

Strategies of (In)Visibility and Resilience: Women Writers in a Digital Era

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Miriam Borham-Puyal and Daniel Escandell-Montiel,
"Strategies of (In)Visibility and Resilience: Women Writers in a Digital Era"
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Abstract: Women's presence in literary history has been particularly conditioned by their place in society and by the limited spheres in which their production was expected to appear (e.g. the sentimental novel, romances or children's literature). In today's digital, open and connected society, women continue to face visibility problems in the publishing industry and in the online spaces that grant presence and agency. Their role in cultural creations is still hindered by vertical powers that operate as main censors. This circumstance takes place even in a rhizomatic and decentralized virtual space, where dissident discourses have highlighted it, although without enough discursive power to create a full disruption in those monolithic powers capable of isolating and making invisible whole social and cultural sectors. Forcing women's invisibility or limiting the scope of their production in cultural spheres results in adverse, when not downright traumatic, situations for these authors. The present study addresses the phenomenon of the neutralization of the female author and the strategies developed by women writing in Spanish and English in order to turn this situation around.

Miriam BORHAM-PUYAL and Daniel ESCANDELL-MONTIEL

Strategies of (In)Visibility and Resilience: Women Writers in a Digital Era

1. Introduction

1.1. Digital Presence of Women: Female Entity in the Web-Nation

When talking about the presence of women authors on the Net, it becomes necessary to consider first the presence of women in general. The United Nations official report in 2013 stated that the Net-population was 1500 million men and 1300 million women; however, estimations were pessimistic, and the gender gap was expected to increase in 350 million in just three years. In this respect, the document issued on the general state of Net connectivity in 2014 included a chapter which established as an objective the equity in the digital presence of men and women in 2020 and placed emphasis on the social risks for the latter in case the digital inequality could not be overcome: "If women and girls are unable to enjoy the same access to ICTs, and relevant content, they can find themselves at a serious disadvantage in becoming fully literate, learning about and exercising their rights, participating in public and policy-making processes and accessing skilled jobs" (United Nations Women 42-43). From this analysis it might be derived that women becoming part of the Net-population is of pressing importance in order for them to be able to become involved in the job market or even to exercise their rights and duties as citizens.

Moreover, it is essential for them to be able to develop artistically in a digital era, as previous studies have revealed that women's presence in the field of digital creation is inferior to that of men. A good example would be blogs, which are direct forerunners for the development of literature on social networks and represent the emergence of more open and democratized online publishing. Concerning women's presence among the blogging community, Escandell (121-124) has argued that only 27.57% of all global bloggers in 2014 were women, even after a slow but steady upward trend taking place since 2009. This points at the fact that, within the digital sphere, literary creation has also been traditionally dominated by men. While women are not completely absent, literary history proves that their representation is scarce. If the (mis)treatment of women's intellectual, artistic and research capacities and the boundaries imposed to their integration within the spaces of learning have always played against them in more traditional settings, the space for and representation of women authors in a potentially more hostile environment—the virtual realm—could be even more conditioned. It is, at least, a plausible hypothesis given the historical conditioning and the sexual discrimination that has taken place until now on the Net.

This invisibility might not just be a matter of access, but of survival. It is important to consider the desire not to reveal one's identity as a woman because of the digital harassment they experience from trolls. This harassment can take the form of spying or stalking; sexual exhibitionism—such as sending unsolicited dick pics to unknown women as a form of forced sexting; doxing, the publication and dissemination of audio-visual material by partners, exes or third parties without their consent; or hate mail in multiple social networks, forums and other communal spaces from the Web 2.0. These toxic attitudes have become an acknowledged form of harassment in online communities, and have even been addressed by awareness campaigns developed by medical institutions (Lee). However, there are not enough sociological studies on these specific forms of harassment, nor reliable statistics on the percentage of women that have felt harassed by some of these attitudes, or similar ones. Nevertheless, there are two essential data. First, the United Nations' 2015 report on cyberviolence against women, which found that 73 percent of women had experienced some form of Internet abuse. This means that women are 27 times more likely to be harassed online than men, with the age range from 18 to 24 being the one at greater risk (United Nations Women 14-16). Secondly, the analysis of the volume of online articles and newspapers that have dealt with some of these matters demonstrates that it is an increasing tendency. As an example, for the present study such a shocking phenomenon as the aforementioned dick pics was analyzed using Google Trends, paying attention to its presence in headlines (Fig. 1). The results are alarming: a growing tendency is perceived, reaching its peak in August 2016. While it may seem anecdotic, there are certain aspects that must be taken into account to highlight its relevance. First, it is a very specific phenomenon, one among the many forms of online harassment; secondly, it signifies in itself a taboo that would have made it more difficult for the term to reach the headline, making it necessary to overcome social barriers before it would become the focus of the press.

