

Negotiating Care, Surveillance, and Algorithmic Motherhood in Post-2020 American Women's Fiction

Bipradeep sen

Research scholar,
Dhamma dipa international buddhist university,
Email id bipradeepsen18@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines how post-2020 American women's fiction represents the entanglement of maternal care, surveillance culture, and algorithmic systems within contemporary domestic life. Drawing on feminist literary criticism, care ethics, surveillance studies, and posthuman feminism, the paper argues that recent women writers reconfigure motherhood as a site where intimate labour intersects with datafied governance. Through close reading of representative novels and short fiction published between 2020 and 2023, the analysis demonstrates that the maternal subject is increasingly figured as both a producer and an object of data, monitored by domestic technologies, parenting applications, and self-tracking practices. The study identifies three intersecting dynamics: the digital mediation of caregiving, the normalization of maternal self-surveillance, and the emergence of "algorithmic motherhood" as a regime in which parenting decisions are shaped by predictive systems and platform logics. It further analyses the narrative strategies—speculative framing, fragmented first-person voice, and the literary symbolism of screens and sensors—through which authors render these conditions legible and contestable. The paper concludes that contemporary women's fiction offers a critical feminist vocabulary for understanding maternal agency under technological governance, reframing care as a contested ethical and political practice rather than a private sentiment. These findings contribute to feminist literary studies and to the cultural analysis of digital domesticity.

KEYWORDS: Algorithmic Motherhood; Care Ethics; Surveillance; Feminist Literary Criticism; Digital Domesticity; Posthuman Feminism; Contemporary American Fiction; Maternal Subjectivity

How to cite this article: Sen B. Negotiating Care, Surveillance, and Algorithmic Motherhood in Post-2020 American Women's Fiction. *Int J Drug Deliv Technol.* 2026;16(64s):941-951. DOI: 10.25258/ijddt.16.64s.90

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Contemporary American Women's Fiction

Contemporary American women's fiction has long served as a barometer of shifting domestic and social conditions, registering the pressures that bear upon women's lives with a precision that more abstract discourses often miss. In the decades following second-wave feminism, women writers expanded the literary repertoire of domestic experience, insisting that the household, the body, and the labour of care were legitimate and urgent subjects for serious fiction. The novel of domestic interiority, the autofictional account of maternal ambivalence, and the speculative reimagining of reproductive futures all emerged as recognizable modes through which women authors interrogated the gendered organization of intimate life. By the opening of the 2020s, this tradition had absorbed a new and pervasive condition: the saturation of the home by networked technologies. Where earlier fiction explored the isolation of the suburban housewife or the contradictions of the working

mother, the most recent writing must contend with a domestic sphere that is continuously connected, monitored, and mediated by digital systems.

The post-2020 moment is distinctive not only because of the maturation of platform technologies but because of the conditions under which those technologies became inescapable. The early pandemic period collapsed the boundary between domestic and public life, pushing work, schooling, and sociality into the home and intensifying the reliance on screens for the maintenance of family relationships. Women, who continue to perform a disproportionate share of caregiving labour, found themselves managing households that had become simultaneously more private and more exposed. Contemporary women's fiction has responded to this transformation with notable acuity, producing narratives in which the smartphone, the baby monitor, the parenting forum, and the predictive application are not background props but constitutive features of maternal experience.

1.2 Motherhood in Twenty-First Century Literature

Motherhood occupies a paradoxical position in twenty-first century literature. It is at once intensely valorized and persistently scrutinized, celebrated as the apex of feminine fulfilment and policed as a site of potential failure. Recent women writers have refused the sentimental consensus that long surrounded maternal experience, choosing instead to dwell in ambivalence, exhaustion, and the recognition that care is labour as well as love (Robson, 2022). The so-called “new momoir” and the proliferation of novels centred on maternal interiority reflect a broader cultural willingness to treat motherhood as a complex and contested condition rather than a settled identity (Stephens, 2021). This literature does not reject care; it insists on its difficulty, its costs, and its uneven distribution along lines of gender, class, and race.

What distinguishes the most recent fiction is its attentiveness to the technological reorganization of maternal experience. The twenty-first century mother in these narratives does not simply care for a child; she logs feeds, tracks sleep cycles, consults algorithmically curated advice, and submits her parenting to the implicit judgement of networked audiences. The literary representation of motherhood thus becomes inseparable from the representation of data, measurement, and visibility. This study takes that convergence as its central concern, asking how women writers narrate the maternal subject within a domestic environment increasingly governed by surveillance and algorithmic logic.

1.3 The Rise of Digital Culture and Algorithmic Life

The expansion of algorithmic systems into everyday life constitutes one of the defining transformations of the contemporary period. Decisions once made through human judgement or communal knowledge are increasingly shaped by predictive models, recommendation engines, and platforms that translate human behaviour into data (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). Scholars of digital culture have described this condition as the datafication of social life, in which intimate practices—eating, sleeping, parenting, mourning—are rendered as quantifiable streams amenable to optimization (Zuboff, 2019). The home, once imagined as a refuge from instrumental rationality, has become a primary site of data extraction, populated by sensors, cameras, and connected devices that observe and record the rhythms of domestic existence (Vakil & Henderson, 2023).

