sexual behavior among young girls and teens with older men. Humberts are not necessarily pedophiles, Trainer explains; most men caught in Lolita's web have good reason to be susceptible. His framing of guilt predominately faults Lolita, which further discredits Dolores's story.

Trainer's 1966 publication is hardcover: a black, leather-bound medical textbook-looking production.<sup>13</sup> It has the feel of authenticity and authority; other medical experts are liberally quoted in it. For my study I needed a copy of my own. I ordered a used copy, a 1967 paperback version,<sup>14</sup> through Amazon and was surprised when I saw it. In paperback form it has less authority; on the cover, a young, smiling girl peers up from within a hazy gold wheat field. The text at the bottom of the cover reads: "For adults only." Inside, the frontispiece states the book is "...a major work on sexual behavior and provides insight into an important social problem." Mr. Trainer is not a medical doctor or a Ph.D.; however, he asserts the book is for "concerned professionals and interested readers." He also claims the contributing factors to the Lolita complex are, "fatherlessness, the sexual influence of the mass media, mother persuasiveness, and the ambivalence of teen-age girls" (Trainer, 1967, p. i).

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<sup>13</sup> OSU's library copy had disappeared when I attempted to check it out again.

<sup>14</sup> I will be referring to Trainer's 1967 paperback version when citing page numbers.

In order to read his book, Trainer introduces the vocabulary needed. He states he is quoting Nabokov's terms; however, he seems to be taking liberties with Humbert's words, not Nabokov's, further adding to misconceptions surrounding Dolores's role in the novel. Instead, he compounds Kubrick's version:

- Lolita—The child seductress of the book. A nymphet. Usually of prepubescent age, sometimes in her teens.
- Humbert—The middle-aged lover of Lolita, the pursuer of child-love. To some reviewers and many psychiatrists, Humbert was a pedophile—a pervert with the sexual instinct that manifests itself in a compulsive urge toward children and young adolescents.
- Nymphet—A term used to identify that particular girl-child within the range of nine to fourteen found by Humbert to have a special, even if premature, glimmer of sexuality. Usually, nymphets are recognized best by Humberts. (Trainer, 1967, p. 10)

Trainer clarifies further, noting that Nabokov's Lolita was twelve, Humbert, 50, and in his book the terms "Lolita" and "nymphet," "should be taken to mean any girl of a very young age who is *given* [my emphasis] to sexual intercourse or its aberrations with men of an age at least equal to that of her father" (p. 10). Discursive shifts occur on this introductory page, placing guilt onto Dolores/Lolita. Additionally, Trainer is factually mistaken; Humbert is 37 at the start of the novel. Numerical age, a critical issue in many articles written about the novel (Bordo, 1998; Kauffman, 1989, Kennedy, 1997; Patnoe, 1995), is often incorrect for both characters. Misinformation, repeated as true, is part of the authoritative issues inherent to socio-cultural understandings and discursive interactions. I question the following Trainer statements and describe transformational language patterns.

First, Trainer's use of the word "given" implies complicity, negating several of the case studies that involve the act of forced incest or rape. Second, Trainer's use of the

word “seductress” is better suited to Kubrick’s *Lolita*, a version not referenced in Trainer’s book. Finally, “incest” is not included in these initial descriptions, and yet the book includes a chapter on fathers, stepfathers, and incest, the “springboard to Lolitaism” (p.7). The content of the book is salacious, gleefully told, and far more disturbing than Nabokov’s hotly contested novel. The following passage is an excerpt from a psychiatric case study in Trainer’s book describing an adult male, Compton, and an event that took place while babysitting his girlfriend’s young daughter, Sue:

The girl was propped up in front of the television set. She wore a thin, very frilly nightgown, through which Compton could see her awakening breasts, youthfully flat belly, and fragile thighs. Like a needle slipping to its magnet, Compton was drawn to the child...Sue must have also felt some rustle of excitement within her. She answered Compton’s every look, then boldly expressed her permission for what she had seen in his eyes. “You want to touch me don’t you...?” (Trainer, 1967, p. 84-85)

The use of the words “psychiatric case study” serves to dismiss any claims that the book is pornographic; rather it positions the book as science, based on research. However, I question the flowery, descriptive language Trainer employs to relate these case studies, which sound more like erotic prose than objective reporting.

Trainer uses scientific study to venerate his claims of authority, twisting Nabokov’s *Dolores* into a pathological version of Kubrick’s *Lolita*. If Humbert and Kubrick have not already placed guilt on the girl’s shoulders, then Trainer clearly does. He accomplishes this transformation by bringing in more authorities, as if to say, “If you don’t believe me, here are some other powerful voices in agreement.” For example, he quotes teachers, policemen, psychiatrists, social workers, and assistant prosecuting attorneys, who describe out of control predators bent on fulfilling their sexual needs. However, it is *Lolita*, not Humbert, they are describing (Trainer, 1967, p. 25-27). Trainer

cites Dr. Robert Drews, who explains that the Lolita complex stems from the Electra complex, “Lolitaism is largely one of father fixation, the basic urge within all girls to replace the mother and have sexual intercourse with the father” (p. 29). Broken households add to the problem, sending fatherless girls out into society seeking love from older men. And the Humberts?

Trainer’s research points back to Nabokov’s Humbert and his explanation or justification for nympholepsy; it’s more affliction than perversion. An early sexual experience becomes fetishized, in most cases having to do with a young girl of shared age, which is unfulfilled or interrupted. If this is not the case, then some type of sexual humiliation took place causing the man to seek young, inexperienced girls (p.70). He quotes Dr. Linus Foster, who declares, “Many cases of sexual relations between a very young girl and an older man are provoked by the girl. I have found this to be true in many pedophile-molester cases I have reviewed” (p. 34). Trainer’s text repeatedly blames the victim, while alternately espousing the ruination of men’s lives if exposed to predatory Lollitas. In describing Humberts, Trainer asserts, “Quite often it is a thinly-veiled line which separates the Humbert from the normal adult male. Perhaps the difference between them is as minute as the provocation and proximity of an attractive Lolita” (p. 57). The girl, in his equation, holds the power, and the adult male is powerless. It is Lolita society should fear, not Humbert.

In Trainer’s introduction, he explains that his book is an investigation, “it is not meant to condemn, excuse, or sensationalize, but only to evaluate through the use of case studies, professional opinions, police records, transcripts, and interviews...that we Americans may very well be preparing the way for the spread of Lolitaism” (p. 9).

However, Trainer's book fails to evaluate, rather it condemns Lolita, excuses Humbert, and sensationalizes sex with young girls. It is a tawdry read, 233 pages of titillating narrative hiding behind a scientific banner; his evaluation of the Lolita complex is five pages total. Advertising, sexual freedom, technology, and parental neglect are all listed as possible influences. Trainer even warns that in the future, middle-aged men will have longer sex-lives, almost as if he was predicting Viagra (p. 233-235).

In the final paragraph of his conclusion, Trainer writes a passage that seems to echo John Ray, Jr., Nabokov's fictive psychologist. Both warn of dangerous trends, the need for communication, and the responsibility of society to better future generations. While I agree with the message, I disagree with how they got to it. I wonder if those who read Trainer's "major work on sexual behavior" (cited on the back cover) bother to look at his evaluation of the problem. Instead, it calls to mind Wood (2003), quoting Trent, who says of Nabokov's text, "He did more than investigate the idea that pubescent girls can be sexually attractive, he proves it" (p. 188).

Authority over Dolores/Lolita's story is the main discursive practice during the time period between Nabokov's narrative, early critical literary reviews, Kubrick's retelling, and Trainer's text, *The Lolita Complex*. While Humbert tells a one-sided story about his time with Dolores, early critical literary reviews continue to re-characterize Dolores. Kubrick, under the guise of following Nabokov's screenplay, takes on another authoritative role. Dolores becomes Lolita; Lolita becomes the post-pubescent manipulator, sexually aggressive, and morally bankrupt. This new Lolita wields false innocence as a weapon, and her targets are quickly vanquished, destroyed, and left in ruins.

*Academic:*

*Trainer, and his “important” treatise (as cited on the cover of his book) on Lolitas, is not referenced anywhere else in my collected data, the one exception being a 1967 book review. Beigel writes in the Journal of Sex Research that Trainer’s classifications regarding Lolitas and Humberts “does not seem advisable to adopt as classification for use in textbooks” (p.246). I cannot ignore Trainer’s book, in that it bridges the novel to sociocultural shifts, while solidly placing Lolita in the predatory role—a role Humbert would eagerly agree justifies his actions.*

### Looking up Lolita

**D**uring the 1960s, Lolita found her way into dictionaries and educational texts used to define and explain words. If someone has not read *Lolita*, or seen either Kubrick’s (1962) or Lyne’s (1997) cinematic versions, dictionaries offer many definitions of the word. A sampling of current definitions follows:

- a precociously seductive girl. (Dictionary.com)
- a pubescent girl regarded as sexually desirable. (American Heritage)
- a sexually precocious girl; a sexually attractive young girl. (The Free Dictionary)
- a young girl who has a very sexual appearance or behaves in a very sexual way. (Cambridge)
- a young girl who is sexually alluring. (Wordnet.com)

An etymology of the word “Lolita” explains, “Title and name of character in the 1958 novel by Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) about a precocious schoolgirl seduced by an older man; by 1960 the name was in widespread figurative use”

(<http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/lolita>). The word “nymphet” is sometimes included as an alternative definition and uses the same language as Lolita definitions.

Sexuality or sexual behavior, precociousness, the desirability of young girls, and seduction are attributes present in these definitions. The descriptor “prepubescent” is

notably absent from all of these examples, as is the name Dolores. “Lolita,” as defined by educational authorities, has an agreed upon set of characteristics. Terms not included in these definitions are “controversial,” “stepdaughter,” “molestation,” “rape,” “incest,” “pedophilia,” “abduction;” or “twelve.”

The label “Lolita” is culturally interchangeable with any manner of behaviors by girls that are deemed inappropriate, immoral, manipulative, sexually motivated, or seductive. Discursively, Lolita is socioculturally understood through claims about her character and characteristics through repetitive pronouncements of guilt, accusations of predatory behavior, and claims of indiscriminate sexuality, which have become tacitly agreed upon notions that society continues to uphold. For example, a popular baby-name book (Lansky, 1998), which includes surveys of what people think of when they hear a particular name, includes the following write up for Lolita:

*Lolita*, a Spanish form of Lola; *Image*: People picture Lolita as an exotic, black, Hispanic, dark-haired girl young girl who is pretty, flamboyant, seductive, and promiscuous. (p. 92)

In a separate listing of descriptive traits associated with specific names, Lolita is the only name under the word “promiscuous,” a category found between the traits “prissy” and “proper” (p. 9). Lolita is also included in a list of “evil baby names” alongside Lucifer, Adolf, Judas, and Jezebel, a notorious grouping (<http://optimist.geekisp.com/samwise/category/evil-baby-names/>). The origin of the name Lolita is the Spanish derivative of “suffering,” a descriptor I find applicable considering Nabokov’s novel. Dolores originates from the word “sorrow.” Lolita has become



“a generic term for a sexually precocious young girl,” and disappeared from the top one thousand baby names in 1960, shortly after the Nabokov book was published

(<http://www.thinkbabynames.com/meaning/0/Lolita>).

Having knowledge of Nabokov’s book is not needed to develop an understanding of *Lolita* as evidenced by the following anecdote. Stephen Schiff, screenwriter for the 1997 film version of *Lolita*, was bemused by one woman’s response after a screening, “I guess you called her *Lolita* because she was really kind of a *Lolita*, huh?” (cited in Ramirez, 1998, p. 1). Whether it is literary, cinematic, or psychiatric, the *Lolita* phenomenon is culturally entrenched in popular culture texts. *Lolita*, as she is culturally known, remains ever present, while Dolores remains without agency.

### Literary Voices

And thereby we constitute the psychological and cultural reality in which the participants in history actually live. In the end, then, the narrative and the paradigmatic come to live side by side. All the more reason for us to move toward an understanding of what is involved in telling and understanding great stories, and how it is that stories create a reality of their own—in life as art.

Jerome Bruner, 1986, p. 43

**J**eremy Gilbert-Rolfe, an art critic, explains the problem with influential criticism:

It may be the case that your interpretation of the work is entirely wrong but conceivably so influential as to color the way in which the work is seen even by succeeding generations, so that you may in fact both be the one to recognize the importance of the work and the person responsible for consigning it to infinite misreading. (cited in Barrett, 2000, p. 3-4)

I use the previous quote because I think it captures what has happened to Dolores. Greene, Trilling, and Davies are three of the influential men who wrote about Nabokov's *Lolita* when it debuted. Todd Bayma and Gary Fine (1996), whose study surveyed early reviews of *Lolita*, also believe influential interpretations seem to forgive Humbert and blame Dolores, likening them to "those used by convicted rapists in order to view themselves as non-rapists, reviewers depicted Dolores Haze as both morally unworthy and at least partially responsible for her own victimization" (p. 167). Interpretations of *Lolita* set the stage for myth to begin its historical march toward sublimation. *Lolita*, a fictional story, is re-mastered and reiterated, resulting in myth, also a type of fictional story. Why does this matter? It matters because, as Barthes (1973) states, "We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature" (p. 129).

*Wife and Academic: From my dissertation journal*

*While trying to locate a lost reference, I veer off onto a series of Google links concerning Lolita. I find a site that has images of 128 Lolita book covers, which I print off and file away. The book covers have many common threads that I will analyze later. Somehow I end up on Amazon, ordering three new books dealing in some manner with the Lolita phenomenon. I feel as though my data will never stop growing, and the sheer numbers of stuff I have collected already overwhelms me. Either this dissertation will be the size of the New York City phone book, or I will have to gloss over or by-pass a lot of important info. I decide to stop for lunch and get some distance. An hour later I return and re-read what I have written today. Six hours later, my husband asks me to stop working for the night. I resist, explaining that writing doesn't always want to be stopped. These battles over time spent working and time spent with him are common, but if I haven't shut down my thoughts on what I'm doing or thinking about, they follow me to bed, troubling, arguing, and pleading to be reckoned with. Some good stuff has come to me during sleepless jags, but I still despise insomnia-plagued nights.*

The vast number of books, articles, and essays written about *Lolita* exemplifies an understanding of the interest in the subject. I have reviewed and included as many as I

have rejected, but have collected a comprehensive group, which I believe help to examine how the novel itself complicates meaning making. I looked at these literary analyses as a whole and then separated them according to gender. The topics in the literature by women are varied and show the depth of inquiry centered on the subject of *Lolita*, ranging from desire, pornography, incest, pedophilia, and rape, to the dangers of fiction (Bordo 1998, 1999, 2003; Bouchet, 2000; Kauffman, 1989; Kennedy, 1994; Megerle, 2002; Morrissey, 1992; Patnoe, 1995; Shelton, 1999).

Some of these writers look to explain how “Dolores” gets lost in the telling, but most wonder how her story moved from “miss to myth.” Susan Bordo (1998) writes of reading the novel, watching Kubrick’s (1962) version, and the more recent film (Lyne, 1997) as she describes her own interpretations over time. Elizabeth Patnoe (1995) suggests caution when teaching with the novel, describing how her female students struggle with male classmate’s opinions and interpretations. Gender differences play a significant role in meaning making when dealing with *Lolita*.

Male analyses (Goldman, 2004; Kennedy, 1997; McCracken, 2001; McNeely, 1989; Tweedie, 2000) include issues of reliability of the narrative/narrator, morality, deviance and normality, pornography, the dangers of fiction, misrepresentation, and pedophilia. While some topics are very much related to similar themes that women write about, others focus on male-centric issues concerning Dolores Haze and her sexual role. Some note, as Bordo (1998) does, that their own feelings regarding *Lolita* have changed over time. Male-authored criticisms are often times strongly influenced by the change of fatherhood. One word used repeatedly when writing about the novel *Lolita* and Dolores Haze is myth.

## The Women Speak

**E**lizabeth Patnoe (1995) asks, “Why didn’t the Lolita myth evolve in a way that more accurately reflects Nabokov’s Lolita? Why isn’t the definition of “Lolita” “a molested adolescent girl” instead of a “seductive” one?” She points first at Nabokov’s text, Humbert’s “skillful rhetoric,” and finally the readers’ misinterpretations. Lolita, then, according to Patnoe, is co-opted, “Lolita myths circulating in our culture...reading of evil Lolita and bad female sexuality...have become an ongoing and revealing cultural narrative, a myth” (p. 83). She argues for a reclaiming of the book, disrupting misogynist tellings in order to “counter the Lolita myth distortions and resist some of the cultural appropriations of female sexuality” (p. 85).

Patnoe does more than just question how Lolita’s myth proliferates, she goes on to explore how and why the novel continues to violate the voiceless, warning of the potential damage it may inflict. In a difficult, but vividly described passage, she relates the story of a group of colleagues discussing *Lolita*. One woman remains quiet during the discussion and then abruptly leaves. Another woman goes to see what is wrong and learns of the horrific rape her colleague endured as a nine year old by her father (p. 87). The passage describing the rape is too graphic for me to quote<sup>15</sup> here, and traumatizing to read. This is her point: *Lolita* is exactly the kind of book that traumatizes, especially for those who know and understand what Dolores is facing.

Patnoe also relates an exchange with a man regarding Nabokov’s narrative, who argues that Dolores was an experienced seductress and was not raped by Humbert. She

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<sup>15</sup> I could include it, as my advisor suggests I should, but I prefer not to. I am still disturbed by Patnoe’s graphic description.

replied, “If your daughter were Lolita, you’d call it rape” (p. 86). He agreed. Another colleague told Patnoe, “It’s just a book.” She reiterates it is not “just a book” for everyone. She wonders if this text is being “forced” upon students who can’t escape reliving painful past events, who sit listening as male classmates absolve Humbert of his crimes, or describe the novel’s erotic hold (p. 89). Patnoe questions pedagogical authority, reminding teachers of the minefield-like qualities a text like *Lolita* embodies, again describing female students who felt agitation when engaging with the novel (p. 91).

Patnoe ignores one other possibility, that of male students, specifically those who have been sexually molested, who could also find themselves unwillingly violated by the text. Two articles suggest Nabokov himself was a victim, having been sexually molested at age twelve by an uncle, suppositions the Nabokov family deny (Centerwall, 1990; Morgan, 2005<sup>16</sup>). It is Patnoe who is often cited by other feminists when discussing the pivotal “seduction” scene in which Humbert claims Dolores seduces him, primarily referring to her deconstruction of Humbert’s language and rhetorical narrative as an empowering alternative reading. Patnoe points out Humbert’s “double-speak,” his use of words that infer, or imply, such as “it” or “games” rather than clearly describing the events that may or may not have transpired (p. 18). Patnoe encourages a literal reading instead, suggesting the “games” Dolores has in mind are petting games, not intercourse (p. 21). Humbert’s telling, according to Patnoe, suggests a seduction; however, the outcome for Dolores is rape (p. 22).

Linda Kauffman (1989) is another writer who sets forth a strong rebuttal to predominant interpretations of *Lolita*. Her article explores whether there is a woman in

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<sup>16</sup> Morgan’s book has been criticized as inaccurate and near fiction (Holland-Batt, 2005); however, she is not alone in her argument that Nabokov may have been sexually molested.

the text and tries to locate where she might be. She reframes Trilling's (1958) words, restating, "Lolita is not about love, but about incest, which is betrayal of trust, a violation of love" (p. 131). She goes on to ask, "How have critics managed so consistently to confuse love with incest in the novel?" (p.131). For Kauffman it begins with the foreword and the fictional Ph.D. hired to edit Humbert's confessional diary. Child abuse is notably absent in this introduction to the narrative confession. She argues that feminist criticism should challenge the text by obliterating the father's body and focusing on the body of the child, Dolores. This is a difficult task given the tenor of Humbert's telling. Kauffman identifies a place in the text in which Humbert does describe Dolores's body in action and what she might be feeling, a passage layered in artistic language:

A slave child trying to climb a column of onyx...a fire opal dissolving in within a ripple-ringed pool, a last throb, a last dab of color, stinging red, smarting pink, a sigh, a wincing child. (Nabokov, 1958, p. 124)

*Academic and Mother:*

*This particular passage has always stuck with me from my very first reading. How elegantly Humbert diffuses the stark act of violating a child's body, reducing Dolores to a metaphor of jewels. A gift of some value. The price of taking her childhood. It is one of many disturbing passages, so beautifully structured they take several reads before revealing their monstrous truth.*

Kauffman translates: "Lolita is enslaved, bleeding, and in such pain she cannot sit because Humbert has torn something inside her," a plain-speaking alternative to the rapturous words Nabokov offers to describe the penetration of Dolores's body (p. 142). In her final paragraph she answers her original question, is there a woman in the text, with "no."

But there was a female, one whose body was the source of crimes and puns, framed unsettlingly between the horror of incest and aesthetic jouissance, between material reality and postrepresentation, between pathos and parody. Like Lolita's stillborn child, that body was not a woman's—it was a girl's. (Kauffman, 1989, p. 151)

*Stopping point:*

*It is here that I sent my first set of pages to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Barrett. As of this writing he is a visiting professor in Texas. I continue to journal while waiting for his reply.*

*Artifact 2*

Butterfly

*Shari L. Savage, 2008*

*The following artifact features altered text, cutting Nabokov's words from one page and then layering onto another. Tissue paper, watercolor, and black ink add more layers to diffuse the text.*

bags into the car, and then a funny thing happened. I do not know if in these tragic notes I have sufficiently stressed the peculiar "sending" effect that the writer's good looks—pseudo-Celtic, attractively simian, boyishly manly—had on women of every age and environment. Of course, such announcements made in the first person may sound ridiculous. But every once in a while I have to remind the reader of my appearance much as a professional novelist, who has given a character of his some mannerism or a dog, has to go on producing that dog or that manner. **Never** have I experienced such agony in the course of the book. There may be more to it in the present case. My gloomy good looks should be kept in the mind's eye if my story is to be properly understood. Pubescent Lotte swooned to Humbert's charm as she did to hiccuppy music; adult Lotte loved me with a mature, possessing passion that I now deplore and respect more than I care to see in Jean Farlow, who was thirty-one and absolutely neurotic. She so apparently developed a strong liking for me. She was **What special suspicion could I have?** burnt sienna complexion. Her eyes were like large crimson polyps, and when she closed her eyes in her barking laugh, she showed large dull teeth and pale gums.

Wildly, I pursued her either with my hands or billowing skirts with ballet slippers. I drank any strong liquor in any amount, had had two **I ripped** shirts, wrestled with wild animals, painted, as the reader knows, and was already nursing the cancer that was to kill me. I was and was hopelessly unattractive to me. Judge the scene when a few seconds before I left (she and I) in I pushed her head, with her always trembling fingers, into mine by the temples, and, tears in her bright blue eyes, attempted, unsuccessfully, to glue herself to my lips.

"Take care of yourself," she said. "Lose your daughter for me."

A clap of thunder reverberated throughout the house, and she added: **Impatient Humbert!**

"Perhaps, some day, some day, at a less miserable time, we may see each other again." (Jean, whatever, wherever you are, in



## Interlude

*Excerpts from my dissertation journal:*

*November 19, 2008*

*Today, I presented my research in an undergraduate class. Some of my GTA colleagues invite me each quarter to talk with their students. I don't like to generalize, but...the girls listen with rapt attention, gasping, nodding, asking questions, offering thoughts, sometimes expressing disgust at the whole "eroticizing girls" theme, while the boys lean back, cross their forearms and feign listening. Two slept openly. Today at least one boy joined in, asking several really insightful questions.*

*I try to walk a fine line, not wanting to distance the males or make them feel as if this is male bashing. I mention several times that my research acknowledges that the Lolita phenomenon is impacting their lives as well. Relationships with females, how they view and respond to media practices predicated on sexualizing girls, their own sisters, girlfriends, and others. This is not just a feminist centered topic. It is cultural, widespread, and normalized to the point we barely react to eroticized girl images. They exist, and that's just how it is. My mission, I explain, is to open as many eyes as possible to the ways in which these depictions, patterns, and roles, limit, oppress, and objectify.*

*I know that for some males in these classes the very images I include in my presentation are erotic for them. Perhaps they feel discomfort in learning that many of the representations are based on signifiers related to desire as projected by Humbert, a man who is aroused by girls ages nine to fourteen, and admits to his own pedophilic obsession with prepubescent bodies. Or perhaps they just think I'm another pissed off windbag feminist. One thing I do know is that girls don't sleep through my presentations. Dolores is front and center, in spirit and in my inquiry. By the time I leave, everyone, including the boys, knows her name. It's something, anyway.*

*November 24, 2008*

*It's a miserable gray, chilly wet day. My students trudged in loudly, boot dragging, damp smelling, and late. I, too, wrestled my way through campus bus crowds, hoping as each stop drew near more would get off. No one wants to be here today, including me. A warm, down-fluffed bed is preferable. We pushed on though; none too eager to head back out into the weather, and got our class projects done. On my way out of the building, I ran into my department Chair; she wondered if we could speak briefly. Sure, I replied, more curious than worried. She is hosting the program review visitors today, and I was certain she had little time for me, but I always love the chance to sit down with her.*

*Curiosity aside, she simply wanted to clear the air. She was concerned I felt she had been too hard on me during my exam. I reassured her that I had not felt that way at all. My*

*trepidation was self-inflicted. I explained that when I wrote in my exam diary that her question “bugged” me, it was because I was struggling with it. The question itself or her posing it is not at issue; my uneasiness with formulating an answer is what was bugging me. Still is. I asked for clarification, an arrow of assistance as to what I was missing. She explained that I am too one-sided, or impassioned, and need to consider the gray areas. Not every man is out to prey on little girls. She’s right. I need to consider how my passion and personal experiences keep blinders on my argument.*

*It only seems like the world is populated by Humberts. Every morning in the papers, on the local news, there is some kind of story related to a young girl being molested, or a hard drive full of images, a person in authority, something like that. I am attuned, as I should be. Just after I had lunch (left-over pork loin and parsnips, ala “Crock-pot”) I open up my latest issue of Chronicle of Higher Education to find an article about male professors being charged with sexual harassment and two recent suicides coming weeks after they were accused. Not every male professor harasses; most don’t. Sometimes it is a female professor. Most professors never find themselves accused. A few find themselves falsely accused, later exonerated, but feel their reputations are sullied, nonetheless.*

*I read the article on a tightrope of emotions. I will soon be a professor. I was sexually harassed by a professor and later by two employers. I dealt with what occurred by not dealing with it—avoidance being my preferred method of action (inaction). But in the grand narrative of my time in academia and the workplace, all it takes is a few bad experiences. My guard is up. My scale of justice should be heavily weighted toward non-harassment, but it is the actions of a few that tend to linger.*

*So why, then, am I unable to consider the gray areas? Also from the Chronicle, an article called “Humbert Humbert, the T.A.,” sent to me by a professor in another department who knows of my research. It’s anonymous, for good reason. The male T.A. writes of being sexually aroused by female students, fantasizing about them, and complaining about the lack of a dress code. How is he supposed to lecture on math when all he can see is Jennifer and her “...tiny shorts that reveal every inch of her golden-brown legs?” (p.1). I must admit I’ve never considered this particular issue or point of view until now. I’ve had girls come to class dressed in similarly described outfits, wholly unsuitable for the classroom and even the bars on Friday. Do I have the right to address it? Them? Is that even in any part of my job description? I see the young men nearby struggle to stay focused on our coursework. If a male instructor did intervene, mentioning her attire, is he more likely to be attacked for his actions? In the shoes of the other, I think I would refrain from saying anything at all, which in effect says it’s ok to attend class dressed like...like what?*

*Still, I haven’t dealt with the real issue. Why am I resistant to stepping out of my cocoon of righteousness? I read feminist works that rail, rant, declare, all the while brooking no offering of alternative readings. I honestly want to rant and rail at times, and when I do I usually delete or tone down what I have written the next day. It’s there, though, underneath. I am so invested in defending Dolores I mute any other narrative.*

*Back to Humbert the T.A., and the idea of defending his position. Yes, it must be difficult to be a heterosexual male in a highly sexualized culture. A media landscape populated with ripening youth and eroticized things to be gazed upon. I gaze, too; however, my reactions are markedly different. I am upset by how young, how objectified, how powerless, even lifeless, sexualized female images seem to be. I feel old. Sad. I see my daughter walking through that same world, being gazed upon. I see my son gazing, consuming, enjoying. I see my husband squirming when I remind him that he is gazing at someone else's daughter. We all look, process, make meaning, feel, and respond. It's the responding that worries me.*

***She looks like a bitch. She's a cock blocker. What a slut. Don't bother; she's just a tease.*** All phrases I've heard in my own home. In reference to, in order, a girl acting in charge, the overweight friend of the hot girl, a high-heel wearing short-skirted college student, and a smiling female peer. Courtesy of my son and his friends. Recently, my daughter casually mentioned some boys at school that have been bugging her. Why, I asked, what are they doing? "Oh, just being boys..." I pressed further, "In what way?" She sighed, dropped her overloaded backpack onto the kitchen floor, "Stuff like... 'Hey Callie, I beat off to your Facebook picture last night' ...stuff like that. I don't even have a Facebook" she exclaimed, "So he totally didn't whack off to my picture." Stunned, I stated what was obvious to me, "Cal...it's not that he did or didn't...it's that he thinks he can say that to you! Did you tell him how rude and inappropriate he is?" Eyes rolling, "Mom, chill...guys always talk like that." Not in my day, I responded. "Yeah, well...it's different now." And so it is.

*Why not? Everything in the teen boy's visual world says it's perfectly natural to treat girls as things, to gaze and respond, to feel they are allowed to use and consume. And they get away with it because girls live in the same visual world and are learning the same lessons. Frustrated with my daughter's lack of agency, I said, "Next time someone does that tell them to fuck off." Mouth open in disgust, she replied, "Right...then they'll say I'm a bitch." I refrained from telling her that bitch is preferable to slut, at least in the pecking order of things girls are labeled. I started emptying the dishwasher, clanging as I forcefully, angrily, removed the dishes. While I am pretty sure boys did masturbate to girls pictures in my high school, maybe even mine, they wouldn't brag about it in the hallway, loudly, between classes. I try to stand in as the other, grudgingly admitting that I have seen Facebook photos posted by my daughter's peers that do indeed invite the gaze, images posted to attract, display sexual aspects, and incite commentary. I closed the dishwasher and pushed my daughter's backpack under the island and out of the way. I would hate to be in high school now.*

*November 25, 2008*

*Amazon delivered a box of Lolita related goodies, including Gigi Durham's The Lolita Effect (2008). A professor at Iowa, Durham has written the kind of book I would like to have written. In other words, she beat me to it. Still, I have some important ideas to discuss and propose. I am going to delve into the precedents of the Lolita phenomena,*

while Durham is starting from the position of “Lolita is” - now how do we deal with it? I, too, will consider the “how do we deal with it” aspect; however, I am also interested in Art Education being one of the places to work on dealing. One crucial point Durham and I absolutely agree on is this—write so that your message is clearly articulated to a broad audience.

Durham’s book came to me days after my department Chair and I had our talk about my one-sided, heated take on my project. Her first sentence states, “The Lolita Effect begins with the premise that children are sexual beings” (p. 11), and I will need to take a similar stance on Dolores. Dolores was a sexual being. Dolores was developmentally beginning the process of puberty, expressing normal sexual aspects, exploring her own sexual agency. She may have engaged in sexual play, perhaps even intercourse with a boy her age at camp. Durham and I agree that nothing is wrong with Dolores or her healthy sexual development. Things shift, shatter, and inflict emotional, if not physical harm, when normal and healthy are upended. Dolores moves from the realm of normal and healthy when her 37-year-old stepfather begins to pursue her. Her normality vanishes as Humbert floats the supposition that Dolores is a demon child, abnormal in her nympholeptic ways. It is her sexuality that is evil, not his.

Durham argues there are five myths connected to The Lolita Effect, each working to perpetuate the girl as spectacle. She begins each chapter with a well-chosen quote from Nabokov’s *Lolita*. She ends each chapter with discussion points on what we can do as parents, teachers, and concerned citizens to foster conversation. Boys are often part of these discussion points, an area I need to address and acknowledge more than I have so far. Right now, I’m making my way through myth one. Her five myths and my myth arguments will work together, I think. Two other Amazon offerings await: Kilbourne & Levin’s (2008) *So Sexy So Soon*, and Lamb & Brown’s (2006) *Packaging Girlhood*. I am still waiting on another recent book called *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov’s Little Girl All Over Again*, by Graham Vickers. Thanksgiving break reading material. Not exactly Danielle Steele.

I am also working through Clandinin’s (2007) *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*—again. Taking notes, drawing out the places that most fit what I am trying to do or say. Because it seems incredibly open-ended, so difficult to map in any cartography I am familiar with, I keep trying to locate a position of absoluteness. Narrative inquiry is not about absolutes; it’s the opposite. I want to be the pin stuck firmly in a spot. You are here. I need solid footing and a clearly defined path. I am unlikely to find either. I make more notes, setting out some semblance of where I can move freely, navigating what can only be my particular way of travel. The map from here to there is creased, wrinkled with possibilities, marked with past visits, and in desperate need of a clear legend to refer to lost. Whether it is Dissertationland or Lolita-land, observation is my most finely tuned skill. Normally a shy, or reserved person, a descriptor many that know me would find incorrect, I grew up watching. I learn best by processing what is going on around me, paying attention to how others respond or react, and then making my own determination

*of what I should do (or not do). Maturity has taught me to become more outspoken, more social, and less shy. But before any of those socially conscripted traits come forward, I am watching.*

*December 1, 2008*

*Durham (2008) is not alone in arguing against sexualizing girls; Levin & Kilbourne also want to discuss the sexualization of childhood. In So Sexy, So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids (2008), the authors focus on the social and cultural contexts of highly adult sexual content bleeding down into younger and younger age-groups. Like Durham, they state up front that children are sexual beings and then let loose on the however's. I am beginning to see what it is I need to do. Ranting and raving is to be proceeded by a disclaimer. I get that kids are sexual beings, but...*

*Levin & Kilbourne's book is less about Lolita and more about the present climate of growing up in an overtly sexualized American culture. Vickers (2008), however, is keenly focused on Lolita in his new book Chasing Lolita. He, like me, is interested in how she came to her present day undeserved reputation, and uses a historical, but not linear narrative to discuss his findings. Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters From Marketers' Schemes, written by Lamb and Brown (2006), concerns how girls are targeted by advertisers who prepackage what it means to be a girl. Again, another theme I am looking at. Three of these four books begin by claiming the authors are not writing as academics, rather as women and mothers. What is troubling me at this time is that these four books are already doing much of what I have been doing all these months. They quote the same sources, argue many of my findings, and at times read as if they have stolen my previous scholarship. On the positive side, we are all working toward challenging and critiquing current sociocultural issues.*

*And, if only to make my dissertation worth continuing, I am planning to weave each thematic subject area into one interconnected and self-reflective treatise on Lolita, the girl, the myth, and the popular culture representation. I also take comfort in knowing that the major scholarship choices I found are considered important to these writers as well. I do have several articles I feel are critical to my study that these authors have not yet connected to. Beyond that I am buoyed by the fact that my topic is relevant, being talked about, and published. So, my contribution will likely be in connecting these themes, adding to the discussion, and creating spaces for art education and media literacy. I was on the right track all the while; however, so were at least four other writers.*

*December 3, 2008*

*A glitch. A time-sucking glitch. Dr. Barrett never received my first 76 pages via Fed Ex. I rush to my local mail services office and walk in to find the owner holding my returned Fed Ex envelope. Another 30-some bucks later it is on its way again, this time to the school offices at UNT. Fingers crossed it will arrive today. While I wait for his go ahead,*

*yes, you are on the right track; I busy myself with my student's final papers. The quarter is over and I see a large amount of uninterrupted time ahead for dissertating. Well, except that it is the Holidays and most if not all, of this season is on my shoulders. I bought X-mas cards today, started gathering photos of the kids, seemingly always present, and yet never captured together in one photo. I guess I will resort to the collaged patchwork print I have been using the last few years, a format brazenly copied by multiple friends since I debuted it.*

*I promised the family I would drag out some of the decorations later today. Christmas has never held the same magic since the kids hit middle school. Cash is King. Our tree looks pretty sad when all that is under its branches are flat gift card boxes or envelopes. God forbid we actually purchase an item they have not already seen or itemized in detail. And this year, with the depressed (and depressing) economy, we are preaching moderation, but not getting seriously heard. Despite the heavy burden of getting the Holidays under wraps, I am looking forward to time at my computer. I am hopeful I will get to re-engage at page 76 and not start over or do major shuffling or whatever other bad things could occur. You see, the more days I sit idling, the more unsure I am about what I have written so far. The more I am idling, the more I start to re-hash, re-imagine, and reinvent ways of writing through my data. In this sense, time is both an enemy and a creative force. To stop my mind from unraveling my current writing path, I decide to bake. It needs to be done, so I might as well do it. Biscotti, my only claim to baking fame, are my traditional gift to faculty, close friends, and Tony, my mailman.*

*December 15, 2008*

*I am becoming increasingly agitated about not writing. Writing is critical to my inquiry because it fixes, if only temporarily, how my thoughts compete. Committing words to paper allows reflexivity a field to move around on. As I re-engage with what has previously been written, I re-engage with thinking about my writing. Even if only a day has passed, I am invariably layering new thoughts on top, or weaving them into new strands of thoughts. This text, my dissertation in progress, is in constant flux. I wonder how distracting it would be to the reader if every time I re-read and edited or added text, it was delineated by a color change. I'll think on this for a bit before acting. I worry my text and artifacts are already too distracting.*

*It is almost as if I need to stop reading anything not already in my data. For example, today I received my weekly Chronicle of Higher Ed, and inside are three wonderful essays on Literacy Studies. As one of two visual literacy members of Literacy Studies grad seminar, I am drawn to many of the arguing factions in literary theory. Literacy Studies is currently located at the same juncture Art Education found itself many years ago: the canon versus—well, all the rest. Embedded in each of these essays are relevant connections to my research, narrative as inquiry, and “useful” texts versus “usable” texts—useful meaning important or academic, usable meaning texts that are accessible and/or relevant to future careers. Lately, everything I pick up I find myself tying to my project. I need academic blinders. I am like a draft horse plodding dutifully toward the*

*dissertation barn, and then suddenly I am pulling against the bit, straining to root around in the tall grass. A sharp crack of the whip is called for, a firm disciplinary reminder that I should stay focused and on task. So, accordingly, I return to my dissertation, going back to the beginning and revising once more, despite the fact that I have still not heard back from my advisor. It may well prove to be a futile exercise, but it is also a way to ensure my blinders are working.*

*December 21, 2008*

*I've been fairly delinquent at research writing. Christmas is upon us and I am fitfully unprepared. There are few things I hate more than last minute shoppers and crowds and yet I have spent the last two days crawling through overstuffed aisles and standing in ridiculously long lines. I did order and receive the book *The Lover* (1984) by M. Duras, recommended to me by Dr. Stout who thought the story line might offer some insights. I just started it and so far a 15-year-old girl is about to describe how she came to have an affair with an older man. Two things are very interesting from the start. First, the girl tells it in first person. Second, although it was first published as fiction, it has since been revealed that the author is the young girl in the story. The writing style is different and takes some getting used to.*

*I have decided to give myself a break and enjoy the holidays. I'll not obsess over what I am not getting done on my dissertation. It looks as though I will not be teaching next quarter and that will give me time to write like a full time writer, whatever that is. Days and days devoted to getting focused and productive. I look forward to it. I dread it. I am trying to slowly let my husband know all the dire stats on new hires at small liberal arts colleges during this economic crisis. Even Harvard, the most heavily endowed higher ed institution in the world, has suspended faculty searches. On the bright side I managed to get a Master's and a Ph.D. for free (or nearly free) and made a small profit, too. I may have to settle for being the most highly educated salesclerk at Talbot's. "My visual culture training tells me that cobalt is the best shade for you, Madame."*

*December 29, 2008*

*I am back at it, this time for real. I truly did stay in Holiday mode for eight days. I feel guilty now, but can't exactly take it back. I did engage in two activities that might qualify for being in the process of dissertation mode. First, I decided to try for the Manuel Barkan Dissertation Award, given to a post-candidacy but not yet finished dissertating graduate student whose work is promising. A self-nomination letter, a timeline to defense, and the first three chapters of my dissertation are due by January 31<sup>st</sup>. I wrote the letter and will be working toward getting something like 3 chapters done. The timeline, however, was the real eye opener. Yikes. Seeing it laid out, row after row of dates, deadlines, and application forms, was scary in every way possible. My goal, a June graduation, became undeniably real. Real, yes, but doable? My candidacy exam pressure returns. Eighteen timeline entries precede the June 14th graduation date. Only five are checked off as completed.*

*I am a wiggler. I fidget, move my legs with nervous energy. Other grad students who fidget know to sit next to me. Those who are distracted by a shaky table, sit away from us. Luckily for them, I am no longer a student and my rapidly moving leg is mine alone to endure. Right now, I am fidgeting near record pace. That dissertation timeline is posted near my desk, heavily weighing on my mind, but unable to press my legs into compliance.*

*The second activity was the building of an online blog for my dissertation journal. This is important to me because I resist impersonal communication. I'm not a fan of e-mail correspondence. I think Facebooking, Twittering and texting are sad replacements for real human interaction. I prefer voice, expression, and the ability to discern mood and acceptance through visual interaction. Journaling is one sided, but at least if I put it out there, others can read and post responses. Engaging in tech interaction pushes me out of my paradigms. It makes me think about opening my solitary process to a larger view and what that will feel like. It makes me consider what is private, or needs to remain sheltered. It requires me to acknowledge collaborative actions that might be critical to my thoughts and writings. It also helps me grow in my understanding of why people blog. While it seems brave to publish to the world, it also seems safe. Honesty at a distance. Hit delete and someone's critical or questioning response to your posting is gone. Most important, however, is my learning to build and create while navigating the software available to set up my blog space. I even figured out how to insert my artifacts and the reproduction quality is surprisingly good.*

*Academic:*

*I return now to my dissertation work. The preceding journal entries indicate how my personal life and academic life are rarely separate, even when I intend them to be. They also show how often my research follows me. Today is December 29, 2008.*

**P**atnoe (1995) and Kauffman (1989) criticize literary analyses that ignore Dolores, citing the lack of the victim's voice and the obliteration of her physicality. Dolores is not seen or heard. Jen Shelton (1999) acknowledges the lack of a corporal body, but further argues that Nabokov's novel works as an incest narrative. She explains: "Incest provides the mechanism through which Nabokov, his narrator, and readers can negotiate between contrary reading strategies" (p. 275). These contrary readings are moral or aesthetic, leaving the reader to choose morality or pleasure. My



reading of *Lolita* is certainly a moral and empathetic one, but it also is pleasurable in that I enjoy and admire Nabokov's writing style. Pleasure, if described as desire, is not part of my reading.

Shelton (1999) observes that actual incest narratives are loaded with patriarchal structure, while the child's telling is often "disadvantaged" in its ability to describe or name what has happened. Dolores can and does name her structural relationship with her stepfather as incest; however, she is disadvantaged in that she is also bound by the same structure. As Shelton reminds us, "Humbert is, structurally, her father, as he goes to great lengths to establish, telling her, in the hotel where he plans to drug and rape her, that for 'all practical purposes I am your father' "(p. 275). Once Dolores learns her mother is dead, Humbert's authority is not only strengthened, it is solidified. She simply has nowhere else to go.

Shelton disagrees with analyses that claim Dolores's voice is missing. Rather, she argues it is present but uncomfortable for readers to acknowledge. Nabokov, through Humbert, is able to direct readers away from the subtext, allowing the narrator to plead his case and insinuate Dolores's complicit acceptance. In Humbert's narrative the mythic girl Lolita is centralized and Dolores moves to the background, newly vanquished, her childhood and child's body is a distant thought. While Kauffman (1989) argues to bring attention to Dolores's absent voice and focus on her body, Marie Bouchet (2005) attends to Lolita as "an ambiguous object of desire," a series of metaphoric descriptors that fail to "fix the unfixable" nymphet (p. 101).

