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***From Lolita to Where Have  
You Been?***

**The hypersexualization of the female  
teenager in Nabokov's novel & Oates's short  
story**

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**From *Lolita* to *Where Have You Been?* The  
hypersexualization of the female teenager in Nabokov's  
novel & Oates's short story**

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**Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:**

This essay will consist in a study of the hypersexualization of female teenagers in North American literature. The examples that will be analyzed are Nabokov's novel *Lolita* and Oates's short story *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*.

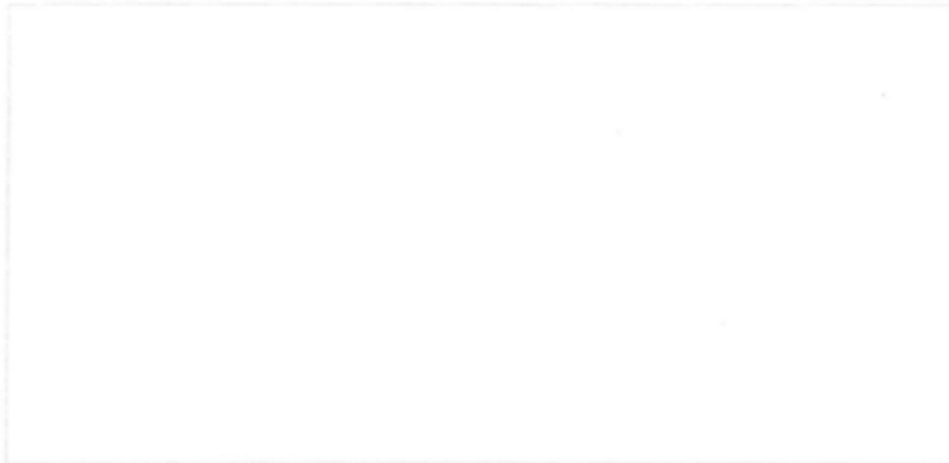
In order to clarify if the female teenagers of these stories (*Lolita* and *Connie*, respectively) are actually represented in a hypersexualized way, we will focus our attention in certain points of the narrative (e.g: the description of the female teenagers and the representation of female teenagehood) which will be a key to understand the role and portrayal of men and women in the North American society reflected in *Lolita* and *Where Have You Been?*.

Moreover, we will also observe how the male protagonists (Humbert Humbert and Arnold Friend, respectively) see the girls in order to figure out if their obsessions and the justification of the sexual aggressions they finally commit (and their apparently lack of regret) are biased by the patriarchal society in which all the characters inhabit.



Finally, another point we will take into consideration in this essay is the difference between the representation of men and women in these stories, which is displayed in several evidences such as: the age gap between the male and the female protagonists or the fact that these adolescents are the victims of the assaults perpetrated by men.

To sum up, our purpose is to study how female teenagehood is depicted in these examples of North American literature.

SRA. DECANA DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)



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## Index:

1. INTRODUCTION .....	p. 6
2. HYPERSEXUALIZATION.....	p.8
2.2 The Hypersexualization of Women.....	p.10
2.3 Effects of the Hypersexualization of Women on Girls .....	p.12
3. “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been”.....	p.15
3.1. Joyce Carol Oates (brief biographical information) .....	p.15
3.2. Connie (description, role, interests).....	p.16
3.3. Arnold Friend (description) .....	p.17
3.4. Relationship and aggression.....	p.19
3.5. Social Context/Reaction .....	p.23
4. Lolita.....	p.26
4.1. Vladimir Nabokov (brief biographical information) .....	p.27
4.2. Lolita (description, role, interests) .....	p.28
4.3. Humbert (description).....	p.31
4.4. Relationship and aggression.....	p.32
4.5. Social Context/Reaction (misogyny, self-justification, etc.) .....	p.36
5. COMPARISON:	
5.1. Hypersexualization of the two female teenagers .....	p.39
5.2. Arnold’s and Humbert’s reactions.....	p.43
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	p.46
7. Biographical References.....	p.48

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This essay focuses on the analysis of the hypersexualization of the female teenager characters in Nabokov's novel *Lolita* and Oates's short story: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?". With this aim in mind, we will analyze the depiction of these female characters and their relationship with the main male characters in order to explore if they are actually represented in a hypersexualized way and how this affects their behavior and the sexual aggressions that are inflicted upon them.

We have selected these two literary works because both depict the relationship between an adult man and a female teenager, who suffers the traumatic experience of being sexually abused by the adult male character. The term: "Lolita" is colloquially employed to refer to a sexually precocious teenager so, in our analysis of the novel, we will explain the origin of this concept and discuss to what extent it actually suits the main female character of the novel.

"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is narrated from Connie's point of view, which allow us to study how she plays a part in her society in order to determine the instances of unequal gender relations present in the narrative.

The choice of the hypersexualization of the female teenagers as the main topic for this essay respond to an interest in feminism, gender studies and teenage culture. We live in a patriarchal society which has traditionally denied the relevance of the female experience and subdued women's interests to male desires: many of these patriarchal attitudes are learnt in childhood and began to manifest themselves more openly in adolescence, especially those attitudes related to sexual behavior, so in order to discover the basis of some prevailing misogynist ideas we are going to analyze and compare these two North American literary masterpieces, depicting the traumatic experience of sexual initiation of two teenager girls.

In this essay, we have combined the task of analysis of the primary texts and the reading of bibliographical resources of two different kinds: studies on the main topic of this essay, that is, the hypersexualization of women and teenagers, gender violence, etc. have been especially useful in the elaboration chapter 2, while in the following chapters we have combined the reference to these scholarly works with studies focused on the critical analysis of the two literary works. Among the

first kind literary resources the report of the American Psychological Association on the Sexualization of Girls (2007) and the article: “Endangered Girls and Incendiary Objects: Unpacking the discourse on Sexualization” (2008) have been especially useful, while in the case of the second group the book *Where are you going, where have you been?* that belongs to the Women writers’ collection from Rutgers University Press (cop.1994) along with Quayle’s article: “Lolita is Dolores Haze: The ‘real’ child and the ‘real’ body in *Lolita*” (2009) have been remarkably inspiring.

This essay is divided into four main parts with the purpose of retailing the information in the most clear way. After devoting chapter 1 to this introduction, in chapter 2, we explain the meaning of hypersexualization, how we understand this term, its evolution throughout history and the consequences it has for the normal development of the teenagers. Then, chapter 3 focuses on the analysis of Joyce Carol Oates’s “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” and chapter 4 deals mainly with Nabokov’s *Lolita*. Both chapter 3 and 4 are divided into five sections: the first is a short introduction to each author, followed by a description and analysis of the role of the two main characters in the next two sections, the fourth section focuses on the explanation of the relationship between them and the aggression, while in the fifth one the social context and the reaction of the rest of the characters to these events are analyzed in order to determine how this reaction reflects a patriarchal society.

Finally, chapter 5 will consist in a comparison between “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” and *Lolita* in which we scrutinize topics such as: the hypersexualization of the two teenagers and Arnold’s and Humbert’s aggression by explaining the similarities and differences in the way these events happen in the two literary works.

To sum up, our purpose is to study the representation of female teenagehood and the ways in which the hypersexualization of the girls construct unequal relations with the male protagonists and affects our perception of the characters and the events exhibited in both writings.

## 2. HYPERSEXUALIZATION

### 2.1 The Term: Sexualization and Hypersexualization

As we said before, in this essay we will analyze how “hypersexualization” appears in Nabokov’s *Lolita* and Carol Oates’s short story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”. First of all, we will explain what we understand as “hypersexualization” in this essay in order to offer a glimpse of how we will look at it in the literary writings we are going to study. In her thesis, Eeltink explains ‘hypersexualization’ in these terms:

Though extensively researched, a universal definition of hypersexualization seems hard to find. This has to do with the nature of sexualization as a term and a concept. This term emerged as a portmanteau of the words “sexual socialization” and was originally meant to signify three aspects of sexual maturation: “development of a gender identity; acquisition of sexual skills, knowledge and values; and development of sexual attitudes or disposition to behave” (Eeltink 6).

This definition is not adequate for us because we consider that the social relationships Lolita and Connie establish with the other male protagonists are not part of ‘normal’ teenage desires of growing up and experiment sexuality. We assert it due to several reasons such as: the generational gap existent between teenagers and adults, unequal relations of power present in these heterosexual intercourse, or submission of the teenagers to the men’s desires.

In order to understand what we actually mean by ‘hypersexualization’ we will pay attention to the explanation provided by the American Psychological Association (APA). In 2007, the APA formed the Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, which published an influential report on sexualization. They defined sexualization as follows:

Sexualization occurs when [1.] a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, 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; [4.] and/or sexuality is

inappropriately imposed upon a person”. All four conditions need not be present; any one is an indication of sexualization. (1)

Throughout this essay, we will follow this concept of sexualization because we consider it suits perfectly what can be seen in both stories. However, we prefer to use the term ‘hypersexualization’ to emphasize the strongly sexualized vision of the girls, the premature age when this process starts and the negative consequences for the teenagers.

As we said before, hypersexualization implies a deviation from the normal progress of growing up and sexual development due to the fact that the characters’ thoughts, attitude and behaviors are biased and distorted by the rigid patriarchal society. The addition of the prefix ‘hyper’ meaning: “over, beyond, over much, above measure” (OED) to the original term “sexualization”, usually employed in the bibliographical references in this essay, serves to remark the negative and premature impact that this kind of sexualization has on Lolita and Connie and thus fits more accurately the purpose of this essay.

As already noticed in Eeltink’s definition of sexualization, part of the process implies a normal development that constitutes a stage of the teenager’s progress into adulthood. However, when it has a negative impact on one’s personal evolution the implications transcend the limits of what is simply known as “social sexualization” which again justifies our preference for the term ‘hypersexualization’ to imply more meanings that stand apart from simply sexualization.

Our main goal is to remark the negative impact that hypersexualization has on Lolita and Connie since it forces both teenagers to act as sexually mature women only to satisfy a selfish patriarchal fantasy. The biased vision of female sexuality is subtly entrenched in society up to the point that it justifies and promotes a general state of hypersexualization in which the limits of consent, childhood, innocence and healthy relationships between men and women are blurred. In other words, sexuality is not bad because it constitutes an important aspect of human nature but hypersexualization of women leads to a dangerous consequence named: “sexual objectification”.

People are fundamentally social, and an important aspect of their sociality revolves around sex. Sexual objectification – seeing or treating another person as a sexualized object – have long been identified within philosophy as one of the darker sides of human sexuality. (Loughnan and Pacilli 309)

This type of objectification is an indication of hypersexualization. They are both complementary aspects entrenched in a complicated structure of oppression named patriarchy. Moreover,

hypersexualization is linked with heteronormativity which is the imposition of heterosexual relationships as an obligatory requirement for men and women.

