Antero **Garcia**

Networked Teens and YA Literature:
Gossip, Identity, and What Really #matters

When we consider how youth interact, socialize, and learn in the 21st century, the important role of digital social networks cannot be overstated. Myriad researchers in information and communications technology (ICT) describe the shifting nature of social interactions in today's "network societies" (Castells, 1996, 2005; Papacharissi, 2010) or "networked publics" as "publics that are restructured by networked technologies" (boyd, 2014, p. 8). "Updates," "likes," and "shares" transpire in our classrooms on a daily basis, as the vast majority of teens, regardless of socioeconomic background, engage with social media on their own devices regularly (Lenhart, 2012; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Perrin & Duggan, 2015). And while there are larger concerns about teen privacy and cyber bullying as a result of the ubiquity of social networks, such networks have ultimately become an inescapable part of youth culture over the past decade and a half.

In this manuscript, I explore three research questions related to the intersection of young adult literature (YAL) and teen uses of social networks:

1. What social network practices are demonstrated in contemporary YAL?
2. How do these practices mirror real-world contexts of social network use in youth "networked publics" (boyd, 2014)?
3. What is the responsibility of educators in considering the discrepancies between uses of social networks in YAL and in the real world?

By looking at the differences between YAL depictions of social networks and *real-world* contexts of youth participation in virtual texts like #blacklivesmatter, educators can guide critical, civically engaged uses of these tools from within their classrooms. To investigate these questions, I analyzed the depictions of social network use by teens in popular YAL. I limited the YA texts I selected for this analysis to include novels published since 2002. This date is noteworthy as the year of release for the first widely used social network in the US, Friendster. I further narrowed my search by looking selectively across the books published since 2002. This provided me with a range of genres and textual themes that kept abreast of advances in digital technologies. I then looked at the books that focused on social networks by authors who were included in the syllabus for the "Adolescents' Literature" course I frequently teach to preservice, secondary English students at Colorado State University. The course readings for this class are not selected by me; they are, instead, crowd-sourced by the students in the previous semester based on the novels they feel are most important for their peers to read.

This comprehensive approach to text selection yielded novels by widely recognized YA authors in which social networks played prominent roles in the plots of the books. Although this article does not offer a comprehensive meta-analysis of all YAL depictions of social networks, by selectively focusing on the books that have received popular attention by future educators, I emphasize key authors and texts that teens are likely to encounter within classrooms and teen libraries. Further, this approach allowed me to

better explore here the textual nuances of four titles: *Gossip Girl* (Von Ziegesar, 2002), *Little Brother* (Doctorow, 2008), *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), and *Goodbye Stranger* (Stead, 2015), each of which reflects a different epoch through which digital social networking is seen in contemporary, realistic YAL.

Defining Social Networks

Acknowledging variations from one platform to another, boyd & Ellison (2007) define social networks "as web-based services that allow individuals to 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). For students, these social networks can be understood more conventionally as digital platforms, like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook, and more mobile-mediated apps, like Instagram, Vine, and Snapchat. Similarly, in her comprehensive look at teen socialization and "networked publics," *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, boyd (2014) identifies a set of "core activities" teens engage in when using social networks; these include "chatting and socializing, engaging in self-expression, grappling with privacy, and sharing media and information" (p. 8). Extrapolating from both of these definitions, the three key social network characteristics I explore in this article follow:

> In particular, I look at the pedagogical implications of elevating discussions of social networks beyond merely facilitating gossip, emphasizing instead the civic potential of critically engaging youth in discussion about social networks and YAL.

1. *Social networks allow for public dissemination of text attributed to an identifiable individual.* A character like the anonymous Gossip Girl in *Gossip Girl* (von Ziegesar, 2002) or the fan fiction author Cath in *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013) can post information under his or her actual name or a pseudonym that others can easily locate and read.

2. *Social networks include the opportunity for archived, asynchronous commenting.* Because information is posted publicly, others can respond to this information and review comments others have made at their leisure.

3. *Social networks promote multimodal forms of textual production.* Individuals often post photos, videos, and links alongside traditional text.