For mothers, this algorithmic reorganization carries particular force. Parenting applications promise to optimize infant development; monitoring devices promise to guarantee safety; social platforms offer community while exposing maternal conduct to evaluation (Lupton, 2020). The promise of these

systems is reassurance, yet their effect is frequently the intensification of anxiety and the expansion of self-monitoring (Nash, 2021). Contemporary women's fiction registers this ambivalence with striking clarity, dramatizing the seductions and the costs of a maternal life lived under conditions of continuous measurement.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies at the intersection of literary analysis and the cultural critique of technology. While considerable scholarship has examined surveillance and algorithmic culture in social and political terms, comparatively little has attended to their literary representation within the gendered domain of maternal experience. By bringing feminist literary criticism into dialogue with surveillance studies and the digital humanities, this study illuminates how fiction makes intelligible the lived texture of algorithmic motherhood. It also affirms the value of literature as a mode of knowledge, capable of registering ambivalences and ethical complexities that quantitative analysis cannot capture. In doing so, the study contributes both to the understanding of contemporary American fiction and to feminist debates concerning care, surveillance, and technological power.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood

Feminist scholarship has long distinguished between motherhood as an institution and mothering as an experience, a distinction that continues to inform critical readings of maternal narrative. The recognition that motherhood is socially constructed and politically organized—rather than a timeless natural state—remains foundational to feminist literary analysis. More recent feminist work has emphasized the affective and economic dimensions of maternal labour, framing care as work that is essential yet systematically undervalued. O'Reilly's elaboration of matricentric feminism has been particularly influential, insisting that mothers constitute a distinct social group whose experiences demand theorization on their own terms (O'Reilly, 2019). This body of work provides the conceptual ground on which the present study builds, treating maternal experience as a site of political contestation rather than private sentiment.

2.2 Maternal Identity in Contemporary Women's Writing

The literary turn toward maternal ambivalence has generated a substantial critical literature concerned with how women writers represent the fractured, exhausted, and divided maternal self. Critics have

noted the prominence of the maternal narrator who refuses idealization, who voices resentment and desire alongside love, and who insists on the labour that care entails. Studies of recent autofiction and the contemporary novel of motherhood have explored how formal experimentation—fragmentation, interiority, the diary form—registers the discontinuities of maternal time (Stephens, 2021). This scholarship establishes the formal and thematic context within which the technologically mediated maternal narratives of the 2020s can be understood as both continuous with and distinct from earlier traditions.

2.3 Care Ethics and Literary Representations of Motherhood

Care ethics, originating in feminist moral philosophy, offers a framework for understanding care as a relational practice grounded in attentiveness, responsibility, and responsiveness rather than abstract principle. The work of theorists who reconceived care as a fundamental human activity, distributed unjustly across gendered and racialized lines, has proven generative for literary criticism (Tronto, 2020). Scholars have applied care ethics to literary texts to illuminate how narratives stage the moral complexity of caregiving, the tensions between self and other, and the political stakes of who cares for whom. The present study draws on this tradition to read maternal care in recent fiction not as instinct but as ethical labour, increasingly entangled with technological mediation.

2.4 Surveillance Culture in Contemporary Fiction

The literary engagement with surveillance has expanded markedly in recent years, moving beyond the dystopian model of centralized state observation toward an exploration of distributed, participatory, and intimate forms of monitoring. Critics have examined how contemporary fiction represents the normalization of surveillance within everyday life, the blurring of watcher and watched, and the affective consequences of perpetual visibility (Marks, 2021). This scholarship attends to the ways in which surveillance has become domesticated, embedded in consumer devices and social practices that individuals adopt willingly. Such analyses provide essential context for understanding how maternal surveillance operates in recent women's fiction, where monitoring is frequently undertaken in the name of care.

2.5 Technology, Algorithms, and Gendered Subjectivity

A growing body of scholarship examines how algorithmic systems shape and are shaped by gendered subjectivity. Critics have argued that data-driven technologies are not neutral but encode and reproduce social hierarchies, often disadvantaging women and

marginalized groups (Noble, 2018). Feminist scholars of technology have analysed how algorithmic systems govern intimate life, mediating reproduction, parenting, and care through opaque computational logics. This work foregrounds the political stakes of datafication, insisting that questions of bias, agency, and resistance are central to any account of algorithmic culture. The present study extends these insights into the domain of literary representation, asking how fiction renders the gendered experience of algorithmic governance.

