

The adverse psychological impacts of digital technology: critiquing Schulman's *this beautiful life* from postmodern insights

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the psychological effects of digital technology on individuals by analyzing the characters of Jake and Daisy in *This Beautiful Life*. It also focuses on how the postmodern trend of imbibing the ethos and spirit of late capitalist consumer culture and the commodification of subjectivity put extreme pressure on individuals, leading to their disintegration and degeneration. The study uses the theoretical ideas and insights of leading postmodern theorists, such as Arthur Kroke and David Kroke, to analyze the harmful effects of the postmodern trend of simulating double identity in excess. It explores the causes of the psychic deviations and disintegration of Jake and Daisy within the postmodern context. This research is a qualitative analysis of the novel by using a postmodern theoretical framework to analyze the characters of Jake and Daisy and their actions and choices in the novel. The study finds that the harsh psychological effects of digital technology are evident in the characters of Jake and Daisy. Their unrestrained involvement in the postmodern trend of imbibing the ethos and spirit of late capitalist consumer culture leads to the degeneration and decadence of their psychic integrity. Meanwhile, Daisy's mundane and monotonous life leads her to construct fantasies in her mind, leading her to embark on a sporadic spree of murdering her close friends. The study concludes that the postmodern trend of imbibing the ethos and spirit of late capitalist consumer culture and the commodification of subjectivity have a detrimental effect on individuals' psychological well-being. The lack of postmodern trend to erase the boundary between the normal and the abnormal exacerbates the situation, leading individuals to become cruel and violent.

Keywords: digital technology, cyberspace, psychological effect, fantasy, viral.

Os impactos psicológicos adversos da tecnologia digital: criticando esta bela vida de Schulman a partir de *insights* pós-modernos

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo examinar os efeitos psicológicos da tecnologia digital sobre os indivíduos, analisando os personagens de Jake e Daisy em *This Beautiful Life*. Ele também enfoca como a tendência pós-moderna de absorver o ethos e o espírito da cultura de consumo do capitalismo tardio e a mercantilização da subjetividade exercem extrema pressão sobre os indivíduos, levando à sua desintegração e degeneração. O estudo usa as ideias teóricas e percepções dos principais teóricos pós-modernos, como Arthur Kroke e David Kroke, para analisar os efeitos nocivos da tendência pós-moderna de simular identidade dupla em excesso. Explora as causas dos desvios psíquicos e da desintegração de Jake e Daisy no contexto pós-moderno. Esta pesquisa é uma análise qualitativa do romance usando um referencial teórico pós-moderno para analisar os personagens de Jake e Daisy e suas ações e escolhas no romance. O estudo conclui que os severos efeitos psicológicos da tecnologia digital são evidentes nos personagens de Jake e Daisy. Seu envolvimento desenfreado na tendência pós-moderna de absorver o ethos e o espírito da cultura consumista do capitalismo tardio leva à degeneração e decadência de sua integridade psíquica. Enquanto isso, a vida mundana e monótona de Daisy a leva a construir fantasias em sua mente, levando-a a embarcar em uma onda esporádica de assassinato de seus amigos íntimos. O estudo conclui que a tendência pós-moderna de absorver o ethos e o espírito da cultura de consumo do capitalismo tardio e a mercantilização da subjetividade têm um efeito prejudicial no bem-estar psicológico dos indivíduos. A falta da tendência pós-moderna de apagar a fronteira entre o normal e o anormal

agrava a situação, levando os indivíduos a se tornarem cruéis e violentos.

Palavras-chave: tecnologia digital, espaço cibernético, efeito psicológico, fantasia, viral.

1. Introduction

The novel *This Beautiful Life* depicts the adverse impact of digital technology. The researcher in the novel investigates the psychological effects of an obsessive desire for a digitalized lifestyle, which Jake and Daisy Cavanaugh, the main characters, develop. The researcher delves into their choices, privileges, and erratic activities, examining their relationship with the context of consumer culture and postmodernism. Additionally, the novel explores various aspects of Jake's extreme affinity for unconventional culture.

The postmodern context is responsible for the psychological deviations and disintegration of these characters. The dual pressures exerted by late capitalist enterprise and consumer culture lead to the degradation and deterioration of Jake's psychological well-being. By indulging in a fascination for a digitalized lifestyle, Jake resists the pervasive influence of rapid technological advancement and innovation.

From a normative perspective, both Jake and Daisy are victims of their unbridled involvement in the postmodern trend of assimilating the ethos and spirit of late capitalist consumer culture. The choices and erratic behavior of Jake and Daisy are the consequences of their full-fledged exploitation of the trend to indulge in excess, waste, and deaccumulation. All normative values seem to break down, and their behavior appears to be pathological and nihilistic. Their choices and actions run counter to the established normative ideals of society.