In looking at these characteristics derived from pre-existing ICT research, it is worth stating that plenty of YA books deal with uses of technology that are beyond this article's scope of analysis. Although chat rooms (*ttyl,* Myracle, 2002), email (*Attachments,* Rowell, 2012), Wikipedia pages (*Paper Towns*, Green, 2008), and online video games (*For the Win*, Doctorow, 2010) all entangle and highlight youth interactions in online spaces, these digital tools are different from how social networks function. Further, although the ad-driven social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter are the most obvious forms of social networks that youth interact with today, I have built this analysis on the *processes* of networking that occur in digital contexts. In doing so, public comments on a blog, such as in von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* (2002) and comments posted publicly in fan fiction communities (Rowell, 2013) still function as spaces for social networking.

In the remainder of this article, I highlight the previously listed three key findings about how social networks are represented in YAL and explore how they are utilized in the real world as well as what educators should take away from these parallels and discrepancies. In particular, I look at the pedagogical implications of elevating discussions of social networks beyond merely facilitating gossip, emphasizing instead the civic potential of critically engaging youth in discussion about social networks and YAL.

Findings

There are three general uses of social networks by teens that are demonstrated consistently across the YA texts I examined:

1. Social networks function as hubs for the rumor mill in teens' lives and amplify gossip.
2. Social networks allow for alternate identities of characters to manifest.

3. Social networks infrequently illustrate models of organizing and political action.

By looking at the affordances of social networks as demonstrated in YAL, I explore first how these texts corroborate real-life uses of these tools for gossip sharing and for identity performance. However, I ultimately suggest that YAL does not often engage in the same kinds of civic and activist opportunities that these networks invite in the world outside of books. Contrasting YAL examples of social network use with the real-world example of #blacklivesmatter, I suggest that educators can actively guide students through powerful literacy development that sustains the use of social networks for the betterment of society.

Social Networks as Amplifiers of Gossip

The role of social networks in distributing the chattel of teenage hearsay is clearly articulated in *Gossip Girl*. Though published in 2002, just as the social network Friendster was forming, von Ziegesar's novel illustrates that social networks are not about specific platforms; the titular Gossip Girl (aka GG) relies on publishing and responding to comments on her blog to distribute gossip. For example, midway through the novel, GG responds to the email of one of her readers (now posted to her blog, this becomes a public comment her audience can read and engage with):

> Hey gossip girl,
> i saw **S** go upstairs with some dude at the Tribeca Star. she was wasted. i was kind of tempted to knock on the door and see if there was a party going on or s/t, but i chickened out. i just wanted your advice. Do you think she'd do me? I mean, she looks pretty easy.
>
> —Coop (p. 144)

Explaining that "**S** may be a ho, but she has excellent taste" (p. 145), Gossip Girl's response helps set the novel's lurid look at sexuality as just a part of the expected social milieu of teenage life. Instead of simply teaching her readers about the inner workings of Constance Billard School, GG's writing serves as a larger meta-text that illustrates, even in the early days of social networks, how teen gossip travels, expands, and amplifies in online environments.

Expanding upon and updating this representation of online contexts as amplifiers of gossip in teenage life is Rebecca Stead's recent novel, *Goodbye Stranger* (2015). Written for a middle grade audience, *Goodbye Stranger* explores how social networks function

in teenage networked publics for an even younger audience than that of *Gossip Girl*. Bridge, the seventh-grade protagonist, checks in on her social network after a recent party:

> She [Bridge] pulled her phone out and looked again at the picture Em had posted—the one Celeste took of the three of them before they'd left for the party. Bridge stared at herself: at her long hair bundled on top of her head with strands escaping, at her penciled eyes looking dark and huge, at her arms inside the tangles of thin bracelets. She has never seen herself like this before. (p. 114)

The description allows Bridge to see the social changes around her and how different she has grown in this new adolescent context. Moments later, Bridge understands that this photo is no longer a private one that allows her—and her alone—to reflect on herself and her relationship with her friends, but is instead a text on which public gossip, commenting, and performance are inscribed:

