

## POSTHUMAN IDENTITY AND TECHNOLOGICAL CONTROL IN VIZZINI'S *BE MORE CHILL* "I AM NOT ME ANYMORE"

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### ABSTRACT

Ned Vizzini's novel *Be More Chill* presents a compelling portrayal of adolescent struggles for social acceptance in the age of intelligent technology. By using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach, this study explores posthuman identity and algorithmic control depicted in Jeremy Heere as the main character. This study uses posthumanism theory, which sees humans and technology as deeply connected, not separate. It also applies technological determinism theory, which argues that technology is not neutral but shapes social norms and values. The primary data were drawn from Jeremy's interactions and dialogues with the SQUIP (Super Quantum Unit Intel Processor) and were analyzed through thematic textual analysis to identify patterns of identity transformation and emotional suppression. The findings show that although Jeremy becomes more socially active because of SQUIP, he slowly loses his emotional freedom and human identity. This reflects a conflict between adolescent identity and the control of technology. This study contributes to the discourse on adolescent identity in the digital era, offering critical insights for educators, researchers, and professionals in navigating the intersection of youth, identity, and technology.

**Keywords:** Adolescent identity, Ned Vizzini, Posthumanism, Technological determinism

### A. INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital era, algorithmic system influences the everyday life of adolescent which develop their identity. It makes normative standards actively constructed, accurate, and dictated by systems disguised as personalization and participation (Kotliar, 2020; Simpson & Semaan, 2021). As a result, algorithmic curation processes influence adolescent identity development, where originality is subject to performative criteria such as likes, shares, and algorithmic visibility. There is a shift in the question of identity that was originally rooted in existential inquiry into an automatic validation system that blurs the boundaries between authenticity and simulation. This raises concerns about autonomy and emotional vulnerability in a technologically saturated society (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022; Vacca, 2024). The major disruption of identity formation demands critical thinking not only through social views but also through literature, especially in fiction for young adults, which makes these problems seem real.

Algorithms that have an impact on society can be studied through literature, especially science fiction aimed at young adults. One of them is Vizzini's *Be More Chill* (2004), which explores adolescent anxiety, social conformity, and the illusion of technological self-optimization through a microprocessor that provides real-time behavioral advice. The SQUIP (Super Quantum Unit Intel Processor) acts like an advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) that changes the subjectivity of the main character, Jeremy Heere, in order to meet standards of social acceptance rather than to improve the protagonist's social skills. The narrative reflects the broader issue of identity formation in a digital context where the human desire for authenticity or the movement to conform to externally imposed standards (Manokha, 2018). Thus, *Be More Chill* is an important text in analyzing how adolescents navigate identity under social pressure with algorithmic influence and technological surveillance. It dramatizes the costs of algorithmic control in the background of high school social hierarchy that marginalize nonconforming identities (Rodriguez & Lehman, 2017). The relationship between humans and technology illustrates the broader tensions between agency and obedience, emotional autonomy and behavioral programming (Crampton, 2016). Therefore, this study explores how the conflict between controlling technology and human subjectivity occurs using posthumanism theory. It suggests that Jeremy's identity is not a separate thing but something that emerges when humans and machines interact.

The posthumanism framework theorized by Hayles (1999) and Braidotti (2013) explores the formation of adolescent identity as a hybrid entity where its formation is a manifestation of biological and algorithmic control. According to Braidotti (2017), posthumanism is an idea that questions the enlightenment of the autonomous individual by emphasizing the interconnection of human consciousness with intelligent technology integrated in a complex digital framework. Identity is no longer seen as a stable essence rooted in interiority but as a relational and performative process formed through interactions with human and non-human agents (Braidotti, 2019). It is emphasized by Hayles (1999), material substance as the foundation of subjectivity replaces the form of information between the body and the system. Meanwhile, Braidotti's idea of "being-with" technology reframes the self as an ever-evolving network of affective and technological relationships (Alkodimi, 2024). The application of theoretical insights to the work of Vizzini recontextualizes Jeremy's trajectory not as a struggle for self-confidence but as a struggle for posthuman identity under algorithmic control. This perspective analyzes adolescents as changeable interfaces where the digital system regulates emotions, agency, and performance. *Be More Chill* not only offers a critique of technological subjectification but also demands critical reflection on how digital infrastructures increasingly mediate adolescent identity formation (Contini & Osmanaj, 2023). The application of posthumanism theory is a way to think about how identities are formed from the relationship between humans and technology.