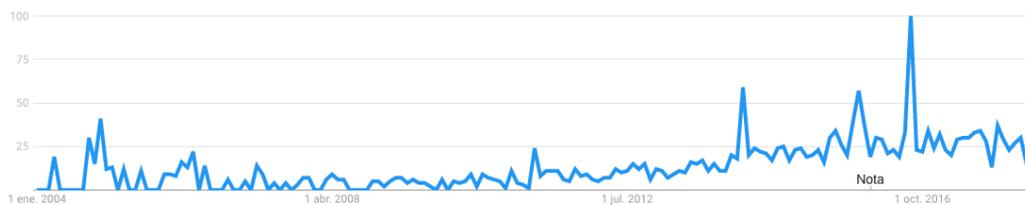


Figure 1. Incidence of "dick pic" in Google News headlines (2004-2017) according to Google Trends

This real-life observation is reinforced by the already mentioned UN 2015 report which ratifies not only that women are more harassed than men, but that those responsible for these actions are rarely prosecuted (United Nations Women 2), something extremely anomalous if we consider that the same report describes the situation of online violence against women and girls as *endemic* (United Nations Women 4). Given all these circumstances, it should not be surprising that women decide to keep a low profile or even hide in the Net to avoid becoming victims of these situations, a strategy that has already been described in previous studies on gender and the use of the Net (Ledbetter). Unfortunately, this proves that the patterns to be found in past centuries of women authors hiding under pennames, or actresses and travellers hiding under male clothes to avoid an overly sexualized reading of themselves have not completely disappeared. On the other hand, it also enables scholars to perceive that women are still willing to fight and to develop strategies of resilience in order to gain presence and to appropriate the public sphere.

1.2. Female (In)visibility: Women's Mechanisms of Resilience

Faced with the abovementioned inequality, or even targeted violence, attitudes or strategies have varied and could be grouped under the concepts of *neutralization* or *feminization*. These terms have been used to describe linguistic strategies to combat gender discrimination (Sczesny et al.) and they could be applied to authors' approaches as well. On the one hand, authors hide their sex to achieve an invisibility that would grant gender equality, or, in the case of women, they even write under a male pseudonym in order to be bestowed more consideration as professionals. Previous research in other professional areas concurs with the idea that gender neutrality benefits women in the process of a job application or even that describing one's profession avoiding the female form aids the applicant, for feminine job titles still carry a lower status (Formanowicz et al.; Sczesny et al.). On the other hand, women writers emphasize their sex as means to reclaim their space and achieve the same visibility as their male counterparts, seeking gender symmetry in language and, hence, in society as well. These approaches to inequality are not new to 21st-century creative environments, nor exclusive to online spheres, for they have been in practice for centuries.

It is possible, for instance, to find examples in previous centuries of literary women who chose to hide their female identity under a pseudonym, making themselves invisible. Well-known authors across Europe have signed with a male or neutral pseudonym in order to publish their work: Charlotte Brontë (a.k.a. Currer Bell), Cecilia Böhl de Faber (a.k.a. Fernán Caballero), Sidonie Gabrielle Claudine Colette (a.k.a. Willy), Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin (a.k.a. George Sand), or Mary Anne Evans, even today best known as George Eliot. In the 18th or 19th century this granted protection from unwanted popularity, but also freedom from the association made by publishers, critics and readership between certain genres and genders, as well as from the claim to decorum women were expected to sustain. It also prevented women authors from being *read* into their works at a time when the morals of the text were said to reflect those of the writer. Invisibility granted an equal treatment for these women.

In recent times, there are also relevant cases. J.K. Rowling, for instance, published her thriller *The Cuckoo's Calling* (2013) under the penname Robert Galbraith. The author of the Harry Potter universe seemingly had the intention of leaving behind the literary associations recalled by her name in her transition towards writing *noir*, stating her desire to "take my writing persona as far away as possible from me" (Bury). A male crime writer, in fact, would be a literary persona that reversed forms regarding gender (men/women) and genre (crime/young adult fiction). Moreover, her choice of name recalls other male or androgynous *noms de plume* in crime fiction, such as L.T. Meade and P.D. James.