> She paged down and read the comments again.
>
> *Gorgeous.*
>
> *Prettiest girls in the seventh grade.*
>
> *OMG. HOT!*
>
> There were twenty-six comments. And Em had taken the time to respond to every one of them: *Thanks!* Or *Aw, UR Nice.*
>
> Julie Hopper had written *SO BOOTYFUL!! LOL.*
>
> And Em had written back *ILYSM.*
>
> The last comment on Em's page was from Patrick.
>
> *Your turn.*
>
> Beneath it was Em's response:
>
> *Soon.* (p. 115)

This initial string of comments is an example of public engagement with the ephemera of socialization. Taken during a party and posted later, the photo projects the three girls' performed identities at the teen function; the comments on the photo are both reflections of this performance and additional performative gestures themselves. Further, we can see that Julie Hopper, a student older than Bridge and her friends, is making a gesture to include Bridge's friend in a new, more elite social circle. This move is responded to by Em with the affirming and clique-ish response: *ILYSM* (I love you so much).

These shared comments (out of a total of 26) are telling: they function as lessons and reflections on how social networks function for youth within adolescent social spaces. In fact, as a public performance that elevates social status, references developing sexual interest, and includes common forms of praise, this short snippet of networked dialogue acts as a pedagogical demonstration for readers of *how* to interact on online social networks like Facebook. What is important to remember here and in all social network exchanges is that these are public performances. *ILYSM* is not a message that Em is sending to Julie alone; it is a public message through which Em is traversing the school social spaces and interacting with more popular students. Patrick's interest in seeing explicit photos of Em is made public, a fact that she is largely oblivious to and which will engulf her in scandal later in the story. These performances, by being accessible to all students with means of looking online, amplify the kinds of gossip and relationship news that spread across a school.

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The ways that digital networks exacerbate gossip in online contexts in these YA titles is most clearly illustrated in the nondigital context of a game of "telephone" played during an intruder drill later in *Goodbye Stranger*. Recounting to Bridge the moment that she realizes that the photo she sent to Patrick was shared with a large portion of the school's boys, Em explains:

> So David Marcel is next to me, he's practically standing on my feet in the stupid closet, breathing all over me, and the "secret message" is coming down the line, and everyone is giggling and going "Shhh!" really loudly. If we'd been hiding from a real gunman, we'd all be toast right now. Anyway, David leans away so Sara J. can whisper in his ear, and then he leans toward me and whispers, "You're a slut." And then he cracks up laughing, and stupid Eliza is on my other side going "What is it? Come on!'" She's practically shoved her ear into my mouth because she's so desperate to know. (p. 151)

Like a line of spreading gossip shared by many but occasionally withheld or ignored in the digital flotsam and jetsam of newsfeeds, Em's sudden awareness that her private information had been "networked" (boyd, 2014) is a shock. Amplified gossip is not just a consequence of social networks but a natural product of them; teen readers take away from these contemporary depictions of social networks that their lives both in and out of schools are surveyed by their classmates. It is no wonder that social networks can also function as spaces where teens can take on identities that are not tied to those that they publicly perform in schools (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

For educators, these implications mean that classroom discussions must focus on the holistic, social, and emotional *causes* of gossip. Looking more broadly at the sexual rights of adolescents in online contexts, Livingstone and Mason (2015) suggest that "curricula should cover emotions, consent, sexual identity, dynamics of healthy (and unhealthy) relationships, sources of trustworthy information, critical media analysis tools, and critical analysis of pornography" (p. 7). If gossip is portrayed within the YA reading choices in our classrooms and persists in the real-world school contexts in which we teach, our responsibilities as educators include being critically literate and socially and emotionally savvy in contending with online spaces and the student identities within them.

Social Networks as Spaces for Alternate Identities

From the anonymous Gossip Girl (von Ziegesar, 2002) to M1k3y in Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008) to Cath's fan fiction author persona in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* (2013), YAL regularly points to teens that perform identities that differ from their "real-life" identities. As educators, it is important to recognize that such identities in virtual settings are just as real as the identities of teens sitting in classrooms daily. While the fictional adventures of YAL characters see them make catty snipes about the dating lives of other teenagers, lead grassroots revolutions on the streets of San Francisco, or write hugely popular fan fiction, the ways our own students are taking on new identities have powerful civic potential in the world they access on their digital screens today.

