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Influence of digital communication on young adult contemporary fiction

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Abstract
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THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ON YOUNG ADULT

CONTEMPORARY FICTION

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By
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Date Approved   Graduate Faculty Reader

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Date Approved   Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

Digital communications are profoundly influencing young adult communications; yet little is known about how novels that use digital communications such as text messages, e-mails, or blogs as the voice and point of view. The purpose of this qualitative content analysis was to analyze how select young adult novels portray digital communications themes using the following research questions: What digital communication themes are portrayed in young adult literature that use digital communication as the voice and point of view? In what ways are the digital communication themes developed in these young adult novels? In what ways might these themes inspire young adults to consider issues such as ethics and safety in their own digital communication practices and experiences? The study found that the novels used many forms of communication to support the narrative voice including blogs, e-mail, IM, text messages and social networking sites. The themes of establishing interpersonal connections, constructing identity and relationships with family were also analyzed through the books.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Walk down the hallways of any high school, or even a middle school or elementary school these days, and listen closely to what you're hearing. Look over a teen's shoulder as they're chatting with their friends using an instant messaging (IM) program on the Internet. Peek at some text messages they send to their friends. After such observations, you may feel like you need a translator to communicate with young adults these days. You may hear and see such things as:

> "Just Facebook me later." – Translation: "Send me a message on Facebook."
> "So, I Googled him." – Translation: "I looked him up on the Internet and used Google search engine to find more information."
> "LOL! IDK what 2 say but gtg 4 now. brb" – Translation: "I'm laughing out loud! I don't know what to say, but I have to go for now. I'll be right back."
> "Omw! C U Soon! :)" – Translation: "I'm on my way! I'll see you soon! Smiley face."

In March of 2011, Anna Stewart of CNN announced that the *Oxford English Dictionary* would be formally recognizing such language and listing OMG (oh my god), LOL (laughing out loud) and FYI (for your information) as words. Chief editor of new words for the dictionary, Graeme Diamond, explained that although these words may have resulted from the character limits in tweets and texts, they have been adopted as commonly used expressions in everyday speech and print.

Digital Communication History

It began with e-mails in the early 1990s and quickly evolved into bulletin board systems, chat rooms, and instant messaging programs. College students across the country were connecting with strangers all over the world, and teens would later use it to

continue conversations with friends from school once they got home for the evening. By 1996 AOL introduced the Buddy List, which allowed users to know when friends were online and available to instant message with others (Clemmitt, 2006).

Social networking sites such as Friendster, MySpace and Facebook gained popularity upon their introduction in 2003. These websites allowed users to set up a web presence and befriend people that they knew, or would like to get to know, all over the world. If a person had an opinion he or she wanted to share with the rest of the world, he or she could set up a web log, or blog, to be read by millions at the click of a mouse.

Years of e-mails, text messaging and instant messages through social networks such as MySpace and Twitter have finally started to change the written word (Brown, 2010). The 2011 version of *The New Oxford American Dictionary* now contains what is being called webspeak and includes such phrases and abbreviations such as BFF (best friend forever), defriend (to stop being someone's friend on Facebook), and hashtag, the pound sign (#), to create a keyword in a status update on Twitter.

Young Adult Literature and Digital Communication

Digital media have increasingly impacted communication styles and literature written for young adults. Braun (2007) stated in her article *Reading – It's not just about the books* (YALSA, Summer, 2007) that teens read more than some realize when one considers the time they spend on the Internet reading blogs, MySpace, wikis or Facebook pages. Rosen (2010) noted the rules of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and other conventions of the English language are more relaxed on the Internet, causing some adults to fear that this is allowing teens to develop bad writing habits. However, researchers pointed out that not all students use text speak, and of those who do most

were able to separate its informal context from the need for more formal communications such as with instructors. (Drouin & Davis, 2009).

Emge (2004) asserted the digital age has affected the way young adults communicate in society through text messaging, chatting on the Internet through instant messaging, and surfing the web at the same time. The quick way in which their communication flows is affecting their attention span. This change in interaction between young adults has inspired authors to write books to appeal not only to young adult interests, but in a format they understand and can easily read.

Young adult literature has commonly addressed the issues faced by its readers in real life; reflective of this, the narrative voice of young adult literature has been changing to reflect communication changes. As technology changes, so do the writing styles of recent novels, and more books are being published to mimic digital communication formats such as e-mails and instant messages (Koss & Teale, 2009).

Emge (2004) noted that in 2000, Paula Danzinger and Ann Martin coauthored *Snail Mail No More*. This was one of the first young adult novels to be written to include e-mail messages between the characters. Two years later, *ChaseR: A Novel in E-mails*, was written by Michael J. Rosen entirely as e-mails from the character, Chase, to friends and family.

As time progressed, so did the young adult novels that used digital communication as a means for the characters to share their stories. In 2004, Lauren Myracle began a series of books entirely in instant messages between four friends. *TTFN* was her first book to be written entirely in instant messages. The pages were printed to resemble a chat screen, complete with emoticons. Readers were invited to learn the story

of these characters and make assumptions about twists and turns in the plot based on what was happening in the conversation.

Emge (2004) asserted that not all books are written strictly for enjoyment of the reader. Some authors have used this genre to help teach young adults about Internet Safety and the importance of protecting their privacy. *Love, Sara* written by Mary Beth Lundgren in 2001, is the story of a girl who meets up with someone she has been chatting with online and is molested. *Katie.com* by Katherine Tarbox, written in 2000, is her true story about how she was persuaded to meet a man in real life, only to be molested by him in a Houston hotel while in town for a school swim meet. Regardless of the plot, these novels continue to be popular among teens and young adults.

Significance

The introduction of books written in netspeak more than 10 years ago and the trend of increasing young adult books using digital communications (Koss & Teale, 2009) may cause young adults to gravitate toward novels with a language familiar to them. This study will help teacher librarians and teachers understand thematic messages of books written using digital communication as the voice as point of view and see the potential need for such books in their libraries and classrooms as they appeal to young adults.

Problem Statement

Digital communications are profoundly influencing young adult communications; yet little is known about how novels that use digital communications as the voice and point of view such as text messages, e-mails, or blogs portray themes that may be essential to young adults such as ethics or safety.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to analyze how select young adult novels portray digital communications themes.

Research Questions

1. What digital communication themes are portrayed in young adult literature that use digital communication as the voice and point of view?

2. In what ways are the digital communication themes developed in these young adult novels?

3. In what ways might these themes inspire young adults to consider issues such as ethics and safety in their own digital communication practices and experiences?

Definitions

Chat Room – "Online messaging facility (esp. an Internet site) dedicated to real-time exchanges, usually on a particular topic; a notional space occupied by two or more participants in an online chat service." (Oxford English Dictionary online, September 22, 2010.)

Cyberbullying – "The electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person (as a student) often done anonymously." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary online, January 29, 2012.)

Digital Communications – "Text messaging, blogs, instant messaging (IM), social networking websites, and e-mail." (Koss & Tucker-Raymond, 2010, p. 43)

Instant Messaging – "A system for sending messages quickly over the Internet from one computer to another computer." (Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary online, March 19, 2012.)

Text Messaging – "The action or practice of sending text messages from one mobile phone to another." (Oxford English Dictionary online, September 22, 2010.)

Web Log (blog) – "A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary." (Oxford English Dictionary online, September 22, 2010.)

Assumptions

1. A number of books for young adults have been written in a form of digital communication such as text messaging, instant messaging, e-mails, and blogs.

2. Some themes of these young adult novels will convey messages about ethics and safety on the Internet.

Limitations

The books selected for this study were published between the years 2010 through 2011 and appeared on the *Middle School and Junior High Core Collection* or *Senior High School Core Collection* databases.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research relevant to this study examined how digital communication has affected reading and writing skills in young adults, the way digital communication has affected young adult communication and relationships online and in real life, and the influence digital communication has on young adult literature.

The Influence of Digital Communication on Literacy in Young Adults

Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) noticed a growing trend in articles that claimed IM were causing a "breakdown in the English language" (p. 3). They sought to add to the information about computer-mediated communication and focus specifically on instant messaging between teenagers. They analyzed more than a million words of IM communications of 72 people between the ages of 15 and 20. The study analyzed a quarter of a million spoken words total. Tagliamonte and Denis' findings showed that although IM language shared some of the patterns used in speech, its vocabulary and grammar tended to be relatively conservative. For example, teenagers are more likely to use the phrase "He was like, 'What's up?'" than "He said, 'What's up?'" when speaking - but the opposite is true when they are instant messaging. This supports the idea that IM represents a hybrid form of communication.

Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) also found that teens do not use abbreviations as much as the stereotype suggests: LOL (laugh out loud), OMG (oh my god), and TTYL (talk to you later) made up just 2.4 % of the vocabulary of IM conversations - an "infinitesimally small" proportion, (p. 24). They also found that rumors of the proper use

of the word "you" would appear to have been greatly exaggerated because it was preferred to "u" 9 times out of 10.

Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) said that the use of such short forms is confined mostly to the youngest users of IM. They also concluded their findings with this reflection about ways the youngest users are growing in their use of IM:

> "Indeed, this study of IM language is likely already behind the times and taps only a very small part of what is even now developing. The insurgence of new media into the contemporary world of communication is always expanding. Since we conducted this study, newer and trendier ways to interact online have developed, including mushrooming social-networking Web sites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook) (see Baron et al. 2005), multiplayer online role-playing games (e.g., World of Warcraft), and undoubtedly untold other newfangled ways to communicate online." (p. 27)

Like Tagliamonte and Denis (2008)**,** Drouin and Davis (2009) hoped to shed light on the assumption that text speak, shortened abbreviations for commonly used words, can be potentially detrimental on literacy. Their study consisted of 34 text speak users and 46 nontext speak users, (24 males and 56 females), from a Midwestern four-year commuter university. The purpose of the study was to find how familiar and proficient the subjects were with text speak and their standardized literacy levels and misspellings of common text speak words.

Drounin and Davis (2009) sought to collect data on the following:

1. Use of textisms in formal versus informal communication: Emails.
2. Text speak proficiency: Translating Standard English [SE] to text.
3. Text speak familiarity: Translating text speak to SE.
4. Literacy processing speed: Speed of translation to and from SE
5. Spelling errors: Translating target textisms to SE
6. Standardized Literacy: reading and spelling. (p. 55)

Participants met with the experimenter individually and completed tests including an e-mail task, translation task, word ID, reading fluency, spelling and a survey. The tests

were performed privately and in the same order for each participant. Experimental and standardized measures were used to find students' use and familiarity with text speak vocabulary, how students differentiate between text speak and Standard English, and to find a correlation between the two languages (Drounin & Davis, 2009).

The use of textisms in formal versus informal communication, specifically e-mails, was addressed first. Students were asked to write an e-mail to a professor and a friend, based on the same subject. Drouin & Davis (2009) analyzed the messages and recorded the number of words, errors, and textisms. Text speak proficiency, meaning translating Standard English to text, was measured by asking participants to translate five sentences from standard English into text speak. Data was collected on whether or not they used an acceptable textism, although points were also given if they used alternate abbreviations.

Translating text speak to standard English was used to measure the participants text speak familiarity. They were asked to translate five sentences from text speak into Standard English. Drouin & Davis (2009) then recorded and coded the entries for acceptable use of Standard English. Only a correctly spelled and punctuated word or phrase in Standard English was counted correct. Participants were assessed on how quickly they were able to translate to and from Standard English while the researchers measured literacy processing speed. Submissions were timed and recorded for each of the translating sentence exercises. Cumulative scores were calculated for the total time translating words and phrases from text speak to Standard English, and vise versa.

Spelling errors were used to measure whether or not the use of textisms negatively impact the spelling of words commonly abbreviated in text speak while

participants translated target textisms to Standard English. Standardized literacy, reading and spelling, were also measured. Letter and word identification and reading fluency, as well as spelling, was assessed using the Woodcock Johnson III Achievement tests battery and subtests (Drouin & Davis, 2009).

Lastly, a survey of the participants was given on an array of items ranging from the students' use of text speak in different contexts, their opinions about appropriateness of text speak in formal and informal communication, and whether or not they believe the use of text speak positively or negatively influence memory of standard English. A six-point Likert scale response format or true-false format was used.

After the research Drouin and Davis (2009) found that 43% stated they use text speak, while 57% stated they do not. Seventy-five percent of the students stated they thought it was appropriate to use text speak in written communication with friends as this is an informal situation, while 6% thought it appropriate to use text speak in written communication in a formal setting, such as with instructors.

Influence of Digital Communication on Young Adult Real Life and Online Relationships

Parents and teachers may wonder if social skills and relationships of teens that spend hours online are influenced in a positive or negative way. They may also question a young adult's ability to comprehend the consequences of misbehaving while using online networking websites. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) did a study on online communication and adolescent relationships to examine how young adults' relationships with friends, romantic partners, strangers, and their families were affected by communication activities. The researchers studied the nature and quality of online and

offline relationships, how online communication affects adolescents' relationships and well-being, and whether the effects are positive or negative. They also included something relatively new, the study of adolescents' relationships with strangers, because the Internet has opened up a whole new school of thought about ones' neighborhood.

The researchers examined how "technology shapes two important tasks of adolescence – establishing interpersonal connections and constructing identity" (p. 125). Their research showed that the expanded networks available to young adults could be a positive influence because it relieves social anxiety to talk to people online rather than face-to-face; however, there are hidden dangers such as sexual predation. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) stated "although researchers have conducted no rigorous experiments into how adolescents' wide use of electronic communication may be affecting their relationship with parents . . . it may be reinforcing peer communication at the expense of communication with parents" (p. 120).

The following year Mishna, McLuckie and Saini (2009) did a qualitative study that examined online relationships of children and youth and their experience with cyber abuse. It was found that many of the students, ages 15 to 19, used instant messaging to interact with existing friends; while approximately 14% of them stated they had developed close relationships with people they had never known in real life. Little research has been done to examine such relationships; however, this study suggested children who form such relationships are vulnerable.

Anonymous postings from children and youth to a web based counseling service were analyzed from March 2004 to September 2005. Of this information it was found that many struggle with cyber relationships and cyber abuse such as cyberbullying, cyber

sexual solicitation, and pornography (Mishna, et al., 2009). Of the 346 posts taken from 35,000 originals, five common themes were found in the struggles the youths were experiencing with online relationships. Although they were seemingly aware of the dangers of the Internet they encountered issues with "extent and importance of online interactions and relationships, online dating, awareness of potential online dangers cyber abuse (bullying, stalking, solicitation, and exposure to online pornography, and not telling parents" (Mishna, et al., 2009, p. 109).

The youth admitted to feeling that an online relationship was just as important to them as those they had in real life. Even though they knew the dangers of meeting someone online, they often trusted online friends and held those friendships and romantic relationships in high regard. Online dating appeared to intensify quickly and involved sexual encounters that included explicit sexual dialogue, displaying nudity via Webcams, and possibility meeting in person in the future. (Mishna, et al., 2009).

Mishna, et al. (2009) found that cyberbullying was reported by children as young as 11 years old. Many were made fun of because of their physical appearance, popularity and sexual orientation. Some students blocked others on chat rooms, while others posted lies or private information on blogs or social networking pages. Some students reported being stalked by peers and even older people even though they insisted they did not give out personal information.

Although most young people's online interactions can be positive or neutral, Mishna, et al. (2009) concluded that parents and educators must be aware of the risks. The students in the study feared telling an adult about their problems because of the punishment they may have received such as a loss of Internet privileges. Instead of

simply making students aware of the dangers, Mishna, et. al. stated a focus should be made to prepare them to open up to adults about what may be happening and help them problem solve the situation.

A few years later Kite, Gable and Filippelli (2010) did a study on how well middle school students understood the consequences of behavior while using social networking websites. The researchers wanted the schools to assess student's knowledge of their conduct online and the potential consequences so that an education program could be developed to lessen cyberbullying and threats of Internet predators. They examined their comprehension of this by using a self-administered survey. A total of 588 male and female students in grades 7 and 8 in urban and suburban schools responded to the survey entitled *Survey of Internet Risk and Behavior* conducted during a regular school day.

The findings of Kite, et al. (2010) study showed that although the media had made students aware of the risks of Internet predators on social networking sites, a total of 71% of the students didn't think an Internet predator would contact them based on something they have posted online. Only 40% of students thought it necessary to tell their parent if a stranger contacted them online; in part because they feared losing Internet privileges or other disciplinary measures from their parents.

Although only 10% of the students who took the survey by Kite, et al. (2010) admitted to being a victim of cyberbullying only 44% stated they would tell an adult if the situation occurred. The researchers declared that even though 10% seems to be a low number, there is still a need for parents and educators to be more involved in educating students of the consequences of their online behavior. The statement was also made that

the real consequence of cyberbullying could be suicidal thoughts or action and that "parents need to take a more active role in the development of their child's behaviors, particularly in the digital world" (p. 163).

Psychologists and educators are realizing the importance of research about the correlation of cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying. Accordino and Accordino (2011) published *An Exploratory Study of Face-To-Face and Cyberbullying in Sixth Grade Students* citing Subrahmanyam and Greenfield's (2008) study previously mentioned as the rationale for their work. One hundred twenty-four sixth grade students in a suburban middle school were surveyed about bullying, cyberbullying, and their relationship to their parents. The survey collected data on student's demographic information, use of technology, parent-child relationship, and coping mechanisms.

The demographics that were collected included age, sex, gender, age, ethnicity, and being a recipient of Special Education services. Students were also asked if they have an e-mail account, a cell phone, and if they spend hours on chatrooms, social networking sites, or instant messaging. In addition to the previous questions about technology, Accordino and Accordino (2011) also asked if the students were bullied and cyberbullied and how they coped with such situations. The final question addressed the students' perception of bullying and cyberbulling and if they believed it occurred at their middle school.

It was reported that the students spent an average of 1.51 hours using a cell phone, 1.13 hours instant messaging, and .76 hours in chatrooms and on social networking sites per day. Accordino and Accordino (2011) also reported that 73% of the students had a personal e-mail account while the remaining 51% did not. Students were also rating

themselves as quite confident in their technology skills as there was an average score of 4.94 on a Likert scale from one to seven, with one being no confidence and seven being very confident.

The findings on cyberbullying showed that students who had close relationships with their parents were cyberbullied .25 times less for every unit increase in their ratings of closeness, on a scale of one to seven, than those who reported being distant from their parents (Accordino & Accordino, 2001). An increase of Internet chat room and social networking time also showed to correlate with the higher frequency of a student reporting being cyberbullied by .20. The last finding showed students who participated in cyberbullying were about 1.6 times more likely to be victims themselves.

This study reflected the findings of previous studies as Accordino and Accordino (2011) summarized their results and stated that students' time spent in chat rooms and on social networking sites correlated positively with their likelihood of being or committing cyberbullying. The researchers also concluded that "based on these results, it would seem prudent to focus on parents setting limits with regard to online activities and electronic media" (Accordino & Accordino, 2011, p. 23).

Teens' reactions to how others are treated in online social networking sites was examined in a recent study titled *Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites: how American teens navigate the new world of "digital citizenship."* This study, by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project (2011), in partnership with the Family Online Safety Institute and Cable in the Classroom, sought to find how teens develop a sense of what makes a good or bad digital citizen and how they react when others are treated unfairly or unkind on the Internet.

The Pew (2011) study was a three-part, multi-modal study that included interviews with experts, seven focus groups with middle and high school students, and a nationally representative random-digit-dial telephone survey of teens and parents using both landline and cell phones. The study included 799 teens ages 12-18 and a parent or guardian of each child. The majority of the teens who used social media said their peers were mostly kind to one another on social networking sites. In contrast to these findings, 88% of teens surveyed said they witnessed other people be mean or cruel on social networking sites. Over the past 12 months, 15% of the teens said they had been the target of online meanness and there were no statistically significant differences by age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status.

Students were also surveyed about privacy and safety issues. The results showed almost one-half of the teens admitted to having pretended to be someone older in order to access a website or online service even though they realized it could put them in an unsafe situation (Pew, 2011). Over half, 55% of students, stated they have made decisions to not post negative content that could reflect poorly on them in the future and have considered potential negative implications.

Sexting was another topic in this survey. It was found that 2% of the teens surveyed admitted to sending a sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photo or video of himself or herself to someone else (Pew, 2011). A higher number, 16% of teens and 18% of cell phone users, said they have received such photos or videos.

Parents' insights were also collected in this survey. It was found that parents were likely to talk to their teens about digital safety and behavior. Almost all of the parents, 98% of those surveyed, said they talked to their children about how to behave online and

handle problems that may arise online. However, they are hesitant to take a hands-on approach to restrict or monitor their child's use of computers and cell phones.

The Influence of Digital Communication on Young Adult Literature

Throughout history we've seen our literature evolve to mirror trends in society concerning themes and style. This is also true for young adult (YA) literature. Although Koss & Teale (2009) observed that there has been little explicit examination of literature published for today's teens. The purpose of their study was to find the characteristics of English language young adult books currently being published by asking four questions:

(a) What genres are represented and predominate in the current body of YA literature? (b) Who is or is not represented in the current body of YA literature? (c) What is the content of YA books? (d) What identifiable trends are evident in the narrative, stylistic and structural features of current YA books? (p. 564)

For this study, a database of young adult books, fiction and nonfiction published in English between 1999 and 2005, was examined by Koss and Teale (2009). Included were books educators considered high quality, books young adults chose as favorites, as well as popular books. The initial list included 370 titles but was then later narrowed to 59.

Books were read, coded, and analyzed for patterns and trends on genre, characters represented, content, narrative, style, and structure. This content analysis found there to be a reoccurring theme of embedding digital communication technologies into narrative text. Once categories were coded and analyzed using respected textbooks in the field of young adult literature, tables were created of the themes and a percentage of the books that met the criteria were shown (Koss & Teale, 2009).

The relevant finding in this paper showed the identifiable trends that were seen in the narrative, stylistic, and structural features of the books. There were also a number of changes in formatting to mirror those of journal entries and epistolary novels. The overall trends included a growth in digital communication formats (e-mail and instant messaging) and the different forms of text adolescents are engaging with because of the changes in society in general. Koss and Teale (2009) stated, "It appears more authors are taking risks, experimenting with their writing by playing with new forms of voice and structure" (p. 570).

A study by Koss & Tucker Raymond (2010) titled *Representations of Digital Communication in Young Adult Literature: Science Fiction as Social* Commentary, found that digital communication is becoming more prevalent in young adult literature. The researchers stated this is still a relatively new form of character development and representation of society in novels, and they sought to show how often the novels mirrored real-life actions.

Koss & Tucker Raymond (2010) studied a total of 31 books and did a qualitative content analysis to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the main characters and in what settings do they use digital communication?
2. What types of digital communication are being integrated and what writing conventions are being used?
3. What is the content of the digital texts that characters produce?
4. How are characters in such novels positioned as purposeful types of people?
5. What meta-discussions of digital communication practices are present? (p. 44)

The copyright dates of the novels were between 2002 and 2009 and they were selected from favorable reviews from *The Horn Book Guide*, online children's

literature databases, the authors' personal collections, and recommendations from children's literature listservs.

The results of Koss & Tucker-Raymond (2010) relevant to this paper showed that the teens in the novels used digital communication daily, and it is portrayed in young adult literature as part of the setting and through text layout such as the imitation of blogs, instant messages, text messages, and e-mails. The text types parallel real life for teens and their preferred method of communication. Koss & Tucker-Raymond also stated that "text types prevalent in YA novels closely parallel teens' real lifeworlds, yet have not caught up with current social networking technologies" (p. 47).

Summary

In the past five years researchers have started to take an interest in how digital communication is changing communication abilities and etiquette of teens. Taligamonte & Denis' (2008) study found that teens' use of Instant Messaging has not caused the breakdown in traditional English as was once feared. The messages analyzed showed that the patterns of instant messages were similar to that used in speech and the vocabulary and grammar still followed the rules of conventional English. The study also showed that teens do not use abbreviations as much as adults stereotypically imagine. Although they concluded their study may have taken place a little late with the quickly changing forms of communication and varieties of technology, they were able to show that instant messaging, a form of digital communication, is a hybrid of text speak and conventional spoken language.

In 2009 Drouin and Davis continued to analyze text speak and textisims used by teens. They concluded that students were able to translate various textisms into Standard English, and vise versa, in very little time and with few spelling errors. The participants also shared their opinions about using text speak rather than formal English in various social situations. The majority said if it was an informal situation it was okay to use text speak in written communication, but that it was best to communicate with adults and instructors using proper English.

In recent years research has also been conducted to see how digital communication has influenced young adult real life and online relationships. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) focused their study on how technology shapes interpersonal connections and the formation of identity in young adults and found that teens use digital communication to expand networks and add potential face-to-face friendships. Their study also found that although adolescents claim to be aware of the dangers of Internet predators, parents need to begin taking an interest in what their children post online.

Cyberbullying has also been an issue to face teens in recent years due to the increased amount of time they are spending online or even sending text messages. Mishna, McLukie and Saini (2009) and Kite, Gable and Filippelli (2010) all found that students who stated they had been the victims of cyberbullying had also had a larger amount of unsupervised time online Instant Messaging or posting messages on social networking sites. It was also found that students who have a close relationship with their parents were less likely to be victims of cyberbullying or a perpetrator in a cyberbullying attack.

Accordino and Accordino (2011) referenced the study of Kite, Gable and Filippelli (2010) and their findings also showed that middle school students who spent more time online were also caught up in cyberbullying, either in the role of the bully or the victim. This study also found that those who had a close relationship with their parents were less likely to have problems with cyberbullying. All researchers concluded that parents should have a more active role in their children's online presence to protect them from the dangers of Internet predators, cyberbullies, or other relationships that may be harmful to them at a young age when they are still trying to form their own identities.

Literature today is mirroring the way young adults communicate using instant messages, text messages and e-mail. Koss and Teale (2009) and later Koss and Tucker-Raymond (2010) found patterns and trends in genre, characters, content, narrative style and structure which also had a reoccurring theme of digital communication. They also concluded that there has been little done to examine teen literature recently so there is a need to continue examining recent novels with this premise.

Deficiencies

Using digital communication is not new, however, the study of its portrayal through young adult novels is a relatively new topic for researchers. Koss & Tucker-Raymond's (2010) most recent study stated "We offer our research as the groundwork for a critical examination of digital communication in YA texts used in and out of classrooms so that teachers and students may become aware of transparent positioning of tools, uses and users of digital communication" (p. 51). However, Koss and Tucker-Raymond's study did not include thematic analysis and the authors acknowledge that the books used from 2002 – 2009 had not yet caught up to social networking technologies. It is with this

in mind that this researcher chooses to continue a study of young adult literature and the

way that digital communication is portrayed in more recent novels from 2010 to 2012.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study will focus on the problem that digital communications are profoundly influencing young adult communications; yet little is known about how novels that use digital communications as the voice and point of view portray themes that may be essential to young adults such as ethics or safety. The method of qualitative content analysis was used for this study to analyze how select young adult novels portray digital communications themes.

Research Design

Creswell (2008) defines qualitative research as "an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon . . .[asking] general questions . . . [and analyzing] information for description and themes" (p. 645). The researcher will compile a text database and determine the meaning of the text segments. After collecting data, the researcher reflected on how the findings relate to past research of others.

According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), a qualitative analysis, specifically a directed content analysis such as this one, starts with a theory or relevant research findings. These findings will then be analyzed to find reoccurring themes that answer the initial research questions.

Book Sample

For this study books between the year 2010 and 2012 were selected. The year 2010 was chosen as the starting date because the researcher followed the analysis of Koss and Tucker-Raymond (2010).

Senior High Core Collection and *Middle and Junior High Core Collection* databases were used to compile the list of books for this study. Simultaneous searches of the databases, with the limit of a publishing date of 2010 – 2012 were performed. Search terms included: blog and fiction, blogging and fiction, weblog and fiction, e-mail and fiction, e-mailing and fiction, texting and fiction, text messaging and fiction, text messages and fiction, social networking and fiction, and online and fiction. Titles removed from the search results included reference books and selection guides for librarians, as well as books that appeared as results in more than one search. This initial list was made up of 28 books.

The initial list was then narrowed to those that were set in the United States, included some form of digital communication within the text, and with an interest age of Grade 5 or above. Books were also removed if the subject was online gaming or YouTube because the purpose of the study was to analyze books that use digital communications text as the voice or point of view. After reading the abstracts for each book, titles were eliminated if they did not indicate in some way that the book included digital communications as a narrative voice or point of view for at least some portion of the book. A total of 14 books were read for the analysis. This list is Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

After the titles were identified, the researcher read the books while journal entries were kept using a note taking form (see Appendix B) to record initial themes as they appeared. After reviewing notes, the books were grouped into categories based on the themes that occurred most often.

Questions addressed when evaluating each novel include: What digital communication medium is used in the novel? What is the conflict in the novel? What might the author want the reader to learn from this novel? What are the themes in this novel?

Data Analysis

Following the initial reading the researcher reviewed the data to find reoccurring patterns based upon the research questions (see Appendix C). Once common characteristics were determined, novels were placed into categories. The researcher also identified common themes among the novels in regard to the narration and digital communication medium used. Additional themes were added as necessary. The overall findings were analyzed to see how digital communication was portrayed in young adult literature and how these themes were developed. The findings are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The researcher conducted a content analysis by looking for themes that emerged in the titles read. The list of books chosen was provided in Appendix A. The researcher initially looked for two themes, Establishing Interpersonal Connections and Constructing Identity. Additional themes and subthemes emerged during the reading of the novels and many books contained more than one theme.

Findings

Each book was examined through a thematic lens to answer the revised research questions for this study:

1. What digital communications are used to support the narrative voice and point of view in these young adult novels?

2. What digital communications themes are portrayed in these young adult novels?

3. In what ways are these themes developed?

4. In what ways might these themes inspire young adults to consider issues such as ethics and safety in their own digital communication practices and experiences?

Table 1 was created to show what digital communications are used in each book. Tables were also created to show each theme and which books contained the theme with summaries or descriptions to indicate how the book addressed each theme.

Digital Communications Used

Table 1 shows each form of digital communication and each book in which it was used to support the narrative voice and point of view. Email was used the most, as seven novels used this form of communication, while blogs were used in six of the novels. Text messages were used in five novels, while social networking site and instant messages and chat rooms were each used in only three novels.

Of the 14 books, two used nearly all forms of communication. *Very LeFreak* and *Want to go Private* both used e-mails, instant messages and chat rooms, text messages, and social networking sites to tell the story.

There were four books that used only one form of digital communication throughout the story. *Gossip From the Girls' Room*, *My Life Undecided*, *The Vinyl Princess, Mac Slater Cool Hunter*, and *Things I Know About Love* each used only blogs. Two books, *My Big Fat Secret*, and *The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz*, were the only books that were written entirely as e-mails.

Table 1

Digital Communication Used to Support Narrative Voice

Title	Digital Communication Used					
	Copyright Date	Emails	Instant Messages & Chat Rooms	Text Messages	Blogs	Social Networking Sites
The Boy Project	2012	X			X	
Gossip from the Girls' Room	2011				X	
iDrakula	2010	X		X		
Little Blog on the Prairie	2010			X	X	
Loser/Queen	2010	X		X		
Mac Slater Cool Hunter	2010				X	
My Big Fat Secret	2010	X				
My Life Undecided	2010				X	
The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz	2010	X				
The Vinyl Princess	2010				X	
Things I Know About Love	2010				X	
Unfriended	2011	X	X			X
Very LeFreak	2010	X	X	X		X
Want to Go Private?	2011	X	X	X		X

The books that used the most digital communication, *Very LeFreak* and *Want to Go Private* have two different outcomes but stories are similar. Each of the characters became very dependent on the relationship they had with someone they had met online and have trouble functioning without daily contact with them. In *Very LeFreak* we learn that all of the technology in her life, e-mail, text messages, instant messages, chat rooms, has finally taken a toll on Very. After friends and school faculty stage an intervention to lessen her dependence, Very is distraught when she finds out her computer is broken beyond repair and she is sent to a technology detox facility. It is there she is able reflect on her life and the relationship she has formed with someone online she calls El Virus and finally considers how her life could be different with this person if they ever meet in real life.

In the book *Want to go Private?* we see that starting high school is a huge change in Abby's life and she and her best friend's opinions differ on how to make the adjustment. While Faith is outgoing and wants to join many activities, Abby is happier reaching out to friends she meets in an online chat room. After meeting "Luke" she spends a lot of time sharing with him the thoughts and feelings she would normally confide with Faith. Through her chats, e-mails, and text messages with Luke, Abby is eventually convinced that she is his girlfriend and she runs away to be with him because she feels her family and friends no longer care about her.

The outcome of Very's ordeal was positive in that she was able to realize that she did not need the constant contact with her online friend and that she was strong enough to go through life with limited technology. Abby, on the other hand, had to go through a tough time of finding out the person she thought she fell in love with was a child predator

and needed to deal with the emotions of losing a confidant at a time she needed a friend. Both girls carry on with their life differently after realizing the way technology had changed their lives.

It was also found that seven of the thirteen novels analyzed used blogs as the main form of digital communication. With the exception of one small part of *Things I Know about Love,* and *Mac Slater Hunts Cool*, all of the bloggers were girls. Blogs were used to share life experiences and hobbies or passions with unknown readers. Some of the bloggers were reminded that they needed to refrain from mentioning people by their real names so they would not hurt anybody or put them in danger.

Only two of the bloggers kept their thoughts private from the public. In *Things I Know About Love,* the character has chosen a blog as a diary of her thoughts about her past and future love life. Her new boyfriend also begins a blog that becomes part of the story and we are able to see his thoughts on their growing romance.

The other prevalent form or communication was e-mail. The characters used this to keep in touch with their friends, and sometimes family, that they wanted to share ideas and questions with. The e-mails were a private way of corresponding with each other.

Thematic Analysis

Before reading the novels there were two initial themes the researcher expected to see emerge in these novels: establishing interpersonal connections and constructing identity. These themes were previously observed in the Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) study which found adolescents use digital communication to maintain friendships with real life friends, make new friends with strangers they didn't know whom they met online, or become romantically involved with someone online. While reading the novels

for this study and recording thematic elements, a set of subthemes began to appear, as well as a third overall theme, family influence on identity. The themes and subthemes are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Subthemes of novels analyzed

Establishing interpersonal connections	Constructing identity	Family
• Cyberbullying • Forming new "online friendships" with unknown people • Friendships with real-life friends explored in the online world • Relationships with boyfriend/girlfriend • Sharing interests or passion i.e. music • Sharing of feelings and emotions	• Changing identity • Jealousy • Privacy and sharing of personal information online • Sharing of private information about others /harm to others unintended or intended • Alter personalities online of strangers • Alter personalities for self created for online presence	• Attempting to meet high expectations set by parents or older siblings • Adjusting to single parent or non-traditional family i.e., raised by grandparents • Uninvolved parents

All 14 books showed how the characters were each working to establish interpersonal connections. Some were dealing with cyberbullying, while others tried to make themselves better people by making good choices or trying to find a boyfriend. All but one of the novels presented characters in a way that they were constructing their identity either through pretending to be someone else online, or trying to make connections with others who had similar interests and hobbies. The third theme, family, appeared to have a central role in 8 of the novels. This was prevalent when characters were part of a dysfunctional family and used the Internet as an escape, or they were allowed to use the Internet with more freedom due to their parents being uninvolved in their lives because of work. The following table shows which themes occur in each novel.

Table 3

Themes Occurring in Each Novel

	Establishing Interpersonal Connections	Constructing Identity	Family
Gossip from the Girls' Room	X	X	
iDrakula	X		
Little Blog on the Prairie	X	X	X
Loser/Queen	X	X	X
Mac Slater Cool Hunter	X	X	X
My Big Fat Secret	X	X	X
My Life Undecided	X	X	X
The Boy Project	X	X	
The Opinions of Amy Finawitz	X	X	
The Vinyl Princess	X	X	
Things I Know About love	X	X	
Unfriended	X	X	X
Very LeFreak	X	X	X
Want to Go Private?	X	X	X

After reading each novel, it was noted that the subthemes that emerged were found in at least one or more novels. Tables 4, 5 and 6 below give examples of the subthemes and how they developed in some of the novels.

Table 4

Examples of Interpersonal Connections and Subthemes

Establishing Interpersonal Connections	
Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying in *Unfriended* leads to Maddie losing friends because she was afraid they would learn about a secret in her past if she didn't do as she was told.
Forming new "online friendships" with unknown people	Abby formed an online friendship with Luke in *Want to go Private* when she was feeling alone after starting high school and found she and her best friend no longer shared the same interests. She felt she could connect with him easier than those friends already in her life.
Friendships with real-life friends explored in the online world	Brooklyn began to hang out with Brian at school and later realized that he was reading her blog and trying to help her make better decisions in *My Life Undecided.* She self-censored what she posted because she had an idea he was reading what she wrote.
Relationships with boyfriend/girlfriend	In *The Boy Project* Kara used social networking, a blog, to try to find a boyfriend. She thought she could come up with the perfect way to attract a guy by posting on the Internet.
Sharing interests or passion i.e., music	*The Vinyl Princess*, also known as Allie, uses her blog to share her interest of music with readers around the world. She begins to have friendly debates with them and starts a relationship in real-life with someone she thinks she is conversing with anonymously online.
Sharing of feelings and emotions	Amy sends daily e-mails to her best friend, Callie, who is out of town for a year. *The Opinions of Amy Finawitz* told Amy's story of trying to get to know her neighbor better while missing her friend.

Table 5

Examples of Constructing Identity and Subthemes

Constructing identity	
Changing identity	In *Very LeFreak*, Very falls in love with someone who later turns out to be a completely different person. *In My Life Undecided*, Brooklyn anonymously posts her big, and little, life decisions to a blog so she can have help living a life with fewer mistakes.
Jealousy	*Unfriended* storyline is based on the concept of jealousy. Isabelle blackmails Maddie because she was jealous of all her friends and her boyfriend. The social networking site they both use was a way Isabelle kept track of what went on in Maddie's life and she used it to persuade her to unfriend all of her friends.
Privacy and sharing of personal information online	Abby was very willing to share personal information with Luke in *Want to go Private*. He convinced her to do so by pretending he cared for her and wanted her to be his girlfriend. Even though she knew it was wrong, she wanted to keep his attention because he made her feel special. Jenna in *My Big Fat Secret* used emails to family members and her school counselor as a way to open up to them about private matters in her life. She used the indirect contact as a way to distance herself and feel more comfortable sharing her unhappiness with her body image.
Sharing of private information about others /harm to others unintended or intended	Gen unknowingly shares personal information with strangers on the Internet in *Little Blog on the Prairie*. Her text messages to her friend at home are later posted to a blog and she ends up angering people by sharing too much about their thoughts and feelings of the summer vacation in a camp set in the 1800's. When others find this out they are extremely upset with Gen because she ruined some relationships between friends and family members. Sophia wants to gain popularity in *Gossip from the Girls' Room* so she starts a blog about things happening in her middle school. Many instances of what she shares are overheard gossip. She is reminded multiple times by her teacher that she needs to keep real names out of publication.
Alter personalities online of strangers	In *Want to go Private*, Abby fell in love with Luke, who was actually an older guy, and not a teen her age attending school in another city as she was led to believe.

| Alter personalities for self created for online presence | In *Mac Slater Cool Hunter*, Mac and his friend post a vlog (video blog) of all of the "cool" things that could be found in his city. Mac feels like he is better than his best friend, for a time, because he got a lot of positive votes from viewers for his work in front of the camera. |

Table 6

Examples of Family and Subthemes

Family	
Attempting to meet high expectations set by parents or older siblings	Brooklyn knows her parents think she is a lost cause in *My Life Undecided*. This prompts her to start her blog and ask perfect strangers for advice so she will make better life choices about clothing, homework, and friends. *The Life and Opinion of Amy Finawitz* included her feelings about the annoyance she felt with her older brother who caused her parents to pay more attention to what she did in hopes of helping her make better decisions. They wanted her to get straight A's and encouraged her to get to know and be helpful to her elderly neighbor.
Adjusting to single parent or non-traditional family i.e. raised by grandparents	Getting away with a relationship with the cyberbully in *Loser/Queen* was easier for Cammy than it may have been for other kids her age since she lived with her grandparents. Their lack of technology skills kept them out of her way and nobody was suspicious when she began receiving messages with directions on what to do next to help or sometimes sabotage the life of other students. Very also lived with an older family member, her great aunt, who did not realize just how much she had become addicted to the technology in her life in *Very LeFreak*.
Uninvolved parents	Maddie's family had no idea she was being cyberbullied in *Unfriended* because her mother was out of town on business and her father was very consumed in his writing career. Abby's family did not realize how involved she was becoming with her online boyfriend in *Want to Go Private* because they were very wrapped up in their own jobs and dealing with her younger sister who took more attention.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Problem

This study sought to discover how digital communication affected young adult literature and how it was used as a narrative voice and point of view of the characters. As noted in Chapter 1, the researcher was interested in how the themes were developed in the novels and if they did so in such a way that they would inspire young adults to consider issues such as ethics and safety in their own digital communication practices and experiences.

Conclusions

The researcher found that the novels used many forms of communication to support the narrative voice including blogs, e-mail, IM, text messages and social networking sites. Email was used the most as seven novels used this form of communication, while blogs were used in six of the novels. The use of text messages was used in five novels, while social networking site and instant messages and chat rooms were each used in only three novels.

Nearly all forms of communication were used in two of the books. *Very LeFreak* and *Want to Go Private* both used e-mails, instant messages and chat rooms, text messages, and social networking sites to tell the story. Only four books used simply one form of digital communication throughout the story. *Gossip From the Girls' Room*, *My Life Undecided*, *The Vinyl Princess, Mac Slater Cool Hunter*, and *Things I Know About Love* each used only blogs. Two books, *My Big Fat Secret*, and *The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz*, were the only books that were written entirely as e-mails.

The themes of establishing interpersonal connections and constructing identity were noted in all but one of the books that were read. Characters in the novels often dealt with making new friends online, continuing real-life friendships in the online world of social networking or chat rooms, or even cyberbullying. While meeting people online the characters also found ways to construct their identity in such a way so as to appear more confident, older, or as someone who wants to change their actions for the best. Although they tried to make positive changes they still struggled with knowing whom to trust when the identity of those giving input was unknown. Some characters were sometimes unsure of how much to share about their lives online because they didn't want to give too much information out to the public, while others occasionally wanted to share as much as possible about themselves with the friends they made online.

The third theme, family, appeared to have a central role many novels. This was prevalent when characters were part of a dysfunctional family and used the Internet as an escape, or they were allowed to use the Internet with more freedom because of uninvolved parents.

Recommendations

Research question four speculated if these themes would inspire young adults to consider issues such as ethics and safety in their own digital communication practices and experiences. This researcher has found that some books in this list would lend themselves to discussions about Internet Safety and may be considered for a class or book group. Reviewed for high school level students, *Want to go Private?* has a website started for this reason alone and includes study guides and book discussion guides for teachers. It can be found at www.wantogoprivate.com. This site also includes information about

visits with the author and teacher librarians may consider contacting her for a collaborative visit about writing and Internet safety.

For junior high or middle school students, *Loser/Queen* would be a good resource for a small group to discuss Internet safety and cyberbullying because the character is contacted using text messaging and the content is not as mature.

Another title, *Unfriended* could be used to help students realize how easily their e-mail accounts and computers can be compromised and help them to remember to keep in mind what they say or do on the Internet could be accessed and shared with others.

The book *My Big Fat Secret* could compliment self-esteem curriculum for guidance counselors at the elementary level. The sensitive subject of childhood obesity is addressed in the book in a way that is nonthreatening for students and it could also be used to recommend changes toward a healthy lifestyle.

A limitation of this study was the focus specifically on text forms of digital communication. In the future, researchers may want to look at books that include gaming or YouTube as it is still a form of digital communication.

The researcher noted that there was only one book on the list that had a boy as a main character. It would be helpful if authors took this into consideration as this may help increase interest for male reluctant readers. Researchers in the future may also want to look at more recent titles to build on this list for teacher librarians.

This research focused on young adult books that used digital communication as a way to give the characters a voice. Novels selected were published in the United States between 2010 and 2012. For further study a researcher may want to include books that

have been published at a more recent date or those that were published outside of the United States.

The list of books would make a great addition to a high school library collection, and while some would also be a good in a middle school library, as indicated in review sources. Teacher librarians could use this list to provide students with more books that reflect adolescents' digital communications with their peers.

The nature of the topic of Internet Safety may be of interest to school guidance counselors as well. The books *Want to Go Private?* and *Unfriended* would be a good way for a guidance counselor or classroom teacher to introduce the topic of cyberbullying or internet safety to a class and help foster a discussion amongst students. Cyberbullying is another topic that is gaining attention as a need that should be addressed among youths today is addressed in *Unfriended*, and *Loser/Queen* that would also be a benefit to the professional collection of a school counselor as a tool to help students open up about this if it is happening to them or to someone they know.

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APPENDIX A
FINAL LIST OF BOOKS TO BE ANALYZED

AUTHOR	TITLE	COPYRIGHT DATE
Anderson, Jodi Lynn	Loser/queen	2010
Bancks, Tristan	Mac Slater hunts the cool	2010
Black, Bekka	iDrakula	2010
Bloomsbury, Cathleen Davit	Little blog on the prairie	2010
Brody, Jessica	My life undecided	2010
Cohn, Rachel	Very LeFreak	2010
Cooper, Rose	Gossip from the girls' room: a Blogtastic! novel	2011
Finn, Katie	Unfriended: a top 8 novel	2011
Kinard, Kami	The Boy Project: notes and observations of Kara McAllister	2012
Littman, Sarah Darer	Want to go private?	2011
Prinz, Yvonne	The vinyl princess	2010
Schecter, Lynn R.	My big fat secret: how Jenna takes control of her emotions and eating	2010
Toffler-Corrie, Laura	The life and opinions of Amy Finawitz, eighth grader	2010
Vann, Kate	Things I know about love	2010

APPENDIX B

NOTE TAKING FORM

Title:

Author:

Copyright:

Themes:

Initial thoughts:

What digital communication medium is used in the novel?

What is the conflict in the novel?

What, if anything, might inspire YA's to consider these ethics or safety issues?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE ANALYZED

What digital communication themes and subthemes are portrayed in young adult literature which uses digital communication as the voice and point of view?		
Initial Themes	**Title**	**Author**
Establishing interpersonal connections		
Constructing identity		

What characteristics of the novels might inspire young adults to consider issues such as ethics and safety in their own digital communication practices and experiences?			
Plot summary	Problem / Solution	Title	Author

APPENDIX D

BOOK SYNOPSIS

iDrakula – When their friend Jonathan is committed to a mental hospital, Mina and Van Helsing work together to try and figure out what caused his breakdown. They piece together stories of events using correspondence with other friends through text messages, e-mails, and web browsing.

Little Blog on the Prairie – Gen is not happy to have to spend the summer at an early 1900's camp with her family. To stay in touch she sneaks in a cell phone that is supposed to be her reward for making it through the summer with little complaining. While sending text messages home, Gen breaks the rules of 'no technology'. She later finds her rival, Nora, has a technology shack and has been using electronics that were confiscated at the beginning of the summer. Nora finds Gen's friend has started a blog based on the text messages about the camp and is upset when her family and other campers find out her true feelings about the farm.

Loser/Queen – A classmate took a picture of Cammy while she was changing clothes at school and posted it online. That night she receives a text messages with directions on how to get revenge. Once she follows through she begins to receive private and sensitive information about classmates as well as orders to deliver objects to their lockers to cheer them up when having a bad day. Despite the warnings from her best friend, Cammy continues to follow the orders given through text messages and gets caught misusing the information.

Mac Slater Hunts the Cool – Mac and his best buddy just want to make flying machines. Two strangers who want to hire them to be cool hunters interrupt their adventures. Over the course of the week Mac and Paul find cool things in their city and post it to a vlog (video blog). Kids from around the world vote for the coolest things. The competition is fierce between Mac and Nora, a girl in his school. Posts on his blog and comments on the vlog in the end show Mac is the favorite and he wins a trip to NYC.

My Big Fat Secret: How Jenna Takes Control of Her Emotions and Eating– Embarrassed about her weight and the teasing she's receiving, Jenna finally opens up about her feelings to her cousin in California. She later gains confidence to share her emotions with her parents, a teacher, and her school counselor. Jenna makes a trip to the doctor to learn ways to help her self become healthier and make better choices about eating and exercise. The book is told through e-mails and some webpages that friends have shared with Jenna.

My Life Undecided – Brooklyn is sick and tired of making mistakes. After a fire that burns down a model home her mom is trying to sell, Brooklyn starts a blog to ask people to vote on how she should live her life. She knows the importance of keeping herself and her friends anonymous, so she uses an alias and code names for people. Should she go to the prom with the gorgeous guy or the friend? Should she forgive her former best friend who fled the scene and left her to get stuck doing community service? Her voters make

the decisions, but in the end Brooklyn knows in her heart who to choose as her date for the prom.

The Boy Project-- Kara tries to win the science fair by creating a way to find out exactly what types of girls boys in her class are interested in. In addition to taking notes at school in her science journal, she sets up an online voting system on Faceplace (similar to Facebook) and collects her data.

Gossip from the Girls' Room -- Using her blog to try and gain popularity, Sofie has no qualms about sharing gossip about classmates and friends. Her decision to be mean online comes back to haunt her and she loses her best friend who does not want to be the topic of conversation on the Internet. After many reminders from her teacher about not divulging private information and facts about others, Sofie is confronted by classmates who figure out she's the one spreading the rumors.

The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz – An extra credit English class assignment brings together the unlikely trio of Amy, her elderly neighbor Miss Sophia and her Hasidic Jewish nephew Beryl. Miss Sophia thinks Amy needs to get out and experience the world more. Amy is content to share her life story through many e-mails with her friend, Callie who is spending the year in Kansas with relatives. The e-mails share the ups and downs of missing a best friend, yet the joys of making new friends.

The Vinyl Princess – Allie is a teen with a passion for music and loves the nostalgia of vinyl records. She wants to share that with others and starts a blog to share her passion knowledge. Her work in a record store becomes more unpredictable when the neighborhood is troubled with robberies and Allie thinks she knows who did it after her store is also robbed.

Things I Know About Love – Off to spend time with her brother in The United States, Livia starts a blog to document her experiences and share what she's learned about love in the few short years she's been in relationships during and after her treatment for cancer. The 14 year-old keeps this private because she doesn't want others to be offended or hurt by her thoughts about them, but she does share the fact she's writing her blog with a good friend Adam. This inspires him to start a blog as well and readers watch their friendship blossom into a relationship and see both sides of the story in their blog.

Very LaFreak – All of the technology in her life, e-mail, text messages, instant messages, chat rooms, has finally taken a toll on Very. After friends and school faculty stage an intervention to lessen her dependence, Very is distraught when she finds out her computer is broken beyond repair and is sent to a technology detox facility. It is there she is able to do some much needed reflecting on her life and the relationship she has formed with someone online she calls El Virus and finally considers how her life could be different with this person if they ever meet in real life.

Want to go Private? – Starting high school is a huge change in Abby's life and she and her best friend's opinions differ on how to make the adjustment. While Faith is outgoing

and wants to join many activities, Abby is happier reaching out to friends she meets in an online chat room. It is there she meets Luke and spends a lot of time sharing with him the thoughts and feelings she would normally share with Faith.

Unfriended – Maddie is having a great summer and enjoying spending every minute she can with her new boyfriend. Unfortunately things she did earlier in the school year come back to haunt her and Isabel blackmails her with files about all of her closest friends. Since her computer has been hacked in the past, Maddie is carful about what she shares with and about others online, but she's still not able to keep Isabel from learning more than she should about friends and family. Forced to give up social networking sites Friendverse and StatusQ and "unfriend" people in real life and online, Maddie takes a turn into a depressing summer while she tries to her best to protect the people she loves.