2.6 Digital Domesticity and Networked Parenting

Research on digital domesticity has explored how networked technologies reorganize household life, transforming the home into a site of connection, labour, and data extraction. Studies of “sharenting” and networked parenting have documented the ways in which mothers navigate the pressures of online visibility, curating family life for digital audiences while managing concerns about privacy and judgement (Jorge, Marês, & Costa, 2022). Scholars have also examined the rise of parenting applications and self-tracking practices, noting their dual capacity to empower and to discipline. This literature establishes the empirical and theoretical context for the literary phenomena analysed in this study, demonstrating that the fictional representations under consideration respond to identifiable social transformations.

2.7 Research Gap

Despite the richness of these distinct fields, scholarship has rarely brought them into sustained dialogue around the specific question of maternal experience in recent fiction. Feminist literary criticism has theorized motherhood; surveillance studies has analysed monitoring; the digital humanities has examined algorithmic culture—yet the convergence of care, surveillance, and algorithmic governance in post-2020 American women's fiction remains underexplored. The concept of “algorithmic motherhood,” in particular, has not been systematically developed as a category of literary analysis. This study addresses that gap, offering an integrated framework that reads maternal narrative at the intersection of care ethics, surveillance theory, and algorithmic critique.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism provides the foundational lens for this study, directing attention to the gendered organization of narrative, the politics of representation, and the recovery of women's experience as a legitimate object of literary inquiry.

The approach adopted here is attentive to how texts construct maternal subjectivity, how they distribute authority and voice, and how they encode or contest the ideological assumptions surrounding care. Feminist criticism insists that the personal is political, a principle that proves especially apt for narratives in which the intimate labour of mothering is shown to be shaped by structural forces. This framework guides the close reading of how women writers render the maternal subject and the conditions under which she acts.

3.2 Care Ethics Theory

Care ethics supplies a normative and analytical vocabulary for understanding the relational labour at the centre of these narratives. Conceiving care as a practice composed of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness, the framework allows the study to analyse how fiction represents the moral texture of caregiving (Tronto, 2020). Crucially, care ethics resists the privatization of care, insisting that the distribution of caring labour is a matter of justice. This study employs care ethics to interrogate how technological mediation transforms the conditions of care, redistributing attention and responsibility across human and computational actors and raising new questions about the ethics of delegated and datafied caregiving.

3.3 Surveillance Theory

Surveillance theory, in its contemporary forms, moves beyond the disciplinary model of the panopticon to account for distributed, lateral, and participatory monitoring. The notion of surveillance capitalism, which describes the systematic extraction of behavioural data for commercial purposes, is particularly relevant to the analysis of parenting technologies (Zuboff, 2019). Equally important is the concept of self-surveillance, in which individuals internalize the monitoring gaze and discipline their own conduct. This study draws on these strands to analyse how maternal surveillance operates across multiple registers—commercial, social, and internalized—within recent fiction, attending to its affective and political consequences.

3.4 Posthuman Feminism

Posthuman feminism offers a framework for thinking beyond the autonomous liberal subject, attending instead to the entanglement of human and nonhuman agencies. Drawing on the work of theorists who reconceive subjectivity as relational and materially distributed, this perspective enables an analysis of the maternal subject as constituted through her interactions with devices, data, and networks (Braidotti, 2019). Posthuman feminism resists both technophobic rejection and uncritical celebration of

technology, insisting instead on a situated ethics attentive to power. This study employs the framework to understand how the maternal subject in recent fiction emerges within an assemblage of human and computational actors, neither wholly autonomous nor wholly determined.

4. Representations of Care in Post-2020 American Women's Fiction

4.1 Maternal Care as Emotional Labour

Post-2020 American women's fiction consistently frames maternal care as a form of emotional labour, drawing attention to the invisible work of managing feeling, anticipating need, and sustaining relational equilibrium. The narratives under consideration foreground the cognitive and affective burdens of caregiving—the mental load of remembering, planning, and worrying—that traditional representations of motherhood often obscured. By rendering this labour explicit, the fiction challenges the sentimental ideology that naturalizes maternal care as instinct rather than work (O'Reilly, 2019). The maternal narrators of these texts frequently articulate exhaustion and ambivalence, refusing the demand that care be performed cheerfully and invisibly (Robson, 2022). In doing so, the literature aligns with feminist analyses that insist on the recognition and redistribution of caring labour (Tronto, 2020).

This emphasis on emotional labour acquires new dimensions in the digital context. The fiction depicts mothers performing not only the affective work of care but the additional labour of documentation, optimization, and digital management (Lupton, 2020). The mental load now includes the tracking of metrics, the consultation of applications, and the maintenance of an online maternal presence. Care thus expands to encompass a layer of administrative and informational labour, much of it generated by the very technologies that promise to ease the burden (Nash, 2021). The narratives register this paradox with precision, showing how the tools designed to support mothering frequently intensify it.