Bouchet's article title, "The Details of Desire: From Dolores on the Dotted Line to Dotted Dolores" is, however, the last time she refers to Dolores by name. Kauffman

and Shelton make a point of using Dolores's name, but Bouchet abruptly shifts to Lolita for the remainder. Perhaps this shift is in reference to Humbert's need to upgrade the prepubescent twelve-year-old Dolores to Lolita, his knowing and demonic nymphet. I recall that Humbert's most longing descriptions are about Dolores's body before he takes sexual possession. Whenever Humbert attempts to describe Dolores he offers hundreds of minute fragments, markers of desire that even when strung together leave an eroticized impression rather than an actual whole. In contrast, after they begin their sexual interactions, he describes her post pubertal changes in less than desirous terms, reminiscing in sensual detail of her younger, childlike form. In the following passage from the novel, Humbert mourns the loss of his nymphet's youth and innocence. It also contains an example of Dolores's rejection of Humbert's sexual needs, a one-sentence (in italics, my emphasis) glimpse of how she feels:

I perceived all at once with a sickening qualm how much she had changed since I first met her two years ago. *Tendresse?* [Nabokov's emphasis] Surely that was an exploded myth. She sat right in the focus of my incandescent anger. The fog of all lust had been swept away leaving nothing but this dreadful lucidity. Oh, she had changed! Her complexion was now that of any vulgar untidy highschool girl who applies shared cosmetics with grubby fingers to an unwashed face and does not mind what soiled texture, what pustulate epidermis comes in contact with her skin. *Its smooth tender bloom had been so lovely in former days, so bright with tears, when I used to roll, in play, her tousled head on my knee. A coarse flush had now replaced that innocent fluorescence.* (Nabokov, 1958, p. 204)

The post-pubescent Dolores has exploded the myth. "Sickening," "dreadful," "vulgar," "untidy," "grubby," "unwashed," "soiled," and "coarse" are used to describe the aging, maturing nymphet. Dolores is moving dangerously close to the limits of Humbert's nymphet boundaries, "the intangible island of entranced time where Lolita plays with her likes" (Nabokov, 1958, p. 17). Now he must look back, delight in the

“perilous magic” that once drove his obsession while denigrating what Dolores has become. Dolores, now abused enough to be hardened to Humbert’s sexual demands, is no longer “bright with tears,” of shame or resistance. Still, she is, as always, an aesthetic object, which exists because of Humbert’s fetishized details and eroticized body fragments.

Likewise, recalling Roland Barthes (1980), Bouchet posits *Lolita* is full of literary “punctums,” a word that refers to “the details that break the continuity of the background and directly reach the viewer/reader” (p. 109). These punctums occur with regularity; working toward helping Dolores cross into reality from text to textualized, or semiotized (Brooks, as cited in Bouchet, 2005, p. 110). It is here that Bouchet identifies an important moment in mythmaking, Dolores’s body as text; the nymphet becomes a semiotic signifier. Peter Brooks, again in Bouchet, observes:

What presides at the inscription and imprinting of bodies is, in the broadest sense, a set of desires: a desire that the body not be lost to meaning—that it be brought into the realm of the semiotic and the significant—and, underneath this, a desire for the body itself, an erotic longing to have or to be the body.  
(Brooks, cited in Bouchet, 2005, p. 110)

Bouchet describes two types of body signs: body marks such as moles, freckles, dimples; and markings on the body in the form of scars, scratches, bites or bruises (p. 110). For Bouchet, these serve to first make Dolores a readable text (or body as text), and secondarily, acknowledge her body as a real, changing, imprintable text. However, Dolores’s body markings, while critical to making the leap from page to the “realm of the semiotic” signifier, represent one aspect. Next, and more critical to my research, Bouchet introduces the idea of “Lolita-motifs,” descriptors with potent visual impact: white socks,

red apples, cherries, braids, and gingham frocks (p.112). Later, I argue these same motifs are remarkably intact and act as signifiers in current Lolita-like representations.

### Seducing the Reader

While Bouchet (2005) argues Dolores/Lolita's body reads as a semiotic text of desire while simultaneously keeping the girl fragmented, never seen as Barthes describes, "the total body" (p. 103), Patnoe (1995) asks how Dolores came to be known as a seductress rather than a victim. Kauffman (1989) and Shelton (1999) suggest incest frames *Lolita's* narrative structure. So, then, how is it Nabokov manages to seduce readers? How is it such difficult themes have produced more aesthetic interpretations than moral, empathetic readings? Brenda Megerle (2002) wonders too. She argues that Nabokov uses the same eroticism employed in pornographic fiction—tantalization—and this is what keeps the reader engaged in part one. Nabokov would agree with Megerle. Writing in the author's notes of *Lolita*, he admits that many people stop reading after part one, as did at least four of the publishers that initially rejected his novel (Nabokov, 1958, p.313).

Nabokov, in defending against charges of pornography, claims his novel fails to honor the narrative structure of pornography and instead titillates without offering release (p. 313). Part one seduces the reader, and then Humbert frustrates the reader by ignoring the details he's clung so obsessively to, the erotic thread that has been pulling us along. He wants the reader to believe that now, as he has captured his elusive nymphet, his descriptions of what, precisely, transpired are unimportant except that we understand

resolutely that it was she, not he, who did the seducing. Nabokov declares that the “bad reader” or the “childish reader” is left frustrated, but the aesthetic reader (good reader) isn’t fooled (Megerle, 2002, p. 341). How readers respond to Nabokov’s novel structure is the focus of many critical literary reviews (Kennedy, 1994; McNeely, 1989; Tweedie, 2000). Thought to be one of the main reasons some reviewers hear Humbert and ignore Dolores, *Lolita*’s narrative structure is argued to have contributed to her myth.

*Academic:*

*I wonder if I fall into the bad reader camp. I was frustrated at the end of part one but not from being titillated. Rather, I felt frustration over the lack of Dolores’s voice. I do find it amusing that Nabokov finds it necessary to disparage those who didn’t react to his narrative structure as he had intended.*

*I should also make clear that I do not think Lolita is pornography, or even pornographic. The novel is, however, disturbing, but beautiful at the same time. Like watching childbirth. Yuk, but wow, that’s amazing! Nabokov’s artistry in language is like a vividly colored butterfly flitting across your arm, landing, and then unexpectedly launching a venomous barb into your flesh.*

Colleen Kennedy (1994) asks why more feminists aren’t critiquing *Lolita*. While she acknowledges Kauffman’s 1989 critique, (and since then more women have questioned the text), Kennedy argues that feminist readings often fall prey to Nabokov’s instructions on how to read the narrative, believing the aesthetic view is the sophisticated view (p. 46). Instead, she draws attention to Susanne Kappeler’s (1986) book *The Pornography of Representation* and her claim that pornography and art have an important commonality, that of “desire for control, for self-determination” (p.47), which reminds me, in many ways, of Humbert and Dolores. Humbert seeks absolute control over

Dolores, and becomes increasingly frustrated by her attempts to grow up and out of reach, to leave her “island of entranced time” and him behind.

Kennedy, sarcastically using the term “proper” reader in place of bad or childish reader labels, argues that Nabokov assumes only the intelligent will realize that *Lolita* “is about art, not pedophilia” (p. 50). She ends her article with an anecdote that mirrors, but predates Patnoe’s “teaching *Lolita*” classroom warning. She describes her own experience with a female student, new to literature courses, who asked to be excused from what was to be a feminist-based critique of Nabokov’s *Lolita*:

Sexually abused as a child, she simply could not bear to hear the novel (not Humbert, but the novel) defended by other students. Incapable of being a proper reader in this circumstance, she achieved no sense of control; she felt victimized yet again. And naïve though she was by our standards, she saw immediately that to endorse *Lolita* is to endorse its contents. (Kennedy, 1994, p. 55)

Patnoe and Kennedy, both educators, call attention to the possible issues surrounding the teaching of *Lolita*. They do so with good reason, each relating personal exchanges with students. According to Durham (2008), it is estimated that one in four American girls have been sexually molested or abused, and boys are only slightly behind this percentage, making it highly probable that most classrooms could be seen as places of re-victimization (p. 12). I, too, must consider that when presenting my research to students, I might be contributing to someone’s pain. However, I am unlikely to be accused of endorsing *Lolita*’s contents and perhaps might empower someone to reclaim control over their story.

*Teacher:*

*I am brought back to my female student who wrote about her abuse at the hands of her uncle. While she may have inspired my eventual topic, unpinning my passion, I am suddenly grateful she was not subjected to my research. How do you preface a presentation with a disclaimer to warn victims and not draw attention to those who excuse themselves? Do I hope my critique will help them voice what they might not be able to say? I don't know. These are issues I am raising because of writing about Patnoe and Kennedy, as it occurs to me that I could be just as culpable.*

### The Men Speak

I begin with Eric Goldman (2004) because his approach to *Lolita* is unlike any of the others, and he challenges Kauffman's position that Dolores is an abused child. Writing in *Nabokov Studies* (yes, a journal exists just for Nabokov), Goldman calls attention to Dolores's sexuality, arguing that she is normal in her sexual development, not deviant as Humbert claims. He points to the Kinsey reports, released just before Nabokov's *Lolita*, and suggests that Nabokov had surely read these reports and was interested in questioning the "boundaries between sexual deviance and normality...exposing cultural myths" regarding female sexuality (p. 88).

Kauffman and other feminist critics, Goldman argues, confuse Humbert's vision of Dolores with Nabokov's, thereby missing the point that Dolores is sexual; however, I believe Goldman may be the one missing the point (p. 89). Kauffman isn't critical of Nabokov or Humbert's supposition that Dolores is sexually experienced or lacks morals; rather, she wonders why so many reviewers also cast her in a bad light, believing the words of a child rapist while ignoring the victim (Kauffman, 1989, p. 134). I think

Kauffman and I would both agree that Dolores's sexuality is normal, but not within the confines of her forced relations with her stepfather. Humbert sees that she has any sexual agency at all as abnormal.

It is Humbert, Goldman (2004) asserts, who condemns her first, essentially shattering the myth of the "unknowing" nymphet when he tells us she is already "debauched," bringing to mind Eve, "culpable for her fall from innocence, and her fall from sexual *ignorance* becomes a mark of innate depravity" (p. 88). According to Goldman, Humbert uses apples to serve as symbolic reminder of Dolores's fall from grace, a motif reoccurring throughout the story in various contexts. For Humbert, Dolores is the forbidden fruit; a societal taboo, he argues, that is a modern and contrived convention, and yet it is the possibility that she is sexually awakened by an age-mate that bothers him most. The mythic nymphet, bound by her "island of entranced time," ceases to exist if she is already awakened through a furtive camp experience, rather than being initiated into the special realm Humbert has planned.

Goldman asks Kauffman to reconsider Nabokov's *Lolita*, to see it as feminist rather than misogynist because Dolores, in the end, is depicted as normal, a pregnant "quintessential American housewife... living in an American suburb," who, like many other American housewives, has a sexual past (p.100). I disagree with Goldman's description, and would remind him that Dolores is seventeen, lives at the end of a muddy road in a "clapboard shack," and is last seen accepting money from her stepfather abuser to help finance the upcoming arrival of her baby (Nabokov, 1958, p. 269). She simply had no one else to go to. Normal? Suburban? Dolores might be described as a survivor, and she is, but only for few more months.



Timothy McCracken (2001) gives a name to the kind of criticism Kauffman, Patnoe, and other feminists use to theorize about *Lolita*: Lo-centric (p. 134). Lo-centric readings work to keep Dolores at the center, not Humbert. By concentrating on Dolores's absences, her muted voice, the glimpses of resistance, anger and pain, Lo-centric critiques conjure her into flesh and blood. Feminist critics can bring Dolores to the forefront, as I have tried to in this dissertation; but, as McCracken reminds us, while criticism can "contest, negotiate, rethink, and reframe, it cannot rewrite *Lolita*" (p. 134). Next, he introduces the idea of Helene Cixous's "white ink revisions," exploring several texts he identifies as examples that serve to privilege the abused's emotions in ways that *Lolita* failed to (p. 134). White ink retellings feature re-interpretations of male-authored texts through a feminist lens. McCracken names Allison's (1992) *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Prager's (1999) *Roger Fishbite*, and Morrison's (1994) *The Bluest Eye* as *Lolita* counter narratives—white ink Dolores' in which "the object talks back" (p.137).

Of these books, Prager's novel is the only one that directly acknowledges *Lolita* as inspiration; however, in all of these examples the father or stepfather is the abuser. In each case, McCracken emphasizes, sexual engagements with the adult abuser are graphically described, difficult to read, and Lo-centric in delivery. In these tellings the girl is undeniably present, painfully aware of the actions forced upon her body, and spiritually defeated. Witnessed from Dolores's perspective, McCracken asserts, any notion of romance or affection Humbert might claim is indefensible (p. 139). Had Dolores been allowed to "talk back," I think it's unlikely early literary reviews of *Lolita* could have pronounced the novel a love story.

A text not referenced in McCracken's list, Kim Morrissey's (1992) *Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita*, is the most "white ink" telling I have found. Written in Dolores's voice, an "object talking back" to anyone who dares read her diary, Morrissey offers an unadulterated and at times, X-rated response to Humbert. An excerpt from Morrissey's<sup>17</sup> text:

I am the book of Dolores B. Haze  
otherwise known as Dolly  
(sometimes as Lo) age twelve  
and almost a quarter

I come with a curse

and my pages  
are private

if you read me, be warned

I am the Book of Dolores  
beware:

put me back in my box  
and be happy

*Artifact 3*

Broken

*Shari L. Savage, 2008*

*Morrissey's text becomes increasingly graphic as Dolores's language quickly moves from the world of childhood. Describing the very adult ways her body is being used in words that cannot be Humbertized into prose, she sees herself reflected in a shattered mirror. Her childhood irretrievably broken, the "doomed child" speaks directly to the man responsible, "The word is incest." In naming their relationship, Dolores gains a small bit of agency. In the following artifact, I explore Morrissey's poetry and Nabokov's text using an image of underage model Ali Michael from the controversial New York Times fashion supplement "T" (Holiday edition, 2007). Her photos and the resulting controversy is addressed later in this dissertation.*

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<sup>17</sup> From the front pages of Morrissey, 1992, p. 3.



Trevor McNeely (1989) seeks to view *Lolita* as an elegant riddle, a riddle Nabokov has so cleverly constructed that critics have continued to chase down the same tired themes. Introducing yet another moniker for the reader, this time referring to Nabokov's use in the author's notes of *Lolita* of the "contemptibly naïve" general reader, McNeely posits Nabokov not only fools the reader into siding with Humbert, he has also tricked the scholar (p. 185). Nabokov, he asserts, is laughing from the grave as literary critics foam at the mouth, spewing symbols and embarking on allegorical scavenger hunts. The point of *Lolita* is not found within the bickering factions of criticism, McNeely claims, rather it is that Nabokov is making a point—style can do anything:

The subject of the novel, the sexual slavery and abuse of a twelve-year-old orphan girl by a mature and diabolically clever man, who continues his abuse until the girl finally escapes him into the arms of an even more perverted second man, and for which not a single word of regret or remorse is once expressed, is an integral, indeed *the* essential element giving the riddle its focus and point. The subject is deliberately chosen as being of all human activities the most universally despised...pedophilia. (McNeely, 1989, p. 185)

McNeely suggests Nabokov has managed to write in a style that not only masks the abhorrent, it seemingly supports it to the extent that literary critics and general readers alike are willing to absolve Humbert, invalidate Dolores, and denigrate Lolita. Adding to Nabokov's supposed literary joke is the author's notes he includes at the close of the novel, which mirror the fictive Foreword, each arguing against a moral reading, or as Kauffman observes, an instructive on how to read the novel (p. 188). Within McNeely's argument, I find critical connections to the current practice of eroticizing girls in visual culture. Repetitive images of sexualized girls, now normalized through their proliferation,

have in effect given a cultural instructive on reading Lolita-like representations in popular culture. Mainstream society views Lolita-like representations as instructed by our cultural understandings of her negative reputation.

Later, McNeely (1989) points out the similarities between Nabokov's tale and Lewis Carroll's 1886 book *Alice in Wonderland*. Carroll, who liked to take semi-nude or nude photographs of little girls, used the name Charles Dodgson to remain separate from his writer persona. McNeely likens Dodgson's photographs of semi-clothed or nude girls to Humbert's attempts to capture the essence of his elusive nymphet, in that the photographs fix "once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (Nabokov, 1958, p.134). *Lolita*, McNeely argues, is Dodgson's version of *Alice in Wonderland*, "if Dodgson would have lived 100 years later..." (p. 197).

Nabokov does make use of *Alice in Wonderland* motifs in his novel, playing on words—a breeze from wonderland (Nabokov, 1958, p. 131), or "she had entered my world, umber and black Humbertland" (Nabokov, 1958, p. 166). Nabokov, according to Alfred Appel (1991), referred to Carroll as "Lewis Carroll Carroll...because he was the first Humbert Humbert" (p. 381). Socioculturally, both Nabokov and Carroll are rumored to have been pedophiles, or at least enamored with young girls (Centerwall, 1990), but these accusations have not been proven (Holland-Batt, 2005). Commonalties between Carroll and Nabokov are more likely to be found in their enjoyment of linguistic riddles (McNeely, 1989, p. 197), rather than pedophilia.

Briefly, McNeely touches on the very fringes of the "dangers of fiction" viewpoint, essentially circling back to Kauffman and Patnoe, when he observes that those who live as Humbert does, "could not ask for more eloquent boosters and friends than

those professors who praise *Lolita* as a great work of literature, in the naïve belief that they can somehow do this without necessarily supporting pedophile rights at the same time” (p. 192). Thomas Kennedy (1997), however, takes a more direct approach, describing fictional works that can and do inflict “soul damage” when read (p. 119).

In his essay reflecting on *Lolita*'s fortieth anniversary, Kennedy takes a socio-historical journey regarding his own interpretations of *Lolita*. He begins by relating a story about an acquaintance, another writer, who has asked him to read a manuscript. He agrees; and when opening the package, finds a rejection letter on top, a letter that counsels the manuscript writer to reconsider his work. Curious, Kennedy begins to read. The main character is a child pornographer, and although he finds it well written and imaginative, he reaches a scene so heinous he feels by continuing he might suffer “soul damage” (p. 120).

Kennedy sends the manuscript back, simply noting that the subject matter was not for him. Incensed, the writer called up the reader, chastising him for his moralistic take, reminding him that the context, Copenhagen at a time when child pornography was legal, should be considered. Undeterred, Kennedy repeats his distaste for the book. Have you not read Nabokov? Kennedy admits he has not. The author continues to argue, telling Kennedy something about child pornography he wishes he had never heard—that much of the point of it is to see tears (p. 123). Kennedy ends the call.

Soon, Kennedy picks up the book *Lolita*, with the same up-the-skirt cover I own, and begins to read it, but not because of his acquaintance's question. Kennedy's decision to read the book is fueled by colleagues he knows that think highly of Nabokov's novel. He admits being engaged in the narrative, “delighted and fascinated” by Nabokov's

language, until it begins to bother him—a “moral nagging” weighing him down. He is also bothered by his own reactions, unsophisticated by his colleague’s standards, and wonders if he is missing something. As a father of two young children, Kennedy wrestles with critical analyses that find greatness in the book, but ignore the willful hurting of a child (p. 127).

Kennedy asks a series of questions about Nabokov’s intentions, while reminding us that Humbert is only a character, “and a character is words and only words. As Aristotle observed, the word ‘dog’ does not bite...what does bite is that in the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, Eastern Europe, everywhere, grown men pay money to abuse children sexually” (p. 128). In attempting to connect the two ideas, Kennedy asks, “Why do we embrace certain cultural artifacts? You are what you eat. To what extent are you, or do you become, what you read? (p. 130). In the end, he gives no answers to his rhetorical line of questions, and instead poses two more: “I wonder if *Lolita* is popular for the wrong reasons? I wonder, in fact, if it is even great?” (p. 130).

James Tweedie (2000) points out that *Lolita* “entered the national mythology” because of both laudatory and dismissive reviews, simply by creating a controversy. The resulting controversy helped readers and non-readers of the novel come to preconceived beliefs about *Lolita*. Tweedie labels yet another reader typology; this time the “naïve” reader (p. 150). Tweedie agrees with analyses that suggest Nabokov’s foreword and author’s notes have much to do with instructing readers on how to interpret the novel, assuring that “Dolores Haze becomes a footnote to a case study in sexual deviance or a conceit for aesthetic pursuits. *Lolita* has become an enduring cultural phenomenon” (p. 152). *Lolita*, he tells us, is a book that needs to be read more than once because it “is a

qualitatively different book, not only for the story remembered but also for the knowledge newly revealed” (p. 158). As support of his argument he cites Elizabeth Janeway’s 1958 review, one of two female literary criticisms at the time, who declares *Lolita* “one of the funniest books I’d ever come on...the second time I read it...I thought it was one of the saddest” (p. 158). I agree with Tweedie that *Lolita* requires multiple readings, having returned to the text many times, nearly daily as I write this dissertation, it never fails to reveal something new. I also agree with Janeway that parts of *Lolita* are laugh out loud funny, especially Humbert’s comical attempts to attract Dolores, but mostly it is sad.

A re-reading of *Lolita* clarifies Nabokov’s narrative, allowing the veil of Humbert’s one-sided telling to lift, if only to glimpse tiny cracks in his story. The blink or you’ll miss it moments, “eyes bright with tears,” her “sobs in the night—every night” skitter out briefly into consciousness. In these quickly worded passages, Dolores emerges, a shadow figure constantly replaced by her more important signifier, Lolita. “Lolita is...not only a girl, a fantasy, and a book, it is the constitutive element of all three: a word” (Bullock, cited in Tweedie, 2000, p. 168). A word, I argue, that has a connotative bite—recognition of what Lolita represents, a bad girl who does bad things.

The final analyses in this section come from Susan Bordo (1998; 1999). She offers intertextual readings of *Lolita*, from novel to film to novel again, through the filter of time. She admits to picking up *Lolita* at age fourteen to look for the “dirty” parts, giving up quickly because of the dense language. Next, she watches Kubrick’s 1962 adaptation, a visual narrative that leaves her with a negative understanding of what a Lolita is. Much later, after becoming a mother, professor, and writer concerned with



feminist issues, she approaches the book again. This time she cries (p. 299). In 1998 Bordo reviewed the most recent attempt at capturing *Lolita*, director Adrian Lyne's 1997 film adaptation of the same name. In theorizing about Lolita's transformation, the move from 12-year-old incest victim to seductress, Bordo notes that Nabokov was "uncannily prescient in giving Humbert a taste for undeveloped, coltish beauty, which is hardly an eccentricity anymore" given visual culture's archetype (p. B7). Bordo questions how reviewers could declare Lyne's version "a lavishly faithful production," or "almost debilitatingly loyal to Nabokov's novel" (p. B7). Had they actually read the book, she wondered, knowing how often Lyne's movie deviates from the book. Or had their memories been intertwined over time, as hers once had, mixing film with novel and adding tacit knowledge? Bordo's essay helps me understand how culture breeds new meanings.

In the years since *Lolita* first appeared in American culture, multiple authorities have controlled, altered, or re-represented who and what Lolita is. Lyne's 1997 directorial viewpoint (analyzed in detail later) is perhaps the most powerful shift because unlike Kubrick's film, which did not depict any sexual interactions, this one does. Without alluding to Humbert's self-serving version of his relationship with his stepdaughter, their sexual engagements are contextually unfixed, and in this case, complete new fiction. That this *Lolita* is seen enjoying being raped, even climaxing, delivers the most damaging blow to Dolores's reputation—she likes it.

Bordo (1998) introduces the idea of the eroticized child as an image remarkably commonplace in popular visual culture, a representation that goes beyond evoking desire in males, and simultaneously evokes discontent in females:

What Nabokov could not foresee, before the empire of mass images had colonized our imaginations, was that the undeveloped female body that he presented as emblematic of the nymphet would become a dangerous obsession for young girls, too. Many young girls today are as disgusted as Humbert by the spectacle of their bodies plumping out into womanhood, are as disturbed by their own hungers and desires (for sex, for comfort, for food) as Humbert was of the adult woman's needs. They find the skinny bodies of the models compelling for the same casual, desireless sex appeal that Humbert found entrancing in *Lolita*. (Bordo, 1998, p. B7)

Bordo's interests regarding female eating disorders underscore her claims; however, she may have been forecasting one of several trends found in current interdisciplinary research studies (APA, 2007; Durham, 2008; Keltner, 2008; Puhl & Boland; 2001). A more fully described discussion about the path of interdisciplinary research and *Lolita*-like representations is attended to later in this dissertation.

#### Common Ground Criticisms

In synthesizing critical literary reviews of *Lolita*, I find general consensus centers on how the structure of the novel effectively keeps Dolores in the margins. While many critics disagree on how or why the book does this, as presented in the previous section, empathy for Dolores is not part of Nabokov's overall intent. Readers who resist Nabokov's and Humbert's instructives on how to "read" the book come away with one way of interpreting, while those who comply have yet another understanding. Gender, sexual experience, morality and values, can also tip the scales when it comes to judging *Lolita*. Secondary readings bring additional views. Multiple engagements, either textual or visual, offer further understandings. Time and context also alter perspectives.

*Lolita*, in whatever form, is a narrative that keeps people talking, debating, criticizing, condemning, and validating. Dolores's place in that conversation varies. Vulgar, ordinary, sexually manipulative Lolita, who seems to be the more recognizable of the two girls, is a mythic girl with a mythically loaded reputation. The particulars of this mythic girl, and the guilt saddled reputation she carries, are present in current visual representations. Lolita-like representations in popular visual culture are the next part of my inquiry.

### Section 3: Lolita Representations

#### Representing Lolita

“Lolitas” are not born...but fabricated by male desire.  
Timothy McCracken<sup>18</sup>

**T**he concept of ‘representation’ is critical to understanding how cultures make meaning. Words and images, which stand for or represent things, produce meaning and understanding through socio-cultural exchanges (Hall, 2003, p. 15).

A representation describes or depicts something, but it can also symbolize something.

Stuart Hall (2003) suggests there are two systems involved in representation:

First, there is the ‘system’ by which all sorts of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts or *mental representations* which we carry around in our heads. Without them we could not interpret the world meaningfully at all...Language is therefore the second system...(p. 17-18)

Culture can then be thought of as the sharing of conceptual maps; language allows us to negotiate meaning. Hall uses the word “language” in a broad sense, in that words,

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<sup>18</sup> McCracken, 2001, p. 130.

sounds, and images can all be part of the construction of meaning, and these are called signs. Things, concepts, and signs together produce meaning, and the process “linking these three elements is what we call ‘representation’ ”(p. 19). In this sense, Lolita-like representations work as a system of signs, in this case “iconic” signs with tacit shared ideas concerning what the images mean or convey (Danesi, 2007; Hall, 2003).

Theories of representation include reflective or mirror like; intentional or author imposed; and finally, constructionist or socially communicated or signified. Ferdinand Saussure, along with Charles Peirce, is credited with bringing the semiotic approach to thinking about images (Danesi, 2007, p.10). Semiotics refers to a system of signs that communicate meaning (Hall, 2003, p. 31). The semiotic formula adds the form and the concept associated with the form, which then equals the meanings. The parts of his formula are called the sign, the signifier and the signified. Central to this idea is that meaning is arbitrary and contextually changeable—socially, historically, and culturally shifting throughout time. Hall states: “This opens representation to the constant ‘play’ or slippage of meaning, to the constant production of new meanings, new interpretations” (p. 32). Interpretation becomes the exchange between the writer and the reader, or the artist and the viewer, thus producing meaning.

Roland Barthes (1972) marries semiotics to popular culture, introducing the idea that visual texts can be read or deconstructed using two concepts: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to a basic and neutral description of an image, while connotation refers to what the image implies or conveys (Hall, 2003, p. 28). What an image implies carries a message. But an image or representation may not mean the same

thing to everyone; so for a message to convey or persuade consistently, it needs myth.

Barthes (1973) offers the following description on how myth works:

Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all history. In it history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out. The master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for me to do is to enjoy the beautiful object without wondering where it comes from... (p. 151)

Furthermore, Barthes asks, “What is myth today?” He answers, “Myth is a type of speech” (p. 109). Myth, according to Barthes, is simply a method of communication that speaks a message. It is not about the object; it is about the meaning we assign to the object. Meaning, Barthes observes, is first negotiated through concepts or qualities, “a chain of causes and effects, motives and intentions” through which a “whole new history is...implanted in the myth” (p. 119). The motives and intentions behind a representation involve questions of power, and Michel Foucault, who was interested in the production of knowledge, not just meaning, calls this process discourse (Hall, 2003, p. 43).

Discourse analysis, as proposed by Foucault, looks specifically at “how human beings understand themselves in our culture, and how our knowledge about ‘the social, the embodied individual and shared meanings’ comes to be produced in different periods” (Hall, 2003, p. 43). Foucault’s ideas are rooted in previous scholarly theory; Saussure and Barthes are both precursors, but Foucault takes a more historically grounded, rather than semiotic approach (p. 43). Nietzsche, and his thoughts on genealogy, also had a significant impact on Foucault’s discourse analysis theory (Foucault, 1977).

Genealogy refers to inquiry that examines the ways in which interpreting and evaluating subjects changes over time, including the social systems of thought and the

historical factors that influence how subjects are constituted (Schwandt, 2007, p. 125). Thomas Schwandt states genealogies purpose “is to disturb the taken-for-granted and allegedly self-evident character of our interpretations of ‘subjects’ as, for example, men, women, boys, girls, criminals, adolescents, and so on” (p.125). His explanation fits how I am considering Lolita myths, especially the taken-for-granted beliefs about Dolores’s character. Baert (1998) describes what genealogy does in practice:

The genealogist goes back in time to show that at some point radically new meanings were allocated to concepts. He or she then demonstrates that the emergence of these new meanings was due to power struggles or contingency. The new meanings were subsequently transmitted across generations, and so become part of our culture. These meanings gradually came to be experienced by people as self-evident, necessary, innocuous (if not honorable and consistent). Foucault’s genealogy...aims at demonstrating that these meanings are neither obvious, necessary, harmless, honorable, [n]or coherent. (cited in Schwandt, 2007, p.126)

Foucault, Schwandt (2007) writes, argues 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 analysis of a representation takes into account the discursive formation to which, “a text or a practice belongs” (Hall, 2003, p. 51). Discourse, then, is understood as a system of representations that produce knowledge and the historical and social practices that hold influence (p. 44). Discourse analysis, when connected to visibility rather than language, explores “how images construct specific views of the social world” (Rose, 2001, p. 140). Fran Tonkiss (1998) takes this idea further, in that discourse analysis is more concerned with “how images construct accounts of the social world” (cited in Rose, 2001, p.140). Genealogy is part of the inquiry of determining “how” images construct views and accounts of our social world, or culture. How discourse analysis as a method is

implemented is not a task Foucault spells out, however several types of methods exist. For the purposes of my dissertation I will be using Gillian Rose's framework for discourse analysis and visual culture from her 2001 book, *Visual Methodologies*.

Rose (2001) describes two ways to approach discourse analysis. I am using discourse analysis 1, which considers texts, referring to language and images, intertextuality and contexts. Discourse analysis 1 relates to the way images and verbal texts produce discursive formations, but it does not attend to regimes of truth or institutions of power, as discourse analysis 2 does. Instead, it addresses how images construct social and cultural understandings, and the effects of discursive practices. This is not to say power and regimes of truth are set aside; rather, they are not the main focus of discourse analysis 1 (p. 140). Lolita-like representations are, I argue, a discursive formation. I see the Lolita phenomenon as a discourse through which meaning is articulated.

Intertextuality is critical in discourse analysis because meaning is negotiated through multiple texts or images (Rose, 2001, p. 136). Inherent in the formation of Lolita subjects and interpretation is the discursive connections threading throughout, therefore, my data draws from multiple sites and multiple mediums. Rose (2001) describes discourse analysis as being flexible, which encourages intertextuality in data analysis (p. 154). Here, she lists strategies useful for looking at data:

1. looking at your sources with fresh eyes.
2. immersing yourself in your sources.
3. identifying key themes in your sources.
4. examining the effects of truth.
5. paying attention to their complexity and contradictions.
6. looking for the invisible as well as the visible.
7. paying attention to details. (p. 158)

Rose (2001) quotes Rosalind Gill (1996), who states, “The analysis of discourse and rhetoric requires careful reading and interpretation of texts, rigorous scholarship rather than adherence to formal procedures” (p. 158). The open-endedness of discourse analysis allows for the interplay of interpretive contexts. Additionally, Rose (2001) brings together a list of ideas, which helps to focus writing up (or through) the research. Her list draws from Jonathan Potter (1996), Gill (1996), and Tonkiss (1998), and she advises researchers to consider:

1. using detailed textual or visual evidence to support your evidence.
2. using textual or visual details to support your analysis.
3. the coherence the study gives to the discourse examined.
4. the coherence of the analysis itself.
5. the coherence of the study in relation to previous related research.
6. the examination of cases that run counter to the discursive norm established by the analysis, in order to affirm the disruption caused by such deviations. (p. 161)

The two previous lists serve as guiding principles for me when using discourse analysis as a visual methodology. Each offer insightful ways to look at, describe, interpret, and analyze images or texts. Additionally, Stuart Hall’s (2003) book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* looks deeply at culture and shared meaning, both important issues in discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis, then, can be likened to myth analysis, a process of unpacking a myth to find the underlying contributors to a set of beliefs or values. Myth is circulated in modern cultural contexts through media, as cultural critic Douglas Kellner (1995) states:

Radio, television, film, and other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be made male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Media images help shape our view of



the world...Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture. (cited in Durham, 2008, p. 61)

Using Rose's (2001) guiding strategies and her secondary hybrid list of considerations, I begin my examination of Lolita myths by describing how we "look" and how media represents. I posit Lolita, as understood in popular visual culture, is socially constructed by mythic signifiers derived from the original novel, a cultural development with contextual tentacles embedded in invention, illusion, and lore. Dolores Haze is not myth or girl; she is a fictional character who is known and understood through inaccuracy, misinterpretation, and fantasy, thereby producing a cultural representation with mythic attributes: Lolita.

*Academic: From my candidacy exam journal*

*A few thoughts on thinking, inspiration and mind-clutter. I once saw an interview with a famous female author.<sup>19</sup> I can't recall who, or what specifically she writes, but I think it's in the fiction genre. She told the interviewer (Katie Couric, that much I remember) that she stops reading other people's work for at least a month before she begins a new book. She doesn't want to be influenced by other ideas or thoughts that may inadvertently slip into her writing. I thought this was odd. Impossible and odd. How is it possible to flip up a shield, zap away thoughts traveling on neurons, and otherwise deny prior knowledge? Isn't everything we read residing somewhere in that giant file cabinet we call a brain? Granted, many files are lost, never to reappear. Others still are only half readable, or crumpled behind another file. I should probably upgrade this analogy to the digital age. Anyway, I started thinking about what I am currently reading for pleasure, and by pleasure I mean not exam related.*

*For Maine, I picked up a novel by A.S. Byatt called Possession: A Romance, a Booker award prizewinner. So it's not found in the romance section of Barnes & Noble. Romance, in this case, refers to style, not bodice-ripping. Part love story, part mystery, it tells the story of two academics researching different dead authors. "Love" refers first to their respective devotion to their research topics; "mystery" refers to the investigative process of research, especially historical research. Possession, the book's title, refers to the fact these two professors, a man and a woman (the needed sexual tension*

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<sup>19</sup> Dr. Stuhr, one of my dissertation committee members, remembers this interview and believes I am referring to Mary Higgins Clark.

component), have recently discovered a literary bombshell, a stack of love letters from one author (male) to another author (female), who have never been linked before. Who gets to claim the find? Who are they not going to tell? Should they share the research or publish together? Get together sexually? I can't answer any of these questions because I haven't gotten very far. Too busy. But it did get me thinking.

I am in love (o.k., strong like) with my research. Research is investigative, and occasionally, I suppose, one might discover a "bombshell" piece of data. The only bombshell remotely related to *Lolita* is two authors claiming Nabokov was sexually molested from age 12 to 15 by his uncle. Both authors have been taken to task for implying such. I, too, have wondered how Nabokov got inside the head of a pedophile with such clarity. Nabokov has stated he did extensive research, reading confessions of pedophiles (yuk) and even riding school buses to listen to young girls talk. I imagine today he'd have trouble doing that. Thus far, I have no smoking gun, no undiscovered piece of the puzzle. What I do have is a tapestry of information that has perhaps never been woven together in this form. The idea of creating this tapestry is what keeps me up at night, and gets me up in the morning. Possession serves as a reminder that academic research should not be possessed, owned or otherwise tucked away for your own enjoyment. It should be shared. In my case, I also want to share how we research, why we research, and what constitutes research. Does Possession count as part of my process? Should I have set it aside, pushed it to the deepest recesses of my file cabinet brain? Can I push it away?

No. It, and almost everything else I do or encounter in the next year (my proposed dissertation timetable) will invariably thread through my tapestry. With that proclamation in mind, I hereby vow not to watch *South Park*.

### *Lolita* Book Covers

Critical literary analyses investigate the text between the book covers. But how do we judge *Lolita* by the cover? A book cover is a form of advertising. It needs to attract attention to the book, say something about what the book is about, and do so in an expedient manner. With the expanding popularity of large chain booksellers, the image plays a much larger role than text, an ironic turn in a business originally based on publishing words. I examined 74 different *Lolita* book covers to

explore how the story is represented or captured in an image. The original printing of *Lolita* (1955) from Olympia Press carried no image and was a two-volume set (Appel, 1970). Nabokov expressed that a girl should *never* appear on the cover of his book (Vickers, 2008, p. 8). From my overview of *Lolita* book covers it is clear publishers disregarded the author's request.

Over 30 covers feature a young girl. Kubrick's poster image of Sue Lyon in red heart shaped sunglasses appears on 8 covers in various configurations. Fragments of a girl's body are common, eyes, lips, and legs being the most common. Legs ending in saddle shoes and white folded over socks are popular as well, like the image seen on my own Vintage Books cover. References to school uniforms or short plaid skirts are usually shown when the torso of the girl is cut off. The author Nabokov is pictured on four covers (not the most attractive *Lolita* cover image). The butterfly motif is used on 4 covers. Several use film stills from the 1997 movie version by Adrian Lyne and feature the actress Dominique Swain; however, actor Jeremy Irons is also seen with her on one cover. It is one of two covers that depict a girl and a man together. Another cover uses a photograph of a young blonde girl lounging on a bed in a man's button down shirt. Although Nabokov's Dolores is described as having auburn brown hair, book cover *Lolitas* are predominately blonde. A few covers feature abstract nudes. Three covers stand out from the others: one depicts an illustration of a young girl, naked from the waist down, her pubic hair clearly visible; another features the mid-section or exposed stomach of a girl as she yanks down on her plaid skirt. The most disturbing cover to me, however,

features an illustration of a very young, perhaps eight or nine-year-old looking girl, reclining in a short skirt with her knees apart, exposing her white underwear to the viewer.

In analyzing *Lolita* book covers, I see a particular narrative, a narrative that fits the framework of tacit understandings about the novel's content. I could argue Humbert himself assisted in developing *Lolita* book covers, considering the fragmented body parts, obsession with knees, white socks, and schoolgirl skirts that he liked to write about. Just as my initial "reading" of the book cover on my copy told me specific things about the girl Lolita, these representations keep the myth of the sexually manipulative nymphet in circulation.<sup>20</sup>

*Academic:*

*A few years ago I spoke to a group of graduate students about my research. As I left the classroom, a female student came out into the hall to speak with me. She related that it was her legs pictured on my copy of Lolita. Stunned by the chances that I would be presenting my topic, holding up my Vintage book cover, and that the photograph depicted a peer in my own graduate school is, well, unreal. I asked her to e-mail me with all the details about how she came to be the knock-kneed legs on my book. A few days later she came through as promised.*

*She was visiting family friends in New York, who happen to be professional photographers. They had just been hired to create a new book cover for Vintage Books' edition of Lolita. Mara, then fourteen, was enlisted to pose. Vintage had sent over some props, a pair of saddle shoes, white cuffed socks, and a short pleated wool skirt. She explains:*

We tried socks on, socks off, shoes on, shoes off, crossed legs, uncrossed legs. I remember she looked at some of the proofs and had picked out a few that she liked (no shoes), but sent them all to the editors. They of course did not pick any of her favorites. When the book came out I was so excited. I had a faint idea of what it was about (old man, young girl), but really, it was just cool to be able to

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<sup>20</sup> To view *Lolita* book covers see <http://www.librarything.com/work/913/covers/>

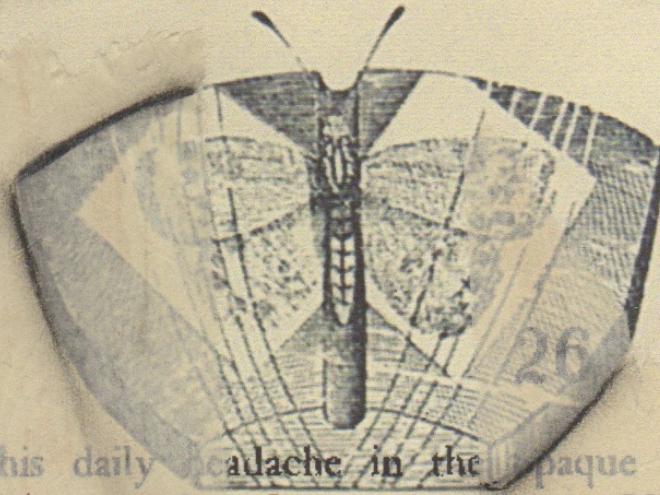
say that was me...and still is. I started reading the book at one point, but never finished...Incidentally, I have been seeing all of the places Lolita shows up since you spoke to our class...like Wegman's dog at the Wexner. What a great topic. (Mara Gross, personal communication, October 16, 2007)

*Artifact 4*

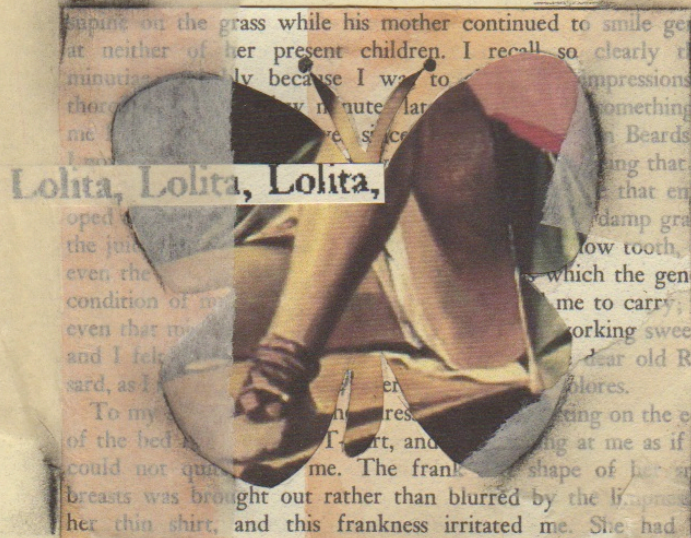
Repeat Lolita

*Shari L. Savage, 2008*

*The following artifact features the "crotch shot" book cover, framed through the negative silhouette of a butterfly. The engraving of a butterfly, top center, is reminiscent of the butterfly Humbert sees at Dolores's camp office, the "pinned to the wall" nature study.*



This daily headache in the opaque air is  
disturbing, but I must persevere. Have  
hundred pages and not got anywhere yet. I  
confused. That must have been around A  
think I can go on. Heart, head—everything  
Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita



Lolita, Lolita, Lolita,

Repeat till the page is full, printer.

## *Lolita* DVD Covers

**K**ubrick's (1962) film is available on DVD. Now digitally restored and remastered it is part of the Stanley Kubrick collection. The DVD cover background is white; the iconic close-up of a sunglass-wearing girl peering over red heart-shaped dark lenses featured on the original movie posters is centered in the top two thirds. Red lips are pursed around a red lollipop. Something is reflected in the sunglass lens on the right (her left), but is difficult to identify, it might be the side view mirror on a car. The image, perhaps a photograph, is hazy, heavily pixilated, and out of focus in the bottom third. *Lolita* is written in red script below Kubrick's name. The film synopsis on the back cover states:

Newly arrived in Ramsdale, New Hampshire, European émigré Humbert Humbert is smitten. He plans to marry Charlotte Haze. That way he'll always be close to his dear one—Charlotte's precocious daughter. Filmmaker Stanley Kubrick explores the theme of sexual obsession (a subject he would revisit 37 years later in *Eyes Wide Shut*) with this darkly comic and deeply moving version of Vladimir Nabobov's novel.

