

***Lolicon*: The Reality of ‘Virtual Child Pornography’ in Japan**

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Abstract: As its popular culture rapidly disseminates around the world, there is increasing pressure on Japan to meet global standards for regulating child pornography, and certain types of purely fictional images have been implicated. One of the keywords is *lolicon* (or *rorikon*), used to describe manga, anime and games that feature “underage” characters in sexual and sometimes violent situations. This paper examines the large and long-standing community of fans (among those referred to as *otaku*) in Japan who produce and consume *lolicon* works to question the assumptions of media effects. In recent debates in Japan, proponents of new legislation, which was eventually adopted, argued that sexual and violent representations in manga and anime should be specially regulated because such content is “the same for whoever reads or watches and there is only one way to understand it.” However, a review of *lolicon* culture suggests that messages and receptions are, and have always been, much more varied and complex. Even the relation between fiction and reality is not at all straightforward. Responding to the new legislation, Fujimoto Yukari comments that manga and anime are “not always about the representation of objects of desire that exist in reality, nor about compelling parties to realize their desires in reality.” From a legal standpoint, no identifiable minor is involved in the production of *lolicon* and no physical harm is done. There is no evidence to support the claim that the existence of *lolicon*, or engagement with such content, encourages “cognitive distortions” or criminal acts. As Mark McLelland argues, criminalizing such material represents a form of “thought censorship” and a trend towards the “juridification of imagination.” This potentially might shut down alternative spaces of imagination and communities negotiating or opposing dominant cultural meanings.

Keywords: child pornography / *rorikon* / *otaku* / *shōjo* /

Introduction

As its popular culture rapidly disseminates around the world, there is increasing pressure on Japan to meet global standards for regulating child pornography, and certain types of purely fictional images have been implicated.¹ One of the keywords is *lolicon* (or *rorikon*), used to

describe manga, anime and games that feature “underage”² characters in sexual and sometimes violent situations. This paper examines the large and long-standing community of fans (among those referred to as *otaku*) in Japan who produce and consume *lolicon* works to question the assumptions of media effects. In recent debates in Japan, proponents of new legislation, which was eventually adopted,³ argued that sexual and violent representations in manga and anime should be specially regulated because such content is “the same for whoever reads or watches and there is only one way to understand it.”⁴ However, a review of *lolicon* culture suggests that messages and receptions are, and have always been, much more varied and complex. Even the relation between fiction and reality is not at all straightforward. Responding to the new legislation, Fujimoto Yukari comments that manga and anime are “not always about the representation of objects of desire that exist in reality, nor about compelling parties to realize their desires in reality.”⁵ From a legal standpoint, no identifiable minor is involved in the production of *lolicon* and no physical harm is done. As Mark McLelland argues, criminalizing such material represents a form of “thought censorship” (McLelland 2005) and a trend towards the “juridification of imagination” (McLelland, forthcoming). This potentially might shut down alternative spaces of imagination and communities negotiating or opposing dominant cultural meanings.

The ‘Lolita effect’

Critics such as Naitō Chizuko have called Japan a “loliconized society” (*rorikonka suru shakai*), where *lolicon* has come to represent “societal desire in a broader sense” (Naitō 2010: 328). It is important to keep in mind, however, that Japan is not necessarily unique in the production and consumption of sexualized images of young girls. John Hartley notes that the democratization of the public sphere through popular media was “conducted through the media of feminization and sexualization” (Hartley 1998: 48). The mass media tends to communicate using images of young girls (drawing an audience and holding its attention), and to position the comfort-seeking consumer as an infantilized and feminized subject. Hartley refers to this phenomenon as “juvenation,” or “the creative practice of communicating...via the *medium* of youthfulness” (Hartley 1998: 51). The increased public fascination with youth is accompanied by a discursive drive to patrol age boundaries, thereby producing the reified category of the child.

Transgression is documented and prominently reported to a captivated audience; this is perpetuated by the promise of high ratings and profits. M. Gigi Durham agrees that the sexualization of girls is a general phenomenon in capitalist societies, and identifies the emergence of what she calls the “Lolita effect,” or a “distorted and delusional set of myths about girls’ sexuality” (Durham 2009: 12).⁶ Durham traces this primarily to the drive to cultivate consumers as early as possible, which erodes boundaries between children and adults:

“Marketers call this ‘age compression,’ or ‘KGOY’ – ‘Kids Getting Older Younger’ – and this marketing construct is blurring the line between adults and children, especially with regard to sexuality. ... Increasingly, very young girls are becoming involved in the sphere of fashion, images, and activities that encourage them to flirt with a decidedly grown-up eroticism and sexuality. ... Increasingly, adult sexual motifs are overlapping with childhood – specifically girlhood, shaping an environment in which young girls are increasingly seen as valid participants in the public culture of sex” (Durham 2009: 126, 21, 115).

This has to do with maximizing profits, but also with making the sexuality of young girls into a spectacle, ostensibly to appeal to boys and men, but also to girls and women. Even as sex becomes a spectacle, there are limited chances to discuss its realities (Durham 2009: 51). By Durham’s estimation, the results are clear. In the United States, an estimated 25 percent of girls (and 20 percent of boys) have been molested (Durham 2009: 12). The rate of teen pregnancy and abortion is the highest in the industrialized world – eight times that of Japan (Durham 2009: 28).

While agreeing with many of Durham’s assertions, this paper does not agree that all images of sexualized children, including those that are purely fictional, are equally part of the problem, that all of these images, regardless of context, exploit girls and empower men, and that ideology is necessarily aligned with images.⁷ It follows Shigematsu Setsu in rejecting theories of mass culture as a “direct reflection of the minds and desires of the masses” or a direct influence on consumers (Shigematsu 1999: 128). In support of this, Milton Diamond and Uchiyama Ayako show a trend towards more violent pornography and fewer sex crimes in Japan (Diamond and Uchiyama 1999). This is not to suggest that consuming images of sexual violence somehow compensates for or relieves real desires. Glenn G. Sparks has surveyed existing studies on media

effects, and concludes that the evidence does not support the “catharsis theory” (Sparks 2010: 89-92). A violent person watching violent media does not become less violent, and may even demonstrate elevated levels of violence for a short period of time after exposure. However, as Sparks also points out, not everyone reacts to media in the same way, and those without violent tendencies do not simply develop them when exposed to violent media. With this in mind, the Diamond and Uchiyama finding might be interpreted as follows: violent pornography does not necessarily reflect the desires of viewers or influence them to commit sex crimes. Likewise, the urge to view images of sexualized girls does not necessarily reflect the desires of viewers or influence them to physically abuse girls. In Japan, where sexually explicit material depicting fictional minors is “readily available and widely consumed” (Diamond and Uchiyama 1999: 9),⁸ there does not appear to be sexual abuse of children to the extent of, for instance, the United States.⁹ Japan offers an opportunity to see how another modern capitalist nation deals with the Lolita effect.

***Shōjo* and Japanese consumer culture**

Japan has a history of positioning the young girl at the center of consumer and media culture. By the 1970s, the tumultuous years of military occupation, economic recovery and social upheaval were over, and consumerism was rapidly rising (Murakami 2005: 119, 192; see also Yoda 2000). This engendered a turning point in Japan so drastic that Yoshimi Shun’ya argues it was the beginning of “post-postwar society” (Yoshimi 2009). Tokyo was one of the most capital-saturated urban centers in the world, and an unprecedented amount was invested in advertising, packaging, design and image production (Yoshimi 2009: 56). Ōtsuka Eiji argues that the young girl, or “*shōjo*,” became a dominant image in the media, representing consumptive pleasure suspended from productive functions (Ōtsuka 1989: 18, 20). John Whittier Treat comments:

“Magazines, radio, above all television: in whatever direction one turns, the barely (and thus ambiguously) pubescent woman is there both to promote products and purchase them, to excite the consumer and herself be thrilled by the flurry of goods and services that circulate like toys around her” (Treat 1993: 361).

It is important to keep in mind that the *shōjo* is not necessarily real. She is, as Honda Masuko describes her, “something evanescent, something that has no shape or actuality. Should we risk articulating this idea in words, we might label it ‘the illusion of beauty’” (Honda 2010: 32). Treat proposes that the *shōjo* is not necessarily male or female, but rather is a distinct gender “importantly detached from the productive economy of heterosexual reproduction” (Treat 1993: 364). To a certain extent, then, the progressively younger age is predictable. Serizawa Shunsuke comments:

“*Shōjo* [girls] excel in cuteness, *yōjo* [little girls] in innocence, and both have begun to signify an idealized Eros. The tendency to attribute this quality to females at ever-younger ages can be seen as the inevitable consequence of the spontaneous drive in consumer society to market an unproductive Eros as a new universal – a new commodity” (Ōtsuka and Nakamori 1989: 73).