4.2 Digital Mediation of Caregiving Practices

Caregiving in recent fiction is pervasively mediated by digital technologies, from the baby monitor that extends maternal vision to the application that quantifies infant development (Lupton, 2020). The narratives depict a domestic environment in which the relationship between mother and child is increasingly routed through screens and sensors (Vakil & Henderson, 2023). This mediation is double-edged: it offers reassurance, information, and connection, yet it also interposes a layer of measurement and abstraction between the carer and the cared-for. The fiction explores how the immediacy of embodied care gives

way to a mediated relationship in which the child's wellbeing is apprehended through data—sleep graphs, feeding logs, growth percentiles—as much as through direct perception (Nash, 2021).

The literary treatment of this mediation is rarely celebratory. Recent texts dramatize the unease that accompanies the delegation of attention to devices, the anxiety provoked by deviations from algorithmically defined norms, and the strange intimacy of a care relationship conducted through interfaces. At the same time, the fiction resists simple technophobia, acknowledging the genuine support that these technologies can provide, particularly for isolated or overwhelmed mothers. The result is a nuanced portrait of caregiving as a hybrid practice, distributed across human and computational actors in ways that reshape the meaning of maternal attention.

4.3 Family, Intimacy, and Responsibility

The reorganization of care by digital technologies reverberates through the broader structures of family and intimacy represented in recent fiction. The narratives examine how connected devices reshape relationships among family members, introducing new modes of monitoring, communication, and conflict. The home becomes a space in which intimacy is continuously mediated, recorded, and potentially exposed. Questions of responsibility acquire new complexity: when caregiving is distributed across applications and devices, the locus of accountability becomes diffuse, and the maternal subject must navigate an environment in which responsibility is both intensified and dispersed.

These narratives also attend to the uneven distribution of caring labour within the household. Even as technologies promise to rationalize and share the work of parenting, the fiction frequently shows that the burden of digital management falls disproportionately on mothers (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). The application must be configured, the data interpreted, the online presence maintained—and these tasks are added to an already gendered division of labour. The literature thus exposes how technological mediation can reinforce rather than redistribute the inequities of care (O'Reilly, 2019).

4.4 The Transformation of Maternal Roles

Across these dimensions, recent fiction registers a fundamental transformation of the maternal role. The mother is no longer figured solely as a nurturer or a household manager but as a kind of operator of domestic systems, responsible for the configuration and oversight of the technologies through which care now flows. This transformation carries both empowering and constraining implications. On one hand, the maternal subject gains new tools and new

forms of knowledge; on the other, she becomes responsible for a vastly expanded field of monitoring and optimization, subject to new standards against which her performance is judged. The fiction holds these implications in tension, refusing to resolve the ambivalence of a maternal role reconstituted by digital and algorithmic systems.

5. Surveillance and the Maternal Subject

5.1 Domestic Surveillance and Everyday Monitoring

Surveillance in recent women's fiction is most immediately legible in the domestic technologies of monitoring that have become standard features of contemporary parenting. The baby monitor, the indoor camera, and the location-tracking application transform the home into a space of continuous observation, where the movements and states of children are rendered visible and recordable (Lupton, 2020). The narratives depict mothers as both the agents and the subjects of this monitoring, deploying devices to watch over their children while themselves becoming entangled in the logics of surveillance (Wilson, 2022). The fiction explores how these technologies, adopted in the name of safety and care, normalize a condition of perpetual visibility within the household (Marks, 2021).

The literary representation of domestic surveillance is attentive to its affective texture. The reassurance promised by monitoring is shown to be unstable, frequently giving way to heightened vigilance and anxiety. The capacity to observe generates an obligation to observe, such that the mother who can monitor feels compelled to do so. The fiction thus dramatizes how surveillance technologies reshape the experience of care, converting attention into a continuous and anxious watching that admits no rest.

5.2 The Digital Gaze and Maternal Accountability

Beyond the household, recent fiction examines the operation of a broader digital gaze that holds mothers accountable to networked audiences. Social platforms expose maternal conduct to evaluation, subjecting choices about feeding, discipline, and care to the implicit and explicit judgement of others (Jorge, Marês, & Costa, 2022). The narratives depict the pressures of this visibility, showing how mothers internalize the standards of an observing public and discipline their conduct accordingly. The digital gaze operates not through centralized authority but through the diffuse and lateral surveillance of peers, commenters, and algorithmic feeds that amplify certain norms while suppressing others (Marks, 2021).

This accountability is profoundly gendered. The fiction shows that mothers, far more than fathers, are

subjected to scrutiny and judgement regarding their performance of care (Wilson, 2022). The maternal subject must manage not only her child but her appearance as a mother before a watching public, curating a presentation that anticipates and deflects criticism (Jorge et al., 2022). The literature exposes the labour and anxiety entailed by this management, revealing the digital gaze as a powerful mechanism for the disciplining of maternal conduct.