The researcher employs the theoretical concepts and insights of prominent postmodern theorists in the analysis. Arthur Kroke and David Kroke propose the concept of panic culture, which is useful in examining the fearful and morbid disposition of both Vaughan and Bateman. The concepts of panic sex, panic body, and excremental culture are particularly relevant. David Kroke argues that technological society provides a platform for the emergence of the great mythological primitivism, revealing the potential of individuals to experience unspeakable anarchy, terror, and cruelty.

Daisy and Jake become victims of the harmful effects of the postmodern trend of simulating double identity to excess. They fall prey to narcissism and obsession. Jake becomes entrapped in the process of commodity fetishism, with his subjectivity commodified in the cyber world. The pressures exerted by consumer culture and the commodification of subjectivity cause him extreme distress, caught between privilege and choice. The more he immerses himself in the cyber world, the more mundane and monotonous his experiences become. Although he desires to escape from the numbing experiences of digital culture, he finds himself compelled to compete with his colleagues in corporate settings, and he eventually retreats into pointless fantasies.

Jake is solely preoccupied with clothing, and when judging people, he invariably focuses on their attire. Similarly, Daisy develops the same level of obsessive yearning. Homosexual interest, masturbatory practices, and deviant passions dominate Jake's life as he pursues alternative and novel forms of sexuality in relation to technology. The body dominated by technology and technological innovation requires a different locus of sexual affinity.

Daisy's mundane and monotonous life leads him to construct fantasies in his mind, which eventually leads him to commit sporadic murders of his close friends. Jake judges other people and things with the same disdainful attitude, while his passion for cyber glamour and tendency to rupture the normal and normative makes him cruel. The domination of human conscience by technocracy and the lack of postmodern trend to erase the boundary between normal and abnormal are also contributing factors. In the era of postmodernism, well-wrought objects do not evoke aesthetic impact, and Jake cannot reach sexual excitement under usual conditions. His attachment to deviant and disordered forms raises questions about the catastrophic condition of the postmodern mind if viewed with a modernist bias. However, if viewed with the fresh perspective of post-modernity, all of Vaughan's malaises appear to be the effects of reality.

For Jake and Daisy, the distinction between reality and illusion is rendered irrelevant by their postmodernist mindset. The traditional dichotomy between right and wrong, as well as the binary of normal and abnormal, ideal and real, symmetrical and grotesque, no longer holds weight. As a result, the grotesque is now seen as a form of resemblance to the symmetrical and well-shaped.

The pursuit of sexual frenzy and fanaticism is considered a natural and normal part of aesthetics in this new postmodernist worldview. However, Jake's search for a new sexual identity through technological innovation is considered abnormal and anomalous as it does not conform to existing heterosexual normativity. His peculiar

affinity for ugliness, deformity, and technological perversion offers a unique perspective on transformed sexuality in the postmodern age. The grotesque and macabre are capable of evoking a distinct postmodern aesthetic.

1.1 Objectives of the research

1. To investigate the psychological effects of an obsessive desire for a digitalized lifestyle, particularly in relation to the postmodern context of consumer culture and late capitalist enterprise.
2. To analyze the impact of the postmodern trend of simulating double identity on the characters, particularly their falling prey to narcissism and obsession.
3. To explore the unique perspective on transformed sexuality in the postmodern age, particularly in relation to the postmodern aesthetic of the grotesque and macabre.

1.2 Research questions

1. How does the postmodern context of consumer culture and late capitalist enterprise contribute to the psychological deviations and disintegration of the characters?
2. What is the impact of the postmodern trend of simulating double identity on the characters, particularly in relation to their falling prey to narcissism and obsession?
3. What is the unique perspective on transformed sexuality in the postmodern age, particularly in relation to the postmodern aesthetic of the grotesque and macabre, and how does it relate to the characters' experiences and behavior?

2. Literature review

Helen Schulman is an American writer who is part of the new wave in e-fictions. Her work, *This Beautiful Life*, explores the psychological effects of digital technology. Leigh Claire La Berge argues that the novel critiques the upper-middle class, urban consumerism through rambling descriptions of branded commodities and the representation of lethal violence. La Berge (2002) suggests that the novel engages with cyber narratives in fiction, autobiography, and economic journalism, rather than the abstract postmodern cult of excess and disregard for normative values.

