QUEERING DIGITAL LITERATURE AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING IN JEFF GARVIN'S *SYMPTOMS OF BEING HUMAN*
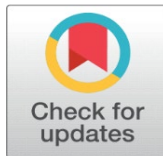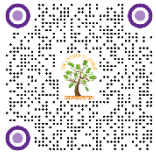
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ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology and communication has brought about rapid transformation in the field of literature. Books, articles, blog posts, tweets, and conferences, that constitute the digital humanities have grown exponentially in the 21st century. The emergence of the digital space has received a quick response from various literary genres, and in no exception, queer literature, which ranges from online book publications to documenting queer experiences through blogs and more generic social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram, has not only become a popular and affordable space for the queer community but more than a socializing space across the globe. Queer literature on digital space can now be seen as the fastest-growing genre of literature that evolved. Jeff Garvin's Symptoms of Being Human, which is written in the form of blog posts, explores the way in which this digital space has provided an opportunity for queer literature and the community to thrive by curating their identities online, reaching out to like-minded people across the globe, documenting their experiences, and educating the public about their unacknowledged identity and sexuality. The paper examines how this new mode of communication paved the way for digital well-being by maintaining a balance between the digital and the real world, accommodating and acculturating social space, acting morally and responsibly, and effectively managing digital and real-life interactions, as demonstrated in Jeff Garvin's Symptoms of Being Human.

Keywords: Digital, Queer, Blog, Identity, Culture, Sexuality

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL QUEER LITERATURE

The early 1980s are taken as the year in which the internet truly took off as a global phenomenon, although the basic technological foundation had already been tested and was expanding by the early 1970s. During these years, millions of people from across the globe had already been participating in email exchanges and Usenet conversations. The development of digital technologies and virtual reality paved the way for a rich variety of audiences, writers, discourses, and narrative productions.

The period saw the emergence of many social rights movements and discourses on digital platforms opposing conservative policies that continue to jeopardize the position of the minority communities. During this socio-cultural turmoil, digital space provided a safe space for this section of the community when they were shunned in the social world and banned from book publication in print that defied conventional wisdom. Writers, particularly those belonging to minority section of society, depended largely on networking sites to navigate their way in response to the dominant culture. One such prevailing example is the use of digital space by queer writers to express their views about the ongoing debate of sexual identities. Undoubtedly, the exponential growth of the World Wide Web (WWW) to a great degree in the early 1990s met the demand of common readers, writers, and digital publishers that reflected the life of the common people through digital literary publication. Due to its vast scope, rapid development, and diverse range of users, writers, resources, and storytellers, cyberspace has become a literary artifact since the 1990s. It has also become the most useful and also the most celebrated platform for disseminating information, especially when the issues of gender identity and non-conforming sexual representation are not much welcomed in social world. Browner et al. (2000)

2. THE BREAKING OF LITERARY HIERARCHIES

The accelerated progress of digital culture and literature saw the rise of a new generation of critics, artists, and theorists who focused their attention on the political and cultural effects and freely expressed their opinions on digital platforms when large segments of cultural norms could not capture the dynamics of human sexuality, identity, and culture. The dismantling of traditional hierarchies–that is, breaking away from any canonical traditions–is one of the citable accomplishments of digital literature. The concept of digital literacy helps writers and users to raise questions for all that has been revered and regarded as conventional selection, including the so-called canonical writers. One of ways that conventional literary hierarchies are being broken with the emergence of digital literacy is the questioning of who is currently discussing, evaluating, reacting to, or even analyzing literature in print and online. The breaking away of this literary hierarchy is understood not as the rearrangement of literary works but in terms of contexts and readership. Digital literature gained an alternative viewpoint for comprehending and evaluating social structure as a result of this paradigm shift in the non-conventional understanding of literary texts, which necessitated a comprehensive redesign of social and cultural institutions. Literature within the digital platform, which celebrates and welcomes all types of contexts and every level of readership provides gender representation with diverse opportunities to redefine gender and sexual identities. Among the various genres of literature that evolved and challenged the literary hierarchy, digital queer literature became the most dominant genre of literature that has taken over the internet since the 1990s. What constitutes the centrality of digital queer literature is its projection on the distinction between what is truly real and what is merely a social construct, apparent or secondary. The so-called canonical literature is not only called into question but also its projection on the distinction between the dominant and subordinate culture, the high and low literature, and who decides the production of texts, whether literary or not.

3. JEFF GARVIN AS A DIGITAL QUEER WRITER

Although the idea of the text itself as an autonomous and unified work had been under attack long before the emergence of digital literature or the World Wide Web (WWW) by post-structuralists and techno-critics, the capacity of a literature to incorporate digital and technological elements into the novel's plot to illustrate the possibilities of curating identities in digital space began with writers like Jeff Garvin and others. Jeff Garvin, as a digital queer writer, explores the capacities of digitalization and online-based communication as a vital tool to raise issues in contemporary digital literary and cultural criticism. He sees digital space and literature as a medium to convey messages–of gender injustices, inequality, and discrimination–that has been witnessing in today's culture, literature, and society. However, Jeff Garvin does not view digital literature or digital technology as a kind of alien submerging the traditional book readers, but rather, he reasons it in terms of literary progression where readers are able to independently negotiate ongoing theoretical and cultural concerns. His idea of digital literature comprises subscribers to reviews, blogs, images, links, and sounds that cluster around digital culture for digital well-being. Colebrook (2004)