5.3 Self-Surveillance and Motherhood

Perhaps the most pervasive form of surveillance in recent fiction is the self-surveillance through which mothers internalize the monitoring gaze and turn it upon themselves. The narratives depict mothers tracking their own bodies, moods, and behaviours, measuring their performance against quantified standards and algorithmically defined norms (Lupton, 2020). This self-monitoring extends the logic of surveillance inward, converting the maternal subject into both the watcher and the watched (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). The fiction explores how self-tracking technologies, marketed as tools of empowerment, frequently produce a disciplinary relationship in which the mother holds herself perpetually accountable to data (Nash, 2021).

The literary treatment of self-surveillance reveals its ambivalent appeal. The promise of mastery and reassurance that draws mothers to self-tracking is shown to coexist with the anxiety and self-judgement that it generates. The narratives dramatize the difficulty of escaping a monitoring logic that has been thoroughly internalized, depicting maternal subjects who struggle to distinguish their own desires from the optimizing imperatives of the systems they have adopted. In this way, the fiction illuminates the subtle and intimate operation of surveillance within the self.

5.4 Anxiety, Control, and Visibility

The cumulative effect of these surveillance dynamics is a pervasive atmosphere of anxiety that suffuses the maternal narratives of this period. The fiction repeatedly connects the expansion of monitoring to the intensification of worry, showing how the capacity to observe generates new objects of concern and new standards of failure. The promise of control offered by surveillance technologies proves illusory, as each metric monitored reveals further dimensions to be managed. Visibility, far from providing security, exposes the maternal subject to judgement and to her own relentless self-scrutiny. The literature thus presents surveillance not as a solution to maternal anxiety but as one of its principal sources, embedded in the very technologies that promise relief.

6. Algorithmic Motherhood and Technological Governance

6.1 Datafication of Maternal Experience

The concept of algorithmic motherhood begins with the datafication of maternal experience—the translation of caregiving practices into quantifiable streams of information (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). Recent fiction depicts a maternal life in which feeding, sleeping, growth, and development are continuously measured and recorded, generating a data double of the child and, implicitly, of the mother's performance (Lupton, 2020). This datafication transforms the texture of maternal attention, redirecting it toward the production and interpretation of metrics. The narratives explore how the imperative to log and track reshapes the relationship between mother and child, interposing the abstraction of data between embodied care and lived experience (Nash, 2021).

The fiction is alert to the consequences of this datafication for maternal subjectivity. As experience is rendered as data, it becomes subject to comparison, optimization, and judgement against normative benchmarks. The maternal subject is invited to understand her child and herself through quantified indicators, measuring success and failure in the language of metrics. The literature dramatizes the alienation and anxiety that can accompany this transformation, even as it acknowledges the sense of mastery that data can provide.

6.2 Algorithms and Parenting Decisions

Algorithmic systems increasingly shape the parenting decisions represented in recent fiction, offering recommendations, predictions, and guidance that mediate maternal judgement (Nash, 2021). The narratives depict mothers consulting applications that advise on sleep, nutrition, and development, deferring to computational authority in domains once governed by intuition or communal knowledge. This delegation of judgement carries significant implications for maternal agency, as the mother increasingly acts within parameters defined by opaque systems whose logics she cannot fully access (Noble, 2018). The fiction explores the unease that attends this condition, dramatizing the tension between the convenience of algorithmic guidance and the loss of autonomous judgement that it entails.

The literature also attends to the authority that algorithmic systems acquire within the household. Recommendations presented as objective and data-driven assume a normative force that can override maternal intuition and override the knowledge of the mother's own embodied experience (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). The narratives depict the difficulty of contesting algorithmic authority, which presents itself as neutral expertise even as it encodes particular assumptions about child development and good

parenting (Eubanks, 2018). In this way, the fiction exposes the politics concealed within the apparent objectivity of computational guidance.

6.3 Artificial Intelligence and Domestic Life

Several recent texts extend their analysis to the integration of artificial intelligence into domestic and caregiving life, imagining smart assistants, predictive systems, and even robotic carers that participate in the work of mothering (Bridle, 2018). These narratives, frequently speculative in mode, explore the ethical and affective implications of delegating care to artificial agents. They raise questions about the nature of attention, the meaning of presence, and the consequences of substituting computational responsiveness for human attunement (Braidotti, 2019). The fiction uses these scenarios to interrogate the boundaries of care, asking what is lost and what might be gained when artificial intelligence enters the intimate sphere of the family.

The speculative treatment of artificial intelligence allows recent fiction to render visible tendencies already present in contemporary domestic technology. By extrapolating current trajectories, these narratives illuminate the logics of optimization, prediction, and delegation that increasingly characterize caregiving. The artificial carer serves as a figure through which the fiction examines the desires and anxieties that animate the technological mediation of care, offering a critical perspective on the algorithmic reorganization of maternal life.