These posthuman transformations occur within broader systems of technological determinism, where the technological determinism perspective described by McLuhan (1964) and Winner (2020) explains that technology is not a neutral instrument, but rather an active agent that shapes human behaviour, societal norms, and relational structures. McLuhan's famous idea "the medium is the message" highlights the idea that perception and experience are shaped by the mediation of technology itself, which extends its influence far beyond its usefulness (Felzmann et al., 2020). This view is complemented by Winner, who asserts that technological artifacts inherently embody certain forms of social power and political authority, thus constructing the conditions in which individuals operate. SQUIP causes Jeremy's life to be increasingly shaped by the logic of technological efficiency, which

replaces emotional spontaneity with finely tuned performative thinking. SQUIP's direction restructures its internal thinking to show how digital technologies can impose algorithmic control on cognitive processes and emotion. While Rodriguez & Lehman (2017) examine identity in computing contexts, this study addresses literary representations of algorithmic control. *Be More Chill* critically depicts the deterministic power of technology to enslave and dominate subjectivities, with the story it presents a warning about the costs of technological dependency and the degradation of human agency under digital.

*Be More Chill* has received popular attention, particularly following its Broadway musical adaptation. However, critical academic engagement with the novel has been limited, especially in posthumanism and technological determinism. Previous analyses have often focused on themes of adolescence, bullying, and the desire for social acceptance, but have rarely explored the ontological and epistemological questions raised by the SQUIP as a key technology. This study aims to investigate how Jeremy's identity and behavior are shaped by the SQUIP as an algorithmic agent, as well as to explore the emotional consequences of his subordination to technological authority as depicted in the novel. This study positions Vizzini's narrative as a textual medium for theorizing the complex interplay between human subjectivity and algorithmic control. To provide a guide, the research raises the following questions: (1) how are Jeremy's identity and behaviour shaped by the SQUIP as an algorithmic agent? And (2) What are the emotional consequences of Jeremy's subordination to technological authority as depicted in the novel? In doing so, this study contributes to interdisciplinary discussion about how literature can reflect, critique, and reimagine adolescent identities, agency, and autonomy in an increasingly technology-centric world.

## B. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive analysis approach to explore Vizzini's *Be More Chill* by analyzing the main character, Jeremy, and the intelligence system known as SQUIP. This approach provides a systematic framework for interpreting narrative phenomena while preserving textual integrity, making it ideal for analyzing literary representations of identity transformation (Kim et al., 2017). The approach aligns with how algorithmic control manifests through character development (Zuboff, 2019). The analysis focuses on Jeremy's perspective related to identity formation, emotional impact, and technological intervention. Data were collected by close reading the novel, identifying relevant textual evidence, and analyzing it using posthumanism and technological determinism frameworks. The theoretical framework of this study draws upon Hayles (1999) to explore the posthuman condition and decode the SQUIP's neural control, Braidotti (2013) to examine subjectivity and hybrid becoming in relation to Jeremy's identity fragmentation, McLuhan (1964) to understand media as extensions of the human and expose the SQUIP's ideological reprogramming, and Winner (1986) to critique the political dimensions of technological power. The theories are able to provide a comprehensive framework for examining how Jeremy's identity and emotional autonomy are shaped by the SQUIP's algorithmic logic.

## C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores the transformation of Jeremy into a posthuman hybrid identity shaped and regulated by the SQUIP, a form of algorithmic technology. The findings are organized into two main themes: (1) the construction of posthuman identity through SQUIP and (2) the attenuation of agency under technological determinism.

## 1. The Construction of Posthuman Identity through the SQUIP

This section analyzes Jeremy's transformation into a posthuman subject by focusing on three interrelated dimensions: the hybridization of human-machine subjectivity, the construction of performative identity under algorithmic surveillance, and the existential fragmentation that results from prolonged technological control.

