Chapter 9

Performing Girlhood through Typographic Play in Hebrew Blogs

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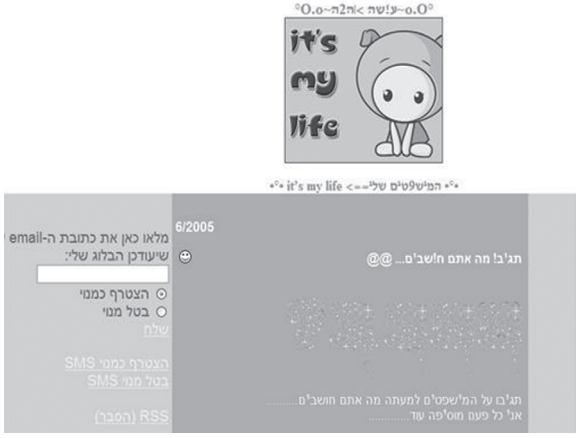
THIS CHAPTER IS concerned with the ways girls employ discursive repertoires for styling their online gender identities. Specifically, I look at the playful use of Hebrew orthography and digital typography by Israeli teenage girls as part of a multimodal identity toolkit articulated through their blogging practices. The chapter emerges from a larger ethnography of girls' engagement with new media literacies in the Hebrew-language blogosphere. This study is based on posts sampled between 2004 and 2007, from the blogs of 140 Israeli girls aged 11–16 on *Israblog*, Israel's largest blog-hosting website and populated mainly by adolescent girls.

Research on language and gender emerged from a motivation to explore the reflection of social differences/inequalities between men and women (e.g., Lakoff, 1975) and initially was based upon an assumption of gender as a fixed category and on the sociolinguistic framework of speech communities. In the early nineties, however, the field was revolutionized



by two concepts that changed both the perception of gendered identity and the contexts in which it was analyzed. Judith Butler (1990) extended Goffman's identity performance concept in supporting her argument that gender was not simply a biological category but, rather, a set of performed rituals—something we do, not something we are. Research on language and gender then took a "performance turn" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003), exploring the diversity *among* men and *among* women, who perform a variety of masculinities and femininities. One well-known example of this approach is Kira Hall's (1995) study of phone-sex service workers, which demonstrates how women (and one man) move between diverse feminine identities performed solely through their speech styles and other discursive resources. At the same time, the classic sociolinguistic framework of speech community was also being problematized and has now largely been replaced with the notion of "community of practice" (Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; although see Rampton, 2009). The turn to practice theory has encouraged research on language and gender to take on more refined microanalyses of various linguistic practices involved in the performance and the struggle over gender identities. The focus is thus on language as local practice (cf. Pennycook, 2010) and on vernacular practice.

Much of the prominent research on gender and language is concerned with spoken discourse among groups of girls (e.g., Bucholtz, 1999; Coats, 1999; Goodwin, 2006), with less attention given to written discourse (mostly fictional, see Gilbert, 1993; Orellana, 1999). Indeed, the historical tendency of linguistics as a field is to focus mainly on spoken language, especially where nonstandard language is concerned (Sebba, 2003). This has, of course, changed with the advent of new media. The first wave of new media discourse research was mainly descriptive and criticized for its deterministic focus on listing formal features of new media genres (Androutsopoulos, 2006). Increasingly, it has been complemented by analyses that shed light on how different contextual parameters shape and are evoked in the discourse of various new media (see Thurlow & Mroczek's Introduction to this volume). In this way, we can trace the study of language and gender in new media in Susan Herring's pioneering research (e.g., Herring, 1993, 2000) through to more "doing gender" approaches (e.g., Rodino, 1997) and studies of multigender identity play (e.g., Danet, 1998; Turkle, 1997). All gender identities are produced through everyday communicators' discursive repertoires of which language is a key one (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Eckert and Rickford, 2001). Where in

offline life this may also include clothing, gestures, hairstyles, and so on, gender performances online rely heavily on language.

