

**Identity and Digital Self in Jennifer Haley's *The Nether*:
A Posthumanist Study**

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Abstract

The paper examines the impact of technology on human identity with a particular focus on Jennifer Haley's play *The Nether*. It portrays the ethical and psychological implications resulting from the connections between both the physical and the digital worlds. This study adopts the theoretical framework of posthumanism, drawing on N. Katherine Hayles's concept of the posthuman subject. It aims to challenge the humanist views that consider humans as the center of the universe. Instead, technology comes to prove that humans are no longer considered as single and autonomous beings. The study argues that humans invented technology, and it plays a major role in their lives nowadays. Through analyzing *The Nether*, the paper shows how difficult it becomes to distinguish between real and virtual as the boundaries turn out to be completely blurred. The paper questions how the interaction between humans and technology alters the notions of identity, embodiment, agency, and perceptions. By delving into the

characters' experiences, the study focuses on how the characters become posthuman or cyborg-like figures.

The paper concludes by highlighting the dangers behind merging both humans and digital technologies. Ultimately, it warns the audience in tech theatre of the negative impacts of technology and its ethical and psychological dilemmas.

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية تأثير التكنولوجيا على الهوية البشرية مع التركيز بشكل خاص على مسرحية جنيفر هالي العالم السفلي. انها تصور الآثار الأخلاقية والنفسية الناتجة عن الروابط بين العالمين المادي والرقمي. تتبنى هذه الدراسة الإطار النظري لما بعد الإنسانية، مستفيدة من مفهوم ن. كاثرين هايلز للذات ما بعد البشرية. وتهدف إلى تحدي وجهات النظر الإنسانية التي تعتبر البشر مركز الكون. وبدلاً من ذلك، تأتي التكنولوجيا لإثبات أن البشر لم يعودوا يُعتبرون كائنات فردية ومستقلة. وترغم الدراسة أن البشر اخترعوا التكنولوجيا، وهي تلعب دوراً رئيسياً في حياتهم في الوقت الحاضر. ومن خلال تحليل مسرحية العالم السفلي، تُظهر الورقة البحثية مدى صعوبة التمييز بين الواقع والافتراضي حيث اتضح أن الحدود غير واضحة تماماً. وتتساءل الورقة البحثية عن كيفية تغيير التفاعل بين البشر والتكنولوجيا لمفاهيم الهوية والتجسيد والوكالة والإدراك. ومن خلال التعمق في تجارب الشخصيات، تركز الدراسة على كيفية تحول الشخصيات إلى شخصيات ما بعد بشرية أو شبيهة بالسايبورغ. وتختتم الورقة بتسليط الضوء على المخاطر الكامنة وراء دمج كل من البشر والتكنولوجيات الرقمية. وفي النهاية، تحذر الورقة الجمهور في مسرح التكنولوجيا من التأثيرات السلبية للتكنولوجيا ومعضلاتها الأخلاقية والنفسية.

Introduction

We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism (Hassan, 1977. p. 843)

The twenty-first century is an age of convergence when artificial intelligence, organic computers, genetic modifications, nanotechnology, cognitive science, biotechnology, and other domains of techno-science jointly redefine and redesign human bodies and life. Man, the once privileged, unified rational being of the humanist project is decentered by technology, and the future of humanity is fragmented in the discussions of human embodiment and disembodiment. What it is to be a human today has

become a central ontological and epistemological question that promotes scholars to explore new frameworks, among them is posthumanism (Sawadogo & Simpore, 2023).

The prefix "post" in posthumanism means "after" humanism which marks a departure from traditional humanist views that regard humans as exclusive, distinct, and autonomous (Nayar, 2014). According to Cary Wolfe, "post" does not mean after as it usually means in Latin (coming after). He gives it the meaning "beyond" suggesting that beyond and beside humanism, there exist alternatives" (Gajewska, 2015). So, instead of the anthropocentric views that considered human beings as the centre of the universe, posthumanists aim to disrupt social and biological hierarches, emphasizing the interconnected and dynamic forces between organisms and that move through complex systems and networks (Wolfe, 2009). Posthumanist thinkers share eco-critical and critical notions of human minds and bodies "becoming with" which means human beings are in continuous interaction with their environment and not as separate entities (Haraway, 2008). Thus, the human is seen as integrated and connected with his environment physically and mentally alongside other species (Tarr and White, 2018).