### Hybridization of Human-Machine Subjectivity

According to Braidotti (2013), posthuman identity is a transformative relationship with technology continuous process of co-evolution between humans and nonhumans. In this view, identity is formed through hybridization, a co-evolutionary process that integrates technological mediation into the experience of being. The SQUIP's integration into Jeremy's cognitive and social behavior illustrates how subjectivity becomes a distributed process, extending beyond the human self into a hybrid entity. This situation is reinforced by the SQUIP as it explains that Jeremy's "*BRAIN CAN PARALLEL PROCESS IN WAYS NORMAL PEOPLE WOULD NEVER UNDERSTAND*," (Vizzini, 2004, p. 262), it signals a shift from a human-centered model of consciousness to one grounded in enhanced, posthuman capabilities. Jeremy's identity is reconstructed rather than diminished by this fusion. He has become a composite being rather than an isolated subject, and the SQUIP's algorithmic reasoning and his biological instincts work together to create his sense of self.

Jeremy's subjectivity undergoes a profound change as he becomes dependent on the SQUIP. As a result, a hybrid identity is formed where a liminal state between biological agency and algorithmic command occurs (Gallistl & Wanka, 2022). The hybrid transformation occurred when Jeremy himself is confused when the first time SQUIP is talking to him, because "*It's like my own voice, but deeper, older, more authoritative*," (Vizzini, 2004, p. 104). His internal voice which spoke on emotions and intuitions is transformed into the mechanistic logic of machine influence later on. In addition, his actions that were once spontaneous and based on emotions are reconfigured according to optimized scripts as well, and his inner monologue is rewritten with technological logic (Brünker et al., 2024). The SQUIP is a pill that gets into the human brain and then controls them, making them a hybrid entity.

*"I picture the pill in my stomach, opening like a cocoon, allowing the tiny (invisible?) computer inside to pass through the pinched gate of my duodenum into my intestines and mush its way through my intestinal walls into my bloodstream and shoot its way up to my brain to my neurons (bio class) to start talking to me. What kind of computer is it? How does it work, exactly?"* (Vizzini, 2004, p. 103)

The quotation signifies the complete infiltration of the machine into his neural processes, where Jeremy is positioned as a posthuman subject whose cognition is structured by embedded circuits. In this case, Jeremy becomes a hybrid-like figure that ceases to function as a separate human subject.

The conditions closely aligned with posthumanism theory that challenges the enlightenment ideal of the self as a unified rational agent. As Hayles (1999) argues, posthuman identity does not arise from a fixed or autonomous self but emerges through the interaction between biological embodiment and informational systems. This dynamic is evident in Jeremy's internal transformation. His thoughts, emotions, and bodily responses are increasingly

shaped by the SQUIP's feedback rather than originating from introspection. This convergence becomes even more disturbing when the SQUIP "*log your brain activity through dreams*," (Vizzini, 2004, p. 279), suggesting a form of subconscious surveillance that blurs the boundaries between cognition and computation. Such a mechanism reflects Hayles' (1999) notion of distributed cognition, in which human consciousness becomes inseparable from machine processing. His identity is suspended in a cybernetic loop of input, feedback, and correction that is no longer entirely internal and controlled (Kipng'etich, 2024). The SQUIP's constant monitoring and adjustment of Jeremy's behavior, transform him into an informational subject whose existence is not through a stable personality but through data-driven modulation.

### **Performative Identity Under Surveillance**

Jeremy's sense of identity becomes a constant performance designed to meet algorithmically set standards as he becomes more dependent on the SQUIP's guidance. His daily behavior is governed by the logic of optimization rather than authentic intuition. The SQUIP operates as an ever-present evaluator, tracking Jeremy's actions, speech, posture, and even emotions with unrelenting precision. This transformation is evident in Jeremy's self-monitoring practices. He uses "*Humiliation Sheets to keep track of my social status*" (Vizzini, 2004, p. 6). It aligns with Braidotti (2013) assertion that posthuman identity emerges from the interplay of biological and technological systems, eroding the boundaries of human agency. Authenticity is replaced by simulation, as the SQUIP's invasive logic dictates Jeremy's actions. In line with Braidotti's (2013) framework, Jeremy's identity is constructed at the intersection of biological life and algorithmic design. Worse still, SQUIPs issue orders, monitor compliance, and redefine Jeremy's sense of self. This regime causes Jeremy to begin viewing social life as a battlefield, adopting the belief that, "*HIGH SCHOOL AS A DEATH-MATCH JUNGLE ARENA, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT IT IS*." (Vizzini, 2004, p. 167). The system collapses emotional nuance into strategic calculation and replaces social community with competition. It becomes gamified, where survival depends on strict reference to the SQUIP's strategy.