This Beautiful Life has garnered significant critical attention, with various critics offering their perspectives on the novel's shocking content. Schoene (2009) has noted that Jake's attempt to inhabit a vulnerable subject position is not the most shocking aspect of the novel. Rather, it is the excessive and unrelenting violence displayed by Jake that is truly shocking. This violence seems to be a product of Jake's digital escape from the overwhelming pressures of the cyber world and is consistent with the types of fantasies that occupy his mind.

Flower (2007) conducts an analysis of the correlation between humans and machines and perceives Schulman's stance on the unregulated use of technology as a means of alleviating the stresses and complications of existence to be nuanced. Schulman's novel is located in or near climactic upheavals; even there the dominant landscapes are internal. He appeared more interested in dreams, myths, psychology, the personal and social constructions of reality, than in technology per se. In his universe such elements are all inextricably intertwined; fiction and reality are not separate.

In the novel, *This Beautiful Life*, Jennifer Philips delves into a multitude of incompatibilities. She expresses her regret that Schulman refrains from making any commentary on the emergence of perversion. Philips (2001) expounds on the characterization of Jake and his descent into committing heinous acts, and her observations are articulated as follows:

This Beautiful Life is structured to be read on the explicit narrative level as the personal confession of the narrator Jay, a young, attractive psychopath. The novel traces numerous acts of violence which are narrated in the same cool and detached tone in which Jay catalogues the objects he owns and the designer labels his companions are wearing. (p. 4)

Jay's psyche is deeply affected by the pervasive anti-Semitic attitudes, ostentatious display of business cards by his peers, and the vanity of women, which create an uncontrollable sense of rage and resentment within him.

Even the slightest reactions and responses from his acquaintances seem to fuel his intense feelings. Jay seeks to distance himself from them, resorting to extreme and violent measures to achieve this objective, such as mercilessly and summarily murdering them.

Smithson (2007) contends that Schulman's *This Beautiful Life* primarily revolves around the theme of the loss of optimism. The catastrophic effects of postmodern conditions have penetrated human consciousness, causing irreparable damage. Smithson (2007) opines that:

The emergence of a different consciousness is projected in *This Beautiful Life*. There's no reason why not - after all the brain is a mass of circuitry - there's no mystery about the units that make up the brain - it's a mass of neural networks. There's absolutely no reason why the operation of this complex system of neural networks shouldn't be understood in its entirety. Now I think this will lead to manipulation of the brain in any way - so that everything from transcendental experiences to the creation of sort of ad hoc religions will be possible. (p. 53)

It is posited that the manipulation of molecular biology will reveal all that is necessary to understand genetic structures in the chromosome, enabling human organisms to be manipulated in any desired manner. Should such developments arise, it is plausible that computer-simulated realities may contain more informational units than those offered by current optical systems in the brain.

Laine (2008) analyzes each postmodern text through the lens of characters experiencing a panic-stricken mentality. Panic body, panic mind, panic jealousy, panic sexuality, and panic sense are among the chronic fates that modernist characters endure, and Jay falls into this category. Jay's response to everyday occurrences is excessively alarming. As a typical individual, he lacks the ability to respond to commonplace events normally. Panic body and panic attacks are recurring experiences for him, and his identity is marred by hallucinatory elements, which constantly affect him.

The fundamental paradox in Schulman's oeuvre pertains to temporality. Schulman's protagonist attempts to evade his memories for the better part of his life and utilizes his creative writing as a means of visualizing a moment in which the flow of time is arrested. John Baxter characterizes this as a form of non-religious mysticism, but ultimately posits that Schulman employs the psychopath's veneration for the present moment. Baxter (2001) expounds on this viewpoint in the following statement:

Yet what he was struggling to achieve in the several genres of fiction he deployed was a reconciliation between conflicting impulses that were not his alone. From the dream-haunted landscape of the cyber world to the deadpan surrealist comedy of *Hello America*, from the experimental novels to the thrillers of his later years, it was the universally human conflict between seeking to preserve meaning in memory and the need to shake off the burden of the past that Schulman explored. (p. 27)

Schulman demonstrates great attention to detail in his subject matter. While deconstructing literary biographies can provide insight, John Baxter's approach appears to be a haphazard amalgamation of irrelevant facts, scraps of gossip, and random inferences that create a fictitious ogre. The novel subtly hints at a return to the universal appeal of human relationships.

Noel (2003) identifies the underlying elements of nothingness in Daisy's intense desire for sadistic joy, at the expense of his own identity. Noel suggests that Daisy's search for a new identity based on passion and terror is destined to end in illusion. The image of Daisy is merely an imaginary construct, doubling back on itself.