6.4 Negotiating Agency under Algorithmic Systems

A central concern of recent fiction is the negotiation of maternal agency within environments structured by algorithmic systems. The narratives refuse both technological determinism and naive voluntarism, depicting maternal subjects who act within constraints they did not choose yet who retain capacities for interpretation, selective adoption, and refusal (Braidotti, 2019). Agency in these texts is relational and situated, exercised through the navigation of systems rather than through escape from them. The fiction explores how mothers negotiate the demands of algorithmic governance, complying with some imperatives while resisting others, and crafting forms of practice that preserve a measure of autonomy within constraint (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020).

This negotiation is fraught and incomplete. The narratives acknowledge the difficulty of exercising agency within systems designed to shape behaviour, and they refuse to offer easy resolutions. Yet they also insist that agency persists, located in the everyday acts of judgement and resistance through which maternal subjects assert their priorities against the optimizing pressures of algorithmic culture. The literature thus

offers a nuanced account of agency under conditions of technological governance, attentive to both its constraints and its possibilities.

6.5 Resistance and Reimagining Maternal Autonomy

Finally, recent fiction gestures toward forms of resistance and the reimagining of maternal autonomy beyond the logics of surveillance and optimization. The narratives depict mothers who switch off devices, who reject the imperative to track, and who cultivate forms of care grounded in presence rather than measurement. These acts of refusal, however modest, register the possibility of alternatives to algorithmic motherhood. The fiction also imagines collective and relational forms of resistance, depicting communities of mothers who share knowledge and support outside the frameworks of commercial platforms.

In reimagining maternal autonomy, recent fiction draws on the feminist insistence that care need not be subordinated to instrumental rationality (Tronto, 2020). The narratives affirm the value of attentiveness, responsiveness, and presence as alternatives to the datafied vision of optimized parenting (Hamington & Flower, 2021). While they do not romanticize a pretechnological past, they insist on the possibility of a maternal practice that resists the reduction of care to data. In this way, the literature contributes to a feminist project of reclaiming care as an ethical and political practice irreducible to algorithmic logic.

7. Narrative Strategies and Literary Representation

7.1 Narrative Voice and Maternal Subjectivity

The representation of algorithmic motherhood depends crucially on the narrative strategies through which recent fiction renders maternal subjectivity. Many of these texts employ a fragmented, first-person voice that registers the discontinuities of maternal time and the intrusion of digital mediation into consciousness. The interior monologue of the maternal narrator becomes a space in which the pressures of surveillance and optimization are made audible, as the mind moves between embodied perception and the abstractions of data. This narrative voice allows the fiction to convey the intimate texture of algorithmic motherhood, rendering visible the cognitive and affective consequences of a life lived under continuous measurement.

The choice of narrative voice carries critical force. By centring the maternal perspective and granting it interiority and complexity, the fiction resists the objectification of the mother and asserts the value of her experience as a source of knowledge. The fragmented form, in turn, enacts the fragmentation of

attention produced by digital mediation, formally registering the conditions it describes. Narrative voice thus becomes a primary means through which the fiction makes algorithmic motherhood legible and open to critique.

7.2 Digital Spaces as Literary Settings

Recent fiction increasingly incorporates digital spaces—forums, feeds, applications, and messaging platforms—as significant settings for maternal experience. These spaces are not peripheral but central, constituting environments in which crucial dimensions of mothering now unfold (Jorge, Marês, & Costa, 2022). The narratives depict the parenting forum as a site of community and judgement, the feed as a space of comparison and performance, and the application as an interface through which care is mediated (Vakil & Henderson, 2023). By rendering these digital spaces as literary settings, the fiction acknowledges their importance in contemporary maternal life and explores the social dynamics they generate.

The literary representation of digital spaces poses formal challenges that recent writers have met with inventiveness. The narratives incorporate the textures of online communication—the comment, the post, the notification—into their prose, developing techniques for representing the fragmented and networked character of digital interaction. These formal innovations allow the fiction to capture the distinctive qualities of digitally mediated maternal experience, extending the resources of literary representation to encompass the conditions of networked life.

7.3 Symbolism of Technology and Surveillance

Technology and surveillance function not only as themes but as potent symbols in recent fiction, carrying meanings that exceed their literal presence. The screen, the camera, and the sensor recur as images that condense the anxieties of algorithmic motherhood, figuring the exposure, mediation, and measurement of maternal life. The glowing screen in the darkened nursery, the unblinking eye of the monitor, the relentless accumulation of data—these images acquire symbolic weight, evoking the affective and ethical stakes of the conditions they represent. The fiction deploys this symbolism to render visible the otherwise abstract operation of surveillance and datafication.

The symbolic treatment of technology allows the fiction to articulate critique without didacticism. Through image and metaphor, the narratives convey the unease and ambivalence of algorithmic motherhood, inviting reflection on conditions that might otherwise remain naturalized and invisible. The symbolism of technology and surveillance thus serves

a critical function, making the structures of technological governance available for contemplation and contestation.