The *shōjo* was the first to be identified as unproductive, but certainly not the last. Soon, not just young girls, but also boys, women and men were “pure consumers” (*junsui na shōhisha*) shut away in pleasure rooms disconnected from concerns of society and the state (Matsui 2005: 210-211). To phrase this in Hartley’s terms, mass media in Japan communicated through images of young girls (*shōjo*), and comfort-seeking consumers were positioned as infantilized and feminized subjects (*shōjo*) (Hartley 1998: 51).

In the 1970s, some began to find the *shōjo*, the woman who is not one, to be an appealing fictional ideal. Novelist and critic Honda Tōru argues that at the time consumption had come to play an increasingly important role in courting in Japan, and women gravitated towards men with resources (Honda 2005: 66-67). He describes this as “love capitalism” (*renai shihon shugi*), an extension of market logic also reflected in discussion of “the love gap” (*renai kakusa*), roughly corresponding to the income gap. According to Honda, men marginalized by this system, especially “*otaku*” types investing in hobbies rather than relationships, turned to the fictional girls (the *shōjo*) of manga and anime (Honda 2005: 59, 81, 151). Such characters provide “pure love” (*junai*), or love free of socioeconomic concerns (Honda 2005: 209). Seeing in this the chance of liberation, Honda proposes that men should abandon love capitalism, and along with it the bonds of socially constructed masculinity, and focus on building intimate relationships with two-

dimensional girls (Honda 2005: 16, 81). Itō Kimio discusses this as a move towards a “culture of distance,” or the tendency to avoid direct physical engagement and instead visualize and control fantasy objects (Itō 1992: 93-95). Simply, some men could not keep up with the rapid pace of changes in femininity, and so disengaged from real adult women. This resonates with Durham’s proposition that the Lolita effect was encouraged by the patriarchal backlash against feminism (Durham 2009: 129),¹⁰ but the use of images/objects is more complicated than just male empowerment. Sharon Kinsella suggests that the *shōjo* possessed her own power, and male viewers both abused *and identified* with her to negotiate an ambiguous gender position (Kinsella 2006: 83). Specifically speaking of *lolicon*, Kinsella discusses the *shōjo* as a performance scripted by and for men, one that became central for those transitioning from the “male” position of producer to the “female” position of consumer.

Risk and pre-emptive discipline

A recurrent point in the discussion of *lolicon* and the broader “Lolita effect” is the emergence of an environment where children are endangered by adult sexuality. The possibility of “cognitive distortions” and future crimes is reason to regulate, if not censor, images now. This discourse of risk management needs to be placed in historical and theoretical context. Michel Foucault points out that in the 18th century the idea of “decency” began to appear in legislation and its enforcement (Foucault 1988). However, “in the pornographic explosion and the profits that it involves, in this new atmosphere, it is no longer possible to use” decency “to make the law function” (Foucault 1988: 6).¹¹ As Foucault sees it:

“[W]hat is emerging is a new penal system, a new legislative system, whose function is not so much to punish offenses against these general laws concerning decency, as to protect populations and parts of populations regarded as particularly vulnerable. In other words, the legislator will not justify the measures that he is proposing by saying: the universal decency of mankind must be defended. What he will say is: there are people for whom others’ sexuality may become a permanent danger. In this category, of course, are children, who may find themselves at the mercy of an adult sexuality that is alien to them and may well be harmful to them. Hence there is a legislation that appeals to this notion of a vulnerable population, a ‘high-risk population’” (Foucault 1988: 6).

For Foucault, the issue is that sexuality is not prohibited by precise laws against certain actions, but rather by a “roaming danger” or an “omnipresent phantom.” His example of children at risk proves an apt one. Indeed, Catherine Lumby points out that child abuse is paradoxically seen as totally aberrant and yet widespread in contemporary society; its “effects are seen everywhere but its source is impossible to locate” (Lumby 1998: 47-48). The crime thus “attains a phantasmic status.” In the Internet age, where adults and children can come into unsupervised contact, there has been an explosion of cultural concern and a condemnation of child sex-imagery, seen as a step towards child sex-abuse. Thus, as Mark McLelland summarizes, “any expression of sexual interest in children communicated via any medium is in need of surveillance, censorship and prosecution” (McLelland 2005: 62). The discourse is what James Kincaid calls a “gothic narrative” where there is only absolute good (the children) and absolute evil (the pedophiles), which are impossible to question (Kincaid 1998).

At the practical level, legislation against the production, distribution and consumption of child pornography tends to separate images into three categories: real, pseudo and virtual (McLelland 2005: 63). The first category is a record of a crime. The second category involves digitally manipulated images of children that sexualize them, which represents an abuse of real children’s images and their right to privacy. The third category is concerned with purely fictional representations, for example *lolicon* manga, anime and games. As McLelland points out, “Since no actual child is harmed in any way as a result of the creation and dissemination of fictional images, issues of freedom of expression and thought come to the fore of legislating against this material” (McLelland 2005: 64). The issue is the proper way to think, coupled with the “roaming danger” of those who might think the wrong way:

“[T]he possibility that the sexualization of child cartoon characters *may* result in the reinforcement of ‘cognitive distortions’ requires regulation and management by the authorities. The proposition that the manipulation of cartoon or animated characters (and this is particularly so in games regulation) *may* pose a future risk to actual people is sufficient to regulate even this fantasy space where no actual person is harmed and no real crime is committed” (McLelland, forthcoming).¹²

McLelland draws attention to the situation in Australia, which at the time was in contrast

to the United States, where the Supreme Court's ruling in *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition* (2002) seemed to protect virtual child pornography under the First Amendment's right to free speech.

This distinction is no longer so clear, however, as recent prosecution of obscene manga in the United States demonstrates. In May 2006, a 38-year-old Iowa man named Christopher Handley went to pick up a package of manga he ordered from Japan. He did not know that the Postal Inspector had obtained a warrant to search the package and found it to contain "cartoon images of objectionable content." Handley took the package home, and was followed by agents from the Postal Inspector's office, Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency, Special Agents from the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation and officers from the Glenwood Police Department. They seized his collection of over 1,200 manga books and publications, hundreds of DVDs, VHS tapes, laser disks, seven computers and other documents. Handley was prosecuted, despite the fact that the seven items he ordered – many from the anthology *Comic LO*, or "Comic Lolita Only" – were only a small portion of his collection, that they were purchased for private consumption, and that there was no evidence to show that he had ever owned real child pornography. He faced penalties under the 2003 PROTECT Act (18 U.S.C. Section 1466A), which Congress passed after the Supreme Court struck down a broader law prohibiting any visual depictions of minors engaged in sexual activity. The PROTECT Act narrows the prohibition to cover only depictions that the defendant's community would consider "obscene," determined by the Miller test:

- (a) Whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest.
- (b) Whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law.
- (c) Whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

Rather than attempt to explain *lolicon* to a shocked Iowa jury, Handley pleaded guilty in May 2009 and was sentenced in February 2010 to six months in prison. Further, the court ordered

three years of supervised release and five years of probation. During this time, Handley was to participate in a treatment program to assess his mental health and limit any possible future crimes springing from “sexual deviance.”

Responding to critics of the guilty plea, which kept the debate out of the courtroom and might have set a dangerous precedent, Handley’s lawyer, Eric Chase, wrote to *The Comics Journal* and explained why he could not have won the case. First, *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition* “held that sexual images of virtual minors could not be prosecuted as child pornography” but “did not hold that virtual child pornography was legal” (Chase 2010: 1-2). Second, the PROTECT Act designates a mandatory sentence of five years for the receipt of materials depicting sexual abuse of children, cross-referenced in the Federal Sentencing Guidelines and so no different from real child pornography. Third, “community standards” as laid out in the Miller test. Chase explains the issue:

“The *Miller* obscenity test is vague, indecipherable, and clearly chills protected speech. Among its most frightening aspects is that its ‘community standards’ element *may* allow ‘moral majority’ communities to dictate to the rest of us. The extortionate tool given to prosecutors through the receipt charge, with its mandatory minimum, gives incentive to defendants to not mount appropriate ‘community standards’ or ‘serious artistic value’ challenges” (Chase 2010: 3).

The right to free speech becomes contingent on a poll that changes each time, a poll that is taken from a community that may not be the same as the community of use.

