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'THE CALL IS COMING FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE': SURVEYING THE FEAR FACTOR OF STRANGER DANGER THROUGH THE LENS OF NABOKOV'S *LOLITA* (1955)

Aleyna Petts[1], Selçuk Şentürk[2]

ABSTRACT

'The Call is Coming from inside the House' trope, emblematic of betrayal, has permeated both visual and written narratives, evoking dread and questioning characters' innocence. This paper critically explores the fear instilled by the stranger danger narrative, juxtaposing it with Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) to underline the insidious nature of domestic abuse. While once a potent social warning, the overuse of the trope has desensitised audiences to domestic violence, rendering it banal. The narrative unpacks how social conditioning perpetuates fear, particularly among women and girls, confining them indoors with potential abusers. Drawing parallels between the narrative of *Lolita* and real-life instances of grooming and abuse, the paper elucidates how abusers manipulate victims into complicity. By examining *Lolita* as a lens through which to understand social dynamics, the paper prompts a revaluation of cultural tropes and their implications for gender relations and individual autonomy. Through Humbert Humbert's manipulation of Lolita's memories and perceptions, the paper highlights the pervasive control exerted by abusers. The paper advocates for a multilayered understanding of fear and safety, challenging the narratives that perpetuate gender-based violence. It critiques social responses to stranger danger, arguing that they perpetuate victim-blaming culture and fail to address root causes. By unpacking the parallels between the patriarchal culture and grooming tactics, the paper finally exposes the false security offered by domesticity, as in *Lolita*.

Keywords: Domesticity, Fear, Grooming, *Lolita*, Gender-based violence.

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'EVİN İÇİNDEN GELEN ÇAĞRI': NABOKOV'UN LOLİTA (1955) ESERİYLE YABANCI TEHDİT KORKU FAKTÖRÜNÜN İNCELENMESİ

Aleyna Petts[1] , Selçuk Şentürk[2]

ÖZ

'Evin İçinden Gelen Çağrı' klişesi, ihanetin sembolü olarak görsel ve yazılı anlatılara nüfuz etmiş, korku ve karakterlerin masumiyetini sorgulama duygusunu çağrıştırmıştır. Bu makale, 'yabancı tehlike' anlatısının içsel bir tehlikeyi vurgulamasını, özellikle Vladimir Nabokov'un *Lolita* eseri üzerinden, ev içi istismarın gizil doğasını eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla inceler. Bir zamanlar etkili bir toplumsal uyarı olan bu klişenin aşırı kullanımı, hedef kitleyi ev içi şiddete karşı duyarsızlaştırarak ilgili kavramı sıradanlaştırmıştır. Bu çalışma, özellikle kadınlar ve kız çocukları üzerinde ev içinde potansiyel tacizcilere karşı nasıl bir korku oluşturulduğunu ve bu korkunun onları nasıl ev içinde kısıtladığını incelemektedir. Makale *Lolita*'nın anlatısı ile gerçek hayattaki kandırma ve istismar vakaları arasında kesişimleri ele alarak, tacizcilerin kurbanlarını iş birliğine zorlayarak nasıl manipüle ettiklerini açıklar. Toplumsal dinamikleri anlamak için bir lens olarak *Lolita*'yı merkeze alan bu çalışma, kültürel klişeleri ve bunların cinsiyet ilişkileri ile bireysel özerklik üzerindeki etkilerini yeniden değerlendirmeyi amaçlar. Eser karakterlerinden olan Humbert'ın Lolita'nın anılarını ve algılarını sürekli manipüle etmesi, istismarcıların genellikle başvurduğu bir kontrol yöntemini vurgular. Makale, klişeleşmiş cinsiyete dayalı şiddeti sorgulayarak, korku ve güvenlik konularında çok yönlü bir anlayışın toplumsal olarak benimsenmesini önerir. Ataerkil kültür ve kandırma taktikleri arasındaki kesişimleri inceleyen bu çalışma, ev içi yaşamın Vladimir Nabokov'un *Lolita* adlı eserinde yanlış bir güvenlik algısı ile dayatıldığı sonucuna ulaşır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ev içi yaşam, Korku, Kandırma, *Lolita*, Cinsiyet temelli şiddet.

