

**PROTEST AGAINST THE LOSS OF PRIVACY IN DAVE
EGGERS' *THE CIRCLE* NOVEL (2013): A
SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**



**Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Getting Bachelor
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PROTEST AGAINST THE LOSS OF PRIVACY IN DAVE EGGERS' *THE CIRCLE* NOVEL (2013): A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh hilangnya privasi dalam *The Circle* oleh Dave Eggers dan alasan penulis dalam menulis novel ini. Dalam menganalisis *The Circle*, penelitian ini menggunakan perspektif sosiologis dengan tiga perspektif yang disajikan oleh Swingewood dan Laurenson (1972) dan tiga sosiologi prinsip-prinsip sastra disajikan oleh Wellek dan Warren (1948). Efek dari kehilangan privasi yang coba ditunjukkan oleh Dave Eggers ditemukan bahwa ada beberapa privasi yang telah terputus. Dengan menyelidiki masyarakat pada saat itu dapat disimpulkan bahwa hilangnya privasi yang dibuat oleh *The Circle* Company telah memberikan dampak kepada salah satu pengguna program yang mereka buat, yang disebut *TruYou*. Dengan demikian, hasil penelitian ini membahas dampak negatif dari teknologi zaman baru terhadap masyarakat dan mencoba untuk memperingatkan salah satu konsekuensinya.

Kata kunci: privasi, perspektif sosiologis, TruYou, masyarakat, dampak negatif

Abstract

This research aims to find out the effect of loss of privacy in *The Circle* by Dave Eggers and the author's reason in create this novel. In analyzing *The Circle*, this research uses sociological perspective with three perspective presented by Swingewood and Laurenson (1972) and three sociology of literature principles are presented by Wellek and Warren (1948). The effect of loss of privacy that Dave Eggers tries to show is found that there are several privacy has been interrupted. By investigating the society at that time it can be concluded that the loss of privacy created by *The Circle* Company has given impact to one of the users of the program they built, which is called *TruYou*. Thus, the result of the study is discusses the negative impact that new age technology has on society and tries to warn one of the consequences.

Keyword: privacy, sociological perspective, TruYou, society, negative impact

1. INTRODUCTION

In this research paper the researcher interested in Dave Eggers' novel entitled *The Circle*. The researcher is interested in the topics discussed in that novel about someone's privacy that is easily known by everyone whenever and wherever. We know that privacy is very important for everyone. Privacy is the ability of an individual or group to seclude themselves, and thereby express themselves selectively. When something is private to a person, it usually means that something is inherently special or special to them. In this era everyone can easily know someone's activity by using social media.

As the author Dave Eggers in his novel *The Circle* raises a privacy that can be easily known by everyone. In *The Circle* he serves up a work of dystopian fiction that takes aim at our social media-saturated lives. In the world of *The Circle*, "transparency" is fast becoming the ultimate proof of your goodness and value as a human being. Privacy is basically seen as stealing from your fellows, and secrecy of any kind is the very same thing as a lie.

The story begins when Mae Holland is hired at *The Circle*, the most influential company in the world. *The Circle* was initiated by three "Wise Men" combining all online interactions (social media and other business and personal communication, medical information, everything) into one identity called *TruYou* and has been growing to contain virtually all the other information that exists across the world.

This novel have adopted to the film on 2017 with the same title directed by James Ponsoldt with a screenplay by Ponsoldt and Dave Eggers. The film premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival on April 26, 2017. Emma Watson (Mae Holland), Tom Hanks (Bailey), Karen Gillan (Annie), Ellar Coltrane (Mercer) and John Boyega (Kalden) play the lead roles. The film made over \$20 million in the box office but it received very poor reviews. The film review website, Rotten Tomatoes, gave the adaptation a rating of 16/100. The Rotten Tomatoes site also offers the

following quote as a critic consensus: “*The Circle* assembles an impressive cast, but this digitally driven thriller spins aimlessly in its half-hearted exploration of timely themes.”

This novel has a third – person narrator , that narrator’s perspective is so bound up with Mae Holland’s that it is often difficult, if not possible, to tell the two apart. *The Circle* is all about the kinds of communication that social networking tools like email, text messaging, instant messaging, comment threads, and other web forums make possible on a daily basis. For that reason, Dave Eggers’ writing style throughout the novel is ultra contemporary and colloquial, capturing that everyday language that millennial Americans – and digital media users around the world – use in their daily lives.