‘Juridification of the imagination’

There is a tension between local communities of use and universal legislation or global standards, which can be approached theoretically. McLelland makes a useful application of Jürgen Habermas’ discussion of the “juridification” of “lifeworlds” (McLelland, forthcoming). The lifeworld is a “communicatively-based interpretation of the world and individuals’ perception of their own and others’ place in it” (McLelland, forthcoming). The lifeworld is “colonized” by macro-level discourses derived from increased monetarization and

bureaucratization. Habermas refers to a process of juridification, or the expansion and densification of law (i.e., more social relations are legally regulated in more complex ways). McLelland advances an understanding of the legislation surrounding virtual child pornography as juridification:

“[T]hat is, a ‘densification’ of legislation limiting what can be imagined and produced. The result is that the interactive lifeworld communication of fan communities is increasingly hemmed in by regulations serving both commercial interests and the ideological biases of government agents” (McLelland, forthcoming).

There is a gap between what fans think they are doing and how regulators understand their actions. This is all too obvious when images from manga, anime and games are extracted from the specific lifeworld context of fan communities and scrutinized with regard to abstract and universal notions of child abuse. Despite the possibly criminal nature of the representations, fans do not understand highly stylized characters as “real” or sexualized representations of young characters to be “child pornography.”¹³ Fans “militate against any kind of real interpretation of these stories” (McLelland 2005: 69), are offended by those aligning their works with child pornography and reject real and pseudo child pornography (McLelland 2010: 14). Characters do not necessarily represent real boys or girls, but rather what McLelland refers to as a “third gender” (McLelland 2005: 73). Speaking of female fans consuming (and producing) images of beautiful boys, he writes, “It is the intermediate nature of these fantasy characters that makes them amenable to diverse appropriations by women with a range of sexual orientations” (McLelland 2005: 73). An examination of *lolicon* culture reveals that the same is true for male fans consuming (and producing) images of beautiful girls.

Background of manga and anime

Before moving to the specifics of *lolicon*, a brief comment on the general prevalence of sex and violence in manga and anime is required. After WWII, manga emerged as mass culture in Japan because it was cheap, and lower barriers to participation made it attractive for young creators (Schodt 1983: 62-66). Other more established outlets were harder to break into, and hierarchy was more prevalent. Tezuka Osamu, for example, wanted to be a filmmaker, but is now

remembered as the “God of Manga,” who revolutionized the medium. Even in the 1940s, mature themes and experimental techniques appeared in manga. It spread rapidly and became a staple of popular culture before television. It also became a contested terrain, even an outlet for anti-establishment and proletariat themes (so-called “*gekiga*,” or dramatic pictures, were attractive to members of the student movement, for example). Tezuka’s *Astro Boy* paved the way for serialized TV anime in the 1960s. Even as the film industry became more conservative and less appealing to young creators in the 1970s (Napier 2005: 16-17), there was an outpouring of creativity in anime. As with manga, animation was not partitioned off as “for kids” and did not have many medium-specific limitations. Ōtsuka Eiji argues that anime reflects a hybrid of influences from imported media, for example Disney animation and Russian avant-garde cinema, and thus developed expressions not seen in American or European cartoons.¹⁴ Mariana Ortega-Brena adds, “Given its roots in a kind of animation the role of which was never categorically differentiated from narrative cinema, *anime* caters to all ages, collectively and individually, and is seen as a fit medium for a wide array of topics and techniques of representation” (Ortega-Brena 2009: 23).

Creators did not shy away from sex and violence. As Kinsella has noted, “pornography has not been as strongly compartmentalized in post-war Japan as it has in post-war America or Britain. Pornographic images have tended to appear throughout the media as well as in specifically pornographic productions” (Kinsella 2000: 46). Despite a notable preference for young and young-looking characters (McLelland 2005: 76),¹⁵ these images, until recently, generated little anxiety. That is, there was little resistance to putting youthful characters into sexual and violent situations, or showing images of such characters to children as well as adults. Saitō Tamaki points out that though Tezuka was inspired by Walt Disney, they were vastly different creators.¹⁶ If their characters are placed side by side, Tezuka’s look obviously younger. Further, Tezuka’s works abound with sex, violence and moral ambiguity, things Disney avoided. This set the tone for a very different sort of comic and cartoon culture in Japan.

Public/pubic surveillance

Obscenity law in Japan, as elsewhere, is based on a vague premise: “that which produces

a sense of shame in a ‘normal’ Japanese person who encounters, in public, an image or text whose primary intension or effect is to stimulate sexual desire” (Allison 2000: 149). While enforcement can take the form of restrictive censorship, it has historically been specific to depictions of pubic hair and realistic genitalia (Allison 2000: 149). The general context of the depiction is ignored. Anne Allison traces this to Japan’s period of modernization and the promulgation of Article 175 of the Criminal Code in 1907 and Article 21 of the Custom Tariffs Law in 1910. She argues that Japan was put into an inferior position by western nations judging the emerging Asian power to be “primitive” (Allison 2000: 163). New laws “were a means of covering the national body from charges that it was obscene” (Allison 2000: 163). Further, it was a Foucauldian shift toward disciplining that body in “developing a notion of the public as a terrain that is monitored and administered by the state” (Allison 2000: 163). The connection between obscenity and realistic depiction of genitals was codified in 1918, when the courts ruled that the “pubic area need not be hidden but there should be no anatomical details to draw the viewer’s attention” (Rubin 1984: 44). Although these restrictions loosened along with sexual censorship in the years following WWII, by the end of the Allied Occupation in 1952 the laws regulating obscenity were reactivated. In 1969, the art book *Sun-Warmed Nudes* was deemed too explicit and denied importation into Japan. In many ways, prohibiting pubic hair encouraged the use of models who appeared (or were) prepubescent or who had shaved pubises (Allison 2000: 169).

Indeed, even as *Sun-Warmed Nudes* was denied a place in Japan, the discourse on *lolicon* began. *Lolicon* is an abbreviation for “Lolita complex,” derived from Vladimir Nabokov’s novel *Lolita* (1955), but more associated with the Japanese translation of Russell Trainor’s *The Lolita Complex* in 1969 (Takatsuki 2010: 6). That same year, *shōjo* nudes began to appear in major media outlets in Japan. A photo collection titled *Nymphet: The Myth of the 12-Year-Old* was released by Nobel Shobō (Takatsuki 2010: 50). In 1972 and 1973, there was an “Alice boom” surrounding *Alice in Wonderland*, including nude photos inspired by the classic novel (Takatsuki 2010: 55). In 1976, Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci became an international star at the Montreal Olympics. In Japan, she was called the “white fairy,” famous for the leotards that exposed her shapely legs (Takatsuki 2010: 47). With *The Little Pretenders* in 1979, *shōjo* nudes lost all pretense of “fine art” and shifted to the adult market. In the early 1980s, many specialty

magazines began to appear, carrying nude photos, reviews, essays on the appeal of young girls, fiction and “reader submissions,” including illegal photographs of girls on the street taken in moments of unanticipated exposure (Takatsuki 2010: 47). This slowed down with laws passed in 1985, which were a response to the overexposure of the sexualized *shōjo*. Takatsuki Yasushi notes that the boom in photographic images faded in the late 1980s not only because of the backlash, but also because many young men preferred two-dimensional images of *shōjo* (Takatsuki 2010: 64-65).

The rise of fictional *lolicon*

Manga, anime and games in Japan have historically been able to depict a variety of sexual scenarios insofar as pubic hair and genitals are hidden or effaced (Schodt 1983: 43, 136). The ability to make genitalia graphically simple, to erase or replace them, made manga an obvious choice for skirting obscenity laws. Fictional *lolicon* works appeared relatively early, beginning with Wada Shinji’s *Alice in Wonderland*-inspired short manga, *Stumbling Upon a Cabbage Field*, published in 1974. Fan works began with Hirukogami Ken’s *Alice*, published in 1978 (Takatsuki 2010: 102). The following year, Azuma Hideo, the “Father of *Lolicon*,” penned a work titled *Cybele*, which featured erotic images of cartoony girl characters. Rather than being entirely pornographic, there was a humor intended in exposing and foregrounding the sexual appeal of these characters. Itō Gō points out that the circular lines of Tezuka’s characters had a certain eroticism to them,¹⁷ but no one commented on it until Azuma. Pornographic manga had been done in a more realistic style, but, as cultural critic Takekuma Kentarō recalls, with Azuma suddenly “Tezuka-style cute characters were having sex” (Takekuma 2003: 107). Takekuma sees the emergence of such art as resistance to and parody of the previous generation. At first, only a minority saw these images as erotic, but soon there was a vocal fandom (much to the chagrin of many older fans). This marked the birth of a genre of pornographic manga that was stimulating despite being, or precisely for being, unrealistic. While some *lolicon* images demonstrate a sharp contrast between realistic bodies and cartoony faces, the general trend after Azuma was towards an unrealistic (iconic, deformed) aesthetic.