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1. INTRODUCTION

'The call is coming from inside the house' is an idiom that has been exhausted by both visual and written media. It marks the moment in the plot when a character, hitherto assumed innocent of any legal or moral crime, is proven guilty. In turn, the character who was staged as the antagonist is absolved of their alleged crimes. As both a cinematic trope and a literary device, it arouses dread and unease in audiences by making them insecure in their judgement of character. The trope is at its most effective when the characters do not fit the mould of their archetype, be it aesthetically or in relation to the victim. For instance, crime shows typecast white females as their victims, exasperating the narrative that only white damsels can be in distress, and hide the true scale of white male offenders (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 24). Particularly, *Law & Order Special Victims Unit (SVU)* overwhelmingly represents rape as being fatally committed by a stranger, black men being the key suspect. Despite African-American women being the most at risk of victimisation in Manhattan, where the show is set, they are seldom represented as rape victims. As such, a show that employs 'the call is coming from inside the house' would position a woman of colour as the victim and a white male relative as the perpetrator. Whilst this version of events is more consistent with reality, it is less realistic to an audience that has never known the truth.

When ghoulish film-makers first introduced 'the call is coming from inside the house' in the 1970s, they were exploiting the public's moral panic over familial betrayal. Child abuse and abduction cases were rife during this era, 4,024 of which were only recently convicted (Dodd, 2020). The serial offenders have now been identified as teachers, caregivers, and religious leaders, authority figures children ought to feel protected by rather than seek protection from. The research published by Andrew S. Denney in the Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology could be an example to demonstrate the increasing number of "identified offenders" in religious settings. Denney (2022) concludes that a significant proportion of identified abusers exhibit patterns indicative of serial offending, highlighting an urgent imperative for churches to fortify their policies and procedures to prevent and detect sexual abuse. The findings of the research call for sustained scholarly inquiry and institutional vigilance to foster a safer environment, necessitating ongoing efforts to proactively prevent, intervene in, and investigate instances of sexual abuse within what is commonly referred to as "safe environments".

If audiences or readers care to harvest a moral from the story, they can deduce that nobody is worthy of their trust, not even their own kin. Admittedly, this is a fair assessment to make. Trust operates as a precious asset, a currency that should be invested wisely. Placing confidence in another person is akin to wagering on one's security and welfare, making the act of trust fraught with potential hazards. Consequently, the deeper the trust extended, the greater the risk incurred, as one exposes oneself to the possibility of betrayal or disappointment. For this reason, it is sound to say that 'the call is coming from inside the house' was most effective during the 70s because people had a lot to lose. Trust was the social bond that society would not function the same without.

For contemporary consumers of film and literature, however, the urban legend of a call coming from inside the house has run redundant. In truth, domestic violence has been sensationalised by the film industry to such an extent that the reality of it is comparatively bathetic. The trope of terror that emerges from within the confines of domestic space is vividly illustrated in a series of films and urban legends that have exploited the unsettling notion of an intruder who is already within the house. In the 1979 and 2006 versions of 'When a Stranger Calls', the narrative centres on a babysitter who receives menacing phone calls, only to discover with mounting dread that the calls originate from within the house she is supposed to safeguard. Wes Craven's 'Scream' (1996) takes a similar approach, as it opens with a chilling sequence where the protagonist receives a call from her killer, who is lurking within her own home. This theme echoes the classic urban legend of the Babysitter and the Man Upstairs, a story that has been retold across various horror anthologies and folklore collections. In this legend, a babysitter is repeatedly terrorised by calls from an unknown source, only to uncover that the calls are coming from inside the house. More recently, 'The Call' (2020) reinvigorates this trope with a modern twist, featuring time-travelling phone calls connecting two women living in the same house separated by two decades. As aforementioned, crime shows like *SVU* depict rape exclusively as gruesome, resulting in death or, much worse: irreversible damage to a woman's appearance. Each iteration of this trope taps into a primal fear of invasion, where the safety of one's domestic environment is upended by the realisation that danger resides within. Every day in America, three women are killed by an intimate partner (Sanctuary for Families, 2023). However, the public does not register these cases as a cause for concern unless they discern it worthy of a Netflix Original. Indeed, audiences show no interest unless it is a dramatised docuseries loosely based on a true story. In turn, real-life incidents of harrowing crimes are no longer subverting but pandering to their expectations. Gone are the effects of fables like *The Juniper Tree and Cinderella*. These allegories about evil family members now appear to be mere case studies, not cautionary tales.