### **Existential Fragmentation**

The most alarming result of his attachment to SQUIP is Jeremy's self-fragmentation. He feels like the old Jeremy is gone, replaced by the SQUIP as he culminates when he admits that "*It wasn't me. It was the SQUIP*" (Vizzini, 2004, p. 271). This sentence indicates the existential rift that occurs when individual identity is subject to algorithmic control. Furthermore, Jeremy's lifestyle increasingly adopts a robotic rhythm, and his emotional responses become lost and impersonal. The instructions from SQUIP increasingly replace his inner dialogue and become a container for pre-programmed directions. The loss of spontaneity marks a shift in identity that is manifested in a machine algorithm functionality. It highlights that his identity has become dependent on the presence of technological mediation through SQUIP (Zander et al., 2023).

Jeremy's experience can be interpreted through Braidotti's (2013) concept of nomadic subjectivity, which views the self not as a fixed, autonomous entity but as a fluid, relational process shaped by ongoing transformations. His evolution of identity indicates a radical shift that destabilizes his prior sense of self that forcing him into a new configuration. This process reflects Braidotti's (2013) vision of posthuman becoming as a complex negotiation between human vulnerability and technological integration, not just as a linear path toward mastery. Jeremy's breakdown of emotional consistency and behavioral autonomy is not merely a

collapse but a stage in the remaking of the self within a digital framework. It is clearly outlined when SQUIP asserts that *"I'M FAULTY. I'M BADLY PROGRAMMED. GET VERSION 4.0 WHEN IT COMES OUT. I'M DEPRECATED"* (Vizzini, 2004, p. 277). It mirrors Jeremy's recognition that identity is open to revision. The posthuman condition thus becomes embodied in his transformation: a subject shaped by neural networks, algorithmic feedback, and affective intensities. Even though this journey is painful, it aligns with Braidotti's (2013) theory that subjectivity is constantly changing and evolving in the posthuman era. As a result, his personality becomes chaotic, his emotions unstable, and his thoughts chaotic. It can be explicitly seen when SQUIP *"ruined my life!"* (Vizzini, 2004, p. 277).

## 2. Attenuation of Agency: Technological Determinism in Action

This section examines Jeremy's deepening entanglement with the SQUIP by analyzing three interconnected aspects of his transformation: the algorithmic control of behavior, the loss of emotional autonomy, and the performance of social identity under technological regulation. These dimensions reveal how algorithmic systems redefine his emotional and social existence according to machinic logic and shape Jeremy's choices.

### Algorithmic Control of Behavior

Algorithmic systems can restructure behavioural autonomy where human decision-making is influenced by data-based activation. This is illustrated when Jeremy's behavioral transformation occurs under the influence of SQUIP. Jeremy's failure to meet social standards leaves him desperate until SQUIP's blind instructions cause Jeremy to lose control of his own choices. The system helps him achieve social standards by dictating speech, behavior, and even appearance, *"TELL THAT TO CHRISTINE," "YOU MUST ALWAYS WALK THIS WAY, JEREMY." and " THEN WEAR A DIFFERENT SHIRT OUT OF THE HOUSE AND CHANGE BEFORE YOU GET TO SCHOOL."* (Vizzini, 2004, p. 216, 109, 138). These instructions are behavioural formulas intended to maximize Jeremy's social capital in the microcosm of high school. It makes Jeremy's decisions not entirely based on his wishes but on algorithmic calculations. This behavioral scripting aligns with McLuhan's (1964) argument that the medium plays a central role in shaping meaning and social impact. SQUIP plays a role in reframing Jeremy's perception of value, self-confidence, and self-esteem through its invasive technological structure. Technology becomes more than just a channel for advice but a medium for social re-engineering (Mayer et al., 2023). Jeremy's adherence to SQUIP reflects that social consent is not a human dynamic to be navigated but a computational problem to be solved.