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 Img1: Erotic scene from Azuma Hideo's "Little Red Riding Hood in Wonderland," published in *Cybele* Vol. 1 (April 1979). Notice the roundness of his characters, which are said to be cute rather than sexy.

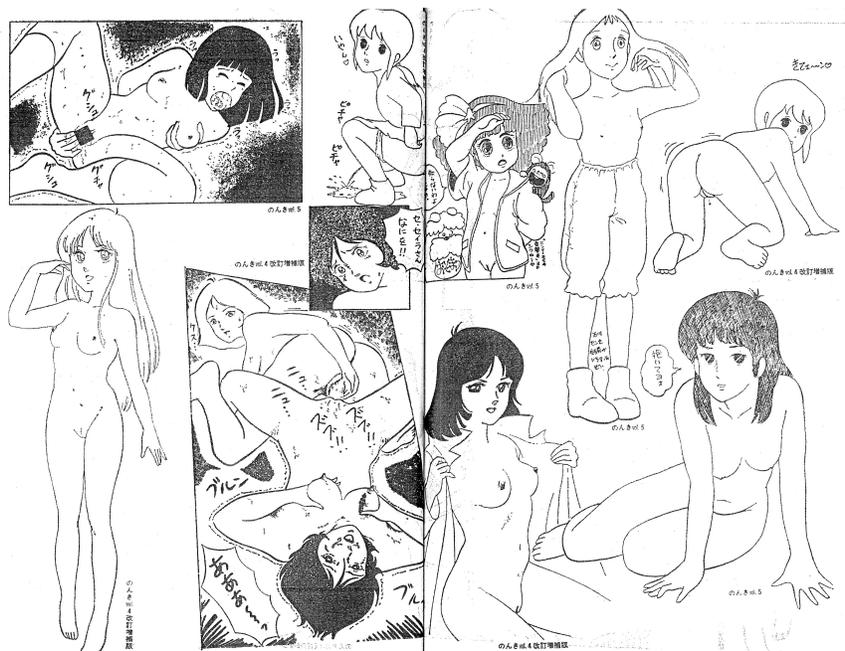
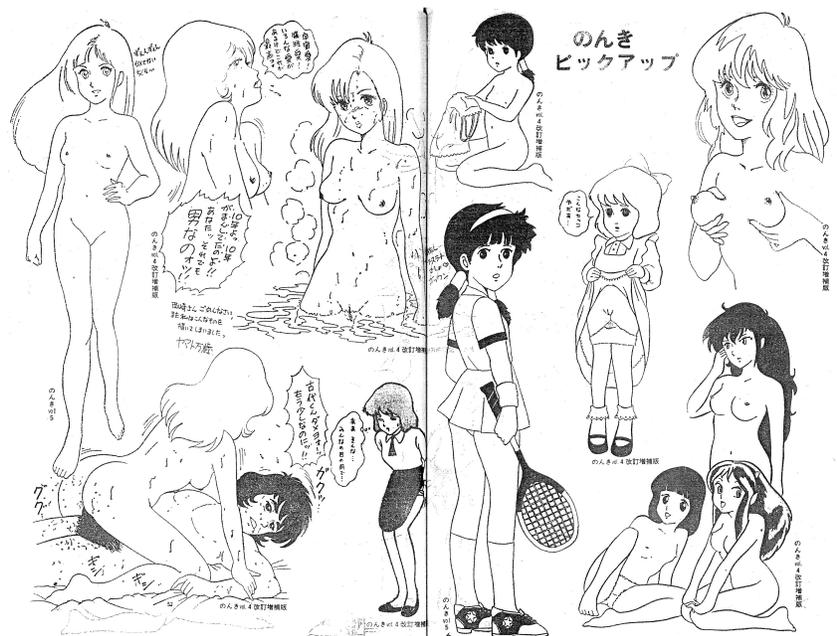
The rise of *lolicon* is intimately tied to the rise of hardcore manga and anime fans (often referred to as “*otaku*”) in Japan. The increasingly complex narratives and visual style of anime began attracting a more mature audience from the late 1970s (Murakami 2005: 133), as can be observed in the June 1977 issue of *Gekkan Out* covering *Space Battleship Yamato* (Takatsuki 2010: 94). Part of the trend was the emergence of a discourse on beautiful *shōjo* – on *lolicon* (Takatsuki 2010: 97). *Lupin III*, the story of a super thief and his capers, captivated older fans, and Miyazaki Hayao’s 1979 animated feature film *The Castle of Cagliostro* was no exception. The young female character Clarisse was particularly popular, and discussions of her appeal connected to a series of articles on *lolicon* in *Gekkan Out*, *Animec* and *Animage* (Takatsuki 2010: 97-98). In many ways, she became a “*lolicon*” idol (Macias and Machiyama 2004: 48), though her age (16 years old) and look differ from images associated with the term today. Longing for

the heroines of anime was not necessarily new – Miyazaki himself was apparently inspired to become a creator by his exposure at a young age to a *shōjo* character (Saitō 2007: 239)¹⁸ – but never before had it been openly discussed. There was a slew of fan works featuring Clarisse, not explicitly sexual, but what fans called “fairytale-esque” (*meruhen*) or “girly” (*otomechikku*) forms of *lolicon* (Takatsuki 2010: 102). Despite being preceded by the short-lived “Clarisse syndrome,” the term “*lolicon*” was favored, along with more parodic and pornographic representations.



Img2: Clarisse from Miyazaki Hayao’s *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979)

The so-called “*lolicon* boom” came in the early 1980s. This was a time of extreme consumption, when the market ripened enough to support niches (Takatsuki 2010: 14). Specialty magazines appeared, among them publications dedicated to *lolicon* such as *Lemon People* (from 1981) and *Manga Burikko* (from 1982).¹⁹ There was a general outpouring of *lolicon* art, both professional and amateur.



Imgs3-4: Examples of “parody” art created during the lolicon boom

Fans took to watching anime shows targeting young girls (which tend to feature cute young female characters) in search of idols, and creators courted such viewers to increase ratings and profits. For example, *Magical Princess Minky Momo* (1982-1983) is the story of a coquettish

little girl who transforms into a sexy adult, complete with fetish costumes.²⁰ Even companies that are now major in Japan were involved, for example Enix, which put out the erotic game *Lolita Syndrome* in 1983. The very first erotic animation in Japan was *Lolita Anime* in 1984. While often described as a subculture, *lolicon* was a much more widespread media phenomenon than such a term might imply.



Img5: Promotional art for Magical Princess Minky Momo: Hold on to Your Dreams (1991-1992).

of young nude girls (often Caucasian). The word “*shōjo*” is used to describe one such girl in the February 1983 issue, indicating a loose association of the subjects of photographs (real girls) and drawings (fictional ones). This inclusive approach to *lolicon* was not to last, however. In June 1983, a softer aesthetic appears in the drawn images, and the magazine takes on the subtitle, “*Bishōjo* comic magazine for dreaming boys” (*yume miru otoko no ko no tame no bishōjo komikkushi*).²³ *Bishōjo* literally means “beautiful girl,” but is a term reserved almost exclusively for fictional characters. The

It is worth restating that the fascination with *shōjo*, the desire for young female characters, was not necessarily sexual. The case of *Manga Burikko*, one of the core *lolicon* magazines in the early 1980s,²¹ demonstrates this well. While it is difficult to know the precise target demographic of the magazine, a survey published in the September 1983 issue shows that readers range from “below 15” to “above 26,” with the majority indicating that they are 17 years old.²² Another survey in the November 1983 issue reveals that 80 percent of readers are male, 15 percent female and 5 percent undisclosed. Early issues of *Manga Burikko* feature rather realistic images of young female characters in sexual situations. They also contain photos

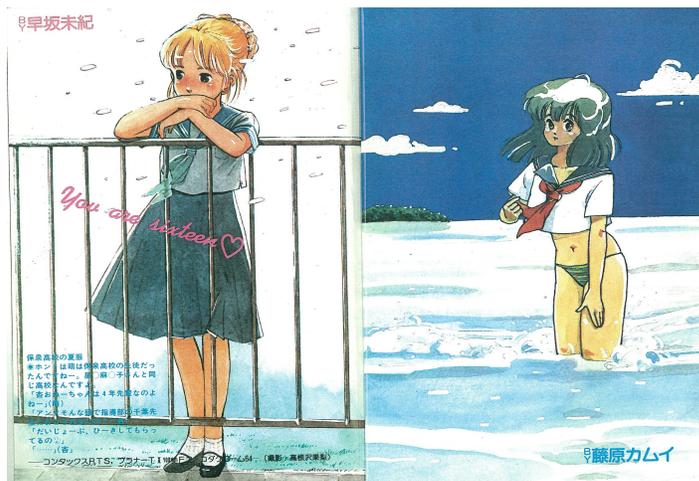


Img6: Cover of the premiere issue of Manga Burikko in November 1982.



