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LAUREEN MYRACLE'S *INTERNET GIRLS* AND CENSORSHIP: DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AS A CHALLENGE TO IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL THROUGH LANGUAGE AND AS A FIELD FOR FACING GENDER ROLES

INTERNET GIRLS *DE LAUREEN MYRACLE Y CENSURA: LA COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL COMO UN DESAFÍO ANTE EL CONTROL IDEOLÓGICO DE LA LENGUA Y COMO UNA FORMA DE AFRONTAR LOS ROLES DE GÉNERO*

Abstract

Taking L. Myracle's *Internet Girls* novel series as a starting point, this article tries to investigate and hopefully unveil the reasons behind the censorship imposed on the series by the "gatekeepers of canonicity and morality." The article is a literature review and semi-content analysis. After a brief discussion about the term Young Adult literature and the subversion of the arguments put forward as a justification of the banning of the books, we examine the relationship between the epistolary novelistic form and the female voice. Finally, we focus on the most distinctive feature of the novels: the exclusive use of online chatting to advance the narrative. The role of digital communication in Y.A. literature and the youth's idiomatic language on the net are also discussed. Our main argument is that the root causes triggering the adult censors' distress and challenging their standards are not the controversial sexuality and attitudes of the characters. Rather, it is their language and writing in internet chatting. Digital communication is imbued with webspeak. It becomes a field of intergenerational tension, a vehicle of undermining pedagogical censorship. This type of communication evades the absolute control of some adults not savvy in webspeak. A number of these individuals -possibly a social group that is over-represented in the teaching and school librarian professions- perceive digital communication as a threat to traditional language codes. Their reaction to the *Internet Girls* concerns not only the content of the books but –first and foremost– the style and the code these books are written. What is more, the girls' "digital" conversations allow for free self-expression. Prescribed boundaries of politically correct female attitude are transgressed leading to harsher adult public outcry.

Key words: Y.A. literature; Digital communication; Ideological control; Gender roles; Censorship.

Resumen

Tomando como punto de partida la serie de novelas *Internet Girls* de L. Myracle, este artículo intenta investigar y desvelar las razones de la censura impuesta a la serie por los "guardianes de la canonicidad y la moralidad". El artículo es una revisión de la literatura y un análisis de contenido parcial. Tras una breve discusión sobre el término literatura juvenil y la subversión de los argumentos presentados como justificación de la prohibición de los libros, se examina la relación entre la forma novelística epistolar y la voz femenina. Finalmente, nos centramos en la característica más distintiva de las novelas: el uso exclusivo del chat en línea para avanzar en la narrativa. Nuestro argumento principal es que las causas fundamentales que desencadenan la angustia de los censores adultos y desafían sus estándares no son la sexualidad y las actitudes controvertidas de los personajes. Más bien, es su idioma y escritura en el chat de Internet. Varios adultos (posiblemente un grupo social sobrerrepresentado en las profesiones docente y bibliotecaria escolar) perciben la comunicación digital como una amenaza para los códigos lingüísticos tradicionales. El lenguaje web permite transgredir los límites prescritos de las actitudes femeninas políticamente correctas, un hecho que conduce a una protesta pública más severa entre los adultos.

Palabras clave: Literatura juvenil; Comunicación digital; Control ideológico; Roles de género; Censura.

Introduction: Young Adult Literature: a brief outline

Internet Girls is a young adult novel series comprising 4 books published between 2005 and 2014. Myracle's books were deemed as the most challenging novels of 2009 and 2011 by the American Library Association. They are still considered problematic for school libraries, due to their perceived provocative and obscene content. To understand the public reactions to the *Internet Girls* novel series, the context and expectations generated by young adult literature (Y.A.) and its historical evolution needs to be explained briefly; the cultural and historical background will help evaluate the series under discussion.

Young Adult Literature was conceived and first launched in tandem with the emergence of "young people" as a social category—a group not only distinct in biological terms but also in psychological characteristics. It is a social grouping with access to public expression and, above all, with the right to "purchase" preferences. In the post war era the public arena experienced the active participation of young people in the labor market and the individuals belonging to this social category exhibited unconventional behaviors, which gave rise to the term teenager (Savege, 2008).