So, what is there in a penname? A penname that changes the author's sex establishes a social mask that throughout history allowed women the possibility of achieving their due recognition. Besides unbounded freedom, the reasons behind the use of a penname might be economic, the need for one's survival or the audience's acceptance, especially if the author's gender exposes her to particular

criticism. All of them can influence the decision to leave aside one's real name and even subvert one's sexual identity, the latter being particularly relevant in the context of women writers' vulnerability on the Net. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between the intentional oblivion to which critics have sometimes relegated these women writers, and women's escape from patriarchal constructions by voluntarily controlling their presence and visibility online. The former means an endemic lack of recognition that must be counteracted; the latter, power and control over one's image, body, or identity. As Nancy Hirschmann has forcibly argued, "a truly resistant political strategy... would recognize the power of self-construction" (220). In this sense, voluntary invisibility can be much more than a mere survival strategy: it provides the individual with epistemological power, it denies "the other the ability to construct you as she wishes," thus forcing the other to "see you as you present and construct yourself" (220). Women writers online, then, might decide to dually become present and absent, visible and yet invisible, to achieve a liminal position from which to gain control over their online personae.

As part of that control over one's presence and voice, in past and recent times, women authors also fought against these threats with the opposite weapon: increased visibility or a heightened *feminization*. In previous centuries there have been cases such as Aphra Behn, who made a banner of her highly sexual plots, heroines and life (Todd), or Laetitia Pilkington and other writers known as the "scandalous memoirists," who overcame the scandal associated to their name by writing explicit memoirs of their lives (Thompson). A popular eighteenth-century genre, the prostitute narrative or biography, rewrote the lives of famous courtesans to great acclaim, as these women took control over society's commodification of their bodies and used it to their advantage (Smith 38-39). Very recently, it is possible to mention the case of the Spanish novelist Lucía Etxebarria. Writing in the 1990s, her novels meant a rupture with previous fiction in that she wrote novels that revolved around women's experiences, giving visibility to topics such as menstruation, orgasms, infidelity, or sexual pleasure, all of them with alleged autobiographical tones. She presented or *sold* herself as an outspoken and sexually active woman, who became a conspicuous character in the media, to the point of joining a TV reality show, reaching what could be seen as a peak of visibility and exposure. In addition, she is known for inviting her Twitter trolls to her book presentations, so they can chat in person. Another example is provided by Luna Miguel, whose poems were censored on Facebook given their explicit content, heightening her own visibility and placing her at the center of a heated debate which included forms of the aforementioned cyberviolence.

In a digital era, the resilience of visibility is strongly connected to the capacity for inclusion and support of the virtual communities within which one wants to act (Gee and Hayes), and this includes the prejudices and perceptions of said communities of the users' sex. In fact, these communities do not have to act under the usual parameters of other social environments. This is because virtual contexts harbor under the protection of the potential anonymity of the Net, which can involve mirroring the behavior of actual criminals behind the shield of said anonymity (Armstrong and Forde). In this way, an individual might behave in a socially reproachable manner on the Net and dispense a degrading treatment to other human beings under such anonymity, even if they would probably not do it under their real identity or in public, as this becomes a way of getting rid of morality in their social behavior (Shin). In addition, some studies have indicated that the troll behavior associated with these attitudes of harassment and cyberviolence is connected to psychopathic, sadist and narcissist attitudes (Buckels et al.). In these contexts, promoting visibility is an act of resistance and an activist element in itself, just as it was when Jewish, gay or suffragette parades marched in times of anti-Semitic, homophobic, or misogynistic repression. The visibility of the group under attack is a clear way of facing the origin of that social pressure and emotional attack; it is a method to overcome, as a social group, the adversity, at the same time that they seek support from the collective spectrum. On the Net this would involve stating one's sex explicitly in opposition to the strategies of anonymity, with the intention of claiming a virtual production in social networks and other Internet spaces, such as personal or public webs (e.g. Goodreads), a strategy foreseen and supported with regard to the mechanisms of reassertion concerning sexual identity in the digital age (McKenna and Bargh).

Both strategies, the neutralization and feminization of literary production on the Web 2.0, and their use to claim spaces of autonomous identification in the great virtual spaces, such as Facebook, Twitter, About.me and similar platforms, can be understood as a resource of great impact in order to achieve production with presence in the media (Gumbrecht 31). Moreover, digital presence nowadays equals social presence. Kenneth Goldsmith defended the idea that digitality was the new space to conquer with one's presence or ideas, following the logic of Henri Lefebvre in his defense of the production of different spaces, although the French thinker strictly had in mind space supported by material substratum.¹ For

¹ Henri Lefebvre's (1901-1991) position defining all space as social was limited by the scope of his own context, as he wrote before the accelerated growth of the Internet and social networks at the end of the 20th century. Goldsmith,

Goldsmith, "if it doesn't exist on the Internet, it doesn't exist"; thus, connected virtuality becomes the space for social, intellectual and cognitional conquest that must be sought.