Img7: Example of more realistic pornographic images in Manga Burikko.

following month, Eguchi Shigeki, a reader from Yamagata Prefecture, writes to the magazine that he prefers “light” eroticism to “erotic-grotesque” depictions (*Manga Burikko*, July 1983: 201). In August 1983, Kawaguchi Toshihiko from Hokkaidō Prefecture writes, “I have a two-dimensional



Imgs8-10: Examples of softer lolicon images in Manga Burikko.

complex (*nijigen konpurekkusu*). I don't feel anything for the photographs in the opening pages. For that reason, I'd like you to stop with the pictures and run only manga" (*Manga Burikko*, August 1983: 201). *Manga Burikko*'s editors respond that on orders from the top "there is no way we are taking the photographs out." Complaints about the photographs as well as pornographic content continued, including a letter from Suzuki Yōko, a female reader from Miyazaki Prefecture, who praises the artists featured in *Manga Burikko*, but explains, "I feel nothing for manga that is simply about penetration or girls being raped. I psychologically can't accept it" (*Manga Burikko*, October 1983: 193). It seems that the editors finally yielded to reader demands in November 1983, symbolized by the issue's subtitle: "Totally *bishōjo* comic magazine" (*maru maru bishōjo komikkushi*). Gravure idol photography is entirely absent, and remained so for the rest of the magazine's existence. The editors reveal that the least popular section in the last issue was a photographic spread of Kawai Kazumi (*Manga Burikko*, November 1983: 194).²⁴



Img11: A two-page spread from the October 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, showing obvious tension between photographs and drawings, which caused reader backlash.

There are still photographs of naked girls in advertisements, but the editors explain that this is a corporate issue and they cannot easily remove them (*Manga Burikko*, November 1983: 193).²⁵ The other notable change is the increasingly small place for realistic characters and explicit depictions of sex. In general, lines are round and soft. This reflects not only the style seen in Azuma Hideo's art, but also the influence of *shōjo* manga, or comics for girls. While some might find this connection shocking, all the evidence points to it. Men began reading *shōjo* manga in the 1970s,²⁶ and *Manga Burikko*'s chief editor, Ōtsuka Eiji, was part of that first generation.²⁷ In the early 1980s, manga historian Frederik L. Schodt noted the large number of men reading *shōjo* manga (Schodt 1983: 17). Both Schodt and Kinsella suggest that *lolicon* imagery was influenced by male artists mimicking *shōjo* manga (Schodt 1996: 55; Kinsella 1998: 304-306). This is arguably demonstrated in *Manga Burikko*. Schodt further draws attention to the importance of female artists participating in the production of erotic manga for male audiences.²⁸ And, in fact, *Manga Burikko* regularly featured well-known female artists such as Okazaki Kyōko, Shirakura Yumi and Sakurazawa Erika. Given all this, *shōjo* characters and desires for them certainly cannot be reduced to “male fantasy.”²⁹

Likewise, engaging *lolicon* images, even when they are pornographic in function or effect, is no simple matter. According to Akagi Akira, in the 1980s, the meaning of *lolicon* among fans shifted away from older men having sex with younger girls (Akagi 1993: 230). The desire for two-dimensional images was not for girls per se, but rather “girl-ness” (*shōjo sei*), symbolized by “cuteness” (*kawairashisa*) (Akagi 1993: 230). The young age and small size of characters were intended to amplify cuteness. Akagi proposes that substitution and mimicry in *lolicon* function to transform straight sex into parodic forms (Akagi 1993: 230-231). It does not facilitate normal sex, but sexualizes that which is normally not sexual (Shigematsu 1999: 130). Shigematsu adds that the



Img12: A cover from the July 1985 issue of *Manga Burikko*. Notice the image's resemblance to *shōjo* manga for girls.

male penis is often absent from *lolicon* (in compliance with obscenity laws, though not always so in the 1980s), and the replacements for it are objects that do not feel pleasure (Shigematsu 1999: 130). Further, the face of the attacker is often not depicted (Akagi 1993: 232). Akagi sees this as a major distinction from the erotic manga that came before, where there was a sort of “hero attacker” with whom the reader identified. Rather, Akagi provocatively suggests that *lolicon* fans project onto girls: “*Lolicon* readers do not need a penis for pleasure, but rather they need the ecstasy of the girl. At that time, they identify with the girl, and get caught up in a masochistic pleasure” (Akagi 1993: 232).³⁰ Itō Gō supports this analysis:

“Readers do not need to empathize with the rapist, because they are projecting themselves on the girls who are in horrible situations. It is an abstract desire and does not necessarily connect to real desires. This is something I was told by a *lolicon* artist, but he said that he is the girl who is raped in his manga. In that he has been raped by society, or by the world. He is in a position of weakness.”³¹

Recall Kinsella’s suggestion that *lolicon* be understood as men performing the *shōjo* to come to terms with an unstable gender identity (Kinsella 2006: 81-83). If being a man ceases to promise power, potency and pleasure, it is no longer the privileged subject position. Akagi explains that *lolicon* is a form of self-expression for those oppressed by the principles of masculine competitive society (Akagi 1993: 232).³² *Lolicon* is a rejection of the need to establish oneself as masculine and an identification with the “kindness and love” of the *shōjo* (Akagi 1993: 233). This interpretation reverses the standard understanding of *lolicon* as an expression of masculinity to one of femininity. This is, of course, not the only way to approach the wide range of *lolicon* images, but it certainly highlights the complexity of “pornographic content” and its uses.

Moral panic

In the late 1980s, anxiety was building in Japan about the effects of media saturation, emblazoned by Itō Seikō’s novel *No Life King* (1988), which tells of grade schoolers who wake up one morning thinking the world is a game. In 1989, just as the Showa Period was coming to a

close, a young man named Miyazaki Tsutomu was arrested for murdering and molesting four girls between the ages of four and seven. Police discovered 5,763 videotapes in his room, and the mass media decried him as an “*otaku*,” a word that had come to be used to identify certain types of manga and anime fans. In the mass media coverage, however, *otaku* came to mean those with an “unhealthy” fixation on hobbies, or those who were disconnected from society and its norms. That is, in this process of “moral panic,” *otaku* were the “folk devils” that represented all that was wrong with Japan (Kinsella 1998: 294). Perhaps Miyazaki was shut away in his private pleasure room surrounded by media and technology, fixated on producing and consuming images of *shōjo*, but this was not entirely deviant. In fact, Treat contends that Miyazaki was both a symbol and a symptom of the disconnection and excess of Japanese consumer capitalism (Treat 1993: 355). As is hinted at in the film *Little Children* (2007), the fear and loathing of child abusers seems connected to ambivalence about the sexualization of modern culture and guilt about negligent parenting. Images of them perhaps appall so powerfully because imagined deviance relates to personal fears and unconscious wishes.

Lolicon was a keyword in the media frenzy surrounding the “Miyazaki incident.” Examples of it were found in his room (along with a book on *shōjo* culture by Ōtsuka and images from *Magical Princess Minky Momo*), and positioned as the source of his deviance (Schodt 1996: 45-46, 49-59). Soon after his arrest, a non-profit organization, CASPAR, was founded, campaigning for regulating pornographic depictions of minors, even when purely fictional. Schodt notes that in the early 1990s there was a very successful nationwide movement to “banish harmful manga,” a movement made up of “housewives, PTAs, Japan’s new feminist groups, and politicians. Tougher local ordinances against obscene *manga* material were passed by various prefectures throughout Japan. Arrests of store owners found to be selling this obscene material increased dramatically” (Schodt 1996: 56; see also Takeuchi 1995: 181-190).³³ However, so-called “harmful manga” was encouraged by obscenity laws, if not also by the capitalist system itself. To erase the genitals is to promise pleasure but ultimately withhold it, engendering a desire that cannot be fulfilled despite endless consumption. Further, as Allison states, “Restrictive laws are actually a boost to the big business of sexual fantasy-making in Japan, which, in the format of ‘fantasy,’ can be marketed to children as well as adults” (Allison 2000: 150). Indeed, this is precisely the situation that collapsed together target audiences for *shōjo* media in the 1980s (for

example, anime such as *Magical Princess Minky Momo*) and placed adults and their desires in close proximity to children; this situation of risk, as Foucault might put it, was in turn the kernel of the moral panic. However, the ingrained need to expand the consumer base did not simply disappear. Selling adult sexuality to children and youthful innocence to adults was far too profitable to abandon.³⁴ As Akagi comments, in the early 1990s *lolicon*-type imagery (i.e., sexualized girls who appear underage) actually expanded and became acceptable in manga (Akagi 1993: 231).