New Media Orthography/Identity Play

Danet (2001) refers to the computer as a grand piano on our desktop. Indeed, in early online text-based communities, the use of keyboard was interpreted as voice and tones production. (For instance, the use of CAPS was interpreted as shouting.) In this way, digital texts could be regarded as objects to look *at* rather than to look *through* for their meaning; it is this that also invites aesthetic play (Lanham, 1993). Danet (2001) defines playfulness as playing *with* the rules as opposed to playing *by* the rules, a definition that applies for nonstandard orthography and typography (cf. also Thurlow, 2011). Typography is not to be looked at as an abstract sign system, but as a situated code choice, which is always part of a specific genre in a specific communicative situation (Androutsopoulos, 2004). Playful practices with orthography and typography demonstrate how people convey social meaning through form and not solely content (Sebba, 2003), signifying the discourse and text as sources of fascination apart from the semantic content they convey (Kataoka, 1997).

In this regard, vernacular forms of nonstandard orthography have been common throughout history (see Shortis, 2007); however, the first known example of online, English-language subcultural language play is *l33t*, a name given to the creative orthographic and typographic practices of (usually male) hackers (Raymond, 1991). A typographic play on "leet," *l33t* stands for "elite." To date, studies of orthographic and typographic practices in new media can be divided into two groups: studies on multilingualism, demonstrating Romanized vernacular literations interpreted in the context of globalization and identity (many of these are to be found in Danet & Herring, 2003, 2007), and studies on youth subculture discourse (e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2007; Sebba, 2003), where deviant orthography and misspelling are signifiers for speech styles and social identities. Few of these studies, however, emphasized linguistic creativity as means of performing feminine identities within online communities of practice. Having said which, the data I am presenting in this chapter does align with similar studies from the Japanese-speaking web (Kataoka, 1997; Katsuno & Yano, 2007).

Blogs have been conceptualized as a distinctive genre (Herring et al., 2005), but given the multiple variations of blogging software and the

flexibility of user choices, others have suggested that the focus should instead be on the situated practices of bloggers (Schmidt, 2007; cf. also Androutsopoulos, Chapter 13 of this volume). While the majority of blogs were created by women and girls, they got little attention from either the mass media or academic research (Herring et al., 2004), where the attention was given to the journalism practices of male bloggers. Recently, there has been a growing body of research on girls and young women as active *producers* of culture in new media forms such as personal home pages and blogs (e.g., Bortree, 2005; Kearney, 2006; Mazzarella, 2005; Stern, 2002). These studies, however, typically don't emphasize the role of language. A few studies do look at identity performance through personal blog narrative (e.g., Langellier & Petterson, 2004; Page, 2008), while others dealing with the linguistic features of blogs (e.g., Huffaker & Calvert, 2005) focus on gender perceptions and linguistic differences rather than take a more performance approach.

In my own work, I have found girls' blogging styles and narrative practices to be clearly associated with the performance of their gendered and (sub)cultural identities. These identities are enacted and performed online through the design choices made on their blogs (e.g., *Freak* girls create black blogs with gothic iconography; *Anime* Girls create blogs with Manga iconography, etc.). One particular community of interest to me has been the *Fakatsa*, a girls-only community of practice that gained visibility through its unusual blogging style; specifically, their playful use of Hebrew orthography or digital typography.

Fakatsa: *Performing* "Girly Girl" *Online*

Fakatsa is the Hebrew abbreviation of "a little outlandish *Frecha*"—a popular Israeli stereotype often used similarly to the slang word "tart" in English. It was originally used as a derogatory name for Moroccan-Israeli women who rebelled against family tradition by identifying with American/global culture and fashion and were thus perceived as promiscuous and superficial. However, during the 1990s, as Israel was quickly globalizing, *Frecha* fashion became mainstream, and *Frecha* has now become a derogatory term for all women deemed to be noncritical early adopters of bold fashion trends. As before, and as a result of their prominence, these women are perceived to be "too loud"—both literally (i.e., in their speech) and metaphorically (e.g., in terms of their sexuality). Crispin Thurlow suggests that many Euro-Americans might recognize a *Frecha* quality in "celebutants"

like Paris Hilton and in a combination of the somewhat outdated notions of "bimbo" and "girly girl."