There are some reasons for choosing this novel and interested in analyzing it. Firstly, this novel has a unique title that is *The Circle* (2013) which can make the readers want to read it because they will curious about what is in the novel. This novel is very interesting because it tells about social media and technology related to today's life. Secondly, the novel tells in detail about the main character from her previous life before working at *The Circle* to about her family, friends, and lovers. Thirdly, this novel tells about the struggle of a Mae Holland who wants to help her father who is struggling with illness by risking his privacy and even her family. Relating to all of the reasons above, the researcher uses a sociological perspective in this research. The writer analyzes the novel by using a sociological perspective entitled Protest Against the Loss of Privacy in Dave Egger’s *The Circle* Novel (2013): Sociological Perspective.

2. METHOD

The writer used qualitative research in analyzing *The Circle* novel by Dave Eggers (2013). According Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009)

qualitative research is a research that produces narrative or textual descriptions of the phenomenon under study, so the researcher provides a richer and more in depth understanding of the population. The writer used qualitative in order to get more data in analyzing the novel. There are two types of analysis this research data: primary data and secondary data. Primary data is *The Circle* novel and secondary data is getting from other sources, journal, article which related to the research and support the analysis research which related to the theory the writer used. The technique which the writer used is descriptive analysis to find the data which is related to the loss of privacy in *The Circle* novel by Dave Eggers. The method of collecting data is the first which the writer did is reading the novel and understanding about the problem which can be used in this research; second, reading the theories that had been written in chapter two. The function of reading theory is to sort the data whether the data were applicable to the theory or not. Afterwards, the writer used sociological perspective in this research to answer the question of the study as follows; first question, what is the effect of loss of privacy in the daily lives of TruYou users in the novel? Second question, Why the author create the novel?

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Effect of Loss of Privacy

Privacy can be defined as an individual condition of life characterized by exclusion from publicity. There are many effects of loss of privacy that will be discussed in this research, including:

3.1.1 The Right to be Let Alone

The right to be let alone in the novel does not exist at all. There are moments in the dialogue mentioned below between Mae and Bailey when Mae tries to defend the need for private spaces:

“But I still think there are things, even if just a few, that we want to keep to ourselves. I mean, everyone does things alone, or in the bedroom, that they’re ashamed of.”

“But why should they be ashamed?”

“Maybe not always ashamed. But things they don’t want to share. That maybe they don’t think people will understand. Or will change the perception of them.” (TC, 2013, p. 288)

Already in her defense of privacy, Mae starts swaying and moves away from the notion of shame, gradually complying with Bailey’s shallow assumption that shame is unnecessary. Without much effort, Bailey systematically convinces her that shame is only an obstacle on the path to truth:

“Okay, with that kind of thing, one of two things will eventually happen. First, we’ll realize that whatever behavior we’re talking about is so widespread and harmless that it needn’t be secret. If we demystify it, if we admit that it’s something we all do, then it loses its power to shock. We move toward honesty, and we move away from shame. Or second, and even better, if we all, as a society, decide that this is behavior we’d rather not engage in, the fact that everyone knows, or has the power to know who’s doing it, this would prevent the behavior from being engaged in. This is just as you said — you wouldn’t have stolen if you knew you were being watched.” (TC, 2013, p. 288)

Based on the above evident, it can be indicated that *The Circle’s* premise is that the brain of *The Circle* that always observes its users prevents the possibility of the emergence of shame in a situation where our behavior might be considered inadequate, indecent or immoral. Bailey’s statements shows that there is no place left to be let alone or there is no privacy for oneself. It means that the right to be let alone has loss, and there is no need to be ashamed. The definition of privacy given by Warren

and Brandeis (1968) as the right to be let alone is described as the most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by civilized men.

3.1.2 Limited Access to the Self

Westin (2003) defined privacy as the claim of an individual to determine what information about himself or herself should be known to others while Fried (1999) stated that privacy is the control we have over information about ourselves. In the novel, Eggers's third-person narrator also contributes to the aesthetics of transparency at work in the text. The authorial view is established from the very beginning:

They entered an elevator of glass, tinted faintly orange. Lights flickered on and Mae saw her name appear on the walls, along with her high school yearbook photo. WELCOME MAE HOLLAND. A sound, something like a gasp, left Mae's throat. She hadn't seen that photo in years, and had been happy for its absence. This must have been Annie's doing, assaulting her with it again. [...] Since the photo — she was eighteen then, angry and unsure — Mae had gained muchneeded weight, her face had softened and curves appeared, curves that brought the attention of men of myriad ages and motives. (TC, 2013, p. 5–6)

As the earlier quoted passage about Mae's enthrallment with the company's ideology also shows a great part of the narration is filtered through the protagonist's perception, that is, focalized on Mae. Based on the above narration, it can be inferred that there is no control over Mae's personal information even from the beginning Mae work in *The Circle*. There is no limited access to Mae personal information.

3.1.3 Control of Personal Information

Westin (2003) defined privacy as the claim of an individual to determine what information about himself or herself should be known to others. There should be a control in revealing the personal information to others.