James Mason plays devious, deluded Humbert: wedded to needy Charlotte (Shelly Winters); rivaled by the ubiquitous Clare Quilty (chameleon like Peter Sellers); and enraptured to his gelatinous core by the blithe teen (Sue Lyon) with that "lovely, lyrical, lilting name"—*Lolita*. (Harris, J. & Kubrick, S., Producers. 1962)

Adrian Lyne's (1997) film went straight to video release in the U.S. Its DVD cover is deep maroon, velvet-like in texture. A copy of one of the original movie posters is centered, directly below the Lions Gate logo. Dominique Swain, who plays *Lolita*, sits high up on a tennis referee's chair, wearing a white halter top with bare midriff and white fitted tennis shorts. Her light brown hair is styled in two circular braids, sitting like

cinnamon buns on the sides of her head. She gazes down and toward the camera, her expression blank. Jeremy Irons, as Humbert, stands in front of her, his head between her knees, but angled toward the camera. He is nuzzling her left knee with the lower part of his face and caressing her calf with his left hand. The image is bisected diagonally, roughly following the angle of her thigh as the lower half of the frame dissolves to white. Lolita is written in red script beginning at Irons' chest, and then slanting upwards to follow the diagonal. The iconic red heart-shaped glasses float disjointedly under the title. The text reads: *A forbidden love. An unthinkable attraction. The ultimate price.* Additionally, two quotes from movie critics float to the left of Swain, truncated excerpts that read, "...stunning and emotionally gripping..." *The New York Times*, and, shorter still, "Erotic..." *People Magazine*. The back cover adds one more review excerpt, "A touch of greatness" from *Time Magazine*. The film synopsis states:

Humbert Humbert (Jeremy Irons) is a remarkable man with a poisonous wound: the indelible memory of a fated childhood love and a haunting urge to rediscover its lost passion. When he encounters Charlotte Haze (Melanie Griffith), a voluptuous widow with romantic plans of her own, it is her nymph daughter Lolita (Dominique Swain) who ultimately wins Humbert's affections; testing his demons and satisfying his secret desires with disastrous results. (Kassar, M. & Michaels, J., Producers, 1997)

In comparing these two DVD covers, much can be learned from both the images and the supporting text. Kubrick's cover, with its iconic image, is instantly recognizable, from the red, heart-shaped sunglasses to the lollipop Lyon sucks on. The image focuses on the center of the Lyon's face: her chin, ear, forehead, and hair are cropped out. Is she young? Is she older? Is she blonde or brunette? The heart shapes, the deep red lips, and shiny wet candy speak to me of lust, youth, and seduction. Peering out from behind dark



lenses reads as secret, hidden, and mysterious. At no time does Lyon wear these sunglasses in the film; likewise, she is never depicted sucking on a lollipop (Vickers, 2008).

The Kubrick DVD synopsis is short on emotional details compared to the 1997 synopsis; however, it does capture the essence of Humbert, calling him devious and deluded, describing his rapture and gelatinous core. Lolita has only two descriptors: precocious and blithe. I agree that the film is darkly comic, as Kubrick does manage to showcase the humorous angles of Humbert's ridiculous plans; however, I find the words "deeply moving" to be unsupported in my interpretation of the film. To be moved, one has to care, and none of the characters garner any of my empathy, including Lyon's manipulative version of Lolita.

In contrast, Lyne's (1997) cover text says more than the image itself. Without the tag lines "A forbidden love, an unthinkable attraction, the ultimate price" and the word "Erotic..." it might be hard to discern the relationship between the two people pictured. Swain's body is adult looking; she seems tall, and her outfit is also adult. His attention to her body is unclear; it could be fatherly affection or something else. If you know any thing about the word Lolita, though, the relationship is probably clear. Her age, however, is not.

The film synopsis of Lyne's *Lolita* is quite different from Kubrick's version. Here, Humbert is a remarkable man, but wounded and has a haunting urge to rediscover lost passion. Lolita, the nymph daughter, wins his affection, testing him, and satisfying his secret desires. This Humbert is painted in emotions. His affection is something to be

fought over and won. He is a game. It's all about him. This synopsis reads with the same selfish quality Humbert writes with in the novel. Dolores is in the margins, once again.

Considering that many critical film reviews (Bordo, 1998) of Lyne's *Lolita* touted his "faithful" adaptation, reviewers must be referring to the themes Kubrick ignored. The film itself is less faithful than Kubrick's version when it comes to sex. Both movies treat the sexual components of the story with little regard to accuracy. Kubrick's has no sexual contact, so Dolores's acceptance or resistance is unclear. Lyne's version has plenty of sex; and in this telling, Dolores likes it. Neither synopsis mentions her age, Humbert's pedophilic needs, or the violence enacted upon Dolores. Susan Bordo (1998) worries that Lyne's cinematic version of *Lolita* is the one mirroring tacit understandings, upholding misinterpretations about Dolores's character, and proliferating erotic girl myths.

Kubrick's film version of *Lolita* was previously examined in this dissertation. I turn now to Lyne's film and question how his telling subverts, negates, and obliterates critical points in the novel. Just as Nabokov and Kubrick had, Lyne dealt with much resistance in his efforts to bring *Lolita* to the public. His directorial resume includes *Nine 1/2 Weeks* (1986), *Fatal Attraction* (1987), and *Indecent Proposal* (1993), proving he has box office cachet, but also a penchant for "glossy mainstream erotica" (Vickers, 2008, p. 187). Multiple screenwriters tried to capture what Kubrick could not. Stephen Schiff's was the eventual choice, his script full of Nabokovian details that did not shy away from sexual content. Jeremy Irons signed on to portray Humbert, despite first passing on the chance. Director and screenwriter agreed *Lolita* could not be twelve in this film, either. Finding the girl was difficult for Lyne as it had been for Kubrick. He saw close to 2500 young girls in his search for Dolores Haze. Fourteen-year-old Dominique

Swain got the part. She was inexperienced, which added to her disarming and sometimes awkward take on Dolores (Vickers, 2008, p. 191).

My DVD of *Lolita* includes several screen tests in which Irons plays out scenes with Swain. Seen here, she appears intelligent, easily digesting directions, even playfully mimicking Lynes' and Irons' British accents. She is thin, lanky, and fidgety. Swain's orthodontia makes her speaking voice slightly mumbled. Her breasts are small, hips narrow, she seems just about to ripen. When Irons slaps her during a rehearsed fight scene her shock is real, her hand instantly covering the red stinging mark. The scene stops and Irons quickly apologizes, gently cradling her chin. The actual scene in the finished film follows this screen test, showcasing Swain's physical growth. She has filled out, her face rounder, less expressive, and the scene lacks the surprise seen in the test version. She is, in my opinion, a fairly good approximation of the real Dolores: not conventionally pretty, with mousy auburn brown hair, and goofy and awkward in her skin at times. Her size is an issue; her height is close to Irons', forcing Lyne to employ some ridiculously clichéd trappings as reminders of childhood.

No longer in braces now that filming has commenced, Lyne reintroduces orthodontia as Swain ceremoniously removes a retainer before performing fellatio on Irons (alluded to fellatio). The retainer is a vivid symbol for the metamorphosis of Dolores, but its fleshy-pink palate is a modern convention, contextually out of place for the times. Pigtailed, braids, gingham dresses, doll playing, candy hording, comic book reading, gum chomping, bubble blowing, panty flashing, over-eagerly applied lipstick, milk mustaches, and tantrum throwing, are some of the other devices used to remind the viewer Dolores is supposed to be a child.

The overall quality of Lyne's film is lovingly depicted, painstakingly correct in visual details, and lit in a golden haze of simpler times. Wardrobes, American post-war culture, the "on the road" sequences, are all spot on. The cinematography is nearly flawless, although some critics have called the close up shots of Swain too reminiscent of David Hamilton, an art photographer who has been investigated on child pornography charges for his teen nudes (Steinberg, 1997, p. 186). Lyne's *Lolita* is elegant in form, beautifully acted, and emotionally riveting. However, critical inaccuracies abound in interpreting Nabokov's narrative. Of course, her age is an issue; fourteen looks and feels less troubling than twelve. Swain's shift from childish to seductive is abrupt, and once crossed, difficult to negotiate without seeming clumsy. Lyne does show Humbert being violent, striking Dolores in anger and jealousy. She is seen sobbing at night, but only once. During Quilty's murder scene, the blood loss is gratuitous and out of place given the overall feel of the film. I can overlook many of these things, but not the handling of their sexual relationship.

Although sexual engagements are a daily part of Dolores's time with her stepfather, only two are depicted in the movie, and despite Humbert's novel assertion that she never enjoyed coupling—she was in fact resistant—the movie shows her receiving pleasure. In the forced intercourse scene near the end of their time together (just before she escapes), the book, or Humbert's telling, is fuzzy on details. In the movie we see Dolores fighting him off briefly before laughing and enjoying what has now become rough sex play, rather than rape. More disturbing to me, however, is the rewriting of a pivotal scene in the book, a scene constructed to make clear how little Dolores participated in Humbert's sexual engagements. First, from the novel:

On especially tropical afternoons, in the sticky closeness of the siesta, I liked the cool feel of armchair leather against my massive nakedness as I held her in my lap. There she would be, a typical kid picking her nose while engrossed in the lighter sections of a newspaper, as indifferent to my ecstasy as if it were something she had sat upon, a shoe, a doll, the handle of a tennis racket, and was too indolent to remove. (Nabokov, 1958, p. 165)

While Lyne's film interpretation captures the humidity of the motel room, the leather armchair is now a rocking chair; stickiness becomes a flypaper strip hanging from the ceiling. Humbert is wearing pajama bottoms; Dolores is wearing the top of his pajamas. She is reading the comic pages in the newspaper, laughing over some part she's just read, facing away from him. The camera moves down to one foot as she pushes off to keep the chair rocking. The camera pulls back slowly, revealing that she is reading while sexually impaled on Humbert. Behind her he is close to climax. Dolores stops reading, closes her eyes and begins breathing harder, reaching climax as Humbert clutches her.

Lyne describes how the sex scenes were negotiated between Swain, her mother, and Irons. A pillow or board was placed between the genitals of the two actors, and in the case of the rape scene, a body double was used in place of Swain. However, after several failed takes, Irons requested Swain, telling Lyne he needed her under him for motivation (Bordo, 1998). After speaking with the actress and her mother, it was agreed that two pillows would suffice. Irons was able to complete the scene. Later, when being interviewed by *Premiere Magazine*, Lyne previewed the rape scene with the interviewer, "his face alight with excitement over the scene: 'It's sexy, isn't it?'" (Bordo, 1998, p. B11). Lyne, who has been credited by many reviewers (James, 1998; Kroll, 1997; Santas, 2000) for his "faithful" and artful interpretation of Nabokov's novel, is as guilty as all the others who implicate Dolores. He just makes it look pretty.

Social climate was an issue for Lyne's *Lolita*, similar to the censorship problems Nabokov and Kubrick faced. Decade's apart, but equally challenging, pedophilia remained the sticking point due to public awareness and concern over child sexual abuse (Vickers, 2008). While Kubrick dealt with the Hays Production Code, Lyne was faced with the newly adopted Child Pornography Prevention act of 1996 (Power, 1999; Vickers, 2008). Any act that visually depicted a child engaging in explicit sex or simulated sex was illegal, and for Lyne, whose movie wrapped in 1995, re-editing needed to be done to avoid legal issues. In preparation for the film's ratings review, a child pornography law specialist was enlisted. The scene involving Dolores and the newspaper comics became the main battleground. After several negotiations, portions of the scene were removed and Lyne began seeking a distributor (Vickers, 2008, p. 195).

Lyne had survived the Child Pornography Act but was about to be blindsided by the death of a small beauty queen, JonBenet Ramsey. No American studio would dare release Lyne's film given the social preoccupation with the Ramsey investigation (Vickers, 2008). Uncannily mirroring Nabokov's rejection by American publishers, Lyne instead looked to Europe. He debuted the film in Spain where it got mixed reviews. Public protests awaited Lyne's *Lolita* in Germany. With British actor Jeremy Irons stepping in to champion *Lolita*, as Graham Greene had in 1955, it debuted in London with little uproar. Here in the U.S., Showtime bought the distribution rights for cable television, and then it went direct to video stores (Vickers, 2008, p. 197). Representations of *Lolita*, however, are not relegated to Kubrick or Lyne's films. *Lolita* lives on in multiple popular visual culture sites, quietly watching, as the public looks her over, as the whispers continue, as the rumors spread. We consume her.

*Mother:*

*The screen test scenes of Swain and Irons are filmed in a seedy-looking trailer or poorly lit office. Lyne's off camera direction feels reminiscent of the controversial Calvin Klein ads (1995), like a porn film in the early stages of plot development (knock at the door, pizza delivery man enters...). Watching the scenes made me feel voyeuristic, and I wanted to know where Swain's mother was. Seeing this very young teen alone with two men, both telling her what to do, how to move, gave me chills.*

## Looking

John Berger (1972) considers how we look and the historical constructs, in this case 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 look at women and then determine how to treat them; women have been socially instructed to understand they are being visually consumed (p. 45-46). Berger 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. (Berger, 1972, p.47)

Women 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, then, are taught to survey themselves. Today, Berger points out, these socially constructed ways of seeing are still working and are seen in advertising, journalism, and television media. 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 mythic beliefs, beliefs that make it permissible to use and consume the girl. Marcel Danesi (2007) argues that myth-based representations inherently have codes, which “provide a set of basic actants or ‘sign roles’ (as they might be called) and implicit instructions for making representations” (p. 126). We expect certain traits, appearances, and behaviors to be present. Myths about Lolita help to articulate and draw her blueprint, a blueprint tailored to sexualize innocence and eroticize girls. Durham (2008) agrees, stating:

Myths are, by nature, untrue. But myths cannot be dismissed as fictions or fairy tales, because they have real impact on girls’ lives. When sexuality is understood only in terms of cultural and social myths that operate in ways that are counterprogressive, hidebound, and restrictive, we have a problem. It is imperative, therefore, to examine myths. (Durham, 2008, p. 60)

#### Section 4: Myth

##### Mythic Innocence

Childhood innocence is a myth. Childhood, at least as we think of it in American culture, is a fairly recent social construction (Danesi, 2007; Driscoll, 2002; Wood, 2001). A mythical world of discovery and wonder, playful and pure, childhood represents an idyllic time of nurturing and protection. It is what parents hope for. It may even represent his or her own youth, but for many childhood is far from innocent (Giroux, 2000; Kitzinger, 1988). Add to this a highly sexual media-saturated



world that is continually informing kids at younger and younger ages (also known in advertising jargon as KGOY or kids getting older younger ), and it is easy to see why parents feel helpless (Durham, 2008).

As a parent, I too, wished for an idyllic childhood for my own kids. It is natural to want to shield and protect. I defy any parent not to react if an out of control car is careening toward their child; it's instinctive. Popular media sometimes feels like an out of control car, careening—but more likely it is a carefully constructed action—at our children. I also know part of growing up and maturing is trusting our kids to react, to step out of the way, to run, to look before crossing. However, before any child can be autonomous, they must be taught what is dangerous, what to fear, who to avoid. These are basic survival skills. The hardest lesson of all is learning that other people might purposefully hurt you, even those closest to you.

Innocence seems to be a mythic realm many parents cling to, a defense against knowing too much too soon, a translucent pink-gold bubble of protection. According to Henry Giroux (2000), this thinking is exactly why innocence has become a commodity, a mythical construct that is promoted, desired, and consumed, at least by those who can afford it. Childhood innocence is rarely part of poverty. Innocence is a class privilege. By staying home with my children for the majority of their youth, I was able to shield and protect, monitor, nurture, provide stability, and purchase mythical experiences. Promoting childhood innocence as commodity is good for corporations. However, in commodifying the myth of innocence, its desirability crosses over into places and spaces that threaten the very idea of protecting the young.

Jenny Kitzinger (1988) examines the child protection movement (against child sexual abuse) and its “emphasis on two particular qualities of ‘real’ childhood—innocence and vulnerability” (p. 79). The language and images used to represent innocence are problematic to Kitzinger, who argues they are counterintuitive, and may in fact titillate the same people we are trying to protect our children from. Signifiers used to refer to innocence include wistful expressions, broken dolls, children staring vacantly, the vulnerability of an empty room, which she believes “emphasizes the child’s youth and passivity” (p.77). She states:

In a society where innocence is a fetish and where men are excited by the idea of defiling the pure and deflowering the virgin, focusing on children’s presumed innocence only reinforces men’s desire for them as sexual objects. As one child abuser said, ‘It was so exciting, she was so young, so pure and clean’. (Kitzinger, 1988, p. 80)

Kitzinger also points out that representing the home as “sanctuary” is equally troubling because most abuse takes place in the home, or at the hands of a family friend or relative, thereby making the “don’t talk to strangers” strategy flawed and dangerous (p. 81). The promotion of family as protective, a desirable situation, negates the power structures and cultural authority adults have over the body of the child, an interesting twist on nurturing narratives. It is Kitzinger’s sexual innocence claims, however, that speak to the notion of deserved violations, an issue in Dolores’s story.

Promoting sexual innocence as a concept useful in the fight against child sexual abuse is flawed, she argues, because it “stigmatizes the ‘knowing’ child” (p. 80). Violating a “knowing” child is often seen as “a lesser offense...allowing abusers to defend themselves on the grounds that their victim was no angel” (p. 80), certainly an argument made many times in Dolores’s case. Using Kitzinger’s view, the sexually pure

are desired as a commodity, a small inventory in high demand, while the young but knowing child is less desirable, but easier to obtain—and less disturbing to violate.

Humbert acknowledges the problem with desiring the unknowing girl. If his fantasy comes to fruition, the unknowing girl becomes the knowing girl. What was once a critical motivating factor, being the first to taste his stepdaughter's innocence, is destroyed by the very act of tasting forbidden fruit (a fruit Humbert claims has already been tasted by a boy at Dolores's camp). Lolita may be born, but her mythic innocence dies in the possession. Humbert laments possessing his Lolita at last, "It was something quite special, that feeling: an oppressive, hideous constraint as if I were sitting with the small ghost of somebody I had just killed" (Nabokov, 1958, p. 140).

Within the pivotal seduction scene preceding Humbert's statement, he alleges an important distinction between girl and woman. As vital as it was to possess the girl Dolores, it became just as vital to announce that her move from stepdaughter to lover is accompanied by the appearance of her first period. No longer a child molester, Humbert upgrades to dirty old man. No longer "a daisy-fresh girl," Dolores is twice pronounced woman (Nabokov, 1958, p. 141). Childhood innocence is banished in Humbert's description of her the morning after they have sexual intercourse:

Nothing could be more childish than her snubbed nose, freckled face or the purplish spot on her naked neck where a fairytale vampire had feasted, or the unconscious movement of her tongue exploring a touch of rosy rash around her swollen lips...every nerve in me was still anointed and ringed with the feel of her body—the body of some immortal demon disguised as a female child. (Nabokov, 1958, p. 139)

Innocence, broadly defined, refers to ignorance, blamelessness, and the lack of guile or awareness. It also means free of sin or guilt.<sup>21</sup> By tweaking the same language—blameworthy, guilty, knowing, sinning, and aware—the lack of innocence can then be described, all qualities now projected upon Dolores. Indeed, Humbert’s chilling words tell us she may look the child on the outside, but under the veneer she is a demon. For Humbert, it is a delightful combination, one that will continue to vex him until Dolores learns to use this skill to her advantage. The discovery of her sexual currency is one of the most enduring qualities tied to blaming Dolores for her victimization, thereby recasting her as master manipulator. What remains unspoken in sociocultural retellings of *Lolita* as the manipulator is that sexual currency is the only agency she has. In popular visual culture representations of girls as *Lolita*-like, sexual currency is exchanged through gaze, but it is a one-way exchange.

*Artifact 5*

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*Shari L. Savage, 2009*

*Berger’s argument, Lewis Carroll’s photographs of young girls, and Nabokov’s text inspire the following artifact. A Vogue magazine editorial using an Alice in Wonderland theme references Carroll’s photos of girls reclining on chaises. Prepubescent-looking model Natalia Voidanova plays the role of Alice. Not shown, but implied in this picture, is Carroll behind the camera.*

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<sup>21</sup> Merriam-Webster’s, 1998, p. 345.



29

door of the lighted bathroom stood ajar; in addition to a skeleton glow came through the Venetian blind from the outside arclights; these intercrossed rays penetrated the darkness of the bedroom and revealed the following situation.

Clothed in one of her old nightgowns, my Lolita lay on her side with her back to me, in the middle of the bed. Her lightly veiled body and bare limbs formed a Z. She had put both pillows under her dark tousled hair. A sliver of pale light crossed her top



believed it to be a potent drug, it was too mild a sedative to affect for any length of time a wary, albeit weary, nymphet. Whether the Ramsdale doctor was a charlatan or a shrewd old

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Artifact 5  
131

## Mythic Girls

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.  
Simone de Beauvoir<sup>22</sup>

Catherine Driscoll, Jennifer Eisenhauer, and Margaret Mead represent a trilogy of women asking one important question: what is a girl? I do not intend to define the word “girl,” and despite having asked the question, Driscoll (2002), Eisenhauer (2003), and Mead (1928) do not define it either. The word girl resists being defined in any agreed upon set of parameters. In many ways girl is woman and woman is girl, and I feel both are firmly entrenched in my identity. Biologically, the onset of menarche tends to be the dividing line between girl and woman, but even that demarcation is rife with questions. Girl, whatever and however one might want to define it, lacks fixity. That said, how girls and girlhood are socially constructed can be discussed in relation to myth and Lolita-like representations. Like the myth of childhood and childhood innocence, girlhood springs from the same mythology.

While Humbert uses statistics and U.S. statutory law to explain the boundaries of girl and woman, sociocultural distinctions are far less exact (Nabokov, 1958, p. 19-20; 43). Mead’s (1928) anthropological account of girlhood in Samoa confirms that social and cultural constraints often trump human nature (p. 13). Girls and girlhood are defined differently throughout history and cultures (Eisenhauer, 2003; Driscoll, 2002). Likewise, contemporary Western sociocultural definitions of girls and girlhood resist statistics, laws, and boundaries. Driscoll (2002) explains, “Girlhood is made up and girls are

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<sup>22</sup> Cited in Eisenhauer, 2003, p. 38.

brought into existence in statements and knowledge about girls... girls are constructed by changing the ways of speaking about girls” (p. 5). Her statement recalls Barthes’ (1973) claim about myth being a type of speech (p. 109). In popular visual culture, girls are spoken to and about through a variety of media. Both text and images work in tandem to explain what girl is and what girlhood consists of (Durham 2007; Kilbourne, 2006; McRobbie, 1996). Girlhood is, then, a mythic realm, but a realm nonetheless, mirage-like spaces whose edges slip, dissolve, and defy locating a beginning or ending.

Socioculturally, however, girls and girlhood are often seen through a spectrum of teleological developments leading to womanhood, a binary of before and after.

Similarly, binary qualities are ascribed to girls within the spectrum of girlhood and are repeatedly supported through images and words. To explore how media does this, I include a collage of words created solely from August 2008 issues of teen magazines, including *Seventeen*, *Teen Vogue* and *Cosmo Girl* (see artifact 6, p. 140).

Demographically, teen-directed magazines are read by girls ages nine to fifteen, a critical time for identity construction according to advertising and marketing research analysis (Kilbourne, 2006; McRobbie, 1996; Wray & Steele, 2002). Teen magazines represent spaces of negotiation between language and images defining girls and “girlness.” Next, I explore and discuss how “girl” might be read through a compilation of words, terms, and phrases in teen magazines.

*Academic: From my candidacy exam journal*

*While having coffee this a.m. the Today show featured Jean Kilbourne (and some other woman) discussing their new book “So Sexy, So Soon.” I’ll have to get it next time I’m at B & N. Their discussion focused on the over-sexualization of children, specifically girls,*

*in our culture. Kilbourne pointed out that this is an issue also affecting boys in that they see sexualized imagery about girls and are taught early on that objectifying girls is culturally acceptable. The same stuff I have been writing about the last few days. Highly sexualized culture is not going away, she says, so we need to talk about why it's so popular, what it means, and remind girls that there are many other ways to "be" in this world, besides sexy and skinny. Really? Where are those girls? Not in teen magazines. (Maybe they are at the movies, like Juno, she was all about individuality—and getting knocked-up—but you have to admire her attitude and humor).*

*This enlightening, but not helpful segment on "So Sexy, So Soon" is then followed by an interview with "the beautiful Rumer Willis," on set to promote her new movie "House Bunny." Plot? A Playboy bunny moves in to a college sorority of nerdy, awkward girls who don't fit into the college sorority mold. She teaches them self-esteem through makeovers and fashion advice, and presto...pretty and popular wins the day. Thank God there are Playboy bunnies that can teach, because self-esteem is all about breast implants and high heels. Hilarity ensues as geek girls are schooled in the art of walking in heels. I know I sound sarcastic, but this is the general storyline of the film.*

Constructing a Girl  
(or 838 ways to look pretty)

**D**uring my candidacy exam, I spent an afternoon building the "mythic girl" in words (Artifact 6, p. 137). After cutting out hundreds of words and phrases about girls and girl qualities as described in teen magazines, I began to see two types of girls. I was not surprised to find the binary of innocence and sexuality, but to see it so clearly "spelled out" is daunting. For my collage, I chose a young, fresh-faced Dolores-like model as the background over which I placed collected words. She gazes out sideways, her mouth passive and slightly open. At the top middle I began with "mythic" and "girl." On the right side I placed words related to innocence; on the left I placed words with sexual connotations. Soon, I had not only covered my allotted 6 by 9 inch



canvas (dissertation margin guidelines), but I was also layering words on top of other words. Eventually some words were lost. “Juicy”, “sexy”, and “fresh,” are three I recall losing underneath new layers.

I acknowledge my placement choices add to the overall sense of connoted qualities, however, the words still speak with clarity. One thing stands out before reading the text; pink and red dominate as colors. Pink, the earliest visual code for girl is culturally foisted upon her at birth. A pink baby blanket may be the first thing an American girl will wear. Pink tells the world which gender is present. Red, a color associated with lust and passion, can also be interpreted as colors of womanhood: menarche, and the loss of virginity.

Textually, the words “girl” and “child” are repeatedly used. Qualities tied to innocence and youth include: *good, sweet, soft, girly, fresh, cute, flushed, and pure*. Metaphors about innocence include: *flowers, petals, blossoming, and secret gardens*. Innocent girls are described as *cute as a button, babies, bunnies, lovely, princesses, and pretty in pink*. Sexual connotations on the left side ascribe qualities to girls, such as: *wild child, party girl, dirty pretty thing, cherry bomb, eye candy, born bad, ready, and flaunting*. Bridging the gap between the binary of innocence and sexuality are the phrases *coming of age* and *spring awakening*.

*Academic: From my candidacy exam journal*

*Myth. Girl. Lolita. Margaret Mead’s Coming of Age in Samoa. How to weave these concepts into my tapestry? That is my current project. I will start at the beginning...why it matters to connect any of these threads. I actually started Q4 with those three words: myth, girl, and Lolita. I got off to a good beginning, moving through an exploration of myth, first. This leads to mythic innocence, girlhood, and then to define girl through the*

*lens of popular media, in this case teen magazines. I created a collage of text (words) overtaking the face of a girl. I devoted all of Sunday afternoon to the project, rationalizing that it would be fun (kind of), get me outdoors (I worked on the porch), and insightful, or at the very least, get me away from the computer. The process is like any other art making process, idea, preparation, planning, doing, and reflecting. A few caveats, or creative restrictions...my artifact had to fit neatly, perfectly, into a 6 by 9 inch space due to dissertation margin rules. I wanted to resist the rectangle. I wanted words and phrases to leak off onto the margins, like border crossings. I had more words than space available, so I layered, creating new combinations and shapes. I kept the girl's eyes uncovered, her mouth, too, but otherwise wallpapered the entire "canvas." What resulted mirrors my Lolita binary argument, the innocent/sexual combo, and the mythic girl. One big message, overarching all else, is girl. Girl...Girl...Girl. Over and over, girl. Womanhood is not part of the teen magazine vernacular. Also, I got a little high from the spray adhesive, and opted for a nap. Lesson learned, next time wear a mask before spraying.*

What is a girl? According to textual messages in teen magazines, girls are an impossible mix of attributes. Stay pure, but get ready. Freud says it best, although long before teen magazines were speaking the same message, "sex as destiny, and virginity as a fated pause before heterosexuality" (cited in Driscoll, 2002, p. 31). What is not found in teen magazines is the word "woman" or the possibility of homosexuality. Teen magazines speak to heterosexual girls (McRobbie, 1996). Teen magazines speak of a mythic girl, a girl who must align herself between being innocent and sexual, pure but dirty (Kilbourne, 2006; Merskin, 2004). In this sense, my collage suggests the "fated pause" on the right, and "sex as destiny" on the left.

The girl peering out from behind the layered text of my collage represents identity. Who am I supposed to be? What am I supposed to act like? The words covering her explain what constitutes a girl, describing important qualities to develop or possess in order to be a girl. Images in teen magazines speak in another way, but generally send the same message about what a girl should look like. The words speak binaries, as do images

in teen magazines. Visual representations in teen magazines support the ideologies behind the fated pause of virginity while on the way to sexual destiny, a concept mirrored by the unknowing Dolores and knowing Lolita. Accordingly, the spectrum of girlhood as seen through the text and images in teen magazines, is not marked by menarche, virginity, sexual activity, or age. A girl is still a girl no matter what *kind* of girl she is.

A cover blurb on *Seventeen* (August 2008) proclaims the magazine will show readers 838 ways to look pretty. Pretty, a necessary quality for girls according to *Seventeen*, is so complicated they have 838 different ways to help girls achieve this quality. Jean Kilbourne (2006) describes an ad by *Seventeen* in an advertising journal promoting ad space for sale in their magazine, “She’s the one that you want. She’s the one that we’ve got...It’s more than a magazine, it’s her life” (p. 131). The longest phrase on my collage (artifact 6, p. 140) is a quote from a monthly column in which readers get to showcase their personal spaces. A large section of a girl’s bedroom is covered in images from teen magazines and the girl states, “I love making collages out of my cut-up fashion magazines” (August, 2008, *Teen Vogue*, p. 174). Perhaps *Seventeen* could amend its ad with, “It’s more than a magazine; it’s her art.”

It isn’t enough to advertise on television...you’ve got to reach kids throughout the day—in school, as they’re shopping at the mall...or at the movies. You’ve got to become part of the fabric of their lives.

Carol Herman-Senior V.P. of Grey Advertising, 1996<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cited in Campbell et al., 2008, p. 410.

*Girl, Mother: From my candidacy exam journal*

*I type Dr. Stuhr's question onto the first page, scroll to the next and center my two quotes. Now for the hard part. Where to begin. I don't begin. Roofing crews show up to fix what the falling tree did to our house during last week's storm. Seven heavy-booted men stand above my head, stomping, tearing and throwing roof tiles. Like gigantic confetti, chunks of asphalt spin past my window. I stare out my other window, watching the puffy, Maine-like clouds (two more days!) move east in the sky. The banging is relentless. I give up. I move my Mac to a safe location (I swear it sounds like one of these guys is going to land on my desk), and leave my good intentions behind. I decide to take my daughter to the neighborhood pool for some girl time. On the way we stop to pick up magazines, drinks, and chocolate chip cookies. I think, incorrectly as it turns out, that my research is on the shelf for now.*

*Callie reaches for Seventeen, Glamour and Cosmopolitan. After a quick negotiation, Cosmo goes back in the rack. The entire cover screamed sex. "Do this trick in bed...he'll never leave" or "Sexy words he can't resist" and other sex-heavy topics. This is the big misnomer with teens and magazines. They read up. Seventeen's demographic is not seventeen. Ages ten through fifteen are their biggest market. Callie, sixteen, is on the fringes of who the magazine attracts. When we get to the pool I flip through the Seventeen while she dips into the pool. I try to read it as if a ten year old would see it. Impossible. At age ten, fashions, boys, and grooming were the farthest things from my mind. Nancy Drew books, making tiny 3-D rooms for my German flocked-rabbit collection, or playing down in the ravine with other kids, filled my days. I can't even move up to age twelve, it was all the same, except I was taller, greasier, and spent days wearing the same ratty Girl Scout patch-covered sweatshirt. I went to science camp that year. Then thirteen. I got breasts and my period. I hated my period. It was messy, I had horrible cramps, and I couldn't go swimming. It also meant accidents, horrifying, humiliating accidents. Everything changed. Why? My research is about to dig deep into that very question. Girlhood. When does it end? Does it end? When does it begin? What makes a girl a girl, and not a woman?*

*As I recall, and it was a long time ago, my period served as the boundary line, before...girl, after...woman. But, I was as much a woman as I was a girl. In truth I was not girly at all; I was a dirty-kneed tomboy. I remember the summer of the cicada, the nasty seventeen-year kind of infestation that crunched under my tennis shoes at dusk. The neighborhood group, a pack of preteens and barely teens that ran wild until 10 p.m. or so, gathered to watch as a pile of just molting cicadas were lit on fire. The boys bent down and watched, the girls squealed dolphin-pitched ear-splitters and ran away. Except for me, the girl right out of science camp, one foot in tomboy-hood declaring it would not run, the other foot on the line of womanhood, wondering why boys would think torching bugs was cool. I took two steps back (it smelled) and held my ground. Not long after, I was a squealer. My dad used to like to repeat an old Bill Cosby routine as if it was his own...One day, some unknown group of interlopers takes your daughter for awhile, and*

*when she returns someone has messed with her voice box, which now only emits spine-rattling, glass-breaking shrieks for no reason at all, or for any reason. I forgive him, though; he was stuck in a house full shrieking of girls.*

*Now, back to the pool and the magazine. While I am reading the contents of Seventeen, squealing breaks my attention. I stop to watch the strange mating rituals of our neighborhood teens. Two boys are attempting to engage two girls in a game of gutter ball. The object is to throw the water soaked Nerf toy across the surface of the pool hard. The other person needs to catch it or if it goes into the gutter they lose a point. One girl squeals, strains to keep her hair dry, and spends a lot of time rearranging her bikini top. She's losing. The other girl is not a squealer; she wears a tank-type suit, and throws as hard, and as seriously, as the boys. She's not losing. To me, they are both attractive young girls. One is not clearly prettier than the other. Something does separate them, however. One has been to the mysterious shrieking camp, and the other hasn't. As the competition continues, the boys start throwing only to the hair-defending, bikini-wearing squealer. I briefly consider asking the tank-wearing girl if she reads Seventeen. It seems apparent she hasn't read about letting boys win for the sake of their fragile egos, a factoid Seventeen helpfully points out. Is squealing and shrieking the female equivalent of insect pyrotechnics? How long will it take before the confident, competitive girl realizes she has won the game, but lost the boy? I'm hoping she couldn't care less, keeps throwing hard, and never resorts to squealing. Maybe she doesn't even like boys.*

*I set aside the magazine and ask my daughter if she wants to get in the pool and cool off with me. Incredulous, she takes off her sunglasses and says, "Really? You have bathing suits that have never been wet...ever!" Sadly, she's right. I am the hair-defending, weak-throwing squealer. I happen to be wearing a new suit. "Well...this one's getting wet," I declare. We jump in; it's cold, but refreshing. A gutter ball hits to the right of me, splattering pool water onto my hair. I refrain from squealing, but quickly shift left in a poorly disguised hair-defending move. Girlhood, however that's defined, has staying power.*

*Artifact 6*

*Mythic Girl*

*Shari L. Savage, 2008*

*The following artifact represents the ways in which language reflects the images in teen magazines.*





*This artifact is from my sorority years. A fraternity would sneak into our sorority house and steal our composite (a large framed picture that contains individual photos of each member) and then return it days later with words and sayings cut from magazines taped over each girl's photo. Meant as a joke, the words often had bite or were highly sexual. We returned the favor by taking theirs. This ritual was called "trashing a composite." I found one a fraternity placed on my photo in an old college scrapbook, a memory recalled when looking at my teen magazine collage.*

Artifact 7

## Inscribing Myth

If myth is a type of speech, as Barthes (1973) claims, then how we talk about girls socioculturally inscribe mythic qualities upon them. If girlhood is made up, as Driscoll (2002) states, or constructed, as Eisenhauer (2003) argues, then who is doing the constructing? Through language, popular media, and social action, discourse about girls and girlhood is produced. Driscoll states, “Images of adolescent girls, whether explicitly referencing virginity or not, mark feminine adolescence as embodying an object of contemplation, disciplined observation, and desiring interpretation” (p. 145). When an object has a name, as *Lolita* does, it is naming which inscribes specific characteristics, creating archetypes of girls.

Humbert, depending on the qualities and characteristics signified by the name, also calls Dolores Dolly, Lo, Lola and Lolita. For example, Humbert tells us, “She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly in school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita” (Nabokov, 1958, p. 9). Humbert continues to address Dolores throughout the book using all of these names, and yet early critical literary reviews (Davies, 1958; Hollander, 1956; Prescott, 1958; Trilling, 1958) barely mention Dolores, reverting to the name Lolita for the remainder. Dolores is lost through the retelling. Lolita becomes the placeholder, the name by which her reputation will be inscribed. Mythic qualities gain strength through the name Lolita, tacit social understandings build upon the myth, and a type of girl is made.



Inscribing Lolita, the name, with mythic qualities and characteristics can be related to my “girl” collage (Artifact 6, p. 137). The right side of the collage speaks of Dolores before Humbert penetrates her; the left speaks of Lolita, whose “spring awakening” leads to “dirty pretty thing.” In popular visual culture, Lolita-like representations combine innocent qualities and characteristics with sexuality, creating a mythic binary often called a Lolita. What is a Lolita? In a broad sense, she is Dolores on the outside, and Lolita on the inside, with a few signifying clues that lean one way or another. The unknowing girl melting into the knowing girl; the fated pause before sexual destiny. A girl ready-made for pursuit; a girl who will be sexually desired, and at the same time, condemned for it.

### Mythic Guilt

Central to my study, are issues of guilt and blameworthiness that follow the name Lolita, upholding her reputation as seducer, manipulator, and victimizer. Earlier I discussed who has had a part in proliferating her myth, the authorial voices casting shadows over socially taboo actions in the novel. It begins with Nabokov and Humbert’s first person narrative, a cascade of unreliable words, until bits and pieces of Dolores’s victimization are layered over, similar to my collage. Nabokov needs to build some kind of empathy for Humbert, or else Humbert is simply a monster. He succeeds, appearing from reading early critical reviews, and little if any attention is given to issues of incest, pedophilia, or guardianship. Also left out of the discussion is Dolores’s contention for sexual engagements with her stepfather. In the following excerpt

from *Lolita*, Humbert is recalling an outdoor sexual act with Dolores. His telling diffuses Dolores's feeling about this particular engagement:

I remember the operation was over, all over, and she was weeping in my arms; a salutary storm of sobs after one of the fits of moodiness that had become so frequent with her in the course of that otherwise admirable year! I had just retracted some silly promise she had forced me to make in a moment of blind impatient passion, and there she was sprawling and sobbing, and pinching my caressing hand. (Nabokov, 1958, p. 169)

Dolores's feelings about her stepfather and their sexual relationship, as referenced above, are only casually described throughout the novel, small currents of disturbing interactions that pass unnoticed in the fluidity of Humbert's telling. Although the words incest and pedophilia are both present in Humbert's confession, they are glossed over in reviews, instead the reviews linger on blood relations and the corrupt, demonic child. Simply put, he's not really her father, and she's not really an innocent child, a necessary subversion if one is to declare the novel to be about passion, not incest, as Lionel Trilling (1958) does. This defense—he's not really her father—failed to convince Jen Shelton (1999) who argued structural relations, as in Humbert's guardianship, is still incest. Even Margaret Mead's (1928) study of the sexually open Samoan culture found that any man engaging sexually with dependants, blood or adopted, was ostracized.

Culturally, incest is taboo in American society. Therefore, Dolores is made out to be the deviant predator so as to diffuse Humbert's role as protector. To re-inscribe Dolores, Humbert's rhetoric works to shift blame, relating jealous rants concerning "a definite drop in Lolita's morals" (Nabokov, 1958, p. 183). He sees in nearly everything she does, an awareness of her sexual power, a willingness to use it, and finally, some kind of negotiation or payment. In the following example, Humbert visits Dolores at school,

finding her reading in a classroom. He spies a “wonderful” girl with a “naked, porcelain-white neck” a few rows up from Dolores; a print of Reynolds’ “Age of Innocence” hangs over the chalkboard:

I sat beside Dolly just behind that neck and that hair, and unbuttoned my overcoat and for sixty-five cents plus permission to participate in the school play, had Dolly put her inky, chalky, red-knuckled hand under the desk...I simply had to take advantage of a combination that I knew would never occur again. (Nabokov, 1958, p. 198)

In this passage Humbert likens Dolores to a prostitute, negotiating a cash payment while extracting an additional promise for future needs. He also declares the value of the mythic girl, a “combination” so irresistible he will pay to be masturbated by his Lolita as the unaware girl is gazed upon. The now thoroughly debased Dolores, well past the “age of innocence,” supplies the needed connection for Humbert’s fantasy.

Guilt, Lolita’s most troubling attribute, is one I hope to dispel. Lolita-like representations imply that eroticizing girls is allowable because of their guilt or their blameworthiness. Dolores’s guilt is myth. Her blameworthiness is based in myth. It is the nature of so-called Lolitas to attract, engage in, and produce sexual desire. It is Lolita’s nature to be consumed and blamed for that consumption. These types of myths are dangerous assumptions that I believe need to be questioned.

## Section 5: Eroticizing Girls In Popular Culture

**G**irlhood, a spectrum of age, and biological and emotional events, are also influenced by the sociocultural realm. Defining place and space along the spectrum is unique to each girl, and girl itself, as already argued, is problematic. Children

are sexual beings, capable of sexual arousal as a reflexive response to stimuli. Desire is different; it involves the hormones produced through puberty, and most important, the want to act upon what is desired. Pre-pubertal children do not experience sexual desire for others (Durham, 2008). Puberty, Driscoll (2002) observes, is an “unwilled” increase in sexual desire, which also coincides with body developments that attract desire from others (p. 151), in other words, children have no say in what is happening to their bodies. School-based sex education, whose purpose is to inform and demystify puberty, presents two versions of how post-pubertal teens are talked to about their sexuality. Boys are educated on responsibility, and natural urges, while girls are taught about appropriateness and how to “hold off male advances,” repressive actions rather than celebratory acknowledgements of sexual development (p. 150). Girls who “fail” to control their natural urges, or submit rather than “hold off,” find themselves outside cultural norms. In this sense, sexual agency is gender-bound and counter-intuitive. Boys can pursue, girls must resist.

Lolita is seen as the girl who pursues, and whose “natural urges” are deviant. She’s seen as being guilty of going against societal rules regarding female sexuality. But Lolitas are also pursued, and desired. Confusing and competing messages like these contribute to cultural narratives about female sexuality. Healthy social development is critical for girls, especially in matters of sexual relationships. If sex education in school contexts continues to silence female sexuality, then parents need to be comfortable discussing sex and sexuality with their children and teens. Given the highly sexualized media, this is an important task, one that Gigi Durham (2008) and Jean Kilbourne and Diane Levin (2008) agree parents could use some help with. Both Durham’s (2008) and

Kilbourne and Levin's (2008) books argue that media literacy education is key in assisting children, teens, and their parents in addressing the issues involved with sexualizing girls in our culture. Navigating a media saturated girlhood is difficult and we, all of us, should be prepared to discuss sex in an open and reciprocal way. However, being prepared to discuss sex and sexuality also carries with it the need to reflect honestly about your own beliefs and value judgments. Morality is a concept that shifts, crossing back and forth throughout history, shifting yet again with gender-based double standards.