In Japan, girls' engagement with American mainstream "global" culture has been met with similar opposition and is often interpreted as subversive to "authentic" or "traditional" Japanese culture (Hjorth, 2003). Similarly, despite the rapid spread of American/global culture in Israel since the 1990s, large portions of Israeli society are Orthodox Jews or at least consider themselves traditional Jews. Even among the secular portion of society, it seems that girls are still expected to conform to a Zionist gender stereotype rooted in a socialist ethos, which stresses communal values and natural beauty, while ridiculing vain preoccupations with outward appearance.

Young girls who overtly adopt global culture and consumerism and who zigzag between fashion trends, seemingly without criticism or reflexivity, are, therefore, labeled *Fakatsa*—the preadolescent version of the *Frecha* young women they are deemed to become. In short, the term has come to refer to any girl who is seen to care too much about her "style"—a spineless "fashion victim." In reaction to this moral/social judgment, many of these girls, usually preteen, have proudly adopted the derogatory term *Fakatsa*, giving it the positive meaning of being feminine and up to date with fashion. For them, this is precisely how a girl should be, not least because this is how the media messages they consume appear to regard girlhood. The *Fakatsa*, like the nerd girl (Bucholtz, 1999), isn't just a stigma but a purposefully chosen alternative, in this case to traditional Jewish and Zionist gender expectations, which is achieved and maintained through language and other social practices, drawing upon global media and new media cultures. (For an interesting comparison, see Peuronen, Chapter 8 of this volume.)

Starting in 2004, the front page of *Israblog* was filled with usernames, blog titles, and posted comments written in a very unusual, distinctive typography: mixing the standard Hebrew writing system with various ASCII signs. The style was described as "scribbled" and "meaningless" by veteran bloggers. At first sight, this typography, used solely by girls with pink blogs and blinking kitsch iconography, looked like digital strings produced by random strokes on a keyboard and was written off as disharmonic noise, an "environmental hazard contaminating the blogosphere," as one dismissive blogger put it.

Girls who used this typography and shared other similar blogging practices were commonly referred to as *Fakatza*s (plural) by other bloggers

who created a new variation of the derogatory *Frecha*, applying the social judgment of girls' bodies to their blogs. A few popular male bloggers in their teens and twenties have satirized *Fakatsa* typography, for instance, by creating Microsoft Word *Fakatsa* fonts or introducing a designed image of a *Fakatsa* keyboard limited to a few ASCII signs and almost no letters, or even a funny web translator from standard Hebrew to the playful typography, which became known as *Fakatsa* language. Male hackers' typographic invention (l33t mentioned earlier) is typically perceived to be a sophisticated performance of linguistic skills (Danet, 2001) based on the assumption that one can only play with language when fluent in it and mastering it. By contrast, the Israeli media and adult bloggers have been quick to dismiss *Fakatsa* girls' no less inventive typography as illiterate and shallow.

Media representations of this playful typography either portray it as a silly code to amuse and challenge the readers, or express explicit concern for the deteriorating literacy and spelling skills of young girls, not even entertaining the possibility of linguistic creativity, nor appreciating the sophistication and the mastery of various scripts required for producing text in this typography. This attitude is consistent with public discourse about emergent technologies involving language change (Baron, 2000; Thurlow, 2006, 2007, 2011). Needless to say, it is only when one delves deeper into these supposedly "meaningless" keyboard strokes that a form of constancy becomes evident; vernacular orthographies may be nonstandard, but they are invariably rule based (Shortis, 2007). And this is precisely what a careful analysis of *Fakatsa* style reveals.