Over the years, Ihab Hassan was the first to use the term posthumanism in his article "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" (1977). Hassan points out that artificial intelligence, aliens, and robots in the American science fiction of the post-industrialist age have articulated a reality that we are forced to address as Posthumanism or the "end of five hundred years of humanism.". He situates a potential future that needs to be studied in terms of posthumanism so that the excluded other in metaphysics and epistemology can be included (Hassan, 1977).

The term of posthumanism was then adopted by cultural theorists like Donna Haraway, who is better known by her essay "A *Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late 20th Century*"(1985). Cyborg here means a biological and technological term, which is a combination of "Cybernetic Organism, she defined it as a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction." (Haraway, 1985, p.3). Haraway uses the cyborg as a metaphor that helps to comprehend the relationship between technology, biology and culture. The

cyborg challenges the traditional divisions by blurring the boundaries between humans and machine, nature and culture and physical and non-physical.

The cyborg is more of duality than a dichotomy (Haraway, 1985). Haraway points out the potential for technology to both oppress and liberate. The cyborg represents a positive and active engagement with technology, viewing it as an essential part of shaping our identities and experiences (Senft, 2003).

Nancy Katherine Hayles is a postmodern literary critic and a professor of English and Media Arts at the University of California. Hayles writes and teaches the relations between science, literature, and technology. She attempts to define posthuman through a deconstruction of the notions of liberal humanism and through an inclusion of cybernetic technology in the evolution of man. Her ideas on Posthuman culture continue in all her major works include *How We Become Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (1999), *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (1990), *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature* (1991), *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (2005), *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (2012) and *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (2017). Her book *How We Become Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* won Rene Wallek Prize for the best book in literary theory (Gitelam, 2002). This book is a brilliant historical account of the interplay between cybernetics, literature, and theory in the construction of the posthuman.

According to Hayles, the concept of the posthuman "is so complex that it involves a range of cultural and technical sites, including nanotechnology, microbiology, virtual reality, artificial life, and cognitive science, among others" (Hayles, 1999, p. 247). It is "the end of a certain conception that may have applied at best to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice" (Hayles, 1999, p. 286). She also argues that "a dynamic partnership between humans and intelligent machines replaces the liberal humanist subject's manifest destiny to dominate and control nature" (Hayles, 1999, p. 288). So the idea of the fraction of humanity is repositioned within the human/ posthuman dichotomy. She discusses it as a purely technological

perspective. Hayles's concept of the posthuman is different in that she does not consider it as a futuristic possibility but rather a perspective that already existed along with man's evolution and that encompasses real life and the illusion of virtual reality at the same time. In taking such a stance, she wants to bring human bodies as part of posthuman discussions. Hayles argues that rather than assuming that our devices distance us from our physicality, our interaction with virtual worlds and social media is deeply embodied and has effects on ourselves (Hayles, 2012).

According to Hayles, humans become posthuman as they interact with virtual realms and social media "as you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screen, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become a posthuman" (Hayles, 1999, p. xiv). In other words, humans become cyborgs as the cyborg model has evolved nowadays to include anyone who engages with modern technology. Turkle in her book *Alone Together* agrees with Hayles's idea of the cyborg. She argues how technology like smartphones and digital devices have deeply integrated into everyday life. People today rely on technology to the extent that they become part of it, blurring the boundaries between human and machine, suggesting that identities are constructed by the interaction between the two. Through her concept of posthuman, Hayles redefines identity. She explains how technology has contributed in shaping new notions of identity and subjectivity which play a major role in defining posthuman ontology. Hayles claims that the technological advancements are not going to be the sole factor beyond the posthuman existence. The influence of technology on humanity creates the possibility for posthuman objects. According to her view, technology is developed by people as they cannot create themselves. However, In her book *How We Became Posthuman*, she links identity to electronic inventions. Hayles focuses on the relationships between humans and machines, emphasizing technology's role in altering human perception, consciousness, embodiment and agency.

Jennifer Haley is an American playwright. She was born and raised in Texas. She earned her Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in creative writing at Brown University before moving to Los Angeles to build a career in theatre and television. Following this, Haley has established herself as a prominent playwright in a city that largely centres on the silver screen, film and television. She founded the Playwrights Union, a collective of LA-based

theatre artists, writing for theatre, TV, and film. Her work has been produced in twenty-eight countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany.

Haley started writing in her last years in college. She studied acting at Texas University and started writing plays to create compelling parts for herself. In her liberal arts thesis, she wrote, produced, and acted in a play that caught the attention of her teacher Susan Zeder. She recognized her talent and encouraged her to develop her play, although Haley had not studied playwriting. Over time, Haley shifted her focus to writing plays. She wrote *Neighborhood 3* (2008), *Sustainable Living* (2008), *The Nether* (2013), *Breadcrumbs* (2015) and *Froggy* (2016) (Rizzolo, 2014).