As the forerunner to the later so-called young adult literature, it often refers to Maureen Daly's novel Seventeenth Summer (1942) (Bright, 2016: 31).

"Y.A. literature" is a largely American phenomenon. It made its first appearance in 1967 with the release of *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton and *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte. These last novels inaugurated a new period. They boldly confronted issues such as youth gangs, drugs, delinquency, and racism and revealed the not-so-innocent side of adolescence.

The term was used to define a category of literature that extends to a variety of genres and forms—fiction, fantasy, sci-fi, graphic novels, thrillers etc. It is aimed at adolescents, without excluding adults. Nowadays, adults are its main consumers, both as buyers and mediators of books for young people, but also as readers. In a fiery article published in The *New York Times Book Review* on August 27, 1967 ("Teenagers are for real"), Hinton herself fervently emphasized the need to turn

Y.A. literature's attention to realistic themes that directly reflect juvenile priorities and fermentations.

Y.A. literature is distinguished from other categories as literature that "deals with the concept of change and transformation" (Horrell, 2012: 47). It reflects the changing nature of society (Koss, 2012: 74), it is fluid and conforms to young people's experiences in the transformative sociopolitical ideologies (Bittner, 2013: 3).

It belongs to the category of reading for enjoyment and especially for entertainment, escape, relaxation, imagination and safety (Howard, 2011: 52-3). Often, Y. A. literature focuses on romance (Hedeen & Smith, 2013), even in non-romantic novels, since erotic awakening is a major issue within the framework of adolescence.

Forever (1975) by Judy Blume brought to the fore the issue of teenage sexuality and became a literary landmark. In this novel, the issue of sex at a young age is not a matter of moral negotiation, but rather of an emotional one and is approached as a matter of health education. Because of its content, this book has been a frequent target of censorship and appears in the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently controversial books from 1990-2000, in number seven.

Pedagogical censorship is a common practice and a timeless phenomenon in the field of Y. A. literature (Zervou, 1992), ideologically legalized in the name of protecting the young, "innocent" readers from harmful readings. Parents, teachers, or librarian associations are still at the forefront of this kind of censorship, exercising a great deal of influence.

In the 1970s, the 'problematic' novel flourished with the introduction of a multitude of social themes, and in the 1990s, so many and such innovations were introduced that radically redefined Y.A. literature in form, content, and structure (Crowe, 2002). The revival of the romantic genre in this context bears significant differences from its predecessors (Ansari, 2017), whereas the issue of sex is central, with young people being more independent and parental figures being almost non-existent.

Nowadays, Y.A. novels are featured in prominent bookstores and adapted for the screen, either in film or TV-series format, with great success. Most recently, top productions were inspired by Y.A.; novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* or *The Twilight Saga*. Websites such as *Forever Young Adult* and *Epic Reads* aim at the readership of the Y.A. community and create online discussion sites. As a product targeted to a particularly young audience, it is inevitably subject to pedagogical censorship. On the other hand, the genre's popularity to adults as well places it in the field of threshold literature (Beckett, 1999: 13-31) addressed to a double audience (Beckett, 1999: xiii); thus creating a double charged dynamic that is attracted by realism and equally repelled by it. Crossover novels constitute a case that questions the so far boundaries and norms/conventions of Y.A. literature. Since 1976, Myles McDowell had compiled a list of "key" features of children's literature, which would require revision, generally, in the light of recent developments and the attraction of adult audiences to the genre (Falconer, 2008: 27).

The boundaries were made permeable, allowing free access from both sides. Sex, drug use, depression, divorce, mental illness, death, the Holocaust, and genocide are issues that are increasingly prevalent in contemporary Y.A. literature.

1. Internet Girls: short description and reception history

The novels under discussion are considered a red flag by the ubiquitous guardians of young readers' innocence. Although bestsellers, with many thousands of sales and fanatical readers, they have sparked intense controversy. Myracle is America's most banned author and at the same time the

most popular one. She has occasionally attracted the overt wrath of parents, teachers, and librarians who turn against her in a vulgar way. The pretext is her explicit and unobtrusive reference to sex and more generally the use of an obscene and provocative language in these novels.