On the other hand, however, Akagi notes that *lolicon* fans and so-called “*otaku*” were branded, and there has been a lasting stigma. Indeed, the term *lolicon* is no longer widely used for this very reason. Since the Miyazaki incident, the mass media in Japan often associates violent youth crimes with disconnection from reality, especially enthusiastic consumption of manga, anime and games.³⁵ Media effects are strongly implied, namely desensitization and priming. What these criticisms miss is that despite the prevalence of sexual and violent images in anime, manga and games, there is nothing indicating that fans are in any way more prone to crime (Saitō 2007: 228). With regards to *lolicon*, Takatsuki Yasushi points out that sexual abuse of minors was statistically much more common in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s, and has actually been decreasing since, which roughly coincides with the increasing presence of fictional *lolicon* (Takatsuki 2010: 258-262). Drawing attention to this correlation, a trajectory that coincides with Diamond and Uchiyama’s general findings on pornography in Japan (Diamond and Uchiyama 1999), is not to suggest that desires are redirected from real children to fictional ones. Rather, it is to suggest that the prevalence of these images does not necessarily reflect the desires of the viewers or influence them to commit crimes. Not all fantasy is compensatory; not all imaginings are of that which is desired in reality. This calls into question dominant understandings of how fiction relates, or does not relate, to reality.

The reality of fiction

There is a robust literature in Japan on the reality of fiction, including contributions by psychologists, manga scholars and academics from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. One leader in this has been Saitō Tamaki, who has conducted clinical work with so-called *otaku*

(specifically, fans of anime, manga and game) and written widely on *otaku* sexuality (see Saitō 2000). He proposes that due to an absence of Platonistic ideals, fiction in Japan has not been seen as necessarily subordinate to reality or striving to reach it.³⁶ Contrary to the idea that *otaku* are immature and confused about the boundaries of reality, Saitō argues that *otaku* have in sustained interaction with fiction developed a mature awareness of reality (Saitō 2000: 279-282). They are extremely strict about observing the distinction between fiction and reality (Saitō 2007: 227). As Saitō sees it, *otaku* are those with an affinity for “fictional contexts” (*kyokō no kontekusuto*), or those who react to fiction itself as a sexual object (Saitō 2007: 227). *Otaku* realize that the object of desire is fiction, and desire it precisely because it is fiction. Anime, manga and games provide them “an utterly imagined space with no correspondent in the everyday world, a space of perfect fictionality...deliberately separated from everyday life” (Saitō 2007: 245).³⁷ Thus while representations of sex may be radical, *otaku* are by and large sexually conservative in their daily lives. Saitō specifically defends *lolicon* and stresses that it is not an expression or symptom of pathology among *otaku*. Ironically, he implies that the United States and Europe, which have not established a distinct and separate “fictional space” (*kyokō kūkan*) and therefore cannot accommodate *lolicon*, might in a sense be less mature than *otaku* (Azuma, Saitō and Kotani 2003: 182).³⁸

Many of Saitō’s assumptions are collaborated by Ōtsuka Eiji, who proposes that there is an internal, enclosed reality to manga and anime (Ōtsuka 2003). He calls this “manga/anime-like realism” (*manga anime teki riarizumu*), as opposed to “naturalism-like realism” (*shizenshugi teki riarizumu*), in which reality is determined by resemblance to the natural world (Ōtsuka 2003: 24). Fiction resembles fiction, or follows its own logic, and captures a sense of autonomous reality. A ready example is the large eyes of manga and anime characters, which do not necessarily correspond to a human face. There is no such face in the natural world, but it adheres to the distinct reality of manga and anime. It has an appeal separate from a human face; viewers do not want this face to be real or desire a human with such a face. Ōtsuka points out that manga/anime-like realism is outside the reader or viewer, or is not mimetic of the world as he or she experiences or perceives it. This does not, however, foreclose the possibility of identification. In his discussion of comics in general, Scott McCloud suggests that there are lines to “see” and lines to “be” (McCloud 1994: 43). Lines to see are detailed depictions that resemble the natural world,

while lines to be are not. The most obvious examples of lines to be are simplified or “iconic” characters, which, despite not resembling the physical viewer, resonate on a subconscious level with self-image and invite identification (McCloud 1994: 29-42). For McCloud, such characters are open to identification by a broad and diverse range of people, though one can just as easily deny identificatory possibilities. Manga/anime-like realism suggests the possibility of complicated engagements with what is seen but not necessarily recognized (see Itō 2005: 135-136; Ortega-Brena 2009: 25).

‘Fantasy dimensions’

As complex as the reality of fiction is, engagements with it are even more complex. Speaking of manga specifically, Shigematsu refers to “non-real” content as the first dimension of fantasy (Shigematsu 1999: 132). She does not deny that manga is very real, but points out the distinction between external/physical/social reality and internal/mental/psychological reality, saying, “It is in between these realms of reality that *manga* is consciously read, mediated, and elaborated on through the reader’s internal/mental processes, and variously rejected, extrapolated, and/or interwoven into a personal repertoire of memories, pleasures, fears, and fantasies” (Shigematsu 1999: 133). This is the second dimension of fantasy: personal fantasy. Further, there is a third dimension of fantasy, or the psychological “phantasy:”

“Phantasy is not a static form but a dynamic one, and there are many distinct kinds of phantasies (conscious, unconscious, and primal) which constitute a differentiated topography of the psyche. Phantasy is not free play, but involves structure, a driving logic, a relation to the subject’s perception of external reality... [P]sychoanalysis demonstrates how the desires (both conscious and unconscious) that structure the phantasy are contradictory yet, to a certain degree, comprehensible and explicable but not necessarily reconcilable with external reality” (Shigematsu 1999: 133-134).

For Shigematsu, reading manga (or watching anime or playing games) is not a simple process: “I think that identifications are more oscillating and fluid, shifting and incomplete, moving among multiple contradictory (psychic) sites that are constituted differently depending

on the specific history and experience of the subject” (Shigematsu 1999: 136). She concludes that because of the “multiplicity of identifications and disidentifications...such consumption will not necessarily *cause* the reader to think certain thoughts, feel aroused, repulsed, or indifferent, or become a pedophile, or child protection activist” (Shigematsu 1999: 137). How individuals consume, appropriate and transform media, and how they act afterwards, cannot be determined in advance. Thus the issue must be production, not consumption: “The use and potential abuse of girls in the *production* of pornography and their sexual molestation is a serious problem that must not be displaced onto or reduced to an issue of ‘pornographic content’” (Shigematsu 1999: 138). As this paper has argued, no one is hurt in the production of *lolicon*, no abuse or sexual molestation occurs. The issue is entirely the desirability of the “pornographic content” and its consumption.

‘Moe-phobia’

Perhaps even more than the content, the act of desiring that which is distinct and separate from reality is itself offensive to some. The character becomes what Shigematsu calls a “cuteness fetish,” which “replaces a lack of desire for the ‘real thing’ – a lack of desire that young men are ‘naturally’ supposed to possess for real young women” (Shigematsu 1999: 132). The desire is “unnatural” and thus disturbing. In many ways, insistence on the *shōjo*, the fictional girl, engenders a certain refusal. This woman who is not one offers a way out of the “real,” or the “body politic centered by the reproductions of family” (Allison 2000: 173). This in many ways approaches a queer politics, specifically Lee Edelman’s rejection of “reproductive futurism” (Edelman 2004). The space of fantasy play is liminal, and extended engagement with it destabilizes the social structure, or at least triggers a fear that it will be destabilized (Kam 2008: 57). Following this logic, Itō Gō notes the existence of what he calls “moe-phobia” (Itō 2008: 24-25). *Moe* refers to a response to fictional characters or representations of them (Galbraith 2009). Thomas LaMarre describes it as an affective response “prior to the formation of a distinct subject or viewing position” (LaMarre 2009: 281). Itō believes that people react negatively to those pursuing *moe* not because the objects of affection are fictional “underage” characters who may engage in “obscene” acts, but rather because the pursuit itself represents a different way of approaching reality and a “queer” orientation (before distinct subject positions). In this way, one

might posit that the current backlash against desiring purely fictional characters is “moe-phobia,” or a violent reaction to desiring outside socially accepted forms.