In popular visual culture, lines of acceptability are blurred, making crossing a line an area of uncertainty. The eroticization of girls in media is not new; however, important social and cultural shifts are occurring, which could have serious consequences. First, the normalization of erotic images of girls, or images that project desirability onto pre-pubescent bodies, is no longer relegated to adult viewing. Teen magazines, venues designed to attract demographics widely distributed across ages, are increasingly using images eroticizing young girls or prepubescent body types (APA, 2007; Durham 2007, 2008; Kilbourne & Levin, 2008; Lamb & Brown, 2006). Likewise, copies of these images are regularly seen in music video contexts, wherein sexual objectification is often the theme. Second, and more important, the possibility of sexual agency by the girl is crushed out in most of these scenarios, print or video. Girls in music video depictions are rarely shown actively pursuing, engaging in, or enjoying sexual activity at first—but quickly acquiesce once sexual interaction commences (Jhally, 2007; Kilbourne, 2006). Awakened to her “natural” Lolita tendencies, her complicity becomes part of the myth.

Despite our sexually obsessed media, American society does have some rules in place regarding acceptability. Cultural agreements are made concerning boundaries; laws

protect minors, and social consensus dictates when a line is crossed. When a girl of fifteen is sexually involved with a teacher, socially and legally a line is crossed. When a girl of nine is sexually involved with a teacher, the public consensus is outrage. Presumptions are made in both examples. At nine, the girl is likely to be prepubescent and sexually unaware, a minor child who needs protecting. At fifteen, the girl is likely to be post-puberty, have sexual awareness, and although a legal minor, the notion of complicity hangs in the air. Culturally, we presuppose one violation of body and trust is worse than the other; nine is disgusting, fifteen is disturbing. Age, however, should have little to do with how *violating* a crime is. A minor is a minor, according to the law.

The girl, wherever she may be on the spectrum of girlhood, can certainly be sexual and have sexual awareness, but once understood as *knowing*, she moves into the realm of blameworthiness (Driscoll, 2002; Kitzinger, 1988). Here is where mythic guilt precedes consumption. The girl is acceptably consumable, deservedly useable, because her eroticized body, as seen repeatedly in popular visual culture, is normalized as desirable. Using phrases from my teen magazine collage, the *sweet, adorable, first flush of blossoming girl is awakened*, crossing over to *eye candy wild child, born to be bad...get ready*. On the girlhood spectrum, the fated pause on the way to sexual destiny, a message related through words and embraced in images, is then projected out as consumable. The eroticized girl becomes acculturated, carrying with it mythic guilt that implies she deserves objectification.

Sexualizing girls does more than speak to girls and about girls; it says girls are available. The emotional and physical consequences of living in a society upholding messages that girls are sexually desirable, sexually approachable, and sexually available,

are profound. The recent American Psychological Association [APA] report (2007) on the sexualization of girls describes significant issues relating to the eroticization of girls in our culture. Lolita-like representations are noted as having both a “trickle up” and “trickle down” effect on society. Women’s magazines dress women as little girls; teen magazines sexualize girls or place them in adult frameworks, blurring the line between. Pedophilic fashions are popular in both women’s and teen magazines, a trend showing no signs of abating (APA, 2007, p. 13).

In the sociocultural sense, youth and desirability are long understood to be critical factors in advertising, and sexualized girls used to market products are profitable commodities. Since the early sixties, Lolita-like representations have been a part of our everyday visual world. It is a representation in need of close examination, especially given its prevalence in youth markets (APA, 2007; Blandy & Congdon, 1990; Durham, 2007; Freedman, 2003; Green, 2000; Wray & Steele, 2002). Where does Lolita reside in our sociocultural world and how is she representing girls? What do her representations say to society and culture<sup>24</sup>? What could her legacy be?

You can tell a lot about a nation by its advertisements—  
Norman Douglas, 1917<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I searched the keyword “Lolita” on iStockPhotos, a photographic clip art database, and got 227 matches. Pigtails, thigh-highs, lollipops, cherries, and schoolgirl uniforms are the main signifiers seen in this genre.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Campbell et al., 2008, p. 391.

*Nabokov's use of Lewis Carroll's book Alice in Wonderland inspired the following artifact. Although Humbert lists many supposed famous child-man relationships, he neglects to mention Alice Lidell or Carroll's photographs of young girls. Nabokov did, however, refer to Carroll's girls as "sad, scrawny little nymphets, bedraggled and half dressed, or rather semi-draped, as if participating in some dusty and dreadful charade," (Appel, 1991, p.382), a description eerily similar to Humbert's description of Dolores as she lay drugged and semi-nude in the Enchanted Hunters hotel room. He later refers to "Humbertland" as the world Dolores now resides.*





Vladimir Nabokov

Moreover studied a midsummer sale book, it was with a very  
knowledge that I examined various pretty articles, sport shoes,

# Beware

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**WONDERLAND**

Artifact 8

## Two Lolitas

**M**y research identifies two kinds of Lolitas in popular and visual culture texts. The passive, prepubescent innocent girl unaware of her desirability is one type. The sexually aggressive pubescent girl aware of her desirability is the other. Dolores, the twelve-year-old prepubescent girl stepfather Humbert desires, is representative of the *unknowing* girl. Lolita, the mythic embodiment of Dolores as created by Humbert, is representative of the *knowing* girl. Each archetype has specific visual codes that tell viewers something about these kinds of girls. Each archetype speaks of eroticizing young girls; however, my interests concern how and to whom these images speak.

Henry Giroux (2000) posits that innocence is a metaphor, one that is “open to diverse uses and whose effects can be both positive and devastating for children...[and] central to analyzing a politics of innocence, the need to address why, how, and under what conditions the marketing of children’s bodies increasingly permeates diverse elements of society” (p. 61). He argues that child beauty pageants, advertising, and fashion, instructs young girls to become little women, stating, “In this instance, Lolita grows up only to retreat into her youth as a model for what it means to be a woman” (p. 61).

Kilbourne (1999) and Valerie Walkerdine (1996) agree with Giroux’s assertion that children are promoted as objects of desire, while adults act as voyeurs. Innocence and purity are appropriated and repurposed in sexualized representations. For Kilbourne, it is the contradictory message that girls should be “innocent and seductive, virginal and

experienced, all at the same time” that confuses both the girl and the viewer (p. 145). Ads directed at teen girls also employ the same contradictory visual narratives, furthering the idea that girls must bridge these binary notions, or choose one. For the preteen and teen girls reading these magazines, choices are limited: attract and be desired, but remain pure and untouched. First, the unknowing Dolores representation is examined and discussed.

*Artifact 9*

17

*Shari L. Savage, 2008*

*Lewis Carroll’s photographs inspire the following artifact. The model is featured in a fashion editorial based on Carroll’s book Alice in Wonderland. This image, however, refers to his nymphet-like photographs of children, some of which were part of a series of girls seen reclining on a chaise. As seen in the fashion photo, a quote attributed to Lewis Carroll reads, “Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.”*



Artifact 9

## The Unknowing Dolores

**D**olores Haze, Humbert's obsession, is at first desired for her innocence, her inexperience, and her unknowing nymphet power to attract those pedophiles "in the know," (Nabokov, 1958, p.17). Specific characteristics of the nymphet, as noted by Humbert, include: age limits of nine and fourteen...tummies and pigtails...slim bare arms...slenderness of a downy limb...dim eyes, bright lips...bud stage of breast development (10.7 years)...the first appearance of pigmented pubic hair (11.2 years)...small agile rump...[and] hips no bigger than that of a squatting lad (Nabokov, 1958, p.16-22). This represents a partial list of attributes relating to nymphets in general. Dolores has her own additional nymphet qualities, many of which can be seen in Lolita-like representations in popular culture. As an example, a recent ad from *Teen Vogue* created by women's fashion design house BCBG for their teen-directed label BCBGirls, is examined.

The full-page ad, done in faded sepia tones, carries no text except for the name of the brand BCBGirls. Slightly off center, and to the left, a prepubescent waif-like girl occupies two-thirds of the page, superimposed over a background collage of palm trees, street signs, an old car, power lines, and vacant buildings. The overall feel is of a little girl lost in the seedier parts of Los Angeles. One sign says "Distribution" in bold letters; the other sign is smaller and reads "Alameda St." Contrasting against the degraded background images, is an innocently clad young girl, kneeling, elbows supported by her right knee, as she sits on her folded under left foot. Her outfit, a white, smocked, eyelet shirt and white rolled-up bloomer-like shorts, is baby-fresh. Her shoulder-length, white-

blonde hair is parted down the middle and slightly messy, as if her braids have come undone. Her head is tilted to the left; her vacant, passive expression faces the viewer. She is wide-eyed, pale and doll-like in appearance. Her limbs are long and thin, her breasts are barely formed and bound by the embroidered smocking usually seen on baby and toddler clothing.

The shoes, four-inch wood and leather ankle-strap platforms, are considerably out of place with the outfit, and reminiscent of streetwalker footwear. She wears two pieces of jewelry: a chunky I.D. bracelet and an oversized heart ring. She is barefaced, devoid of any make-up, however, the underneath of her eyes are shadowed as if tired or smudged. She looks vulnerable, alone and seems to be in a protective pose, curling up into herself. Other than the shoes, which are clearly for a woman, the image is not sexual or identifiably erotic to most viewers. Instead it gives the impression that the girl needs protection, is in danger, or lost. This Dolores is unaware of her power to attract or her desirability to the Humberts of the world. It is unlikely this image would be considered inappropriate to most people, but for those who desire children sexually, it is likely an appealing image (Carnes, 2003; Paul, 2004).

One important stipulation for nympholepts, men who desire nymphets, is that the girl can be possessed without her knowing (Nabokov, 1958, p. 21). Possession, in this sense, is related to desire. Submissive, passive, prepubescent visual narratives of girls meet this requirement. Child beauty pageant contestants also meet the requirement. Almost any image of a young girl would meet this requirement, simply because she is

visually possessed (desired) without her knowledge. Initially, it is a one-sided engagement; however, Humbert asks an interesting question, and one I also ask through my research:

A propos: I have often wondered what became of those nymphets later? In this wrought-iron world of criss-cross cause and effect, could it be that the hidden throb I stole from them did not affect *their* future? I had possessed her—and she never knew it...But would it not tell sometime later? Had I not somehow tampered with her fate by involving her image in my voluptas? (Nabokov, 1958, p. 21)

Is the act of looking at, or visually possessing eroticized representations of girls without consequence? Does the act of being looked at, of being visually possessed, as Humbert wonders, have lasting effects? Several recent popular culture controversies add to the inquiry: Fifteen-year-old pop star Miley Cyrus's photograph in *Vanity Fair* (June 2008) and seventeen-year-old model Ali Michael's similar photograph in *The New York Times* (2007) fashion supplement. Famed celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz shot photographs to accompany a *Vanity Fair* article featuring Disney Channel actress and pop singing phenomenon Cyrus. The image in question, a semi-nude Cyrus clutching a swath of creamy satin fabric over her breasts, raised many eyebrows because of the singer and actress's age and the sexuality depicted.

The image is very similar to the BCBGirls ad described previously, except the background is a muted grey-green wall. Cyrus is curling over herself protectively; her arms are thin; skin, alabaster pale and covered in goose bumps. Her hair is just-out-of-the-shower wet, tousled and obscuring the left side of her face. The only bright color in the image is the matte red lipstick she wears. Cyrus gazes out seductively from over her

right shoulder, engaging with the viewer. In any other context the photo styling is unoriginal. It is Cyrus's age and Disney-pure image that creates the controversy.

The public outcry asked where her parents were when the photo was taken. Statements made by the Cyrus family claim they were at the shoot and then had to leave. Cyrus's handler was in charge when the photo was taken. Cyrus's parents were reportedly shocked to see the image when it first appeared (Carter, 2008). Cyrus herself did not understand why people were upset with the photograph; however, she later issued an apology to her young fan base. Leibovitz also issued an apology statement. When questioned about how the photo came about, and if she was worried about what her Disney employer might think, Cyrus said:

No, I mean I had a big blanket on. And I thought, this looks pretty, and really natural. I think it's really artsy. It wasn't in a skanky way. Annie took, like, a beautiful shot, and I thought it was really cool. That's what she wanted me to do, and you can't say no to Annie. She's so cute. She gets this puppy-dog look and you're like, O.K. (Cyrus, cited in Handy, 2008, p.132)

Cyrus's description of how she was coaxed into posing is reminiscent of the controversial 1995 Calvin Klein ads in which young models are encouraged by an off-camera male voice to disrobe. Klein's ads were said to have child porn-like quality and were quickly removed. Company sales revenues, however, broke records, and in 1999 he launched another campaign, a billboard image featuring very young children frolicking on a sofa in underwear (Giroux, 2000; Kilbourne, 2006).

*Artifact 10*

Disney Lolita

*Shari L. Savage, 2009*

*The following artifact repurposes Nabokov's text to mimic Cyrus's statement on how she was coaxed into posing partially clothed for Leibovitz.*





Artifact 10

Perhaps inspired by Calvin Klein, Lee Jeans used a child porn-like billboard campaign<sup>26</sup> in Australia, featuring a partially nude lollipop-licking pubescent-looking model posing in a photographer's seedy motel room. Other images in the series include the model sucking on a Popsicle, the model topless in bed with the photographer as he aims the camera at the mirror over the bed, another features the model in her underwear on the bed with a young man. The photographer, Terry Richardson, is seen in most of the images. While this representation fits in the *knowing* Lolita category, with the inclusion of classic oral fixation Lolita signifiers like lollipops and Popsicles, a second look suggests the model appears coached; her attempts at seductive expressions are awkward and forced. Australians, generally less concerned with nudity than Americans, did find the ads to be disturbing, calling for their removal. The ad campaign was labeled Lolita-like by several Australian advertising watchdog groups. The billboard ads were eventually deemed acceptable because the model is eighteen, despite styling efforts making her appear much younger (Balendu, 2006).

Cyrus was not eighteen; therefore, her images are problematic for many. A record 915 letters to the editor of *Vanity Fair* addressed the Leibovitz photograph of Cyrus (Carter, 2008, p. 54). Some of the letters questioned not the semi-topless image, but the photograph of Cyrus provocatively draped across her father, an image many, myself included, read as incestuous. Perhaps it is the tacit knowledge that her father, Billy Ray Cyrus, profits from his daughter's commodification that bothers me most.

Model Ali Michael, age seventeen at the time, was involved in another age-related controversy, when semi-nude images of her ran in the December 2007 issue of *T*

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<sup>26</sup> View Lee jeans billboard campaign images at <http://www.adpunch.org/entry/controversial-lee-jeans-ad-declared-acceptable-by-the-board/>

*Magazine*, a *New York Times* fashion supplement. The photographs, taken by Paolo Roversi, had readers complaining about the child porn qualities of the images (Hoyt, 2007). Two photos show Michael nude, a bunched up navy coat around her hips, as she walks away from the camera. In one shot, the curve of her left breast is shown. Like Cyrus, and the model in the BCBGirls ad, Michael is pale, devoid of make-up, except for dark red lips. Her whippet-thin frame appears frail, her coloring anemic. Her expression is vacant, but she too, peers back at the camera from over her left shoulder (see artifact 13, p. 175).

In the December 16, 2007 edition of the *New York Times*, Clark Hoyt investigates how the images made it into the magazine in the first place, given the age of the model. He writes that he told the deputy editor of the *Times*, Jim Schachter, that the semi-nude minor had been placed in a sexualized context. Schachter, who approved the photos, disagreed, pointing out that our culture does not have a “bright line” separating sexually charged images of women “just short of eighteen” (p. 10). Craig Whitney, *Times* standards editor, says that he would have pulled the images, had he been shown them, “because I thought they were tawdry” (p. 10). Whitney was not sent the images or told of the minor girl depicted in the photos.

Michael surfaced again in *The Wall Street Journal*, when referenced in an article about models being too thin. In the article she is described as “wraithlike, with a still-developing body” (Binkley, 2007, as cited in Keltner, 2008, p. 152). Upset by the article, Michael, who began modeling at age fourteen, writes in the June/July 2008 *Teen Vogue* about her struggles with bulimia and laxative abuse. Her first-person essay on the ugly underbelly of modeling describes the pressure her representatives’ put on her to maintain

her prepubescent body (Keltner, 2008, p. 154). While the article appears to be arguing for a healthier modeling body type, the fashion layouts in the same issue feature rail-thin preteens.

Michael, it turns out, is a veteran of semi-nude fashion images. *Italian Vogue* featured Michael baring her right breast in a Lolita-inspired fashion editorial, an image Humbert would have enjoyed as it showcases a prepubescent body (see Artifact 16, p. 190). During a Today show interview regarding eating disorders Michael explained that she had been encouraged to stay very slim, which resulted in the postponement of her natural puberty. She was eventually placed on estrogen pills to jump start menarche. When Michael began to fill out, she was fired from several European runway events for being too fat. The outrage over calling Michael fat and the death of a Brazilian model due to complications of anorexia ushered in a call to monitor the body mass indexes of models working in Europe (Today, May 14, 2008).

Returning now to Humbert and his question—Is the girl we visually possess “tampered” with in the process? It would seem that Cyrus and Michael were affected by the reaction the public and employers had to their respective images. Having sexuality projected upon them by others caused both teens to reevaluate how they are seen and understood by our culture. Cyrus apologized for her desirability; Michael warned fellow teens of the price paid to maintain female attractiveness, a look culturally bound to youthful bodies. Ironically, the controversy that brought both girls notoriety is responsible for bringing more possessive eyes to the images in question. The *Vanity Fair* website crashed following the buzz about Cyrus’s photo. Likewise, Hoyt directs readers to Michael’s photographs at the *Times* website, further disseminating her images.

Presumed innocence is in large part the main issue with Cyrus and Michael's photographs. Innocence as commodity frames the rationale behind these types of images. The exploitation of presumed innocence, in this case the young models featured in these depictions, creates the controversy. For both girls, however, these controversial representations are not out of the realm of past depictions. Cyrus posted her own images on MySpace, images many would say fall into her aforementioned "skanky" category. In one photo she is seen pulling her tank top down to expose her green lace bra, gazing up from under her bangs with a sultry expression. In contrast, Leibovitz's image is far less sexual, but promotes innocence as desirable.

The unknowing Lolita representation trades on the myth of innocence. Her presumed innocence is in need of protection and her vulnerability is portrayed as desirable in popular culture narratives. In this sense, exploiting the myth of innocence is as troubling as the presumption of guilt attributed to the knowing Lolita. Either way, the girl is cast in a stereotypical role, a role she herself has little control over. For Cyrus and Michael, the public dissemination of their sexualized images, whether agreed to or coerced by adults in authority (photographer, mother, handler), is far broader than a magazine's circulation. On the Internet, where I was able to preview and download most of the images in my dissertation, representations of Cyrus and Michael have global staying power. I wonder if Michael, now eighteen, wishes her prepubescent breasts were not available for viewing? What rights do minors have over their own images?

Eileen Zurbriggen, Gale Pearce, and Jennifer Freyd (2003) ask similar questions in their study concerning children who serve as artistic models. Issues raised in their study include nudity, motives behind the image, consent, external vulnerability, and

objectification. Two specific actions are discussed: first, the events surrounding the photograph; and second, the public dissemination of the image itself. The authors note that most discussions regarding nude photographic images of children and their possible consequences center on child pornography. Their study aims to explore issues relating to minors in art photography, minors seen in their parent's art, and minor advertising models (p. 305-306). Photographic artist Sally Mann, who took many nude photos of her own children, and Jock Sturges, who takes nude photos of children on nude beaches in France, are both featured in Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd (2003). Likewise, Mann and Sturges are part of my study and begin my discussion concerning the eroticization of children in art photography.

#### Lolita-like Photography: Art or Child Porn?

**M**ann's 1988 book *At Twelve* features portraits of twelve-year-old girls in and around Mann's native home, Lexington, Virginia. Capturing the elusive space between girl and woman served as her impetus. While many of the images have a sensual quality, they did not cause the same outrage as her 1991 book *Immediate Family*, which depicted her own children in various stages of undress, or total nudity. Some thought the images in *Immediate Family* could be labeled child pornography; however, Mann was not charged or investigated. Protests were formed outside gallery showings and bookstores, and many lingering questions swirled around the public dissemination of the images, some of which appear to be very private moments in her children's lives. Supporters of Mann's work declared that any sexuality seen in the

images were the result of less than innocent readings (Woodward, 1992). Or, as others have argued, children are sexual beings and it is adults who have problems with acknowledging the idea (Stanley, 1991; Woodward, 1992). Mann herself stated, “I don’t think of my children, and I don’t think anyone else should think of them with any sexual thoughts. I think childhood sexuality is an oxymoron” (cited in Woodward, 1992, p. 6). Her multiple positions as artist and mother of the subjects also raised questions. Who is advocating for the minor child, beyond the parent artist?—a condition Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd (2003) assert needs to be considered (p. 313).

Those who argued Mann’s images captured the pure but wild nature of childhood may be put off by knowing some of these images were highly constructed, in many cases re-enacted multiple times for the proper light effects, or simply cropped in a manner that plays on ambiguity (Brock, 1998). For me they are both disturbing and ethereal in their beauty, much like Nabokov’s *Lolita*. I would not judge them as being child porn; however, pictures of Mann’s children are often found on computer hard drives of sex offenders (Carnes, 2003; Stanley, 1991). What people do with these images, and whether or not they find them sexually arousing has little to do with declaring a distinction between art and child porn. What I do wonder, though, is how the subjects might feel knowing that their images are in the possession of pedophiles?

Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd (2003) discuss Mann’s images as having the possibility of bringing external vulnerability; in other words, those who see and have an erotic connection to the images may project sexual understanding onto that child. Mann, who consulted federal law experts before publishing her photographs, also worried about this:

When I went to see that Federal prosecutor, she said: “Do you want to know what you really have to watch for? Someone who sees these pictures and moves to Lexington and ingratiates himself into your family life. They’ll come after Jessie and Virginia because they seem so pliable, so broken.” That seems far-fetched, but if you want to know my worst fear, that’s one of them. (Mann, as cited in Woodward, 1992, p. 7)

Emmett, Mann’s son should also be included in the prosecutors warning, as he is just as desirable to some as the girls. Additionally, Mann sent her children to a child psychologist before releasing her book, a precaution Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd (2003) also suggest doing when dealing with child models. While Mann’s children were deemed well adjusted, she was warned that as they reach adulthood they might have a very different reaction to her use of their bodies (p. 7). Indeed, Mann’s daughter Jessie, now a photographer and painter, tells *Aperture* magazine how the public dissemination of her image affected her:

Those images, our childhood stories, our very characters, were consumed by an outside meaning, which was in a way bigger than we were. As we grew up we didn’t just grow into ourselves, we grew into the larger conception of our characters that others projected for us. (Jessie Mann, cited in *Aperture*, 2006, p. 28)

Mann’s models in *At Twelve* represent a different issue. In this instance parental consent was obtained, but an advocate with a neutral position could have offered protection against exploitation. The photographer, eager to get the shot right, and the parent who may have their own interests in mind (economic, notoriety), may not be attuned to the needs of the model. Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd (2003) use Mann’s own words from *At Twelve* to explain why an advocate is needed in this description of a photo shoot:

This child was distinctly reluctant to stand closer to her mother’s boyfriend. This seemed strange to me, as it was their peculiar familiarity that had provoked this



photograph in the first place. Looking through the ground glass I fretted over cropping her elbow but she would not budge toward him...Several months later her mother shot him in the face with a .22. She testified that while working at a local truckstop he was 'at home partying and harassing my daughter.' The child put it to me more directly. I look at this photograph now with a jaggy chill of realization. (Mann, 1988, p.51)

While an advocate may or may not have noticed what Mann ignored, I question why the image is still depicted in her book? The girl is forever linked to her abuser in the continued use of the image, and by including Mann's after the fact knowledge concerning the photographic shoot; we then participate in this girl's exploitation by knowing her story. It should be her story to tell, not Mann's. (I include Mann's photograph in artifact 11 on page 169; however, I have obscured the girl's face.)

Unlike Mann, Jock Sturges has been fully investigated for child pornography. His images of young nude girls garner criticism because some think they are far more graphic and erotic than Mann's, and he is not related to his subjects. His house and studio were raided by law enforcement in 1990. Among the items confiscated, a copy of Nabokov's *Lolita* (Stanley, 1991). Mann also has a copy of *Lolita*, which she re-read during the controversy surrounding her photographs (many people called her images Lolita-like), admitting it was "difficult to read the second time because of what he did to that girl" (Woodward, 1992, p. 7). What Sturges, Mann, and Nabokov share in common is the ability to unnerve, to represent childhood without apology, to suggest the sensuality in childhood play, while simultaneously shattering the myth of innocence.

*The following artifact critiques Sally Mann's use of this image in her book. I am appalled that the girl pictured is forever linked to her abuser in a way that amounts to a public "outing" of her sexual use at his hands, thanks to Mann's commentary. I use an illustration from Lewis Carroll's book Jabberwocky to frame the Mann photograph, which says, "beware." The word "beware" reminds me of Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd's (2003) assertion that minor models should be accompanied by an advocate who would "be aware" on their behalf.*



Artifact 11

In another context, however, Sturges and Mann's art could easily shift closer to the realm of child pornography. What sets their photographs apart from depictions of child porn is the aesthetic. Their images are, for the most part, pretty. The children exploited in child porn<sup>27</sup> are not set against sun-drenched beaches, or kudzu-encrusted forests. Endless summer days, and imagined worlds populated by woodland sprites frame the bulk of Mann's photographs. Her work in *At Twelve* contains many less "pretty" images, and if these girls were depicted nude, connections to child porn would be easier to argue; furthermore, allusions to incest and child abuse are present in some of her image constructions.

Most troubling for me, however, are the images of Mann's own children that capture the imprint of violence—a black eye, a bloody nose, a gashed forehead, all resulting from, in these cases, normal childhood accidents. In the context of a mother documenting her children in play, even rough play—they seem harmless. Removed from that context they resemble things more sinister. Mann also observes how these images shift contextually, even for her. She finds photographs she took of Virginia's blackened eye disturbing in their ability to read as "post-mortem" (Woodward, 1992, p. 4).

Mann claims to "shamelessly" borrow from the history of photography, and her use of an antique-looking large format camera echoes her assertion (Woodward, 1992). Comparisons to Lewis Carroll's images of children, girls specifically, are easy to make, as Mann appears to "shamelessly" borrow from his photographs. Although Mann doesn't

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<sup>27</sup> According to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children, children depicted in porn are difficult to identify because blindfolds, gags, or other bindings often obscure their faces. Of the millions of child porn images on the Internet only about 1200 kids have been identified. In addition, child porn images are usually taken in non-descript or hard to identify locations (NCMEC, 2009).

refer to Carroll as one of her inspirations, she does quote him in her book *At Twelve*: “Lewis Carroll wrote that a girl of twelve is one on whom no shadow of sin has fallen, but one who has been touched by the ‘outermost fringe of the shadow of sorrow’ ”(Mann, 1988, p. 52). I can’t help but think of Dolores when reading Carroll’s words.

Mann’s decision to stop photographing her children for her art was not influenced by public opinion, or her concerns that her kids could become pedophilic targets, or even their impending puberty. Instead, she stopped using them as subjects because she felt her work began to resemble advertising images (Art21, 2003). Similarly, put a tank top and jean shorts on many of Sturges’s pre-teen girls, and they too would resemble popular culture advertising. Calvin Klein’s 1995 ads and the recent Lee Jeans ad campaign both trade on the ambiguity between what is artful and what is exploitive.

*Artifact 12*

Carrollesque

*Shari L. Savage, 2009*

*The following artifact showcases one of Carroll’s child nudes in comparison to Mann’s depiction of her daughter, Virginia. I added the butterfly wing, inserting it behind Virginia’s out stretched arm.*



For Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd (2003), blurring the lines between art and the exploitation of children can be countered with one bold, but highly unlikely suggestion. Images of minors containing nudity, sexualized allusions, or scenarios that may be construed as exploitive, should not be publicly disseminated until the subject reaches the age of consent (p. 315). Interestingly, Mann considered doing the same with her book *Immediate Family*, but her kids talked her out of it. Later, when Mann was being interviewed for a *New York Times* piece, the photographer asked the children what kind of photo of their mother should accompany the article, “Shoot her naked, shoot her naked,” they shouted (Woodward, 1992, p. 2). Mann complied.

Consent, something Mann gave on behalf of her children, feels shadowed by her additional role as the artist.<sup>28</sup> The parents or guardians of the girls featured in *At Twelve* signed release forms giving Mann control of the images, control that allows Mann to use the images as she sees fit. In contrast, Sturges asks permission to photograph children on nude beaches, or has been asked by parents to photograph their children, but he does not use consent forms. Instead, Sturges claims, he personally contacts each model before using an image, explaining how or where an image might be disseminated, stating, “People mature, grow older, change. I never want to be guilty of making assumptions about those changes” (cited in Zurbriggen, Pearce & Freyd, 2003, p. 315). His explanation, while far more democratic than normal consent releases, does not address who, exactly, is giving verbal consent at the time of contact. Is the model asked for consent? Is it the guardian?

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<sup>28</sup> Although Mann did give her kids “veto” power, her mother role could be seen as persuasive.

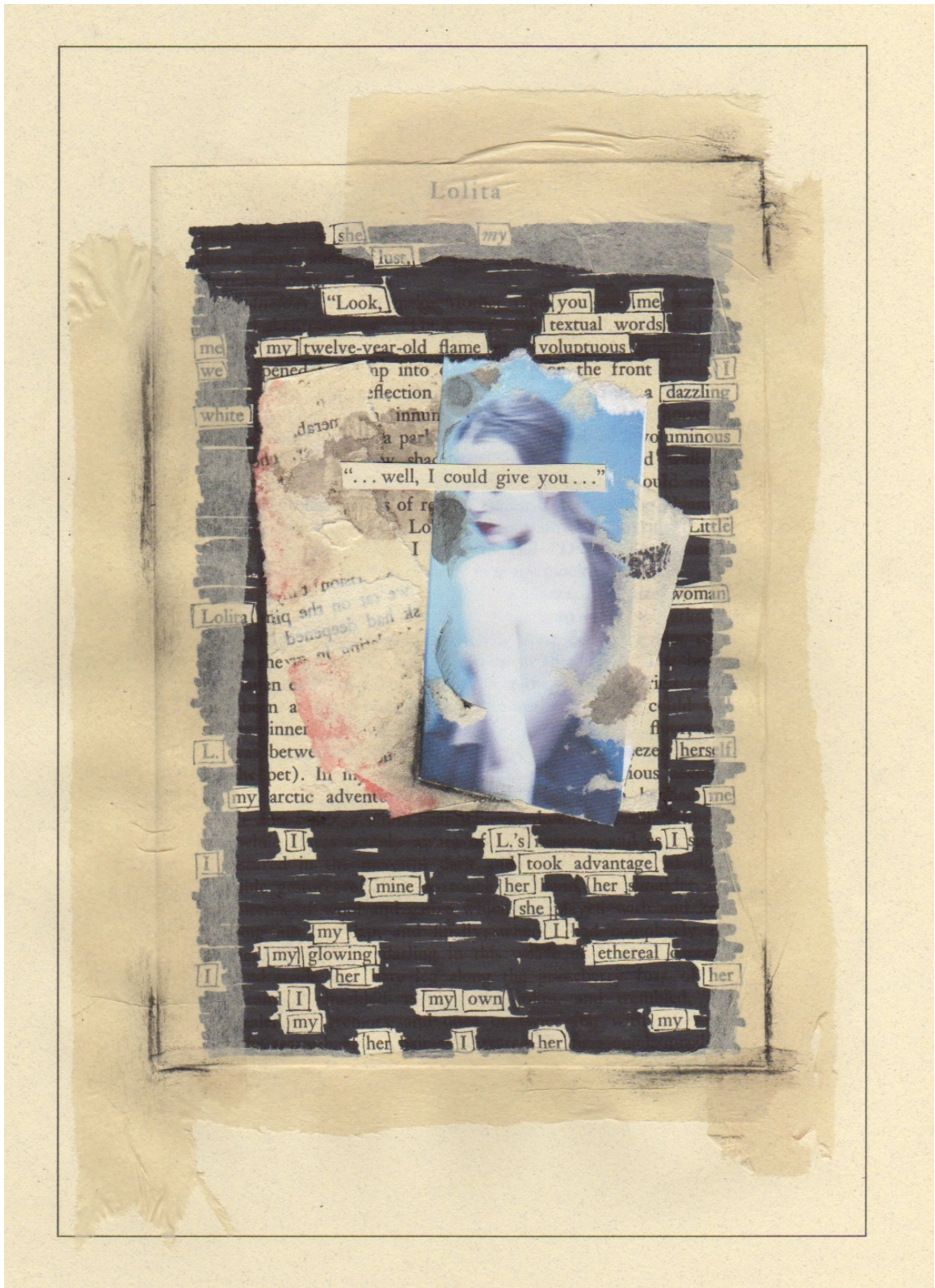
These are critical distinctions because, as Zurbriggen, Pearce, and Freyd (2003) point out, minors, especially the very young, may not be able to understand the implications, the subtleties of sensuality or sexuality connoted in an image. Did model Ali Michael, a minor at the time, fully understand that her prepubescent breasts would become part of an Internet cache of sexualized girl images? Or did she just want to participate in the world of high fashion? I hope it was the latter, but her parents, in this case her mother, should have considered the former. Recalling *The New York Times* response to the uproar over Michael's semi-nude images, and Jim Schachter's claim that our culture does not have a "bright line" separating sexually charged images of women "just short of eighteen," I find myself wondering, along with Hoyt (2007), if a line can ever be drawn (p.10).

*Academic:*

*A colleague heard me discussing Mann's images from Immediate Family and the idea of consent and joined in the conversation. We discussed the Art21 interview in which Jessie Mann talks about her mother and the controversy over the pictures. In it she defends her mom, and the images, saying she did not think they had a serious impact (The Art21 interview predates her Aperture statement quoted earlier). My colleague said, "Oh, yeah? Have you seen Jessie Mann's photography? Google it sometime." I did. Although she appears to have moved on to painting, or at least that was what she had posted on her site, I did locate some images of Mann in several highly sexualized photographs, very Cindy Sherman-like. Other images copied European paintings of nudes, and some seemed to refer to her mother's work.*



*In the following artifact, one of Ali Michael's "T" Magazine images is layered over an altered Nabokov page, in a "black ink" writing that works to rub out Humbert's telling, while making a point of his self-centeredness.*



Artifact 13

## The Knowing Lolita: The Pornification of Popular Culture

**L**olita, the girl with the façade of innocence, is depicted as being aware of her power to attract. She understands how to walk the perilous line between virginity and being sexually experienced. The knowing Lolita is the more prevalent of eroticized girl representations. Because she appears to want to participate in the visual possession, she is rarely seen as being vulnerable, lost, or in need of protection, as is the unknowing Dolores archetype. An example of the knowing Lolita archetype, also from *Teen Vogue*, is a recent Diesel ad that employs many classic Lolita signifiers.

Remarkably similar to the BCBGirls image, this full-page ad is also black and white, except for a small red rectangle containing the brand's logo, located in the top right corner. A nude, but diaper-wearing girl sits, leaning back against large, white-feathered wings. Wings appear to be attached to her back. The overall theme depicts a baby angel crash-landed on earth. The angel's hair is long, black, and hangs over her naked breasts. Like the BCBGirls model, one leg is bent close to the body, while the other folds under her right thigh. She appears wary, but open. Her arms are not crossed; rather, they support her as she leans back. Her head is angled down; her eyes peer out through her bangs. Her lips are dark, heavily made-up, and large. She, too, is pale, thin and has shadows under her eyes. She is wearing athletic shoes with the brand name showing on the tongue. No text is used outside of the brand logo Diesel.

The image seems ripped off from Victoria's Secret Angels campaign. The Diesel model is not styled to look prepubescent, or underage, rather she has a very sexual appeal. The visual narrative trades on innocence, depicting an angelic young woman,

playing as babyish, but broken. She is the fallen angel who is ready and willing, yet the diaper says she may need tutoring. She is not certain she wants to be possessed, but she might allow someone to try. Her gaze is not vacant, but interested in engaging the viewer. In many ways the image is reminiscent of Cyrus's MySpace posting, Disney's angel gone bad.

Debra Merskin (2004) notes that eroticized girl representations featuring a model's returned gaze is simultaneously "vampish and virginal, the forbidden and the accessible," the same binary of which Kilbourne speaks (p. 121). Visual narratives of girls as sexually consumable are not without consequence. These depictions become culturally normalized, continuing the "ideology of girls as sexual agents in the imaginary relations between men and girls provided by these images" (Albright, 2002, as cited in Merskin, 2004, p. 123). Whether it is Dolores or Lolita being visually possessed, both representations are considered to be erotic or sexually desirable for male consumption.

Many teen consumers, whom these ads are meant to persuade, take these culturally acceptable narratives about their identities and copy the looks (Durham, 2007; Kilbourne & Levin, 2008). The teen that wants the outfit advertised by BCBGirls buys it, or something similar, and walks among the Humberts, the would-be-Humberts, or anyone else who might find her Dolores-like look appealing. Like the ad, she can be visually possessed without her knowing. As Humbert argues, only the "bewitched traveler," those who recognize nymphets, "can detect their true nature" (Nabokov, 1958, p. 16). A true nature easily recognized by those attracted to young girls, or as Eylon (2006) states, "an appetite that fits its object consumes those few" (p. 167). Current visual narratives,

especially those repetitively eroticizing girls, pique appetites while “bewitching” the male viewer, supporting the idea that these types of girls are sexually available.

For the millions of girls who read magazines like *Teen Vogue*, *Teen People* and *Seventeen*, repetitive representations of prepubescent, thin, pale, vacant-looking models, creates blueprints of what they should look like in our culture (Durham, 2007). These images are patterned to project passivity, submission, and little, if any, expressive energy (Kilbourne, 1999, 2006). If a representation does depict emotion it is often through a sexual, or provocative facial expression, creating an image often referred to as Lolita-ish (Giroux, 2000). Representations of young girls as desirable or erotic in their passivity negates agency because, as Walkerdine (1997) reminds us, “Images cannot say ‘no’ ” (p. 166).

The purpose of Lolita-like ads is not to arouse girls, but perhaps as Bordo (2003) observes, the advertiser hopes girls will want “to participate in the world they portray” (p. 458). Teen pop stars and actresses are often made to participate in the Lolita realm, further normalizing Lolita-like representations. Megan Greydanus (2004) connects the porn industry to music videos, noting that pop icons Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, and Mandy Moore, all starred in music videos directed by Gregory Dark, a director of adult films. Those who have seen these videos could easily make the connection, especially Spear’s “Baby One More Time” video. In the video she sings and dances while wearing a Catholic school uniform which has been styled sexually, including above-the-knee stockings and girlish braids. Spears herself acknowledges the high numbers of middle-aged men who frequent her concerts, and not as father’s of pre-teens in attendance (Wood, 2001). Dark, who is also an art director for *Rolling Stone* magazine,

was asked about the transition of pornographic representations into popular culture. He stated it is “not so much anomalous as inevitable.” When questioned about *Rolling Stone*’s Lolita-like magazine covers of young pop stars, Dark referred to his styling as “the lure of jailbait” (cited in Junod, 2001, p.133).

*Artifact 14*

What’s a Girl to Wear?

*Shari L. Savage, 2009*

“What’s a girl to wear?” is a melding of fashion images, newspaper articles, and photographs. The Japanese “Lolicon” trend is included, as is an editorial fashion spread on little girl’s clothes with an “Eloise at the Plaza” theme. Lolita references are bracketed in newspaper texts, and then connected to each other. On the far left is an image of a Lolita-like costume I found in one of our campus newspapers, taken on Halloween at a campus area bar. The girl (central) in the red plaid jumper is a student of mine. She dressed as Lolita for Halloween, too, and gave me this photo for my research. She told me that she was surprised by all the male attention she got as she walked about campus, which made her feel uncomfortable. “It felt creepy...” she explained (I love the Ipod tucked in the top of her thigh-high stockings, a modern day Dolores).



Artifact 14

Debra Merskin (2004) asserts that the cultural acceptability and “the ubiquity of sexual representations in advertising also communicates to children that this is something adults condone and the glamorization of which celebrates girls as sexual objects” (p. 127). Kilbourne (1999) believes passive, submissive narratives of girls showcase the lack of sexual agency young females have over their own lives, thereby encouraging men to take charge (p.148). The “myth that children want to be used sexually by adults—paralleling the age-old myth women want to be raped” is often used by abusers to support claims that the child was asking for it, mirroring Kitzinger’s (1988) argument (Davidson, cited in Merskin, 2004, p. 127). Walkerdine (1996), however, looks at the larger issues concerning the sexualization of girls in advertising, stating that the “eroticization of little girls is not a problem about a minority of perverts from who the normal general public should be protected...it is about massive fantasies carried in culture.” Furthermore, “Culture carries these adult fantasies, creates vehicles for them” (p. 330). Fashion is one vehicle; Lolita porn is another.

### Fetishizing Lolita

**L**olita porn, a specific category of pornography, promotes prepubescent female bodies as sites of sexual desire. Legal Lolita porn features models eighteen or older that are styled to appear young. Pedophilia is considered by most people to be a heinous perversion. When ads featuring children or young girls veer closely into the realm of looking pedophilic, the public balks. Several examples have already been introduced. Likewise, pornographic imagery is not normally associated with teen



magazines, and yet advertising makes use of many of the visual codes found in pornography. As porn-like images become mainstream, so does the fetishization of girls as sexual objects of desire (Durham, 2008, 2009; Jhally, 2007; Junod, 2001; Kilbourne, 2006; Levy, 2005).

Kilbourne (2006) speaks strongly about sex used in advertising when linking pornography to advertising. She states, “Sex in advertising is pornographic because it dehumanizes and objectifies people, especially women, and because it fetishizes products, imbues them with an erotic charge—which dooms us to disappointment since products never can fulfill our sexual desires or meet our emotional needs” (p.271). We both acknowledge how often the poses and gestures in ads appear “borrowed” from pornography, promoting objectification, submission, and in the case of Lolita-like representations, the sexual exploitation of children. The implicit danger in using such imagery, according to Kilbourne, relates to the “deeply held belief that all women, regardless of age, are really temptresses in disguise, nymphets, sexually insatiable and seductive, which conveniently transfers all blame and responsibility onto women” (p.281), beliefs Humbert validates as he justifies his sexual relationship with Dolores. Lolita porn does the same work as mainstream porn. It dehumanizes, objectifies, fetishizes, and trades in the eroticization of prepubescent body types.

The world of Internet porn is not a world I am accustomed to researching, and in doing so I found myself in places I had not intended to be and learning things I would rather not know. It is a place without boundaries or conscience. A few statistics bring its scope to light. Internet porn represents roughly 12% of the total content of the World Wide Web, but garners over 60% of web traffic. Over 280 new porn sites are added daily,

and each day 68-million search engine requests involve porn. To put porn dollars into a perspective that illustrates its cultural and societal influence consider this statistic: Global porn revenues are estimated at \$57 billion yearly, while Microsoft software, used in computers all over the world, brings in only \$36 billion in yearly revenues (Ropeleto, 2006).

Internet pornography has thousands of web domains connecting to the keyword “Lolita” (Asher, 2002; Carnes, 2003). The language used on Lolita porn websites is important in that certain key phrases are employed to titillate; *young, girls, innocent, virginal, untouched, uninitiated, first time, cherry poppers, barely legal, and school girls*. Although I hope the subjects depicted in Lolita porn are indeed women, not girls or underage teens, I can’t know that for sure. What I do know is they look, or are presented to look, as young as possible. Some Lolita porn sites promise things I do not want to see and fervently wish is not true, including rape, incest, defloweration, and the use (abuse) of gynecological instruments.

Lolita signifiers abound in Lolita porn. Lollipops, pigtails, braids, ribbons and hair bows, meet small-breasted, thin-hipped bodies with bare pubic mounds, and “lips as red as licked red candy” (Nabokov, 1958, p. 44). Legal Lolita porn is the one place in porn that small-breasted or flat-chested women are preferred. Plaid skirts, anklets, saddle shoes, and white or floral cotton panties add to the visual narrative, referring back to Nabokov’s descriptive catalog of nymphet motifs.

Popular culture intersects with Lolita porn in multiple sites, furthering the normalization of sexualizing the very young. Besides Lolita-like representations in music videos, or Lolita-like fashions, Lolita is also present in unexpected places like

Nationwide Insurance advertising; Japanese anime, in children's dolls called Bratz, and in the Japanese teen subculture called *Loli-con* (Parker, 2004; Jhally, 2007; Kilbourne, 2006). According to James Kincaid (2008), who writes in his essay “*Lolita* at Middle Age,” a Google search of the book *Lolita* reveals it is second only to the Bible in the number of hits—over 50 million, most of which do not refer to literature (p. B18). *Lolita* no longer belongs to literature, Internet pornography, the secreted world of child pornography or pedophilia; she is a marketing juggernaut.