Therefore, taking into account previous research on women writers' strategies in former centuries and the analysis of women's current situation online, the present study was conducted to analyze the strategies of (in)visibility among women writers on the Net. In particular, it focused on the self-representation of women writers on social networks as compared to male authors on the same online space. It explored whether women chose to hide their sex, or, on the contrary, to expose it more visibly. In addition, given what seems to be the doubtless connection between language use and gender equality (Boroditsky; Prewitt-Freilino et al.; Stahlberg et al.; UNESCO; Wasserman and Weseley), it aimed to explore the actual language people use in social media from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, as the need for such research has been acknowledged (Sczesny et al. 8). As language reflects and shapes attitudes, then, this study approached the online language used by writers in two very different cultural and linguistic contexts: United Kingdom and the United States, and Spain and Argentina. These countries were chosen for their representativeness with regard to literary production in English and Spanish, respectively, and their presence in the *2016 Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum). This report would provide the adequate context on the general approach to gender equality in these states, for research supports that the general attitude towards gender equality will be reflected in how language will be used (Parks and Roberton). The aims of the research were, thus, threefold: 1) to compare the presence of men and women writers in Spanish- and English-speaking contexts, respectively; 2) to identify and compare possible strategies of (in)visibility among these writers; 3) to state whether there are differences between both contexts and, if so, to provide a first analysis of the possible causes. It was anticipated that there would be differences in the profile of authors depending on their sex, although there remained to be asserted if the authors' linguistic and cultural background had any effect on their self-representation online.

2. Method

Given its volume of users and the dynamism in the amount of information generated globally, Twitter is currently one of the more relevant spaces of presence-production. It is an *agora* in which people from all over the world meet in an essentially open dialogue. It is used as a means of direct communication by individuals and companies, surpassing other social spaces of the digital sphere, such as Facebook, in its impact on society and the media. These are the reasons why this space has been chosen for the present study. To analyze the strategies of visibility on the social net developed by women writers, the user profiles of men and women writers have been examined. We have considered a total of 212 accounts in Spanish extracted from the lists linked to the literary and publishing world from 6 Twitter pro-users² (both from Latin America and Spain) in those same fields: three men and three women selected at random from the accounts that Twitter recommends to its new users from the topic selection entitled "Escritores y editoriales" [Writers and publishers]. Those accounts were preselected by Twitter given their impact, relevance and fame; therefore, it is assumed that it is a recognized and prestigious group within the field of creative writing, hence a valid one to use as starting point for our research. After this selection, the visual appearance and the written description of the accounts have been analyzed, paying attention to those visual and textual traits that enabled identification. Thus, among the list of people that those 6 authors followed, the extraction was completed, choosing those accounts that were defined by the words "escritor" or "escritora" [male or female writer], and also those of literary authors who did not specify their sex in the description. The duplicated accounts were erased (that is, those that were followed by two or more of the base accounts) and a second search took place, in order to incorporate 25% more accounts. These additional accounts were obtained after eliminating all the cookies and using the browser (Firefox) in private mode. The search was conducted on the Spanish version of Twitter, with its geolocation in Madrid, and they were the first accounts resulting from searching for the terms "escritor" and "escritora." This group did not present variations from the larger

as others, conceived the virtual space of the Internet as an immaterial reproduction of the material world regarding social action. Thus, this heterogeneous virtual space formed by online boards, social networks, online games, etc., has to be exploited as a social space for social action and, in consequence, must also be used to claim presence and identity in Gumbrechtian terms.

² Pro-users (professional users) are those advanced, highly popular, Twitter users that are identified by the platform as relevant influencers. They sometimes possess verified accounts, which are identified by an exclusive blue badge next to the username. These users vary from celebrities to politicians, but also include people such as renowned scholars, artists, newspapers and radio stations, etc. These accounts are suggested by Twitter to new users according to their areas of interest, but the blue badge is not exclusively related to quantitative criteria such as the number of followers, as they are also curated with a focus on qualitative factors.

one, despite having been extracted through this search method and not through the prescriptive process that implies extracting them from the 6 pro-users' accounts and the people whom they follow. For this reason, they were added to the general cluster of accounts in Spanish for statistical purposes. The whole process of extraction took place on 8 January 2016.