The American Family Association characterizes her works "not as literature but as ... propaganda ... or pornography" (Gaffney, 2014). A closer look at the books' content, however, would allow anyone to shape his/her personal opinion, beyond the prevailing doom-speech.

In the first novel of the series, *TTYL* (acronym of: talk to you later) three girlfriends, Angela Silver (SnowAngel), Zoe Barrett (Zoegirl) and Madigan Kinnick (Maddie) are just starting their tenth grade in high school and refer to each other as the "winsome threesome", believing they will be friends for ever. Their relationship, interspersed with other friendly relationships, or even rivalries, is constantly tested, but their friendship prevails. The themes of the book are mainly school competitions, adolescent flirting, a teacher-student attraction case, and teenage parties.

In the next *TTFN* novel (Ta ta for now) in the following school year, a rivalry for a boy between Zoe and Angela, intra-family tensions, a presumed marital infidelity, a forced departure and the girlfriends' compulsory separation as well as the first experience of using grass (by Maddie) are some of the new themes/topics added.

In the *L8er G8er* (Later Gater) the reader learns the issues concerning the sexual intercourse between Doug and Zoe, the ephemerality of youthful relationships with the breakup of the Angela-Logan relationship, revenge, cyber bullying, family quarrels etcetera.

In *Yolo* (You only live once) the girls are now very far from each other. Maddie in California, Zoe in Ohio, and Angela in Georgia. They are concerned about their relationship and the loyalty of their sex partners. On the verge of changes and with the distance among them, their friendship seems more necessary than ever.

One may conclude, the issues touched in the *Internet Girls* series and used as a pretext for censorship in no way do they constitute an innovation or a surprise in the Y.A. literary field. So, inevitably, the question is what the real causes behind the reactions of the adult audience are.

A possible reason for their depreciation is that they have been classified as a type of junior chick-lit. Although the term "chick lit" (Mazza, 1995) refers to literary texts with women protagonists between 20 and 30 years old and presents the challenges of their generation to balance the demands of career, on the one hand, and personal relationships, on the other, the girly perspective of Myracle›s novels is supposed to be the point of contact with this genre. Chick-lit has been described as a "commercial tsunami" (Zernike, 2004) and attracts the undeniable contempt of critics, dismissed as a cheap and low-level para-literature and a means of promoting consumerism (Smith, 2007).

It is further argued that Myracle's language is unpolished and coarse, resembling unfiltered oral speech, causing a sense of stuplimity (a compound term out of stupidity and sublimity), a kind of an aesthetic reaction to the common, trivial and conventional everyday speech. (Sianne, 2005: 271). Sylvia Schultermanlde, however, proposes a reading of Myracle's novels through their cultural reframing in the environment of late capitalism and the galloping digitization of reality. What characterizes her work - she says - is the lack of estrangement, which, according to Russian formalists, is the noticeable difference between everyday language and literary writing. Dialogues borrowed directly from everyday life are not embellished and offer young people, who are their target group, a point of identification.

However, do all these reasons suffice to justify the angry mass reaction of American society, which places the series at the top of the list of banned books of the American Library Association in 2009 and 2011?

Is the lack of literary quality in Myracle's writing, the provoking issues of the novels - such as sex and drugs - and their realistic presentation, the stylistic affinity of the works with low literary quality, pointing to the genre of chick lit, or, is it ultimately, something else to blame for the banning of the series from official institutions and libraries?

2. The transition of the epistolary novel from conventional to digital exchanges and the subversion of the "fragile" female stereotype

A prominent feature of the novels in question is that they were the first written entirely in the form of instant messages. Various graphic techniques (color and font change) are adopted as visual marks of the interlocutors' identity and also represent the material side of writing technologies, in other words, the transition from handwritten to electronic, multimedia writing (Hallet, 2009: 139).