### *Loli-con* and Beyond

**L***oli-con*, a subculture style of dress or costume that has been adopted by teens in Japan, has four main categories: gothic, sweet, classic, and punk. Most Japanese teens wearing these fashions do not view them as overtly sexual, rather, they consider the fashions cute, pretty, and beautiful. The “sweet” and “classic” *Lolita* are closely related to the depictions in American teen publications, featuring lace, ruffles, pastels, and girlish stockings. Japanese trendsetters embellish the look with oversized baby bonnets; they suck on pacifiers, and carry teddy bears or dolls (Talmadge, 2008). The *Loli-con* look is considered a fringe style and is not seen at this extreme outside of Japan, although several stores catering to customers are located in Hong Kong (Kilbourne, 2006; Parker, 2004). I visited some websites<sup>29</sup> devoted to these fashions, and while the text is in Japanese the models depicted are not Asian, they are young looking Caucasian girls.

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<sup>29</sup> View [www.juliette-et-justine.com](http://www.juliette-et-justine.com) to see *Loli-con* fashions.

The Lolita image is also popular in Japanese Manga and Anime, which have allowed the trend to cross borders in Asia; however, acquiring *Loli-con* fashions is still limited to online outlets. Some of the design brand names are *Angelic Pretty*, *Baby*, *Stars Shine Bright*, *Innocent World*, *Stocking Shock*, and *Milk-Pearl*. These brand names certainly embrace a similar feel to the language used in Lolita porn, despite the assertions that these fashion trends are not viewed by Japanese teens as sexual signifiers (Talmadge, 2008). To Japanese men who frequent “image clubs” where schoolgirl fantasies can be played out, it is seen as a highly desirable identity. Tokyo is host to over 100 such image clubs (Kilbourne, 2006, p. 282). In what is an increasingly global culture, it didn’t take long for me to find similar trends emerging in Europe and the United States. American and European fashion designers are embracing little girl chic, too.

Erin Fetherston, a young American designer featured in *Domino* magazine, says her work was inspired by the character “Wendy” in *Peter Pan* and images of pink flamingos, when she created her line of fashion designs called “Wendybird” (Cohane, 2006). She says these two references remind her of childhood innocence and the “wildness” and long-legged awkwardness of flamingos: “I imagined these ethereal creatures twirling around one another, shy but preening” (p.153). Using layers of chiffon and ruffles of tulle, she reworked aspects of girls clothing into “sweet” smocks and lace apron dresses, rendered in pale pinks, creams, and whites. Her designs are for women, not teens, and yet the models wearing her designs appear to be young teens. Fetherston is promoting her line using a short film directed by photographer Ellen von Unwerth, starring film actress Kirsten Dunst, most recognizable from her Lolita-like vampire-role in *Interview with a Vampire*, the movie version of Anne Rice’s book. Designer

Fetherston, who uses the language of childhood, fairy tales, and magical creations, has in effect captured the essence of the myth of innocence. European designers, however, reference both innocence and sexuality, describing the erotic notion of this combination.

An article entitled “Belle du Jour: Bellocq’s pretty babies seize the day look,” (Silva, 2006, p. 80) features the 2006 spring runway fashions from *Prada*, *Chloe* and *Rocha* design houses, connecting them to photographs by Ernest J. Bellocq of twentieth century prostitutes working in Storyville, the red light district in New Orleans. Silva writes, “High fashion is fueled by low urges.” He goes on to describe the designs as vestal whites, off- the-shoulder tops, eyelet baby doll dresses, with lace, ruffles, and gravity-challenged stockings. In the same article designer Muiccia Prada calls these looks “sexual signifiers.” Bruce Wallis, chief curator of the International Center of Photography, says the Bellocq images “...resonate because of the timeless allure of the sitters, whose appeal is precisely the mix of eroticism and innocence” (p.80). In Bellocq’s photographs the prostitutes wear over-the-knee stockings, white bloomers and little girl pinafores, whores playing out the myth of innocence. Silva (2006) also acknowledges:

as much as the fashion world loves a freakish outsider naïf, most likely Bellocq was simply a creepy little guy, a commercial photographer who, not surprisingly, preferred late-night bordellos...then again, Bellocq also photographed class portraits for the local Catholic school and the opium dens of Chinatown. A mix of heaven-sent and the hell bent—how very this season. (p. 80)

Designer Fetherston, whose designs are similar to the looks Silva writes of, uses the language of innocence in describing her designs, but ignores the erotic qualities embodied in her fashions. She focuses instead on the shy and awkward girl, who “twirls and preens,” a description remarkably like the rapturous prose Nabokov intones when writing of nymphets (Cohane, 2006, p. 153).

*The following artifact features the model Ali Michael in an Italian Vogue fashion editorial. One prepubescent breast is shown, qualifying this photo as child porn-ish in the U.S., and yet so reminiscent of the images in Sally Mann's book At Twelve.*



Artifact 15

## It's Just Clothes

Susan Bordo (2003) quotes designer Josie Natori, who argues in *Harper's Bazaar* magazine that “fashion is not about reality” (p. 458). Bordo agrees with Natori on that point, but further argues these images are still “manipulations of visual elements,” which are “arranged precisely in order to arouse desire, fantasy, and longing, to make us want to participate in the world they portray. That is the point and the source of their potency, and it's bad faith for the industry to pretend otherwise” (p.458).

Although some have argued today's teen girls are savvy enough to read against the grain, (Eisenhauer, 2006; Wray & Steele, 2002) they also note that these magazines are often read by girls much younger than the intended market, girls as young as 10, who are perhaps more likely to be manipulated by the messages contained within. Jennifer Wray and Jeanne Steele (2002) believe girls do have the “ability to interpret and resist;” however, it remains “unrealistic to believe that girls do not in some way, internalize the negative messages they receive, no matter how they try to resist” (p.199). Although Jennifer Eisenhauer (2006) argues against bombardment metaphors, words often used to describe the barrage of media constructed representations, I suggest Lolita-like visual narratives are so numbingly repetitive the images serve as normative descriptors, powerfully silent in their accumulative abilities—a soundless bombardment with serious repercussions (APA, 2007; Carnes, 2003; Wilson, Tripp & Boland, 2005).

Angela McRobbie (1996) use stronger language when discussing advertising images, telling us the question must be, “how images of women in magazines are made to mean; the answer being that the meanings typically make a number of connections which



continue to position women in a relation of subordination, passivity and sexual availability” (p.173). She doubts females in magazines will be represented truthfully or in some manner of realistic construction, therefore we need to study and understand “the range of interconnected meanings constructed around the category of women” (p.173). McRobbie also acknowledges complexity, in that visual textualities are multi-layered and likely to be “read” through various meanings. In the case of teen magazines the girl is being produced and defined through repeated representations, representations not created by the reader or teen, but by adults—the editors and advertisers (Durham, 2007; Kilbourne, 2006).

### Underneath

**A**s already posited, looking like a little girl, acting passive or submissive in manner, and dressing in little girl fashions is commonly seen in popular and visual culture; however, it may go deeper than outward appearances. Magdala Labre (2002) warns of a less visible, but equally disturbing trend in women’s fashion and beauty trends: the Brazilian bikini wax. She argues this grooming procedure, the complete or nearly nude removal of pubic hair, socially constructs women into little girls, further positioning prepubescent girls as erotic, and suggests post-pubescent bodies are unattractive to men (p.113). The Brazilian look comes from the mainstream porn industry, is used in legal Lolita porn to create the myth of prepubescence, and is also recommended by celebrity clients. Labre includes interviews with women and their partners who enjoy the denuded appearance of the female genitalia: “I feel like a 12-year-

old, but a naughty, Lolita kind of 12-year-old” (p. 120). A male describes his reaction to realizing his girlfriend had surprised him with her newly bare genitals:

She made sure the lights were off and when I felt her it was like, oh my God, an unbelievable primal welling of emotion. First from the shock and then from the whole little girl eroticism of it. It’s hard to describe. I guess it was like tasting forbidden fruit. (Labre, 2002, p. 120)

Women’s magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, and others, write about the trend, failing to acknowledge the potential risks for infection, a common side effect of this painful, and often degrading procedure. Labre (2002) asserts the Brazilian trend is yet another example of women changing their natural bodies to please men, something American women are already indoctrinated to do, through the shaving of legs and underarms. To forgo either is considered strange in Western culture, and if the Brazilian appearance continues to gain advocates, hairless female genitalia will become normalized (p.130).

Oddly, Brazilian women did not create or ascribe to this trend, but connections to the country speak of the exotic other. The Brazilian is now becoming popular in Brazil because of the American media; television shows like *Sex and the City*, and celebrity endorsements (Labre, 2002, p. 129). Men, who usually shave only the face, are beginning to have a similar procedure done. Also seen in porn, this type of “manscaping” is said to make male genitalia appear larger. In terms of agency and power, the female is made to look young and vulnerable, the male larger and more powerful. Labre (2002) worries that this trend, should it continue in popularity, posits femininity as being tied to hairlessness, and puberty becomes a mark of shame.

*Glamour* magazine's ("Eight is Too Young for a Bikini Wax!" 2009) recent editorial addressing female grooming confirms what Labre is concerned with, preteens seeking genital waxing. Young girls, *Glamour* reveals, are getting bikini waxes as early as eight years, removing "peach fuzz" associated with the onset or impending pubertal changes. A mark of shame? How is the "hairless" norm making it to the consciousness of an eight-year-old girl?<sup>30</sup> As Roni Cohen-Sandler observes, what is most troubling is the message "it's never too soon to start pleasing a man" (cited in *Glamour*, 2009, p. 95).

*Mother:*

*When I first came across this article I admit to being excited that I had found a connection that fits nicely with Labre's argument. Then I wondered what kind of mom would take her child to get waxed? Clearly the girl did not drive herself to the salon, and consent had to be given, right? I'm kind of sick just thinking about it.*

*This unsettling article caused me to ask my daughter if she had heard of anything like this. When I showed her the article, she was shocked at the girl's age, saying how scary and embarrassing a bikini wax would be at that age. "What about your age?" I asked. "Oh, yeah, lots of girls do it." "Why," I asked, "what's wrong with having pubic hair?" Her answer, while not unexpected, was still difficult to hear. "No one has hair down there in magazines or on the web..." she offered. To clarify, I asked, "You mean in porn?" "Yeah, all the girls are bare...well, a few have landing strips, but most of the time they're completely bare."*

...there are few physiques I loathe more than the heavy low-slung pelvis, thick calves and deplorable complexion of the average coed (in whom I see, maybe, the coffin of coarse female flesh within which my nymphets are buried alive)...

Humbert, in Nabokov's *Lolita* (1958), p. 175

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<sup>30</sup> Approximately two thirds of kids ages 10-17 are exposed to unwanted Internet porn (cited in DeAngelis, 2007, p. 50).

*Academic: From my dissertation journal*

*January 30, 2009*

*A lot of time has passed since my last entry. I think I have logged more hours dissertating this week than any other so far. At least two nights I worked until 10 p.m., and may have tried to on one other night, but got hauled out of the bat cave by false promises that The Office was not a rerun. I needed the laughs. My shoulders have been in tight knots for several days and the fleshy base of my right thumb hurts when touched. Carpel tunnel?*

*I am about fifty percent through binder two and about to dig into the really meaty stuff, Lolita porn, the APA report on the sexualization of girls, and some truly scary studies on the shift in female attractiveness waist to hip ratio data. It seems prepubescent body types are the new norm, which when connected to the new “hairless” norm in female grooming practices, means Lolita is where it’s at. I might not ever have run across these studies if it were not for a professor in another department who knew of my topic and printed off copies for my research. Thanks Dr. Gray,<sup>31</sup> for this and for the field trip to the zoo to see Bonobo monkeys get busy.*

*Anyway, my point is collaborative acts have threaded through my research journey from my first announcing my topic area, until now. Through scholars, new and established (a nicer word for old), I have been the recipient of countless bits of information, passed along data, and literary suggestions, all serving to under pin my project. By branching out, in this case joining an interdisciplinary studies group, I have been able to share my research, gain feedback, ponder critical questions, and spread my mission. Lolita is not who you think she is! And by presenting my research, I have been discovered by other disciplines, and been invited to address an even broader group of scholars in training (Grads). Each time I present, I leave with new ideas, new information, and in many instances, new scholarly accomplices, the kind who e-mail attachments, wonderful attachments that fuel my project. I wonder if it is this friendly in the real world of academe...when what you know is suddenly a territory you need to keep fenced. What happens when you are stepping on someone else’s research toes? Well, I guess I’ll never know until I dissertate and graduate, so back to the dangers of Lolita porn. Oh, and if Lolita porn is part of your study...back off, I saw her first.*

*February 2, 2009*

*After a long weekend of butt-numbing editing and re-formatting, I am finally done with the Barkan submission. I ran by our building to drop off my project, and to make my rather daunting pile of pages more intriguing, I placed them in a one and half-inch binder with a full color artifact adorning the cover. I used the same artwork that serves as the banner for my blog. A fav of sorts. I also woke up with a need to rename my dissertation, so now I have to remember all the places I have put the old name, and edit*

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<sup>31</sup> Dr. Jane Gray, sociology, The Ohio State University.

accordingly. I imagine several other names will appear after this one, but until then this will have to be the placeholder-- *LOLITA MYTHS AND THE ACCULTURATION OF EROTICIZED GIRLS IN POPULAR VISUAL CULTURE: THE OBJECT AND RESEARCHER TALK BACK*. Yup...it's a mouthful.

*After delivering my epic chunk of pages, I went home to do yet another purging and organizing session in my office. After all, with almost 200 pages completed, edited and formatted (for now), I feel a bit of prep work is called for before I re-engage. My handy corkboard, where I pin anything I need to recall for later use, is brimming with various data. It's a hodgepodge of bizarre items; for example, if you were to stumble upon it you might ask, "Why is a Facebook picture of Miley Cyrus exposing her bra, a Lewis Carroll quote, a Glamour magazine article entitled 'Eight is too young for a bikini wax!' and an article from The Chronicle of Higher Ed, all battling for space with Post-it notes, and citation lists?" Why? Because that's just how rhizomatic my topic is.*

*Being on campus, in our building, makes me nostalgic. I know I'm done being a student, I get that, but I also miss taking classes, chatting, brainstorming, and trading ideas with faculty. Scholarly engagement is what I've been doing for a lot of years now. It's hard to go cold turkey. Yes, I know writing a dissertation is still scholarly engagement, but it just feels more one-sided. Now it's just me, and a bunch of data playing house all week. Which kind of sucks because data, in case you were not aware, doesn't do anything unless you make it do something. Lazy piles of paper.*

*Tomorrow I will be back in the chair, thinking and theorizing about Lolita; writing, thinking some more, and then re-writing. A vicious circle called revision.*

February 5, 2009

*I did not get back to writing. Instead, I decided to update all my job application documents. I created a new CV, revised yet again my teaching statement and research statement. I gathered the latest student evaluations and computer-generated scores in order to convert everything to PDF files. Once I was satisfied with my documents, I applied for a job, one of those on-line applications "attach files" kind of sites, and then hand-hovering over the button, I hit submit. I received a five-digit code to commemorate my submission. So very personal. Thinking about getting interviewed and hired serves to remind me that I've got to finish my dissertation. After all, I very boldly claim I am graduating in June on my CV, so...back to work young lady.*

*But first, artifact creating was calling me. I haven't gotten the chance to get my hands dirty, or in this case, sticky, for a while. I get so immersed in each little piece, time evaporates and then suddenly it's 7:45 with no dinner plans in sight. Normally, I'm Miss neat and tidy; however, when making my artifacts I tend to look like Julia Childs preparing dinner in a hot kitchen—every action devoted to the recipe, and the collateral damage is left for the prep crew to clean up. Minus the grease splattered apron, and actual food (Remember, dinner is not in sight), I create my masterpiece with tissue paper*

*glued to my shirt, paper scraps littering the floor, while ink pens and Exacto knives roll around the table (dangerously under the papers I am rifling through). Something about the mess-making seems to mesh well with my creative focus, In other words, the less focused the better. Things just happen, end up where I need them to be—that wonderful negotiation between intent and providence. I wish writing could be like that. Maybe it is for some people, but for me the ability to erase (backspace) over the most recent charcoal mark (text) makes it near impossible to commit. Instead, I work that canvas (document) until all the penciled outlines are covered over with slowly drying paint. Providence may influence the original thought, but convention (literary and grammatical) always manages to elbow their way in. In a sense, my artifact creations allow for the pencil marks—those originating “thought sketches,” to remain visible. The intangible stuff, the shadowy ghosts that flit through my mind as I dip my paintbrush into color, the subtle shift of the hand as it moves toward the surface—those insignificant actions that rarely leave an imprint, but impact meaning just the same. Maybe writing is like that after all.*

*February 10, 2009*

*I think I am beginning to see how dissertations drag on. If only one could sit, hours on end, thinking, typing, and revising, without interruption. If only. Even when this is my supposed full-time job for now, so many things distract me outside my office door. First, a lost weekend of angst filled drama as my daughter and her long-term (2 years—a record for high school kids) boyfriend broke up. Nothing cuts deeper than seeing your child’s heart in pieces and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it. We feel as if there has been a death in the family because after two years this boy was like family. We adored him. He adored her. Now she’s a moping, teary-eyed mess. In this electronically connected world of teendom, news travels fast. By Monday morning her friends were looking at her with pained expressions, but afraid to ask, while boys circled her like sharks in chum-filled waters.*

*We had spent the weekend de-picturing her room, boxing up t-shirts, dried flowers, and anything else connected to him, but we could not help her in the halls of her high school. At least outside of high school you can, most of the time, successfully avoid crossing paths. But there he was, bent over at the drinking fountain, popping up just in time to say Hi and touch her arm. She told me it felt like utter despair mixed with a razor sharp scalpel slicing across her heart. By the end of the day she was proud of how she made it through the day, slightly buoyed by the sudden attention from interested and willing replacement boys, and grateful she had managed to see him without tearing up. It will get better, I keep telling her. Two years from now you will barely recall what you two talked about, why you thought he was everything good in your life, and quite possibly, your thoughts will be keenly focused on someone or something else. Still, seeing her go through this brings back similar memories. The first love is among the purest of emotions, un-jaded by life, unfettered by past betrayals, so hopeful and sweet. It is, sadly, a lesson we all seem to experience at one time in our lives. In these cloud-laden gray days of winter, the first blush of spring is far too distant. Brighter days are ahead.*

*So...that is my excuse for not working. I simply am not in the mood, or even remotely interested. When I am, I'll re-engage. For now I'll mirror her sadness, nod my head in concern, and keep my arms ready for hugs. "Mom" is too short a word to represent the breadth of the job.*

## Section 6: Eroticizing the Child-body

In chapter five I began to explore, as inspired by Humbert's question, if visually possessing the girl had consequences. Before reengaging with that thread, I now ask a different version of the same question: Are those doing the visual possessing "tampered with" in the process or act of looking? According to Patrick Carnes (2003) the answer is complicated, disturbing, and intertextually informed by much of the research I am doing. Carnes, a psychologist, studies sexual disorders and specializes in Internet sexual behavior. His study looks at accelerated perception, male arousal, and Lolita porn sites. The world of cybersex carries both positive and negative affects on sexuality. Positive applications include shame reduction, allowing for contact between fetish societies, and information exchange. Negative affects include exploitation, compulsion, and addictive behaviors (Carnes, 2003, p. 309-310).

Lolita porn, Carnes emphasizes, normalizes behavior that is illegal, builds erotic fantasy around the vulnerability of the object, promotes arousal through the breaking of rules, and most important, can lead to compulsive cycles that move beyond the cyber world and into the real world (p. 312). Multiple case studies involving patients are given as examples of how sexual arousal patterns shift rapidly because of the availability of Internet images and videos. One subject, who started engaging in Lolita imagery first

through the work of art photographers David Hamilton and Jock Sturges before moving on to legal Lolita porn sites, had no previous experience with being aroused by a child. A new pattern of arousal developing late in a male's sexual development is unusual, but is now seen with increasing frequency. Sex researchers, especially those whose work centers on pedophilia and the pedophile, are finding significant changes in the profiles of the offenders due to Internet pornography (p. 314).

FBI profiles on pedophiles show the offender is most likely a White middle-aged male whose professional work or hobby allows him contact with children. Much of their life has been structured around the pursuit of children, as pediatricians, teachers, youth leaders, and coaches. They often have a large cache of child pornography images, some with numbers as high as 10,000 downloaded photographs or videos, which are highly protected. Studies show, however, that this profile has changed dramatically (Heimbach, 2002, cited in Carnes, 2003). Today, those looking at child pornography and Lolita-inspired websites range in age from early twenties to the geriatric. Many work in jobs with little to no access to children, and up until now, have never engaged in any illegal sexual activities concerning underage children. Carnes is particularly interested in why and how this shift is occurring (p. 315).

First, Carnes (2003) explores different types of Lolita porn in relation to how the sites market their products. Carnes believes the viewing of Lolita porn often begins at the legal level, in barely legal, petite or teen sites, which then quickly escalates to darker, more graphic sites. He defines each category, in order of escalation, before returning to specific case studies involving men and child body attraction:



*Barely legal, petite, and teen:* These websites feature young and very young looking women. Models are eighteen, but are used because of their ability to appear much younger, often looking prepubescent, and having denuded genitalia. Marketing buzzwords include, ‘first time’, sweet, or innocent.

*Lolita sites, nudist sites, art sites:* These sites depict underage children; however, the images are legal as protected by federal codes regarding freedom of speech and artistic expression. Special emphasis is placed on language supporting artistic content, the beauty of nude children, and distaste for child pornography. Innocence, beauty, and sexual naïveté are the buzzwords used to market these sites, and make the viewing of eroticized children seem normal.

*Illegal sites:* Illegality is the key marketing phrase. Language is angrier, subjects are portrayed as experienced, desiring, and useable. Innocence is no longer a reason to visit. These girls, while children, are depicted as “knowing” Lolitas. Legal Lolita sites feature links that direct users to illegal sites, and are considered the portal to further escalation.

*Hardcore sites:* Language is now very graphic and angry. Rape, incest, and pain are key themes. Seeing and hearing children in pain is the explicit goal at this level. Links to binary groups, child porn bulletin boards, and trading of images are featured. (Carnes, 2003, p. 316)

Carnes argues engaging in the viewing of Lolita porn follows “an explicit trail...that starts with innocence and the unresolved, but progresses into anger, shock, and victimization” (p. 316). Internet pornography use accelerates repeated exposure, brings about extreme levels of arousal not achievable in normal sexual interactions, which then manifests itself in compulsive behaviors outside the privacy of the Internet. The case studies Carnes describes involve men who became collectors of child pornography after becoming aroused by legal Lolita porn. Linked from legal Lolita porn, these men further explored eroticized depictions of underage children on nude art sites, then searching illegal images of child pornography. None of the men studied believed themselves to be pedophiles, even when some of them had made contact with underage girls in order to have sex, or been jailed for sexual contact with a child. Because of the normalizing effect

of Internet pornography, the abundance of Lolita porn, and the seemingly large group of individuals trading images online, such activity is not only seen as normal, it's universal (Carnes, 2003, p. 318). Further normalizing sexual desire for the child body is popular culture's use of very similar depictions—a Lolita-obsessed culture bent on eroticizing child-like attributes.

Humbert, who believes men who recognize the magic of the nymphet are “bewitched travelers,” a special breed, “an artist or madman,”—would find Lolita porn and its normalization effect a threat to his kind (Nabokov, 1958, p.16). Now, thanks to the Internet, any man following the Lolita trail can be “in the know,” developing into a bewitched traveler, while Humbert's unique ability to recognize the “demonic child” becomes unremarkable.

*Academic:*

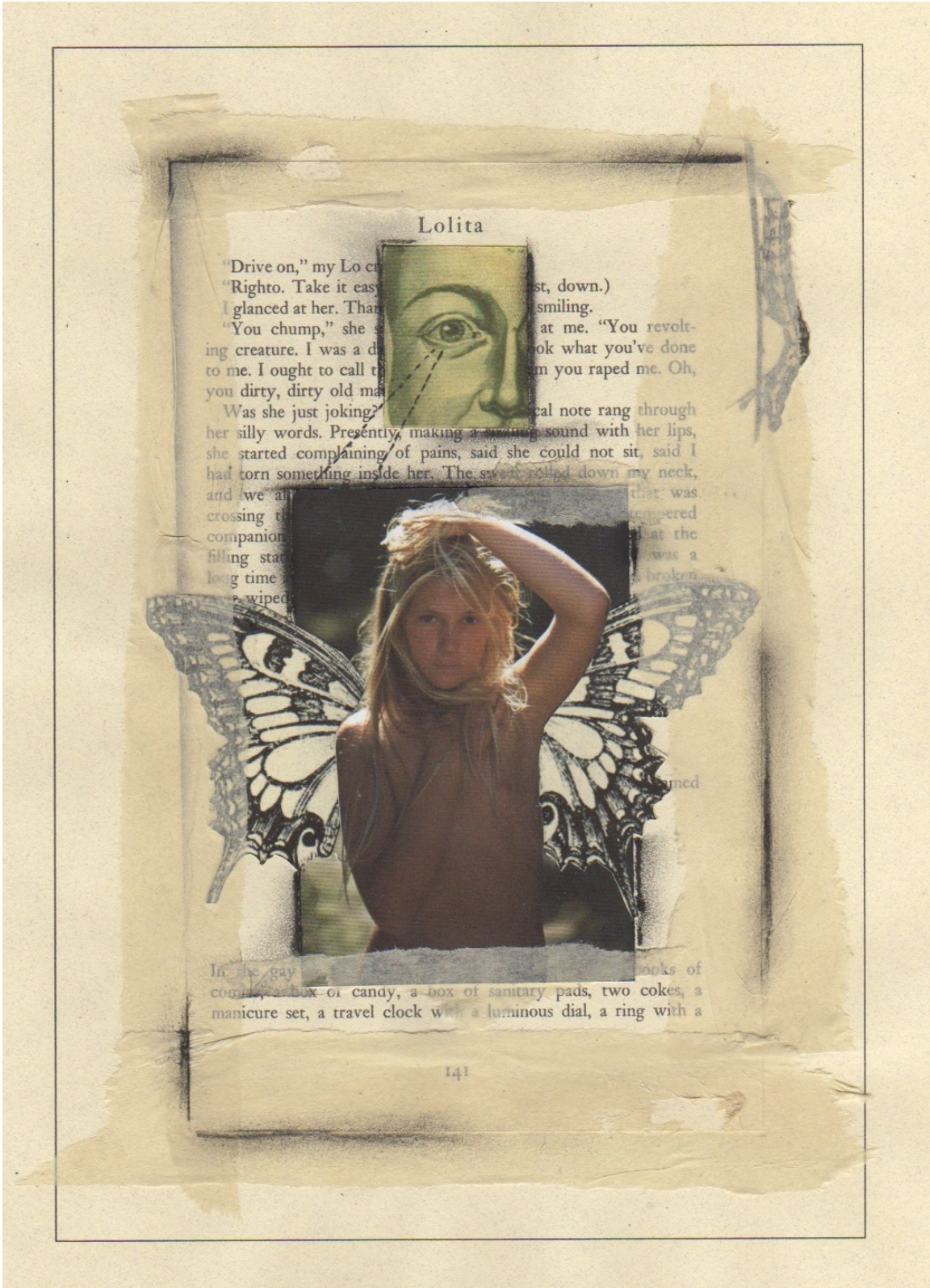
*I struggle with the breadth of pornography use, numbers so large the words “any man” seems not so far off the mark. Carnes (2003) notes that over 70% of Internet pornography use occurs between nine and five during the workweek (women addicted to Internet porn are statistically small in numbers, in part because most porn is created for men, by men). Addiction to Internet porn has long-ranging effects according to Carnes: economically impacting work practices, adding to marital and relationship breakdowns, and contributing to intimacy issues.*

*Artifact 16*

*Gazette*

*Shari L. Savage, 2009*

*The following artifact features a Jock Sturges photo of one of his French beach nudes, a prepubescent girl who could easily be cast in a shampoo ad, if she had a shirt or towel covering her.*



Lolita

"Drive on," my Lolita said. (st, down.)  
"Righto. Take it easy," I said, smiling.  
I glanced at her. That was the first time she had ever  
"You chump," she said, looking at me. "You revolting  
creature. I was a dirty old man. Look what you've done  
to me. I ought to call the police. You raped me. Oh,  
you dirty, dirty old man."  
Was she just joking?  
A high-pitched, shrill note rang through  
her silly words. Presently, making a sizzling sound with her lips,  
she started complaining of pains, said she could not sit, said I  
had torn something inside her. The sweat rolled down my neck,  
and we all crossed the street.  
crossing the street with my companion.  
companion.  
filling stage.  
long time.  
wiped.

In the gay  
books of  
corn, a box of candy, a box of sanitary pads, two cokes, a  
manicure set, a travel clock with a luminous dial, a ring with a

Artifact 16  
201

## When Looking Becomes

Considering the amount of money spent on advertising products and services it becomes clear that advertisers are not throwing money at a medium that does not persuade (Bordo, 2003; Durham, 2008; Kilbourne, 2006). Large amounts of money are spent researching faster, better, more effective ways of messaging the public. Semiotic theorists have been hired to help advertisers reach their audiences (Frank & Stark, 1995; Wolkomir, 1993), the same scholars who critique and challenge consumerism. Carnes (2003), who argues exposure to prepubescent girl images seriously impacts arousal patterns would agree that images, especially repetitive exposure to images, effectively persuade, even change behavior. But can repetitive visual narratives cause widespread shifts in our perceptions of self?

According to Rebecca Puhl and Fred Boland (2001), repetitive visual narratives can and have changed our perceptions about others, ourselves; and furthermore, have ushered in a significant shift in biological factors once attributed to the functions of sexual attraction, especially in young people (p. 27). While female physical attractiveness ideals change over time and cultures, a particular biological or evolutionary norm seemed to be present; that of an hourglass shaped hip to waist ratio [WHR] (p. 28). This ratio, 0.72, is important in an evolutionary sense because it signifies health, fertility, and an ample pelvic structure for carrying a child. Biologically speaking, males desiring females prefer body types within this range (p.28). Because of Western sociocultural pressure to attain thinness, Puhl and Boland wanted to study if cultural norms had affected biological norms, and if so, in what ways. They devised a study that used computer-manipulated

images of female forms within the healthy WHR range (0.67-0.80), and then further manipulated the same forms along various body mass indexes [BMI] to test how weight plays a part in attractiveness (p. 32). In addition to male perceptions, Puhl and Boland included female perceptions in order to learn if what men preferred matched what women found most attractive. Data reported that both males and females tested in the study deemed the lowest weight BMI as most attractive, and the WHR was found to be thin and tube-like, not hourglass. Most troubling, however, was the indication that the preferred body type fell below 16% body fat, in other words, anorexic (p. 41). This is significant evolutionally because 17% body fat is required for menses to begin, and 22% body fat is needed to maintain regular menses. Female reproductive abilities are therefore compromised or non-existent (p. 42).

Puhl and Boland (2001) conclude that “sociocultural pressures facing women in Western industrialized societies which prescribe excessively thin body ideals have implications...[The] endorsement and internalization of the thin ideal has been found to predict bulimia diagnoses and eating disorder symptoms” (p. 42). Jan Wilson, Dean Tripp and Boland (2005) conducted a similar study; one that focused more intently on how BMI factored into attractiveness ratings, and also found the thin-hipped, underweight body-type was supported as the most desired by both male and female viewers. Wilson, Tripp, and Boland conclude, “It would appear, therefore, that social pressures for thinness in Western culture may override evolution to create a current preference for underweight women” (p. 265). While both studies specifically mention media images as being significant factors in attractiveness perceptions, not much attention is given to other indications for prepubescent body preferences. Wilson, Tripp, and Boland (2005) do,

however, note that in “a desire to appear youthful...youthfulness [has become] equated with small stature” (p. 247). The APA report suggests more research is needed to determine why thin-hipped profiles have become idealized in our culture.

What these two studies suggest to me is that both young men and women now prefer Lolita-like body-types—a perfect storm of sociocultural trends now washing over biology, in that what is desired by one gender, is also desired by the other. The underlying reasons are complicated and interdisciplinary. Sexualized girls, eroticized child bodies, Lolita pornography, submissive or passive image constructions, clothing that refashions women into little girls, are all specific areas of concern in multiple fields. My research data comes from sociology, psychology, biology, gender and evolution studies, media studies, feminist studies, literary studies, sexuality studies, and visual culture theory. Each study finds itself connected intertextually with the others. My study considers how and why they are interrelated, as I analyze data through discourse analysis, and identify spaces of interest. I have asked many questions, attempted to answer some or at least theorize on those I am still struggling with. Now I turn to what all this data means to my daughter, to parents, to educators, to society, and to me. Fortunately, an important study specifically focused on the effects of sexualizing girls has recently been released, which offers a broad spectrum of issues to consider.

## The APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls

In 2007 the American Psychological Association [APA] released a thorough examination of issues in our culture related to sexualizing girls. Citing many of the same research studies and popular culture examples I cover, the APA report sets out to do four main things, “define sexualization; examine the prevalence and provide examples of sexualization in society and in cultural<sup>32</sup> institutions; evaluate evidence suggesting that sexualization has negative consequences for girls and the rest of society; and describe positive alternatives that may help counteract the influence of sexualization” (p. 2). Specific components are present when sexualization occurs, but can consist of one or more of the following:

1. A person’s value only comes from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics.
2. A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy.
3. A person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
4. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person. (APA, 2007, p. 2)

Additionally, the sexualization of girls is bound by other sociocultural determinants, such as ethnicity, economic place, and sexual orientation. Media tend to sexualize according to categories; women and girls of color are depicted differently than their White counterparts; heterosexuality is assumed; and economic status is also part of the overall narrative. Young White girls are more likely to be cast in the “unknowing”

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<sup>32</sup> “Culture” is defined in the APA report as being the “dominant” U.S. culture, the culture media speaks to most often.

Lolita role, while girls of color are depicted as sexually aware and more developed. Because of the scope of media in our culture (studies show the average child or teen engages with media 6 hours per day in some form<sup>33</sup>), critical questions must be asked. The APA report argues that “massive exposure to media among youth creates potential for massive exposure to portrayals that sexualize women and girls and teach girls that women are sexual objects” (p. 5). Debra Merskin (2004), also quoted in APA (2007), reiterates this point, stating, “the message from advertisers and the mass media to girls (as eventual women) is they should always be sexually available, always have sex on their minds, be willing to be dominated and even sexually aggressed against, and they will be gazed on as sexual objects” (p. 13). Jean Kilbourne (2006) agrees, stating that these particular messages are repeated on television, in music videos, in song lyrics, in advertising, cosmetics, in video games, in toys, and in cartoons. Growing up in this context it is easy to see why girls learn to objectify themselves and their peers.

The APA report finds girls are thinking of themselves as objects of others desire, internalizing the viewer’s perceptions, and fixating on their appearance (p.18). Teen magazines assist in regulating the constant mirror girls see themselves projected in, a circle of reinforcement supporting the idea that girls are meant to be gazed upon and consumed. How is our sexualized culture affecting girls today? The APA study used several theories to explore the consequences of sexualizing girls, including socialization, sociocultural, cognitive, psychoanalytic, and objectification theories (p. 19). Using these multiple lenses, the APA study was able to identify and examine specific concerns in the following areas:

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<sup>33</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation (2003) cited in APA, 2007, p. 5.



*Developmental:* Young girls are not able to fully understand the purpose of advertisements until about age eight, or understand the sexuality being projected by many of the role models in their lives (Britney Spears, Bratz<sup>34</sup> dolls) (p. 21). Identity formation is a critical function for girls and young teens, and during this “plasticity” phase media messages are more easily internalized. Self-esteem changes are also more likely to take a negative turn during a young teens development. Studies show girls who self-objectify limit themselves in competitive sports, afraid or unwilling to be seen as boy-like (Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005; Robertson & Halverson, 1984, cited in APA, 2007, p. 22). Engaging in sports and other physical activities has been shown to increase well-being and self-esteem in girls, a benefit lost to those who see their bodies as objects (p. 22).

*Body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety:* Sexualization and objectification can bring about negative emotional issues, including shame, anxiety, and self-disgust. Studies show that after viewing idealized media images of females, anxiety increased among girls, an effect believed to be tied to body monitoring (Fredrickson et al., 1998; Mckinely, 1998, 1999; Tiggerman & Slater, 2001, cited in APA, 2007, p. 23). Culturally, body dissatisfaction is predominately a White issue; African-American girls have a much healthier relationship with their bodies (p. 24). Indeed, how mothers talk about their own bodies is crucial in affecting how girls develop their own language concerning their appearance, and African-American mothers are less critical when speaking about their

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<sup>34</sup> Bratz dolls feature highly sexualized clothes, facial expressions, makeup and hair. They are so controversial to parents that birthday party invitations sometimes discourage them as gifts. Mattel, the maker of Barbie dolls, recently sued the company manufacturing Bratz, which must now stop production of the dolls. The reason is not because Bratz dolls are too sexy, as concerned parents believe, but because the inventor of the Bratz concept was an employee of Mattel when he first developed the idea. Mattel successfully argued intellectual property rights. Bratz dolls had taken a sizable chunk out of Barbie sales. Mattel has not announced whether or not they will re-introduce Bratz dolls.

bodies (p. 24). Fathers also play an important role in how girls embrace their bodies, and should remember to be thoughtful when commenting on appearance or changing bodies.

*Mental health:* Disordered eating, low self-esteem, and depression are the three most prevalent mental health issues faced by girls in our culture. How media plays a role in body image issues is clear when looking at studies of other cultures and the effects of being exposed to Western idealized images of female beauty. Once Western media arrived in Fiji, a shift away from cultural norms (a robust body type) was noted (Becker, 2004, cited in APA, 2007, p. 25). Repetitive exposure to limiting visual representations has significant consequences for girls in our culture, and as our media presence increases globally, other cultures will be affected, too.

*Physical health:* Disordered eating has negative effects on many aspects of the developing body. Delay of menses, nutritional deficiencies, brain functions, bone growth, sexual development, are some of the many ways a girl's body is compromised by eating disorders. Many girls concerned with food consumption often turn to smoking as a way to control their weight (Harrell, 2002, cited in APA, 2007, p. 26).

*Sexuality:* Low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and anxiety over appearance impacts girl's feelings about becoming intimate sexually. The sexualization of girls is negatively affecting the healthy development of female sexuality, in both how girls understand their own desires, to the dismissal of their sexual agency in trade for satisfying male needs, a message repeated in teen magazines. Body shame inhibits the "ability to advocate for, or even acknowledge, their own sexual feelings or pleasure" (p. 27).

## Impacting Others

According to the APA report, men and boys are also negatively impacted by the acculturation of sexualized girls in media. Limiting visual narratives of female attractiveness makes it difficult to for men to find real life examples of what they see in media. Studies also show that men repeatedly exposed to pornography found their partners less attractive after viewing porn (Schooler & Ward, 2006; Weaver, Masland, & Zillman, 1984; Zillman & Bryant, 1988, cited in APA, 2007, p. 29). When women and girls are depicted as sexual beings rather than the many other roles they occupy, interaction between the sexes becomes challenged. Adult women are affected by sexualized images of girls and teens because it supports the idea that youth is desirable, and as women age this becomes an impossible expectation to meet. Body dissatisfaction is an increasing issue for age groups not normally affected by eating disorders (Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004, cited in APA, 2007, p. 30). Societal acceptance of plastic surgery, and the glorification of altered, ageless celebrity bodies add to dissatisfaction.

Sexualizing girls may lead to sexism, sex bias, and sexist attitudes. Studies of college age men found that regular viewing of sexually objectifying music videos shifts attitudes concerning rape (p. 32). Continued exposure to sexualized content in media affects both men and women. Recalling Berger's (1972) argument, women tend to behave as modeled and men respond accordingly, treating them as sexual objects rather than people. Lavine, Sweeney, and Wagner (1999) argue that "exposure to sexualized depictions of women may lead to global thoughts that 'women are seductive and

frivolous sex objects' ” (cited in APA, 2007, p. 32). Merskin (2004) adds to the discussion, stating that sexualized depictions “foster an overall climate that does not value girls’ and women’s voices or contributions to society” (cited in APA, 2007, p. 32).

Sexual exploitation of girls, specifically in child pornography and the child sex trade, an increasingly disturbing trend with deep economic power, is another suggested effect of normalized images of eroticized girls. The APA report notes that research concerning child pornography is lacking, but along with Carnes’s (2003) study, Paul (2004) also studied Lolita porn and found similar issues with newly developing strong arousal patterns in men (cited in APA, 2007, p. 35). New arousal patterns contribute to the market for sex with children, resulting in an increase in child prostitution and the trafficking of children. Sexual predators use chat rooms to recruit children and teens, paying them to “perform” for webcam events, which are then broadcast for paying customers (APA, 2007, p. 35).

The Internet offers sex offenders unprecedented access to children and teens. MySpace, a social networking site created for kids, was recently forced by two states attorneys to turn over the names of registered sex offenders who have profiles listed. Over 90,000 names were released. Facebook, another social networking site popular with high school and college kids, voluntarily did their own housecleaning, shutting down over 5000 profiles of known sex offenders (Wortham, cited in *New York Times*, February 4, 2009). While these numbers seem high, they represent only those offenders who have previously been convicted and used their real names when signing up for a social network profile. Sex offenders using fictitious names are much more difficult to screen, but both networking sites are developing security technology that can identify and remove

sexual predator's profiles ([www.insidefacebook.com](http://www.insidefacebook.com)). With over 600,000 new profiles being created each day, Facebook will need a finely tuned program to monitor its 175 million users.

*Academic and Mother:*

*Neither Carnes (2003) nor the APA (2007) report mention parent-owned websites featuring images of their own children. Webe Web, based in Florida, assists in the development of pay per view sites featuring "modeling" type images posted by parents. The daughters on these sites are not nude or semi-nude; rather they are presented in bathing suits or costumes while posing for the camera. For a monthly fee of \$29.99 a subscriber can access new images as posted. Parents who operate these sites claim they serve to promote their young daughter's modeling careers, and so that modeling agencies can find their girls, or to help pay for college. Reputable modeling agencies state they would never seek talent through pay sites featuring children. Subscribers are men, and none of them are modeling talent scouts (Checkley, 2003; Scheeres, 2001).*

*In these scary economic times, I wonder how many parents are visually prostituting<sup>35</sup> their kids? As a parent I cannot fathom exposing my child like this for profit. Likewise, knowing the numbers of sex offenders trolling networking sites makes me question why any parent would allow their child to have an Internet presence in the form of a profile...but just last week my daughter finally created a Facebook page for herself. Mostly to piss off her new ex, but also to reconnect with her high school community. Her profile cannot be viewed unless someone "friends" her (a verb meaning "I know you, if you know me and accept my "friending" I can visit your profile). Still, her identifying profile picture serves as a visual phonebook, essentially able to be seen by any one who searches her by name. I take some small comfort in knowing she is the only one who can give further access to her page.*

To summarize, the APA report makes a strong case for the prevalence of sexualization of girls in Western culture, by using multiple studies from multiple disciplines to broaden the scope of supportive evidence. While many girls and teens can and do resist oppressive visual narratives (Eisenhauer, 2006; Wray & Steele, 2002), many more are negatively impacted by media (APA, 2007; Durham, 2008; Kilbourne, 2006).

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<sup>35</sup> Approximately 35% of child porn images are posted by the parents or guardians of the children depicted. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children [NCMEC] (2009).

Countering a media driven culture includes the enlisting of concerned parents, educators, and professionals, to assist in focusing awareness on media practices. Media literacy education is one approach in challenging the sexualization of girls in popular visual culture (APA, 2007, p. 36). Using the Internet to speak out against sexualization is another empowering counterpoint to current visual narratives; allowing girls to blog, create “zines,”<sup>36</sup> and become cultural producers themselves (p. 39). Caution is warranted, however, because there are sites that use girl supportive language but are adult produced and still contains sexualized ad content. Activism is another action girls can take to gain agency over media narratives, as seen in 2005 when a group of teens protested Abercrombie and Fitch’s demeaning t-shirts. The girls’ protest got national press, and later they were featured on the *Today Show* (May 11, 2006), which started a conversation across the country and led to the removal of many of the sexist t-shirt slogans<sup>37</sup> being challenged (APA, 2007, p.41).