Adhikary (2020) states that The impact of cyber culture on young people who engage with it carelessly leads to a range of consequences. It undermines their dignity and creativity as they become excessively absorbed in it. The author depicts the severe repercussions of this trend, including the use of digital communication, virtual reality, and artificial forms of amusement.

Gioia (1999) argues that while *This Beautiful Life* may not seem like science fiction at first glance, it is often classified as such. Despite only featuring conventional technologies like cars and airplanes, the novel's characters seem to be from another planet altogether. Even the narrator's fixation on sexual potential in car crashes adds to the feeling of otherworldliness. Gioia (1999) suggests that exploring the works of Schulman could show that emotions must change alongside technological advancements. As society constantly searches for newness, violent constructs become more prevalent, resulting in conflict.

Despite the various critical analyses of *This Beautiful Life*, the negative impact of excessive digitization and its widespread abuse has been overlooked by all of them. The loss of the familiar and symmetrical in the novel

leads to the downfall of the narrator, highlighting the emergence of a new type of anarchic awakening. In the postmodern era, even the grotesque and disorderly are capable of creating a new aesthetic sense. The postmodern aesthetic perception blurs the line between the grotesque and the terrible. Consequently, the characters in the novel pay a heavy price for their exposure to the excesses of postmodern culture and its conventions. Their psychological well-being, commitment to normative values, and normality are gradually eroded.

3. Methodology

This study aims to investigate the psychological effects of digital technology on individuals by analyzing the characters of Jake and Daisy in the novel *This Beautiful Life*, with a particular focus on the postmodern trend of imbibing the ethos and spirit of late capitalist consumer culture and the commodification of subjectivity, which puts extreme pressure on individuals and leads to their disintegration and degeneration.

To achieve these research objectives, the study employs a qualitative analysis of the novel, using a postmodern theoretical framework to analyze the characters of Jake and Daisy and their actions and choices in the novel. The theoretical ideas and insights of leading postmodern theorists, such as Arthur Kroker and David Kroker, are utilized to analyze the harmful effects of the postmodern trend of simulating double identity in excess. The study explores the causes of the psychic deviations and disintegration of Jake and Daisy within the postmodern context.

The research is conducted by taking into account several characteristics of postmodern studies, including Baudrillard's simulation and Foucauldian sexuality. The concept of the postmodern condition, as defined by Lyotard (2006), forms the basis of the methodological framework, while the theoretical perspective is informed by Jencks's ideas of self-reflexivity and double-coding. Baudrillard (2005) has presented his notion of simulation and its reflection on digital technology also plays a significant role in the analysis. Additionally, Jameson's (2004) concept of cognitive mapping is employed to identify and analyze the obsessive effects of the postmodern condition.

4. Analysis of Helen Schulman's *This Beautiful Life*

This study examines how the novel *This Beautiful Life* by Schulman investigates the impact of technology and cyber culture in postmodern society. Initially, there were optimistic expectations that postmodernism would elevate people's consciousness, but the pervasive influence of postmodern thinking had a detrimental effect on people's psychological well-being and creative capacity. Schulman's novel explores this concept through the character Jake, whose abnormal and deviant behavior is influenced by the digitalized culture of postmodern society. He rejects the norms of traditional socio-cultural life and believes that only personal experience matters. *This Beautiful Life* serves as an example of the psychological harm caused by postmodernism.

Jake believes that the intensity of experience is more important than the nature of experience itself, which leads him to extreme behavior. During Jake's time, the dominance of digital technology caused a shift from moderate culture to techno-culture, which ultimately colonized human bodies. Jake's body was also affected by the impact of cyber culture and technological dependence. To assert his individuality, Jake broke existing codes and conventions by going to extremes. By doing so, he sought to free himself from the grip of technology and explore his bodily passions.

The dreams and fantasies of Jake reveal the peculiar and mysterious nature of his passion, which sharply contrasts with the dreams of a rational person in their regular course of life. Jake's stylistic choices show extreme deviation from the norm, and his psychological state is abnormal. His fantasies are shocking and stunning to those who adhere to the standards of normality and moderation. One of Jake's fantasies is particularly revealing of his intense death-wish, as illustrated in the following excerpt, which showcases his sadomasochistic tendencies:

I looked down for the last time at his huge groin, engorged with blood. Twenty yards away illuminated by the revolving lamps, the actress hovered on the arm of her chauffeur. Vaughan had dreamed of dying at the moment of her orgasm. Two months earlier I found him on the lower deck of the airport flyover after the first rehearsal of his own death. (p. 7)

Jake is driven by violent and frenzied desires that push him towards the pitfalls and perils of the postmodern world. He is willing to go to extreme lengths to fulfill his dreams, even if it means imagining his own death and

rehearsing it dramatically. Due to the breakdown of ideals and ethics in his solipsistic world, this kind of violent fantasy and breaking of boundaries became a ritual for Jake, which led to psychological retardation. His tendency to rehearse his own death can be seen as a result of his immersion in a risk society, which is synonymous with the postmodern society.

This study explores postmodernism, a complex term used to examine power, knowledge, and discourse in society. While postmodernism has liberated people from restrictive dogma, it also has detrimental effects on thoughts and behaviors. Postmodernism is both celebrated and criticized, serving as a theoretical resource, political lightning rod, and cultural cliché. The ambiguity of the term arises from the challenge of conceptualizing and engaging with postmodernity. Postmodernism blurs the line between reality and representation, leading to a belief in constructed or simulated reality. This can lead to ignorance of the true nature of reality.

Fredriech Jameson is a Marxist theorist who adapts classical Marxism to the inequalities created by the late capitalist system. He emphasizes the ways in which the dynamics of late capitalism infiltrate socio-political spheres and manipulates people's consciousness through both coercive and cogent means. Jameson (2004) views postmodernism as a stratification of the capitalist system, rather than a dominant cultural force. He believes that it can pave the way for new awakenings and excitement but does not mark the return of history.

Jake has grown disillusioned with conventional sexual relations and has begun a quest to discover new notions of sexuality. However, it is only during a disastrous car accident that he experiences sexual ecstasy. Such a path of anomaly can only be chosen by an individual with a disintegrated psychology and corrupted sense of self. The following extract provides insight into Jake's degrading and deviant tastes:

Their tight faces and strained thighs were lit by his Polaroid flash, like startled survivors of a submarine disaster. These aspiring whores, whom Jake met in the all-night cafes and supermarkets, were the first cousins of the patients illustrated in his surgical textbooks. During his studied courtship of injured women, Jake was obsessed with the buboes of gas bacillus infections by facial injuries and genital wounds. (p. 8)

Jake has a fascination with injuries and wounds, and sometimes fantasizes about pursuing romantic relationships with women who have disabled bodies. He finds easy and comfortable sexual acts to be nauseating. It is unclear how Jake developed these morbid sexual desires. However, it is suggested that his immersion in the postmodern cult and concept, along with the standards set by the doctrine of postmodernism, have led him down a hazardous path of pursuing deviant pleasures. Jake's actions are evidence of his degeneration.

The loss of the concept of reality and normality due to postmodernism can lead to dangerous consequences. Without a clear understanding of what is considered normal, people may act impulsively and violate established boundaries. This can lead to extreme behaviors, obsessive desires, and a breakdown of the distinction between the normative and the anomalous. The more individuals are exposed to postmodernism, the more they may become self-absorbed, leading to narcissism and depression. Postmodern practices can also cause a disconnect from the external world and result in split mentality. Additionally, the followers of postmodernism may lose the ability to evaluate their own actions and become trapped in a parodic and ironic sense of life. The influence of postmodernism can lead to a culture of catering to violent and fervent passions, which can result in a loss of freedom and a maelstrom of chaos and confusion.

Jake's sexual desires and instincts are influenced by both known and unknown factors, and the conventional conditions for sexual arousal and sexual behavior fail to stimulate him. His sexual preferences and the manner in which he becomes aroused significantly deviate from the norm. While refraining from passing judgment on Jake's proclivities, it can be inferred that his sexual desires have led him down a path of potential peril and ruin. The following excerpt illustrates this point.

For Jake each crashed car set off a tremor of excitement, in the complex geometries of a dented fender, in the unexpected variations of crushed radiator grilles, in the grotesque overhang of an instrument panel forced on to a driver's crotch as if in some calibrated act of machine fellatio. The intimate time and space of a single human being had been fossilized forever in this web of chromium knives and frosted glass. (p. 10)

Jake is experiencing a thrilling sense of sexual pleasure, but the researcher believes that this may indicate a psychological problem. Without a moral compass or other guiding principles, Jake may be unable to control his deviant sexual behavior and distorted search for virility.

Jean Baudrillard is a prominent proponent of postmodernism, and his concept of simulation is important in understanding the psychological effects of excessive attachment to postmodernism. Simulation goes beyond pretending to have what one does not have and involves a danger of losing touch with reality. As the line between the real and imaginary blurs, individuals can become detached from reality and begin to view everything from a simulated perspective. The reliance on technology is a defining feature of the postmodern world, but Baudrillard explores the negative impact of excessive dependence on technology. He discusses three levels of simulation, with the third level being the most detrimental as it replaces reality and can lead to extreme and obsessive behavior. Overall, Baudrillard's work highlights the potential dangers of excessive reliance on technology and simulation in the postmodern world.

Excessive reliance on sexuality engenders deviant behavior. Jake has apprehended this reality, as per the novel's narrator, who states, "For Jake, these injuries served as the means to a novel sexuality arising from perverse technology. The mental images of these injuries were displayed in his mind's gallery akin to exhibits in a museum" (p. 11). Life, besieged by the tyranny of technology, has regressed. The formidable forces of technology and cyber-intimacy are so overwhelming that they penetrate human bodies completely. Even the postmodern philosophy of extremity has debilitated human life. Jake's life is emblematic of these issues. He is wholly subjugated and overpowered by the constricting and intimidating forces of technology. The only way to evade the ominous forces of technology is to fabricate violent fantasies. This proclivity to visualize induces him to experience hallucinations. The ensuing excerpt discloses crucial details regarding Jake's inclination towards hallucinations.

Jake visualized the specialized crashes of escaping criminals, of off-duty hotel receptionists trapped between their lovers whom they were masturbating. He thought of the romantic encounter of honeymoon couples, seated together after their impacts with the rear suspension units of runaway sugar-tankers. He thought of the withdrawal of digital stylists, the most abstract of all possible deaths. (p. 11)

Jake indulges in visualizing events and situations that are uncommon in real life, sometimes even simulating them to satisfy his perverted and deviant taste. His fantasies include honeymoon couples and the masturbatory practices of broken lovers, which he simulates to gratify his passion for oddity and deformity.

Liotard's definition of postmodernism differs from others. He sees it as the collapse of grand narrative, particularly in science, which he views as a means of domination. In his book, *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (2006) portrays scientific and technological innovation as a form of exploitation of consumers. Postmodernism challenges master narratives and questions cultural codes while opening closed systems to the heterogeneity of texts. Science seeks legitimacy through narrative, which Lyotard sees as a problem. Rather than seeing science as another grand narrative, he suggests it should function as a language game. The concept of language game is central to Lyotard's understanding of postmodernism.

The narrator of the novel is a close friend of Jake who, like Jake, is also involved in the postmodern movement. However, the narrator has a more nuanced understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of embracing a postmodern way of life. While Jake embodies the typical victim of the postmodern condition, the narrator provides a perspective from which Jake's relationship with Daisy can be viewed. The narrator believes that Jake's current life is marked by symptoms of nascent insanity, schizophrenia, depressive silence, and sporadic reaction.

Jake and the deceased individual in the novel represent the deviant adherents of postmodernism, who aim to stylize violence. However, it is incorrect to style violence in any form. Jake has an unbounded obsession with the sexual possibilities of things that surround him, a desire that arises from his internalized postmodern thought. In pursuit of instant gratification, this desire seeks unnatural, amoral, anormal, and eccentric ways. The ensuing anarchic pursuits turn desire into an obsession, and in the extreme state of unbounded obsession, Jake begins to perceive and judge things in terms of their sexual possibilities. His approach to understanding becomes sexualized, indicating the detrimental effect of the postmodern condition. The following lines demonstrate the potential harm that Jake may experience as a result of his tendency to view things through a sexual lens:

Jake imagined the ward filled with convalescing air-disaster victims, each of their minds a brothel of images. The crash between our two cars was a model of some ultimate and yet undreamt sexual union. The injuries of still-to-be-admitted patients beckoned to me, an immense encyclopedia of accessible dreams. (p. 38)

Jake and Catherine possess a peculiar preoccupation with exploring the sexual potential of all things, a pursuit that proves challenging in its breadth. Jake's deviant and warped sexual instincts have compelled him to seek out these possibilities, suggesting that traditional heterosexual norms are stifling to him.

Jake is numbed by a long series of anesthetics, uncertain of what experiences await him. His former belief in a core self and identity is shattered, giving way to a lack of moral values and social ideals. The narrator is unable to take action when his wife and Daisy engage in lesbian activities. Daisy's sexual desires have degenerated, and she is attracted to her male secretary, displaying blunt heterosexuality. She disregards the idea of marital loyalty and is unable to reach orgasm with her secretary. Her sexual experiences lack boundaries and are extreme cases of perversion and moral disgrace. The writer wrote:

Daisy's unrestrained erotic interest in her secretary seemed an interest as much in the idea of making love to her as in the physical pleasures of the sex-act itself. Nonetheless, these pursuits had begun to make all our relationships, both between ourselves and with other people, more and more abstract. She soon became unable to reach an orgasm without elaborate fantasies of a lesbian sex-act. (p. 28)

The person in question is engaged in extramarital relations with the intention of achieving orgasm. There is a possibility of betrayal and marital disloyalty, as she is heading in that direction. She is confused about how her lesbian sexual fantasy contributes to her orgasm. The effectiveness of her search for a new form of sexuality is uncertain and potentially harmful.