The Nether was written in 2011 and first premiered at the Centre Theatre Group's Kirk Douglas Theatre in Los Angeles in 2013. This play won the Ovation Awards for Best New Play. *The Nether* then premiered in the UK, Turkey, Germany, Spain, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines. It has been translated into French and adapted for broadcast on French Culture radio. Additionally, it won the prestigious Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in 2012 (Pham, 2018). *The Nether* portrays a dark and morally challenging virtual world, where digital reality meets the deepest corners of the human psyche. The story centres on Detective Morris, who delves into a strange virtual world called "The Hideaway," where adults commit immoral acts against childlike avatars. These avatars are controlled by the desires of adults, but they do not play in a digital world; it is their alternate reality. At first, the play imagines a traditional investigation: a detective attempting to destroy an illegal world. As the narrative unfolds, Morris comes to realize that this virtual world is not just a place to escape but a complex reflection of distorted emotional desires and needs. In *The Nether*, the audience is confronted with ethical questions like: Is there a line between reality and virtuality or can the virtual environment used as a way of "escapism" that reveals a part of the reality we hide? The play offers a multi-dimensional look at how technology can challenge our notions of love, identity, and evil. As Morris delves into these virtual worlds, she discovers that they are not separate places from real life, but rather extensions of it, with their own complexities and ambiguous morals (Giacona, 2023).

This paper employs a qualitative approach involving textual analysis and close reading of Jennifer Haley's play *The Nether*. The paper scrutinizes the characters' development, relationships, and dialogues to reveal the

nuances of identity and digital self in a technologically mediated world. The study examines N. Katherine Hayles' terminology and concepts of the posthuman subject to question the traditional humanist ideals and to analyze the digital identity and the integration between human and machine. The characters in *The Nether* navigate the complexities of the posthuman world. They experience fragmented identities which result in ethical and social consequences.

Discussion

Jennifer Haley opens her play with a prologue which sets the location of the play. She combines the structures of technology into the techniques of her plays. Haley adapts techniques used in television, cinema, and the internet into her plays using language and structure. The design of *The Nether* employs innovative techniques in tech theatre to merge the real and the virtual worlds in a way that reinforces the posthuman themes. A rotating set is used to allow for a seamless transition between the interrogation room and the virtual world, lighting and visual displays distinguish these worlds, with cool, sculptural lighting representing the real world, while warm lighting creates an immersive atmosphere in the virtual world. The setting also supports a rapid costume changes, the sound design reinforces the separation between reality and the digital world. In addition, the play relies on a simple and flexible design approach, allowing the audience to use their imagination to visualize the virtual world, bringing it to life in their minds (Napoleon, 2016). The setting includes sunshine, trees, and leaves which are idealized natural worlds. This world is created by Mr. Sims. It is not real but a part of a virtual world that is designed to entice participants. The "Victorian house" and "modern table" represent the collision between past and present where romantic elements from the past combined with modern technology. This actually blurs the boundaries between morality and identity. The audience is introduced to Iris. It is not clear if Iris here is the same real figure in real life or she is not. She then calls papa, who is later revealed as Mr. Sims himself. The setting then shifts into the interrogation room where the audience is introduced to another character, who is detective Morris, a young female cyber-detective.

SIMS: I just want to go home.

MORRIS: Which home?

SIMS: I need to talk to my wife.

MORRIS: Which wife?

SIMS: I don't know what you're getting at. I want my phone call.

MORRIS: There are things we want, too.

SIMS: My lawyer.

MORRIS: Which lawyer?

SIMS: Come on! (Haley, 2013, p.4)

Sims here wants to go home, and when Morris asks him about "which home?" This actually reveals how the boundaries between his real and virtual identity are completely blurred. What assures that is his repeated questions as he is eager to meet his wife and his lawyer. The audience questions about the nature of identity and the world of Mr. Sims. It is clear that Morris as a detective wants Sims to tell her something about the virtual world he has created. She opens his file in front of her, asking him about the amount of money he gets from sodomy, rape, and murder. In his opinion, he created this virtual world to escape from real life. When Morris asks him about his children, he admits that he has no children in reality. Morris then goes on to read what is there in his file. She discovers that Sims lives in that virtual world, owns a house, and even children.