The *Dove* Campaign for Real Beauty is an excellent example of advertising that works to promote self-esteem and awareness regarding girls in our culture. Their website contains self-esteem literature, resources, workshops for mothers and daughters, and video clips of several of *Dove*’s empowering ads about being a girl in today’s culture (<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com>). Research shows projects like this, and many

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<sup>36</sup> ‘zines are hand-made magazine-like documents that are passed around, added to, or altered by girls. These critical spaces of cultural production can also be seen in web-based formats (Eisenhauer, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> Slogans like “Who needs a brain when you’ve got these” or “Date a freshman, before they get fat,” as seen on a men’s Abercrombie & Fitch t-shirt.

other girl-empowering sites allowing for critical engagements with media have positive effects for girls (Edut, 1998; Ogle & Thornburg, 2003; Shilt, 2003, cited in APA 2007, p. 41).

*Artifact 17*

Waking Eyes

*Shari L. Savage, 2009*

*The following artifact juxtaposes one of Mann's images with one of Carroll's girls. The manner and overall tone are remarkably similar in these two photographs. I've layered these images onto top of Nabokov's text, a scene in which Humbert is about to enter the hotel room where his nymphet stepdaughter should be asleep in a drugged state. Instead, he finds her groggy, blinking her eyes in the darkened room as she looks up at him. Weeks after I made the artifact, I stumbled across a poem by Lewis Carroll that uses the same language. An excerpt follows:*

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,  
Alice moving under skies  
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,  
Eager eye and willing ear,  
Lovingly shall nestle near.

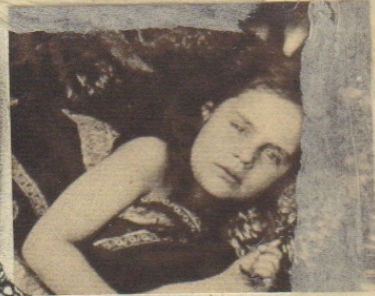
In a Wonderland they lie,  
Dreaming as the days go by,  
Dreaming as the summers die<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Life is but a Dream" from *The Hunting of the Snark and Other Poems and Verses*. Lewis Carroll, 1903.

Lolita

"Where the devil did you get her?"  
"I beg your pardon?"  
"I said: the weather is gettin'  
"Seems so."  
"Who's the lassie?"  
"My daughter."  
"You lie—she's not."  
"I beg your pardon?"  
"I said: July was hot. Where  
"Dead."  
"I see. Sorry. By the way,  
tomorrow. That dreadful crowd  
"We'll be gone too. Good night."  
"Sorry. I'm pretty drunk."  
needs a lot of sleep. Sleep is  
"The Persians say. Smoke?"  
"Nor now."



...the elevator. I again chose the stairs. 342 was near  
the fire escape. One could still—but the key was already in  
the lock, and then I was in the room.

Artifact 17



The APA report notes that most media effect research has been focused on women, not girls. More studies directed at girls specifically is called for, especially those that take a cultural view of the phenomenon of sexualizing girls in popular culture. Future research recommendations of the APA include many of the areas of inquiry I am currently interested in, such as documenting how girls are sexualized in media, identifying effective, culturally competent protective factors that promote nonobjectified models of normal, healthy sexual development, exploring the relationship of sexualizing girls and societal issues (sexual abuse, child pornography, child sex trafficking), and the interdisciplinary examination of body awareness, eating disorders, and female physical attractiveness studies (APA, 2007, p. 42-43).

Beyond academic research, the APA suggests their report should be disseminated to educators, from elementary schools to graduate programs, to raise awareness and to assist in the development of media literacy curriculum. The APA also recommends forums that bring media and research experts together to discuss the implications of sexualizing girls. Media awards that honor positive portrayals of girls, by category (TV, toys, advertising), should be created (APA, 2007, p. 44-45). Disrupting the sociocultural practice of eroticizing girls will require the very culture that breeds media saturation to challenge its own agenda, a difficult but critical look in the mirror of our times.

Be sexy, but not a slut. Stand up for yourself, but don't be a bitch. Be thin, but don't have an eating disorder. Play sports, but don't be too aggressive or competitive. Be smart, but not a nerd. Believe in yourself, but don't be conceited. Speak up, but don't be too loud or have a big mouth. Be original, but not weird. These are some of the stupid standards people expect from girls.  
Marjorie, 15 years old<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> From <http://www.angelfire.com/sk/misplaced> cited in Wray & Steele, 2002, p. 192.

*Girl:*

*I read Seventeen magazine when I was a teen, right after I “graduated” from Teen Beat, whose covers featured teen idol crushes like Donny Osmond and David Cassidy. No longer pining away for unattainable boys, I moved on to the instructive world of teen fashion magazines. Like today, Seventeen was all about clothes, makeup, hair, and boys. Then, it was less sexual, less informative about health and body issues, and less schizophrenic in message. The models were fresh-faced, wholesome, and normal in size. Many times they were just real girls, not paid models. While I might have wished for their flawless complexions, I did not waste time obsessing over my body. I thought I was fine just the way I was. The supermodel culture had not quite developed yet, and Christie Brinkley, the one model I can recall knowing about by name, would be considered fat by today’s modeling standards. During my “identity” formation phase, I was comfortable in my body. Today, I am not. It’s not teen magazines that make me feel that way, however, it’s shows like Desperate Housewives, where middle-aged moms look as though pregnancy did nothing but improve their forms, and the years have ceased to imprint on eyes or mouths.*

## Section 7: Visual Culture and Arts-based Inquiry

### Lolita in the Classroom

**E**ducators, and other professionals concerned with sociocultural meaning making, acknowledge the need to address the sexualization of girls as an area of critical social inquiry (APA, 2007; Blandy & Congdon, 1990; Duncum, 2004; Green, 2000; Kilbourne, 2006; Kopkowski, 2008; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Levin, 2005; Merskin, 2004). Media literacy and visual culture education offer pedagogical opportunities to consider, investigate, critique and re-imagine texts produced in advertising, music videos, fashion, anime and other visual media outlets. The subject matter, the sexualization of girls, should not be limited to secondary and higher education classrooms. According to Cynthia Kopkowski (2008), an educator writing in *NEA Today*, Lolita is already in the classroom, in the form of very young female students.

Elementary and middle school students post provocative images of themselves on MySpace and Facebook, posing in outfits that sexualize themselves in ways that would shock their parents. Whether it is advertising, Hollywood, Bratz dolls or parental indifference, educators today see female students dressing in inappropriate clothing and emulating adult behaviors in the classroom at an increasingly younger age (Kopkowski, 2008; Levy, 2005). While some schools institute dress codes or uniforms to combat the issue, the underlying behavior is still present. The NEA's Women's Caucus also notes provocative or inappropriate clothing worn by new teachers and cautions teaching programs to address this issue before graduation (Kopkowski, 2008, p. 36). Sex is not only an appropriate topic; it is critical for our students, at any age, to talk about the hyper-sexualized media informing contemporary American culture.

Visual culture educators, under the banner of art education, have positioned themselves to create and promote socially relevant curriculum concerning images in our culture. Kerry Freedman (2003) reminds educators that knowledge is constructed from multiple interdisciplinary and intercultural agents, many coming from outside the school environment (p. 105). Fine art, while an important part of art education, may not be as relevant as visual literacy to the students we currently teach. Today's art educator will need a broad understanding of sociocultural issues affecting gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. Expressive thought, critical inquiry and the ability to read, interpret and discuss images are culturally important and socially responsible goals for art educators (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Barrett, 2003; Green, 2000; Taylor & Ballengee-Morris, 2003).

Freedman (2003) offers a framework for teaching visual culture, one that considers all aspects of produced images, including production and exploration contexts, function and meaning, and structural support. Issues concerning historical, cultural, political, social, economic, educational, institutional, family, and mass media can be attended to through this framework. Additionally, technical skills, elements, and principles of design used in production, can be addressed (p. 92).

Gaye Green (2000) posits a different framework, one that specifically looks at ethical inquiry and images in visual culture. Concerned with the number of images a person sees daily, Green is interested in societal power and how images make meaning. She suggests images “are economical forms of representation that condense an array of experiences into singular expressive units” which hold significant impact (p. 20). Endurance, or the ability of an image to continue representing, and the idea of “seeing is believing” are also problematic for Green. Endurance, a word I liken to myth, is part of what fuels tacit understandings.

Ethical issues Green considers regarding media images include defamation, misconception, sensationalism, coercion, offensiveness and invasion, many of which directly relate to my arguments concerning Dolores’s reputation and Lolita’s current position in our culture (p. 21-22). A critical methodology for the analysis of controversial images proposed by Green, works well for my study, offering another layer to Rose’s (2001) visual methodologies for discourse analysis. A brief outline of Green’s (2000) method follows:

- I. Questions, concerns, or motivation for analysis  
Why this image?

## II. Informational analysis and interpretation

- a. content- describe literal and symbolic content of image
- b. format- analyze elements and principles
- c. point of view/assumptions- personal perceptions of image
- d. historical-context of construction and perception of image
- e. image content- consider similar images
- f. image maker- motivation of maker/marketer
- g. conceptual contexts- sociocultural influences of image

## III. Evaluation, conclusions, and implications

Statements that can be made about the meaning of the image, conclusions, implications and areas of further analysis. (p. 23)

Lolita-like representations endure socioculturally thanks to misconceptions that sensationalize the eroticized girl. The study of Lolita-like representations requires multiple lenses for inquiry, lenses that honor the interdisciplinary and intertextual connections inherent to my research. Freedman, Green and Rose each describe ways to engage with visual images. Supporting Freedman's framework, Green's critical ethical inquiry strategies, and Rose's visual methodologies for discourse analysis is semiotics, an integral process which influences the interpretive analysis of images.

Semiotic inquiry helps us understand how meaning is made as we engage with visual texts (Barrett, 2003, 2006; Danesi, 2007; Smith-Shank, 2004). Context and meaning, both critical components of visual culture analysis, link to how prior knowledge and experiences are integrated with new information, which in turn produces understanding. Advertising, an industry well versed in using produced imagery to convey and persuade, uses semiotic coding to disseminate information in an expedient manner (Barrett, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Hall, 2003; Kilbourne, 1999, 2006; Merskin, 2004; Smith-Shank, 2004). Semiotic inquiry, therefore, assists students in focusing on visual specifics as they relate to the whole of an image and its message.

In visual culture education classrooms, creative pedagogical curriculum can address social, historical, cultural and political contexts alluded to in commercially produced visual texts. Because interpretive processes are personal and unique, group discussions about meaning becomes a collaborative act, building on and adding to each student's understanding (Barrett, 2003). Furthermore, educators can facilitate deeper inquiry when issues of sociocultural assumptions are raised, encouraging students to develop their own questions. Questions can be processed through student art making, bringing agency and power to those who are often the intended targets of popular culture media. Questioning or challenging representations is just one part of examining images. Art making is capable of bringing less obvious outcomes to the surface, allowing interplay of emotions and insights to provoke personal revelations. Creating is about asking.

### Arts-based Inquiry

**A**s a researcher, arts-based inquiry (Barone, 2006; Bresler, 2006; Eisner, 2006) is one of the many ways I process data. Visual data, particularly the popular culture representations I've collected that sexualize girls, are useful to me in theorizing and connecting Lolita-like visual narratives to scholarly research data. Beyond the study and analysis of collected images, I engaged in reconstructing, repurposing, repositioning, replacing, reimagining, recreating, and reinventing Lolita-inspired visual culture narratives. Within the creative process, meaningful choices are made regarding what I would include, how I would alter and add to my artifacts, and why I chose specific

motifs or themes for coherence. The intertextual threads seen stitching through my collages come from the interchange of knowledge about my topic, which influences how I interpret Lolita-like representations into critical collages. What may not be evident from looking at my artifacts is that they have helped me clarify areas of resistance, diffused some of my anger over how girls are depicted in our culture, and given me a space to talk back. I feel lighter when I am working on one, I feel less sad about the direction of our culture, and hopeful that by seeing what I have created others may ask important questions about why I am moved to speak for Dolores. I was surprised, however, by how much I enjoyed making my artifacts, despite the sometimes disturbing qualities of the images I was reacting to. A part of me had forgotten the heavenly moment when things fall into place, the tiny shimmer of perfection that comes as I remove my hands from my creation, knowing I am done, of feeling I am done. Or, conversely, the less satisfying feeling of knowing I have said too much, overworked an image or worse yet, under spoke.

Whether my collages fall under arts-based, arts-informed, practice-based, or as Liora Bresler calls it, aesthetically based research—remains murky to me. I'd argue each label could apply, and each carries the underlying work of inquiry (Bresler, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). I like the way Graeme Sullivan (2006) explains arts research, an explanation that supports my own beliefs about the ways in which my artifacts reveal and question the current practice of sexualizing of girls:

Rather than seeing inquiry as a linear procedure or an enclosing process, research acts can also be interactive and reflexive whereby imaginative insight is constructed from a creative and critical practice. Oftentimes what is known can limit the possibility of what is not and this requires a creative act to see things from a new view. An inquiry process involving

interpretive and critical acts is then possible as new insights confirm, challenge or change our understanding. (Sullivan, 2006, p. 20)

*Teacher and Artist:*

*I recently stepped in to teach Writing Art Criticism for a professor who needed to take an emergency leave. I used this opportunity to present my Lolita-inspired artifacts to the class of eleven non-art related majors. After briefly explaining my dissertation topic, I presented about a dozen collages for us to discuss. We practiced offering criticism through various critical lenses, such as formalism, instrumentalism, realism, and expressionism. Out of the eleven, two identified with formalist critics, another two liked realist frameworks, one felt instrumentalist ideologies best fit her needs for judging art, while the rest felt most comfortable with expressionism.*

*The discussions we had helped them develop ways of talking about what they see and what they found interesting, curious, unclear, or though provoking in my artifacts. Progress was made, however, I am the person who learned the most. As the artist, I was amazed at the things they could derive from my images, blown away by the things they articulated that I had not seen or considered, eventually causing me to drag out a note pad to record their comments. For example, several students noted that I obscured certain features, such as eyes, exposed breasts, or even faces. Had I intended to they asked. In at least two I had intended to obscure, but instinctively chose to “protect” the innocent in other depictions. Several students contacted me later by e-mail to ask more questions. One, a male, told me he was now interested in reading the novel Lolita. All in all, a purposeful day in the classroom, but an even better day for the artist to reflect on.*

### Seeing and Saying

A wonderful example of a student critique of MySpace can be seen in Sheng Chung and Michael Kirby’s (2009) article about media literacy, art education, and activism as performed through “culture jamming” (p. 35-36). Culture jamming refers to the act of countering or appropriating media to reveal an underlying agenda, or to suggest a different way of thinking about popular culture constructs. One



student chose to challenge MySpace and its claims of being a friendly space for social networking. Her repurposed logo features the word “My” with a strike through followed by Space.com, the statement “no place for friends,” and the addition of a series of words floating above the logo. These words include child molesters, inappropriate comments, pedophiles, kidnappers, horny people, terrorists, rapists, pornographers, and police officers; reminders that MySpace is also their space. Her stated purpose is to raise awareness among social network users that the Internet can be a dangerous place even though it is not an actual place. “Subvertisements,” as Chung and Kirby call them, empower students to “talk back,” to express and perform social activism, while engaging in production and meaning making (p. 38).

Contemporary artists are often inspired by popular visual culture; many use their artworks to perform similar acts of subverting media in our culture. Michael Ray Charles and graffiti social commentator Banksy are two I have used in my own teaching. Using artwork to challenge, even confront representations that speak about others, commonalities these artists share, fosters classroom dialogue about how images mean. Looking critically at the pieces that make up the whole assists students in seeing beyond what is depicted and how they represent. As much as art educators would like to introduce students to a broad selection of art, it is the world outside the classroom that garners the most viewing time. And, as Kalle Lasn (1999) points out, most of that viewing comes with an underlying corporate agenda.

Lasn, founder of *Adbusters*, a magazine devoted to critiquing power structures and advertising practices, takes a strong position against popular media, stating, “U.S. corporations play the dominant social and political role in shaping everyday realities and

American psyches; consequently, they are destroying cultural diversity and our true sense of community” (cited in Chung & Kirby, 2009, p. 36). Stronger yet, Lasn declares, “Advertisements are the most prevalent and toxic of the mental pollutants” (p. 36). Repetitive visual representations, myth-like narratives, and other quietly persuasive messages, fill the passive eye line of our cultural milieu. As educators, it is not enough to ask our students to pay attention to their mediated world. Active seeing, the act of watching with awareness, requires sets of questions to help students think critically. To inquire deeply, students should be offered a selection of theories and methods for engaging with visual culture narratives. Several methods have already been discussed. Now, using Green’s (2000) critical questions, I propose classroom activities that address Lolita-like representations, including suggestions for grade-level modifications.

*Mother:*

*Interest, or a personal connection to something, brings awareness to the forefront. For example, I see Lolita in a multitude of places because I am aware, interested, or otherwise engaged with her representation. On Valentine’s Day my daughter reminded me of this idea. With her recent breakup fresh in her mind, indeed, tears still close to the surface, she lamented over the preponderance of ads regarding love, couples, kissing, jewelry, etc. Aware to the point of distraction, she turned off the TV and took a nap. Later that same week, in a poorly disguised attempt to buoy her spirits, we went shopping to find a few clothing items. When we got back in the car to drive home she moaned and said, “If I see one more couple holding hands I’m gonna lose it!” I wonder how long it will be before she can passively “unsee” a world in love. I do know exactly what she is experiencing. During cancer treatments for Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, my chemo bald head had the same affect. It seemed as though every ad I encountered was about shampoo, or shiny, luxurious long tresses. Watching some thick-maned model draw a brush down the length of her chestnut locks made me want to scream. I was acutely aware of what I did not have or insanely wanted to possess once again. Now, eleven years later, shampoo ads are background chatter as I watch TV. We all carry a kind of vulnerability when watching, some affected more deeply than others, but with awareness comes recognizing why we feel as we do.*

## Lolita in the Visual Culture Classroom

**L**olita-like representations, iconic images in popular culture, hold tacit understandings concerning what the image means; while the novel *Lolita* (1958) may only generally be familiar. High school and college-aged students are familiar with the image in its many forms. Middle school and elementary students may not be familiar with the novel, or even the name Lolita, but they are familiar with the image (Duncum, 2004; Durham, 2008). Kopkowski (2008) tells us elementary students understand emulating the image and are familiar with Lolita-like representations in ads, music videos, toys, anime, and fashion, but may not understand what the image represents (p. 36). Print advertising, especially from media directed at their age group, is a good place to start facilitating inquiry. A suggested lesson follows:

Ask students to collect and bring in magazines, catalogs, and other print media. Divide students into small groups, give them a pile of magazines or catalogs and ask them to pretend they are visiting from a nearby galaxy.<sup>40</sup> The magazines act as an archeological tool they will use to understand the creatures that live on this planet. Have them create a list of things that seem to be important to the creatures in the pictures. Chances are, Lolita-like representations will be included, as will other narratives that can spark inquiry. Ask them to consider how they deduced what was important, and to identify repetitive images to support their findings. In another format, a class could be grouped by gender, fostering a discussion on how these same images are read differently, or to locate commonalities.

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<sup>40</sup> I have used this idea in several formats; however, the idea came from something I read. I cannot recall where or who inspired it.

Using the lists the students come up with, ask them to return to the print material with the task of finding images that resist the common patterns and visual stories they identified. Gather repetitive imagery and resistant images, and post them where everyone can see them. As a group, compare and contrast the specific traits and trends seen in both kinds of narratives. Older students can be introduced to semiotic theory, while younger students can use denotations and connotations to describe what they see (Barthes, 1973; Barrett, 2003). Introduce issues of gender or sexuality as they come up, if appropriate. As a group, discuss what the creators of some of the images are trying to say or how the images might persuade. Who is in authority of these images? Why are these images in a specific magazine, and not another? Ask students to consider Green's (2000) framework, discussing a particular representation they chose from their examination of images found in their magazines. In a larger unit, written investigations concerning particular issues or topics as raised by Green's ethical inquiry questions could be an option for students, perhaps connecting to other coursework through integrated curriculum.

Finally, if age appropriate, ask the students to create an image that argues against Lolita-like representations. Likewise, students can repurpose resistant images into ones that ascribe to Lolita-like representations, thereby recreating Lolita signifiers. Using magazines, catalogs, other print materials, or newly created drawings, paintings or photographs, students can design images that represent either repetitive or resistant Lolita-like narrative visual narratives. Additionally, students could explore the world of 'zines,<sup>41</sup> creating their own versions of reader produced magazines.

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<sup>41</sup> See Eisenhauer's 2003 dissertation which addresses the production of 'zines.

Finished works can also be discussed using Green's analytic method, or for younger students, Terry Barrett's (2003) denotation and connotation exercise.

Studio activities that encourage students to talk back to the powerful institutions informing the cultural world in which they participate, represents an important step in developing critical, questioning minds. Art education serves as an intertextual springboard for cultural interaction, reflection and empowerment, all elements needed to promote growth and social awareness. Art, and the society that inspires it, helps us make sense of the world we inhabit. Art making helps to illuminate and reveal what makes us human. Collaborative art interpretation builds deeper connections to our commonalities and differences (Barrett, 2000, 2003; Freedman, 2003). Freedman (2003) reminds art educators why visual culture education is vital for our field, and our students:

In order to promote the development of interpretive skills and the knowledge-building connections that come with them, students must have opportunities to come to understand the multiple ways in which representation works in visual culture, how it is used, and how to form visual interpretations of their own ideas. (p. 93-94)

*Academic: From my dissertation journal*

*I didn't have to apply for the Barkan Dissertation Award, and I almost didn't, but now, having just found out I won it, I'm glad I did. In the middle of dissertating it seems counterintuitive to stop, pull my project together in a fully edited, ready to present format, but that is what the application called for. So I did, and it was very stressful and time consuming. Since the deadline for submission, I've spent time doing the internal dialogue thing... "Well, I probably won't win, other peers have really good research projects going too...Some of them could use the award money more than I could..." stuff like that. But I won. I am thrilled and so honored, not only for the award itself, but because scholars who've previously won the Barkan, are scholars I admire. After dancing ecstatically around the kitchen, I called my husband (who came home later with an armload of flowers), and my parents. My mom is currently trying to figure out how she can work my accomplishment into conversation with her friends, the same friends who are sick of hearing about each other's grandkids. I told her it isn't likely she will be able*

*to work it to most conversations. Casual talk involving dissertation writing is rare outside of academia. I advised her to just go for it. Later, alone with my thoughts, I went down the insecurity path...did anyone else even submit? I am bothered by my ability to take a wonderful moment and turn it into uncertainty. Winning the Barkan is only one part of the story, though.*

*In addition to a commemorative plaque, a check for five grand, and a luncheon in my honor, I have to give a presentation about my research. Scary stuff. Scary enough to keep me up last night imagining how it will, or should go. How will I talk about sexualizing girls, Lolita porn, and other disturbing subjects, as my colleagues and peers chew on chicken breasts covered in something white? I have a few ideas in mind; the very thoughts that kept me up most of the night, and will begin plotting out what and how soon. Meanwhile, I have a dissertation to complete, an award-winning dissertation—yes, but it still needs to get finished. I can proudly say that I am well into the last section, the Author's notes, and I can actually see the finish line. One thing sticks in my mind, something my husband mentioned yesterday after I told him my news, "I guess this takes the pressure off...I mean it's not like they are going to fail you in your defense if they have already decided it deserved a major award..." True. But, then I see the insecurity path reappear; its brambly edges a razor sharp reminder of my self-doubt. Maybe I'll be the first ever to win the Barkan Dissertation Award for promising research, and not fulfill the promise. Insecurity, for all its negative energy, is what drives me to always be prepared. Over prepared if possible.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

### Section 8: Summary

In traditional dissertation format, the following portions of this section would include a discussion and summary, implications, perhaps future research areas, and finally, a conclusion. In my format, however, many of these categories have already been discussed and summarized, implications have been examined, and some future research areas have been identified. A conclusion, or a succinct answer to sum up my research, will not be forthcoming. My study is not about concluding anything in a definitive sense. It was embarked upon as discovery, an inquiry that might yield innumerable answers or suppositions, while shedding a focused beam on important connections. An understanding of how Lolita came to be known as an undesirable notion that is desirable at the same time required looking at many possible answers. My discoveries and their intertextual connectedness are addressed in what serves as my conclusion section.

I also wanted to investigate what research looks like, feels like, and what it does to the circle of life revolving around it. If I am the center of this process, the axis, then the spokes of my work thus far have been spinning at various accelerations. I worked in fits and starts. I worked excited, purposeful, and even giddy at times. Conversely, I worked tired; depressed and frustrated in some instances. I worked against the wishes of those

closest to me. I worked with their blessings and help at other times. I had sleepless bouts that resulted in keeping a notepad next to my bed so I could write down and quiet the thoughts keeping me awake. I wrote while aching for my daughter. I wrote after having a generous glass of pinot noir. Sometimes I didn't wish to write at all.

I listened. I read. I watched. I created. I blogged. I kept learning all the while, unable to divorce what was outside my office from the work going on inside. I met with other scholars who gave me supportive talks, specific ideas, or passed along information they were kind enough to share. I applied for jobs, a time consuming and ego deflating process that reminds me why finishing my dissertation is critical for my future dreams. I added copious amounts of music to my iTunes library in an effort to keep computer sitting less dreadful. I began writing in the early fall, a circulating fan to keep me cool on warm Indian summer days. I am finishing with a space heater under my desk and the promise of Forsythia blooms outside my window.

I understand from my professors that what I have just embarked on is a luxury for most Ph.D. candidates. Few can afford to approach dissertation writing as a full-time job as I have. One professor shared with me that she woke up each morning at 4 a.m. to write before heading off to work. As a non-morning person, I am sure that if I had tried that approach my writing would be far more gloomy and to the point. And maybe my family would have seen more of me. Instead, as a night owl I preferred working late. I also enjoyed working on weekends, something that seems counterintuitive to motherhood and family life, but I had fewer interruptions for scheduled obligations.

Reflecting on my work habits helps me see that even if I had set forth a pattern or schedule in the beginning, I might have struggled with adhering to my plan. Indeed, my



intention to write full-time, like a 9 to 5 job, only occasionally happened. I floated within those hourly borders, but also spent a good deal of time writing outside the normal workday. I am a fairly disciplined person by nature; however, punching a dissertation time clock might not be a bad idea for those inclined to procrastinate. I have rarely been a procrastinator, laundry notwithstanding, but there were times when working on my research project felt like a bad idea. For example, during the weeks after my daughter's emotional breakup, I found it difficult to feel anything at all. I became depressed watching her painful journey through heartbreak. While I couldn't muster any enthusiasm for my dissertation, I did retreat to my research journal to write about what was happening. I spent time reflecting on the helplessness of parenting, my need to fix something that can't be fixed. I could say things in my journal that I couldn't say to her.

My online dissertation journal,<sup>42</sup> a forum few people know about and even fewer visit, serves as a space for letting go outside the margins of this project. Writing specifically for a public venue encouraged me to reflect honestly about how my work and life were attempting to co-exist, and reflect less about my actual topic. A dissertation is also a public document, but less likely to be stumbled upon, at least that's how it feels when writing it.

Online blogging, an activity I used to see as self-serving and narcissistic, became a strangely appealing place. More than any writing posts, I was eager to upload my artifacts as soon as one was completed. So far removed from having a showing of my work, (I can't even recall doing an installation after my third undergraduate year), I found myself excited to put my stuff up on display in my digital gallery. My gallery openings

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<sup>42</sup> My journal can be seen at <http://www.sharisavage.wordpress.com>

occur only when I mention to someone that I have an online blog, share its web address, and gently encourage him or her to visit. Like a real gallery installation, I have an artist statement, didactic labels, and a picture of me, as if I were milling about near the sign-in book. Unlike a real gallery, verbal interaction is one-sided; I am the only one talking. I can't hear what viewers are saying, but my blog does have comment areas. So far no one has commented. Regardless, I do like knowing I can share my Lolita-inspired interpretations if I am so inclined. I admit to visiting my artifacts often.

### Writing as Inquiry

**S**o, what did I learn about my project, my process, and myself? Quantifying an outcome would be impossible, as I am still in process, but my dissertation advisor says I need to attempt to quantify. I understand now that I will continue to question, ponder, wonder, and inquire for as long as I can see Dolores in my mind's eye. For as long as I need to defend her, and for as long as girls like her need defending. To say I discovered this fact, or I disproved that fact, would be disingenuous. What I discovered is that there is much more to ruminate on. There is much more to say than I could contain in this particular document. A good thing too, because it will keep me interested in researching and writing about my topic and related issues, the very activities an academic scholar is supposed to be dedicated to doing.

Writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2000) is not only my main methodology, it is also the name of my blog. I am committed to the idea that writing, for me especially, is critical in helping me define or pin down whatever it is I believe. Why I believe as I do is not as

easily resolved, nor is it fixed or conscripted. When I write, as I write, I hear my own voice speaking, compelling my thoughts to move onto paper. Then, as I re-read my thoughts as seen on paper (more correctly, on my computer screen), I think about what I have tried to say and if I have said it clearly. I don't believe I am the first writer to read a passage and wonder, maybe even out loud "huh?" – or worse, realize I made my idea harder to grasp. Backspacing my previous thoughts away, I sit for a time, often staring out the window, waiting for newer, better ways of distilling and wording my ideas. Rarely is there pride in a finely crafted sentence, not the first time. I have come to realize a particular sentence may find itself revised to the point it can hardly be recognized for the tiny kernel that might remain. But, that is the tenuous work of writing, a give and take that I no longer get frustrated by, and sometimes look forward to. Revision is reflection.

Because I write to know, to understand, my style is often free flowing and conversational, a format some will not like or think scholarly. I'm fine with that, though, because my favorite writers tend to process as I do, which makes me feel at home in their writings. I believe a reader should feel welcome. A reader appreciates a quick familiarization of the space we share. While my subject matter may be uncomfortable for some, I hope the way in which I write about my topic is comfortable. That has been my intent in this dissertation. If you are still reading at this point I may have been successful.

In the introduction to my dissertation I acknowledged that many voices would be present in this project. I reflected as a girl, woman, wife, mother, teacher, artist, and academic. I'd like to allow each voice to speak about what it has given to and gotten from this endeavor. I am one person; however, all of these identities reside within me, guiding

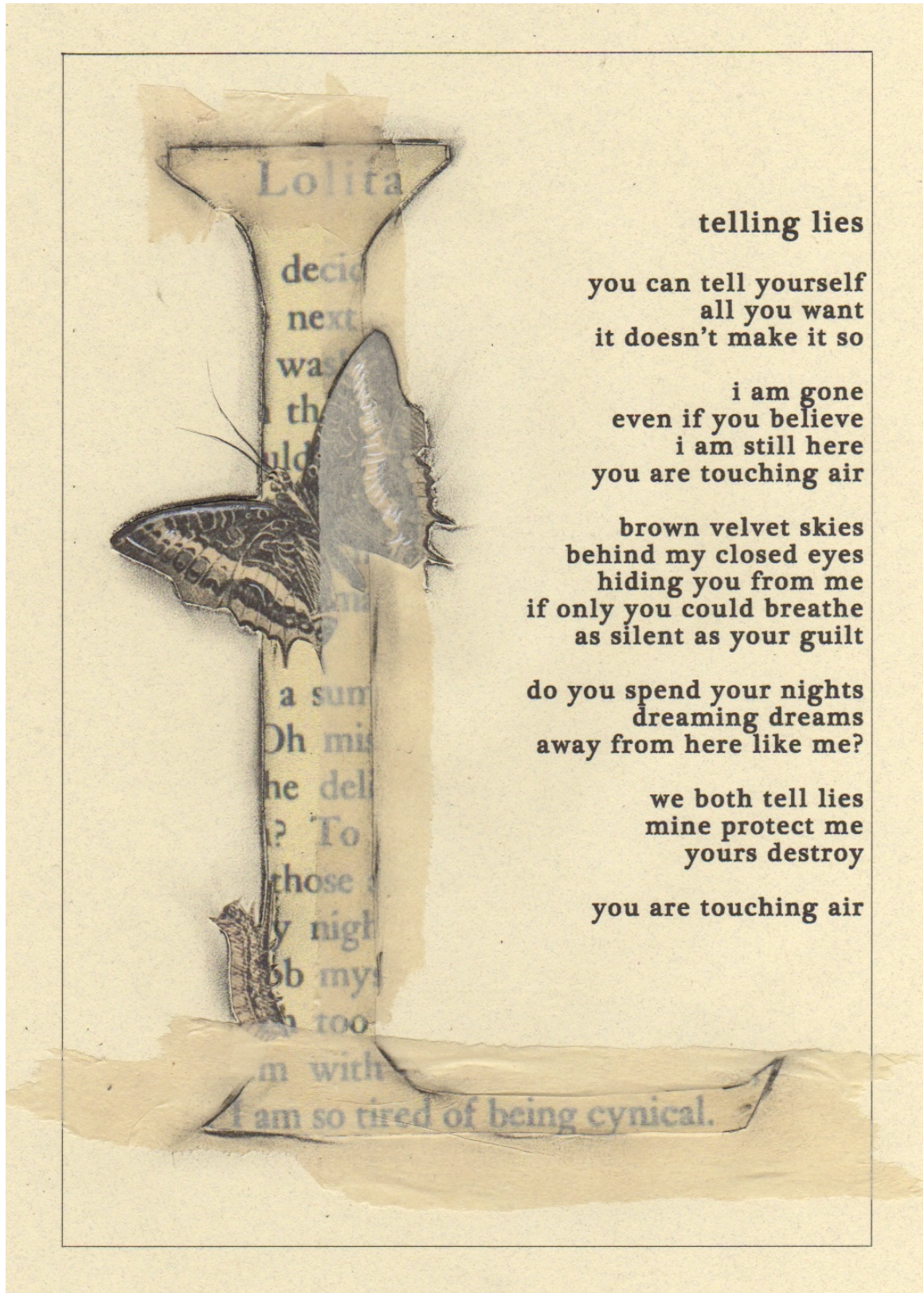
me, confounding me, arguing with me. Some are stronger than others. Some are so tightly bound to one another it is difficult for me to separate them. Nor would I want to. I begin with the most vulnerable voice.

## Girl

**A**s the first-born, I shouldered many hopes for my parents and am still affected today by the need to please. I think back on those years as being worry-free, loving, safe, and incredibly normal. I was, and remain, a private person who keeps things to herself. As a girl, I enjoyed living in a singular world. I was imaginative, artistic, a voracious reader, painfully shy, a tomboy, and a quiet observer of life. As I moved from girlhood to teen, I struggled with balancing my tomboyish attitude with a blossoming awareness of boys, which made acting like a boy feel wrong. My private world served as both light-filled sanctuary and a place of darkly harbored secrets. I relied on myself, and I believe it made me stronger than people gave me credit for.

No one had ever purposefully hurt me, emotionally or physically—until I left girlhood and became a young teen. That’s when a varsity basketball player took me to a party that didn’t exist in an empty house. I had little frame of reference in which to place what had happened there, or what I felt in the days after. I dragged myself out of what I now know was a deep depression. I never told anyone what happened to me. Looking back now, from a more fully lived life, I can see that this event stands as the first realization that my body would not be mine alone.

*The previous passage is purposefully vague. It represents the way I talk around things rather than flat out saying the words I normally resist connecting to this event. Dr. Barrett encourages me to speak plainly, to use exact words when I describe what occurred, but at the time I had no words that made sense. The following artifact contains poetry I wrote to find words for Dolores—and for me.*



Artifact 18

The girl I once was will always be at the core of who I became. I think this may be true for many women. The girl in me provides the link to Dolores. I can easily recall my tanned, fuzz-downed legs, the pinkish-white remnants of freshly picked scabs marring my knees, my unwashed hair, dirt-smudged sweatshirt, and untied sneakers. I am grateful that no one in my life found this look appealing or sexually desirable, and sad for Dolores that someone did. Reading *Lolita*, and locating the girl inside me made Nabokov's book difficult to shake. I became mindful of Dolores's silences. The twelve-year-old girl in me questioned why Dolores was to blame, but the woman I became wanted revenge on those who blame her.

### Woman

**A**t twelve, I was invisible. By thirteen, someone was watching me closely. I was made aware that someone had been leaving sexually disturbing letters in our mailbox. I was never told what, precisely, was written in them, only that they contained detailed information on my daily activities. And lots of other things no one was about to share or explain. Questions regarding my activities, and other inquiries by authorities, made me feel as though I was somehow responsible. When my school bus driver was identified as the letter writer, I was then subjected to more questions about my interactions with him. While no one directly said, "You must have encouraged this behavior," or "Why is it he thought these things about you?"—I understood implicitly that something about me was to blame. That feeling of blameworthiness, my research has shown me, is ever present for many females because of culturally familiar narratives

about women and sexuality. Blameworthiness, a shadow twin that follows closely, made my date rape an event that receded to deeply secreted places. After many years of shoving aside memories of how I was raped, my research has helped me to understand why I felt it was my fault. If someone had assured me then that I was not in any way responsible for my rape, I may not have continued to be passive about being sexually harassed, touched inappropriately, or sexually objectified by men. Reflecting on my past has made me aware of how critical it is to speak openly about female sexuality, agency, and how our culture promotes girls as sites of eroticism.

#### Woman/Wife

**W**oman, wife, and eventually mother, are a combination of identities that overlap in innumerable ways. Becoming a wife, and negotiating the space of marriage, was certainly affected by the events of my girlhood and teen years. My passivity helped to build and support traditional roles that remained in place until I went back to school. Education, and the platonic male support I received while a student, healed places in my self-esteem that I once believed too damaged to repair. My marriage is better for it. My spouse, while at first unsettled by my newly expanding world, began to see me as someone far more complicated. Self-assured, curious, and more interesting to be with, he came to enjoy this new version of a wife. My continued development as a scholar was met with equal parts pride and worry. Education was changing me; my views were no longer as conservative, my social circle larger and more diverse, both were developments that made him uneasy at first. As I near the end of my Ph.D., he is filled



with pride, acknowledges my success often, and helps me balance my fractured schedule. As I have grown, he has grown, but he still appreciates a home cooked meal, and resists my attempts to work through dinner.

### Mother/Teacher

**M**otherhood is one place I have rarely been passive. Caring for, protecting, nurturing, teaching, and supporting, are actions I engage in aggressively when it comes to my children. Mothering and teaching are activities and roles I find to be closely related. My teaching philosophy and teaching style are directly informed by being a mom. I mother my students with the same passion I mother my own kids. It's the mothering part of me that first connected with students in my classrooms. At first, I worried that this was not the most professional way to approach teaching. I shared my concerns with Dr. Ballengee-Morris, my graduate associate teaching supervisor. A nurturing teacher herself, she understood my worries but assured me mothering mirrors many of the best practices in pedagogy. Mothers teach everyday, and it was natural for me to rely on these skills.

Because of the highly personal relationships I nurture in my classrooms, students share personal issues in their lives. Some of these issues inspired my topic. My daughter also inspires my research. My son is affected by some of the findings in my research. As a mother and teacher, the hopes I have for my children are the same hopes I have for my students—purpose, happiness, and security. The sociocultural world my students and

children reside in drives my passion to promote awareness, to encourage change, and to empower young voices through art education.

As a mother, I am moved by Dolores's situation. I feel sharp pain over her motherless state, frustrated by the powerless feeling of not being able to protect her from Humbert. As a mother, I can easily imagine my daughter trying to navigate the disturbing realization that she is alone with someone who professes love, but enacts sexual abuse. As a mother, I desperately want to console Dolores, to absolve her of feeling blameworthy, and to speak up against her undeserved reputation. As a mother, I am appalled at a sociocultural world that glorifies and commodifies sexual innocence, that promotes girls as sexually available, sexually passive, and sexually deserving of abuse. It is my mother identity that pushes my research forward. It is the mother in me that speaks with biased thoughts, the mother that argues without apology, the mother who knows what it is to be used, and the mother who writes to critique media that speaks for, to, and about girls.

The mother in me also needed to listen. I needed to hear other female voices. Some that agreed, some that disagreed, and others that asked me to consider both sides. The mother in me learned that by arguing to protect sexual innocence, I could add to its desirability as a rare and special commodity. The mother in me learned to recognize that children are sexual beings. The mother in me refuses to believe child pornography has any other side to consider. Most important, I learned that mothers react first, and apologize later. An instinctive flaw, but one I do recognize and acknowledge may have undue influence on how I defend my position.

The teacher in me guides my passion to facilitate learning through critical inquiry. When I share my research topic with my students, describe to them the illuminating process of writing through my ideas, I hope to encourage their questioning skills. In turn, by sharing with them, a new dialogue begins that brings additional layers to my topic. I feel successful when students contact me later, months after our time in the classroom, to share a resource or forward a web link they think relates to my research.

The teacher in me receded the day I read the student paper that inspired my future topic, replaced by the mother in me who wanted to comfort and support a vulnerable girl. During the writing of my dissertation, the mother in me was a constant, arguably my most dedicated and emotional voice; however, many times she had her thoughts filtered through the academic. Inseparable as they sometimes were, they needed each other in order to look closely at the work I am doing.

#### Artist

**M**aking artifacts as a way to include popular culture examples that eroticize girls became a multi-purpose tool for inquiry. At first, I envisioned my artifacts as being useful for skirting possible copyright issues. Later, I realized art-making in conjunction with my research imbued personal reflection beyond what I had imagined. I am moved by the vulnerability of the young girls depicted in the images I chose. I see butterfly wings as both fragile and representative of freedom. I see language as canvas, rather than vocabulary. Other times I see language as central to my intent. Re-connecting to my creative spirit is one of the more intimate outcomes of my

project. These small, but personal spaces for playing with ideas, did yield new ways of thinking about how images represent. In my repurposed context, many of the images became less disturbing to me. Perhaps the hopefulness of butterfly wings lightened the overall tone. Other times, what I created left an ominous or cynical impression. I could see Sally Mann's daughter as victim, and then again as fairy-like muse, depending on where I put her. I could see Miley Cyrus's controversial Leibovitz photo as both manipulated and manipulative. My mind is no longer so easily made up. Ambiguity, one of Mann's favorite qualities in composing a photograph, became a fitting description for what I was trying to capture.

Art-making allows me to let go of deeply held beliefs about what makes an image erotic to some, instead exploring what is beautiful or expressive, desirable but not necessarily sexual. No longer convinced a particular image is inherently bad, I can now make room for how an image that once concerned me might fit other definitions of worthiness. Mindful that manipulating images carries a particular value judgment, I spent time thinking about how a repurposed representation might strengthen or weaken<sup>43</sup> my position. In the final analysis, however, I decided to let providence win out. As a collection of artworks, I see a more fully present Dolores, as best I could conjure her elusive spirit.

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<sup>43</sup> One artifact was questioned during my oral defense as being too sexual or erotic and may be seen as arguing against my argument. After considering committee opinions, I removed it.

## Academic

**M**y academic voice, seemingly the most important voice for this dissertation, is the one I worry may be the weakest. It is, after all, an identity I developed late in my life. But, if I reframe the word “academic” by looking back at my roots, to the girl underneath the person writing today, I see the word “observer.” The quiet one in the back row—the girl with wavy brown hair, blue-eyed like her father, with a freckle-kissed turned-up nose—watching, wondering, and wishing she had the courage to say out loud what was in her head. She’s angry with herself because the girl four seats up just said what she wished she had said, but didn’t. I relived those same feelings when I started grad school. A question was asked; I had an answer, or maybe a comment jumped into my thoughts, but I would invariably resist speaking up, only to hear another peer repeat what was in my head. Eventually, I began to trust my voice, knowing I was on point, and pushed myself to speak of the things inside my head.

I no longer gravitate to the back of the classroom, indeed, I now stand before it. I still rely on observation, but I also feel comfortable among my peers and colleagues. Finding my research topic came from observing Lolita-like representations in popular culture. My data, binders filled with readings, boxes filled with torn out magazine pages, downloaded pictures, books, and films, were distilled and filtered through my observational lenses. Living in my head once again, I wrote down what it is I needed to say, no longer angry at anyone sitting ahead of me. The more time I spend with my topic, the more confident I am in defending my position, and in defending, I become comfortable speaking through multiple voices.