When an audience is mentally primed for the worst, it becomes increasingly easier to accept it when it happens. It comes as little astonishment, therefore, that women and girls yield to their assigned role as the vulnerable prey of the human species. Throughout the annals of history, they have been systematically conditioned to exist in a state of perpetual apprehension, particularly concerning encounters with unfamiliar individuals. Most girls heard the

litany of 'stranger danger' as a child and grew up to recite it as a mother. The current paper posits that the concept of stranger danger yields more adverse effects than benefits. For instance, while the notion aims to instil caution in individuals, it often engenders unwarranted fear and prejudice towards people that could provide an avenue out of a harmful living environment. Moreover, this fear may lead to social isolation and hinder meaningful interactions and community engagement opportunities. Historically and ideologically, it has coerced women and girls into staying indoors with the exact people that pose the greatest threat. If the trauma response is between fight or flight, women and girls are left with no alternative but to fawn. As a result, they may find themselves predisposed to prioritise harmony and avoidance of conflict, even at the expense of their safety or well-being. This ideological dynamic not only undermines the safety and well-being of victims but also enables perpetrators, reinforcing their sense of entitlement and impunity to perpetrate further harm. Thus, the social emphasis on fawning behaviour not only fails to protect victims adequately but inadvertently serves to empower and embolden perpetrators, exacerbating the cycle of abuse and injustice.

2. Interrogating Fear and Violence: Exploring the Dynamics of 'Stranger Danger'

Fear is culturally instilled in young girls by their nurturers, giving the impression that the feeling is harmless and, indeed, for their own good. However, residing in a state of fear, the situation of pervertness is not under control; she is. This fear serves as a paralysing force, resulting in emotional and physical incarceration. It is a fear that immobilises, isolates and imprisons. The kind of fear that usurps the territory of the mind, overshadowing every thought and influencing any decision made. A fear that, in turn, destabilises one's self-image, making them prone to accept any form of flattery or attention, even the most disturbed of its kind. A fear that blurs the line between awareness and paranoia. That makes it hard to distinguish between imminent danger and the sound of a tree in the wind or an incoming call inside the house. Lastly, it is a fear that does not come with a guidebook on self-defence and offers no relief. Instead, it is a fear that stays with women until the end, whether that is her own or the patriarchy's.

Karl Marx's assertion that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" finds resonance in the portrayal of fear depicted above (1859, p. 2). The fear described is not merely an individual emotion but a product of social conditioning and systemic inequalities. Just as Marx argues that individuals' consciousness is shaped by their social context, the fear experienced by women is deeply rooted in societal norms and power dynamics. This fear becomes a mechanism of control, perpetuating the status quo and reinforcing patriarchal structures. Consequently, women find themselves immobilised, isolated, and imprisoned by this pervasive fear, which infiltrates every aspect of their lives. Moreover, this fear erodes self-confidence, leaving women vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.

The agoraphobia women develop as a result of fear-mongering is not only debilitating but disproportionate to men, who report significantly lower levels of fear of crime despite having a higher rate of being victimised by a stranger (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 19). Indeed, men are three times more likely to be attacked by strangers and make up two-thirds of street crime cases (Greer, 1999, p. 273). In more recent years, it has been surveyed that strangers kill 29% of male homicide victims and 10% of female victims (Sanctuary for Families, 2023).

That is not to downplay the amount of sexual harassment women do receive in public, with up to 80% reports in Brazil, India, and Thailand; 85% in Canada and Egypt; and 90% in Australia and Afghanistan (Vera-Gray, 2018, pp. 7-8). As a conservative estimate, ⅔ of women have experienced public harassment at least once in their lives (p. 10), including but not limited to being stared at, approached, followed, or spoken to. A 2014 study across Europe epitomises this sentiment, collecting data from 42,000 women, over half of whom experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime and "almost half of which restricted their freedom of movement based on the fear of gender-based violence" (pp. 8, 13). Moreover, a similar study in Seattle determined that 42% of women avoid leaving the house alone, as opposed to only 9% of men (p. 13).

That said, there is no denying that a son is respectively more exposed to 'stranger danger' than a daughter. Bombarded with external threats from an early age, violence becomes his norm. However, he is routinely reminded by his sister's curfew and clothing restrictions that only girls are meant to feel threatened by the prospect of violence. That is, violence is not done to him; it is something he does. As articulated by feminist academic Fiona Vera-Gray (2018), "Men are more likely than women to provide socially desirable rather than totally candid responses" (p. 23). Therefore, if and when a stranger victimises him, toxic masculinity brews feelings of shame and anger which ultimately fuel violence. If he discloses his trauma, he worries that he will be stripped of his freedom and strictly monitored in the same vein as his sister. Resenting this outcome, he releases his frustrations on the people who embody the fragility and defencelessness he felt during the incident: women and girls. Hence, the streets are a breeding ground for the domestically violent.