For example, Cath, the protagonist of *Fangirl*, reflects on her sense of agency and power when writing "mushy gay stuff" (p. 372) within the fictitious world created by Gemma T. Leslie within the novel's conceit:

... when I'm writing Gemma T. Leslie's characters, sometimes, in some ways, I *am* better than her. I know how crazy that sounds—but I also know that it's true. I'm not a god. I could never create the World of Mages; but *I'm really, really good at manipulating that world*. (emphasis added, p. 262)

Working within the confines of someone else's fictional creation and performing in a space shielded from the real world, Cath is able to write confidently and inhabit the identity of a confident writer. Even while Cath writes fiction and maintains a well-received identity in her online fan fiction community, the amount of time this identity demands, coupled with her busy life as a first-year college student, means that she often relies on her sister to aid in *being* this other online person:

> Cath was trying not to pay attention to her hit counts—that just added more pressure—but she knew they were off the chart. In the tens of thousands. She was getting so many comments that Wren had taken to handling them for her, using Cath's profile to thank people and answer basic questions. (p. 414)

If we are to understand our role as educators as one in which we want youth to civically manipulate the world around them, then the lessons that Cath demonstrates here offer powerful guidelines for our students: the safety of Cath's performance in online spaces, the real-world feedback she gets, and the scaffolded pieces of world-building on which she constructs her narratives are all examples of how students can create and perform in online networks and have real-world impact. Building from this point, one of the most salient lessons of YAL that teachers can guide youth readers to understand is that the identities in social networks—those ideas, quips, and questions that are circulated as ones and zeroes from one device to another—have the potential to fundamentally transform the physical world.

Social Networks as Sites of Political Action
Unlike the first two elements of social networks discussed thus far, the role of social networks for deliberate civic engagement is significantly underdeveloped throughout the YA titles examined here. Though many of the books discussed thus far offer social networks as places for students to overcome moral quandaries and ethical dilemmas (Bridge's friend, Sherm, for example, decides to notify school authorities of the sexually explicit image of Em being circulated among boys in *Goodbye Stranger*), there are relatively few incidents of students entangled in the politics that exist beyond gossip.

Perhaps the most striking example of youth involved in social-networked political action is Marcus Yallow's dialogue with other youth through the Xnet in Doctorow's *Little Brother*. However, while Marcus posts on his Xnet blog, Open Revolt, and makes digital speeches that organize his allies, the Xnet is not described clearly as a social network. Instead, Doctorow focuses on describing the Xnet (aka Paranoid Xbox) as a means for secure, private access to the Internet:

> The best part of all this [using the Xnet] is how it made me feel: in control. My technology was working for me, serving me, protecting me. It wasn't spying on me. This is why I loved technology: if you used it right, it could give you power and privacy. (p. 33)

Embedded within this affirmation of technology as a source of power and privacy is the opportunity to communicate openly with those who are also able to access the same, secure network. In distributing the Xnet to other teenagers, Marcus constructs a social network that excludes much of the public and is instead attuned to the needs and interests of youth civic life in a post-terrorist-attack San Francisco landscape. Through this network, Marcus organizes, surveys, and undermines adult authority. When a depiction of excessive police force is caught on tape, Marcus's girlfriend Ange enthusiastically demands: "Post that post that post that post that!" (p. 82). Though youth posting on social networks may be seen as socializing—or worse, as time-wasting drivel—Marcus and Ange's strategic use of the Xnet illustrates how social networks can function as civic action and incite civic dialogue. Via the power of social networks, *Little Brother* concludes with Marcus leading a massive demonstration that resists adult authority.

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Of course, this is fiction, and such youth organizing through digital tools is a bit too inflated, right? This could never happen in the *real* world, could it?

Why Social Networks #matter for Teens in the Real World

Aside from examples like that described in *Little Brother*, much of the YAL examined here portrays young people as only superficially recreating online the same power structures and gossip historically found in schools; social networks in books like *Goodbye Stranger* and *Gossip Girl* simply extend the space and time of campus interactions. However, contrary to these depictions, social networks are being used by teens today in transformative and civically charged ways. Young people right now are leading global social movements and strategically organizing thousands of activists through digital tools in the real world.

