

The Algorithmic Self in Dave Eggers' *The Circle* And Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House*

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Abstract

The emergence of technological systems has transformed human identity and authenticity in the posthuman era. Through the analysis of *The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan and *The Circle* by Dave Eggers, the study investigates how digital technology has transformed identity from being autonomous and subjective to something objective and data-driven. The research employs qualitative textual analysis through the posthumanist theoretical lenses of Katherine Hayles and Cary Wolfe to explore how AI, algorithms and other digital networks construct the algorithmic self. Although several studies have examined identity, authenticity, artificial intelligence and digital surveillance in *The Candy House* and *The Circle* individually, very limited research has analyzed the novels together to examine the construction of the algorithmic self. The analysis reveals that technological systems convert memories and identity into quantifiable data that can be fragmented, recorded and shared in ways that challenge the traditional idea of a stable and authentic self. The findings demonstrate that in *The Circle* the company ideology of transparency and continuous surveillance transforms human identity into data, eroding privacy and human agency. Similarly, *The Candy House* depicts memory sharing technology as destabilizing the boundaries between authentic personal experience and digital data-driven consciousness. The research concludes that technological systems and algorithms have reconstructed human identity into measureable digitally mediated data, challenging the conventional notion of autonomy, identity and authenticity.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a technology behind a screen; rather it is connected with who individuals are and who they become. Although artificial intelligence is very advantageous in various sectors, it has a huge impact on the human's personal self, identity and self-awareness. AI is advantageous in various sectors, but most importantly, it has a huge impact on a human's personal self, identity, and self-awareness. The self is the subjective sense of consciousness or personal sense of being of a person, while identity is the process of social, psychological, and cultural formation of the self based on interaction and experience. In addition, self-awareness refers to a person's

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awareness of his or her thoughts, feelings, and life. In technologically mediated societies, these concepts are, however, dominated by AI, surveillance technologies, algorithms and digital networks. Individuals' presence in digital space continuously constructs their identity. Many algorithms are utilised for improved engagement rather than the authenticity of the work and identity, which has increased people's interest in many fields and directions (Topuz, 2024).

The algorithmic self is an identity that is built, forecasted, and managed in the name of algorithmic-based technology, questioning the autonomous and authentic human subject. Today, identity is not fixed or individual, but a fragmented, quantified, and continually restructured concept that is shaped by technology-mediated constructions and surveillance practices. The algorithmic self emerges from the collection of people's data by the gaze of algorithms based on their past behaviors, interactions, and preferences, and then it gives instructions on what aspects of their identity should be increased, decreased or erased. This algorithmic gaze is statistical, impassive, and reductive, classifying human beings and assigning meaning to them. Human consciousness shapes how he/she experiences and perceives reality, and it is always directed towards achieving something which shapes identity, but algorithms have given individuals an assigned identity and have controlled our conscious experiences. They control what people see, hear, think and how they judge themselves. Personalization feeds, and the 'for you' pages on social media show that machines predict humans better than themselves. Billions of interactions, including clicks, pauses, likes and purchases, etc., enable algorithms to improve their prediction, more quickly than human instincts. In the past, human identity was determined by the way they interact in society, the interactions they had with one another in society, the environment and culture they were living in and the moral and traditional values they observed. However, in the digital era, identity is determined through interactions with different algorithmic systems. This shift raises questions about autonomy, if humans are constantly guided by machines, and if they keep depending on them for creating identity and taking decisions, then the authenticity and reality of human identity comes under a cloud. Therefore, the algorithmic self represents a new form of subjectivity in which human identity is not only socially and culturally constructed but also technologically mediated. The interaction between machines and humans is reshaping and redefining the meaning of being a human being. So, it is very important to understand how they are transforming the world and humans (Priya, 2025).

The present era is an age where human lives are tied to technologies in a very complex and inescapable way. Individuals need to pause for a moment and think about its influence on both society and themselves. Posthumanism is about how human, non-human and technological worlds are interwoven with each other. Posthumanism is a movement which emerges in response to humanism. According to humanists, humans are at the centre of all things, and by studying what differentiates humans from other creatures and things, one can answer the question 'what is a human being?' Humans are superior in this world because unlike non humans they can think, speak and have conscious. Posthumanists view humans as part of a complicated system of humans, plants, animals, and technology. (Allen, 2024)

Nancy Catherine Hayles (1943) focuses on the connections between cognition, technology, humanity and evolution in her work *How We Think*. According to her the most important thing is the distinguishing qualities of cognition that set it apart from the underlying processes of technology and artificial intelligence: choice and decision, which leads to interpretation and meaning. Hayles argues that science and technology shape us and our interactions with the world by shaping conceptions of the world.

Cary Wolf, in his book "*What is Posthumanism?*" (2010), discussed that Posthumanism is not about rejecting humanity but redefining its meaning in a world full of technology. He argues that humans now share the world with machines and systems that have a huge impact on our identity. Now our identity is not just our ideas, thoughts, and feelings, but also includes the data, machines, and algorithms that are around us. This idea shows that technology not only supports humans but also shapes human identity from within. Wolfe believes that if we understand our connection with technology, then it would make us more careful and cautious in using technology.

These theories make the central topic of the study, which is how identity and authenticity are shaped by algorithms. The selected novels, Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013), and Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House* (2022) show how human identity and authenticity are reshaped by technology and algorithms. *The Circle* explores shaping of internal identity by a corporate society full of surveillance and transparency. *The Candy House* depicts identities, and memory sharing through digital media.

Literature Review

Jeena Joseph (2025) discusses the concept of the algorithmic self, where artificial AI is essentially reshaping human identity, reflection and agency. According to the author of the work, artificial intelligence has finally transitioned from a tool of human will to an active player in the continuous self-actualization process that we undergo through constant algorithmic loops. It's not just about the amount of technology, or the amount of data, or the amount of efficiency that is being achieved; it's the nature of the selfhood that's transforming. The work highlights a range of profound psychological shifts, from the fact that introspection is outsourced to AI, and this can lead to the loss of personal feelings of emotional awareness.

Roshni Mishra (2024) says that AI is an innovation stimulus and also the atrocity to what it means to be a human, to have aggression, privacy, and trust in each other in the digital world. It goes further to show how technology like machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing only serve to expose the fact that biases still exist in society and to produce unfair and discriminatory outcomes. Also, they contribute to the crisis of authenticity born from the use of generative technologies like deepfakes that throw open the door between truth and deception and erode trust in online information and creative expression. It criticizes the use of AI in surveillance and exploitation of data, arguing that constant data gathering is a threat to our individual freedom and civil liberties.

Recent criticism places Dave Eggers' *The Circle* in the context of modern dystopian literature that questions the meeting point between technology, surveillance, and identity. The research paper analyses the manner in which artificial intelligence is forming a kind of digital panopticon that imposes self-regulation and leads to identity fragmentation. The scene in which Mae Holland transforms herself from an independent person into a docile member of the ideology of transparency in *The Circle* by Eggers reflects the mental and social consequences of comprehensive surveillance. Understanding the Foucaultian concept of the panopticon, the novel demonstrates the ways AI-based monitoring enforces discipline on behaviour and conditions conformity as a norm. Researchers observe that this fictional narrative is resonant with the real-life fears of surveillance capitalism, selling personal data and the loss of privacy. *The Circle* is connected by the analysis to previous dystopian works like *1984* by Orwell and *Brave New World* by Huxley, reflecting the constant issue of technology taking over literature. (Hassan 2024)

Mosa et al. (2024) discuss how the sophisticated digital regimes change human identity and authenticity in the world of constant surveillance and data-based manipulation. It reminds one that, on the one hand, such technologies improve the level of security and accuracy of operations; on the other hand, they remove the border between the individual's freedom and algorithms. The conversation suggests that identity is being continuously constructed through digital interactions where it has become challenging to be an individual and to make choices about yourself due to constant surveillance. This resistance is a posthuman condition in which humanism is intertwined with technology. The study proposes equal measures of ethics that can protect authenticity but at the same time recognize the reliance of humanity on digital systems.

Research Methodology

This research draws on qualitative textual analysis of *The Circle* and *The Candy House* to investigate the construction and transformation of identity and authenticity in the posthuman era. It enables individuals to examine how the self is no longer a stable entity but a technologically mediated subject.

Data Collection

The main sources of information for this research are the two selected novels, namely *The Circle* and *The Candy House*. The secondary data consists of theoretical texts as well as scholarly works on posthumanism especially as proposed by Hayles and Wolfe as well as critical essays and journal articles in connection to each novel.

Analytical Procedure

This analysis was done in 4 phases. The initial step in this process was to locate extracts from the novels through close reading. Secondly, similarities and differences were identified and organised into themes and patterns in relation to the two novels. Thirdly, the themes were analyzed in terms of the posthumanism coined by N. Katherine Hayles and Cary Wolfe. Finally, the results were synthesized and applied to the study of the algorithmic self and restructuring of the subjectivity of the human being in the technologically mediated space in the novels.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the theoretical framework of posthumanism especially as proposed by N. Katherine Hayles and Cary Wolfe, whose theories question the position of the sovereign, rational human subject in the face of technological and systemic change. N. Katherine Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) argues that the human subject has always been intertwined with information systems. She gives rise to the idea of "embodied virtuality," that identity is not an essence, but a pattern that moves through the networks - organic and digital. This work uses Hayles' perspective as a lens to interpret the ways characters in Dave Eggers's *The Circle*, Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House* navigate their surroundings in which algorithms serve as the defining characteristics of perception, emotion, and authenticity. The novels demonstrate Hayles' contention that human consciousness is being offloaded more to intelligent systems and that questions of where the self starts and stops in the digital continuum arise. Cary Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism* (2010) takes this question a step further, focusing more on the ethical and ecological aspects of posthuman identity. For Wolfe, the human has never been separate from its technological and biological environments; instead, it was always already caught up in systems of communication and control.

Applying Wolfe's theory makes this research able to read the selected novels as critiques of anthropocentrism narratives directed to reveal the fragility of human autonomy in a world where surveillance infrastructures and algorithmic governance redefine the concept of agency and freedom.

Bringing together the work of Hayles and Wolfe in this way, this framework reorients the algorithmic self to being a hybridized construct, part human consciousness, part machine algorithm, but whose genuineness is negotiated across structures of data transmission and surveillance.

The Algorithmic Self in the Digital Era

In *The Circle*, the protagonist Mae Holland's identity becomes increasingly entwined with the company's digital systems, which shows the transformation of an autonomous human subject into a digitally mediated algorithmic self. In the novel, the company named The Circle believes in total transparency. One of its slogan is "All that happens must be known" (Eggers, 2013, P. 59). At first Mae was a private woman and was reluctant to share her life with others or on social media Mae slowly started believing in transparency and created her own sentence which also became slogans of the company, "secrets are lies, sharing is caring, privacy is theft" (Eggers, 2013, P.246) She becomes active on social media and started wearing the camera 'SeaChange', which broadcasts her 24 hours life on the circle page. Her thoughts, emotions and judgement all get dependent on algorithmic feedback. "Mae was loving it, too, feeling daily the affection of millions flow through her" (Eggers, 2013, P. 252). This shows Joseph's idea of how algorithms co-author identity. While the company insists on transparency for moral goodness, "But I am saying that everyone should have a right to know everything" (Eggers, 2013, P. 232) its own leaders were not transparent and were living private lives themselves. On the surface, the company was showing that it was doing everything for the benefit of humanity, however, they were doing all this to create a monopoly and totalitarianism.

In *The Candy House*, a more complex and fragmented form of algorithmic self is portrayed. A character named Bix develops a technology 'Own Your Conscious' in order to connect people and make them understand each other. This technology enable individuals to store and share their memories. According to the novel "Who could resist the chance to revisit our memories, And having done that, who could resist gaining access to the Collective Consciousness for the small price of making our own anonymously searchable?" (Egan, 2022, P. 81-82). This shows how human experiences are quantified and converted to data by digital technology. On the surface, it seems like the system was created for connection, empathy and deeper understanding of humans, but if we see it through Joseph's (2025) lens, it shows the transformation of identity by algorithms. Her idea of algorithms as co-authors is visible here because in the novel, memory is not only transferred to data but it can also be created, deleted and edited by individuals. Her idea about algorithmic identity is that algorithms do not remove human autonomy but reshape it. The system was created for connection, empathy and deeper understanding of humans, but it brought alienation instead of closeness. Seeing their memories through the digital systems makes the character feel like these memories do not belong to them and are someone else's memories. It makes the characters feel emotionally detached from their own experiences. The algorithmic systems in the novel enable characters to see the memories of anyone "in the form of scattered 'gray grabs' from the Collective Consciousness: people's anonymous memories" (Egan, 2022, P. 55). This feature allow individuals to see themselves from the perspectives of others and see what others think about them, which challenges the idea of a centralized and unified identity. The self becomes fragmented because the

characters experience the life of others along with their own experiences. This makes the character question their own identity because they are no longer sure about their real self.

Role of AI in Reshaping Identity and Authenticity

Artificial intelligence plays an important role in reshaping identity and authenticity in the novels. AI is not presented as merely a tool in the novels but as a system that directs human decisions. In *The Circle*, AI works on the basis of collected data, predictive systems and surveillance. The company developed a system TruYou and according to it “Your devices knew who you were, and your one identity the *TruYou*, unbendable and unmaskable, was the person paying, signing up, responding, viewing and reviewing, seeing and being seen” (Eggers, 2013, P.23). It is a system that was developed for the ease of people but is also used to collect all the data of individuals and then this data is used by AI and algorithms to predict behavior. Hassan's (2024) interpretation of *The Circle* visualizes a digital panopticon, which highlights the social and emotional consequences of surveillance, which is operated by AI and digital technology. Rather than using force, the company uses technological systems in a way that seems the most moral and ethical. Many people, especially politicians started wearing ‘SeaChange’ camera to let AI decide that they are clear and not corrupt in any way. This shows how people depend on AI to take their decisions and make judgements. This is shown through the gradual transformation of Mae in the novel. She slowly adopts the company ideology of transparency. She became transparent and develops a view that privacy is theft. She even betrays her close friend for her digital audience, “But could loyalty to one triumph loyalty to millions?” (Eggers, 2013, P. 356).

The Candy House, explores artificial intelligence through memory and consciousness. In the novel, AI systems allow individuals to upload and store their memories, which can also give them access to the memories of anyone. The system ‘OYU’ is an example of Hassan's (2024) logic of external panopticon has transformed into internal surveillance of cognition. The novels show how AI operates to convert consciousness into data. The technology was created so that individuals can understand each other, however it made individuals develop anxiety, and they even question the originality of their own identity. Relationships in the novel also change because of AI. Characters access and view the memories and inner thoughts of others in order to know their perspectives instead of physically communicating with them. Roxy is a character who wanted to see the memories of her father through the AI system, only to discover his regret of inviting Roxy on a trip. Roxy's relationship with her father was very good, and she felt harmony with him. She thought that this trip had brought them closer to each other but when she watched her father's thoughts, she felt that this harmony was temporary and her father does not cherish the trip the way she had done all her life. The experience made her realize that “the perfect harmony she was feeling with her father that her old life obsolete, had been temporary” (Egan, 2022, P. 140). The system was created to connect people, but instead it has disconnected people from each other.

Fragmentation and Multiplicity of Identity

The novels presented identity as flexible, shaped by digital systems, data networks and algorithms. In *The Circle*, identity is shaped by digital participation and transparency. Disappearance of identity does not occur all of a sudden, however, it slowly occurs when characters start interacting with technology on a daily basis. The digital regime concept of Mosa et al helps in clarifying this reshaping of identity since technological systems generate standards which people internalize in their identity. The identity of Mae Holland develops through the digital regime of the company as

she takes in its ideology more, that transparency and sharing is a moral conduct. One character talks about the pressure of visibility: “ When thousands, or even millions, are watching, you perform your best self. You are cheerier, more positive, more polite, more generous, more inquisitive” (Eggers, 2013, P. 266). Mae sees herself through the lens of digital systems and makes the digital audience the judge of her thoughts, actions and emotions. She started measuring herself in terms of numbers and data. One moment in the novel show this occasion when the company ask its employees to vote for Mae, 97% people vote in favour of Mae but she was sad and thinking about the 3% people who did not vote for her, the novel states, “ Three hundred and sixty-eight people who apparently actively hated her, enough to push a button at her to send their loathing directly to her” (Eggers, 2013, P. 331). This shows how she was anxious, sad and thought that the people who did not vote for her were envious of her and wanted to kill her.

The novel also shows how interaction with technology leads to emotional detachment. Technology has made her so emotionless that she even thinks of her parents as her enemies when they concealed the household camera to preserve their privacy, “ Was it because Mae's parents had slipped off the path? And where *were* her parents, anyway? Why were they sabotaging everything Mae was working for?” (Eggers, 2013, P. 330).

In *The Candy House*, identity is present in the form of fragmentation and experiencing others' lives by living their memories. When characters access the memories of others and watch their experiences and memories, it kind of becomes their own memory which affects their identity because identity is the product of experiences and memories. A character describes this process as “ to search the psyches of strangers. It's an eerie sensation like walking through an unfamiliar home and being surrounded by objects that radiate significance I can't decipher. I grab what I need and leave as quickly as I can” (Egan, 2022, P. 82). This supports Hayles' idea that “The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles, 1999, p. 18). The datafication of memories challenges the originality of identity. The self becomes hybrid, an amalgamation of external and internal elements. The fragmentation of memories leads to the multiplicity of identity. This multiplicity can allow individuals to grow and reinterpret people for better understanding, however, it can also present ambiguity about their true identity.

