May 2017

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**Lolita themes in photography: An ethics case study**

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### Abstract

The following case study involves the highly controversial South-Korean photographer, Rotta, and his erotic depictions of women with visual insinuations of underage children, more commonly known as the Lolita aesthetic. These controversial events form an important ethical case study, which I evaluated through the TARES framework by Baker and Martinson (2010). Conducting the case analysis using the framework’s five ethical criteria, I found Rotta to be in violation of all aspects of the TARES principles. In conclusion, despite not breaking federal law, Rotta communicates highly unethical and morally unsound messages to the public through his photography of women.

### Background

South Korean professional photographer and Instagram-user Choi Won-Suk (stage name ‘Rotta’) and his erotic photography depicts women in ways that caused internet users and even South Korean media outlets to accuse him of pedophilia. Lolita themes in his work. 

Rotta established his reputation and media presence through Instagram. His photos depict women in positions that emphasize the breasts, vaginal area, legs and/or buttocks with minimal, childish clothing.

**What is Lolita?**

The term ‘Lolita’ comes from the 1955 novel ‘Lolita’ by Vladimir Nabokov. The plot is centered on the pedophilic relationship between the narrator and a 12-year-old girl, who he calls ‘Lolita’ and engages in sexual intercourse with. The name ‘Lolita’ in East Asian countries is now synonymous with ‘softcore’ sexualized depictions of children, which may or may not have pedophilic intent.

### Controversial Events:

Rotta incited outrage from the South Korean public in several instances, including:

1. In August of 2016, Former member Sulli of the K-pop group “F(x)” uploaded a photo taken by Rotta to her personal Instagram. The photo depicts her and another Korean-pop idol wearing a one-person, skin-tight t-shirt with the Johnson’s Baby Oil logo.

2. In February of 2017, Rotta uploaded a ‘hidden camera’ style photograph of a female kindergartner while in Osaka, Japan.

### Accusations:

Internet users/Viewers accused Rotta of the following claims:

- The way the women pose in a lot of his photos hide their hands/feet, emulating a type of pedophilia where men cut the hands/feet off of children to make rape easier.

- The use of underage girl’s school uniforms communicates Lolita and pedophilic intent.

- His ‘hidden camera’ photo of the kindergartner was taken without permission.

- As he regularly takes erotic photos with Lolita themes, there was no doubt he took the photo with sexual/pedophilic intent.

### Ethical Analysis: Utilizing the TARES Principles

The ethical criteria used for evaluation are the five principles of the TARES test, a test that uses guiding principles and their guiding questions, to assess the moral boundaries and consequences of persuasive communication (Baker & Martinson, p. 159). This test was chosen as Rotta’s work promotes a morally gray depiction of feminine sexuality to the public.

**The TARES test consists of five principles:**

1. Truthfulness of the message
2. Authenticity of the persuader
3. Respect for the persuadee
4. Equity of the appeal
5. Social responsibility for the common good

**Guiding Questions:**

- Are you (the persuader) purposely create false images?
- Do people have reason to question your trustworthiness?
- Do your actions have noble intent? Are you engaging in evil or encouraging it in others?
- Do you have good justifications for your messages?
- Do you promote self interest to the harm of others, or consider their well being?
- How would you feel if the same messages were directed at your loved ones?
- Are you targeting vulnerable audiences?
- Does the messages you promote cause harm to others?
- Do you hold yourself accountable for any harm caused to others/other groups?

### Conclusion

Based on the application of the TARES test and the subsequent analysis on the ethical case study of Rotta and his controversial photography, Rotta has violated all principles of the TARES test. Despite not violating federal laws regarding the sexual depiction/abuse of children, the messages communicated to viewers of Rotta's erotic photography are ultimately unethical and morally unsound.