Instant messaging as a narrative vehicle is considered a contemporary version of the epistolary novel (Schultermanlde, 2018), with literature and technology, in this case, constituting one another (McPherson et al., 2013: 616). By adopting this type of digital communication and making it the sole means of advancing the plot, Myracle has chosen to adapt the discourse to the specifications of the medium that is its vehicle. Indeed, the author, realizing the rapid evolution and transformation of digital environments, on one hand, and the continuous enrichment of the communication code used, on the other, reprinted her novels in 2014, updating them with more up-to-date elements of modern communication and its ever-changing features.

Although the epistolary form has always been thought of as particularly suited for female voices (Goldsmith, 1989: vii), male writers in the 18th century perfected the technique and imitated female writing, mainly presenting women within the restrictions of bourgeois society (Gilroy and Verhoeven, 2000: 2). So, the epistolary voices described women's confinement more than liberation and focused on love stories, which were mostly about sexual victimization (Jensen, 1989: 34) and not mutual love. The representation of female voice and consciousness has been simply unthinkable for long until approximately the seventies (Lanser, 1992: 189), when the term: "feminization" of the writing referred to the adoption of a female point of view in narration (Zervou, 2005: 100). In women's writings indirection, ambiguity, ellipsis, euphemism, reticence, and other buffering techniques had been celebrated as aesthetic principles. Later on, women writers used the genre to talk about their suppression in the male-dominated society, articulating the genuine feminine experience as the "other" in the patriarchal society (Patch, 2014: 11). In the private space of letters, women, so often silenced in public life, had at last personal freedom to rewrite themselves and even, sometimes, to rewrite others surrounding them (Moula, 2009).

With the advent of telecommunications, the traditional epistolary novel virtually disappeared along with the conventional letter writing. For the genre to survive, writers experimented with electronic forms of communication (blogs, emails, IM) to tell stories. These forms ignore the previous prescriptions and restrictions and promise women the opportunity to escape the biological constraints of their gender (Milne, 2002: 81). Cyberspaces allow gender-neutral communication to be generated, without fully eliminating the differences and preferences in the writing styles of the genders.

In the digital environment, where women enjoy equal access authority as men do, they can express themselves unimpeded, and reveal more about their real selves. Even more, the adolescent girls' voice is expected - due to impulsivity and openness of the youth- to be more daring and to challenge the established norms of female attitude. Additionally, taking into account that this so-

called "me - generation" is more confident, assertive and entitled than ever before (Alsup, 2010:6), daring to act impulsively, to subvert prescribed norms and to question adult authority, it is expected that the freedom they rejoice in the cyberspace will double the subversive power of their voice. This is the case of the *Internet Girls*.

2.1. Digital communication in Y.A. literature

However, the assimilation of elements of digital communication environments and of webspeak (Brown, 2010), in particular, is by no means a unique phenomenon in the literary field, as a plethora of literary books, for two decades, already present, in various ways, influences the ever-evolving digital landscape.

In the field of adult literature, similar practices have been enthusiastically welcomed, such as the debut of the Finnish author, Hannu Luntiala, *Viimeiset Viestit* (*Last Messages*) published in 2007. This is a story also told in its entirety in SMS form. In 2008, the project was nominated for the European Book Prize (Prix du Livre Européen) and translated into many languages.

But even in Y.A. literature, the phenomenon is quite common. In the 31 juvenile novels from 2000 to 2009 reviewed by Koss & Tucker-Raymond (2010), digital communication methods are represented throughout: sometimes such digital communication consists the exclusive narrative vehicle, sometimes it is selectively embedded in the narrative, sometimes only one type of digital communication (e.g. im / blogs) is used while at other times a combination of forms (messages, emails, posts) are detected. The texts generally outline the features of webspeak as used in authentic environments (captions, or uppercase (BiCaps), emoji, abbreviations, acronyms, punctuation, etcetera).

The kinds of digital texts that are prevalent in Y.A. novels are similar to those used by young people in real life, but the novels are not fully up-to-date with current developments in social media and are often somewhat behind.

Another study of Y.A. novels between 2010 and 2012 (Dagel, 2012) found an equally large variety of representing or embedding digital media in them. Moreover, there is often a post-discourse from the protagonists about digital media and their impact on young people's lives.

Most juvenile novels which incorporate new communication technologies into the narrative flow focus on everyday life and problems of adolescents, with their interpersonal relationships and identity construction being predominant. The issues raised in these novels are also observed in the respective authentic environments (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008), where adolescents use digital communication for the same reasons: to maintain friendships, to make new friends, or to become romantically involved. Also, through digital communication, friendships are strengthened on the one hand, and, on the other, family relationships are weakened, as a result of increased contact with friends.

Although, in general, such literary texts attempt to reproduce the writing of young people in authentic contexts, it is not rare for writers, such as John Green, when translating texts of their characters, to smooth out the wording and use full sentences, seeking a more academic version of them.

2.2. Young people's language in general and webspeak in particular

Micro-analysis of adolescents' speech highlights a number of special features, such as a significant number of puns, teases, and nicknames, as well as more or less mismatched combinations of stylistic levels (e.g., the combination of formal and informal style), aimed at achieving humorous results (Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Sense of humor is one of the key-features of the youth slang, which states that it is not necessary to treat everything as serious, given and unaltered (Zhou & Fan, 2013). The juvenile vocabulary includes expressions with no counterpart in the standard variety, for example, to describe the specific interests of youth culture.

Also, the vocabulary of young people is characterized by the intense use of taboo words in relation to other age groups, by humor or derogatory expressions (Androutsopoulos, 2005). The discussion topics of youth groups are embedded in their vocabulary and therefore, words related to love, relationships and sexuality, fun and drinking, to their activities in general are identified (Stenström & Jørgensen, 2009).

And, while, until recently, live and direct contact had been the main area of socializing and relating to each other, the ubiquitous presence of computers and the Internet is beginning to affect what is written about young people, the forms in which they come across texts and how and where they read and write to themselves.

In a way, the social results are similar to the impact of the advent of every new technology (radio, cinema, television) in previous generations, when the ways of producing and interpreting texts were adapted to the specifications of the new media of their time. What is new is that the proliferation of computer-related media and cyberspace is creating new textualities, such as emails, blogs, hypertexts and short messages, that mix codes and create trans-texts, combining elements from a variety of different media (Reynolds, 2007: 155).

Years of such digital communication environments, texting and instant messaging across social networks, have finally begun to change the written language (Brown, 2010). The 2011 version of the *New Oxford American Dictionary* now contains what is called webspeak and includes established phrases and abbreviations such as BFF (Best Friend Forever), Defriending (stop being a friend on Facebook), and the hashtag sign (#) to create a keyword on Twitter.

Also, emoji or, in other words, the visual code of communication that originated in such informal environments is now widely recognized and permeates many aspects of life, from advertising to political campaigns. Their dissemination is of such extent, that in 2015, the emoji known as "Face with Tears of Joy" was selected by the *Oxford Dictionary* as "word of the year" (Seargeant, 2019: 4). What was worth noticing was the fact that a pictogram - and not a word- was selected from one of the most imposing dictionaries in the world in the most prominent place. The use of emoji varies (structural, semantic, emphasizing) (Danesi, 2016: 87) with their primary function being to provide nuances in the meaning of the message. They do not completely replace traditional written formats, but they reinforce, extend, and comment on the meaning of written communication, usually enhancing the friendliness of tone.

Young people, growing up in an age where "digital media are part of the social and cultural fabric of learning, play, and social communication" (Ito, Davidson, Jenkins, Lee, Eisenberg & Weiss, 2008: vii), use them as extensions of themselves (Keating, 2005), to project their desired identity, at least at the very moment of using them (Weber & Mitchell, 2008).

In the case of texting, in this new jargon, there is no definite coding and replacement of standard forms: the standard and the unusual coexist, with the latter containing several variants. All individuals exercise their texting choices heterogeneously and in response to their sense of identity, their social status, and their perception of the needs of each particular situation. Various personal writing styles relate to individual users, their choices and habits.

Focusing upon serving the socio-linguistic "principles" of (a) abbreviations and speed, (b) paralinguistic substitution, and (c) phonological approach, young people's messages are both linguistically unfamiliar and communicative (Thurlow, 2003).