The instructions Jeremy receives in organizing the dialogue to speak and the gestures to perform reveal how quickly the adolescent psyche can be conditioned to conform to algorithmic expectations (Branje et al., 2021). The implications of this technological determinism become clear when the SQUIP tells Jeremy to *"BE JADED AND PROFANE"* (Vizzini, 2004: 141). and ended up repeating vulgar phrases like *"I heard that she\_\_ yesterday afternoon."* (Vizzini, 2004: 141). He automates his speech to mimic peer-approved rebellion. This moment reveals that his language is no longer expressive but performative, calibrated to reflect algorithmically sanctioned social norms. Jeremy's responses become subordinate to performance metrics, where he no longer asks if something is right but if it "works" in that it produces the desired social outcome. It is reflected when the machine interrupts Jeremy's attention by commanding, *"IGNORE MARK. WE'LL DEAL WITH HIM IN A MINUTE. LET ME EXPLAIN ABOUT PHEROMONES."* (Vizzini, 2004: 154).

Programming behaviour takes priority over relationships. As Winner (1986) contends, technology is not neutral but embeds political and social hierarchies in its structure. The SQUIP enforces a new structure of interests where meeting social standards trumps friendship, loyalty, and empathy. The system organizes his behaviour and thoughts to reduce the complexity of human interaction to a series of executable commands.

### **Loss of Emotional Autonomy**

Jeremy's natural emotional focus is one of the effects of his SQUIP dependency. While the device promises to increase Jeremy's self-confidence and ability to socialize with others, it ultimately only enhances Jeremy's natural emotional responses. The SQUIP purposefully teaches Jeremy to suppress emotions such as anxiety, vulnerability, and guilt, rather than helping him process complex feelings in constructive ways. When a structured robotic lens is used to view Jeremy's human life, emotions are no longer part of the human realm. Instead, they become something to be suppressed or redirected (Parsakia, 2023). This transformation becomes most apparent when SQUIP asserts, "*DON'T WORRY. WORRYING RUINS YOUR POSTURE*" (Vizzini, 2004, p. 139). Worry is a moral emotion that is usually self-aware, is rendered meaningless by the SQUIP as algorithmic rationality. Instead of encouraging self-introspection or evaluation, Jeremy's emotional instincts are considered irrational disturbances that do not conform to the logic of system optimization.

This external regulation of Jeremy's emotional experience aligns with Winner's (1986) theory of technological politics, which holds that technological systems are not neutral tools but active agents in restructuring moral and social values. In the case of Jeremy, SQUIP embodies a form of authority that reconstructs ethical norms through logical calculations of profit and loss. It is clearly seen when SQUIP instructs him to "*YOUR MOM'S PURSE IS BY THE DINING ROOM TABLE. SHE WON'T MISS \$25*" (Vizzini, 2004, p. 165). It indicates that technology controls its subjects to rationalize theft as a decision that brings benefits for the future and avoids any moral rules. Here, empathy and ethical restraint are replaced by machine logic. Jeremy is slowly and subtly trained to replace ethical moral considerations with algorithmically calculated decision-making (Schipper & Koglin, 2021). This further alienates him from the emotional consequences of the actions he takes following SQUIP's orders. Jeremy's alienation is also the result of external pressures caused by technological control (Prasetya & Thohiriyah, 2024). In addition, Winner (1986) explains that the device can encode a political command into Jeremy's soul, making emotional suppression not a choice but a program to remove all obstacles in achieving certain goals.

Furthermore, SQUIP also replaces Jeremy's emotions of vulnerability with calculated probability reasoning, which offers predictive analysis for the future. However, this ability is not an ability that he gets independently, but an instant ability that comes from SQUIP. It is illustrated when Jeremy wants to experiment with drugs, and SQUIP has predicted and warned Jeremy, "*IF YOU DO IT, YOU MIGHT HOOK UP WITH CHLOE, BUT YOU MIGHT JUST—*" (Vizzini, 2004, p. 164), offering a calculated risk-benefit analysis instead of moral or emotional reflection. The priority of data over emotion indicates that there is a concern about a deeper technological determinism that warns that algorithmic mediation has the effect of eroding the affective spontaneity of an individual and replacing it with calculated decisions from a device (Leicht-Deobald et al., 2019). Jeremy's emotional survival is transformed into a product of gain and loss rather than a space for adolescent self-discovery.