This first study was then replicated in the English sphere of Twitter. In that way, the selection process of 6 Twitter pro-users from the UK and the USA was repeated, obtaining a total of 224 analyzed accounts. These six accounts were attained from the selection that Twitter offers within the literary field to new users; the selected topics being, once more, "writers and publishers." In this case, the browser was set with English as its default language and a VPN (Virtual Private Network) was used to simulate before the Twitter web that we were a user living in San Francisco, California. This enabled to reproduce with maximum faithfulness the results that an English-speaking user would obtain in the US if they registered on Twitter and looked for recommended accounts within the literary world.³ As happened in the aforementioned study in Spanish, the accounts where users identified themselves explicitly as "writer" were selected in order of appearance. Given that in English, contrary to what happens in Spanish, there is no gender mark, it was necessary to pay attention in a subsequent stage to the gender descriptors incorporated to the introductory texts in the Twitter accounts. That is, the sex was identified by the description itself when it was possible by means of the inclusion of gender-marked nouns (e.g. "husband," "wife," "mom," "female"), or the use of pronouns (e.g. "she," "her," "his"). In that way, it was possible to compensate for the difference between both languages regarding grammatical gender.

As had been done in the Spanish process, duplicated accounts were eliminated (i.e. those followed by two or more pro-users) and a second extraction was conducted in order to add 25% more accounts through the searcher of Twitter in its English version. In this process the aforementioned method was applied and, of course, the browser was configured to pretend to be an English-speaking user residing in the USA, after erasing cookies and using the private mode. That 25% which were extracted via a direct search and not through the prescription of those six base accounts did not present variations in behavior when compared with the rest, so they were accounted for as part of one single group. The whole process took place on 3 October 2016.

The use of the private mode of the browser following the elimination of the cookies in the searches intended to erase any determining factor on the obtained results. In spite of that, and to achieve greater faithfulness and reliability, it was thought necessary to employ a VPN in the search in English to reproduce a real-like situation in North-American territory on behalf of a user, again after cleaning the cookies and also using the private mode of the browser. With this the intention was to eliminate variables that were a consequence of the search histories and so Twitter could only condition the results to the configured language and the location information, whether real or forged, that was provided, hence reducing its impact to a minimum by means of that use of the private mode.

3. Results

Although as part of a pilot case study this first sample might not be statistically significant, it does fulfil the purpose of shedding some light on the visibility of women online in different contexts and justifies duplicating the study with a larger number of profiles in future research. The results of the study showed that there were some significant differences between men and women, and between Spanish- and English-speaking contexts. The data collected are displayed in the following tables:

³ Twitter results are dependent on geolocation. By using a VPN to simulate a specific location every time, we replicate more faithfully the results for that region and stabilize those provided by the platform.

	Men	Women	Collective accounts, webs, others
Lexis that identifies sex in the description or nick			
Use of words or expressions that allow to identify gender (e.g. "mujer," "escritora," etc.)	100	88	2
Use of words or expressions that do not allow to identify gender (e.g., a book quotation)	2	12	8
Connotations of the lexis used in the description or nick			
Terms with negative connotations ("ruda," "celosa," "perra," etc.)	0	6	0
Terms with sexual connotations ("sexy," "caliente," body parts, etc.)	2	4	0
Terms with distinctly positive connotations ("líder," "ganadora," etc.)	5	0	2
Terms with distinct connotations of doubt or modesty ("escritor en progreso," "aprendiendo," etc.)	1	6	0
Type of profile image (not heading)			
Portrait	86	52	0
Portrait (with hidden, crossed out, or covered face)	2	6	0
Full body	0	26	0
Close-up of part of their body (e.g. cleavage, abs, etc.)	0	8	0
Use of logos, icons, etc.	18	4	10

Table 1. Analysis of the data extraction of 212 Twitter accounts of Spanish-speaking users obtained through the literature lists of pro-users (3 men and 3 women) belonging to the social net of the publishing field. Data extracted in January 2016.

	Men	Women	Collective accounts, webs, others
Lexis that identifies sex in the description or nick			
Use of words or expressions that allow to identify gender (e.g., "woman," "mom," "female," "dad," "father," "boy," etc.)	10	18	2
Use of words or expressions that do not allow to identify gender (e.g., a book quotation)	92	92	8
Connotations of the lexis used in the description or nick			
Terms with negative connotations ("bitch," etc.)	4	2	0
Terms with sexual connotations ("sexy," "hot," body parts, etc.)	2	2	0
Terms with distinctly positive connotations ("leader," "winner," etc.)	18	24	2
Terms with distinct connotations of doubt or modesty ("writer in progress," "learning," etc.)	10	14	0
Type of profile image (not heading)			
Portrait	82	80	1
Portrait (with hidden, crossed out, or covered face)	6	4	0
Full body	4	4	0
Close-up of part of their body (e.g. cleavage, abs, etc.)	0	2	0
Use of logos, icons, etc.	10	14	9

Table 2. Analysis of the data extraction of 224 Twitter accounts of English-speaking users obtained through the literature lists of pro-users (3 men and 3 women) belonging to the social net of the publishing field. Data extracted in October 2016.