> However, as hashtags link thoughts and build solidarity across time and space, it is important to consider the hashtag as a means for unlocking socially conscious understandings of youth identity within classrooms.

During the summer of 2014, less than a year after *Fangirl*'s depiction of online, anonymous celebrity and a full year before *Goodbye Stranger*'s tussle with teen social quandaries around sexts, Black and brown youth across the country were organizing real-world protests and demonstrations. Their grassroots efforts were spurred on by a hashtag. Apparently, the possibilities in *Little Brother* are not so far off.

The hashtag #blacklivesmatter was a "trending" phrase on the social network Twitter throughout the second half of 2014, signaling that it was one of the most mentioned phrases on this busy social space. During the days it was trending, #blacklivesmatter sparked a powerful debate about the role of marginalized youth and their seen identity in mainstream America. Though understood today as a key feature of how Twitter functions for organizing conversations, the use of a hashtag (#) was actually a user-created "hack" of the initial, rudimentary online network.

Tech-savvy developer Chris Messina suggested the use of the "#" symbol in a tweet in 2007 as a means of organizing dialogue (Parker, 2011; see Messina, 2007, for the original tweet).

From these inauspicious beginnings, the hashtag has been used in several key ways:

- It is an organizing mechanism. A search for a specific hashtag brings users into dialogue with people in the same virtual space and allows individuals to discuss key events happening around the world, from following #oscars to discuss the awards show as it airs to participating in #nctechat, a live conversation with English teachers around the world.
- It is a linguistic shift in written conversation. Including hashtags like #sorrynotsorry, #firstworldproblems, or #summervacation allows writers in digital environments like Facebook to label and signal places, feelings, and experiences with less direct exposition.
- It is a source of civic solidarity and activism. Though some have criticized the tepid nature of online "clicktivism" (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011), hashtags have been used for clear organizing and civic action. From allowing Twitter users to follow on-the-street action related to protests of a non-indictment in #ferguson to signaling connection with the #blacklivesmatter movement, hashtags help amplify individual voices through aggregation and dialogue. These last two contemporary examples parallel uses of hashtags on Twitter for civic action across the globe, from Greece to the Arab Spring.

These uses of hashtags may seem obvious for frequent participants within social media spaces. However, as hashtags link thoughts and build solidarity across time and space, it is important to consider the hashtag as a means for unlocking socially conscious understandings of youth identity within classrooms.

In reviewing how teens, in particular, have engaged in online activism through the use of hashtags, it is worth looking at the trajectory of a single teenage tweeter. Mary-Pat Hector, a 17-year-old activist at the time that #blacklivesmatter rose to national prominence, has been noted as a key organizer in the contemporary civil rights movement (Abber, 2014). Reviewing her public tweets over several months in 2014, it is striking to see a narrative of civic identity and participation in #blacklivesmatter that begins

with individual reflection and quickly moves toward collective solidarity. For instance, on November 28, 2014, Hector tweeted: "I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief. #Black-LivesMatter" (Hector, 2014a). Hector shared this tweet (only her third ever to include the #blacklivesmatter hashtag) four days after the grand jury decided not to indict the officer involved in the shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. Though only one other person retweeted the content, we see Hector ruminating publicly about her own positionality and feelings.

Likewise, on December 4, Hector writes, "I can protest 4 animal, LGBT, women & environmental rights but when I fight 4 black life or say #BlackLives-Matter Im a racist? #alivewhileback" (Hector, 2014b). Moving toward tweeting about larger social action, such as her personal experiences protesting, Hector's online reach expands exponentially; this content was retweeted nine times and favorited eight. Further, by addressing her own tacit experiences as a teen activist, Hector's tweet reflects the pedagogical potential of #blacklivesmatter as a text to be read.

Like Marcus slowly finding his voice in *Little Brother,* the #blacklivesmatter tweets of teens develop in clarity and solidarity, leading to IRL ("in real-life") demonstrations. This was particularly apparent when the #blacklivesmatter movement confronted holiday season consumerism. Continuing to follow Hector's tweets, we can see her documenting, supporting, and advocating for the national movement. Tweeting a picture of a public die-in on December 7, 2014, she writes, "Thank you everyone who showed up to Lenox mall! #BlackLivesMatter #ICantBreathe #Shutitdownatl" (Hector, 2014c). This tweet reached even more online participants, receiving 33 retweets and 14 favorites. Hector's savvy as a participant within the hashtag and her use of the hashtag to reflect solidarity and local action illustrate how she changed her presence online and publicly.