In this case, The Circle has stolen personal information of the users so that they have lost their privacy and there is no control over their personal information in The Circle.

A scene early in the novel, in which Mae responds with “shock and horror” (TC, 2013, p. 121) when personal information about herself is revealed during the launch of a new Circle dating app, is indicative of her attitudes towards privacy. Gradually, however, Mae adjusts her attitudes and behaviors so that they are more in line with the company’s expectations of her. She comes to accept and adopt as her own the company’s views on privacy and is among the first at the Circle to agree to go fully transparent to wear a camera around her neck which broadcasts her every move and every conversation live online. She also comes to accept the view that rapidly diminishing expectations of personal privacy is an inevitability that cannot be resisted.

3.1.4 Secrecy

Secrecy is the act of keeping something secret, or the state of being kept secret. *The Circle* is blinded by the insignificance of privacy and secrecy; as Bailey indoctrinates Mae, he states:

“Secrets are the enablers of antisocial, immoral and destructive behavior. Do you see how this is?”

And he continues:

“But my point is, what if we all behaved as if we were being watched? It would lead to a more moral way of life” (TC, 2013, p. 289–290).

The text makes no secret of the fact that the head of the company does not understand that surveillance in fact relies on shame. In this case, there is no respect for secret and the withholding or concealment of information has been interrupted in *The Circle*.

3.1.5 Intimacy

American professor Tom Gerety (1992) understands privacy as the control over or the autonomy of the intimacies of personal identity.

In *The Circle*, shows that intimacy is not important things and this kind of privacy has been interrupted. This is shown even when Mae's parents having sex thought. It began when Mae wanted to find out the news of her parents through *SeeChange*, she accidentally recorded it and the public knew it. How embarrassed and sad Mae is about that.

3.1.6 Becoming a Control Society

TruYou users has become a controlled society, they have to memorize twelve identities and passwords since they have the TruYou program.

3.1.7 Less Connected with the Real

Direct interaction is not being seen as the best way to communicate anymore, especially among teens, and people are not putting as much value as they once did on face to face interaction. Throughout Book One of *The Circle*, Mae becomes increasingly less connected with the real, natural world and more allured by the innovative technologies and tools that the Circle provides her.

3.2 The author's reason to create the novel of *The Circle*

The Circle (2013) novel created by Dave Eggers imagines the social, cultural and political implications of the tools and services offered by what has quickly become the world's most powerful Internet Company, *The Circle*. With the development of its Unified Operating System, *TruYou*, a system that "subsumed *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Google*" and just about everything online that had previously been separate, and *SeeChange*, a world-spanning video surveillance system designed to make everyone "all seeing" and "all knowing". *The Circle* changes not only the Internet but, by the novel's end, amasses unrivaled power and influence over just about every aspect of life and society. The company's philosophy that "secrets

are lies” and “privacy is theft” and its ultimate goal of complete transparency, have far-reaching and transformative effects on society, including on individuals who decline participation in *Circle* services.

The Circle’s story at that time shows the dangers of privacy, and how they can eliminate everything we value about individualism, freedom of speech and so many other values held firm in American culture. The titular company in this novel, *The Circle*, finds its way into every corner of American society. From security, to internet, to communications, to healthcare, it penetrates every corner of life. It can be seen that this take its toll on the lives of characters throughout the novel, including the main character, Mae, her ex-boyfriend Mercer, and even her own parents. Little by little, it can be seen that the lives and information of private citizens become public knowledge, and this was a critique, or perhaps a warning, about the trajectory of nation. Of course, there may be valid reasons to monitor certain aspects of people’s private lives, but overall, this novel helped readers see that people must fully consider every potential side effect as we advance with this type of intelligence.

4. CONCLUSION

The researcher used Sociological Perspective to analyze the problem in the novel. There are sociology perspective by Swingewood and Laurenson (1972). The researcher also included the literature principle sociology by Wellek and Warren (1948): sociology of author, sociology of literature works, sociology of the readers.

This research tells about the loss of privacy in *The Circle*, it is found that there are several privacy has been interrupted such as (1) the right to be let alone, (2) limited access to the self, (3) Control of personal information (4) secrecy, and (5) intimacy. Based on the findings on the effect of loss of privacy, it can be concluded that the loss of privacy created by *The Circle* Company has given impact to one of the users of the

program they built, which is called *TruYou*. It has made the users (6) to be a controlled society and (7) have less contact with the real world.

Dave Eggers's *The Circle* heavily discusses the negative impact that new age technology has on society and tries to warn one of the consequences. To go even further, Eggers uses the main characters Mae and Annie to express the brainwashing effect that technology and *the Circle* can have. The story was inspired by technology and privacy. This novel helped readers see that people must fully consider every potential side effect as we advance with this type of intelligence.

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