MORRIS: You have a beautiful home, Mr. Sims. Set back from a country lane. Victorian. Painted white. Children on the front porch in long stockings and sailor caps. Barnaby. Antonia. Donald. Iris. Such quaint names. From an era associated with . . . innocence (Haley, 2013, p.4).

In the physical world, Sims has no children, but in virtual reality, he has more than one child. During a conversation with him, Morris remarks, "I thought you didn't have any children, Mr. Sims. Or should I call you – Papa?" (Haley, 2013, p.6). This statement highlights that Sims

has more than one identity. While in real life he is known as Mr. Sims, who lives with his wife without any children “I’m not a shade. I have a fulfilling in-world life. I have a garden. I have a wife. I keep them separate from my life in the Nether” (Haley, 2013, p. 10) In the virtual world, or the Hideaway that he has created, Sims establishes a new identity as Papa, who owns a beautiful house, has a big family, and controls the others. In this world, he can do whatever he wants, so Sims fulfills his desires and achieves his fantasies, thinking that this world is devoid of real life consequences. Through this duality, Sims embodies the concept of multiple identities. Inside him, there is a storehouse of unachievable wishes and desires that cannot be achieved due to the society’s laws. The Hideaway serves as a sanctuary where he can create a version of himself that is free from the restrictions of reality, showcasing the contrast between his physical existence and his digital self.

Next, Morris opens Doyle’s file and introduces him to the audience. He is Cedric Doyle, a science teacher who lives in a society that is dominated by technology. Doyle’s life embodies a fundamental contradiction between his adherence to traditional values, which is evident in his role as a teacher in a physical school, and the economic necessity that compels him to teach in a virtual university. Like Sims, Doyle spends most of his time living a virtual life inside the hideaway, reflecting an internal conflict between the traditional values and modern technologies as well as between his real and virtual identities. Inside the hideaway, Doyle adopts the avatar of Iris, who is a shining and beautiful girl about nine years old. This avatar serves as a kind of escape from his real-world identity, which further blurs the line between the real self and the constructed persona. The matter deteriorates further when Sims develops affection for Iris without realizing the real identity behind this avatar. However, the true identity of Iris does not reveal till the end of the play.

The play employs posthuman elements on stage such as digital screens, virtual reality, images and videos, lighting, sound design, and technical effects. The use of these elements creates a live experience for the audience, reflecting the dominant role of technology in our lives. Haley treats her virtual world as a real one, unlike other virtual plays in which the role of technology is limited to conversations through media only. Haley transcends these boundaries, taking the audience on a journey into

the heart of these virtual worlds, crossing the threshold of the real world, and indulging inside the posthuman realms (Yeadon, 2018).

The characters in *The Nether* became what is known as posthuman or cyborg-like figures. The virtual world becomes an essential part of the characters' lives so that they create avatars and live a life that is completely different from the real one. That reflects how the concept of the posthuman challenges the traditional notions of considering man as the center of the universe. According to Katherine Hayles's concept of the posthuman subject, the characters of Morris, Sims and Doyle are posthuman characters as they indulge in virtual experiences inside the nether, adopting the avatars of Woodnut, Papa and Iris.

What assures Sims to be a posthuman figure is Morris's question; she asks Sims, "what can be gained by spending so much time in something that isn't real?" (Haley, 2013, p.16) He replies, "Just because it is virtual doesn't mean it isn't real... As the Nether becomes our contextual framework for being, don't you think it's a bit out of date to say it isn't real" (Haley, 2013, p.17). Haley's use of posthuman characters challenges the humanist perspectives of considering man as a single entity. Hayles claims that "as you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screen, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become a posthuman" (Hayles, 1999, p. xiv). Sims, as a posthuman figure, spends most of his time living inside the world he created. He believes that the hideaway allows individuals to live freely; they can do whatever they want. The hideaway becomes a place for performing digital identities. So both Sims and Doyle are not considered as single entities; instead, they interact with technology and create different identities from their physical ones.

MORRIS: Or perhaps he's created a world that's both so beautiful and so awful, it's meant to distract you from what's real.

DOYLE: No, that's what makes it real. The two of those together. He's created algorithms to make things grow - like the garden, and the morning glory - and given us the power to present ourselves the way we'd like to be seen. Iris is a truer embodiment of who I am than this sack of bones (Haley, 2013, p.26).