The lingering inquiry persists: what objective does the notion of 'stranger danger' ultimately serve? Is it a mechanism devised to exert control over womankind, constraining their aspirations to the confines of domesticity?

Is it to limit the opportunity for community engagement, the vessel that enables one to outsource help and network their way into the careers that men are born into? Does it distort a woman's comprehension of the world, presenting it as a realm necessitating constant vigilance for protection? Does it perpetuate the notion of women as dependent entities, reinforcing their reliance on men for financial, social, and physical security? Can it be argued, then, that helicopter parenting inadvertently raises daughters as targets for predatory male individuals, unwittingly fostering their subjugation to patriarchal norms? The objective of this paper remains: are we sending our girls down main roads because if they venture into back streets, the alleys no other woman dares to cross, they may stumble upon a more promising destination?

The following paragraphs wrestle with these questions within the parameters of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita*. We aim to resist a romanticised reading of the text. Therefore, we only use it to underscore the truths of domestic abuse and dissect the mind of the abuser. Much more can be said by way of Humbert and Lolita's dynamic being a microcosm for the patriarchy and womankind. For that matter, our interest is not with the poetics or style of prose, only the content. In Nabokov's *Lolita*, the theme of control and manipulation is intricately woven into the narrative, echoing the questions about the purpose of 'stranger danger'. Humbert Humbert's obsession with Lolita exemplifies a twisted form of control over a young girl, confining her within his distorted worldview and exploiting her vulnerability for his gratification. Humbert's actions can be seen as a metaphor for the social imposition of limitations on women's autonomy, symbolised by the confinement to domestic roles and dependence on male protection. Moreover, Humbert's predatory behaviour mirrors the insidious influence of patriarchal norms, which perpetuate the subjugation of women and their objectification for male consumption.

3. Beyond Romance: Unveiling Domestic Abuse and Patriarchy through Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

Henceforth, it would be proper to commence the discussion by exploring what it means to groom a victim into being "not a forced slave but a willing one" (Mill, 2008, p. 19). The process of grooming involves a violation of psychological and emotional boundaries, wherein individuals are subliminally coerced into acquiescence through various means of exploitation. Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* exposes the intricate mechanisms perpetrators employ to cultivate a sense of trust and dependence within their victim/s; ergo, blurring the lines between coercion and consent. What is more, it sheds light on the insidious nature of exploitation that takes advantage of a child's malleable mind, moulding it into believing that they are mature enough to consent, despite the inherent power differentials at play.

Lolita is unreliably narrated by Humbert Humbert, a paedophile who adapts a homogenous narrative to frame the child Lolita as a seductress, a nymph. Therefore, this is not a novel that one can leaf through with divided attention. Readers should remain vigilant and study the prose, lest they become Humbert's next victim. Indeed, the manipulation extends beyond the page, causing discord amongst literary communities as to whether Nabokov's ink was spiked with the venom of a child molester. The present paper argues that *Lolita* is not an insight into Nabokov's closeted paedophilia but an emblem of his literary excellence. The narration is crafted to demonstrate how effective a predator's coercion can be, making even the most well-read and steadfast individuals confuse fiction with reality and become their prey. Therefore, *this paper will not read Lolita* as confessional or semi-autobiographical but as a novel that documents Humbert Humbert's bouts of insanity, not Lolita's loose morals. In short, Humbert weds the widowed Charlotte Haze in pursuit of her daughter, Lolita. Charlotte's death, deceptively described as a car crash, leaves Lolita an orphan. Rather than mourning his late wife, Humbert organises Lolita's life into a series of events that can only be described as harrowing. Performing the role of her quasi-father, Humbert grooms Lolita into enduring countless years of incestuous abuse.

In her memoir *Consent*, Jill Ciment (2024) draws parallels between her husband and Humbert. To the untrained eye, Ciment's relationship is that of fairy tales. That white picket fence kind of love that endures all illness and lasts forty-five years, till death do they part. Beneath the surface, Ciment's husband was once her teacher, a father of two, and twenty years her age when they first sealed their relationship with a kiss. In this instance, I use the plural "they" where a singular 'she' would be more appropriate, for Ciment insists that she was the initiator of their affair. However, with the above discussion on grooming in mind, it can be resolutely stated that Ciment did not make this choice; he did it for her.