Girl, woman, wife, mother, teacher, artist, and academic weave into, outside of, and underneath my dissertation. Reflecting on my research through the eyes and thoughts of my multiple identities sheds light on contradictions, competing beliefs, ambiguities, agreements, and biases. To restrict one voice and privilege another denies my project of the wide lens it deserves. Simply put, this writer is listening to as many voices as she can in hopes of broadening the conversation.

### Section 9: Conclusions

**M**y research set out to trace the teleological path of the Lolita phenomenon from its birth in the Nabokov novel to present day visual culture texts including advertising, art, fashion, film, music videos, Internet pornography, television, and other popular media outlets, thereby dismantling the cultural process of eroticizing girls. Relational questions include:

- 1) How did Lolita move from text to sociocultural myth?
- 2) How are Lolita-like representations visually constructed?
- 3) What do Lolita-like representations suggest to society?
- 4) What are the sociocultural implications concerning the normalized practice of eroticizing girls?
- 5) How can visual culture pedagogy encourage critical inquiry when looking at Lolita-like representations in popular media?

In addition, I wanted to provide an insider view of the research process, acknowledge my role, as well as other influences, which allows others to see what goes into the production of a dissertation. Visual data supports provided an opportunity to

discover new ways of knowing through arts-based research. Now that my research journey is coming to temporary close, I'd like to offer my take on *Lolita's* teleological fast track to today's eroticized girl marketer, while summarizing some of the possible factors paving her way.

### How *Lolita* Moved from Text to Sociocultural Myth

**N**abokov's text was brilliantly structured to first instruct readers on how to consider it as directed by the fictive foreword, then, to diffuse empathy for Dolores by silencing her side of the story. Humbert's tale, told through a self-serving narrative, argues persuasively for understanding and pity. Nabokov's limitless use of language, thickly described scenarios, and hushed female lead, creates a text-heavy workout when it comes to locating Dolores or her feelings. The concluding Author's notes, in which Nabokov defends his novel, admonishes detractors, further instructs readers in the proper reaction to his work, and solidifies absolving Humbert, while claiming "*Lolita* has no moral in tow" (Nabokov, 1958, p. 314).

Despite *Lolita's* difficult road to publication, all it took was one highly influential voice, that of Graham Greene, to declare Nabokov's novel literary genius, and it became the critic's darling. Male-authored critical interpretations, dutifully following Nabokov's instructive framework for reading, described the novel in terms of love, passion, and erotic longing. Dolores became a footnote; *Lolita* became blameworthy, and sociocultural tacit understandings agreed with her bad girl reputation. Stanley Kubrick's 1962 movie version did little to dispel *Lolita's* manipulative designation. Visual signifiers culled from

the book are distilled by Kubrick, re-purposed and re-presented as authentic interpretations of *Lolita*. By 1966, *Lolita* had become a complex of sexual disorders with dire warnings attached, as described by Russell Trainer and his psychiatric colleagues. The motion picture industry continued to market innocence as commodity and the ingénue as box office gold. Eight years after the novel's debut, *Lolita* myths were firmly entrenched (Bayma & Fine, 1996; McCracken, 2001; McNeeley, 1989; Patnoe, 1995; Sinclair, 1988; Trainer, 1967).

### How *Lolita*-like Representations are Visually Constructed

**T**he myth of childhood, the rare and special girl with out sexual knowledge coupled with the complicities of the girl with sexual knowledge, is showcased in multiple media outlets. Visual signifiers continue to support notions of innocence, as well as notions of sexual manipulation, a binary of before and after narratives that remain intact in today's advertising, music videos, Internet pornography, film and television media, anime, toys, and fashion. Myths about childhood innocence are used to create ambiguity in art, challenging long held socially constructed beliefs that complicate and eroticize youth as desirable. The work of Sally Mann and Jock Sturges offer two different but controversial ways of capturing the eroticism of childhood and prepubescent bodies (Duncum, 2004; Giroux, 2000; Kilbourne, 2006).

Inherent in many representations of innocence are wide-eyed blank expressions, passive bodies, skin, awkward limbs, childish clothing, vulnerability, and indifference. Signifiers seen in sexually complicit depictions of youth include a knowing gaze,



submissive body positioning, blossoming bodies, sexualized clothing, oral fixation, and the inclusion of male bodies. Candy, cuffed socks, frilly lace, white, pink, and red color schemes, hair braids, ringlets, and pigtails can be seen interchangeably in Lolita-like representations. Repetitive visual narratives featuring both unknowing and knowing erotic signifiers remain cultural markers for sexualizing girls. Lolita-like representations trade in commoditizing innocence as desirable, while the notion of sexual knowledge depicts girls as blameworthy and useable (Bordo, 2003; Durham, 2008; Giroux, 2000; Kilbourne, 2003; Kitzinger, 1988).

### What Lolita-like Representations Suggest to Society

**T**wo distinct messages are relayed through Lolita-like representations in popular visual culture: innocence is desirable (the unknowing girl), while the loss of innocence (the knowing girl) signals complicity. The first message is loaded with complexities. Sexual innocence itself is myth. Children are sexual beings, with sexual bodies; however, they lack a motivating desire to engage sexually with others until puberty. What is actually desirable about childhood innocence is the presumed lack of sexual knowledge or sexual experience. To be the first to consume a child's innocence is one of the driving forces behind sexual predatory behavior. Virginity is a rare commodity<sup>44</sup> in that its consumption is a one-time event. Deeper issues further complicate, such as power and authority over another, manipulation, and the infliction of pain (Carnes, 2003; Driscoll, 2002; Giroux, 2000; Kitzinger, 1988).

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<sup>44</sup> So valuable that children in the sex trade are sold as virgins, and then sewn back up to be sold again (Personal communication, Dr. Jane Gray, April 16, 2007).

The second message, also loaded with complexities, describes sexually knowledgeable girls as blameworthy, complicit in their ability to attract, and useable. Projecting sexual qualities or sexual awareness onto representations of girls promotes the idea that girls are sexually available, while the quantities of Lolita-like representations say our culture accepts eroticized girls as a normal depiction. Together, these ideas distort how males understand girls, and simultaneously tell girls what it means to be female in our culture. In the sociocultural sense, conflicting messages about girls lead to multiple issues for both men and women. Young girls, however, find themselves trying to navigate a troubling binary of messages telling them to be both innocent and sexual (Carnes, 2003; Durham, 2008; Kilbourne, 2006; Kitzinger, 1988).

#### The Sociocultural Implications Concerning the Normalized Practice of Eroticizing Girls

**A**ccording to the APA report (2007), serious implications exist for girls and for society, implications with profoundly negative effects. The sexualization of girls in our culture negatively impacts girls in the following areas; developmental growth, body image disorders, mental health concerns, physical health, and sexual health. In societal terms, the sexualization of girls affects males in similar areas: developmentally, mentally, and sexually (APA, 2007; Zurbriggen, Pearce & Freyd, 2003).

Studies show men and boys exposed to repetitive representations of eroticized and sexualized prepubescent bodies are likely to develop strong arousal patterns. Increases in

Internet pornography addictions, the escalating need for stronger, more shocking pornographic visual representations of girls, and the probability of becoming involved in the downloading of child pornography, were all mentioned as critical factors in the shift of sexual desire patterns in men. Again, the preponderance of normalized eroticized girl depictions is seen as a contributing issue, in that cultural acceptance encourages men to seek experiences outside the virtual realm. Most disturbing are the connections made to the child sex trade, increases in child pornography trafficking, and child prostitution (APA, 2007; Carnes, 2003; Paul, 2004).

Another troubling outcome of eroticizing the prepubescent body is described in two studies regarding female attractiveness, changing waist to hip ratios, and declining body mass indexes. In these studies, college age women and men reported a preference for thin-hipped, low BMI female bodies, a departure from the long-standing evolutionary preference for an hourglass shaped female body with a higher BMI. Current preferences indicate high results for a female form with narrow hips and 16% body fat, a BMI within the anorexic range. This preferred female ideal is described as prepubescent in form and too low in body fat for menses to occur. Western representations of thin-hipped, low weight women are noted as having a possible affect on the shift in female attractiveness preferences. These studies further claims sociocultural influences may be altering evolutionary biological norms (Puhl & Boland, 2001; Wilson, Tripp & Boland, 2005).

## How Visual Culture Pedagogy Encourages Critical Inquiry When Looking at Lolita-like Representations in Popular Media

The APA report concludes with a discussion on how the information they gathered needs to be disseminated. The report itself is written in a non-academic voice, and is one of the motivating factors in my choice to try to reach multiple readers. The APA notes parents, social workers, and other professionals should read the report. Educators are singled out as one of the most important groups to reach. Media literacy education is also mentioned as an awareness building point, an area visual culture theorists are dedicated to addressing. Media messages, socially constructed representations that come with possible agendas, are central to visual culture goals that seek to empower student agency. Challenging visual culture narratives that restrict, oppress, or distort are critical to social injustice awareness and informed citizens (APA, 2007; Chung & Kirby, 2009; Durham, 2008; Green, 2000; Tavin, 2005).

Lolita-like representations are images that restrict, oppress, and distort. Whether purposeful or not, these depictions speak for and about girls in ways I feel are limiting and negative. By allowing students to challenge repetitive visual narratives, they can develop for themselves a critical curiosity about sociocultural issues in our world. Arts-based inquiry, an important function in visual culture classrooms, offers deeper connections to self, social and political values, and the ability to express opinion. Intrinsic to the art-making process is the possibility of creating new ways of knowing and telling, an outcome of critical inquiry worth striving for (APA, 2007; Barone, 2006; Barrett, 2003; Chung & Kirby, 2009; Durham, 2008; Green, 2000; Tavin, 2005).

Ours is an increasingly visual messaging society. Information is passed along in rapid streams of images that must impress or persuade with expedience. Cultural myths help messages take hold, geminate, and grow. Our mission as art educators concerned with sociocultural issues and the development of informed citizenry involves working towards developing pedagogy that supports student-driven explorations of the cultural narratives informing their world (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Barrett, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Green, 2000; Gude, 2007; Taylor & Ballengee-Morris, 2003).

### Final Thoughts

**M**y dissertation began with two overarching goals. First, to examine how and why Lolita-like representations became acculturated, and second, to explore the inner landscape of the dissertation writing process. By including multiple voices, reflective journal entries, and arts-based creations, I acknowledge the intertextual relationships between work, life, art-making, and the researcher, as a way to expose the realities of the dissertation phase of doctoral studies. I learned more about researching than expected, and even more about myself. As Petra Hendry (2007) explains:

Research becomes not a site of knowledge production but a site of communion. In this sense we become present in our relationships and interconnections with others. This shift from research as a site of production to a way of life that honors relationships deconstructs the duality of research/nonresearch, subject/object, and the knower/known. Research is not a privileged site; however our inquiries become embedded in our lives. (p. 496)

In many ways, my dissertation acted as a space of negotiation between me, those I care for, and that which I care about. Never too far apart, always pricking and prodding,

my research became an integral component of my daily life. Dolores, in whatever form, remains a chattering spirit, telling now as much as she can because I asked her to, and because I gave her the pages to do it. Her story makes me curious to ask more, to know more. What I have learned is multi-faceted, connecting to and through innumerable disciplines and theories, and while casting light on how Lolita became and what her image represents in our culture, I am only beginning to see what her effects might be. If I were to “nutshell” it, as Dr. Stout likes to say, Lolita’s reputation is undeserved, silences Dolores, and upholds innocence and inexperience as desirable, while placing blame on girls who express sexual agency or sexual knowledge. Lolita-like representations, in all their ubiquitous glory, offer mythic narratives that I believe need challenging. Visual culture education is a place where students can challenge, voice their opinions, and wonder about the media saturated culture they participate in.

In my nutshell explanation, several years worth of data gathering, reading, and theorizing culminate in one written document that will never reveal the full extent of the dissertation process. I revealed what I could, when I could, and hope that others will venture off the traditional research path too, scanning the brush for fragrant blooms while avoiding prickly thorns (thorns being time, self-imposed deadlines, stress, insomnia, and other anxiety-raising obstacles). What remains encapsulated in my research nutshell, the bits and pieces clinging to the center, represents questions newly wrought or inklings that continue to bother me. I am still wondering.

Research is, in the final analysis, just a fancy word for wondering. Theorizing is a more formal word for daydreaming.<sup>45</sup> Writing is the act of telling what you are wondering and daydreaming about. My dissertation is inspired by wondering why Dolores is forgotten, why Lolita is a bad girl, and why her mythic reputation is strongly and visually acculturated. My research involves daydreaming about how to discover answers and reveal misinterpretations about Lolita-like representations. Creating Lolita artifacts, or arts-based inquiry collages, allowed me to talk back and give a visual component to my finished product. Reflection, a more directed type of daydreaming, engages experience with insight, leading to new possibilities and new understandings.

All the while I have been writing in order to learn more. Imagination is the glue sticking all these activities together. I imagined, in the earliest stages of my wonderings about my topic, that I would tell a story that met the goals of a dissertation, but also acknowledged the daydreams linking my data processes. I believe I have done that. Still, I am not really done, nor do I want to be. I imagine I will be wondering about Dolores for a while, daydreaming my way to my next research project, and considering the words needed to continue telling her story.

There are gentle souls who would pronounce *Lolita* meaningless  
because it does not teach them anything.

Nabokov, in Author's Notes, 1958, p. 314.

It is what we do after we tell stories that matters.

Phillion, cited in Eng, 2006, p. 340.

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<sup>45</sup> Daydreams come from a barrage of activity in the brain's default network. These connect to multiple parts of the brain and encourage new associations. The daydreaming brain, according to neuroscientist Lehrer (2009), is in overdrive. Creativity is one of the outcomes.

## DISSERTATION RESEARCH JOURNAL

*Oct. 28<sup>th</sup> 2008 Candidacy Exam*

My candidacy exam was this morning. An often re-scheduled, paper work nightmare of an event that must be hurdled on the way to dissertationland. I went in feeling confident. I had labored over the written portion, felt sure I had covered each question thoroughly, and was, in general, prepared. What goes on in an oral exam is mysterious to those who have not gone through one. Casual conversations with peers who had gone before me did little to lift the veil of secrecy. One peer related he had not passed. Another said she was surprised by the line of questions she was asked to expound upon, struggling to argue her point of view without simply repeating what she had already related in her written answers. I re-read mine several times before my exam, just to be sure.

Confidence is a tricky emotion. It builds based on your own admittedly less than objective view, a shaky foundation at best. Someone with issues related to self-worth, like me, can easily find themselves grasping for solid ground once the questioning begins. It took less than a minute for my confidence to slip, mind shifting, circling words sucked into a void of uncertainty. Did I answer her question? I recall feeling sure I was rambling, stabbing blindly for a word, a phrase, anything that even remotely fit the vague idea I had of where I was going. All of me shrank, hunched down in place of doubt. Is this it? Is this when my Cinderella moment is revealed?

I have spent years, really most of my adult life, feeling less than capable of competing in intellectual arenas. Each new course, each new teacher, represents another person I need to impress or convince that I am capable. Once accomplished, I resume convincing myself. I am saddened and perplexed by how tentative my confidence is. For example, a professor returns my written work; I immediately scan the margin notes, digesting as I make my way to the final commentary and grade. I get A's, which should be the validation I need, the cherry on top. However, I dwell on the negatives. Obsess over the precise wording of each margin note. My candidacy exam was no exception.

I passed my candidacy exam. The total deliberation time spent discussing my performance was less than a minute. During the exam I felt completely untethered. I felt like an enemy operator bent on derailing my argument was intercepting the neurons firing between the question I heard and the response I offered. My mouth went dry. Repetitive words spewed forth; as if I had lost the ability to access the vocabulary I have spent years developing. *Inform. Human. Engage with. Resonate. Connect.* Quick! What is the better



word, another word, a different word? I see myself rummaging in a shadowed office, file drawers yanked open, papers scattered on the floor, feet sliding across white. I can't see. I slip and land hard, knocking the air from my lungs. Gasping, I try to relate verbally what the mess in my brain cannot locate, my fists full of papers I can't read. Still, I passed. I got hugs, congratulatory comments, and a beautiful single stemmed rose. I was advised to celebrate.

I drove home in a fog, mentally, not actually. I rehashed the lightening fast two-hour exam, however, I couldn't decipher the verbal margin notes or locate my final grade. Pass or fail, win or lose. I won, but I didn't feel like a winner. I found no joy in the accomplishment, only questions concerning my perceived performance. One thing I did feel was relief. It's over. I can move forward, dissertate, and (hopefully) graduate.

### *Moving forward*

I should get started, but I am finding it hard to get motivated. Endless purgatory is where I have been all night. Insomnia plagued once again, I relive my exam for hours; processing the answers I wish I had given, obsessively wondering about this or that. I always land upon the best ideas while doing it, but it's too late now. I take small comfort in knowing myself in this way. It's what I do. Days from now the uncertainty will fade, feel less sharp, less confidence shattering. The extreme negatives will fester, eventually scabbing over as my confidence slowly heals. That's when I will move forward, safely pressing on my computer keys, letter by letter, word by word, sentence by sentence, semi-secure in my ability to communicate an idea. Getting to safe mode will take time and effort. Rebuilding my confidence means redoubling information acquisition. I'll need to fill in the gaps, consume more knowledge to mortar and strengthen my position. Work harder to find better metaphors, those being unrelated to construction or tools, for one. No matter how I get there, I have to get there.

I order books. Books suggested by my committee and books I have been meaning to acquire all along. It's expensive, despite my searching only the used textbook section on Amazon. Even used, one crucial book is enormously expensive. I decide to order that one through the library system. Each day a few new books arrive. A stack of three sits to the left of my laptop, unread. A fourth book is half read. I recall at least three more books that are still coming. I mentally pile them up on one another, feeling the heavy weight of what they represent; things I don't know or understand fully yet. My lofty goal of graduating June of 2009, the balloon bouncing against the ceiling of my intentions, appears to be losing helium. I need a boost. I need a reason for re-engaging with enthusiasm for a process that, at present, seems endless. Projects of this magnitude need thorough preparation. I feel a boatload of war metaphors is anchored nearby. I need to resist. Instead, I decide to buy a new Mac desktop. A deserved treat, albeit costly, which will spur this researcher to press on.

### *Technological Incentive*

I set out to purchase my new Mac desktop on campus, where a flash of my student identification card means a nice discount. Heavy beyond my wimpy arms, I crab walked back to the parking garage, managing to keep the boxed computer only inches from the ground. I exited the elevator to find myself alone on the top floor, two men walking toward me as I struggled with the unwieldy box. It occurred to me, just then, that I was nothing more than a robbery waiting to happen, a full color life size picture of a Mac screaming loudly of its contents. This was not one of my better ideas.

I was not robbed. Monetarily, perhaps. Moving files from my laptop to the new desktop is proving to be an exercise in, well, exercising patience. I spend some useless time fretting over the fact that I should have gone directly to the Apple store, where the nice tech staff will assist in the transfer of data. As my frustration mounts I am increasingly worried about losing things, important things, like all my sweat equity is about to-poof-disappear into the wilderness of the digital world. Oh, but the huge 24 inch screen and its high definition-like quality graphics quickly win me over. Isn't it beautiful I exclaim to any family member that wanders near. Vividly engaging. Exciting. I am lost to the pretty colors, crisp edges, and the possibilities to come. Blinded by new technologies, I fail to recall that my purpose for buying this desktop is purely functional. A big screen with large-scale text equals less eyestrain. In reality, the word processing, black on white, are the important function I need. The visual perks are just that, perks.

### *Ready to begin*

With a project of this magnitude ahead I face the difficult task of pinpointing a starting place. How will I kick this off in words? Where is the most likely spot? The best opening gambit in dissertationland? I sit back to ponder it for a while. "Crock pot" is the first words that come to mind. I'll explain. Writing my dissertation is what I imagine to be a full time job. I will be at my desk, in my overstuffed office, from 9 a.m. or so, until dinnertime. Dinner, usually my domain, was an often disruptive force during my ten week candidacy exam phase. Stopping, when clearly on an inspired jag of writing, made me crazy, disliked by family, and resentful. This time I have taken a preemptive move; a crock-pot slow cooker. I will load up the 6-quart mother's helper with life-sustaining food; let it cook for hours on end. Questions related to "when's dinner" or "what's for dinner" can be answered with, "In the crock pot...help yourself." Genius move on my part. It will, sadly, be only one thing that will keep kids and husband at bay. I still need to negotiate other spaces, place boundaries, and set rules relating to motherhood and my alter ego, ABD. Unlike this summer, while attempting to write my exam, my children are in school. I look forward to large expanses of alone time. Interruptions, if they present themselves, will be of my own making, and deemed necessary. Phone calls, coffee breaks, dog walking, mail delivery, e-mail, lunch...It seems large expanses of uninterrupted time may be a stretch, intentions aside.

It is November 2, 2008, the day before I officially begin dissertating. I have set an ambitious goal: to graduate in June of 2009. I think I will ignore the actual time span, for momentum supporting reasons, and believe this is a doable goal.

November 17, 2008

I've been writing the actual dissertation and not writing this. Burnt, crisply too I might add, is how I feel after putting together 76 pages. A second bunch of pages, since the first 68 got the boot. My eyes are tired, despite my sight-saving oversized Mac desktop screen, so it must be from eyestrain. I am also sick of my own topic. I sent a draft to my advisor by Fed Ex and will refrain from dissertating until I hear back from him. I simply need a hell yeah or a hell no, before I devote more time and effort to this particular format. Meanwhile, we, the same advisor and I, are working on an article for publication on mentoring. It's kind of weird to be writing about the mentoring process while being mentored at the same time.

I will use this downtime to catch up with other parts of my life. Laundry. Bill paying. Maybe some art making projects related to my dissertation. I am feeling vulnerable about the direction I am taking on my dissertation, even though it is pretty much the framework I had set out an argument for in my proposal, an argument not re-directed by my candidacy exam. So, my idealized process must have been ok. However, I can't help but feel like my process and product thus far, are not what is called for. Called for by whom. I don't know. I just get really bogged down by meeting the rules, or following the proper protocol for a dissertation. Tell me, exactly, how it needs to be, and I'll try to abide.

November 18, 2008

Yesterday I attended two functions after teaching; a show and tell by one of our young and highly regarded faculty, followed by a meeting about our upcoming program review. Our department Chair went over the details of how we found ourselves being scrutinized as a department. It is clear that large-scale academia is chock full of layers, territorial boundaries, further disrupted by lording-over Dean's, and other peculiarities not founding other careers. In our new President's hopes to streamline and disengage departmental collectives, he has unleashed a maelstrom of unintended busy work. I have never seen our Chair so stressed and distracted by matters unrelated to the mission of our department. I feel bad for her. Our department is small when compared to many other units, however we are the largest Art Ed department in the country, nationally understood to be the finest program for Ph.D. study. Despite this, our department is under fire, caught in the cross hairs of a battle that should not be transpiring. Too many war metaphors, but they are applicable when seeing what our Chair is facing. I am proud of her, especially the passionate way she is arguing our case, and hope those sitting in judgment can see that as well.

Later, in the hallway, grad students gathered, swapping semi-frightening stories about candidacy exams and job searches. We are one stressed out bunch, that much is certain,

but somewhere in the air is the overall excitement of possibilities. Where will we end up? Who will we become in academia? It's hard to imagine when in the thick of the dissertation writing phase, as we banter over numbers of pages done, and projected completion dates. One major goal at a time, please.

I am in a state of dissertation limbo. My first draft, some semblance of a chapter, is now in the hands of my advisor and I await his go ahead. Meanwhile, I am fiddling around in my office, trying to re-organize data, computer files, and collected images. I left things in a terrible state once my candidacy exam was done, stacking piles of binders and loose papers in wicker baskets, which are currently shoved into a corner in an attempt to look organized. I have quite a task ahead, and am not feeling it, at all. I click on my iTunes library and queue up a long list of songs to keep me motivated. As I work I contemplate the possible influence my music selections have over my writing and thinking. I often write to a soundtrack of sorts. Just the other day a newly added song made me stop and listen closely because it reminded me of what Dolores might write to Humbert, if she could. I add the name of the song to my running list of ideas, to do's, reminder notepad. I plan to look up the lyrics for later. At the same time I ponder burning a CD to accompany my dissertation, a read along compilation to pass along to my committee. As in "this is what I listened to as I wrote." This song made me sad, this one made me type faster, this one made me feel happy, this one made me stop and daydream. I know music influences my writing process. I have certain CD's or songs that when played send me back to a place in one of my novels. They conjure an emotional journey, settling me into a frame of mind, a specific place, or scene. Now I wonder, did they inspire? Calm me? Give me an idea that is not my own? Is an idea ever my own?

November 19, 2008

Today I presented my research to an undergraduate class. Some of my GTA colleagues invite me each quarter to talk with their students. I don't like to generalize, but...the girls listen with rapt attention, gasping, nodding, asking questions, offering thoughts, sometime expressing disgust at the whole "eroticizing girls" theme, while the boys lean back, cross their forearms and feign listening. Two slept openly. Today, at least one boy joined in, asking several really insightful questions.

I try to walk a fine line, not wanting to distance the males, or make them feel as if this male bashing. I mention several times that my research acknowledges that the Lolita phenomena is impacting their lives as well. Relationships with females, how they view and respond to media practices predicated on sexualizing girls, their own sisters, girlfriends, and others. This is not just a feminist centered topic. It is cultural, widespread, and normalized to the point we barely react to eroticized girl images. They exist and that's just how it is. My mission, I explain, is to open as many eyes as possible to the ways in which these depictions, patterns, and roles, limit, oppress and objectify.

I know that for some males in these classes the very images I include in my presentation are erotic for them. Perhaps they feel discomfort in learning that many of the

representations are based on signifiers related to desire as projected by Humbert, a man who is aroused by girls ages nine to fourteen, and admits to his own pedophilic obsession with prepubescent bodies. Or perhaps they just think I'm another flapping windbag feminist. One thing I do know is that girls don't sleep through my presentation. Dolores is front and center, in spirit and in my inquiry. By the time I leave everyone, including the boys, know her name. It's something, anyway.

November 24, 2008

It's a miserable gray, chilly wet day. My student's trudged in loudly, boots dragging, damp smelling, and late. I, too, wrestled my way through campus bus crowds, hoping as each stop drew near more would get off. No one wants to be here today, including me. A warm, down-fluffed bed is preferable. We pushed on, though, none too eager to head back out into the weather, and got our class projects done. On my way out of the building I ran into my department Chair, she wondered if we could speak briefly. Sure, I replied, more curious than worried. She is hosting the program review visitors today. I was certain she had little time for me, but I always love the chance to sit down with her. Curiosity aside, she simply wanted to clear the air. She was concerned I felt she had been too hard on me during my exam. I reassured her that I had not felt that way at all. My trepidation was self-inflicted. I explained that when I wrote in my exam diary that her question "bugged" me, it was because I was struggling with it. The question itself or her posing it is not at issue; my uneasiness with formulating an answer is what was bugging me. Still is. I asked for clarification, an arrow of assistance as to what I was missing. She explained that I am too one-sided, or impassioned, and need to consider the gray areas. Not every man is out to prey on little girls. She's right. I need to consider how my passion and personal experiences keep blinders on my argument.

It only seems like the world is populated by Humberts. Every morning in the papers, on the local news, some kind of story related to a young girl being molested, or a hard drive full of images, a person in authority, something like that. I am attuned, as I should be. Just after I had lunch (left-over pork loin and parsnips, ala "Crock-pot"), I opened up my latest *Chronicle of Higher Education* to find an article about male professor's being charged with sexual harassment, and two recent suicides coming weeks after they were accused. Not every male professor harasses, most don't. Sometimes it is a female professor. Most professors never find themselves accused. Some find themselves falsely accused, later exonerated, but feel their reputations will be sullied, nonetheless.

I read the article on a tightrope of emotions. I will soon be a professor. I was sexually harassed by a professor, and later by two employers. I dealt with what occurred by not dealing with it—avoidance being my preferred method of action (inaction). But in the grand narrative of my time in academia and the workplace, all it takes is a few bad experiences. My guard is up. My scale of justice should be heavily weighted toward non-harassment, but it is the actions of a few that tend to linger.

So why, then, am I unable to consider the gray areas? Also from the *Chronicle*, an article called Humbert Humbert, the T.A., sent to me by a professor in another department who knows of my research. It's anonymous, for good reason. The male T.A. writes of being sexually aroused by female students, fantasizing about them, and complaining about the lack of dress code. How is he supposed to lecture on math when all he can see is Jennifer and her "...tiny shorts that reveal every inch of her golden-brown legs" (p.1)? I must admit I've never considered this particular issue or point of view, until now. I've had girls come to class dressed in similarly described outfits, wholly unsuitable for the classroom, and even the bars on Friday. Do I have the right to address it, them? Is that even in any part of my job description? I see the young men nearby struggle to stay focused on our coursework. If a male instructor did intervene, mention her attire, is he more likely to be attacked for his actions? In the shoes of the other, I think I would refrain from saying anything at all.

Still, I haven't dealt with the real issue. Why am I resistant to stepping out of my cocoon of righteousness? I read feminist works that rail, rant, declare, all the while brooking no offering of alternative readings. I honestly want to rant and rail at times, and when I do I usually delete or tone down what I have written the next day. It's there, though, underneath. I am so invested in defending Dolores I mute any other narrative.

Back to Humbert the T.A., and the idea of defending his position. Yes, it must be difficult to be a heterosexual male in a highly sexual visually rich America. A media landscape populated with ripening youth and eroticized things to be gazed upon. I gaze, too; however, my reactions are markedly different. I am upset by how young, how objectified, how powerless, even lifeless, sexualized female images seem to be. I feel old. Sad. I see my daughter walking through that same world, being gazed upon. I see my son gazing, consuming, enjoying. I see my husband squirming when I remind him that he is gazing at someone else's daughter. We all look, process, make meaning, feel and respond. It's responding part that worries me.

***She looks like a bitch. She's a cock blocker. What a slut. Don't bother; she's just a tease.*** All phrases I've heard in my own home. In reference to, in order, a girl acting in charge; the overweight friend of the hot girl; a high-heel wearing short-skirted college student, and a smiling female peer. Courtesy of my son and his male friends. Recently, my daughter casually mentioned some boys at school that have been bugging her. Why, I asked, what are they doing? "Oh, just being boys..." I pressed further, "In what way?" She sighed, dropped her overloaded backpack on the kitchen floor, "Stuff like... 'Hey Callie, I beat off to your Facebook picture last night' ...stuff like that. I don't even have a Facebook" she exclaimed, "So he totally didn't whack off to my picture." Stunned, I stated what was obvious to me, "Cal...it's not that he did or didn't...it's that he thinks he can say that to you! Did you tell him how rude and inappropriate he is?" Eyes rolling, "Mom, chill...guys always talk like that." Not in my day, I respond. "Yeah, well...it's different now." And so it is.

Why not? Everything in the teen boy's visual world says it's perfectly natural to treat girls as things, to gaze and respond, to feel they are allowed to use and consume. And they get away with it because girls live in the same visual world and are learning the same lessons. Frustrated by my daughter's lack of agency, I said, "Next time someone does that tell them to fuck off..." Mouth open in disgust, she replied, "Right... then they'll say I'm a bitch." I refrained from telling her that bitch is preferable to slut, at least in the pecking order of things girls are often labeled. I started emptying the dishwasher, clanging as I forcefully, angrily, removed the dishes. While I am pretty sure boys did masturbate to girls pictures in my high school, maybe even mine, they wouldn't brag about it in the hallway, loudly, between classes. I tried to stand in as the other, grudgingly admitting that I have seen Facebook photos posted by my daughter's peers that do indeed invite the gaze, images posted to attract, display sexual aspects, and incite commentary. I closed the dishwasher and pushed my daughter's backpack under the island and out of the way. I would hate to be in high school now.

November 25, 2008

Amazon delivered a box of Lolita related goodies, including Gigi Durham's *The Lolita Effect* (2008). A professor at Iowa, Durham has written the kind of book I would like to have written. In other words, she beat me to it. Still, I have some important ideas to discuss and propose. I am going to delve into the precedents of the Lolita phenomena, while Durham is starting from the position of "Lolita is"- now how do we deal with it? I, too, will consider the "how do we deal with it" aspect; however, I am also interested in art education being one of the places to work on dealing. One crucial point we absolutely agree on is this; write so that your message is clearly articulated to a broad audience.

Durham's book came to me days after my department Chair and I had our talk about my one-sided, heated take on my project. Her first sentence states, "*The Lolita Effect* begins with the premise that children are sexual beings" (p. 11), and I will need to take a similar stance on Dolores. Dolores was a sexual being. Dolores was developmentally beginning the process of puberty, expressing normal sexual aspects, exploring her own sexual agency. She may have engaged in sexual play, perhaps even intercourse with a boy her age at camp. Durham and I agree that nothing is wrong with Dolores or her healthy sexual development. Things shift, shatter, and inflict emotional, if not physical harm, when normal and healthy are upended. Dolores moves from the realm of normal and healthy when her 37-year-old stepfather begins to pursue her. Her normality vanishes as Humbert floats the supposition that Dolores is a demon child, abnormal in her nympholeptic ways. It is her sexuality that is evil, not his.

Durham argues there are five myths connected to *The Lolita Effect*, each working to perpetuate the girl as spectacle. She begins each chapter with a well-chosen quote from Nabokov's *Lolita*. She ends each chapter with discussion points on what we can do as parents, teachers, and concerned citizens, to foster conversation. Boys are often part of these discussion points, an area I need to address and acknowledge more than I have so far. Right now I'm making my way through myth one. Two other Amazon offerings

await; Kilbourne & Levin's (2008) *So Sexy So Soon*, and Lamb & Brown's (2006) *Packaging Girlhood*. Thanksgiving break reading material. Not exactly Danielle Steele.

I am also working through Clandinin's (2007) *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*—again. Taking notes, drawing out the places that most fit what I am trying to do or say. Because it seems incredibly open-ended, so difficult to map in any cartography I am familiar with, I keep trying to locate a position of absoluteness. Narrative inquiry is not about absolutes; it's the opposite. I want to be the pin stuck firmly in a spot. You are here. I need solid footing and a clearly defined path. I am unlikely to find either. I make more notes, setting out some semblance of where I can move freely, navigating what can only be my particular way of travel. The map from here to there is creased, wrinkled with possibilities, marked with past visits, and in desperate need of a clear legend to refer to if lost. Whether it is Dissertationland or Lolita-land, observation is my most finely tuned skill. Normally a shy, or reserved person, a descriptor many who know me would find incorrect, I grew up watching. I learn best by processing what is going on around me, paying attention to how other respond or react, and then making my own determination of what I should do (or not do). Maturity has taught me to become more outspoken, more social, and less shy. But before any of those traits come forward, I am watching.

December 1, 2008

Durham (2008) is not alone in arguing against sexualizing girls; Levin & Kilbourne also want to discuss the sexualization of childhood. In *So Sexy, So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (2008), the authors focus on the social and cultural contexts of highly adult sexual content bleeding down into younger and younger age-groups. Like Durham, they state up front that children are sexual beings and then let loose on the however's. I am beginning to see what it is I need to do. Ranting and raving is to be preceded by a disclaimer. I get that kids are sexual beings, but...

Levin & Kilbourne's book is less about Lolita and more about the present climate of growing up in an overtly sexualized American culture. Vickers (2008), however, is keenly focused on Lolita in his new book *Chasing Lolita*. He, like me, is interested in how she came to her present day undeserved reputation, and uses a historical, but not linear narrative to discuss his findings. *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters From Marketers' Schemes*, written by Lamb and Brown (2006), concerns how girls are targeted by advertisers who prepackage what it means to be a girl. Again, another theme I am looking at. Three of these four books begin by claiming the authors are not writing as academics, rather as women and mothers. What is troubling me at this time is that these four books are already doing much of what I have been doing all these months. They quote the same sources, argue many of my findings, and at times read as if they have stolen my previous scholarship. On the positive side, we are all working toward challenging and critiquing current sociocultural issues.



And, if only to make my dissertation worth continuing, I am planning to weave each thematic subject area into one interconnected and self-reflective treatise on Lolita, the girl, the myth, and the popular culture representation. I also take comfort in knowing that the major scholarship choices I found are considered important to these writers as well. I do have several articles I feel are critical to my study that these authors have not yet connected to. Beyond that I am buoyed by the fact that my topic is relevant, being talked about, and published. So, my contribution will likely be in connecting these themes, adding to the discussion, and creating spaces for art education and media literacy. I was on the right track all the while; however, so were at least four other writers.

December 3, 2008

A glitch. A time-sucking glitch. Dr. Barrett never received my first 76 pages via Fed Ex. I rushed to my local mail services office and walk in to find the owner holding my returned Fed Ex envelope. Another \$30-some bucks later it is on its way again, this time to the school offices at UNT. Fingers crossed, it will arrive today. While I wait for his go ahead, *yes, you are on the right track*, I busy myself with my students final papers. The quarter is over and I see a large amount of uninterrupted time ahead for dissertating. Well, except that it is the Holiday's and most—if not all, of this season is on me. I bought X-mas cards today, started gathering photos of the kids, seemingly always present, and yet never captured together in one photo. I guess I will resort to the collaged patchwork print I have been using the last few years, a format brazenly copied by multiple friends since I debuted it (I later abandon this collage format when I can't come up with enough photos).

I promised the family I would drag out some of the decorations later today. Christmas has never held the same magic since the kids hit middle school. Cash is King. A tree looks pretty sad when all that is under its branches are flat gift card boxes or envelopes. God forbid we actually purchase an item they have not seen or itemized in detail. And this year, with the depressed (and depressing) economy, we are preaching moderation, but not getting seriously heard. Despite the heavy burden of getting the Holiday's under wraps, I am looking forward to time at my computer. I am hopeful I will get to re-engage at page 76 and not start over, or do major shuffling or whatever other bad things could occur. The more days I sit idling, the more unsure I am about what I have written so far. The more I am idling, the more I start to re-hash, re-imagine, and reinvent ways of writing through my data. In this sense, time is both an enemy and a creative force. To stop my mind from unraveling my current writing path, I decide to bake. It needs to be done, so I might as well do it. Biscotti, my only claim to baking fame, are my traditional gift to faculty, close friends, and Tony, my mailman.

December 4, 2008

I attended a job talk today. One of my peers is traveling to Utah for her first ever on-campus job interview. Our Literacy Studies group listened to her presentation and offered helpful hints and posed questions she might have to answer. Kelly, a Composition and Rhetoric Ph.D. candidate, researches intellectualism versus anti-intellectualism and

literacy practices. Her socio-historical research challenges current understandings of lyceum and labor colleges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The way she organized her job talk presentation gave me several new ideas on how to approach the use and integration of all the new Lolita books recently published. I will need to compare and contrast their arguments, add my own ideologies, and synthesize our respective positions, as well as my particular location in the discussion. What am I bringing to the table? How is it different? Is it merely a new recipe or a whole new taste altogether? Food for thought. I also got word that Dr. Barrett has received my 76 pages. He is very busy and will read it when he can. I have been encouraged to write, not wait. I am too afraid to, however, as I am feeling more and more unsure about what I am doing.

December 5-8, 2008

I've spent several days working on my artifacts or art-based projects that will make up the visual components of my dissertation. By collaging together bits and pieces of Lolita-related texts, representations, and visual culture images, I am trying to bridge the pages (novel text) and Lolita-like visual referents. Fitting nicely into a 6 by 9 margin rectangle, I am beginning with photocopied pages from Nabokov's novel and allowing the text to serve as canvas. Layered, outlined text, cut outs, print ads, editorial and fashion images, and whatever else is squirreled away in my Lolita box, are fair game. In an effort to keep my creative collages from looking too crazy, too scattered or too much, I kept to a series type of installment. In doing so I am able to insert popular culture Lolita's into many of the collages. Words, however, remain the foundation to most, if not all, of my collages. Lolita begins as words, text, and only then becomes fashioned into a knowing of imagined scenes. Nabokov's words are beautifully rendered, lovingly chosen, and undeniably potent. Inspiration, as needed for my art-based collages, is easy. Capturing even a thread of his genius is not, but I am learning much about my interpretations of Lolita.

After revisiting my collages, or pastiches as I am now referring to them, I decide to get out my watercolors and play around with shading and defining areas. The application of water does two things; it ages the paper, or makes the pages look older, brittle, and it makes the paper pucker and curl. I like the first effect, but not the second. I decide to place a heavy book on top of the whole mess and hope things will dry flat. Still waiting for Dr. Barrett to report back, even though he told me to keep writing, I am mentally hung up on needing his approval.

December 14, 2008

Still waiting. Meanwhile I tore my office apart, emptying both stacked to the brim closets, ruthlessly editing my file cabinets (I hold on too long to most things), and packing away books not needed for my dissertation journey. I am the rare grad student who has never sold back a textbook. You never know when you might need to grab a quote or re-visit a passage. Like any proficient closet cleaner will tell you, if you have not used it (worn it) in over a year, toss, consign or donate. Using a similar process, I

proceeded to whittle down my book collection. I turned the small built-in desk between the two closets into my art-making area, moving and organizing all my creative supplies into the drawers. A basket of already finished *Lolita* artifacts sits atop the desk. I swept, Windexed and dusted. I spent an hour flipping through a thick stack of articles I'd neglected to re-file. Somewhere in the middle I found a file stuffed with all the articles from my experimental writing course. Scanning them quickly I realized I could or should have used more than a few for my candidacy exam. Two of them are on the list of things I should do further reading on, given to me after my candidacy exam by Dr. Stout. I place these on top of my dissertation basket, an open filing system for items needing attention now, as in where I am in my narrative as of today (as of today I am nowhere in my narrative...). My mind however is somewhere, specifically in the metanarrative phase. I've got a lot of ideas and thoughts circling, things I wish I was writing about. Before I write I need to spend time processing, connecting what I'm mulling over with how it might serve my research. I feel antsy when I can't get things down on paper (or word processed), worried that a really excellent thought will escape. I've taken to carrying a Moleskin notebook around, jotting down snatches of fleeting bits, a scholarly to do list of sorts. Maybe I should include a sampling in my dissertation.

December 16, 2008

I woke early this morning and found myself ruminating on *Lolita*. While in bed, drifting and rooting around for a comfortable spot, I began to construct my own *Lolita* synopsis. Additionally, other voices intruded, and I argued with them, countering. It's organic, and mildly ADD.

Dolores Haze's father died. So did her younger brother. Dolores, a reminder of both what has been taken and what remains, annoys and infuriates her mother with regularity. The widow Haze decides to take in a male boarder. Dolores, now 12, decorates her room with movie star photos and gossip magazines. If we are to believe Humbert, he is movie star good looking, possesses a flair for languages and speaks with a British accent. Mrs. Haze is instantly interested in him. He is instantly interested in Dolores, the single reason he agrees to rent a room. The two Haze's toy with poor Humbert; one overtly flirting, the younger one acting out to get attention. Summer camp fixes the daughter's interference. A love letter confession gives Humbert a choice, marry the widow, or leave at once. To leave means to lose access to Dolores. Humbert marries, drugs his amorous wife, and waits for camp to end. The widow discovers his journals, his secret craving for nymphets, his obsession with Dolores, and his disgust for her mother. In what can only be called the greatest coincidence ever, the widow, trying to mail letters that will expose Humbert, gets conveniently run over by a car and dies.

Humbert becomes a widow, stepfather and guardian in one very fulfilling moment of fate. His journal fantasies are within reach. He drives to camp intending to lie about Dolores's mother, explaining that she is ill and hospitalized. He plans to drug and rape his new stepdaughter at the Enchanted Hunter's hotel. The drugs fail to knock Dolores out. In the morning, Dolores finds Humbert sharing her bed. Humbert tells the reader that

Dolores seduces him and he isn't her first lover. Despite his assertion, Dolores claims he has "torn something" inside her and that what they did "three times vigorously" [Humbert's words] is rape and incest. He responds by buying her everything she wants. Later, when she demands to speak to her mother, he finally tells Dolores her mother is dead. This concludes part one.