Authenticity in the Digital Era

Authenticity in the posthuman era has transcended its traditional definition of being sincere and true to oneself. In the digital era, authenticity emerges from the interaction between humans and technology. Both novels explore characters who face challenges to determine whether their thoughts, emotions, and behaviour are really their own or are shaped and mediated by technology.

In *The Circle*, the idea of complete transparency challenges the traditional idea of authenticity. Privacy, which is the root of authenticity, is considered unethical in the novel. The characters' morality is measured by their transparency, and if they are private then they are immoral and hiding something evil. The characters' morality is measured by their transparency and if you are private then you are immoral and hiding something evil. Mae believes that hiding anything about yourself is morally wrong. She even sacrifices her relationships in order to maintain her transparency and public image. Mae got in conflict with her parents because they believed in the autonomy of humans rather than being controlled by a digital system. The novel states “ They don't want to be smiled upon, or frowned upon, or zinged. They want to be alone. And not watched. Surveillance shouldn't

be the trade off for any goddamn service we get” (Egger, 2013, P. 296). Mae lost her authenticity in the shape of constantly performing for her audience. All humans have their own private and personal lives, but Mae blurred the line between her personal and social life in order to show her audience that she is a good person who follows ethical and moral rules. Mishra's (2024) idea of the crisis of authenticity helps in understanding this transformation of Mae, where she gives more importance to digital relationships instead of genuine human relationships. Mae's constant seeking of validation from technology to correct her behaviour instead of reflecting on her inner self shows the crisis of authenticity. You cannot be authentic when you continuously perform for public validation.

In *The Candy House*, authenticity is expanded to mind and memory sharing. The ability to share and access the memories of others raises questions about the uniqueness and originality of personal memories and experiences. Mishra's (2024) argument that technology has blurred the line between genuine experiences and the productions of digital systems is applicable here. The difference between real experience and technological reconstruction becomes unclear when memories can be accessed and shared by others. Uploading of memories and experiences in a digital system is also a kind of digital surveillance. When people know that their actions are watched and judged by others, they watch their actions. In the novel, characters are no longer authentic, they perform in a moral way and monitor their actions and words to become dignified in the eyes of others. When memories are watched through a screen, they lose their authenticity. According to a character, “We watched the memory again and again. I was clutching Sasha's hand, and I felt her weeping. But repetition dulled her response” (Egan, 2022, P. 59). This shows that when genuine experiences are watched through a screen, they lose their genuineness and character no longer feel the emotions which were felt by the owner of those memories. People wanted to connect and create empathy, so a feature of feeling the emotions of the owner of the memories was also developed in the system, but this leads to confusion between character about whether the emotions they are feeling are from the characters or from their own inner selves. This invention of emotion also leads to the loss of authenticity when emotions are felt through devices then this will blur the line between fake and real emotions and people will feel ambiguous about the authenticity of their own emotions.

Conclusion

The research has explored the concept of artificial intelligence, algorithmic systems, identity, and authenticity in Dave Eggers' *The Circle* and Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House*. The theoretical ideas of Cary Wolfe and N. Katherine Hayles were adopted to conduct the analysis. The results of the study indicate that both novels introduce different worlds in which technology plays a significant role in the lives of people. The digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic systems not only organize the information organized but also influence how individuals think, communicate, and interpret themselves. Posthumanists view identity as flexible and unstable, which develops through interactions with digital systems.

The novels thus give a very complex and balanced view of technology. They neither merely stand opposed to technological advancement, nor do they applaud it wholeheartedly. Rather, they emphasize the conflicts and contradictions that arise when human existence is closely intertwined with digital systems. Such an equal representation indicates the main thesis of the posthumanist theory. Moreover, the study shows that literature is significant in discussing technological transformation. *The Circle* and *The Candy House* challenge the individuals to rethink the role which technological systems play in their lives and identity by offering characters who are facing the

hardships of online living.

To sum up, the given research proves that modern literature offers lots of information about the cultural and philosophical consequences of technological progress. The posthuman condition is described in these novels does not sever humanity. Instead, it transforms it. This relationship between individuals and technology can only be understood in order to deal with the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

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