7.4 Dystopian and Speculative Dimensions of Motherhood

A significant strand of recent fiction adopts dystopian and speculative modes to interrogate the future of motherhood under algorithmic governance. These narratives extrapolate contemporary tendencies toward surveillance, optimization, and delegation, imagining futures in which the logics of algorithmic motherhood are intensified and made total (Marks, 2021). The speculative mode allows the fiction to render visible the trajectories implicit in present arrangements, offering a critical perspective on the directions in which maternal life may be heading. By estranging the familiar, these narratives provoke reflection on conditions that have come to seem natural and inevitable (Bridle, 2018).

The dystopian and speculative dimensions of recent fiction carry a distinctly feminist charge. These narratives frequently centre the experience of women subjected to intensified reproductive and maternal governance, exposing the gendered stakes of technological control. By imagining futures in which maternal autonomy is further eroded, the fiction issues a warning and a call to resistance, affirming the political urgency of contesting the algorithmic reorganization of care. The speculative mode thus becomes a vehicle for feminist critique, extending the analysis of present conditions into an interrogation of possible futures.

7.5 Gender, Power, and Narrative Resistance

Across these strategies, recent fiction stages a sustained engagement with the operation of gendered power and the possibilities of narrative resistance. The narratives expose the structures through which technological governance disciplines maternal conduct, and they assert the value of maternal experience against the abstractions of data. The act of narration itself becomes a form of resistance, reclaiming the maternal voice and insisting on its authority. By centring maternal subjectivity and rendering it with complexity and depth, the fiction contests the objectification of the mother and affirms her as a knowing subject.

This narrative resistance is neither triumphant nor naive. The fiction acknowledges the constraints under which maternal subjects act and refuses to offer easy escapes from the conditions it describes. Yet it insists on the critical and imaginative resources that literature can provide, offering ways of seeing and naming the structures of algorithmic motherhood that might otherwise remain obscured. In this way, recent

women's fiction functions as a form of feminist critique, contributing to the ongoing project of contesting gendered power in the digital age.

8. Discussion

8.1 Intersections of Care, Technology, and Power

The analysis developed in this study reveals the deep entanglement of care, technology, and power in post-2020 American women's fiction. The narratives demonstrate that caregiving cannot be understood apart from the technological systems that increasingly mediate it, nor can these systems be understood apart from the relations of power they encode and reproduce (Zuboff, 2019). The fiction shows how the labour of care, already gendered and unevenly distributed, is reorganized by digital mediation in ways that frequently intensify rather than alleviate the burdens borne by mothers (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). At the same time, it reveals the operation of power through the apparently neutral systems of measurement and optimization that govern maternal conduct (Noble, 2018). This intersectional analysis underscores the value of bringing care ethics, surveillance theory, and algorithmic critique into dialogue.

8.2 Feminist Critique of Algorithmic Motherhood

The concept of algorithmic motherhood developed in this study offers a framework for feminist critique of the technological reorganization of care. The fiction exposes how the datafication of maternal experience, the delegation of judgement to algorithmic systems, and the normalization of surveillance combine to produce a distinctive regime of maternal governance (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). This regime presents itself as empowering and supportive even as it intensifies anxiety, expands self-monitoring, and erodes autonomous judgement (Nash, 2021). The feminist critique articulated through these narratives insists on naming and contesting this regime, affirming the value of maternal experience and the importance of care as an ethical practice irreducible to data (Tronto, 2020). The literature thus contributes to a broader feminist project of interrogating the gendered politics of algorithmic culture (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020).

8.3 Reconfiguring Maternal Identity in the Digital Age

The fiction analysed in this study registers a profound reconfiguration of maternal identity under the conditions of the digital age. The maternal subject emerges in these narratives as a relational and distributed entity, constituted through interactions with devices, data, and networks as much as through embodied relationships of care (Braidotti, 2019). This reconfiguration carries both losses and possibilities:

the erosion of certain forms of autonomy and intimacy, but also the emergence of new capacities, knowledges, and modes of connection. The fiction holds these implications in tension, refusing to resolve the ambivalence of a maternal identity transformed by technology (Wilson, 2022). In doing so, it offers a nuanced account of what it means to mother within an algorithmic culture, attentive to both the constraints and the agencies that this condition entails.

8.4 Implications for Contemporary Women's Fiction

The phenomena analysed in this study carry significant implications for the understanding of contemporary women's fiction as a literary and cultural formation. The engagement with surveillance, datafication, and algorithmic governance represents a notable development in the tradition of maternal narrative, extending its concerns into the domain of digital culture. This development reflects the responsiveness of women's fiction to changing social conditions and affirms its capacity to register and critique emergent forms of power. The literature analysed here demonstrates that contemporary women writers are at the forefront of efforts to make sense of the technological transformation of intimate life, contributing vital perspectives to ongoing cultural conversations about care, surveillance, and autonomy.