In a conversation with Doyle, Morris describes the hideaway as both beautiful and awful at the same time. For Doyle, this hideaway becomes like a real place in which they adopt multiple identities and have digital houses and gardens. His claim of “Iris is a truer embodiment of who I am than this sack of bones” highlights the idea of the self as something liberated from biological constraints, aligning with Hayles’s idea about how identity can be shifted from the physical body to an informational pattern (Hayles, 1999). In other words, identity does not only exist in the physical body but rather extends through technology. Thus, technology redefines identity, allowing it to be shaped by algorithms and systems within the virtual world. Doyle here reveals that Iris is an avatar created by him, demonstrating how technology allows characters to create multiple selves, ultimately challenging the traditional humanist views that considered identity as a fixed entity. Doyle, in a dialogue with Morris, reflects a posthuman condition. He presents himself as an individual who has seamlessly merged his identity with the virtual world. He relies on technology to enhance his experience, embodying the transformation of the self into a flexible entity connected to a digital system. For him, the hideaway is home, which means that the virtual world becomes a place for belonging and performing multiple identities. It knows everything about the characters. This relationship exemplifies the posthuman shift of the self in which the boundaries between the physical and virtual become totally blurred.

MORRIS: You think anything in the Hideaway has to do with love?

SIMS: Yes! I love those children! ... I am sick. I am sick and have always been sick and there is no cure. No amount of cognitive behavioral therapy or relapse deterrent or even chemical castration will sway me from my urges toward children. I am sick and no matter how much I loved him or her I would make my own child sick and I see this I see this not all of us see this, but I have been cursed with both compulsion and insight. I have taken responsibility for my sickness I am protecting my brother’s children and my neighbor’s children and the children I will never have and the only way I can this is because I’ve created a place where I can be my fucking self! (Haley, 2013, p. 16)

In the above conversation, Sims tells Morris about the main reason behind creating the virtual world or the hideaway. He created it not only for the purpose of escaping from the real world but rather as a place where

he can fulfill his desires towards children. In reality, Sims suffers from psychological problems. He does not have children, but in the virtual world he does. Inside the hideaway, Sims clearly finds himself attracted to the avatar of Iris. The play, in my opinion, highlights the role of technology. While technology has many positive effects when one uses it correctly, however, the character of Sims represents its darker potential, leading to dangerous consequences in reality. He thinks that the hideaway will help him in treating his sickness. In other words, Sims does not face or treat his problem in the real world, so he goes to technology and creates his own world where he can change his identity and fulfill his desires, believing that there are no real-life consequences. Technology, due to its misuse, has, on the contrary, exacerbated his condition due to his close attachment to it. As previously mentioned, Sims embodies a posthuman or a cyborg figure. Sims is disconnected from reality and from his wife, who is unaware of his virtual world and his terrible deeds. He spends sixteen hours a day with this world, as Morris claims “but your login records indicate you spend up to sixteen hours a day in the Nether” (Haley, 2013, p. 43). Moving away from his world could potentially lead Sims to engage in legally prohibited actions. Technology, instead of treating him, has made the situation worse. It leads to his loneliness and isolation from others, even from his wife.

MORRIS: The Nether is changing us. Look at my eyes, Mr. Sims.

[She removes her glasses. He peers into her eyes, frowns.]

Even our bodies are changing..

SIMS: Then we'll have lost everything.

MORRIS: You're a shade. What do you care of corporeality? (Haley, 2013, p.58)

Morris and Sims represent the tension between embodiment and disembodiment, which is further encapsulated by N. Katherine Hayles's idea of posthumanism. Morris claims that our bodies are changing and will soon become less valuable. Hayles agrees that digital technologies are changing the relationship between our embodiment and identity. She argues that the body is not a mere container of identity; it is part of identity itself (Hayles, 1999). In spite of that, technology sometimes conceals the primacy of the body through the use of virtual realities and an essential position at the very core of our humanity. This is evident in how Sims

describes himself as a shade, which means a digital identity. His transformation is a reflection of what is called the posthuman condition, which implies that identity can undergo a change that transcends the body as Hayles claims that the posthuman is a mixture, a collection of material informational components whose boundaries are regularly constructed and reconstructed (Haley, 1999). The situation highlights the clash between humanist and posthumanist paradigms. Morris thinks that entering the digital realm makes people move their bodies; according to Hayles, when people interact with technology, they do not totally leave their bodies. She asserts that while spending their time with computers, they use their hands to scroll up and down the screens, so our bodies serve not merely as prostheses but rather act as part of a continuous process that began before we were born. She criticizes the digital era in which the body is no longer has immense importance (Hayles, 1999). Thus, the body becomes less important in an era where technology dominates every aspect of it. Sims is afraid of the future; he believes that humans may lose their notion of personhood. This conversation hints at a dark future, where identity cuts its material ties. It highlights the philosophical worries that an increasingly digitized life has made the body less significant.