With digital literature emerging as the latest manifestation of the politics of self-representation, culminating in the forms of e-books, blogs, and tweets, cyberspace has been emerging as a crucial tool for literary research. Written in the style of digital blog entries, Jeff Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human* shows how this idea of gender representation can positively be disseminated via cyberspace to educate about unacknowledged sexual identities. Jeff Garvin's depiction of characters deviates completely from the canonical representation of characters confined to a natural world. In order to demonstrate how digital and literature should function as bodies independent of the materiality of social constructions, Jeff Garvin allows his characters to freely explore the digital world. According to Jeff Garvin, the human body, that is, the material self, is mortal and constructed; however, digital space, which is not limited to human capacity, is immortal and can even exist forever. As a digital humanist, Jeff Garvin favors the latter and presents digital space, or virtual reality, as a space that should ease and promote the physical, mental, and psychological relief of the mortal being resulting from the cultural effects of the social world. In other words, Jeff Garvin emphasizes on digital well-being. Garvin (2016)

4. QUEERING DIGITAL WELL-BEING

The postmodern world has undergone a radical transformation as a result of the advancement and broad application of information and communication technologies. The aspects of the postmodern lifestyle are being shaped and influenced by the wide range of technological usage. Many writers are concerned about the issue arising in this hyperconnected world; among them is Jeff Garvin, who felt the need to maintain digital well-being. Jeff Garvin's idea of digital well-being constitutes a utopian view of technology that views digital advancement as progress and change that will ultimately transform the world for the better. As virtual reality continues to expand and gender divisions begin to increase more and more, Jeff Garvin's digital world has crafted a safeguard space for queer communities, especially in the absence of shared communal spaces in real world. Moreover, in the face of many cultural divisions–the distinction between low and high art, gender disparities, and cultural differences–Jeff Garvin's idea of the digital world and digital literature emerged as a powerful tool for marginalized voices to express their desire

and identity. Among the many other forms of literary expression on digital platforms, blog posts remain one of the most vital elements in disseminating and amplifying queer voices in Jeff Garvin's digital world, that is, expressed in an autobiographical form. As demonstrated in *Symptoms of Being Human,* Jeff Garvin's digital well-being comprises elements such as the digital capacity to connect, publish, share experiences, and find support for the general well-being of the society. One of these key structural choices Jeff Garvin employs to achieve this idea of digital well-being is the exploration of the digital world to trade loneliness and social exclusion of queer individuals in digital platform. Hanrahan & Madsen (2006)

Riley, the protagonist in *Symptoms of Being Human,* is a digital writer made perfect to be the representative of queer voices in the digital space for digital well-being. Like many other queer individuals struggling to come out in the dominant heterosexual society, Riley is a fully-realized genderfluid individual; however, Riley is unable to come out socially, as this would welcome rejection, abandonment, and criticism. As a result, Riley started early career as a digital writer under the pseudonym Alex in an effort to change people's perceptions about gender fluid identity through daily blog posts. The fact that Jeff Garvin decided not to reveal Riley's sexuality from the beginning to the end of the novel is to put Riley in a fair position free from sexual abuse and gender stereotypes. Jeff Garvin's intention is to do away with societal assumptions and expectations and, beyond this, to educate readers about genderqueer sexual identity. Hence, we are introduced to Riley first as a human being and then as a digital writer by profession. The narrative technique Jeff Garvin employed to achieve this height is the use of gender-neutral language in all Riley's blog entries, which omitted any suggestion as to what sex Riley could have been born with. Moreover, Jeff Garvin's depiction of Riley's relationship with the rest of the characters–in the choice of words and things–tends to do away with gender specificity and shift its focus towards gender neutrality. For instance, in the novel Riley had trouble picking the appropriate attire and colors and could not decide whether to buy a Power Ranger toy or a Bratz doll. Chambers et al. (2019)

In a complex yet interconnected world, Jeff Garvin believed that digital spaces should be free from gender bias and should strike a balance between contradictions, enabling writers and users to experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Riley's gender identity and blog posts demonstrate the fine balance Jeff Garvin attempts to imply about what digital well-being should be about: educating people about an unconventional genderfluid expression, connecting people of their same sex and others, and finding a safe haven both within and outside their community. It may be claimed that Jeff Garvin perfectly disseminated the notion of digital well-being by removing gender expectations and stereotypes from Riley's presentation as a genderfluid character. More than this, Jeff Garvin's understanding of digital well-being goes beyond the understanding and definition of digital well-being. He equates the digital world, which has no distinction between genders, religion, high and low art, or culture, with gender fluidity. Genderfluidity, which is an amalgamation of all genders–men, women, and anything that fits under the binary and non-binary categories–exemplifies this analogy to how digital space and genderfluidity serve as a common area for all people, irrespective of their gender and sexual identities. Put differently, Jeff Garvin's understanding of digital well-being goes beyond the sharing and coding of experiences, escapism from real-world expectations and assumptions, and social criticism, and it exemplifies the way of understanding genderfluid identity as it is transparent and fluid as digital space.

5. CONCLUSION

In eulogizing digital literature over traditional forms, the paper does not disparage the skills and expertise of the traditional literary culture or any work of art. The emphasis is such that emerging digital literature and culture will be more persuasive, have a greater impact on audiences, and enhance the storytelling experience, ultimately making a stronger impact on society. Moreover, the paper emphasizes that the shift in the literary landscape from the traditional to the digital age will open up new opportunities for diverse voices to be heard and celebrated. As more individuals share their unique perspectives and experiences, the digital space will become a vibrant hub for literary exploration and self-expression. The marginalized voices will gain greater visibility, challenge traditional literary narratives, and contribute to a more inclusive literary canon. The paper also emphasizes that digital space would create a vibrant environment for the marginalized and oppressed to gain greater visibility, and it would create a balance between the cultural differences for the well-being of society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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