Following the model developed by Werry for the linguistic features of Internet Relay Chat (Werry, 1996), there are three main motivations for texting: 1. features about the linguistic economy and reduced text input 2. features to simulate the spoken language and 3. features reflecting the transition to a multimodal perspective. All these combined together sometimes propose such an innovative linguistic experience that has been characterized as Neography (Anis, 2007).

In detail, each of these has already been analyzed further (Shortis, 2007), but most of the features discussed in the research literature are met in the *Internet Girls*.

3. Digital communication as a field of intergenerational struggle and a vehicle for undermining pedagogical censorship

So, what is the matter with the particular novels that choose to enforce and impose a different communicative code than the official one, resembling cyberspace?

The explanation for the extreme public reactions to this series is likely to be found in a latent deep-rooted ambivalence towards new technologies in many aspects of Western culture and also in the perception of language as the sole means of narrative and a vehicle of exercising ideological control. Under this prism, the erosion of language through new technologies threatens to weaken adult surveillance and marginalize it.

If, as Rose (1993: 19) claims, childhood functions as a cultural boundary of a fantastic, idealized and pure place of origin that the adults constantly seek to recover, then what is implied here is that this notion is also linked to pre-technological times, the supernatural/spiritual thought and sense of integration, lost in culture, with the advent of technology and scientific rationality (Ellul, 1991).

The majority of children's books dealing with computers, the Internet and other forms of information and communication technology are perpetuating the kind of negative technology stereotype that inevitably affects children's literature response to technological innovation and the adoption of more advanced, hybrid or transmedia forms (Moula & Malafantis, 2018).

Rodney Philbrick's *Last book of Universe* (2000) is marked by the hostility that many children's books display towards new technologies by depicting a future generation that spends its time immersed in cyberspace being repulsed by books and reading.

Books for children that focus on new technologies tend to deal more with the potential moral, philosophical, environmental and social dangers of the "brave, new cyber world" rather than devising alternative, optimistic narratives or empowering choices that used to characterize once qualitative children's literature (Reynolds, 2007: 178).

Moreover, Myracle's novels, choosing the here and now of storytelling through the direct communication of digital environments and their present tense discourse, form hybrid texts, where they conflict with the monomodal notion of the past and the theory of language as the one and only means of representation and communication (Kress, Van Leeuwen, 2001: 45). In the age of digitization and intangible electronic signs, the concept of language as the dominating narrative medium is being undermined and relativized. This way, the series also highlights major shifts in cultural meaning-making practices.

Since it turns out that the meaning is always attached to, and associated with the medium that carries it, the textual world in the *Internet Girls,* on the one hand, and the narrative, on the other, are constructed and deployed in a multi-sensorial way, sustained by the digital environments which reflect the daily practices (Hallet, 2009).

Also, as the dialogues take place between young adult girlfriends, the "vernacularization" of their digital speech is intense, and the use of colloquial, non - standard varieties acquires a prominent place (Coupland, 2014).

The prevalence of this new mixed youth webspeak in digital environments functions as a "meta-pragmatic" practice' (Agha, 2007) that contributes to the dissemination, change or consolidation of codes in the socialized language community of language users. In other words, through digital communication environments, the distinctive speaking style of young people becomes socially recognizable and is registered as an "indicative" of the attributes of a group of speakers (Agha 2005, 2007). So, this kind of speech is consequently being disseminated to the general public as the conversation standard of these social environments.

Besides, as language and literacy are always related to power issues (Olthouse, 2010: 36), hybrid books, such as the *Internet Girls*, raise important questions about the evolution of Y.A. literature in the upcoming decades. For example, should young people's idioms be reflected in literary texts? Will adults be able to read these books with the same fluency as teenagers, or will they be excluded from them?

4. Conclusions: What is really at stake when young people's language is imbued with digital conventions as reflected in their literature?

Those hostile to life's digitization, focus on the reduced communication system and condemn messages that miss punctuation, avoid capital letters and have little or no typographical variation. They see the use of non-standard forms as a declining symptom of the educational and linguistic standards. But focusing upon the extremes only reveals part of the history of online writing, and for a more objective opinion, one should describe the range of spelling forms used in the various circumstances and identify the factors that cause them, which may be different each time: online writers may be unaware of the typical use of language, may also know it but might not care to use it, or may not have the sufficient typing skills. They may have the impression that they have written something correctly, but they do not check the final text, which results in errors, or they may still consciously refuse to use standard language form or may occasionally use idioms for a specific purpose.

Tagliamonte & Denis (2008) studied a large body of IMs (over 1,000,000 words from 72 people aged 15-20) and concluded that textual form in messages is no different regarding syntax and pronunciation than the official language and that shortcuts are mainly observed in younger people. However, the hybrid language is only found in the communication environment between friends. Drouin & Davis (2009), who conducted a multi-factorial survey (using idioms of texting, two-way translation between texting and standard English, spelling, etcetera), also found no effect of digital language on youth's typical literacy.

Crystal (2008) argues that the use of the text language indicates that texter has strong control over the official language. The texter must first know how to use "normal" language so that he/she can shorten and modify it (Drouin & Davis, 2009). Preference and repetition of phrases are part of the

preferred conversational, polyphonic style and are usually emotionally charged (Jones & Schieffelin, 2009).

The realization of digital communication is volatile, reflecting the personalized and often playful nature of private exchanges and the participants' rejection of the prescribed norms. There are cases where it can lead to messages that require decryption as if written in a secret code. However, such messages are deliberate and creative, intended to be incomprehensible to their recipients, and certainly do not resemble mechanical writing, as some language-purists imply (Danet & Herring, 2007: 110).

They constitute a more playful, representational version of the ego in a socially contextually defined code. Common textual behavior is a sign that one belongs to a group of common interests and at the same time consists a kind of passport for it.

The use of non-standard spelling is a "powerful expressive resource. ... [which] can graphically capture the immediacy, the "authenticity" and the "taste" of the spoken language in all its diversity. ... [and] has the potential to challenge linguistic hierarchies ..." (Jaffe, 2000: 498).

It is realized that the moral panic about young people being totally absorbed and distracted by the new media is part of a systemic response. Adults try to turn youth away from social networks in digital environments and from the kind of writing that they support because they find it threatening and dangerous (Ito et al., 2019: 23), as both cyberspace and its practices escape from their immediate supervision.

Even more, young girls' unmediated self-exposure poses an exponential threat, as not only the teenage idiom becomes the exclusive narrative means, but also its web version exacerbates the outcome. In addition, the abolition of the adult narrator, the absence and degradation of the role of adult mentors in narration, the realistic and hence persuasive immaturity of the youth, the confidence and self-centeredness of the young female interlocutors, without any attempt to embellish or self-censor their words, and the absence of an idealized female figure, provoke a strong reaction mainly from parents, given literature's culturally formative and pedagogical mission, by definition.

The protagonists' gender makes the criticism more severe and the adult gatekeepers of order even more anxious. Girls' "digital" talk transgresses the boundaries of bashfulness and decency, as dictated by the adult- mainly male- norms. As the *Internet girls* relexicalize their inner world, some adults' fiery reaction is more than expected.

Counterbalancing the conservative reactions, however, some more objective opinions claim that the series is offering adults, who decide to read it, a valuable glimpse at the lives of adolescent girls (Goldsmith, 2007: 45) or even a lesson in juvenile idiom (Gelman, 2007). What has largely been ignored, though, is that the principles that originate from the ethics of interpersonal relations, cooperativeness, devotion, understanding, loyalty, communality, solidarity and etcetera are still the fundamental concepts that qualify and differentiate female writing (Vandergrift, 1996: 17-20), even in digital spaces which sustain a radically new way of writing and communicating.

Literature simply sets an analogy to life. Therefore, we do our youth a very bad service if we believe that we protect them from the world by restricting their access to public life, (Boyd, 2007) cyberspace included. They have to enter the social -and even more the digital- arena of our times, to make mistakes and learn from them. Our role as adults is not that of the police officer but of the well-intentioned guide. So, instead of trying to control the use of new media, in their lives and their literature respectively, it would be better to try to learn from the digital experience of young people.

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