Jake lacks empathetic concern, as the post-modern cult values seeking new experiences over established moral values. The narrator observes a man's miserable death but feels no genuine humanistic concern. Instead, he concludes that moralistic and humanistic actions hold no value. This disintegration of philanthropic concern is a direct result of adopting a postmodern view on life. The narrator's indifference to human suffering demonstrates how the pursuit of postmodern ideals has made him cold-hearted. The following lines illustrate this point:

I stared pointedly at the clock over the door, hoping that she would soon leave. [...] I had thought for hours about the dead man, visualizing the effects of his death on his wife and family. I had thought of his last moment's alive, frantic milliseconds of pain and violence in which he had been catapulted from a pleasant domestic interlude into a concertina of metalized death. (p. 29)

The narrator believes that showing pity for victims of unexpected disaster is insincere and phony. He finds the idea of pitying the dead man irritating and is unable to feel genuine empathy. He feels like he has become robotic and is not capable of feeling emotions like pity. The events like death and disasters leave a lasting impact on his mind.

Jake and Daisy embrace wild fantasy and sexuality, which often escalate into hallucinations and visualizations. They seek hyper-excitement through alternative sexuality, and the narrator uses sexual and non-sexual stimulation to arouse Daisy's desires. In their pursuit of sexual pleasure, they are willing to engage in any action, disregarding societal norms and values. The boundaries of conventional perspectives and beliefs disintegrate, leaving them adrift in their pursuit of hyper-excitement.

The researcher suggests that violent and wild sexual pursuits are utilized as a means to overcome the stagnation of life, as evidenced by the frequent references to technology, violence, and sexual fantasies. The narrator's description of Daisy's body as inert and motionless reinforces this idea. Those who seek to break away from the stasis of existence are disconnected from reality and are captivated by fantasies and reveries. They are plagued by a sense of impending danger and disaster. This is exemplified in the following passage.

These premonitions of disaster remained with me. During my first days at home, I spent all my time on the veranda, watching the traffic move along the motorway, determined to spot the first signs of this end of the world by automobile, for which the accident had been my own private rehearsal. Whether the accident has occurred really on the ground or is this mental projection of his psychotic frenzy and fantasy is utterly unclear. (p. 66)

The narrator considers the accident scene to be his own personal performance, indicating that reality has been lost and their fabricated fantasies have taken on a sense of realism. This is an example of hallucination and madness. The postmodern view is characterized by a loss of reality, causing the abnormal and unreal to appear real to its followers.

The digitalized view of life eradicates the concept of reality, and only the artificial copy remains. In the novel, the characters do not seek reality, but rather a certain perspective. They attempt to place their bodies in a sexual perspective by visualizing and stimulating themselves. When they are surrounded by objects, they naturally perceive them in a sexual manner, creating sexual possibilities of their surroundings. The narrator reflects on

how his body, placed in a sexual perspective during his marriage, arouses his partner again, specifically fascinated by his chest scars. Currently, exploring sexual possibilities of everything is seen as a way of asserting their freedom, but it has corrupted their moral conscience.

The narrator's obsession with sexual perspective dominates his choice of car model, reaching messianic levels. Every part of the body is stimulated in the pursuit of heightened sexual pleasure, often leading to the sexualization of non-sexual organs and actions. This obsession with violent gratification appears devoid of any emotional affect. The narrator attempts to sexualize Daisy's nonsexual organs and turns their bodies into instinct-gratifying digital machines. The sound of a passing truck further prolongs the duration of orgasm, and they strive to appear like digitalized cyborgs to counteract technology's influence over their bodies.

Daisy suffers from severe depression and anticipates sexual assault, even welcoming it. Her expressionless face and bizarre fantasies are indicative of the harm caused by postmodern schooling and exposure. She is a victim of circumstances, and her fate is no different from that of other characters in the novel. Daisy's condition can be attributed to delusional fantasy and psychosis, evident in her possible split personality as indicated by the bruises on her face. Technology mediates her relationships with others and she, like other victims, is invaded and assaulted by grotesque experiences. Her life follows an increasingly grotesque pattern, with only the grotesque being perceived as real in her postmodern struggle.