Part two tells the rest of the story. They travel cross-country, staying at cheap tourist motels and seeing tourist trap destinations. Humbert secures her compliance with threats of jail, wayward girl's boarding schools, and homelessness. Dolores secures Humbert's compliance with sexual bribery, her only currency, and extorts candy, magazines, clothes and eventually money. Humbert fantasizes of replacing Dolores with his own daughter by Dolores, and later a granddaughter, keeping the incest train rolling. As Dolores becomes more reticent and disagreeable, Humbert becomes more controlling and paranoid. He begs her for sexual favors, strikes her in the face, physically restrains her, and forcibly rapes her. She resists his advances, pushes him away, hits him during sexual intercourse, and cries herself to sleep each night, every night [Humbert's one small acknowledgement]. Dolores meets someone who wants to help her. She hides her extorted payments and plans her escape with another man.

Unfortunately for Dolores, her savior is a well-known playwright and a not-so-well-known child pornographer. Quilty, Dolores's false hero, tries to get her to have sex on film with other children. She refuses and leaves. On her own now, she waitresses and eventually marries Richard Schiller at age seventeen. Humbert re-enters the picture when Dolores needs cash. Humbert, who has been floundering in bad relationships since Dolores's betrayal, rushes to see her. His nymphet is very pregnant, tired-looking and grown up. He begs her to run away with him. She refuses. Humbert asks her to reveal the man who stole her away. After arguing she finally tells him who it was. Humbert leaves to track down Quilty and kill him. Dolores dies while trying to give birth to a stillborn daughter.

Humbert's dream of creating his own personal family tree of nymphet's dies on arrival. Humbert dies too, while in custody for the murder of Quilty. The entire Haze family is gone. All that remain is the nymphet Lolita. Her mythic representation carries on.

December 17, 2008

I wake this morning knowing I need to do some more organizing. Not in any material or physical way, rather in preparation for laying out my narrative structure. I have a lot to say, and now realize while my proposal and candidacy exam followed highly structured formats, my dissertation is far more organic. Still, a blueprint is not a bad idea. I'm brainstorming now. So far I have the following:

Foreword  
Introduction  
Inspirational Accomplices

Dissertationland  
Who am I speaking to?  
Who is doing the speaking?  
How will I speak?  
How will I present my research?  
Narrative Champions  
What am I writing about?  
Why is this important to study?  
What am I asking?  
What am I not going to do?  
Novel Synopsis  
Lolita  
Dissertation, or Confession of a White Female Academic  
Reading Lolita in Columbus  
Lolita on a timeline  
Authorial and authoritative re-writings  
Authoritative conversions  
Intertextual authority  
Pinning down the unquieted  
Criticizing Lolita  
Lolita as mythmaker

And, interspersed throughout are journal entries, reflective commentaries, etc. That's a lot of chapters or sub-headings, or subject shifts. Going forward, what next? I return to my original proposal to see what it was I promised to do and in what order.

Technically I have attended to socio-cultural beginnings, and begun working through critical literary analyses. Popular visual culture should follow, then the eroticized child-body data analysis, visual culture education, and finally the summary and implications. Judging from the laundry list of sub-sets above, and my beginning 76 some pages, I have a rather large task ahead. Because I proposed my lit review would be embedded within the narrative and not a chapter unto its self, I would be better served by laying out when and where certain subjects need to jump in.

Perhaps explaining representation and discourse analysis should preface popular culture. I'll play with that on paper first.

December 21, 2008

So, I've been fairly delinquent at research writing. Christmas is upon us and I am fitfully unprepared. There are few things I hate more than last minute shoppers and crowds and yet I have spent the last two days crawling through overstuffed aisles and standing in ridiculously long lines. I did order and receive the book *The Lover* by M. Duras, recommended to me by Dr. Stout who thought the story line might offer some insights. I just started it and so far a 15-year-old girl is about to describe how she came to have an

affair with an older man. Two things are very interesting from the start. First, it is told in first person by the girl. Second, although it was first published as fiction, it has since been revealed that the author is the young girl in the story. Even in the early pages we learn she is damaged by what transpired in her past, although why and by who is still unknown. The writing style is different and takes some getting used to.

I have decided to give myself a break and enjoy the holidays. I'll not obsess over what I am not getting done on my dissertation. It looks as though I will not be teaching at this point and that will give me time to write like a full time writer, whatever that is. Days and days devoted to getting focused and productive. I look forward to it. I dread it. I am trying to slowly let my husband know all the dire stats on new hires at small liberal arts colleges during this economic crisis. Even Harvard, the most heavily endowed higher ed institution in the world, had suspended all faculty searches. On the bright side I managed to get a Master's and a Ph.D. for free (or nearly free) and made a small profit, too. I may have to settle for being the most highly educated salesclerk at Talbot's. "My visual culture training tells me that cobalt is the best shade for you, Madame."

December 29, 2008

I am back at it, this time for real. I truly did stay in Holiday mode for eight days. I feel guilty now, but can't exactly take it back. I did engage in two activities that might qualify for being in the process of dissertation mode. First, I decided to try for the Manuel Barkan Dissertation Award, given to a post-candidacy but not yet finished dissertating graduate student whose work is promising. A self-nomination letter, a timeline to defense, and the first three chapters of my dissertation are due by January 31<sup>st</sup>. I wrote the letter and will be working toward getting something like 3 chapters done. The timeline, however, was the real eye opener. Yikes. Seeing it laid out, row after row of dates, deadlines, and application forms, was scary in every way possible. My goal, a June graduation, became undeniably real. Real, yes, but doable? My candidacy exam pressure returns. Eighteen entries precede the June 14th graduation date. Only five are checked off as completed.

I am a wiggler. I fidget, move my legs with nervous energy. Other grad students who fidget know to sit next to me, those who are distracted by a shaky table, sit away from us. Luckily for them I am no longer a student and my rapidly moving leg is mine alone to endure. Right now I am fidgeting near record pace. That dissertation timeline is posted near my desk, heavily weighing on my mind but unable to press my legs into compliance.

The second activity was the building of an online blog for my dissertation journal. This is important to me because I resist impersonal communication. I'm not a fan of e-mail correspondence. I think Facebooking, Twittering and texting are sad replacements for real human interaction. I prefer voice, expression, and the ability to discern mood and acceptance through visual interaction. Journaling is one sided, but at least if I put it out there others can read and post responses. Engaging in tech interaction pushes me out of my paradigms. It makes me think about opening my solitary process to a larger view and

what that will feel like. It makes me consider what is private, or needs to remain sheltered. It requires me to acknowledge collaborative actions that might be critical to my thoughts and writings. It also helps me grow in my understanding of why people blog. While it seems brave to publish to the world, it also seems safe. Honesty at a distance. Hit delete and someone's critical or questioning response to your posting is gone. Most important, however, is my learning to build and create, while navigating the software available to set up my blog space. I even figured out how to insert my artifacts and the reproduction quality is surprisingly good.

January 2, 2009

My advisor is finally back from Texas. We just met at his office to go over my first chunk of pages. On a scale of one to ten, ten being good, I think the meeting was a seven. After some gentle sparring over what I am attempting to do and what I am actually doing (confusing him), we agreed to a new simplified format. I promised to have a sample Chapter with all my formatting present and rationalized. I need to include a blueprint of sorts, to clue in the reader as to my how to read this document. On this bright side he identified an area that he thinks could be a good article. And when I have, oh, I don't know, free time...I'll consider that. Right now I have some serious brainstorming to simplify my over taxing word fest I call a dissertation.

January 6, 2009:

I've been working from right after I got home from my meeting with Dr. B. I worked all day Saturday, took Sunday to re-group (laundry, grocery shopping, errands, etc), and was back at it on Monday morning. Unfortunately, I spent a good deal of the day trying to undo a formatting mistake that I could not understand how I managed to do in the first place. So, I Googled it—*First line of each page automatically has a slight indent*—and read through forty odd hits, geek blogs, including one guy who asked the exact same question, and was told by two different gurus that he could not have done what he had done without knowing code. He fired back that he didn't know code or how to write code and the fact remained the first line of every new page was indenting slightly and could they suggest how to fix it. Several angry post and reply entries later, the boss of the tech crew answering the questions posted his own nasty reply, also claiming he could not be having the issue he was having. Like the guy is making up questions about a problem that doesn't exist! So far three hours have been frustratingly wasted. I stopped, made a microwave hot dog, and spent the afternoon creating two more artifacts to get re-centered. Just after dinner, I stumbled across a fix, fixed it, and moved on at last. Now I wish I could find the blog postings to tell the poor guy with the same first line issue that he's not crazy and to re-visit his headers and footers. Despite feeling really good about solving my hiccup, I spent most of the night not sleeping, in an upright position due to intense heartburn. I am exhausted, but on a deadline. I will keep slicing and dicing my document today, and never, ever go near those headers again.

January 12, 2009

My newly formatted doc with illustrations and nifty drop cap beginnings to each major section got the green light, for now. I am, again, encouraged to “keep writing” by my advisor. So I did. Literally, writing from nine to five or six pm each day, yes, even the weekends. My husband darkened my office doorway several times—suggesting (asking, sometimes telling) that I wrap it up. We will do this dance, I imagine, many times over during the course of this process. Despite the long hours at my desk, I am enjoying the drill. I am learning much more each time I re-engage with articles I have read many times previously. I find something new, another layer or thread that connects back to something else, processing info as go. I started a “post it note” board with ideas or “looking toward the future” intertextual places I know are coming later, and will undoubtedly forget by then if I don’t remind myself. The board makes me look like a magazine editor planning out an issue page by page (or at least what I think—according to TV—a magazine editor would do).

Time planning wise, I am through one whole 3-inch binder of data. Three more to go. Yeah! As an act of celebration I spent Saturday night creating two more Lolita-inspired artifacts and posted them on my blog space, a creative respite before I get back to the writing and ruminating phase. These are the only two artifacts that are also wine assisted. Dissertating while under the influence. Perhaps I should make this a Saturday night ritual. Pinot Noir and an Exacto knife, a semi-dangerous combo to be sure, but who knows...some good stuff could come from this idea. See that rust colored spot on the left border? I bleed for my art. Or maybe I splashed some Castle Rock. Whoops.

January 15, 2009

Writing, an activity that seems effortless when going well is equally daunting when nothing is working. My days are chopped up by good writing days and fruitless writing days. Monday good, Tuesday bad, Wednesday very good, and today is undecided. My mood at the end of the day is dependant on how my writing went. I finish up a good, productive day on a high. I mope; wander back to my desk, re-read, and sigh a lot, when a day has been difficult. I have over 140 pages now, and at least eight artifacts are scattered throughout, and now I have a rough guestimate for how many more pages I need (want has been abandoned, in order to graduate on time I am sticking to need, what do I really need to say). An internal deadline, the Barkan submission, is 15 days away. I will try, I will try, I will try. That’s about all I can do right now, try. Meanwhile, I ignore e-mail’s I know will just add to delays, and pray for a stretch of good writing days.

I feel fairly isolated from school. While I am grateful to have a large expanse of writing time, I also miss teaching. I miss my peer’s, my professor’s, the office staff. I miss the energy of the college atmosphere. What I don’t miss is parking lots so far from campus I have to ride the campus bus, or the fact that it is 9 degrees outside. Slush crusted boots, slippery cobbled brick sidewalks, and bone-chilling or rainforest-like classrooms are not missed either. For sanity, I do have a coffee date planned on MLK day with my dear



friend and colleague Laura, for a well-needed bitch session. We are elegant grippers, quick-witted sarcasm dripping sword-wielding bitches. It feels good to vent, and it is most critical in letting go of stuff not worth holding onto (vendettas, anger, indignation). Okay, enough stalling, back to the dissertation rock pile.

January 20, 2009

I'm up to 184 pages, so another 44 generated since my last entry. With no frame of reference I have no clue if this is on pace, too quick, or normal considering my pulled in all directions life. Those 44 pages come from adding new stuff, not rearranged or extrapolated text from my exam, proposal, or any other writing I've done on Lolita. New stuff, but stuff whose genesis is born out of discovering connections not seen before. It's sort of like a giant ball of yarn I am unraveling, undoing tiny knots when I find them, and then trying valiantly to knit something wearable. This metaphor is for Molly, our resident grad school knitter, and I hope I have done her justice because I have no experience with knitting whatsoever, except that I occasionally wear clothes that may have been knit (probably by a machine, however). I avoided writing for a good deal of yesterday as my coffee date turned into lunch, an expansion I do not regret. Oh, how wonderful it is to sit with an intelligent, soulful, supportive friend and linger on the minutiae of life (that I actually spelled minutiae first try is wonderful, too). We worried out loud about why academia—should we be bailing out before it is too late? Considering I'm dissertating, it is too late for me, but she has options. This is a lot of crap to make it through only to end up adjuncting at three different schools for roughly the same pay as GTA's make per course. As a devotee of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and its many forums and blogs, I see we are entering a dire historical juncture for academe. What was once a call for new profs, and hurry please the boomers are all retiring, we find ourselves waiting, noses pressed to the fogged glass of college teaching. Hey, it's cold out here, don't you want to retire and go south? But since our University building has thermostats set by Lucifer most of our professors are fanning themselves and cracking the windows.

Nevertheless, dissertate I must. I must. Repeat until you start writing. Oh...one more thing. My dog peed on a stack of papers next to my desk. She's either mad at me (doggy passive aggressiveness) or she really hates feminist media studies. Probably both.

January 22, 2009

I attended one of my Preparing Future Faculty meetings today. PFF is a yearlong program for PhD's that think they want to work at a small liberal arts school instead of a gigantic research one institution. We get paired with a faculty mentor at a local SLA school to learn the ropes and get advice, etc. I am paired with the Chair of the English department at Ohio Wesleyan. She's fabulous, and has allowed me to do some very cool things, such as attend a faculty meeting and sit down with a new hire to find out about what it's like to go through the search process. Today was a brown bag lunch roundtable for us "on the market" or "soon to be on the job market" Ph.D.'s at OSU. I kinda wish I had missed it.

Horror stories poured out. No callbacks. Or called back by some never before heard of school in the backwoods of, well, never mind, I could end up there. Several people said jobs they applied for are now sending letters explaining that the job search has been suspended due to the economic crisis. I remained fairly quiet. First, I've only applied to one school so far. A dream type job...one I could not ignore until I was done, and knew I would regret not at least trying for. Nothing from them yet. Anyway I drove home in a funk.

January 23, 2009

Intentions to continue writing this week took another small detour, a good one, but I am backed up by several days. My dissertation advisor called and suggested we meet for lunch and talk about my completed work. We had a nice visit, catching up on his travels (Holland) and my office travels (by roller chair, from computer to file cabinets to bookshelves and back). In all the years I have been working with him we have never grabbed lunch before. He'd brought my edited pages and we went over them. The usual stuff, overzealous semi-colon use, passive voice, some formatting glitches, but overall he was pleased.

I recently worked on a mentoring article with him, and a few other Ph.D. students, too. I wrote about how we negotiate through my writing issues, my truly sad inability to trust my own voice, and how I need more feedback than he normally gives. Usually, after penciling my margins, circling punctuation, and question marks...he closes with a simple directive—"This is good-keep writing." Because of my statements in the article, or in spite of them, my dissertation pages ended with EXCELLENT! That's right, in bold, with exclamation point. I beamed all the way home. And immediately started fixing whatever he found, followed by re-formatting, and re-arranging headings. My husband was out of town so I had the luxury of writing without stopping. Luxury is not a word that always applies to my writing days, but this day it did. It's a good thing too because the next two days got chopped up into manic bits of unproductive work. It suddenly dawned on me that the Barkan Award deadline is fast approaching, and if I wanted to get my pages edited and proofed, I had mega chair sitting ahead. Today was the mega chair day. It sucked. I wrestled with a massive sinus headache that multiple doses of Advil and sinus medication could not vanquish. It is fortunate that I was not engaged in writing or God knows what kind of venomous bias could have seeped through.

Today involved the detailed, frustrating work of making sure everything lined up, was paginated properly, formatted correctly, etc...so that I could flesh out the table of contents (A TOC that will no doubt change weekly), format a list of illustrations, or artifacts as I call them, and prepare my document for printing. This took roughly seven hours. Seven hours that felt like four days thanks to my headache. A trip to Staples for the printing of two copies (one for me, one for my proofreader) and \$36 bucks later I had what I needed. My document, only 180 odd pages, sat on the counter looking very much

like a mid-sized city phone book. I feel bad for the dissertation awards committee. Really bad. My dissertation does not look that big on my computer. It looks rather unwieldy as a hard copy. A tome. An epic tome.

Our Graduate secretary agreed to proof it for me. I asked if I could hire her because I only recently learned she had an M.A. in English. Once this gets around the department she will make a nice chunk of change on the side. (Just to be sure, we cleared this transaction with the hirer ups). It is in her capable hands now. My headache miraculously disappeared. I went home and attacked my office, feverishly cleaning and purging, all to prepare for next week. Once I get back her proofed copy I will have more mega chair days ahead. Another visit to Staples. And finally, the deadline for the Barkan Award will be met.

January 30, 2009

A lot of time has passed since my last entry. I think I have logged more hours dissertating this week than any other so far. At least two nights I worked until 10 p.m., and may have tried to on one other night, but got hauled out of the bat cave by false promises that The Office was not a rerun. I needed the laughs. My shoulders have been in tight knots for several days and the fleshy base of my right thumb hurts when touched. Carpel tunnel?

I am about fifty percent through binder two and about to dig into the really meaty stuff, Lolita porn, the APA report on the sexualization of girls, and some truly scary studies on the shift in female attractiveness waist to hip ratio data. It seems prepubescent body types are the new norm, which when connected to the new “hairless” norm in female grooming practices, means Lolita is where it’s at. I might not ever have run across these studies if it were not for a professor in another department who knew of my topic and printed off copies for my research. Thanks Dr. Gray, for this and for the field trip to the zoo to see Bonobo monkeys get busy.

Anyway, my point is collaborative acts have threaded through my research journey from my first announcing my topic area, until now. Through scholars, new and established (a nicer word for old), I have been the recipient of countless bits of information, passed along data, and literary suggestions, all serving to underpin my project. By branching out, in this case joining an interdisciplinary studies group, I have been able to share my research, gain feedback, ponder critical questions, and spread my mission. Lolita is not who you think she is! And by presenting my research, I have been discovered by other disciplines, and been invited to address an even broader group of scholars in training (Grads). Each time I present, I leave with new ideas, new information, and in many cases, new scholarly accomplices, the kind who e-mail attachments, wonderful attachments that fuel my project. I wonder if it is this friendly in the real world of academe...when what you know is suddenly a territory you need to keep fenced. What happens when you are stepping on someone else’s research toes? Well, I guess I’ll never know until I dissertate and graduate, so back to the dangers of Lolita porn. Oh, and if Lolita porn is part of your study...back off, I saw her first.

February 2, 2009

After a long weekend of serious butt-numbing editing and re-formatting, I am finally done with the Barkan submission. To make my rather daunting pile of pages more intriguing, I placed them in a one and half-inch binder with a full color artifact adorning the cover. I used the same artwork that serves as the banner for my blog. A fav of sorts. I also woke up with a need to rename my dissertation, so now I have to remember all the places I have put the old name, and edit accordingly. I imagine several other names will appear after this one, but until then this will have to be the placeholder-- *LOLITA* MYTHS AND THE ACCULTURATION OF EROTICIZED GIRLS IN POPULAR VISUAL CULTURE: THE OBJECT AND RESEARCHER TALK BACK. Yup...it's a mouthful.

After delivering my epic chunk of pages, I went home to do yet another purging and organizing session in my office. After all, with almost 200 pages completed, edited and formatted (for now), I feel a bit of prep work is called for before I re-engage. My handy corkboard, where I pin anything I need to recall for later use, is brimming with various data. It's a hodgepodge of bizarre items; for example, if you were to stumble upon it you might ask, "Why is a Facebook picture of Miley Cyrus exposing her bra, a Lewis Carroll quote, a *Glamour* magazine article entitled 'Eight is too young for a bikini wax!' and an article from *The Chronicle of Higher Ed*, all battling for space with Post-it notes, and citation lists?" Why? Because that's just how rhizomatic my topic is.

Being on campus, in our building, makes me nostalgic. Yeah, I know I'm done being a student, I get that, but I also miss taking classes, chatting, brainstorming, and trading ideas with faculty. Scholarly engagement is what I've been doing for a lot of years now. It's hard to go cold turkey. Yes, I know writing a dissertation is still scholarly engagement, but it just feels more one-sided. Now it's just me, and a bunch of data playing house all week. Which kind of sucks because data, in case you were not aware, doesn't do anything unless you make it do something. Lazy piles of paper.

Tomorrow I will be back in the chair, thinking and theorizing about *Lolita*; writing, thinking some more, and then re-writing. A vicious circle called revision.

February 5, 2009

I did not get back to writing. Instead, I decided to update all my job application documents. I created a new CV, revised yet again my teaching statement and research statement. I gathered the latest student evaluations and computer-generated scores in order to convert everything to PDF files. Once I was satisfied with my documents, I applied for a job, one of those on-line applications "attach files" kind of sites, and then hand-hovering over the button, I hit submit. I received a five-digit code to commemorate my submission. So very personal. Thinking about getting interviewed and hired serves to remind me that I've got to finish my dissertation. After all, I very boldly claim I am graduating in June on my CV, so...back to work young lady.

But first, artifact creating was calling me. I haven't gotten the chance to get my hands dirty, or in this case, sticky, for a while. I get so immersed in each little piece, time evaporates and then suddenly it's 7:45 with no dinner plans in sight. Normally, I'm Miss neat and tidy; however, when making my artifacts I tend to look like Julia Childs preparing dinner in a hot kitchen—every action devoted to the recipe, and the collateral damage is left for the prep crew to clean up. Minus the grease splattered apron, and actual food (Remember, dinner is not in sight), I create my masterpiece with tissue paper glued to my shirt, paper scraps littering the floor, while ink pens and Exacto knives roll around the table (dangerously under the papers I am rifling through). Something about the mess making seems to mesh well with my creative focus, in other words, the less focused the better. Things just happen, end up where I need them to be—that wonderful negotiation between intent and providence. I wish writing could be like that. Maybe it is for some people, but for me the ability to erase (backspace) over the most recent charcoal mark (text) makes it near impossible to commit. Instead, I work that canvas (document) until all the penciled outlines are covered over with slowly drying paint. Providence may influence the original thought, but convention (literary and grammatical) always manages to elbow their way in. In a sense, my artifact creations allow for the pencil marks—those originating “thought sketches,” to remain visible. The intangible stuff, the shadowy ghosts that flit through my mind as I dip my paintbrush into color, the subtle shift of the hand as it moves toward the surface—those insignificant actions that rarely leave an imprint, but impacts meaning just the same. Maybe writing is like that after all.

February 10, 2009

I think I am beginning to see how dissertations drag on. If only one could sit, hours on end, thinking, typing, and revising, without interruption. If only. Even when this is my supposed full-time job for now, so many things distract me outside my office door. First, a lost weekend of angst filled drama as my daughter and her long-term (2 years—a record for high school kids) boyfriend broke up. Nothing cuts deeper than seeing your child's heart in pieces and there's not a damn thing you could do about it. We feel as if there has been a death in the family because after two years this boy was like family. We adored him. He adored her. Now she's a moping, teary-eyed mess. In this electronically connected world of teendom, news travels fast. By Monday morning her friends were looking at her with pained expressions, but afraid to ask, while boys circled her like sharks in chum-filled waters.

We had spent the weekend de-picturing her room, boxing up t-shirts, dried flowers, and anything else connected to him, but we could not help her in the halls of her high school. At least outside of high school you can, most of the time, successfully avoid crossing paths. But there he was, bent over at the drinking fountain, popping up just in time to say Hi and touch her arm. She told me it felt like utter despair mixed with a razor sharp scalpel slicing across her heart. By the end of the day she was proud of how she made it through the day, slightly buoyed by the sudden attention from interested and willing replacement boys, and grateful she had managed to see him without tearing up. It will get better, I keep telling her. Two years from now you will barely recall what you two talked

about, why you thought he was everything good in your life, and quite possibly, your thoughts will be keenly focused on someone or something else. Still, seeing her go through this brings back similar memories. Young love is among the purest of emotions, un-jaded by life, unfettered by past betrayals, so hopeful and sweet. It is, sadly, a lesson we all seem to experience at one time in our lives. In these cloud-laden gray days of winter, the first blush of spring is far too distant. Brighter days are ahead.

So...that is my excuse for not working. I simply am not in the mood, or even remotely interested. When I am, I'll re-engage. For now I'll mirror her sadness, nod my head in concern, and keep my arms ready for hugs. "Mom" is too short a word to represent the breadth of the job.

February 19, 2009

Writing is sporadic right now, for many reasons, but most important is because of my two new jobs. Not the "go on an interview on a campus" type (sadly) but the internal kind. Within my department—the head of the Undergraduate program needs an assistant for two days a week. I am doing many functions I've not dealt with before, like Excel spreadsheets, accessing student information, organizing and filing other peoples stuff, setting up interviews, advising students, helping to plan committee reviews, and attending faculty-type meetings for various department committees. I haven't done all of these yet, but I will as the year unfolds. Then, yesterday while working at my new desk area, our department Chair appeared and asked if I could step in for a professor who needed to go on emergency leave. I've done this before, just not half way through a quarter. I start Monday, and have yet to get a copy of the syllabus to even know what they are doing so far. Oh, well—I suppose a warm body will do for now until I get settled. Now I have two jobs and an unfinished dissertation. To which my husband said, "Are you sure you want to do all of this right now?" He's right, as he irritatingly often is; however, I am a people pleaser, despite my own attempts to cure myself of this trait. In this tough job market, I like to present myself as someone who is willing to jump in, help out, and make things a little easier for those around me. In the world of academic karma (I'm hoping such a thing exists), being the one person who willingly says yes at the drop of a hat, not even bothering to ask how much or how long, will cosmically pay back. Picture my husband; leaning back on the kitchen island, arms crossed, sardonic smile and all, "What are they paying you for this new assignment?" Me, hemming, "Umm...well, I not sure...but it's not about the money, I'll learn so much, it's all stuff that I can add to my skill sets." He wisely chooses to leave it at that.

February 27, 2009

I didn't have to apply for the Barkan Dissertation Award, and I almost didn't, but now, having just found out I won it, I'm glad I did. In the middle of dissertating it seems counterintuitive to stop, pull my project together in a fully edited, ready to present format, but that is what the application called for. So I did, and it was very stressful and time consuming. Since the deadline for submission, I've spent time doing the internal

dialogue thing... “Well, I probably won’t win, other peers have really good research projects going too...Some of them could use the award money more than I could...” stuff like that. But I won. I am thrilled and so honored, not only for the award itself, but because scholars, who’ve previously won the Barkan, are people I admire greatly. After dancing ecstatically around the kitchen, I called my husband (who came home later with an armload of flowers), and my parents. My mom is currently trying to figure out how she can work my accomplishment into conversation with her friends, the same friends who are sick of hearing about each other’s grandkids. I told her it isn’t likely she will be able to work it to most conversations. Casual talk involving dissertation writing is rare outside of academia. I advised her to just go for it. Later, alone with my thoughts, I went down the insecurity path...did anyone else even submit? I am bothered by my ability to take a wonderful moment and turn it into uncertainty. Winning the Barkan is only one part of the story, though.

In addition to a commemorative plaque, a check for five grand, and a luncheon in my honor, I have to give a presentation about my research. Scary stuff. Scary enough to keep me up last night imagining how it will, or should go. How will I talk about sexualizing girls, Lolita porn, and other disturbing subjects, as my colleagues and peers chew on chicken breasts covered in something white? I have a few ideas in mind; the very thoughts that kept me up most of the night, and will begin plotting out what and how soon. Meanwhile, I have a dissertation to complete, an award-winning dissertation—yes, but it still needs to get finished. I can proudly say that I am well into the last section, the Author’s notes, and I can actually see the finish line. One thing sticks in my mind, something my husband mentioned yesterday after I told him my news, “I guess this takes the pressure off...I mean it’s not like they are going to fail you in your defense if they have already decided it deserved a major award...” True. But, then I see the insecurity path reappear; its brambly edges a razor sharp reminder of my self-doubt. Maybe I’ll be the first ever to win the Barkan Dissertation Award for promising research, and not fulfill the promise. Insecurity, for all its negative energy, is what drives me to always be prepared. Over prepared if possible.

March 8, 2009

Not much dissertating going right now. Between my two new assignments (jobs), the continuing saga of young love gone horribly wrong, and a nasty upper respiratory infection, I’ve been remiss. My administrative position is consuming me. I spend hours re-formatting charts and documents, using frameworks I’ve never used before (Excel), and creating new charts from scratch. Cutting and pasting has become the main function of my days in front of the computer. I need to stop, refocus, and get back to the real job at hand, my Ph.D. While I admit to learning boatloads of stuff, I am also learning why it is I would rather teach and write. Despite my keen need to organize and streamline, I do not find these activities at all compelling when dealing with administrative functions.

Now I find myself an insider in committee meetings, a non-voting, voiceless member, but present regardless. Academe doesn’t look as pretty from here, but I sort of knew that

already. Service is surely a thankless job, but a necessity for the tenure process. Despite the tenured faculty in the room, everyone seems to take this work very seriously. And, I was heartened to see the young ones (newbies) eager to participate and speak their minds. All was dealt with respectfully, and fairly, which is comforting to see. Beyond that, it did occur to me that many voices lead to many continued items to be revisited at an upcoming meeting. Service, however one defines that, is part of the tri-valve of the professorial life. I wonder if it is as true at small liberal arts colleges. Maybe I'll broach that subject with my Preparing Future Faculty mentor. She's always been delightfully candid about the in's and out's of departmental duties.

Meanwhile, central Ohio is enjoying a brief respite from winter, a stretch of seventy-degree days that I don't want to stop stretching. To stand outside and close ones eyes and feel the warm breeze is nothing but a tease because once you open your eyes reality slams back. It is gray, dead, and worn out looking. A tired landscape in need of a kick in the pants. Spring is close, and yet little evidence exists to confirm that. Except that last night we "sprung forward" into daylight savings time so the lingering light this evening will bring a small bit of hope.

March 11, 2009

Dr. Stuhr stopped me in the hall today. She had been meaning to e-mail me to suggest I read Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, a book she felt could help me with morality issues. I explained that many people have asked if I had read this book, while many other people told me not to bother because it had little to add to the specific intent of my topic, and actually only briefly talks about *Lolita*. She nodded her agreement that it is less about *Lolita*, but added that it still offers critical insights into how morality shifts over time, cultures, and contexts. I own the book, in fact it sits right along side all my other *Lolita* books, I just haven't read it yet. I promised I would.

Later, I e-mailed Dr. Barrett, telling him my recent promise of a nearly complete draft would not be forthcoming due to my new reading assignment. He wrote back, I love that book, why didn't I tell you to read it? Let's talk when you are done. So I am reading it. We'll talk when he gets back. I am worried that I missed the point Dr. Stuhr is hoping I'll connect with.

March 12, 2009

I attended the Marantz awards today, an annual award given by the graduate students to deserving alum. This year's selection is very deserving, a copious writer on art education curriculum, and a name recognized throughout our discipline, Dr. Marilyn Stewart. In the hallway of the Faculty club, I bumped into Dr. Stuhr again and told her I'd made progress with the book. She asked if I saw the morality piece she had been referring to. I briefly toyed with yes, but offered the truth instead. No, so far all I am getting is that innocence and virginity are more desirable there than in our own culture (for massively different reasons), so desirable in fact, men will kill for it, over it, or have permission to kill



women and girls who do not possess purity, or are rumored to be impure. A glimpse of hair, ankle or neck is enough to get a girl imprisoned or killed. Or at least during that period in Iran. What is most intriguing is the idea that it wasn't like that before the fundamentalist Islamic movement came into power. To go from relative freedom, to complete powerlessness is unconceivable. Just now, as I wrote that sentence I thought of Dolores, but I still don't think that's what Dr. Stuhr is getting at.

Anyway, Dr, Stuhr gracefully changed the subject to the way in which the author wrote the book, a structure we both agreed is really fascinating, especially the use of literature that serves as a thread of connective humanity running throughout the novel. I told her I'd keep at it, hoping the light bulb will come on.

March 13, 2009

I finished the book today while waiting for my daughter's appointment to end. I'd squirreled it away in my purse for just this purpose, resisting the brand new *People* magazine mocking me on the side table. I found a few great passages in the last chapter that I marked, but they fit my needs, not Dr. Stuhr's hopes. I've decided to ruminate on the book for a while. One thing is maddeningly clear, however—that every reader brings something unique to the reading. Just as Professor Nafisi's girls discussed in their furtive book club meetings, just as Dr. Stuhr describes her understandings, and just as Dr. Barrett says he thinks the book is about freedom. Morality, a fluctuating barometer in Iranian history, was certainly a repressive function in the day-to-day lives of Iranian women. Literature served as the escape, the passport-free border crossing to other ways of being in the world. I need to keep writing about the book until I see the flash of recognition I am looking for.

March 16, 2009

I am turning in my final draft for Dr. Barrett to read. I will have about a month to fix whatever he finds wrong or suggests I work into, disregard, or any other manner of possible outcomes. I hope he reads it quickly, but thoroughly. I am done teaching, done writing for now, and bound to be antsy until I hear back from him. I really don't know what I will do with myself until then. I guess I could catch up on all the books my book club has read that I failed to read. I go for the wine and girl talk, which is fortunately most of what we do after making a pass at discussing the book. Two summers ago I made the group read *Lolita*, and when we discussed the book it was fascinating to hear how many members had forgotten what the real story line was. Many had remembered it as being closer to tacit understandings. I mentioned how Nabokov's structure may have had something to do with how they read it the first time, or perhaps time and sociocultural contexts could diffuse memories. One woman admitted she thought she had already read it, maybe in college, but now realizes she hadn't. Like me, she was having a difficult time shaking its hangover effect.

Now that I am officially done with the writing portion of my research, perhaps I should read *Lolita* again just for the experience, not for supportive evidence. I wonder, will I be a proper reader? A good reader?

March 28, 2009

My dissertation, still in the capable editing hands of my advisor, is off limits for now. Soon after I dropped it off, I got word that an article I am a co-author on has been accepted. This is good, really good; however, along with that smile-inducing bit of news, my advisor passed along that he had been through ten pages of my work and it took him one day. He estimates 30 days of full time work, which—of course—he does not have. So, naturally this is the info I dwelled on instead of doing a jig for getting published. For now I am stuck. I decide, along with the rest of my family, to take off on a last minute spring break trip to sunny Florida. And by last minute I mean as of Saturday March 21<sup>st</sup> at 8:00 a.m. we were not going anywhere. By 9:45 we were paying online for a house rental and packing suitcases. We took the dog, whatever we thought was Florida beach worthy, and got the house shut down.

Thinking back, I cannot believe we managed to pull this off. I got the mail stopped; the paper stopped, put three lights on timers, and emptied the fridge of food that would not make it the week...all by 11:00. We were on the road to Birmingham, Alabama by 11:30. Of course, I could write an equally lengthy paragraph containing all the things we did forget, like paying the bills (on the counter, stamped), books to read, beach towels, beach chairs, and toothpaste. At least we remembered the dog.

We drove south watching spring slowly wake from her downy bed. By the time we reached Birmingham she was wide awake, dressed in floral splendor, all Azalea, Wisteria, and Redbud trees set against spring-green grass. Oh, and it was 74 degrees at 7:50 at night. Nice. And it only got better from there. We all felt we needed this treat, a mental health necessity of sorts, and now, back home in Ohio, I am so happy we made such a rash decision to get out of here. I am looking forward to watching Ohio wake from its downy bed, don its multi-colored gown, and reach 74 degrees all on its own.

March 30, 2009

I have agreed to pick up a section of *Criticizing Television*, very last minute. Now my tuition is paid for again, and a nice unexpected stipend, in addition to my part-time work for Dr. Tavin. Add to that the Barkan award money and this is shaping up to be a profitable last quarter of my years at OSU. In addition, this Friday I will present my dissertation work to the Ohio Art Research symposium. While I am looking forward to this, I am also a tad worried about what I have piled onto my plate as I am attempting to edit, defend, and graduate. I am trying to think of this as a practice run at real academia...in testing my ability to balance teaching, presenting, publishing, service, and home life at the same time. Balance, which implies activities that are equally attended to,

might not be the right word, considering I am unlikely to do any of these with the same focused purpose. Just surviving the quarter will be proof of my battle preparedness.

April 5, 2009

I got back the first 80 pages of advisor-edited dissertation. So far so good. I worked through his very applicable suggestions, which took about a full day, and then started digging through the rest of my document to fix things he found lacking in the first set of pages. At the same time we are also, Dr. Barrett and I, revisiting our Visual Art Research article on mentoring, which was accepted for publication, but needs a few adjustments. Add to that the undergraduate art education core applications, and this all makes for a busy, busy girl. I am not making any friends at home right now. I did warn my family, and my new TV class, that this quarter is going to be a challenge. I apologized, in advance, for whatever thoughtless, forgetful, bitchy things that may occur over the next ten weeks. I think they think I am being overly dramatic. I am not kidding, however, it will get messy, of that I am sure.

I am, by nature, a pretty mellow gal. I tend to internalize, act as if everything is going well, that I am handling everything just fine...and then I reach the critical point, the pot lid clattering to the floor as the boiling water rolls over the edges. Usually, I am the only one who gets burned, but the sudden clank of metal hitting hardwood will spook those nearby.

April 7, 2009

In the midst of a time that will become known as “the final crunch” I took a tiny job starting next fall. A lecturer position, at OSU, but not on main campus. I had to Google the location, because I had no idea we had a satellite campus (mini-campus) just south of Delaware. It’s a course I have never taught before, but I am pretty sure I can handle it. I have all summer to prepare. In a naïve act of desperation I took the position without knowing how much I will be paid. Who would do that? Well, someone who is tired of having people ask, “Hey, did you get a job yet?” I just want to be able to say I am teaching, as a college professor, just as I had hoped to be doing all along until the economy made having a Ph.D. the equivalent of “a person who is over-educated and unemployed.” A lot of other newly minted Ph.D.’s could add “heavily in debt” to that list, so at least I am lucky in that regard. Whatever paltry money is coming my way will serve one helpful purpose...pay my son’s tuition for fall quarter. When I called my mom and told her about the small job I’d been hired for, she asked an interesting question— Does that make you a professor? What she’s really asking is if I’m not on a tenure-track will anyone hear me when I fall in the woods? It’s a fair question, and I’m afraid I don’t know what I am. A lecturer could be anything, anyone, I suppose. I know one thing I am...a teacher.

April, 8 2009

Still editing recently returned pages. Dr. Barrett told me this is the longest dissertation he's read. I scoffed. Surely not. I actually thought it was too short, considering. I wanted to say and do a lot more than I did. Time was not on my side, though, and an executive decision was made, several, as a matter of fact. I had to gloss over a few things, touch lightly on a couple of others, and daily I resist trying to go back in and add to my dissertation. For example, I started reading *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion. I know, like I have time for pleasure reading. But book club, a place I often make time to show up for to enjoy a glass of wine, seems better if you have actually read the book being discussed. So I am reading the assigned book of the month. Anyway, this book, which I am barely into, is written in such a wonderful, intuitive way...in ridiculously long sentences, sometimes a paragraph-sized chunk of text I could not read out loud without gasping for air. Still...I love it. Unfortunately, it's also one of those books that makes you feel like a run-of-the-mill writer, of the dreaded Christmas letter-type, the gloriously deluded writer who thinks anyone and everyone cares about your crappy life details. I am almost afraid to re-engage with my stuff.

What Didion does is quite remarkable. Her ramblings reveal the uniquely human ways we process our lives, so unlike anyone else, and yet highly relatable. Through her I am learning what it might be like when my husband dies, assuming he goes first, which I am pretty sure is how it will be or has to be because he could not survive without me. This sounds awful, I know, but I would lump my Dad right in there, too. If my mom dies first he will be lost. Now, these are both men who are wholly in control of their lives, careers, etc; however, mostly because a woman chose them for those very qualities. Yes, I married my dad. Clichéd...and worse yet, my daughter shows the same tendencies in her attractions to boys. I have hope for her though, in that she is also wholly in control of her life, obsessively dedicated to her grades and getting ahead in life. She has massively high standards for herself. I sometimes wonder how that happened. Has my quest for the highest academic degree sparked a fire in her journey of self? Then, I recall the time, not that long ago, when she was seven, maybe eight-years-old, and told my husband that she wanted to be just like mom when she grows up, "so I can watch TV and eat the left over chicken nuggets that my kids didn't eat..." I mull over this sentence for a time and then realize the same sentence could apply to me today. I watch TV, and I still eat what my kids leave on their plates. I guess a Ph.D. doesn't change you that much after all.

April 12, 2009

I am entering the "freak out" phase of dissertationland. I realized yesterday that I have exactly one month until I defend. I have edited 151 returned pages of my document. One hundred more to go. I am not counting the reference pages or the addendum, which contains my dissertation journal in full. That brings it to 300 some odd pages. The scary part, okay one of many scary parts to come in the next four weeks, is that whenever I get back edited pages I usually have to add more stuff to clarify, explain better, or further flesh out a point or passage. 300 creeps up to 325 and when will this end? It has to end.

Please make it end soon. And the forms! My God, the forms. Get this signed by this day and then track down everyone on your committee again for more signatures. Turn that in; don't forget to get a copy, and then print off the next form. It occurs to me now that this exercise in paperwork calisthenics is yet another preparatory exercise in getting the "soon-to-be professor" acclimated to academic bureaucracy.

April 15, 2009

I have been given the final edited pages. Dr. Barrett is pleased, so I am pleased. We worked out a few formatting details. As I took my final pages from him, I began to feel as if something sad was happening. A finality, an end to a lengthy gestation, my purpose and focus for so many months is over. It reminds me of how it felt after I gave birth to my son, my first baby. The nurse placed him on my chest, he felt heavy, solid, and squirmy—more real than my imaginings had ever conjured. My immediate thought was a panicky "now what?" That's what today felt like. Now what? Beyond the final edits, the printing, the defense...what will I do with myself? Academic life has been my world, at least my connection to the outside world, and it was mine, all mine. I decide to push those worries away for now, because I am still in the thick of the final push to graduate. With that in mind, I attended a seminar for Ph.D.'s who plan on graduating this spring. The graduation service coordinator, who was running the seminar, said something really awful—at least 100 of the Ph.D.'s who apply to graduate this quarter, will not. The reasons were varied, some mundane; some were horrible mistakes, some were defenses gone wrong. I wish I had never attended.

Today was chilly, misting and gray. It's also the day the Titanic went down. It's tax day. It's the day I found out I had cancer. It's the day my dissertation ended. I decide to reframe my outlook. Tomorrow it will be sunny, warmer. I'm not planning on going near any icebergs. We are getting a tax refund this year. I have been cancer-free for twelve years. And, my dissertation is not really done—It's just the beginning of a long relationship with my research.

## EPILOGUE

April 28, 2009

Editing and formatting are perhaps the worst part of finishing a dissertation, in that any spacing or shift changes can, and often do, change everything below it. I have been ready to print the final version for several days, but cannot seem to let go. I read and re-read, agonizing over every little detail, and am repeatedly frustrated by discovering misplaced punctuation, or other mistakes. I passed the draft review at the Grad school last week, but I have devoted almost six days to editing a document that has been edited numerous times, by numerous learned people. And yet...I still find small, overlooked details. I need to declare this document done. I need to allow my committee at least two weeks leeway to read this thing, so I am heading out to Staples to get five copies printed. I had not given much thought to the cost involved with printing 300 plus pages with 19 full-color plates, times five. Too late now. As difficult as it is to write this...I am done.

I am done...repeat until I believe it.

May 15, 2009

I am now *officially* done. After I successfully defended my dissertation I made some suggested changes to my document. Nothing major, or theoretically challenging, thankfully, but a few fine-tuning type changes for clarity. I was advised to strike out several places my sarcasm came through too strongly. I removed one artifact my committee found to be arguing against my argument (ironically...). Unlike my candidacy exam, I felt calm, knowledgeable, and I did a respectable job listening to their various suggestions. I agreed with most things my committee discussed. I respectfully stood my ground on one or two points. I felt very good about the scholarship I produced and that certainly helped my ability to remain relatively calm as I awaited the determination of my committee. When invited back into the conference room, a hearty round of “Congratulations, Dr. Savage” greeted me. Weirdly anti-climatic...I felt like there should be fireworks or at least I’d be introduced to the secret professorial handshake. None of it felt real. Just like that...I’m Dr. Savage. The next day, in the main hallway of our building, a faculty member, smiling, addressed me, “Good morning, Dr. Savage.” It is real after all.

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