When addressing the results in Spanish-speaking countries, the first interesting data is that there is little difference in the number of accounts between men (102) and women (100), plus a small percentage of collective accounts or webs (10). Among the collective ones it must be highlighted that 2 out of 10 had gender-marked expressions (female), while the rest chose neutral descriptions. Between men and women authors, there are no significant differences in the presence of gender in their descriptions. In the English-speaking context it is significant that most accounts employ expressions that are not gender-marked (184: 92 by men, 92 by women), while those that are show more women than men, even if not in statistically-significant numbers. In addition, there are slightly more accounts belonging to women than to men.

Among Spanish-speaking authors, there are women who employ traditionally pejorative terms to refer to themselves compared to no men who do that, while English-speaking men describe themselves with such terms as "dumb" or "awkward," in contrast with the absolute lack of self-deprecation among women. In addition, although maybe not statistically significant, Spanish-speaking women use more terms regarding their physical attractiveness to describe themselves (e.g. sexy), while they do not employ lexis regarding leadership or success and they express more doubts about their skills. On the contrary, in an Anglo-Saxon context, few authors describe themselves according to their sexual attractiveness and all four cases use the same term, "hot." In addition, while more women express doubt about their abilities (14), there is also a high number of them who highlight positive traits regarding their skill as writers (24). Additionally, it is important to note that 9 out of the 10 male authors who explicitly state their gender in their description by means of words such as "husband" or "dad," also employ descriptors of modesty or doubt ("reluctant" or "in process," for instance). Finally, only one of the authors who describes herself as a mother, displays parts of her body and speaks of herself in sexual terms. One comedian, Lauren Reeves, also names herself "Nasty Woman," a term employed by one other writer. Both cases employed a non-sexual picture, a regular close-up portrait.

In addition, the use of images is also relevant. Women writing in Spanish use less portraits and more full-body pictures and parts of their body as identity markers, whereas in the English-speaking context more men hide their face and only two women expose body parts.

4. Discussion

Preliminary results do indicate differences in the writers' self-representation according to their gender and background. The first matter that needs to be addressed to explain some of these variances is the difference in language. While Spanish is a grammatical gender language, English belongs to the group of natural gender languages (Stahlberg et al.), that is, in Spanish nouns are gendered, whereas in English most nouns have no marking of gender. Consequently, authors writing in Spanish will necessarily employ more marked words than English-speaking ones. For the former, then, using neutral expressions could be thought to be a more conscious and elaborated strategy, for it would require changing the natural way in which women writers would describe themselves as "escritor-as." Spanish lacks an epicene—a form with invariant grammatical gender—for writers, therefore authors must use the grammatically-gendered nouns or a neutral generic which coincides in form with the masculine (escritor-es). While the generic is said to include both male and female, studies indicate that in the mind of the readers the association is usually with a male exemplar (Stahlberg et al.), which is also the case for Spanish-speakers (Carreiras et al.). Therefore, the use of the generic would serve in Spanish to effectively erase traces of the female sex, as well as to eliminate a suffix that can be interpreted in gendered-language contexts as having derogatory connotations and affecting their perception as professionals (Merkel et al.; Sczesny et al. 3-4). It is important, hence, that not many women have chosen to hide their gender on their accounts, or to identify with a masculine generic, but rather to preserve the mark of gender in their professional definition. Their visibility could be seen, then, as defying those pejorative connotations and reinforcing the need for gender symmetry in language as a means to support women's presence, and prominence, as authors in the digital context.

Likewise, English being a natural gender language, those 26 authors that defined themselves by qualifying the noun "writer" with gender-marked words or with gender-marked nouns (husband, mom, dad, etc.), were seeking to do it intentionally. In addition, English demands a more conspicuous gendering than Spanish: it does not add a suffix, but requires "woman" or "female" to be added as mark of gender. This means that English grants a very explicit inclusion of women, even if the generic "writer" will still be interpreted with a male bias,⁴ and, in fact, no man thought to define himself as a "male writer," probably because it would seem redundant. Also, it means that those that employ gender-markedness in their descriptors include added connotations, such as those related to family roles (husband, mom, dad, etc.). Nevertheless, from the small percentage included in this group, it might be derived that most authors prefer to hide their gender or not to overtly emphasize it in the case of the profiles that include a portrait. Gender neutralization is the recommended strategy for natural gender languages (Hellinger and Bußmann); however, it does not mean that the male bias in mental representations will disappear when faced with neutral terms (Sczesny et al. 2). Maybe that is the reason why some authors have chosen not to use the generic word, but to include a quotation or another form of self-representation: it prevents all forms of bias. Nevertheless, it is necessary to state that, given the fact that many accounts provide a portrait of the author, the lack of gender-markedness is often counteracted by their visual discernibility as women.⁵