While not all teens may feel as civically engaged as Hector, consuming a text like #blacklivesmatter constitutes an empowering literacy act that must be taken up alongside the reading of YA fiction. When a hashtag is treated as literature and, particularly, as young adult literature, it extends youth understanding of social networks as more than simple, digital gossip. Further, a hashtag creates active reading practices; retweeting and favoriting content may be an initial

step for teen participants in the robust and continually growing text of important conversations such as #blacklivesmatter. Such narratives, constructed in short 140-character blips and woven together in conversation via hashtags, become a new YAL text.

To be clear, this is an argument for teachers to have students read, analyze, and produce additional text within a civically engaged hashtag like #blacklivesmatter. The images, words, and conversations developed across this hashtag represent a polyphonic text that mirrors dissonant, visceral humanity. Though young people are afforded the chance to read books about social networking in our classrooms, we must also provide them with opportunities to read (and contribute to) the texts created in real-world contexts. What conclusions will young people have when they compare #blacklivesmatter as a text with the YA books on our shelves? This hashtag has just as much "action" as adrenaline-fueled YA texts, but it also demonstrates these actions as "real" and in the service of an ongoing struggle for civil rights in the 21st century. Sure, real-time digital formats include spammed advertisements and adversarial, racist attacks. However, sift through this noise and what will be found is an amalgam of anger, solidarity, and action.

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In an interview with MTV, Hector shared her enthusiasm for the #blacklivesmatter movement, noting, "I believe this is a very exciting time where young people are being invited to the table. We are now being seen as assets not liabilities on a larger level" (Abber, 2014). While it is useful to explore how youth are actively engaged in the construction of YA texts, it is equally important to consider the fact that educators must be proactive in understanding these texts and their role in participating in them. Prominent leaders in virtual and physical spaces of activism surrounding #blacklivesmatter have been educators (McDonald & Woo, 2015), and classroom teachers can spearhead

the demonstration of active engagement with topics of representation and justice.

Within the purview of English language arts, consider a tweet from former NCTE President Ernest Morrell, tweeting from his graduate course at Teachers College in New York. Sent on November 24th, 2014, the day the grand jury announced it would not indict the Ferguson, Missouri, officer that killed Black teenager Michael Brown, Morrell tweeted: "Break the Internet #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter" (Morrell, 2014). The tweet reflects a powerful instance of an educator pushing civic action into various spaces. Consider the landscape of what was happening that week in cities across the country: youth and adults alike were shutting down traffic, holding die-ins (Levenson, 2014), and generally forcing their lives to be reflected in those of an otherwise White hegemony. Civic action is meant to disrupt and challenge the lives of those privileged to overlook the experiences of the oppressed. Shutting down traffic, as protestors did in Los Angeles, New York, and many other large cities, is *supposed* to be an inconvenience. In this context, Morrell's call, read by his thousands of Twitter followers (and retweeted 30 times), asks us to consider how such physical action can be taken into digital spaces.

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When feelings of injustice, rage, and indignation emerge in the lives of urban youth of color, digitally constructed, collective texts, such as those found in Twitter hashtags, can allow educators to find and share critically necessary reflections written by young people today. Readers may encounter fictional uses of social networks that allow characters like Gossip Girl or Bridge or Cath or Marcus to use online spaces for action and indignation. The same tools that youth have seen as means of gossip-spreading can also serve as founts of truth-telling. At the same time, however, we must recognize what these popular YA texts lack: authentic opportunities for real-world engagement. Reading a text that tells readers that #blacklivesmatter is one that, even in its title, spouts a truth so often ignored in YAL; it is a text that is generative and participatory. In reading online and civic-oriented hashtags, youth identify as both audience and author of such narratives. The sharing of racial experiences of youth through hashtags allows pain, anger, and solidarity to be interpreted in ways that corporately published books do not.

When looking at hashtags as texts in their own right, it is necessary to recognize that they are evolving narratives; a struggle for racial equity is an ongoing one. To treat a hashtagged text like #blacklivesmatter as anything but a continuous, serialized conversation would be disingenuous. While it does not read in the same ways as linear novels and memoirs, the constantly evolving narratives found within #blacklivesmatter reflect the definitions of adolescence that have been lacking in traditional, print-based YAL. This is the *meaning* of social networks for adolescent readers. Social networks do not simply offer civic opportunities; they create a pedagogical mandate that educators entangle in the politicized lives of youth.

If we are to see YA literature and educators' roles in teaching it as a way of not simply provoking a delight in reading but in highlighting pathways for engagement and participation in the world after K–12 schooling, extending means of social network engagement is imperative. Youth must know they are doing more than simply spreading gossip when they utilize social networks. Comparing a text like *Gossip Girl*, a text like *Fangirl*, and a text like #blacklivesmatter creates powerful opportunities for reflective writing and discussion in classrooms; by fostering these comparisons, teachers create spaces to discuss differences, uncertainties, and pathways toward personally and socially responsible uses of these digital tools.

Conclusion: Reflecting Networked Publics

To conclude, I want to draw upon "The Mirror of Erised" from the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 1997–2007) to point to the idealized discrepancies between what YAL suggests social networks are for and the revolutionary potential that we see for how these tools are and can be utilized in the real world. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), a young Harry Potter gazes at his reunited family posing on the other side of a magical mirror. When Harry finds it difficult to break his gaze away from the affirming

and sustaining image, Dumbledore informs young Harry of the mirror's true purpose. Called "The Mirror of Erised," the artifact is said to show the "deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts" (p. 213). Dumbledore explains to Harry that the "happiest man on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is" (p. 213).

Though no such magical device exists in the real world, perhaps the basic principles of the mirror thrive in our teaching of YAL and social networks today. This notion of YAL functioning as both "mirrors" and "windows" is not a new one, and this scholarship is continually challenged and expanded (Bishop, 1990; Brooks, 2006; Larrick, 1965; Sciurba, 2015). However, while contemporary YAL may offer an ordinary, perhaps even mundane, mirror image of youth use of social networks, the entanglement of these texts alongside actual hashtags and exchanges in online networks can create even more enchanted projections of what youth civic life *could* be like. ICT researcher Manuel Castells (2005) notes, "[S]ociety shapes technology according to the needs, values, and interests of people who use the technology" (p. 3). As such, educators must remember that the social networks our students use are culturally grounded; these tools act as reflections of the needs, interests, and milieu of the societies that created them. In replicating only some affordances of social networks, YAL reflects back certain kinds of uses of social networks to teens, reinforcing limited applications of these platforms. In contrast with real-world contexts of #blacklivesmatter, depictions of social network use in YAL has historically (over the past decade and a half) been extremely limited; these texts do not mirror the possibilities and experiences of students today. We must contrast these differences and emphasize how to read hashtags and networked narratives for lessons of civic engagement.

In taking on this work, it is important that we heed the warning that Dumbledore offers Harry about the Mirror of Erised after explaining its purpose: "Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible" (p. 213). Looking at the world of activism and digital networks through which we interact today, we know that social change can be amplified through social networks. We know that such reflections in YAL, as infrequent as they may be, are real, are possible. As educators, we must demand more of the social networks through which students engage and learn, and we must challenge the gimcrack depictions of social networks acting as little more than digital rumor mills.

Antero Garcia *is an assistant professor in the English department at Colorado State University. His research focuses on developing critical literacies and civic identity through the use of participatory media and gameplay in formal learning environments. Among his publications are four recent books:* Pose, Wobble, Flow: A Culturally Proactive Approach to Literacy and Learning *(with Cindy O'Donnell-Allen, Teachers College Press, 2015);* Doing Youth Participatory Action Research *(with Nicole Mirra and Ernest Morrell, Routledge, 2016);* Critical Foundations in Young Adult Literature: Challenging Genres *(Sense, 2013); and* Teaching in the Connected Learning Classroom *(Digital Media Hub, 2014).*

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