Conclusion

Many scholars speak of the increasing role Japanese popular culture plays in the “global imagination” (see Allison 2006). The assimilation of Japanese entertainment marks the “making of a new ‘norm’ that becomes part of mass culture’s possible imaginary” (Shigematsu 1999: 127). The question, however, is what is the *possible* imaginary? At present, certain forms of imagination are under attack on a global scale. They are labeled dangerous or obscene and banned. This is reason for pause. As McLelland points out, fantasy is often “*deliberately transgressive*” (McLelland 2005: 74-75).³⁹ Even if a “normal” citizen might find it offensive, or precisely because it represents such a challenge, the freedom of expression must be upheld. Fans of anime, manga and games come together to form “counterpublics,” which are supportive of critical analysis of the mainstream (McLelland 2005: 75). For McLelland, “apparently unobjectionable ‘child protection’ legislation, when handled badly, has serious ramifications for adult communication, particularly that conducted between sexually nonconformist individuals and groups – *even when that communication involves fantasy alone*” (McLelland 2005: 75). The current trend is to close down what Shigematsu calls “alternative sites and different dimensions” of sex and sexuality (Shigematsu 1999: 128). The resistance to virtual child pornography such as *lolicon*⁴⁰ is a case in point.

Some free speech advocates have attempted to defend *lolicon* on the grounds that only the faces of characters appear childish, and the curvy hips mark them as adult women. While the goal is admirable, the argument is misguided, as it seeks to set aside certain forms of imagination as “healthy” and others as not, and risks legitimizing censorship accordingly. What if a character appears in both face and physique to be a child, but is indicated in the narrative to be above the legal age of consent? In the end, is it not strange to even consider the legal age of consent for purely fictional characters? Such characters are only as old as they are imagined to be, just as sex with them is only imagined. Because there is no actual crime committed, it ultimately ends up an issue of how one interprets images, of a person’s private thoughts, and this is not something that

can or should be regulated. All forms of imagination, regardless of how repugnant some may find them, are legal up to and until they present a real danger to self or others. The evidence suggests that those producing and consuming *lolicon* images pose no such danger. They have a nuanced understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality, and desire *shōjo* characters precisely because they are unreal. That said, it is not possible or even prudent to posit a unified way that “they” approach “these” images. Interactions with media are dynamic, and defy static categories of analysis. For example, Shigematsu takes up the appearance of *lolicon* images in manga written by and for adult women (Shigematsu 1999: 146). It is important to allow for such unexpected engagements regardless of age and sex.

Sexual violence against women and children is an unfortunate social reality, and censoring fictional depictions does not reduce it (Shigematsu 1999: 147). It does, however, make it taboo to even imagine sexual violence and denies a space to represent and respond to it. It positions women and children as “pure,” objectifying them every bit as much as the “Lolita effect” (Durham 2009: 12). Indeed, such reification is one half of the twin processes of “juvenation,” the revaluation of girls (Hartley 1998: 51). Today, growing up in a saturated media environment and encountering images of sexualized girls is something that cannot be avoided. However, the case of Japan demonstrates that this need not contribute to problematic or pathological desires. To the fear that images of sexualized children, even fictional ones, naturalize “cognitive distortions,” the response must be that learning is a social process. This is precisely why the lifeworlds of fans, including *lolicon* fans, should not be “juridified” out of existence (McLelland forthcoming). It is in these communities, in interaction with one another, that meanings are negotiated. Universal standards will not prevent someone, somewhere from getting the wrong idea, and limiting public interaction may in even encourage it.

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¹ For example, on March 11, 2008, UNICEF Japan issued a statement calling for further tightening of child pornography laws in Japan, including the ban of sexual depictions of minors in manga, anime and computer games.

² According to Takatsuki Yasushi's fieldwork among fans, the peak age for a *lolicon* idol is 12, when secondary sex characteristics emerge (Takatsuki 2010: 14-15). As Takatsuki sees it, *lolicon* is different from pedophilia, which is directed at children before secondary sex characteristics emerge (Takatsuki 2010: 18-20). *Lolicon* also encompasses asexual desires, discussed below.

³ On February 24, 2010, a proposal was submitted to reform the Tokyo Youth Healthy Development Ordinance. The proposed reform included an amendment to article seven, which states that producers and proprietors are to avoid exposing youth to text and images that stimulate sexual feelings, promote cruelty, induce suicide or crimes or other things that might inhibit the healthy development. The proposed amendment concerned published materials, specifically sexual depictions of "non-existent youth" (*hijitsuzai seishōnen*). Non-existent youth refers to a depiction that the viewer can identify as underage through visual and textual indicators such as age, dress, personal belongings, school grade, background/setting and so on. What matters is what one can "recognize" (*ninshiki*) as a minor or sex act; the issue here is thought processes. The amendment received massive resistance from publishers, artists, academics and fans, but eventually passed on December 15, 2010 (self regulation mandated from April 1, 2011, and sales regulation enforced from July 1, 2011). While the reform bill removes problematic references to "non-existent minors," it in fact expands the target to any character, irrespective of age, engaged in "sexual or pseudo sexual acts that would be illegal in real life" or "sexual or pseudo sexual acts between close relatives whose marriage would be illegal" if presented in a manner that "glorifies or exaggerates" the acts in question. Fujimoto Yukari has called this the "Nonexistent (sex) crimes bill," stating "the logic is that any illegal sex act that would be subject to penalty should be regulated even when only drawn on paper." Translations are by Dan Kanemitsu and are available on his blog:

<<http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/05/bill-156-the-nonexistent-crimes-bill-fujimotos-analysis-translated/>>.

⁴ This statement was made by Asakawa Hideo of the Tokyo Metropolitan Office for Youth Affairs and Public Safety on December 9, 2010. For details, see <<http://togetter.com/li/77163>>.

⁵ Posted on her blog, translated and reposted by Kanemitsu on his blog:
<<http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/05/bill-156-the-nonexistent-crimes-bill-fujimotos-analysis-translated/>>.

⁶ Similar to what Naitō Chizuko calls the "loliconization phenomenon" (*rorikonka genshō*), which indicates "the commodification of children, young girls (*shōjo*), and young women as sexual symbols in society" (Naitō 2010: 328). Naitō also matches M. Gigi Durham's logic (Durham 2009: 129) in proposing that men who are unable to communicate with members of the opposite sex project "delusions" onto the empty symbol of the girl, who is in her innocence made to lack an autonomous will.

⁷ For further critique of Durham and media reports on sexualized children, see Thompson 2010.

⁸ Page numbers refer to the online version:

<<http://www.hawaii.edu/PCSS/biblio/articles/1961to1999/1999-pornography-rape-sex-crimes-japan.html>>.

⁹ Instances of sexual abuse in Japan are low, only 754 cases in 2000 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare: <http://www.uraoka.com/gyakutai/page36_b.PDF>) compared to 89,500 cases in the U.S. in 2000 (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: <www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/199298.pdf>). This is not a conclusive comparison, of course, as the size and population of the two countries is vastly different, and there is the concern of possible underreporting in Japan. However, the point stands. Despite criticism of Japan for its virtual content, North America hosts the majority of sites for real and pseudo child pornography – 48 percent compared to 7 percent in Asia (UK Internet Watch Foundation:

<<http://www.iwf.org.uk/resources/trends#Location>>).

¹⁰ Durham writes: “Little girls fit more easily into a conventional mold of female sexuality: a perspective in which she lacks authority over her own body and is therefore less threatening than any adult woman today. Because of this, little girls epitomize a patriarchal society’s ideal of compliant, docile sexuality” (Durham 2009: 129). This is a familiar critique of desire for *shōjo* in Japan. Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, for example, suggests that *lolicon* is the epitome of the “one-way street” (*ippō tsūkō*) of male sexual desire (quoted in Takatsuki 2010: 6). He writes, “[I]t is the *shōjo* who most perfectly satisfies the essential sexual urges of the male...because both socially and sexually the *shōjo* is utterly ignorant. And being ignorant, the *shōjo* – like little birds and dogs – symbolizes the total object, the object of play, and one that cannot express itself of its own accord” (quoted in Treat 1993: 363).

¹¹ Page numbers refer to the online version: <<http://www.ipce.info/ipceweb/Library/danger.htm>>.

¹² Quotes are from a draft obtained by the author. Many of these points came out at a public lecture titled “Australia’s Child-Abuse Materials Legislation, Internet Regulation and the Juridification of the Imagination,” held at The University of Queensland on November 9, 2010.

¹³ Where fans are aware of the extent of the law, anxiety exists from not knowing what images considered harmless by those inside the community might be considered harmful by those outside of it. The result is self-censorship and regulation, as well as marginalizing and discriminating against fans of media that might be deemed “obscene.” That is, the values of society at large are rearticulated into the fan community.

¹⁴ Personal interview, October 2, 2009.

¹⁵ “[C]haracters who we know from their histories in the narrative are adult may well *appear to be* under the age of 16 to those unfamiliar with the visual tropes of the genre” (McLelland 2005: 76).

¹⁶ Personal interview, February 26, 2010.

¹⁷ Personal interview, March 19, 2010. Saitō Tamaki and Honda Tōru elaborated on this point in separate interviews (February 26, 2010 and September 26, 2009, respectively).

¹⁸ Miyazaki Hayao’s *Future Boy Conan* (1978) featured an 11-year-old girl named Lana, another

character central to the early development of *lolicon*. The director became a favorite among *otaku* for his “three princesses:” Clarisse from *The Castle of Cagliostro*, Nausicaa from *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and Sheeta from *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986). Nausicaa is perhaps the most popular female character in anime history, spending 54 months at the No. 1 spot on the character rankings in *Animage* magazine. However, it is unclear how much Miyazaki condoned fan activities. In an interview, the director commented on the cuteness of his characters: “It’s difficult. They immediately become the subjects of *lolicon* fantasy. ... [T]here are too many people who shamelessly depict (female protagonists) as if they just want them as pets, and things are escalating more and more” (Miyazaki and Murakami 1988). It might be said that the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s was a time when there was still a gap between the desires of producers and consumers, which eroded with the rise of a new generation of fans who transitioned to creators. A ready example is Gainax, a major animation company well known for starting out as a group of fans who produced the cult-classic opening animation for the Daicon III festival in 1981, which features a *lolicon*-type character.

¹⁹ Others include *Manga Hot Milk*, *Melon Comic*, *Monthly Halfpflifta* and so on.

²⁰ Those involved with these works, like Miyazaki, tend to denounce older male viewers or the “*otaku*” audience. Satō Toshihiko, president of Production Reed and planner of the original *Magical Princess Minky Momo*, claims that he had no knowledge of such fans until after the anime was already on air, and calls them and their activities “disgusting” (*kimochi warui*) (personal interview, July 28, 2010).

²¹ *Manga Burikko* was important for building fan consciousness, community and pride. For example, a quiz in the September 1983 issue is titled “*Lolicon* Mania Exam: How Much of a *Lolicon* are You?”

²² Of a total 59 responses, 17 indicated that the respondent was 17 years old. It is safe to assume that there was a fairly low response rate, and that the older readers (often endearingly referred to in the pages of the magazine as “*ojisan*,” or middle-aged men) are underrepresented.

²³ It is difficult to know for certain if there was a subtitle before this, or if that subtitle was different, as the April and May 1983 issues of *Manga Burikko* were not available at the Contemporary Manga Library in Waseda when archival research was conducted in 2010. There are no subtitles on the covers of magazines dated March 1983 or before.

²⁴ Many readers apparently commented that her breasts were simply “too big.” That is, she was too physical, too womanly, too real. Kawai was 18 years old at the time, and her semi-nude photos appeared right after a section titled “Uniforms are Correct! Sailor-suit Illustration Collection,” which featured young, ethereal girls (most in school uniforms) drawn by fan-favorite artists. The contrast with Kawai’s spread is stark, perhaps accounting to some extent for the tension and negative reaction.

²⁵ Saitō interprets this as a major turning point, as it signaled that *lolicon* fans did not need, or even want, realistic depictions (personal interview, February 26, 2010).

²⁶ According to Itō Kimio (personal interview, February 19, 2010). There was a renaissance in *shōjo* manga in the 1970s, and a number of men were attracted to the avant-garde works of “the Magnificent Forty-

Niners,” and well as the “girly” (*otomechikku*) works of Mutsu A-ko.

²⁷ According to Itō Gō (personal interview, March 19, 2010).

²⁸ The prime example of a female artist having a major impact on the forms of male desire is Takahashi Rumiko, author of the manga *Urusei Yatsura* (1978-1987). The main female character, Lum, is remembered as a sex symbol in Japan, and an important one for young men growing up in the 1980s. Her image often appears in fan art submitted to *Manga Burikko*.

²⁹ Nagayama Kaoru argues that erotic manga in general is not simply pornography by and for men, as women were incorporated into the creative process in order to sell product (Nagayama 2003: 43). Though creators are almost equally divided between men and women, there are women writing as men and men writing as women; others write using names that are gender ambiguous, for example the names of objects (Nagayama 2003: 43-44). Nagayama argues that you cannot tell if the author is male or female simply by the visual style. He concludes: “There is no other genre where the sex of creators is as chaotic” (Nagayama 2003: 44).

³⁰ Nagayama suggests that since the *lolicon* boom in the 1980s, there has been a marked preference for identification with cute girls rather than “sweaty men” (Nagayama 2003: 52). Indeed, he goes so far as to say that the history of erotic manga has been not about men’s pleasures, but rather depictions of female pleasure, and it is natural that men would eventually want to be on the receiving end.

³¹ Personal interview, March 19, 2010. Carol Clover observes a similar dynamic among male fans of horror films, who at times identify with emotional females rather than their monstrous attackers (Clover 1992).

³² Resonating with Honda’s critique of gender roles and the emergence of two-dimensional love in Japan in the 1970s (Honda 2005: 66-81).

³³ For example, in 1991, police took 74 people into custody for possession of obscene manga.

³⁴ The ban on depictions of pubic hair was partially lifted in 1991, leading to a string of “hair nude” photo books, but manga and anime did not qualify as artistic exceptions. While child pornography was outlawed in Japan in 1999, manga, anime and games escaped the regulation, preserving the market.

³⁵ For example, a man who murdered a seven-year-old girl in Nara Prefecture in 2005 was suspected of being a “*lolicon*.” After wide media speculation, which disseminated to the public the image of *lolicon* as pathological, it was revealed that the man had no interest in anime or manga. On June 9, 2008, the *Evening Fuji* newspaper identified a mass-murderer as sexually repressed and a “*lolicon*.” This had nothing to do with his crime (a massacre of random people in broad daylight in Akihabara), and was only based on a coworker’s testimony. Later that year, a man murdered a five-year-old girl in Chiba Prefecture, and the media reminded Japan that he was a fan of the *Pretty Cure* anime franchise, which targets young girls but features sexy female character designs. In these cases and others, consumption habits were explicitly or implicitly linked to heinous crimes in reactionary mass media reporting.

³⁶ Personal interview, February 26, 2010.

³⁷ Akagi Akira agrees with Saitō that for Japanese growing up since the 1970s, fiction and reality already

existed as parallel spaces of possibility (Akagi 1993: 233-234). For example, media and anime characters were very much a real part of everyday life. The private spaces of fantasy began to overlap in fiction such as *lolicon*, which made them into a “communal fantasy” (*kyōdō gensō*), both public and commercial. Fiction was real, but also completely separate from reality. Volker Grassmuck, commenting on representations of sex in manga and anime in general, writes: “Maybe they represent pure, abstract sex, the simulation of stimulation” (Grassmuck 1990: 9).

³⁸ This point was expanded in a personal interview (February 26, 2010), where Saitō went so far as to suggest that it is the reality of pedophilia in the United States and Europe that makes it impossible to approach as fantasy. Honda made a similar comment (personal interview, September 26, 2009). This remarkable reversal has it that it is precisely the lack of real child abuse in Japan that allows for fictional representations of sexualized children.

³⁹ *Lolicon* is certainly an example of this. Azuma Hiroki identifies a global trend towards approaching sex and violence as separate, and *lolicon* as a resistant trend where attention is drawn to, and pleasure drawn from, power differentials (Azuma, Saitō and Kotani 2003: 180). For Azuma, *lolicon* is treated much the same way as terrorism, because it builds on a fear of violence, only sexual rather than political or religious in nature.

⁴⁰ Though *lolicon* is not necessarily always pornographic, and in the form of “*moe-style*” (*moe-kei*) works today consists mostly of mild eroticism (for example, glimpses of panties rather than explicit sex or vaginal penetration).