Secondly, and closely related to language use, in order to understand these differences, the overall approach prevalent in these countries to gender equality has been taken into account. The initial hypothesis was that depending on their ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report it would be possible to foresee differences in the authors' self-representation, whether they would choose to heighten visibility of gender or to hide it for fear of a greater bias or gender violence online. In the GGG report of 2016,

⁴ This case has been studied in the cover of sports in the media. Sports will be assumed to mean male sports, while it is necessary to add an explicit mark of gender for women's sports. Scholars disagree on whether this explicit visibilization is positive or mainly marks a recurrent bias. See, for instance, "Separating the Men from the Girls: The Gendered Language of Televised Sports" (Messner et al.).

⁵ Parenthetically, another significant factor is that in both contexts women writers support one another: whether they overtly display their gender or not, they explicitly enhance other women writer's visibility. It is important to note how women have used their own conspicuousness to support one another throughout history, and it is also the case in the context of their online presence: many of the accounts analysed showed women writers retweeting information about their colleagues and making positive comments about their work. They are the online version of Jane Austen's praise of women writers, at the same time she advertised their novels, in *Northanger Abbey* (1818). In addition, another advantage of feminization, of implementing gender symmetry or visibility in language when it comes to the self-representation of these authors, is that it makes female exemplars of writers visible, which has the effect of encouraging other women to pursue this career, or to avoid the assumption that men are the norm in the literary sphere.

Spain and Argentina scored higher overall than the United States, although in the subindexes there were important differences, as the following table attests:

Country	Global Index	Economic Participation and Opportunities	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
UNITED KINGDOM	20	53	34	64	24
SPAIN	29	72	43	91	26
ARGENTINA	33	101	54	1	22
UNITED STATES	45	26	1	62	73

Table 3. Rankings in the 2016 GGG Report. 144 countries were included in this report.

These results, in particular those regarding the subindex of "Economic Participation and Opportunities," may allow to explain the differences in the matter of the authors' self-effacement. Whereas men writing in Spanish do state their success, women writers tend to choose expressions of modesty. On the other hand, women writing in English display, in general, less modesty and self-effacement (14 used expressions of modesty, while 24 employed terms of success); overall, they seem more confident about their skills and this reflects in their online representation. This is an important landmark, for their greater assertiveness and self-reliance is an important resilience strategy when faced with online criticism and trolling. Moreover, as prior research has proved, a general approach to women's representation in the media evinces that there is a lack of words such as "successful" or "powerful" applied to them (Baker), which seems to be counteracted by English-speaking women, while in the Spanish-speaking context the apologetic tone of writers seems to reflect the media's biased description of professional men and women.

The need to present a self-effacing image has been traditional for women writers: in previous centuries women felt the need to apologize for their writing or their success to a body of publishers, readers and censors who were not just men (Gallagher; Poovey). Even nowadays an increasing body of work indicates that since childhood women feel the need to hide their achievements in order not to be attacked by friends and foes, women and men alike (Alborch; Brown). Sheryl Sandberg's famous *Lean In* (2013), for instance, proves that self-effacement and doubt can cripple a women's career even today. Nevertheless, there are more positive readings. For one thing, self-effacement has been used as a strategy for recognition: to name but one example, Frances Burney was a *modest* writer who became one of best paid authors in the 18th century. Playing it modest did not mean women were not good negotiating publishing deals or valuing the worth of their work. In fact, adopting the persona of a *modest muse* could appeal to the patriarchal depiction of femininity and secure good press for the writer, who could later subvert that same patriarchy in her texts (Borham Puyal) or, in this case, by gaining presence online.

As for the use of pejorative terms, it is definitely problematic. Among Spanish-speaking authors women employed terms with negative connotations (e.g. *bitch*, *ruda*, *perra*), while men used none. In English accounts, male authors were who described themselves with pejorative expressions (e.g. dumb, awkward), contrary to female ones. However, the difference in the nature of the terms they use is significant: in the case of men they refer to their intelligence or social skills, never to their overt sexuality, strength of character or power, the three connotations the word "bitch" has acquired throughout history (Appleton Aguiar 8-9). This seems to indicate a bias in what are considered stereotypical qualities for one gender or the other: men should not be dumb or awkward, women should not be manifestly open about their sexuality or display strong or aggressive attitudes. In addition, the epithets chosen by men have an endearing connotation that women's choices do not possess. In the context of online harassment and the struggle for visibility, the use of these terms on behalf of women deserves careful consideration. On the one hand, these women appropriate the language that is usually employed against them to drain it of its power by using it on themselves. In recent years we have seen the increased visibility of the word "vagina" or "pussy" in literature and in the media as a way of balancing the huge presence of "penis" and its variations—e.g., Amy Schumer's monologues or TV appearances, Etxebarria's explicit language, or the publication of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. In the same way, appropriating the word "bitch" or "nasty" could be interpreted as another way of stating that they are strong, independent, subversive women—the kind of women usually at the receiving end of these terms. The extended use of "bitch" or "biatch" in anything from novels to songs and its re-appropriation by feminism and literature written by women (Appleton Aguiar 9), or its use by