!!ה33פ *The Stylistic Conventions of* Fakatsa

As I say, the main orthographic/typographic principle of *Fakatsa* style is based on replacing Hebrew characters with ASCII characters—specifically, those that are graphically similar to the Hebrew script. The Hebrew alphabet consists only of consonants, written from right to left. It has 22 letters, 5 of which use different forms at the end of a word. It has no distinct capital or lowercase letters, but it has both typographic and cursive writing systems with various fonts and variations. During the three years I documented *Fakatsa* style, in as many as 140 girls' blogs, I found that ASCII signs were used as visual replacements for all but two Hebrew letters, including two extra forms used for the end of a word. Half of the letters had more than one possible replacement, and many of these

signs were, in fact, similar to the respective cursive Hebrew letters, which vary from the shape of their typographic equivalents. Table 9.1 shows all documented variations, including rare replacements with extended ISO-ASCII signs, arranged by frequency of use. The typed letters are in *Times New Roman* Hebrew font, and the cursive letters are in *Guttman Yad*—a Microsoft Word font that represents cursive Hebrew in a standardized typographic version. One need not know Hebrew to assess the visual resemblance of Hebrew letters to their ASCII replacement signs. ASCII replacements are both case and font sensitive, as I will discuss presently.

Every sentence written using this creative typographic form is a unique performance of style, exercising different, often spontaneous choices that compel readers (ratified or unratified) to "decipher" them according to their specific context of use. Each letter has a number of possible replacements,

Table 9.1 *Fakatsa*-style ASCII replacements for Hebrew letters

Letter numbering	Hebrew typed letters	Hebrew cursive letters	ASCII replacements								
1	א		K	X	%	@	ı<	| (	‡€	|€	IC
2	ב		2								
3	ג										
4	ד		T								
5	ה										
6	ו		1	!	ı	‡	i	ı			
7	ז		T								
8	ח		n	^							
9	ט		6	C							
10	י		*	^	'	+	1				
11	כ		<	[	{	¢					
12	ל		5	&							
13	מ		N	[\]	M	||					
13a	ם		][	] [	0						
14	נ		J	[	)	{					
15	ס		0	O	()	§					
16	ע		y								
17	פ		9	F	g						
18	צ		3								
18a	ץ		Y								
19	ק		q								
20	ר		7								
21	ש		W	e	|/	(!)					
22	ת		)ר								

and not all letters are replaced in every word; for example, the title of this section of my chapter contains a *Fakatsa* style literation of the word פצצה, which means "bomb," but is used as a slang word for a hot chick (as in "sex bomb") or a mind-blowing pleasure. This is one of the few words that is spelled the same way by all *Fakatsa* girls, replacing letter number 18 (in Table 9.1) with the numerical sign 3, which closely resembles the letter's cursive script; however, should a girl need to write the sentence "I am a mind-blowing hot chick" in Hebrew typed script ((אני פצצה פצצתית), she would have to decide which letters to replace and which of the ASCII signs to use as replacements. To list just a few of these possibilities, varying only in replacement choices of the first word from right to left, "I" (אני):

K*נ פ33ה פ33תית
א| ^ פ33ה פ33תית
JXי פ33ה פ33תית
%נ+ פ33ה פ33תית

From my careful analysis of the posts in my dataset, it appears that the choice of replacements is influenced by two main considerations:

1. Accessibility and flow

a. An ASCII sign is more frequently used if it is easily accessible on the keyboard, making rapid and flowing writing possible in the new typography. For instance, on Israeli keyboards, numbers are more accessible than Roman letters, and so numbers are the most common replacements for letters.
b. Letters tend to be replaced by a *single* ASCII sign whenever possible. Constructing a letter from two or more signs is clearly more complicated and slows down the writing.
c. Despite genre and medium differences between text messages and blogs, they are both sites of spontaneous speechlike writing, and a similar concern for speed and flow influences typographic and orthographic choices in both cases (see Shortis, 2007; Thurlow, 2003).