Consent purports to answer the question of whether "a story's ending excuse[s] its beginning" (Ciment, p. 116). Nabokov's *Lolita* contains the answer. Had the departing note of the novel been that Lolita was stronger for what she had been through and that she was now immune to hardship, the accusations that Nabokov glorified abuse would have had merit. This paper does not tolerate such rhetoric, however, because *Lolita* does not have that quintessential happy ending that people so often associate with survivor's stories. Even victims themselves will report "[b]elieving that no one would be unlucky enough to be raped twice" (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 30). In this sense, readers are reluctant to accept Nabokov's narrative because that would be to accept that they, too, are vulnerable to [re]victimisation in the same vein that Lolita was. That said, the final page of *Lolita* suggests that she remained Humbert Humbert's victim until the end:

> But while the blood still throbs through my writing hand, you are still as much part of this blessed matter as I am, and I can still talk to you from here to Alaska. Be true to your Dick. Do not let other fellows touch you. Do not talk to strangers. I hope you will love your baby. I hope it will be a boy. That husband of yours, I hope, will always treat you well because otherwise my spectre shall come at him, like black smoke, like a demented giant, and pull him apart nerve by nerve. (Nabokov, 1993, p. 327)

Broadly, Humbert refuses to lay to rest his past with Lolita until he himself has been laid to rest. He articulates this threat through the present tense "while" and "throbs" in the noun phrase "while the blood still throbs", addressing Lolita as "as much [a] part of" his life so long as he is alive. Alternatively, the noun phrase "as much part of this blessed matter as I am" cements Lolita's involvement in her own victimisation. Although Lolita is now of an age that is far too old for Humbert to overpower and too overripe for him to desire, he is still determined to possess her mentally. There is an overall understanding that, even when a victim of grooming has physically escaped from her predator, mental warfare is an endless battle.

Moreover, Humbert contradicts himself with the baleful statement that his "spectre shall come at [Dick, Lolita's husband] like black smoke, like a demented giant". The discrepancy between the claim that Lolita is his so long as he shall live and the threat that he will continue to haunt her after he dies is yet another sign that Humbert is an unreliable narrator. Nabokov also laces in the subtle irony of Humbert threatening to hurt another man who harms Lolita, lacking the self-awareness that he himself has treated Lolita despicably.

When insisting that she is his to keep, Humbert reveals that all his efforts are to yield a tangible sense of power. Admittedly, the mental gymnastics he performs are the workings of a skilful man. However, this is not a powerful man, for a powerful being would not rely on violence to certify his authority. Drawing parallels between Humbert and the patriarchy, it cannot be overlooked that both are prepared to go to extreme lengths to enslave the female mind. Rather than lock predatory men up, the system locked women and girls inside. This insidious cycle perpetuates the narrative of female subjugation, as exemplified by Humbert's manipulation of Lolita's autonomy, a microcosm of the broader societal structures that uphold patriarchal norms. Thus, Humbert's attempt to assert control over Lolita's mind not only underlines his own moral bankruptcy but also serves as a stark indictment of the systemic mechanisms that perpetuate the subordination of women.

Whilst Lolita's case is extreme, it is by no means unusual. In total, 20-36 per cent of girls are sexually abused in childhood (Taylor, 2020, p. 2). What is more, child protective services substantiate a claim of child sexual abuse every 9 minutes (RAINN, 2024). Knowing that 93% of these victims knew of their perpetrator (RAINN, 2024), it can soundly be asserted that many of them were groomed. Through grooming, the abuser isolates his victim from their support network, automating himself as the sole provider of their wants and needs, thus, their life force. Subsequently, the victim is manipulated into believing that they are active participants in their own abuse. Often, the victim convinces themselves of this as a survival mechanism vis-à-vis processing trauma. Indeed, they find solace in the thought that their suffering is self-regulated because it wagers a sense of control. As a result, they develop *Stockholm syndrome*, a condition that submits the captive to their captor by internalising the narrative that they are safest inside with him.