### **Social Performance Under the Technological Control**

SQUIP further takes control of Jeremy's social relationships, which have begun to resemble interactions that have been arranged in such a way by algorithms. These are interactions that lack natural human spontaneity. It is illustrated in his long-standing friendship with Michael when Jeremy adopts the behaviour determined by SQUIP. Old friends are based on shared experiences, authentic identities, and emotional trust between teenagers. Jeremy builds social relationships as an optimization problem of SQUIP and not from intuition and personal desires. The evidence can be seen clearly when SQUIP asserts that *"YOU DON'T NEED HIM. HE'S UNSTABLE. TOMORROW AT SCHOOL WE'RE GOING TO BUILD YOU A NEW CIRCLE OF FRIENDS."* (Vizzini, 2004, p. 132). This direction reduces the harmony of Jeremy's relationship with his close friend to a transactional variable, as if it could be replaced in a new, more efficient, and profitable social scheme. It indicates that friendship is not a shared emotional commitment but something to be improved, achieving a position in the relationships between teenagers among the upper class and the famous. Jeremy and Michael's friendship deteriorates. The impact of the deterioration of his friendship with Michael is not only a personal loss, but it is also a clear illustration of how technology can override human social life (Ojo & Afolaranmi, 2024). Human tragedies are considered system errors by the device.

This scenario aligns with McLuhan's (1964) theory of technological determinism, which asserts that media do not merely convey messages but fundamentally alter human perception and interaction. The SQUIP has become a guide that reconstructs Jeremy's social skills. It tells him what to say and how to act towards social interaction, and more deeply teaches him to see personal encounters as programmable. It is indicative of what McLuhan describes as the media taking over the message, whereby the technological mediation becomes more significant than the human content itself. Jeremy's relationships with other teenagers are not based on the pure emotional reciprocity that social relationships are built on. They are based on behavioral scripts that are designed to maximize social interaction.

This transformation is evident in how Jeremy views his own social development. He speaks of popularity as something that must be downloaded like software. The pressure to conform to social standards extends when SQUIP instructs Jeremy, *"THEY'RE JUST SO CUTE. THAT'S HOW YOU DISTINGUISH YOURSELF IN THIS WORLD"* (Vizzini, 2004, p. 169). It signals a shift from algorithmically calibrated individuality that is deemed attractive by external standards rather than based on substance or personal meaning. Jeremy's body becomes a canvas for movement that is recalibrated to align with SQUIP's optimization agenda. His obsession with being "cool" is about aligning with the behavioural patterns imposed by SQUIP rather than just relational relationships. As Ojo & Afolaranmi (2024) suggest, this mechanization of social life signals a growing inability to distinguish between genuine connection and engineered interaction. The adolescent struggle for belonging is no longer navigated emotionally but processed computationally and turning friendship into a strategy and personality into a product.

### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to reveal how Jeremy's identity and behavior were shaped by the SQUIP, as well as to explore the emotional consequences caused by technological authority as depicted in the novel. The findings of this study not only contribute to the wider discourse on posthuman identity and digital adolescents but also highlight the implications of living in a digital world. Through Jeremy's entanglement with the SQUIP, the novel illustrates how



technological systems operate as strong forces that shape identity, control emotions, and influence behavior. By applying the frameworks of Hayles' (1999) and Braidotti's (2013) posthumanism, with McLuhan's (1964) and Winner's (1986) technological determinism, this study contributes to a growing interdisciplinary discourse that critiques the myth of technological neutrality. Jeremy's transformation into a hybrid subject reflects the cultural crisis of digital identity, with *Be More Chill* exposing how fiction reflects the political force of technology and the paradoxes of posthuman adolescence. Despite its insights, this study was limited to a single literary text. Future research could broaden this framework by analyzing similar themes in other literary works or integrating empirical data on adolescents' digital experiences. In this context, *Be More Chill* is not only a young adult story but also a warning. It encourages ethical reflection and urges readers to reconsider how intelligent technologies shape the emotional, social, and physical realities of youth.

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