2. Visual proportion and design

Many of the less common variations were preferred over the accessible ones when

a. The sign bore greater resemblance to the Hebrew letter. For instance, the cursive Hebrew letter numbered 14 in Table 9.1 can be represented

by an easily accessible sign like **J**, yet it is more commonly represented by the roman letter **J**, which has more pleasing, rounded proportions. For the same reason, girls are often sensitive to the use of capitalized letters or different Roman fonts. For instance, when the typed Hebrew letter **פ** (17 in Table 9.1) is replaced with the Roman letter **g**, it is always in *Arial* font (**g**) since the *Times New Roman* **g** lacks the graphic proportions required for this replacement.

b. The sign or signs were proportional to the written Hebrew text in that segment. When using different sign systems in the same sentence, the width or height of the digital line is altered. In the example below (Extract 9.1), a girl uses the unique typography only in the title and signature, thus even for a non-Hebrew reader the digital field proportions of standard Hebrew typography versus the disturbed proportions of the unique typography are evident.

W!נ%ת תג!2!ת מגע*ל!ת

אז מה אם אני פאקצה? זה אומר שאין לי חיים? שאין לי תכליית?
אני פשוט ילדה שאוהבת וחד, בנים, מסיבות, שטויות, ולכתוב עם סימנים.
הבלוג פה נועד כדי שאנשימוש יראו אותי אחרה, ולא ישפטו אותי רק לפי דעתם שאני פאקצה.
אני לאהוב אותכם הרבה, אזמה אם אתם לא מבינימוש?
ק%ר*נה

In Extract 9.2, however, it is harder for a non-Hebrew reader to identify the replacements that are non-Hebrew script because of the careful proportions constructed by the use of less common ASCII replacement choices. In particular, notice that the first sign on the right is the Roman letter **c**; also notice the appearance of several **i** and **e** marks and the single use of **y**. The efforts put into proportion demonstrate a concern for the look (the design) of the typography, as part of what makes writing both creative and pleasurable.

סוזה מליון פיפולים חמודימים נירשמו לטבעות השiiet שלי !!

very similar, but not so good that its readers will not spot it! This is the reason why, for example, the Hebrew letter **o** numbered 15 in Table 9.1, is so rarely replaced—in its cursive form it is merely a circle, and the Roman letter **o** resembles it too much, making the replacement unremarkable/unnoticeable. Replacing it with the number **0** is, therefore, more common because it is slightly more noticeable due to the elliptical proportions of the sign. Occasionally, girls will use disproportional sign replacements for aesthetic or phonetic emphasis, a point I return to shortly.

In this playful typographic system, the graphic form—the *look*—of the sign prevails over any other connotative meaning that it may carry (cf. van Leeuwen, 2006). An extreme example (although a quite rare one) is the replacement of the Hebrew letter **ו** numbered 6 in Table 9.1 with its most rare replacement (the last sign on the right in Table 9.1), which is in fact the cursive form of letter number 14 when appearing in the end of a word. Both are from the same writing system, representing entirely different letters and sounds, but they are graphically close (with one being a slightly shorter line than the other) and are thus considered suitable replacements for each other when proportions are altered and the word needs a shorter- or longer-looking Hebrew sign. The reason this replacement isn't very common is that it imposes hardship even on the reader familiar with the Hebrew writing system, and it is also prone to be misjudged as a grammatical mistake (i.e., a question of poor standard literacy) rather than playful innovation.

Fakatsa style also favors the look over the phonology of the sign: girls do not mind representing different Hebrew letters and sounds through the same ASCII sign. For example, letters number 7 and 4 (**ז**, **ד**) or 11 and 14 (**כ**, **נ**) in Table 9.1 represent entirely different letters and sounds but are graphically similar and often share some ASCII replacement signs. This further forces the reader into a unique, context-based reading of each and every written performance. Alternatively, of course, it serves the purpose of excluding the outsider altogether, as users are sensitive to different audiences when making orthography and typography choices (Shortis, 2007; Thurlow, 2007).

There are only two Hebrew letters, numbered 3 and 5 (**ג** and **ה**) that have no evident replacements. For the girls there is a good reason for this. What makes these letters unique is that they are made of two parts, one below the other, making it impossible to represent them proportionally with two signs in the same digital field, which allows room for only one

sign at a time. Meanwhile, some signs, although they might serve as letter replacements, are purely ornamental and used to decorate the sentence as a form of pencil art around written words, as in Extract 9.3.

These are ornaments designed around nicknames on ICQ (i.e., instant messaging) that one blogger offers her friends. The writing in the middle says "your name" in standard typography; all other signs, including + ^ and], which are often letter replacements, serve as ASCII art decorations. This ornamental form of use is consistent with earlier documentations of ASCII art practices (Danet, 2001; Werry, 1996; see also Thurlow, 2011); however, the embedding of ASCII art practices around and in between words written in *Fakatsa* style further complicates its performance, challenging the reader to detect the function of the sign: is it a visual-based letter replacement or an abstract ("meaningless") art decoration? To complicate matters, some ornamental signs can fulfill a communicative function of speech emphasis, signifying a certain slang/subcultural accent or pronunciation. This brings me nicely to another key expressive resource used by *Fakatsa* girls.

From Look to Sound: Phonetic Play in Fakatsa

In addition to the kinds of visual orthographic play that I have been discussing above, there is also another common type of sign play that *Fakatsa* girls like to engage in. The shaded signs in Table 9.1 stand for exceptions to the visual-form rule, involving a form of *phonetic* creativity. So, for example, **M** and **F** are not quite visually similar to the Hebrew letters they replace, but they do represent their sound. Some of these signs are thus double coded, requiring even more complex and, indeed, multilingual reading (or "deciphering") skills. For example: the ASCII ampersand @ often replaced the letter **a** in l33t, though it wasn't prominent in other vernacular literations mentioned earlier in the chapter. In Hebrew

it is often used to represent the same sound (ɑ: in English phonetics). Understanding this therefore requires knowledge of two writing systems and additional familiarity with the conventions of English-language new media styles.

q and **¢**, for instance, are graphic mirror images of the Hebrew cursive letters they often replace (numbers 11 and 19) and at the same time representations of their respective Hebrew phonetics. In yet another twist, bloggers' language play may often resonate with Biblical Hebrew, which contains a set of written marks above the letters telling the reader how to pronounce the word or even how to sing it. Hebrew punctuation retains a trace of these vocal emphasis instructions, and my analysis of typography play revealed that some of the rare replacements are used as vocal signifiers for syllable emphasis and for expressing subcultural (or "slang") word pronunciation and accents. Take, for the example, Extract 9.4:

In this case, the **¢** signifies a deep-throat pronunciation of the letter **c** in English (phonetics: k) and כ in Hebrew (number 11 in Table 9.1), normally indicated in Hebrew punctuation by a dot in the middle of the letter (כָּ). The **§** is a circle signifying the letter **o** (number 15 in Table 9.1) in the middle of the sign, but with "curled" edges. This letter's sound in Hebrew is like the English phonetic **s**, but in some Hebrew slang/subcultural styles the **s** sound is prolonged and "curled" with the voice (phonetics: ssssss), carrying various connotations of pleasure, teasing, or even threat, depending on the context of the performance. The graphic "curls" of this sign are a vocal signifier for such "curly" vocal playfulness with the word. Once again, these accent simulations are akin to other new media (Shortis, 2007; Thurlow, 2003).

The nickname in Extract 9.5 replaces only the Hebrew letter ו (number 6 in Table 9.1) that produces the sound **u:**, while the parenthesis around it **{}** is ornamental ASCII art; it serves, however, a phonetic function of stressing and prolonging the **u:** sound. The meaning of this word in Hebrew is "pampered," and the result of the prolonged **u:** is a pampered girly voice

tone. Such practices could be interpreted as onomatopoeic forms, similar to some variations documented in text messages (Thurlow, 2003). In attempting to make the words look like they sound, girls bring it closer to what it actually means (possibly in a Barthesian pursuit of the essence it stands for).