The digital simulation of reality and the prevalence of violence and sexuality in media have contributed to the disintegration of Jake's psychological state. His interest in technology and automobiles is greater than his concern for human behavior, as evidenced by his photographic record of his relationship with Daisy mediated by cars and technology. The media's focus on violence and sexuality has resulted in individuals becoming more preoccupied and stimulated by these themes, leading to a gradual disintegration of normal psychology. The media is also exposing socially forbidden and deviant sexual relations, which are often devoid of an erotic dimension and considered immoral by society. Despite this, those involved in such acts appear to be indifferent to societal responses.

The advent of printed media ushered in a new era of sexual degradation. The narrator recounts in the ensuing excerpt how he was enticed by a myriad of salacious images captured in magazine pages:

I looked through the color photographs in the magazines; in all of them the motor-car in one style or another figured as the centerpiece- pleasant images of young couples in group intercourse around an American convertible parked in a placid meadow; a middle-aged businessman naked with his secretary in the rear seat of his Mercedes; homosexuals undressing each other at a roadside picnic; teenagers in an orgy of motorized sex on a two-tier vehicle transporter. (p. 82)

Young couples are seen engaging in unrestrained sexual activity in parks on certain magazine article pages. A nude middle-aged man is standing about. At a roadside picnic, homosexuals are changing one other's clothes. Teenagers are also attempting to experience the highest amount of sexual happiness possible by having sex while driving. These sexual acts have subversive characteristics and are shown in many mediums. Human life teeters on the brink of misery and abominable suffering. The narrator's and Vaughan's lives are in danger due to the subversive postmodern ethos' unrestricted absorption.

Jake experiences a range of emotions including anticipation, nostalgia, exuberance, agony, loneliness, and lassitude in a short period of time. Despite engaging in various activities, he ultimately feels empty and desolate. The owl's eyes serve as an objective correlative to his harsh existence, which becomes evident through his downfall and degradation. The degradation and insanity of youths like Jake can be attributed to the troubled relationship between individuals and deadening socio-economic phenomena. Postmodern trends, such as valuing life in terms of extreme financial profit and seeking alternative pleasures, also contribute to this phenomenon. Jake admits that he cannot stop engaging in homicidal behavior as it is the only way he can express his blocked needs. His tendency to seek unusual and uncanny joy in everything he does, along with social factors and a postmodern outlook on life, are responsible for his insane life. Jake's mind is devoid of self-awareness, which leads him to engage in homicidal activities to knock the closed door of his consciousness.

To sum up, *This Beautiful Life* effectively illustrates the negative consequences that can result from an individual's unbridled involvement in the postmodern way of life. Postmodernism rejects normative ethics and values, and thus excessive indulgence in postmodern principles can lead to the deterioration and breakdown of one's psychological well-being.

4. Conclusions

The main conclusion drawn from the study is that excessive dependence on digital technology can have detrimental psychological effects on individuals, as depicted in Schulman's *This Beautiful Life*. The novel portrays the extreme consequences of participating in cyber culture without control. The protagonist, Jake, indulges in his passions to an excessive degree, showing an obsession with deformed objects and a lack of interest in symmetrical ones. He resorts to violence to reach sexual ecstasy, which is abnormal and harmful. Although Jake considers his experiences to be normal, they are considered deviant and dangerous by societal norms. Jake's uncontrolled passions lead him towards a path of obsession, debauchery, self-deception, ignominy, and narcissism. His search for new forms of sexuality involving violence puts his existence at risk of immediate evaporation.

Jake, the protagonist of the novel, is under heavy pressure from cyber culture. Insults from his friends about his handling of cyber issues lead him to feel jealous and vindictive. He decides to take revenge on them by inviting them to his apartment, feeding them, and then killing them with a hatchet. In his romantic life, he dates several girls at the same time and even has sexual relations with two girls, whom he later kills. Jake displays both cruelty and compassion and represents both sanity and insanity at the same time.

Jake simulates a personality he is incapable of achieving and dissimulates his real nature, giving vent to his repressed desires in a maddening way. He lacks moral pressure, sense of restraint, and firm control over his haphazard and meandering passions. To escape from this miserable situation, he concocts violent fantasies. Jake hallucinates a vivid scene of sexual exploitation and murder while talking to his girlfriend. His mind has become a storehouse of insanity, hallucinatory fantasy, and murder plans. The slightest disorder in the outer world provokes Jake to act dreadfully, and his inner malaise puts him in confinement. To achieve temporary freedom from his inner malaise, he lets his mind operate in whichever way it dictates.

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7. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

8. Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

9. References

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