one girl to call another, or by writers, singers, actors to define themselves, could support this (Wurtzel). Although concerned voices have raised against this use that typifies women negatively and sanctions its use by men (Kleinman et al.), it is important to emphasize that a woman consciously decides to use that term, to create and present that *bitchy* persona to her followers, necessarily altering the perception they might have of her. She is in control of that perception. In consequence, independently of how it is interpreted, it provides a striking element that attracts the attention of the users, so it could well be merely a marketing strategy that achieves the purpose to heighten visibility.

Finally, it is necessary to pay attention to the already mentioned over-sexualizing of one's description. This phenomenon is not limited to the lexis employed, but also to the profile picture selected (the headings were not taken into account, as many had not been created or coincided with the profile picture). No male author used full-body images, while 26 Spanish-speaking women identified themselves in this manner. Moreover, 8 women used close-ups of their anatomy—cleavages in particular, but also bottoms—while no man used for his profile a picture of his abdomen, to give an example. As with the word *bitch*, on the one hand there is a vindication of one's body and sexuality in the theatrical self-presentation way that Lucía Etxebarria or Amy Schumer develop, and that many writers before them also displayed. For centuries women actors were reified, for example; they were seen as the embodiment of their characters, of certain values, or as commodities, something to be observed and enjoyed on stage. Many used that to their advantage: it made them popular and necessary. Current uses of these sexualized images could be a form of capitalist self-reification; exposing one's body as a statement of the writer as *product* on the Net, as someone to be paraded, advertised and sold to audiences. The artistic pictures emphasize the idea of a careful presentation: maybe to claim a wider audience, but maybe also to embellish what trolls and other abusive users try to transform into something to be ashamed of by their own reifying of women writer's bodies. As recent feminist theories have shown, the beauty myth, while questionable, can be empowering and it is most certainly a strategy to gain presence, to be seen and even heard (Lakoff and Scherr; Scott). This strategy gains visibility, presence, although the implications are also ambiguous. After all, self-reification is nevertheless still a form of objectification. Maybe at this point in history it is still better to be visible and face the consequences, than to remain invisible.

5. Conclusions

Women writers have used different strategies to gain presence in print and the media; they have resisted obliteration and censorship and have fought for a place in literary history. However, present-day research in the digital sphere indicates that the problems, stereotypes and limitations that women writers faced in the past are still in force. Cyberviolence, online harassment and trolling are experienced by women every day, and their strategies in facing those problems vary. In addition, writers wishing to attract followers or to become relevant literary personae within the online communities, might still deem it necessary to carefully market that persona in order to avoid prejudice and harassment, or, on the contrary, to heighten their visibility and exposure. In an open and connected digital world, where profiles are carefully edited, pictures airbrushed to perfection, and success measured by the number of people you reach, no choice of words for one's self-presentation would seem coincidental. Hence, understating how women re-write themselves online enables us to understand societal values, and the digital world, better.

As advanced in the discussion, it would be possible to assert that Spanish-speaking writers apparently expose their gender and sexualize their image more, while also proving more self-effacing. On the other hand, women authors writing in English favor gender neutrality and adopt a less self-deprecating attitude. Some of these differences must necessarily respond to the difference in language: whereas Spanish has grammatical gender, English employs natural gender. However, writers in Spanish would be performing a conscious act of invisibility by avoiding such marks, while English-speaking Twitter users might decide to emphasize their gender by adding an epithet to the word "writer." This enables to perceive different attitudes towards gender visibility.

Together with how they label their profession, the profiles give insight into the users' self-description. The use of self-effacing epithets, or others that indicate success, have been analyzed in relation to the Global Gender Gap Report. It would not be difficult to speculate that in an environment of little support for equal opportunities, women might feel the need to apologize for their success, mirroring as well the language often employed by the media. Finally, the use of sexual images or pejorative terms indicates an empowering, yet problematic, use on behalf of female users.

These results, which spring from a first approach and are still tentative, attest that more needs to be done to understand the reasons behind these apparent differences, and that more needs to be written about the strategies women employ to overcome the obstacle of invisibility. Hopefully, academia will be

one of the resources that enable women writers not to be erased from digital literary history and that grant them the presence they deserve.

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