Another phonetic-based variation found in many of the blogs resembles the logic of letter-number homophones like the Gr8 (great), which are common in texting forms (Shortis, 2007). The number *100* is pronounced in Hebrew as *mea*; thus, many words that start with the syllable *mea* (and have nothing to do with the number) replace the syllable with the number. This variation appears mostly in adjectives, for instance: ממת100 (pronounced *mea-memet* and meaning gorgeous in the feminine grammatical form). Since the numbers *1* and *0* are common replacements on the basis of their visual form in *Fakatsa* style, this variation challenges the reader to switch quickly between different meaning-making systems: in other words, treating *100* as a number one minute and then having to attend to its phonetic value the next minute. Often *Fakatsa* girls create a one-off, context-based performance replacement principle that the reader also has to identify, as with the example in Extract 9.6.

קשה^לה*1ת*צנ!ע*ה^כשאנ*^ה*ט!2ה^2*!ר

The sign ^ in Extract 9.6, often used to replace either י or ח (numbered 10 and 8 in Table 9.1) in Hebrew, is used here as a signifier for space between the words in the sentence. One can only figure out this temporarily established rule during the process of carefully deciphering the sentence.

General Discussion: New Media Language Play and/as Gender Performance

Like many varieties and styles that spread through imitation and evolve through continuous decentralized creativity, it is hard to trace the origin of the *Fakatsa* style. However, it seems that the development of the kind of language play I have been looking at here is multisourced. Some of its early uses were in instant messaging (ICQ) usernames, maintaining a girl's name through playful typography changes when her preferred nickname was already taken. Playful typography can be a convenient way for girls to avoid being "*Googled*" by their parents (i.e., checked up on by the

parents). Indeed, I learned that most girl bloggers write their full name and other identifying details only in the blog frame that is a nonsearchable field in *Google*, while their posts, signatures, and self-mentions in the searchable blog text are almost always in playful typography or designed gif images.

Finally, some evidence suggests that *Fakatsa* style evolved from SMS "mistakes." Mobile phone keys represent both letters and numbers typically produced by a different number of keystrokes. On Hebrew mobile phones, the keys representing the letters ר, פ, ל, ט (numbered 9, 12, 17, 20 in Table 9.1) also represent their most frequent replacements in playful typography: 6, 5, 9, 7. These numbers are just one stroke away from the letters and are often mixed up when texting quickly, so it is possible that *Fakatsa* girls first noticed the graphic resemblance by mistake and later developed it intentionally. At the end of the day, it is also possible that girls are exposed to playful variations on the English-speaking web, might have wanted their own local version of it, and developed it intentionally according to similar principles.

Fakatsa style's communicative function is also consistent with research on new media vernacular literations, performing speechlike emphasis signifying subcultural/slang accents, punctuation, and pronunciation (see Nishimura, Chapter 5 of this volume). According to previous research, nonstandard orthography and typography signify subcultural speech styles related to music and graffiti practices (Androutsopoulos, 2007; Sebba, 2003) or in the case of Mandarin are used to express the Taiwanese accent (Su, 2003). However, *Fakatsa* style is more closely associated with the performance of a pampered, teasing, and girly "cute" identity, often resonating with a colloquial speech style associated with Tel Aviv's uptown girls. These findings run parallel to research on young Japanese women who perform their online gender identities and cuteness through playful orthography (Kataoka, 1997; Katsuno & Yano, 2007; Nishimura, 2010).

What makes *Fakatsa* style unique, however, is its added ornamental function for aesthetic emphasis of titles, prose, and quotes. This function could be interpreted as an attempt to dissolve the alienation of standardized digitized writing by bringing it closer to a brushstroke performing the calligraphy of personal handwriting (and then "drawing" some cute signs around it, as girls often do in their notebooks). The practice certainly brings orthography closer to ASCII art, corresponding with a reversed practice of ASCII calligraphy—letters "drawn" with ASCII signs (see Danet, 2001,

for more on this). Along these lines, Katsuno & Yano (2007) also demonstrated a distinct feminine orthography based on motion and onomatopoeia inspired by Manga art and Japanese calligraphy tradition. They claim Japanese women have a tendency to artfully design handwriting and at the same time interpret online Kaomoji as a form of female embodiment online, facilitating emotional sharing within the respective community. It is in all these ways that I argue written words can be thought of as *avatars*, since they are a performative sign system facilitating both the ways girls appear *on* their blogs and appear *to* their blog readers.