digital subject must be grounded in embodiment. In *The Nether*, an avatar does not exist in a vacuum but is necessarily linked to a living body, even in the extreme case of a “shade” — a person who has decided to cross over to the virtual world full time and has to be hooked up to life support. The ability to experience vivid sensations in the Hideaway as avatars, thus, is not the proof of a successful ontological separation of body and mind. Quite the contrary, it accentuates the persistent significance of the body through a process of disembodiment and re-embodiment. Albeit the digital body is the one interacting in the virtual world to create sensory experiences, the material body remains the final destination of these experiences (Pham, 2018, p. 5)

In her book *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles asserts that when humans interact with technology, it alters their perception, consciousness, embodiments and agency. This is clear in this play when Morris declares that “The Nether is changing us” (Haley, 2013, p.58). The hideaway enables the characters to create multiple identities; this multiplicity serves as a critique of the ethical implications. While this virtual world offers the freedom for the characters to create alternate selves, it raises questions

about the authenticity of identity and the moral implications of the actions that are performed inside the hideaway. At the end of the play, Doyle commits suicide, and Sims is punished due to the laws of the Nether.

He thinks that by creating a digital world, people can be able to act out their perverse desires without causing real-life consequences; it is a perfect world for him. However, Haley proves the opposite when she gives three definitions for the hideaway “another world for mythical creature,” “demon worlds” and “ a dimension of evil or imagination” (Haley, 2013, p.1). These definitions contradict Sims’s belief about the hideaway as a utopian world that has no real harmful consequences. Morris declares:

MORRIS: We cannot hold you here without charging you. That would be against the law (Haley, 2013, p.5)

According to the laws of the Nether, there should be punishment for those who misuse the world by doing illegal deeds. Sims is punished in both, the digital and the real worlds. In *the Nether*, there is a difficulty in separating the real and virtual worlds. Digital experiences lead to psychological and moral consequences in real life. Although the Nether is presented as an alternative solution for those individuals who suffer from deviant tendencies, the play shows the negative effects of the virtual worlds on individuals and social identities. The closure of this world triggers devastating disturbances in the characters, such as Doyle who commits suicide as a result of losing such a mythical place. Morris’s father was also immersed in the digital world before. He chose to isolate himself in a world far from reality; his decision had a serious psychological effect on his daughter. At that time, Morris felt that she was neglected and unwanted by him “he never looked at me when I was a child.... he never touched me...” (Haley, 2013, p.49). This reflects Turkle’s ideas in her book *Alone Together*, in which she discusses how technology like virtual reality and social media makes people feel alienated and distanced from other members of family and society (Turkle, 2011). Although the characters like Morris’s father, Sims and Doyle think that technology is a useful tool, it sometimes leads to ethical and psychological problems as a result of performing multiple identities (Pham, 2018).

Conclusion

This study has examined the impact of digital technology on human identity through the lens of posthumanism, with a particular focus on Jennifer Haley's play *The Nether*. By applying N. Katherine Hayles's concept of the posthuman subject, the analysis has demonstrated how the play challenges traditional humanist notions of selfhood, revealing the dissolution of clear boundaries between the physical and digital realms. The characters' immersion in virtual spaces not only disrupts conventional understandings of embodiment and agency but also raises ethical and psychological concerns about the consequences of technological integration. The findings underscore that digital environments do not merely serve as escapist domains but actively shape individual identities and social realities.. The ability to adopt multiple selves within *The Nether* illustrates the fluidity of identity in a technologically mediated world, where personhood is no longer anchored solely in the biological body. However, this multiplicity also exposes the darker implications of technological immersion, particularly the moral dilemmas and existential crises that arise when virtual actions are divorced from real-world accountability. Sims and Doyle's experiences exemplify the extent to which digital identities can blur ethical lines, reinforcing the urgent need for critical engagement with the governance and regulation of virtual spaces. Ultimately,. this study highlights *The Nether* as both a reflection of and a warning against the unchecked expansion of digital technology. The play compels scholars, artists, and audiences to reconsider the implications of posthuman existence, urging a deeper examination of how technology reshapes human perception, ethics, and agency. As digital and physical realities become increasingly intertwined, the questions raised by *The Nether* remain more relevant than ever, challenging society to navigate the complexities of identity in a posthuman world.

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