Familiarly, girls who absorb the stranger danger rhetoric from an early age struggle to make friends because they self-seclude. Consequently, predators target her as a prospective victim due to her decreased likelihood of disclosing her experiences to others. Humbert articulates that the offender sees a lonely girl like Lolita as opportune to be "safely solipsized" (Nabokov, 1993, p. 60). By "solipsized", Nabokov infers that Lolita has no will nor consciousness – "indeed, no life of her own" (p. 62). Not only does Humbert force Lolita to share her body with him, but her mind, too. He funnels his desires, thoughts, and concerns into her so she feels they are her own. Therefore, she is the one to initiate the first kiss, refuse to interact with the boys her own age, and prompt Humbert to take her out of school. Eventually, she became a willing slave, not a forced one.

As scholar John Stuart Mill (2008) attests, cunning predators like Humbert utilise the resources they acquire from their undue male privilege to capture their prey and cement her obedience (p. 19). Stranger danger purports that predators hunt their prey for the kill. To that effect, people conceive of abuse as an isolated incident that cannot be perpetuated over time or manifest in different ways. This sentiment cannot be further removed from the truth. Rather, whomever the brutish man tyrannises over is his for the keeping. The victim's absolute reliance upon him is his only tangible sense of power. It can, therefore, be stated with certainty that men are only powerful so long as women keep them in power. The sheer nature of the violent crimes men have to commit in order to feel just an ounce of power is de facto a symptom of their innate weakness. To that end, girls like Lolita possess the power that abhorrent men like Humbert leach onto until she herself believes her body to be nothing more than a weak vessel. In this sense, Humbert will tighten his grasp on Lolita in the most literal and figurative sense and hold onto her until death does, and they part. To make the process easier for himself, however, he must ensure she does not put up a fight. Observably, the more he has to control her, the more out of control he feels. Therefore, he implements the fear factor of stranger danger so that Lolita will keep herself in check for him.

Humbert references stranger danger three times in *Lolita* (1993): "*Never Talk to Strangers"* (p. 32), "If I were you, my dear, I would not talk to strangers" (p. 138), and "[d]o not talk to strangers" (p. 327). In the first instance, Humbert is leafing through the limited selection of books in his prison's library. Nabokov wove this detail in to ridicule Humbert's hypocrisy in protesting the monotonous life being a prisoner has forced him to live when he is in there for violating Lolita's human rights to the same extent. Underscoring the irony, one of the books that Humbert skim reads has Lolita's government name in it: Dolores. Coincidentally, the Dolores that his chosen text mentions is about an actress who debuted as the lead role in a play conveniently named "*Never Talk to Strangers*". Recall that this paper forewarned that Humbert is an unreliable narrator. Allowing this information to dictate the reading of *Lolita*, it can safely be asserted that only a remarkably cosmic event would spur Lolita's birth name and a play titled after the stranger danger trope would appear in a prison's restricted library.

All considered, Humbert manages to plant his manipulative seed early on without being overtly transparent to an ordinary reader. It is no longer Lolita that he is trying to persuade but his reader, who is left to dissect the purpose and meaning of every word he uses, every story he tells, and every urban legend he employs if they are to form an opinion independent of his own. Following this line of reason, when Humbert first lectures Lolita on why she should "not talk to strangers" (p. 138), readers have already been wired to believe he is acting out of care. That is, a reader may embark on the novel already suspicious or, perhaps, indifferent to Humbert. However, as he meditates on the name Dolores associated with a cautionary play on stranger danger and draws parallels back to him cautioning a girl by the same name, the reader is subliminally informed that he was pre-empting that play being based on her. By the same token, stranger danger has permeated generations of women and girls into believing that they ought not to "talk" to anyone outside of their echo chamber.

On that note, *Lolita* begins plateaus and ends with stranger danger. Imperatively, the warning, "[d]o not talk to strangers" (p. 327), sits on the final page. What Humbert intends to be the moral of the story lingers with readers who have fallen victim under the spell of his prose. Alternatively, if the novel's content did not escape their attention, the reader concedes that stranger danger is the least of Lolita's problems. The end pursued through stranger danger is otherwise. Malevolent men like Humbert distract their prey by framing others as their predators.

Let us now consider how patriarchal capitalism does the same. Foremost, women and girls are sold expensive anti-rape devices that range from pepper sprays to emergency alarms, indeed anything but criminal justice reform. Evidently, capitalism has the financial capacity to haemorrhage money on counterproductive gadgets but cannot redirect the money flow to improve the justice system. Men also have the common sense to give out safety advice like "[d]o not talk to strangers" (Nabokov, 1993, p. 327) despite research showing this "may increase women's fear" (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 20) and they are more likely to be victimised. The increased fear is often a result of the subliminal message that women and girls ought not to trust their own perception of reality, causing them to wait until an incident has escalated before they consider defending themselves.