Apart from the fact that heteronormativity limits every other option to express human expression of sexuality and affection, it has an intimate relation with the topics we want to analyze in this essay due to its construction of male and female roles:

Feminist scholarship on compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity and heterogender consistently finds that tradition gender arrangements, beliefs and behaviors reinforce women's sexual subordination to men. (...) Heteronormative discourses consistently link female sexuality with passivity, vulnerability and submissiveness, and male sexuality with dominance, aggression and desire. (Hlavka 3)

For all the reasons explained in this chapter, hypersexualization is the central topic that will be analyzed in Nabokov's *Lolita* and Carol Oates's "Where Have You Been?". In the following point, we will talk about the relationship between patriarchy and hypersexualization of women in order to show how patriarchal societies reduce women to a sexual role.

## **2.2 The Hypersexualization of Women**

Hypersexualization of women is not an exclusive event present in literary works like the ones we analyze in this essay. Actually, patriarchy is intimately linked to the hypersexualization of women and the imposition of constricting gender roles. In this sense, patriarchy restricts women to family sphere and the satisfaction of masculine sexual desire.

Western societies have always been dominated by patriarchy. In other words, rights and liberty were associated with men while women had a subordinated role in society. As Kaweci says: "throughout history, women's bodies have been viewed as a commodity for sexual pleasure" (2).

Over the years, women could liberate from patriarchal restrictions in order to be more independent from men. Nowadays, Western women are allowed to study, work, participate in politics, and, definitely, they have the agency to rule their lives. Nonetheless, society is still terribly misogynist and female sexuality constitutes an etiquette that defines and submits women to a heteronormative, male-centered gaze.

Although equal rights for men and women are legally guaranteed, women are sexually objectified and pressured to fit impossible beauty standards with the purpose of satisfying heterosexual male desire. Society praises only young, slim, pretty girls, naively subdued to men's wishes and seductive

enough to provoke lust. This means that women are judged only by sexual standards. Therefore, women are encouraged to participate in sexual activities while being also considered as ‘gatekeepers’ of masculine libido: “There is often a sexual double standard within a culture when girls and women are portrayed in a sexualized manner. This double standard occurs when women are discouraged from being sexually active, while men are encouraged to be sexually active. The result is that girls and women are limited and affected in ways that men are not. (Rideout, *Abstract*)”.

Strikingly, media represents women in a sexualized way and praises the benefits of enjoying sexuality. Not so long ago, society was encouraged to be chaste, family life was highly valued and sexual representations were totally absent from the media. Lately, technological changes such as the invention of the TV in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the recent popularization of the Internet became new means for patriarchy to spread its message.

The achievement of more civilian rights went together with a liberal attitude towards sex. Contraceptive methods became highly available so it is easy to enjoy a healthy sexuality without compromise. Sexual representations are not a taboo for media anymore. Moreover, Internet and social networks allow younger generations to have access to pornographic content. Even though information and liberty are good, this over-representation of sex turned into the hypersexualization of women and girls.

The socialization of girls and boys (...) contributes to the ways in which males and females are treated differently by society. (...) Sexual objectification is more prevalent for women. Frederickson, Hendler, Nilsen, O’Barr and Roberts (2011) reflect that adolescent girls’ and women’s bodies are perpetually the focus of sociocultural messages that emphasize their bodies and compare their bodies to often unattainable ideals. (...) Further, it has been found that women self-objectify more often than men do, which supports the notion that women are socialized by society to scrutinize their own bodies as objects, the way that others do. (Sibley 7)

We have improved only in certain aspects such as: accessibility to information and liberty of expression. Patriarchy still resides in almost every depiction of mainstream female sexuality, imposing in girls and boys restrictive gender roles. The message differs a little bit from the past but the meaning is still the same: women are relegated to heteroromantic, sexual roles. Even though women have economic independence and we do not need male sustenance anymore, female liberty is strongly feared and subtle great efforts are made in order to restrict women’s agency and blame every attempt of individuality and liberation from patriarchy.

In this context, we talk about hypersexualization and its harmful effects for women and girls. If misogyny prevails in society, then gender violence and other attacks exclusively directed towards women will be justified so girls still have a secondary function in society. Nowadays, this role is masked under the appraisal of sexualization. Therefore, women have not achieved yet a state of total liberty in which we are not blamed, judged or imposed stereotyped expectations.

## **2.3 Effects of the Hypersexualization of Women on Girls**

Until now, we have talked about how the hypersexualization of women and its manifestations (gender violence, imposition of gender roles, sexual assaults, sexual objectification) are rooted in patriarchy. Henceforth, we will explain the effects of the hypersexualization of women on girls in order to analyze how the development of girlhood is determined by an excessive sexualization and its implications in girls' lives.

Adolescence is a necessary step in human maturation because teenagers start to be more independent from their parents in order to develop their own opinion and a strong sense of one's self. In this period, they establish strong bonds with their peers and some of them get involved in romantic relationships. Besides, sexual desire arouses in them for the first time so they tend to be curious about everything related to sex: "For better or worse, adolescence is an inescapable part of the life cycle. Although many parents, teachers, politicians and adolescents themselves might prefer that sexuality were not involved in the process of moving from childhood to adulthood, it is. (Gender Matters 4)". Apart from biological reasons, the differences between men and women imposed by patriarchy, teenagehood is not the same for boys and girls. Girlhood has specific characteristics related to socialization which are only present in females.

Recent research suggests that adolescence is the crucial moment in the development of psychological disempowerment for many women. As they enter adolescence, many girls lose an ability to speak (...) as they come under cultural pressure to be "nice girls" and ultimately "good women" in adolescence. When their bodies take on women's contours, girls begin to be seen as sexual, and sexuality becomes an aspect of adolescent girls' lives. (...) Many girls have demonstrated the ironic tendency to silence their own thoughts (...) for the sake of relationships, when what they think (...) threatens to be disruptive. At adolescence, the energy needed for resistance to crushing conventions of femininity often begins to get siphoned off for the purpose of maintaining cultural standards that stand between women and their empowerment. (Tolman, *Doing Desire* 324 325)

Adolescence is a confusing stage in girls' lives because they experience lots of changes and new expectations in such a short period of time that sometimes they have lots of doubts. This is normal because growing up makes us feel insecure at first but adults are not always able to deal with teenagers' actual needs. Besides, the hypersexualized depictions of women in the media send contradictory messages to girls.

While sexual feelings are likely normative among adolescent girls, girls rarely get the message that such feelings are normal, to be expected and respected. (...) Much of this relies on how girls are socialized to understand themselves within a framework of compulsory heterosexuality where they are considered passive in relation to their own desires, and responses in relation to the desires of their ostensibly male partners. (Ball 124)

Moreover, authors such as Egan and Hawkes state that: “[sexualizing] images have a catalytic quality that impede normative maturation: they impair the ‘mental functions and cognitive processes necessary’ for healthy sexual relationships” (qtd in Ball 126). In any case, the hypersexualization of women has other harmful effects for girls: “Exposure to sexually-objectifying media has been linked with self-objectification, body surveillance, body shame, and anxiety over appearance, as well as with an acceptance of the normative belief that women are sexual objects. (Goodin et al 2)”

Actually, these features constitute violence against women even if the girls themselves are the ones who engage in this misogynist behavior. Hatred towards themselves and subordination to male interests are terrible attacks on girls' welfare. Nonetheless, the association between sexual appeal and success made by mainstream media encourage girls to accept hypersexualization as a path to happiness. The problem is that their lack of experience turns them into a defenseless state against other forms of violence.

Further, it has been argued that pre-teens are particularly vulnerable to this barrage of society's messages because they are in the process of developing identities. At a time when self-esteem can be fragile, girls might be drawn toward certain sexualized roles that seem to promise popularity, attractiveness, maturity, power, and social acceptance. (Goodin et al 2)

We need to take into account that hypersexualization not only distorts girls' self-esteem and their expectations, a sexualized environment leads teenagers to an early initiation in sexual activities which not always fulfill the characteristics of healthy sexuality (it means, practicing safe sex in a desired, consensual and respectful way towards the partner).

Typically, as adolescents become older their sexualized media consumption increases and they gradually develop more advanced sexual behavior and permissive attitudes. (...) The more sexualized media adolescents consume, the more advanced they will be in their sexual development. (...) Specific to sexualized media consumption, adolescents may acquire gender roles, knowledge about sexuality, a sexual behavior repertoire, and sexual attitudes based on sexualized media images. (Overbeek et al 1427-1428)

The truth is that: "dominant cultural conceptions of female sexuality as passive, devoid of desire, and subordinate to male (...) desires make it difficult for women to negotiate safe sex". (Tolman, *Gender Matters* 6). Thus, girls tend to imitate attitudes that are socially rewarded, and, as women suffer hypersexualization but teenagers are not able to understand its harmful consequences, they follow sexualized behaviors in order to feel more popular or attractive: sometimes girls engage in sexual activities with boys, not because they actually desire it but as a way to become part of what society deems as normal.

Although teenagers sometimes display a rebellious attitude, they have a strong urge to fit in and understand their role in society. Hypersexualization influences their inner vision and attitude towards their peers. As hypersexualization is extremely misogynist, it leads men to perpetrate specific forms of sexual violence against women such as: unwanted sexual advances, harassment or getting hit on.

If violence against women is extended and socially accepted, it is very difficult for young girls such as Connie and Lolita to establish healthy relationships with men. On the other side, misogynist believes lead men to start abusive relationships with girls.

To sum up, enjoying sexuality is a good thing when it's something you choose in a free way. But, when hypersexualization of women alters female and male attitudes it is necessary to develop a critical point of view with the objective to create a more egalitarian society for men and women. Henceforth, we will start the analysis of the literary works.

### 3. “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been”

In this short story, Joyce Carol Oates explores the topic of the female teenagehood through Connie’s eyes, a young girl which enjoys going out with her friends, attracting the male attention and is always arguing with her mother due to their opposite visions of life. What makes this tale stand out from other narratives which focus on teenagehood is the sudden split between Connie’s dreams and her brutal crash with “adult reality”.

Among the four hundred stories published during her career, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” remains the best known and most widely discussed. It was inspired by a magazine story about a teenage killer in Arizona. Oates’s story was first published in the literary magazine *Epoch* in autumn 1966.

In recent years, it has been reprinted as part of the feminist canon in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985), edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Furthermore, Oates has drawn attention to the centrality of the story in her literary development by using it as the overall title of two collections of her short stories.

As Elaine Showalter has accurately noticed, “Where Are You Going” contains many elements that have been characteristic in Oates’s work, including the blurring of realism and the supernatural, and the effort to bear witness “for those who can’t speak for themselves”. The story also takes up troubling subjects that have continued to occupy her in her fiction: the romantic longings and limited options of adolescents, especially girls; the sexual victimization of women; the psychology of serial killers; and the American obsession with violence. (3-4)

Before our analysis of “Where Are You Going”, we will give some information about the author’s trajectory.

#### 3.1. Joyce Carol Oates

Oates is among the most distinguished writers of her generation. She was born on June 16, 1938, in rural Lockport (New York). She grew up in a Catholic family and her parents were both devoted readers who supported their daughter’s emerging intellectual and literary gifts.

When she was fifteen, she submitted her first novel to a publisher but it was rejected. Eventually, Oates won all the school prizes, including a New York State Regents Scholarship to Syracuse University. There she devoured philosophy and literature, especially Nietzsche, Kafka and Faulkner, and graduated class valedictorian, *summa cum laude*, and Phi Beta Kappa in 1960.

At this stage of her life, Oates was planning to become an English professor; she entered graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, where she met and married another student, Raymond Smith. She was beginning her doctoral work at Rice University when one of her stories was selected for the honor roll of Best American Short Stories, and she gave up academic criticism for fiction, although she has continued to teach throughout her career.

Over the decades, Oates has established herself as a highly prolific writer of dozens of books that include novels, short story collections, young adult fiction, plays, poetry and essays. Her first published book was the 1963 story collection *By the North Gate*, followed by her debut novel *With Shuddering Fall* in 1964. Inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1978, Oates has won scores of awards over the course of her career, including the Prix Femina Etranger and the Pushcart Prize. Currently, she is still alive and is one of the most prolific writers of North American Literature.

### **3.2. Connie (description, role, interests)**

Connie is the protagonist of Joyce Carol Oates's tale "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?". The plot focuses on her life, dreams and expectations which are broken due to her encounter with Arnold Friend. She is depicted neither as a princess nor a heroine. She is only a typical fifteen-year-old teenager of her time. She is full of daydreams about love influenced by the popular music she is constantly listening and tries to live according to her fantasies.

The constant obsession with physical beauty displayed by Connie functions in the story as an instance of hypersexualization as defined by the APA: "[hypersexualization] occurs when a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics". (1)

Moreover, following the APA indications, in this case hypersexualization manifests itself by *interpersonal contribution* because the excessive importance that Connie gives to her physical appearance is reinforced by her mother, whose negative comments, contribute to Connie's insecurity the teenager would never admit this, due to her typical teenage fighting attitude against her mother. Connie, seeks to be beautiful in order to achieve the male attention, which is not only related with the emergence of Connie's sexuality.

Unconsciously, the protagonist is seeking the self-confidence she actually lacks in the boys that find her pretty. The conflict in this story happens because Connie is very young so she doesn't understand how the adult world really works and her adolescent naivete makes her oblivious of the harmful consequences of the patriarchal hypersexualized society in which she lives.

Moreover, Connie is curious and rebel because she wants more liberty than the one offered at home: she wants to experience how it is to be a seductive woman but she lacks the necessary guides to have a safe experience in the adult world.

That her laugh is “high-pitched and nervous” when she is “anywhere that was not home” betrays the fact that Connie, like all young people, needs help as she begins to move from the past to the future, as she begins the perilous inward journey towards maturity. This journey is an essential part of adolescents’ search for personal identity, and though it is a quest that they must undertake by themselves, traditionally it has been the responsibility of culture to help by providing symbolic maps of the territory through which they will travel, territory that lies on the other side of consciousness. (Schulz and Rockwood 115-116)<sup>1</sup>

In the story, Connie feels encouraged to be a superficial girl who adores shallow distractions such as: popular music, hanging out with friends and being attractive to men – to the extent that these teenage interests constitute her only life directory and aspirations: “Connie’s ‘trashy daydreams’ are shaped by popular culture, and she sees her little world through the rosy lens of romantic films. The drive-in restaurant is a ‘sacred building’ and Connie does not imagine anything bigger or better in the city. The shopping plaza and the moviehouse are enough for her; and adolescent sex has been just ‘the way it was in movies and promised in songs’”. (Showalter 17)<sup>2</sup>

Fantasies, the only motivation in the protagonist’s life, will soon be confronted with the patriarchal society and the adult world she wishes to enter but also scares her. The dark side of her unconscious nightmares and desires will abruptly enter her life starred by Arnold Friend.

### 3.3. Arnold Friend

Arnold Friend is both a mysterious figure and the antagonist that confronts Connie’s life. Moreover, he is also a product of collective imagery. For the construction of this character, Carol Oates was inspired by an American teenage murderer: Charles Schmid, also known as “The Pied Piper of Tucson”, who, as an idol of the local youth in Tucson, became the love goal of several girls and employed this closeness to kill them.

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1 These words belong to the book: Oates, Joyce Carol. *Where are you going, where have you been?*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, cop. 1994

2 This quotation belongs to the book: Oates, Joyce Carol. *Where are you going, where have you been?*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, cop. 1994

According to Attwood: “Sex is increasingly linked to youth and consumer cultures”<sup>3</sup> and everything that surrounds Arnold Friend represents this. He tries to seem younger in order to have intercourse with girls. With that purpose, he imitates what is in vogue among young people, and becomes the incarnation of Connie’s fantasies and the male teenage ideal promoted in the songs and movies she worships. The description of his looks, the gold convertible car and his way of talking reminds us what was on trend at the time this story is settled.

At first sight, Connie confuses him with the kind of boys she normally meets because he wears the typical jeans, white shirt and black boots all of them seem to dress. But still, there are flaws in his appearance: “The inadequacy of his disguise – the slang just a little out of date, the makeup that covers his face but not his neck” (“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” 96)<sup>4</sup> which make Connie intuit in a terrifying way the impending danger that is approaching her.

Another remarkable feature is that he walks and stands up with difficulty giving the impression that he wears something in his boots to hide the fact he is actually a short man. This could also happen because he has paws instead of feet. In other words, he might be an infernal creature used to walk on all fours. Similarly, he is linked with death. His threats suggest more and more definitely that Connie is to die.

Additionally, he clearly represents a sexual threat for her taking a form like that of her boyfriends and proposing to become her lover. The numbers of the “secret code” painted in his car also carry a sexual meaning, for they add up to 69. Ironically, all his sexual prattle terrifies Connie because, due to her lack of experience, she doesn’t expect lust to be so vulgar and straightforward.

Thus, the shocking and confident sexual directness of Friend contrasts sharply with the “caresses of love” Connie dreamed of before Friend pulled into her drive. Arnold Friend also exhibits some of the characteristics typical of a common man, raised in a misogynistic, patriarchal and consumerist society. That is why he is used to think and act according to the premise that money, youth and physical appearance will enable him to fulfill all his wishes.

He is the product of a superficial and paternalistic society which subordinates women to masculine desires and sees youth as an almost sacred value, and he himself is deeply influenced by hypersexualization since, in an unconscious way, he merely esteems himself in terms of beauty, physical force and sexual attractiveness. His main wish is to be perceived by girls as an erotic man.

3 These words are taken from: Attwood F. “Sexed Up: Theorizing the Sexualization of Culture.” *Sexualities* 9, no. 1 (2006) (4)

4 Hereafter cited as: “Where Have You Been”

Besides, he is entirely concerned about his libido. We appreciate this in the fact that his speech is exclusively related to sex.

He speaks in the form of puns, lyrical rhythms that remind us of popular songs, threats and insinuations with the only purpose of : “coming inside you where it’s all secret” (“Where Have You Been” 40). These evidences reduce Arnold Friend to an example of male dominance, driven only by sexual impulses. Definitely, he is only a hypersexualized creature up to the point we don’t know anything about him that is not related to his gender or lust.

Even if he pretends so, Arnold Friend is not a teenager like Connie, he is an adult man who uses a masculine dominant attitude to disguise that his inner self is perverted because of his obsession with youth and popular culture. He is the living form of a distorted adolescent dream turned into a nightmare by the uncontrolled patriarchal forces that ruled the society.

As a consequence, his character is empty since it has been deprived of a complete personality and his purpose in the story is to represent the empty moral values caused by the pervasive tendency to hypersexualization which constitutes the turning point of Connie’s coming-of-age and the beginning of the confrontation between these two characters that will be analyzed in the following points.

### **3.4. Relationship and aggression**

In this part we will analyze the relationship between the two protagonists which results in the aggression perpetrated by the male character. Connie and Arnold Friend lack the ability to establish healthy relationships based on mutual agreement and respect due to the effects of a combination of issues such as gender roles, paternalism and hypersexualization which influence them tending to reduce them to stereotypes that clash against each other.

The story recreates the restrictive effects of gender expectations on human beings, since they actually cut up the personal development of the characters and prevent them from living a healthy life full of goals and personal decisions. The female version of this situation is exemplified by Connie and the masculine one is represented by Friend. Their encounter provides us with the reality of what happens when the lack of true moral values in a society leads their members to collapse and to an uncertain destiny.

Throughout all her life, Connie has been protected by the people who surround her. As a teenager, Connie is sometimes insecure about herself and seeks the approval of other people, specially the boys she meets.

In contrast, Arnold Friend acts as a self-confident man which takes for sure that his misogynist and dominant attitude will enable him to get every girl he wants. His main purpose in the story is to be with Connie, whether she likes it or not.

That is why he exhibits a domineering disposition in his interactions with her due to his conviction that he, as a man, is able to bring every girl down to his lust: “girls are sexualised to a much greater degree than boys... That children themselves are now being sexualized in... ways that emphasise male domination seems likely only to increase the risk that ethical values that foster healthy relationships will be undermined, in particular for boys” (Bragg 1)

Both protagonists share this popular perspective. The constriction that gender roles impose on them is a motif of clash not of understanding, and the consumer values and hedonist pleasures associated to these roles cannot lead the characters to liberty, love or happiness.

In order to define Arnold Friend’s behavior towards Connie as gender violence or not, we will resort to the elements of domestic violence listed by Jaeline Jaffe in her article: “Domestic Violence and Abuse: Types, Signs, Symptoms, Causes, and Effects” where she explains in a very simple and clear way which conducts are characteristic of an abusive relationship.

Since their first encounter, we can see that Arnold Friend and Connie are in a completely unequal position

It was a boy (...) in a convertible jalopy painted gold. He stared at her and then his lips widened into a grin. Connie slit her eyes at him and turned away, but she couldn’t help glancing back and there he was, still watching her. He wagged a finger and laughed and said, “Gonna get you, baby”, and Connie turned away without Eddie noticing anything (“Where Have You Been” 28)

As we can see, he has a car which endows him with the possibility of traveling and the independence of moving with total freedom. Moreover, in this scene we have an example of verbal abuse because he is yelling at Connie in order to intimidate or embarrass her in front of the male partner. Not only his shouting is used to achieve that, he also employs a name-calling: “baby” and

refers to her in a possessive way: “gonna get you”. We must not confuse his attitude with flirting because he is being rude, unwanted and violent with her. <sup>5</sup>

The aggression starts when he parks his car in front of her house without being invited. To appear in someone’s house without being invited constitutes a form of symbolic violence: according to Jaffe, suddenly showing up where the victim is, excessive checking-up on the victim or stalking are elements of gender violence. The first time they see each other, they do not even talk, which suggests that his knowledge about her whereabouts has been achieved in a dubious way, so in this case an abusive relationship is announced from the beginning.

Another warning sign of abuse is the fact that he seems to know almost everything about Connie before even having had a conversation with her. Researching personal information about a person without her consent and with the purpose of control and limit the victim’s liberty is part of what we know as gender violence: “How do you know what my name is?” she said suspiciously. “It’s Connie.” “Maybe and maybe not.” “I know my Connie,” he said. (...) “I never said my name was Connie,” she said. “But I know what it is. I know your name and all about you, lots of things,”” (“Where Have You Been” 35).

In any case, the excessive amount of information Friend has about her life and the fact that he is exploiting it in order to frighten or harm her is a sign of gender violence. According to Jaffe, “Domestic abuse is not a result of losing control; domestic abuse is intentionally trying to control another person. The abuser is purposefully using verbal, non verbal or physical means in order to gain control over the other person”. (Jaffe 2)

As we can see, this is a perfect description of Friend’s attitude towards Connie through the whole tale. His interactions with her will increase in violence until Connie is so scared that she just wants him to leave. Finally, the abusive relationship will culminate in a sexual aggression that will determine the end of the story: “Arnold Friend said. “You don’t want your people in any trouble, do you?” (...) She cried out, she cried for her mother, she felt her breath start jerking back and forth in her lungs as if it were something Arnold Friend was stabbing her again and again with no tenderness”. (“Where Have You Been” 45). This is a very violent aggression since, although there

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5 The list of what constitutes non verbal abuse is present in: Jaffe, Jaeline. “Domestic Violence and Abuse: Types, Signs, Symptoms, Causes and Effects”. *ResearchGate* (uploaded on 07 January 2016) URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265155866> (3)

is not a detailed description of the rape, we are witnessing here that he has blackmailed and threaten to hurt her family. Thus, Connie is totally terrified and is not able to protect herself against him.

At the end, Arnold Friend isolates Connie from her relatives and friends because he has convinced her that there is no way out of the relationship. His threats of hurting her family and making her feel ashamed of what happened between them confuse Connie so much that she feels herself dissociated from reality.

According to Jaffe: excessive possessiveness, isolation from friends and family, sexual assault and preventing the spouse or intimate partner from working or choosing an occupation are characteristics of gender violence. (3, 4, 6). These few words constitute everything Arnold Friend has inflicted on Connie throughout the entire story and at the end there is no evidence that this situation is going to stop. Moreover, there is no alternative for her than this abusive relationship. Perhaps this is the biggest aggression perpetrated against Connie in the tale.

The protagonist is so terrified and desperate that she will follow Friend's orders in an automatic way believing that love is her final destiny. Connie is not able to identify or handle the fact of being raped due to several issues such as, her youth and innocence or a patriarchal society which accuses women of being responsible for suffering sexual aggression instead of blaming the rapists. Thus, Connie is lost at the end of the story because she feels unable to trust anybody apart from Arnold Friend.

The protagonist is left only with the consolation of old memories and past hopes to deal with the horrible truth of being abandoned by the whole society after a terrible rape. The incarnation of her romantic dreams is actually the one who destroyed her and is never going to care about her. This is the sad reality which Connie confronts at the ending.

It is really curious and striking that societal divisions of gender, hypersexualization and the ideals promoted by the songs and movies Connie worship create individuals so devoid of any ability to develop an independent behavior, think by themselves and being adults in a proper way. The truth is that both of them are enslaved, in different ways, by sexual desire and the role models they follow.

### 3.5. Social Context/Reaction

In this section, we will give a general view about the society in which the story takes place and an analysis of the events that happen in the tale. We are in front of a North American typical scenery settled in the 1960s, a decade of revolution and change in politics, music and society.

Although “Where Have You Been” is the story of a rebellious teenager against her mother, this situation shows more than a stereotypical adolescent narrative. Connie’s despise of family life is not only a typical teenage symptom, but also a manifestation of an unconscious fear caused by women’s lack of opportunities in society. Unintentionally, the protagonist sees her mother and her sister as negative role models she would be afraid to follow due to the fact that she feels more free when she is away from family life.

In “Where Are You Going”, Connie is eager to separate from the dull domestic world of her mother and sister, but also plays out a charade of conflict with her mother that masks an uneasy intimacy and identity. Connie fears that life is taking her to a moment in which she too will be scuffling around in old bedroom slippers with nothing but photos to remind her of her adolescent flowering, nothing but a tired, silent husband to remind her of the sweet caresses of love. (Showalter 16)

At that time, Connie was not the only woman who did not agree with women’s role in society. Due to the difference of age, her mother was raised in other historical context which is the root of why they see themselves so different.

The American society in the 1950’s was mainly founded on the ideology of the housewife, shaped by magazines and other media targeted to women. (...) After the Second-World-War, marriage was the main goal for girls; family life was their major aspiration, and the manifestation of a “perfect” existence. However, the dissatisfaction that women started to feel at the end of the 1950’s became a national issue. (Lamb 1)

In general, the sixties were a time of political and cultural turmoil in the United States: the assassinations of Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the space race, the civil rights movement, the emergence of the hippies, the sexual revolution, the Vietnam War protests, and the formation of the New Left all happened in that eventful decade. The American Dream of the 1950s – home ownership, nuclear families, television sets, laundry machines, and cars – was challenged by a

potent counterculture. This is reflected in the narrative in the sense that the predominant point of view is the teenage one because the main characters are young people, who starred most of the situations. Thus, the events will be enriched with plenty of references to popular culture, such as the music in vogue in the 1960s. These allusions shape the teenage imagery and fashion their expectations, desires, behaviors or thoughts. Moreover, they make us feel integrated in the adolescent atmosphere in our reading.

“Where Are You Going” reflects many of the ideas and attitudes of the 1960s, but is set in a teenage culture more like the 1950s. Such recognizable details of American adolescent life as popular music, radio disc jockeys, cars, drive-in restaurants, and shopping plazas feature in the plot, yet they also seem fixed in an unreal and stylized teenage past shaped by movies. (...) Her coming-of-age story also anticipates the coming-of-age of American society, its emergence from the hazy dreams and social innocence of the 1950s into the harsher realities of random violence, war and crime. Oates has located the story in the “transformational years” of the 1960s, when she saw a “new morality... emerging in America” (Showalter 7)

Society is characterized by a clear division of gender roles that permeates the text and a general urge on hypersexualization imposed strongly on young people, specially women. This is combined with the hedonist feeling fed by consumerism and the American Dream. People want to stay young, beautiful and sexy throughout their entire existence. Moreover, men are the ones who take the important decisions and choose their female partners. Therefore, creating a traditional family seems to be the only conceivable future. Women are depicted as part of the family life and they worry especially about their physical appearance. On the contrary, men are the ones who work outside home, start families, drive cars and initiate love affairs with girls.

Connie, too, is virtually immobilized by her sex and her age. At fifteen, she is too young to drive a car, but in any case, in the story only boys and men seem to drive. If the girls want to go to the movies, they have to find a father to drive them; if they want sexual privacy with a boy, his car provides it. Connie is always at the mercy of men who will come with a vehicle to take her away, to take her somewhere else. Women have no agency, no vehicle, no wheels. It's not coincidental that Arnold Friend's golden convertible is part of his magic. (Showalter 17)

There are several elements in the narrative which anticipate the imminent danger that is approaching Connie. Women's dependence on men limits their decisions, liberty and the ability to

control their destiny. They can't avoid patriarchy nor escape towards a better future. The characters' prospects in life are determined by a patriarchal society which imposes gender roles on them.

Connie's family does not provide her with the necessary moral values she needs to grow up and overcome life difficulties. Not because they are irresponsible parents, the circumstance is that the whole society is empty in an ethical way. This leads people to follow groundless paths, such as the family attachment to routine.

Due to her young age, she reacts against her situation by worshiping the ideals promoted by trends and popular culture. Society moves people to buy, stay young, enjoy sex, and admire beauty or money above anything else. The problem is that her lack of experience prevents our protagonist from developing a critical vision which could help her to resist hypersexualization and patriarchal impositions.

At the end, there is no clear evidence of the social reaction or of what will happen to Connie after the aggression because we are in front of an open ending. Finally, as it has been usual along the story, Arnold Friend is the one who guides and conducts Connie to "so much land (...) never seen before (...) except to know that she was going to it". ("Where Have You Been" 48). It means, Connie is left in a state in which she cannot find protection in her home anymore, so there are no other options for her than to follow a male Friend.

Indeed, according to Johnson, the story is a "feminist allegory" in which Connie is "surrendering her autonomous selfhood to male desire and domination. Her characterization as a typical girl researching sexual maturity suggests that her fate represents that suffered by most young women -unwillingly and in secret terror – even in America in the 1960s. Overall, he concludes, "Where Are You Going?" is "a cautionary tale, suggesting that young women are actually 'going' exactly where their mothers and grandmothers have already 'been' - into sexual bondage at the hands of a male "Friend". (Showalter 10)

After the aggression she is left with nobody to judge, comment or even help her. And we as readers are left so despaired and abandoned as the protagonist at the end of the tale. Only a big and unknown landscape is there, and, even if this may seem as a typical symbolism for growing up that suits perfectly a coming-of-age story, the presence of Arnold Friend is really disturbing. He is the one who directs her steps in this ending. And, taking into account the previous assault, this does not seem at all as a happily ever after.

#### 4. Lolita

Nabokov's novel *Lolita* is one of the most well-known masterpieces of literature which belongs to the literary canon and constitutes an important contribution to the best North American novels. The popularity of the story is based in the fact that many readers and critics considered the female protagonist (Lolita, as the novel eponymous) a precocious and sensual teenager who seduces an adult man named Humbert. Besides, this interpretation is the one which pervades today for the ones that may have not read the novel but its fame makes them to be familiar with the story.

However, is Lolita really a temptress evil or has patriarchy actually hypersexualized her? This is the question we are going to answer and explain in our analysis of the novel but you may take for granted that, if you look at the story in a feminist and comprehensive way towards women, she is more the victim than the one to blame.

Humbert's name for her continues to obscure her individual identity, even as it attains its own separate existence beyond the pages of Nabokov's novel. The word "Lolita" lives on in child pornography, urban slang, advertising, journalism, and popular culture, where it is usually defined as "a sexually precocious young girl" (*Collins English Dictionary*) or "a precociously seductive girl" (*Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*). One can even imagine readers assuming that the title of *Lolita* denotes the heroine's sexual precocity, without realizing that the novel's narrator is the source of that popular association. Humbert's efforts to rename her as "Lolita", apparently, have been quite successful (Sweeney 6)

*Lolita* was very polemical at that time due to the fact that the plot was centered in a sexual relationship between an adult man and a teenager, who is actually his step-daughter. One of the most censored topics in our society are, and have always been, paedophilia and incest. Besides, the novel was received as a pornographic one although explicit sex is not present in the text. As Bergstad affirms: "Nabokov assumedly chose taboo motifs of paedophilia and incest, which he knew would create strong reactions, intentionally to push boundaries". (7)

When Nabokov tried to publish his novel, it was rejected not due any concrete motif present in the story, this happened because almost nobody wanted to publish a book related to taboo topics.

*Lolita*'s road to fame was not an easy one. After being rejected by several editorials, it was finally released in Paris in 1955 through the French publishing company the Olympia Press, run by the controversial publisher Maurice Girodias.

He ultimately became Nabokov's savior and last chance to publish his novel, after the author was turned down by a vast number of publishers. Nabokov was even reluctant to publish the novel under his own name, as he feared the release of *Lolita* would ruin his reputation and cause the demise of his career at Cornell University.

The fact that Nabokov himself feared the outcome of the release of the novel in his name proves he knew very well the storm it would arouse. Some of the lasting controversy of this novel might also originate from the fact that the Olympia Press was the publisher behind various works of pornographic fiction. The attacks and accusations against Nabokov following *Lolita*'s release did not prevent the novel from becoming the Olympia Press' most profitable publication.

It is fair to conclude that *Lolita* gathered major attention because of its controversy, as well as the momentary banning of the novel in the UK and France, which turned out for the good as it boosted curiosity and engagement from a wider audience; works that are deemed taboo and obscene seemingly evoke immense interest, and perhaps an ambiguous mixture of disgust and enthusiasm among readers.

To sum up, despite varying criticism, attempts of censorship and accusations against the novel *Lolita*, both protagonists (Humbert and Lolita) remain two of modern literature's most famous characters. After this introduction to the novel, we will talk in a brief way about Nabokov's biography.

#### **4.1. Vladimir Nabokov**

Nabokov was born in Russia on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1900. He began learning English at the age of two. A very strong influence in Nabokov's prose is rooted in his love and enthusiasm for butterflies that started when he became seriously ill with pneumonia in 1907 and began studying them during his recovery.

Nabokov's writing career began around 1916. Initially, he translated literary masterpieces. An abrupt change in his life ensued from The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 which made the

Nabokov family's residence in St. Petersburg impossible. At the age of eighteen, Nabokov and his family were forced to move from Russia. In 1919, Nabokov's family moved to London where he studied zoology and then modern languages (French and Russian) at Cambridge University. During this time, his love for writing increased as he wrote poetry in Russian and English.

In 1950, Nabokov began his first novel entitled *The Kingdom by the Sea* with an obvious reference to Poe's poem "Annabel Lee". This later developed into the first transcript of *Lolita*, which Nabokov finished in December 1953.

From March to May 1977, Nabokov was in hospital in Lausanne. He briefly recovered but was forced to return to hospital in June. He died the following month. After his cremation, his ashes were buried in Clarens cemetery in Montreux, Switzerland, where they remain until this day.

## 4.2. Lolita

Perhaps one of the most mysterious literary characters, Lolita is an ordinary teenager which is perceived by us through Humbert's biased description of her. Thus the novel is actually the story of a rapist who is trying to defend himself, so his narration is hardly reliable. Moreover, he has mental problems and this condition makes him confuse dreams with reality:

Further, it is argued that Humbert is so consumed by and focused on this imagined artistic image that it obscures the 'real' girl for him (...) Linda Kauffman, who writes, "From beginning to end, she remains an enigma to him... Lolita does not exist for Humbert precisely because he fails to imagine her except as a projection of his desires". (Quayle 3)

In spite of the questionable first person narrator and the almost inexistent Lolita's words in the novel, we will try to describe her in the most precise way: "Indeed, the reader does not know much about Lolita beyond the special natures of her nymphic qualities Humbert so values in his object. In her youthful childishness and as a tragic figure at the end of the novel, there is not even much to be said of her as having individual characteristics separate than that Humbert assigns her." (Kovačević 289)

At first sight, Lolita is an ordinary teenager gifted with a well-developed and complex personality. A very witty and intelligent girl too, as we can see in those occasions when she seems to be half-conscious about what is going on between her and Humbert: "Inside the motel room, before their first sexual encounter, Lolita anticipates and names Humbert's intentions, interrupting his mumbled justification for sharing a room by revealing, 'The word is incest'." (Green 15)

In cases like this, her reactions may appear a bit premature but we need to take into account that she is an orphan child who doesn't have a good relationship with her mother. Lolita is a middle-class girl who is used to be on her own and she gets a great part of her education from magazines, movies or advertisements rather than from proper advice given by adults. Moreover, children who have overcome difficult situations (such as the loss of a parent) mature faster in certain aspects due to the hard experience they have experimented, which may explain why sometimes she seems to stand apart from teenage ordinary behavior and her speech may resemble that of a little grown up woman. But still, we need to have in mind is that she is still a teenager, and, even if her attitude sometimes shocks both the reader and Humbert, Lolita shows conserves the mixture of innocence and rebelliousness nature characteristic of teenagehood. Her early age makes her vulnerable to abuse while being curious about sex. In other words, she is more a tampering teenager who follows each opportunity to have fun than a sensual or mature woman that actually wants to engage in sexual relationships.

I knew, of course, it was but an innocent game on her part, a bit of backfisch foolery in imitation of some simulacrum of fake romance, and since (as the psychotherapist, as well as the rapist, will tell you) the limits and rules of such girlish games are fluid, or at least too childishly subtle for the senior partner to grasp – I was dreadfully afraid I might go too far and cause her to start back in revulsion and terror. (Lolita 113)

Humbert himself recognizes, he exploits Lolita's innocence, lack of affection and naughty nature in order to submit her to his selfish wishes. This will cause her to grow up incredibly fast and change in a dramatic way throughout the novel. Our description will be centered in the teenage girl she is at the beginning of the story because the best way to understand her is to know how she is until Humbert enters her life.

Due to the fact that Lolita is a teenager, sometimes she can be very selfish. Her absence of concern about others and her vain or frivolous moods are disproportionate in certain occasions: “‘Your mother may have to undergo a very serious operation, Lo’. ‘Stop at that candy bar, will you’, said Lo.” (Lolita 115)

Lolita is here depicted as a superficial child whose main interest is to have a good time. In order to achieve that, she likes to eat sweets or fast food. Besides, her hobbies consist in watching movies (especially: musicals, underwolders or westerns), going out with her girl friends or following each trend that is in vogue. In other words, Lolita is very naive and impressionable by the tendencies or

the media. She is also very passionate about drama, up to the point that she worships Hollywood actors and joins the theatre play at Bearsdley School. These pastimes clash with the adults' vision of the world represented by her mother or Humbert.

As Menzie Jones says: "Lolita is a child and is described as having a child's enthusiasm for that which is new" (63). This attitude exasperate the adults who are in charge of Lolita. For example, in one moment of the novel Charlotte marks in a magazine the following adjectives to describe her daughter: "distrustful, impatient, irritable, inquisitive, listless, negativistic (underlined twice) and obstinate" (80). On the contrary, Humbert considers this "really maddening" because he thinks: "she had ignored the thirty remaining adjectives, among which were cheerful, co-operative, energetic" (80).

This scene is notable, not so much because Humbert defends Lolita's character, but rather because the adjectives with which he chooses to describe her in place of those selected by Charlotte - "cheerful, co-operative, energetic" - ring true as accurately reflecting the 'real' child, Dolores Haze, as she is revealed to the reader in scenes where her behavior and other attributes are presented in a relatively unmediated fashion. (Quayle 11)

Another important trait of her, as we can guess from her interest in being an actress and her behavior towards her peers, is the fact that she is a very sociable girl who likes meeting new people and enjoys being accompanied. This contrasts with the rude attitude she sometimes displays towards others. Perhaps this last behavior is caused by the unstable mood characteristic of teenagehood.

Despite being a friendly girl when she is liberated from the adults' safeguard, her modals differ considerably from perfect politeness: "Early in the novel Humbert is well aware of, and sees as desirable, what he refers to as Lolita's 'American vulgarity'. For example, he writes fondly of the 'vulgarity' that penetrates her slangy and unrefined speech". (Quayle 10)

In fact, Lolita is an ordinary teenager with virtues, flaws and a strong developed temperament. She can be sympathetic and charismatic at certain moments but unpleasant or blunt at others. The truth is that Humbert's obsession not only blurs the important traits of her character, it also deprives her of enjoying teenagehood and thwart her agency.

Lolita is thus mainly an average teenager, full of life until Humbert's continuous abuse destroys her. Lolita is not a precocious or seductive woman, she is only a curious girl whose innocence will be annihilated by an adult pedophile. As Baarsrud states, "the Lolita we see, through Humbert's memory is, in fact, "an entirely ordinary child, unbearable, lovable, funny, moody" (44)

This is the girl we have tried to described: a complex individual with intrinsic contradictions like every character. Her name is Lolita and she is everything but the misogynist portrait that the popular culture has imposed upon her.

### 4.3. Humbert

Humbert is a cultured, adult man who pretends to appear as a figure of rationality in the novel. The protagonist has a great imagination and he defines himself as an artist. Definitely, Humbert plays the role of the 'perfect' middle-class, refined man but his actual self differs greatly from the image he gives to the rest of the characters. He is an absolute pedophile who uses his position in society as a means to relieve his lust for girls (or nymphets, as he calls them: a specific type of girl "between the age of nine and fourteen [...] who, to certain betwitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is demonic); and these chosen creatures I propose to call 'nymphets' (*Lolita* 16)).

Besides, he has stayed in several asylums due to his mental condition which has not improved at all. Actually, the protagonist keeps his sexual deviation in secret at all costs. It means that he usually lies to justify himself and, find 'excuses' for his behavior. Above all, he disguises his depravity with references to fine culture, art and a perfect use of language. But his own narration shows lots of contradictions throughout the whole novel.

Humbert is a master of rhetoric who is gifted with a great sense of humor and irony. He criticizes everything that diverges from his point of view, ignoring the fact that his hypocrisy is worse than the lack of moral values in North American society which he condemns:

Humbert is able to perceive only himself and his needs, and he thereby reduces everything around him to the barest of essences whose reality is acknowledged when Humbert experiences fear, antipathy, or sexual arousal. By reducing everyone around him, Humbert's reality becomes a madman's and only when it is too late to have real regret is Humbert able to feel something akin to compassion, 'oh, my poor, bruised child'. (Menziez Jones 46)

The truth is that he is an egotistic and selfish man who has a distorted version of himself. Humbert feels he has the right to achieve everything only because he is more cultured than most of the characters in this novel, but his pedophilic lust, at the end of the novel, consumes him, and his main justification is the fact that he is a middle-class man, which is more or less like claiming that he is perfect and the ones who are different must submit to his desires. This is Humbert's philosophy and the basis of his thought, behavior and justification. More or less, it reflects some basic patriarchal definition so we can assert, that Humbert is a living product of patriarchy. This idea is also shared by Menzies Jones: "Humbert's way of look at the world seems very current since it has much to do with the patriarchal power of images and advertisement". (6)

Some critics, many of them contemporary to the release of the novel, who have identified themselves with Humbert and supported him. Although his arguments are very rational and he is a master at defending himself through a great use of language, we need to take into account that he is biased by his misinterpretation of reality: "Humbert would find his task of convincing a jury of his unique and singular love for Lolita much more difficult today. In our current climate, Humbert's deft comedy would meet with sullen rejection, since not many of us would allowed ourselves to be amused by Humbert's comic account of his attempt to ravish a stupefied, newly orphaned twelve-year-old girl". (Menzies Jones 16)

Besides, Humbert obscures and ignores deliberately the damage he inflicts on Lolita. At the end of the novel, he seems to change and recognize his mistakes but we can't be sure if he actually regrets what he has done or if he is only trying to give a good impression due to the fact that he is a liar who wants to justify himself for his crimes.

#### **4.4. Relationship and aggression**

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this novel is the relationship between the two main characters, but, differing from popular thoughts, we want to prove that she was actually a victim of an abusive relationship and not a seductive temptress.

The "Lolitas" of our time are defined as deliberate sexual provocateurs, turning adults' thoughts to sex (...) The original Lolita -the twelve-year-old Dolores Haze, protagonist of Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel – was a rather different girl. (...) It is clear in the book that she is the powerless victim of her predatory stepfather, Humbert Humbert. Nabokov's Lolita is a nuanced character whose sexuality is complex – like many preadolescent girls, she is

sexually curious – but she has no control over her relationship with Humbert, which is abusive and manipulative (Durham 4)

The protagonists meet by chance. Humbert was looking for a place to stay in the US and some acquaintances recommend him to visit Haze's house. At first, Humbert was about to decline the invitation because he disliked Charlotte. However, when Humbert saw Charlotte's daughter, Lolita, for the first time, he decides to do everything in order to be with her.

Humbert is charmed by Lolita's physical appearance. It means, Humbert's motivations are thus more related to lust than to love because Lolita lures sexual desire in him up to the point that this wish becomes an obsession. Humbert plans to be part of the Haze's family in order to approach the daughter and exploits Charlotte's love for him as an excuse to spend time with them. At the beginning, Humbert only spies Lolita without being noticed and writes extensively in his diary about her body, his lust... He is a voyeur who enjoys his position to control his victim from a hidden place.

As mentioned when we analyzed the abusive relationship between Connie and Arnold Friend, conducts such as: stalking, spying, excessive possessiveness or excessive checking-up on the victim are characteristics of domestic violence according to Jaffe (3-4). These actions are done by Humbert even before he starts a relationship with Lolita. Besides, the detailed description of everything that surrounds her (daily activities, a list of her classmates...) in Humbert's diary is a warning sign of the intense control he is imposing on her only because, as a pedophile, Humbert finds her childish body seductive: "Saturday. My heart is still thumping. I still squirm and emit low moans of remembered embarrassment. Dorsal view. Glimpse of shiny skin between T-shirt and white gym shorts". (*Lolita* 53-54)

Eventually, looking from the distance will not be enough for him so Humbert stops writing his diary (perhaps he is trying to be more careful in order to avoid suspicion) and starts harassing her in a subtle way. Apparently, Humbert is the perfect gentleman and guest so both women (Charlotte and Dolores) trust him. Therefore, Humbert exploits that confidence in order to release his lust without any punishment.

My heart beat like a drum as she sat down, (...) on the sofa next to me (...) Lo flipped violently through the pages in search of something she wished Humbert to see. (...) I faked interest (...) Then, with perfect simplicity, the imprudent child extended her legs across my

lap. By this time I was in a state of excitement bordering on insanity; but I also had the cunning of the insane. (...) It was no easy matter to divert the little maiden's attention (...) She cried with a sullen shrill note in her voice, (...) while I crushed out against her left buttock the last throb of the longest ecstasy man or monster had ever known (*Lolita* 57-60)

In this scene, Humbert is exploiting Lolita's innocence in order to masturbate against her without being noticed. Lolita does not have any sexual intention as we can see. Dolores is a child who trusts him because he is nice to her. She is not experienced enough to understand what has exactly happened but, at moments, we perceive that she is uncomfortable. Humbert does not care about her wishes. Instead, he puts all his effort in doing it privately without being discovered.

Even worse, he is so arrogant that explains elaborately his state of excitement without paying attention to the consequences of this abuse for the child. As Jaffe says, sexual abuse includes sexual assault which consists in forcing someone to participate in unwanted or degrading sexual activity (4). This is what Humbert has inflicted on Lolita in this scene. Moreover, initiating a private sexual activity without the consent of a partner while forcing the other person to watch it is intimidating. Every type of intimidation is a way of controlling the victim. That is the root of abusive relationships.

Henceforth, the aggression will increase. Charlotte dies soon after discovering Humbert's diary where he narrates his true intentions towards Lolita. As she did not have time to warn anybody, Humbert becomes Lolita's step-father so he will have free rein to abuse her without any obstacle.

After Charlotte's decease, his first decision is to take Lolita from the camp masking the fact that her mother has died. Humbert's purpose is to travel with the child throughout the whole country without being found by any acquaintance. This comes close to kidnapping.

In that state of events, the only option that is left for Dolores is to behave according to his wishes. As the only relative left for her and without nobody knowing the truth, the protagonist's life is totally controlled by him. Due to the fact that they are constantly traveling at the beginning of their relationship, nobody knows them so Lolita does not have anybody to ask for help. Actually, she does not want to be with him.

The first sexual intercourse between them should be classified as rape, since Humbert is so secure that she will refuse having sex that he tries to drug her, and forcing sex on a person under the

influence of any substance is rape. The description of their first sexual act is one such moment. Kauffman notes, “The first act of coitus is rendered so poetically as to camouflage what is being described”. (Green 17). Humbert’s words describe the scene as a work of art, which terribly contrasts with the aggression he is actually inflicting on his step-daughter: “There would have been a sultan, his face expressing great agony (belied, as it were, by his moulding caress), helping a callypygean slave child to climb a column of onyx”. (Lolita 134)

We see in Lolita’s reaction when they leave the hotel that a terrible harm has been inflicted on her. Moreover, realizing what has happened between them is very painful for her. In her words, we observe that she is deeply wounded, angry and distressed due to the traumatic experience. The protagonist’s confidence and innocence have been betrayed by someone who was supposed to take care about her. And this was only the beginning of an abusive relationship she became entrapped in: ““You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me (...)’ An ominous hysterical note rang through her silly words. Presently, making a sizzling sound with her lips she started complaining of pains, said she could not sit, I had torn something inside her”. (Lolita 140)

Time passes and the relationship between them evolves. In one moment of the novel, they stop traveling because he gets a job and Lolita enrolls in school. Then, the relationship between them starts to change: “Although Nabokov hints at the isolation and pain Lolita suffers in Humbert’s hands, it is not until Part Two that the full extent of his abuse or the damage Lolita incurs is revealed, despite Humbert’s effort to portray himself as the victim”. (Green 18-19)

Since Lolita gets in touch with ‘normal’ teenage life again, her desire of enjoying teenagehood and having a stable family life will be stronger. As Lolita is also a very smart and keen observer, she starts to discover Humbert’s flaws and exploits this to get all the advantages possible for her. In this part of the story, Humbert tries to fulfill an imposed role as a father without raising suspicion about the true relationship between them. Humbert is also terrified about the fact that Lolita might leave him. That is why he is extremely jealous of the extracurricular activities where Dolores can meet other boys.

Through this state of events, Humbert is very nervous and stressed because he does not know how to take care of a teenager. Besides, he discovers that it is very difficult to satisfy a child who loathes

him and wishes to run away. According to Quayle, Humbert is now apparently aware of Lolita's feelings regarding the situation:

The narrative is studded with innumerable acknowledgements by Humbert of the fact that Lolita is both disturbed and disgusted by him, and by the erotic activities in which they engage. (...) At numerous points in the novel, Humbert similarly makes clear Lolita's revulsion and reluctance with regard to engaging in sexual activities with him, and he also describes in some detail how he must humor, bribe and cajole, threaten, trick, and even quite brutally coerce Lolita to secure her continued participation in these acts (Quayle 9-10)

According to Jaffe's description of domestic violence<sup>6</sup>, Humbert's behavior towards Lolita while they are living together constitutes in certain aspects economic or financial abuse which includes: withholding economic resources such as money, stealing money from a partner, exploiting the intimate partner's resources for personal gain or preventing the partner from choosing an occupation. Humbert is so desperate to control her that he even steals the money back preventing a possible escape.

Therefore, Lolita never desired Humbert and, in the few occasions outside his step-father's presence, she will plan the best way to leave him with the help of her friends. Finally, Lolita will leave Humbert for Quilty, her lover, who shares lots of similarities with the male protagonist.

#### **4.5. Social Context/Reaction**

*Lolita* is settled in post Second-World-War American society. In the novel, Nabokov satirizes the decadence in society. The topics denounced are: hypocrisy, excessive consumerism, superfluous materialism, dependency on psychoanalysis as a false cure of a debauched population, superficiality and rejection of culture.

Humbert criticizes this postwar America by means of Lolita's main characters/caricatures: Annabel Leigh, Charlotte, Lolita, Quilty and himself. Through them he pretends to denounce to what an extent Americans depend on psychotherapy, are alienated by the advertisement culture; how uncultivated they are and how they (Quilty and Humbert, and people like them) take advantage of their social position, power and prestige to abuse

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<sup>6</sup> This description is taken from: Jaffe, Jaeline. "Domestic Violence and Abuse: Types, Signs, Symptoms, Causes and Effects". *ResearchGate* (uploaded on 07 January 2016) URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265155866>  
(6)

children. Humbert cannot escape his own criticism and will end up portraying himself as the morally most wretched character in the novel. (Muñoz Varela n.pag)

Through Humbert and Lolita's travels across the US, we see that they do not care at all about the landscape which surrounds them. Definitely, Humbert is allowed to control and exploit his step-daughter because he is a man and has money, and nobody pays attention to his true intentions behind his façade:

More often than not, even the same geographical America seems pointless and futile; it is in this sense that Humbert wrote that "[they] had been everywhere. [They] had really seen nothing." The hotels they go are anonymous and void; the culture of *laissez-faire* has been imposed. No one really tries to ascertain whether Humbert is actually Lolita's father or tutor. Had any of them made a couple of telephone calls, Humbert would have been caught at the beginning of his *road adventure*. Notwithstanding, the only thing Americans seem to care for in the novel is money. As long as Humbert pays, nobody will bother whether his version is true or fallacious. (Muñoz Varela 12-13)

In a patriarchal society that undervalues women's well-being and values money above anything else, Humbert is given free rein to harass his step-daughter whenever he wants. While alive, Charlotte accomplished her maternal role in protecting Lolita.

The cultural institutions, such as schools, are also ineffective in their role of helping the pupils to develop a critical view on the hypersexualization of girls. Instead, we see in the novel that the school Lolita attends prefers to publicize itself in a way similar to television advertisements, focusing more attention on: social skills, heterosexual relationships and charisma rather than providing knowledge.

The educational programme at the school that Lolita attends in Beardsley is directed towards the acquisition of (...) a curriculum summarized like an advertising jingle as 'the four D's: Dramatics, Dance, Debating and Dating' and deliberately cast as a rejection of European cultural priorities: 'with due respect to Shakespeare, we want our girls to *communicate* freely with the live world around them rather than plunge into musty old books'. (Bowlby

57)

In that school, girls are educated to be attractive to men. Those liberal messages which seem to be avant-garde and open-minded due to the fact that they pay attention to the teenage sexual desire are

actually the means employed by patriarchy to deny women's agency: girls are told that their only mission in life is to be popular and desired, but this way their lives will be incredibly limited. This type of female education implies that they will never be able to enjoy a healthy and freely sexuality.

Most important, the absence of culture or, at least, a critical view on society prevent girls from resisting gender violence or constraints imposed by patriarchy and hypersexualization. In other words, these messages only increase Lolita's suffering because, in an indirect way, the education system is supporting the male domination. That is why the teachers who are supposed to take care of Dolores are completely unable to understand what is actually going on in her home.

Mrs. Pratt perfectly exemplifies this new decadent American society: as a headmistress of Beardsley school, she is more concerned about Lolita's lack of social skills or her absence of sexual interest than about her grades and acquisition of knowledge. Certainly, she can be read as a funny and extravagant character, but nonetheless it is a rather sad example of what Humbert is criticizing. (Muñoz Varela 12)

In this state of events, Humbert manages to do a constant critic to psychoanalysis and the excessive pressure psychology puts in trying to classify or understand sexual behavior. Throughout the novel, psychiatrists attempted to cure the protagonist's paedophilia without any result. Humbert usually mocks the doctor's efforts and he also ridicules theories stating that childhood memories and the first experience of love will determine adult's behavior. His story with Annabel is not only an attempt to awaken the reader's pity, he is also laughing at the traditional conception of eternal romance.

Definitely, *Lolita*'s world is one dominated by: advertisements, capitalism, 'eternal' girls and a great pressure to buy and try everything that appears to be new. Love, respect or familiar bonds are not strong enough to drive the characters through true paths liberated from decadence or consumption.

As she is a victim of gender violence, Lolita is the most damaged character up to the point that society has finally convinced her to be constantly dependent on men. The abuses Lolita suffered and her idolization of movie stars explain her attachment to Quilty, despite his similarities to Humbert, the man she abhors.

At the end, her tragic circumstances turn her into a worn-out, pregnant woman of seventeen, married to a poor man. Unfortunately, the constant sexual aggression the protagonist suffered in Humbert's hands have weakened her body so much that she is not able to survive after giving birth to an unborn child.

### **5.1. Hypersexualization of the two female teenagers**

First of all, we need to take into account that both girls share lots of personal traits and they are not precisely perfect role models. It means, common aspects between them are the fact that they are ordinary teenagers who sometimes can be really moody. These girls are very rebel so they try to bolster themselves through an opposition to their mother's wishes: "Lolita is not an example of well-behaved and nice girl. She is rebellious and moody. But still, she is an innocent, pubescent girl" (Zelená 30)

Connie does not differ very much from this statement. Like Lolita, she has also been raised with the absence of a male figure and has a weak relationship with her mother. Their innocence, combined with the sexual curiosity they both display is the weakness through which adults such as Humbert or Arnold Friend will aggress them.

In both girls, we can perceive that they are not able to recognize the male sexual advances towards them at first sight. These teenagers only care about having fun and enjoying the present. They are naive and often unaware of the dangers around them: "She said suddenly, "Hey, how old are you?". His smile faded. She could see then that he wasn't a kid, he was much older- thirty, maybe more. At this knowledge her heart began to pound faster". ("Where Have You Been" 37)

In contrast with adults, as teenagers Connie and Lolita are ready to explore every novelty around them and find pleasure in trying new activities with their friends. Sexual desire figures among those novelties as a landmark of their entrance in the adult world.

Connie tends to trust boys because she believes firmly what the popular songs tell about love and, in this sense, Lolita's behavior does not differ much from Connie's. Both girls have male friends and are used to be with boys, but they are not able to distinguish the difference between hanging out with peers and male adults. It is implicitly understood in the narrative that for Connie and Lolita sex

is nothing more than a “kissing game” (*Lolita* 119) or casual meetings with boys interrupted when a father figure comes to drive Connie home.

Adults’ inability to deal with the girls’ necessities is seen in both stories in the fact that Connie’s parents do not care about her activities when she goes out. On the other hand, Charlotte sends her daughter to a summer camp in order to release herself from maternal duties. As a consequence, it is the media, rather than the parents, that teaches girls how to socialize with their peers.

Their means of entertainment contribute to their processes of hypersexualization them because since they impose on teenagers the strong need of being sexually desired: the girls do not see any harm in wishing to be sexy and give the impression of a mature woman. Moreover, the male characters are not able to see the girls as more than sexual objects:

Sexualization is problematic because girls are too young to “correctly” decipher such images or make sense of such commodities. (...) The problem of sexualization (...) is not really about age, it is about the production of a particular type of sexually precocious girl. The expression of sexuality in girls, in one form or another, emerges as an effect of sexualizing materials. Once sexualized, girls fall outside of the parameters of “normal” girlhood and morph into something else – an ambivalent and ultimately irresolvable category – girl-woman or ‘miniature adults’. (...) It challenges the hegemonical construction of the child. (Egan and Hawkes 305)

The influence of the media in the process of hypersexualization is clearly seen in Connie’s case: her feelings of sexual desire are linked to the messages promoted by songs or movies rather than to her experiences in reality. This makes her believe she is very mature, although she is actually just a naive girl who has no knowledge of the adults’ world: “All the boys fell back and dissolved into a single face that was not even a face but an idea, a feeling, mixed up with the urgent insistent pounding of the music. (“Where Have You Been” 29)”

The music Connie listens installs in her the believe that she needs sex and is ready for sexual experiences. Accepting hypersexualization without any critical view leaves no answer for the girls, they consent male desire on them believing that they should not fight against it. That is how hypersexualization works and it is obvious why is so harmful for the girls:

As Feminist Emma Rush cautions, in a cultural context where sex is heavily glamorized and represented as highly desirable, is it wise to actively encourage girls (...) to have romantic fantasies about older men? How do we then expect them to behave if an older man approaches apparently offering romance? To sexualise children in the way that advertisers do – by dressing, posing and making up child models in the same way sexy adults would be presented – also implicitly suggests to adults that children are interested in and ready for sex. (qtd. in Egan and Hawke 295)

The awakening of Lolita's libido shares some similarities with what happens to Connie. Although the novel is not narrated by Lolita, we know that the influence of the relaxed attitude about sex displayed by her camp mates was decisive in her first sexual experience:

Lo would be left as sentinel, while Barbara and the boy copulated behind a bush. At first, Lo had refused 'to try what it was like', but curiosity and camaraderie prevailed, and soon she and Barbara were doing it by turns with (...) Charlie, who had as much sex appeal as a raw carrot but sported a fascinating collection of contraceptives. (*Lolita* 137)

The problem in this is not that her friends convinced Lolita to try sex. The dangerous hypersexualization comes from the fact that Humbert exploits this to present Lolita as a seductress and he uses this incident to justify his sexual abuse of the child. Enjoying a healthy sexuality should not be something shameful for girls. Actually, sex is a natural act and it should be done without any pressure or coercion. Sexual relationships are choices and not a requirement of normality.

In Connie's case, we can perceive that her main interest is to be with boys at all costs. She does not even care about her friends or family and her efforts are directed towards caring about her appearance. In this sense, Connie is totally hypersexualizing herself because she only values herself in terms of physical beauty and her main goal seems to look sexy.

Satisfying the dictates of compulsory heterosexual romance while maintaining both intimacy with same-sex friends and a sovereign sense of self can be daunting. (...) On the one hand, orienting to compulsory heterosexual romance usually confers status and popularity with like-minded young women, which in turn can promote social status symmetry and a feeling of being in-sync with each other's experiences. (Korobov and Thorne 51)

This also happens in her group of friends. They do not meet each other to hang out together but use the nights out as an excuse to have intimacy with boys. Indirectly, this kind of behavior is a consequence of hypersexualization due to the fact that their attitude reveals how the girls' interests are focused only in their physical attractiveness or sex appeal: "When he left her off at five to eleven only the movie house was still open at the plaza. Her girl friend was there, talking to a boy. When Connie came up, the two girls smiled at each other and Connie said, 'How was the movie?' and the girl said, 'You should know'". ("Where Have You Been" 29)

Hypersexualization inhibits them from enjoying female friendship, individuality and self-esteem. Rather, they are encouraged to seek desperately for male company although, meeting boys is not actually desired by them: unconsciously, these girls follow this attitude due to several factors such as: social pressure, imposed hypersexualization on them and the characteristic teenage necessity to feel accepted by their peers.

As we can see, Connie's and Lolita's first heterosexual experiences are enlivened by female peers. Apparently, this is not something bad. The problem relies on the fact that the promotion of a compulsory heterosexual sexuality comes from a patriarchal structure which imposes on women the false belief that their value resides only on youthfulness, physical beauty or a male partner. The core of hypersexualization is rooted in the denial of women's agency: "Sexualization (...) sexualizes girls and perpetuates the sexualization of women by collapsing youthfulness with sexual attraction. (...) Confronted with these sexualizing pressures, girls are stuck with narrowing social options that conflate sexiness with popularity (...) as the 'pathway to power'". (Egan and Hawkes 295)

Hypersexualization conditions the characters so much that the ideal men for both Lolita and Connie are actually the most aggressive ones for them. In Lolita's case, Quilty is even worse than Humbert.

Connie is not the only girl seen exclusively in sexual terms, Lolita's description by Humbert focus more on her body or sexiness than in the characteristics of a real child. Humbert only cares about his step-daughter in sexual terms, up to the point that there are daily moments imbued with an improper sensuality due to the biased male narration: "Why does the way she walks – a child, mind you, a mere child! - excite me so abominably? (...) Very infantile, infinitely meretricious." (*Lolita* 41)

These few words from the novel satisfy two features of the APA's definition of hypersexualization: "a person's value comes only from (...) her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics; (...) sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person". As we have seen, in spite of being only "a mere child", Lolita is blamed as: "infinitely meretricious". In this type of descriptions overly present in the novel, we observe that Humbert imposes an inappropriate sexuality to a child while he accuses her of "exciting" him. This is how gender violence towards girls is exerted in the name of hypersexualization.

Through the aggressions they suffer, Connie and Lolita discover that their fantasies are actually weapons used against them. After this, they both feel too scared and confused to not understand exactly what has happened. In Connie's case we only know that she did not rebel against Arnold Friend. Nonetheless, Lolita made efforts to escape from Humbert but all the aggressions and the hypersexualization imposed upon her turned the character into a person incapable of taking decisions without depending on men. Considering that aspect, both girls and their stories are very similar.

## **5.2. Arnold's and Humbert's reactions**

Arnold Friend and Humbert are sexual predators who have lots of things in common. First of all, both display a misogynist attitude towards women because they believe themselves with the right of having sexual intercourse with every girl they desire. Secondly, they share a taste for younger women. As both are adults who feel lust for teenagers, we may assume that they are both pedophiles.

In Humbert's case, it is obvious that he is a pedophile because he himself recognizes it, and, besides, he has a long psychiatric history in which his paedophilia is treated without any results (in great part due to his interminable lies and his refusal to be cured). We do not have so many details about Arnold Friend, but, due to the fact that he is actually an adult who sexually aggresses a teenager, we assume possible pedophilic tendencies.

In the third place, these adults are terribly nostalgic of their childhood. In Humbert's case, this is very noticeable through his idealized narrative of a first love named Annabel. Humbert tells us that he has spent his entire life searching the "nymphet" who reminds him of Annabel in order to recreate his first love experience. At least, this is what Humbert wants us to believe.

Humbert's story is actually a mechanism employed to justify his pedophilia before the reader's eyes. As Quayle acutely notes: "the Annabel storyline is almost entirely absent from the text. (...) This argument is given more weight by the fact that – as with the idea of Lolita-as-Annabel – after this first sexual encounter with Lolita, Humbert rarely refers to the concept of the nymphet again, and when he does so, it is only in brief and joking asides" (Quayle 8-9). Throughout the novel, Humbert asks the audience's compassion since he presents himself as the victim.

Arnold Friend also pretends to recreate his youthhood in a similar way. Apart from searching the company of young girls, he also dresses, acts and shares teenage hobbies.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, Humbert exploits his image of a respectable, well-educated man in order to approach children. In other words, Humbert likes to inspire respect and is proud of his mature appearance: "Humbert presents himself in disarmingly human guise, devoid of (...) demonizing traits (...). He is dressed in all the attributes of cultivation and attractiveness; he is intelligent, eloquent, charming, witty, handsome, robust, and 'not plague by fears that he is weaker or less potent than those around him'". (Baarsrud 27)

However, Arnold Friend resembles a modern teenager who is always in fashion with new tendencies. He dresses as a young boy and also has an adolescent taste towards music.<sup>8</sup> This proves to be an effective method in order to earn the trust of teenagers like Connie: "It was the same program that was playing inside the house. 'Bobby King?' she said. 'I listen to him all the time. I think he's great.' 'He's kind of great,' Connie said reluctantly. 'Listen, that guy's great. He knows where the action is.' Connie blushed a little". ("Where Have You Been" 32-33)

Arnold Friend and Humbert act in a similar way towards girls. They both follow their victims and calculate everything in order to assault them with impunity. Arnold Friend uses his car to drive around the places in which teenagers hang out. This gives him enough privacy to spy girls from the distance. The car allows him to move with total independence and it's a secure hiding place for his crimes.

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7 In Arnold Friend's description present in the section 3.3 of this essay, we explain in more detail his physical appearance and behavior.

8 As we explained in point 3.3 of this essay, Arnold Friend is a stereotypical character affected by hypersexualization, excessive consumerism and patriarchy in the sense that he doesn't want to get old. Arnold Friend isn't mature enough to act as an adult but he is neither a teenager anymore; even if his life is entirely centered in pretending to be a young boy. Nonetheless, his façade also works as a mean that allows him to aggress young girls as Connie.

Arnold Friend confuses himself with the crowd of teenagers that hang out in summer nights. Actually, Arnold Friend is a coward who pretends to be brave using his car and accomplices such as Ellie who help him in his criminal activities. This is seen in the fact that Friend is apparently alone when he shouts at Connie for the first time. But, when he discovers she is lonely at home, he parks suddenly the car in front of her house accompanied by Ellie: "I'm gonna be your friend, honey, and inside the car's Ellie Oscar, he's kinda shy". ("Where Have You Been" 33)

On the contrary, Humbert is a solitary adult who doesn't ask his friends for help in order to approach girls. Although he is an extroverted and charismatic character, Humbert never establishes strong bonds with people. Humbert only cares about having intimacy with girls and, with that purpose, he gets close to people related to children in order to earn their confidence and assault whenever there is a chance.<sup>9</sup>

In "Where Have You Been" we see that Arnold Friend could aggress Connie after obtaining enough information about her. In other words, he calculated everything in order to appear in Connie's house when she was alone. Arnold Friend did not leave anything to fate, his acts were committed with total premeditation. Personally, I consider that if Friend couldn't find anything about Connie's background, he would not have raped her because the aggression was more a result of the surprise factor and coercion rather than the use of physical force against Connie.

Another common aspect of the narratives is the reality that the desire of both male characters to stop time and enjoy the benefits of everlasting youth result in a terrible harm for the girls close to them:

Humbert, however, is not satisfied with this visionary transcendence alone. He wants to "incarnate" Annabel, representative of the spell of the past, in an actual nymphet. The impossibility and tragic results of such a wish are part of the story of Lolita. The person, Lolita, vies with eidolon; the real "horror" of Humbert's sexual exploitation. (Prioleau 430)

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<sup>9</sup> As we explain in part 4.4 of this essay, Humbert stays close to Charlotte in spite of hating her because he is conscious that being part of the Haze's family will provide him with multiple occasions to be left alone with Lolita. Moreover, Humbert is incredibly lucky because Charlotte dies without having the opportunity to warn anybody about H.H's true intentions so he becomes Lolita's step-father.

In both narratives, male desires imply suffering and domination for the girls that surround them. Arnold Friend and Humbert don't dedicate their lives to be fulfilled and happy. In other words, they only find pleasure at the expense of girls' welfare.

Even if they would never admit it in public, both characters are addicted to have non consensual sex with teenagers up to the point that they don't know how to live without establishing abusive relationships with underage girls or committing sexual crimes. In order to achieve this, they employ similar methods but the great difference between them relies on the fact that Humbert is a mature man who has lots of experience in life and Arnold Friend reminds us more to a stereotypical teenager than to the adult he actually is.

## **6. Conclusions**

Throughout our analysis, we have seen evidences of the hypersexualization of the girls and its consequences in both literary works.

Hypersexualization conditions our vision of the two girls because sometimes they are depicted in a way that seems to be unfavorable. Although the generational gap between adults and teenagers may have something to do with this, this perspective is mostly conditioned by patriarchy and its prejudices against women. In Lolita, this is especially evident since the novel has a first person narrator, Humbert, whose misogyny, paedophilia and his intention to justify himself create a non reliable account of the events.

In "Where Have You Been" Connie's voice is lost after the rape, and, presumably, the absence of the female perspective on the experience of gender violence functions as a manifestation of the effects of patriarchy and hypersexualization. Both teenagers are objects of desire for men such as Arnold Friend or Humbert, and the fact that Lolita or Connie don't have the possibility of denouncing the aggressions they suffered – or, at least, give their version of the events – supports our claim that they are victims of hypersexualization and patriarchy which normally silences female voices.

In both works, the characters live in a patriarchal society in which the attitude towards sex is relaxed and oppressive at the same time. Lolita and Connie are denied the possibility of having their own agency independent from any male figure while men are mostly characterized by their obsessive lust towards girls. Moreover, adults are not prepared to protect the girls from the perilous influence of sexualization promoted by the media. Therefore, they are also guilty actors on the

hypersexualization of the girls because they don't provide the girls with the necessary tools to empower themselves. This is seen in the fact that Connie's parents seem not to care about her nights out and Lolita's mother sends her to a summer camp in order to liberate herself from any responsibility.

Additionally, sexualization is also present in the entertainment the girls seek (trying to attract the male attention, listening to sexually charged songs...etc.) and the social activities they engage in with their peers (flirting, trying sex...etc.). Thus, according to the APA, the sexualization of girls occurs mainly by the contribution of society, but the contribution of interpersonal relationships and self-sexualization is also prominent in the process. (2).

Hypersexualization conditions the characters so much that the ideal men for Lolita and Connie are actually the most aggressive ones for them. In turn, the hypersexualization of the girls also conditions male sexual fantasies: in Friend and Humbert's case, their lust for teenagers evidences the existence of a rape culture in which men are encouraged to submit girls to their desires.

At heart, both literary works constitute to certain extent a denunciation of patriarchy because they show in a clear way what happens to the girls when hypersexualization and misogyny rule society without any restriction. In certain moments, Humbert even criticizes the hypocrisy and shallowness present in society although he himself embodies these flaws. On the other side, "Where Have You Been" also adopts an ironical attitude towards the idolization of superficiality and misogyny as we can see in the comparison of the drive-in restaurants with sacred buildings and the characterization of Arnold Friend.

To sum up, accepting hypersexualization without any critical view causes girls to be totally vulnerable against patriarchal domination. In this sense, the fact that the term "Lolita" is charged with prejudiced connotations towards girls proves the extent of this patriarchal perspective among readers and even early critics of the novel by putting the blame on the female teenager rather than the male aggressor. We have seen that patriarchy and misogyny are powerful means to blame the girls every time they express their own desires and try to impose their views on a short-sighted male opinion.

Although it is very difficult to change the roots of our society, we need to develop a more critical vision because this is the way to delete the negative effects of hypersexualization. Enjoying a free, healthy life full of possibilities for everybody in which a safe and freely chosen sexuality is also another step of personal development should be a duty and a goal for everybody. But this will only

happen when the male domination disappears and everybody can act without any gender constraints.

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