As *Fakatsa* practices became prominent on *Israblog*, many other bloggers chose to mock it by, for example, opening a fictitious *Fakatsa* blog and blogging for a short while in the visual and linguistic style associated with the real Fakatsa girls. This was equivalent to the satiric imitation of cross-dressing and linguistic speech adoption of stereotyped groups. These fictitious *Fakatsa* blogs became widespread in the blogosphere during 2005, until most readers could not differentiate between the real and the parodic. Not unlike the fabricated text messages used by journalists in their reporting (see Thurlow, 2006, 2007), the male bloggers who created these spoof blogs would normally exhaust all possible practices and language play conventions in a few lines of text, making the text nearly unreadable. *Fakatsa* girls would never write an entire blog post in playful typography. In addition, girls almost never exhaust all possible replacements in one word, allowing some standard orthography that keeps the word decipherable. It is this that marks girls' practice as creative but also culturally situated; the ultimate goal is to communicate with each other, to be recognized and understood by their in-group peers.

Hackers' language, l33t, evolved as a way of eluding computer search algorithms that are unable to make sense of the orthography if one letter is replaced by a sign (Sherlbom-Woodward, 2002); nevertheless, l33t could be interpreted as a playful performance of the (mostly masculine) hacker identity (Danet, 2001), demonstrating their technological virtuosity and expertise in software decoding through the their virtuosity in the coding of language. *Fakatsa* girls, who seemingly applied the same principle of typography and orthography choices to those of hackers and other male-dominated subcultures like graffiti and hip-hop mentioned previously, always made the effort to maintain its orthographic clarity, replacing only a few letters based on aesthetic criteria rather than coding.

Cameron (1997) has argued that discourse is male or female insofar as its style rather than its content is stereotypically recognized as such. In her well-known fraternity house piece, she demonstrates how young men perform heterosexual masculinity through gossip (i.e., considered as feminine style) about "gay" masculinity, thus defining the masculine against the feminine (gender but not necessarily sex) performances of other men. In my work, *Fakatsa* girls take up orthographic/typographic practices often associated with male hacker subcultural style to perform their "glocalized" feminine identities. However, their femininity is not constructed solely through the discursive content of these literations, but also through their "messing with" colloquial "rules" and patterns of literation. In other words, if vernacular literations are a creative performance of youth and (often subversive) subculture, *Fakatsa* style is a creative performance of girlhood, possibly subversive to male-dominated youth subcultures.

Feminist theorists are at odds with contemporary girlhood, often accusing girls of actively adopting the stereotypes their mothers fought to dissolve (Mazarella and Pecora, 2007). Yet postfeminist discourse isn't limited to girls (see Gill, 2006; McRobbie, 2009). For example, Gill (2006) argues that postfeminism isn't a historical turn, an epistemological break, or a backlash, but rather a sensibility defined by free choice and a move from objectification to subjectification. Furthermore, one person's hegemonic mainstream global culture, media, and stereotypes can be another person's empowering alternative or resistive performance. It is no coincidence, I believe, that my findings correspond so well with case studies of Japanese women (Kataoka, 1997; Katsuno & Yano, 2007) where global styles—including new media styles—are indeed sometimes liberating for certain traditionally oppressed groups (see Peuronen, Chapter 8 of this volume). In the case of *Fakatsa* girls, digital discourse is a powerful but also playful resource for (re)negotiating their stereotype as shallow, vain fashion victims and for reframing their social identities in a self-aware performance of a desirable, stylish girlhood.

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