Adding flesh to the bones of this argument, Vera-Gray (2018) lists the range of personal safety devices marketed directly to women, including "pepper spray that looks like perfume, lipsticks that are also three-million-volt stun guns, and even a range of sports bras that contain either a built-in knife sheath or a pocket to hold pepper spray…knife and mace sold separately." (p. 26). Knowing what we do about men not only being more likely to be victimised but also being in denial about their level of risk, would it not be more fit to make them the target audience of these products? A key message is being sent here: Women are not self-sufficient enough to protect themselves; men are – or, at least, they are supposed to be.

In more explicit terms, the system is happy to place the onus on women to take preventative measures but refuses to tackle the issue at its source: men. Indeed, these anti-rape kits contribute to victim-blaming culture inasmuch as the precautions of stranger danger do. If a woman or girl does not have the money to invest in these items or if she dares to interact with other human beings that her partner or parents have not screened, what results from that is her fault and hers alone. Moreover, a serial offender, especially one who has narcissistic tendencies, will be nothing more than amused by these devices. For perpetrators like Humbert, they are nothing more than that their prospective victim is living in trepidation of strangers and thus is the least prepared to notice and pre-empt his attack from inside the house.

It is also a point of interest that Humbert hopes Lolita's baby "will be a boy" (1993, p. 327). In this simple sentence, many truths can be unveiled. For instance, it could be that Humbert wishes for a boy because he knows what men of his kind can do to a young girl. An ounce of remorse can be detected in this interpretation, giving Humbert a fraction of humanity as he does not wish the same ill he caused Lolita on her baby. Whilst optimistic, this interpretation is out of character for Humbert, once again lending itself to the unreliable narration. A reader who has fallen victim to Humbert's schemes would have sympathised with him at this moment, identifying it as a redemption arc. However, this character development would have been long overdue, and it is not promising that Humbert would repent for his sins when he got away with them for so long. On that note, it is fair to speculate that

this is yet another technique groomers use in their arsenal against women and girls, pretending to have changed when they do not intend to.

There is also reason to believe that Humbert is hoping for a boy because it would be easier to attack him in public. Due to the misconception that males are less likely to encounter stranger danger, the streets become their playing ground from an early age. A young girl, on the other hand, especially one born from a mother who has experienced sexual trauma, will not have that same freedom. As such, it is harder for perpetrators to access girls, hence why they are more likely to either victimise a boy in public or target the girls in their private life.

All told, a more realistic perspective on Humbert hoping Lolita will not have a girl is that, in raising a girl, Lolita will be able to identify all the wrongdoings Humbert committed as her pseudo-father. Being in a position where she is taking care of a girl that is of her age when she was first victimised by Humbert, Lolita may experience flashbacks and come to terms with some of the traumas she suppressed. In doing so, Humbert's grasp on her mental well-being will loosen, giving her more free terrain and him less power. For perpetrators like Humbert, power is of utmost importance in securing a victim's complicity. Hence, Humbert took advantage of the long-term memory loss that is characteristic of childhood. Even when Lolita reaches an age where she can comprehend what happened to her, she will only recall Humbert's telling of events. A lot of sexual trauma that occurs during formative years is, both fortunately and lamentably, forgotten. Whilst it is expected not to reflect on your childhood in vivid detail, those who endured pain that was too harmful for their brain to harbour often experience dissociative amnesia. In this case, dissociative amnesia entails the subconscious act of erasing and reworking memories from childhood with a primal intent to self-preserve. As such, many victims are unaware of what they experienced until a later stage. Certain stimuli like a man's scent or sense of nostalgia can provoke these memories, flashbacks, and nightmares. Subsequently, child abuse cases like the ones from the 1970s were only recently explicated (Dodd, 2020).

Furthermore, Humbert forecasts Lolita's lapses in memory and fills these gaps with his preferred telling of events. Alternatively, as John Stuart Mill would posit, he truly believes that his version of the past is a fact, for "men usually see only what they already had in their own minds" (2008, p. 28). Irrespective of his level of self-consciousness, Humbert describes this process as a matter of "feed[ing] the analytic faculty with boundless alternatives […] which causes each visuali[s]ed route to fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of [the] past" (Nabokov, 1993, p. 14). Broadly, the noun phrase "without end" threatens the extent to which Humbert is willing to go to protect himself at the expense of Lolita. Although his sexual appetite for her has a short shelf-life, he is determined to possess her mind until the last possible moment, be it the "end" of the novel. As aforementioned, the imperative "[d]o not talk to strangers" (p. 327) is woven into the departing lines of the text, cementing Humbert's commitment to controlling Lolita until that very last moment.

Epitomising paedophilia, Humbert would consider late adolescence Lolita's expiry date. Therefore, he moulds Lolita into the adult he prefers her to be: an adult that bears no resemblance to adulthood at all. Notably, the adjective "boundless" puts flesh on the bones of the argument that there is no 'end' to his cruel treatment so long as he shall live. Likewise, the noun "alternatives" depicts the spectrum of beliefs about the outside world he instils in Lolita to control her. That way, if and when her memory serves, she will be insecure in her own perception of the past and favour Humbert's version of events.

Similarly, stranger danger is a lesson that is taught to girls from the early stages of life, preparing them for a world that reserves no safe space for them indoors or out, so much so that "women [are] restricting their own access in public space" by not "hanging out in public with no purpose or reason in the same way many men [do]" (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 9). As such, they do not loiter or explore nature, the hub for creativity and freedom, because they have learnt that "keeping themselves safe *from* violence is more important than feeling safe *to* express and expand [themselves] freely in the world" (p. 83). That is, they believe that staying inside is trading their freedom for safety. To the detriment of both, men who are violent towards them in both public and private spaces share the desire to decrease the life space of women to increase their own. The limits set on women's ability to exercise their freedom are, in part, self-induced and, in total, engineered by men.

4. CONCLUSION

It is now time to revisit the initial inquiries deferred in the introduction. This paper has confirmed that a girl's or woman's greatest enemy is domestic. It has also been reasoned that the fear instilled in young girls through 'stranger danger' not only undermines their autonomy but also restricts their ability to establish independence and make informed choices about their bodies. It shortly became clear that a life ruled by fear is a life not lived. In *Lolita*, the illusion of domestic safety is fundamentally undermined by the presence of Humbert Humbert, whose insidious manipulation and control transform Lolita's seemingly secure environment into a space of psychological and emotional peril. Much like the babysitter's disquieting discovery that the source of her fear is an intruder already within her home, Lolita's reality is destabilised by Humbert's covert and pervasive influence. This research has illustrated that the domestic setting, as in Nabokov's novel, often perceived as a bastion of security, can become a site of profound vulnerability and exploitation. The study, hence, has exemplified how Humbert's manipulation of Lolita's perceptions and memories mirrors the trope's unsettling revelation that danger lurks where it should be safest. This connection has highlighted how cultural narratives of fear, whether through horror films or folklore, resonate with the psychological horror of Lolita. Both domains underscore the unsettling reality that the boundaries between safety and danger are perilously thin and that the actual threat often resides within the very confines of domesticity itself. Thus, *Lolita* has offered a fertile literary lens through which the trope's implications can be further explored, revealing how the facade of domestic security can mask the most insidious forms of control and abuse.

The study has shown that the fear instilled by 'stranger danger' not only undermines the autonomy of young girls but also restricts their ability to establish independence and make informed choices about their bodies. Ergo, a life ruled by fear, is a life not lived. Nabokov's Lolita aptly illustrates the parallels between patriarchal control and grooming tactics, revealing the illusion of safety within domestic confines. The study has unpacked the truth that persists through Lolita, which is that the home is not a safe space but a trap. This study has also illuminated the intersections among social narratives, gender dynamics, and the subtle mechanisms of domestic abuse. Analysing the 'Call is Coming from inside the House' trope alongside Lolita; the study has reached out that the pervasive fear surrounding 'stranger danger' perpetuates cycles of victimisation and complicity among women and girls. The parallels between patriarchal dominance and grooming tactics have underscored the unsettling reality that the home, traditionally seen as a place of refuge, can be a facade for exploitation. As such, Lolita has served as a reminder that safety cannot be assumed within domestic confines alone. Hence, it is imperative to challenge established cultural norms and social responses that foster victim-blaming and overlook the root causes of gendered violence. By advocating for a precise understanding of fear and safety, this study has aimed to spark a reassessment of prevailing attitudes and norms, ultimately striving towards a future where autonomy and agency are safeguarded, free from the shackles of fear and oppression.

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1.yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı %50, 2. yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı %50'dir.

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