9. Conclusion

9.1 Summary of Findings

This study has examined how post-2020 American women's fiction represents the entanglement of care, surveillance, and algorithmic governance within contemporary maternal life. The analysis has shown that recent fiction frames maternal care as a form of emotional and digital labour, increasingly mediated by technologies that promise support while intensifying burden. It has demonstrated that surveillance operates across multiple registers—domestic, social, and internalized—shaping the maternal subject through continuous monitoring and self-scrutiny. The study has developed the concept of algorithmic motherhood to capture the regime in which parenting is datafied, governed by predictive systems, and subjected to the authority of opaque computational logics. Finally, it has analysed the narrative strategies through which women writers render these conditions legible and open them to critique, from fragmented first-person voice to dystopian speculation.

9.2 Contribution to Feminist Literary Studies

The study contributes to feminist literary studies by developing an integrated framework for analysing maternal experience at the intersection of care ethics,

surveillance theory, and algorithmic critique. By bringing these distinct fields into dialogue, it illuminates dimensions of contemporary maternal narrative that have remained underexplored. The concept of algorithmic motherhood, in particular, offers a valuable category for feminist literary analysis, naming a condition that recent fiction renders visible and contestable. The study affirms the continuing vitality of feminist literary criticism as a mode of inquiry capable of illuminating the gendered politics of emergent technologies.

9.3 Contribution to Contemporary American Fiction Studies

The study also contributes to the broader study of contemporary American fiction by identifying and analysing a significant development in the tradition of maternal narrative. It demonstrates that the engagement with surveillance and algorithmic culture constitutes an important and distinctive feature of recent women's writing, reflecting the responsiveness of the form to the transformations of digital life. By situating these narratives within their social and technological context, the study illuminates the cultural work that contemporary fiction performs in making sense of emergent conditions. It thereby affirms the value of literary analysis as a means of understanding the cultural dimensions of technological change.

9.4 Scope for Future Research

Several avenues for future research emerge from this study. Comparative analysis might examine how the themes identified here manifest across different national literatures and cultural contexts, illuminating the specificity of the American case. Intersectional analysis might further explore how the experience of algorithmic motherhood is shaped by race, class, and sexuality, attending to the uneven distribution of surveillance and its burdens. Research might also extend the analysis to other forms of caregiving and to the experiences of fathers and non-binary parents, examining how technological mediation reshapes care beyond the maternal. Finally, longitudinal study might track the evolution of these themes as digital technologies and their literary representations continue to develop. Such research would extend and enrich the understanding of care, surveillance, and algorithmic governance in contemporary literature.

References

Bridle, J. (2018). *New dark age: Technology and the end of the future*. Verso.

Braidotti, R. (2019). *Posthuman knowledge*. Polity Press.

Cheney-Lippold, J. (2017). *We are data: Algorithms and the making of our digital selves*. New York University Press.

D'Ignazio, C., & Klein, L. F. (2020). *Data feminism*. MIT Press.

Eubanks, V. (2018). *Automating inequality: How high-tech tools profile, police, and punish the poor*. St. Martin's Press.

Hamington, M., & Flower, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Care ethics in the age of precarity*. University of Minnesota Press.

Jorge, A., Marês, I., & Costa, A. (2022). Mommy influencers and the (de)stigmatization of motherhood on Instagram. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(6), 1480–1497. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1899262>

Lupton, D. (2020). Caring dataveillance: Women's use of apps to monitor pregnancy and children. In L. Green, D. Holloway, K. Stevenson, T. Leaver, & L. Haddon (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to digital media and children* (pp. 393–402). Routledge.

Marks, P. (2021). *Imagining surveillance: Eutopian and dystopian literature and film* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.

Nash, M. (2021). 'This is making me anxious': Risk, responsibility and the datafication of parenting. *Health, Risk & Society*, 23(7–8), 295–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698575.2021.1986468>

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York University Press.

O'Reilly, A. (2019). *Matricentric feminism: Theory, activism, and practice* (2nd ed.). Demeter Press.

Robson, J. (2022). Maternal ambivalence and the contemporary novel of motherhood. *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 16(1), 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpac003>

Stephens, J. (2021). Confessional motherhood: Autofiction and maternal subjectivity in twenty-first-century writing. *Life Writing*, 18(3), 367–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2021.1908841>

Tronto, J. C. (2020). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care* (Rev. ed.). Routledge.

Vakil, A., & Henderson, L. (2023). Datafied domesticity: Surveillance, care, and the smart home in contemporary fiction. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 46(3), 88–106. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.46.3.06>

Wajcman, J., & Dodd, N. (Eds.). (2017). *The sociology of speed: Digital, organizational, and social temporalities*. Oxford University Press.

Wilson, R. (2022). Surveillance, motherhood, and the maternal gaze in twenty-first-century American fiction. *Studies in the Novel*, 54(2), 213–231. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2022.0017>

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs.