



Fragmentation of the Self, Digital Identity, and Alienation in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*

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Abstract

This article focuses on the idea of the loss of self-identity in Patricia Lockwood's No One Is Talking About This (2021) and the role of digital culture in the life of modern individuals. In the novel, there is a character whose life is greatly influenced by the online community, where there is an overwhelming presence of scrolling, memes, and viral posts. Through the character being deeply immersed in the 'portal,' Lockwood conveys the idea of the destruction of self, the creation of an empty self, and the dependence of the character on the online community for identity. There is an instability in the mind of the character, reduced emotional capacity, and numbness in the body of the character because of too much scrolling. All these convey the negative impact of an individual being deeply immersed in the 'portal.' This article asserts that Lockwood critiques the superficial identity of the 'portal,' the dull life, and the impossibility of genuine emotional human connection in the 'portal.'

Keywords: digital identity, loss of self, digital alienation, online persona.

Identity is a way a person understands who they are and by the same way they are identified by others. Identity includes a person's self, values, and roles. Modern theory defines identity as something fluid. Critics such as Stuart Hall claims that identity can be constructed through discourse, history and power relations.

In twenty first century, identity is no longer formed based on social roles or communities. It is created based on their digital space. Stuart Hall argues identity as a process rather than a fixed

essence. In digital space, online identity is never complete. It is continuously updated in response to shifting trends and dominant ideologies. This constant process of change reflects Hall's concept of identity as 'becoming' rather than 'being'.

In digital space, identity is formed by likes, followers and trends. Post-modern theorists suggest that identity is fractured due to various social conditions.



Individuals maintain different online personas. There will be huge difference between online and offline identity.

Patricia Lockwood is a contemporary American poet, essayist and novelist known for bringing internet language and online life. Her debut work is *Motherland Fatherland Homeland sexuals* published in 2014. Her famous work is *Priestdaddy* (2017) and it won the Thurber Prize for American Humour. The Novel *No One is Talking About This* published in 2021 won the Dylan Thomas Prize. This novel creates a symbolic representation of Internet culture and is structured like an application named 'portal', around which the narrative revolves. Just like the social platform portal, the novel is fragmented. The novel is non-linear which gives the reader experience of scrolling through a feed.

The unnamed female protagonist is obsessive with scrolling the feed. Her whole day revolves around scrolling the portal and reacting to the memes, satires, and informations. She is known for her online activities rather than her physical presence. Her thoughts are influenced by internet discourse, memes and trending topics, capturing this tension vividly throughout the novel. The protagonist's immersion in the 'portal' exemplifies how digital spaces create a fragmented consciousness. The self is the foundation of personal discipline, action, and emotional regulation. Platforms such as social media encourages individuals to divide themselves across multiple identities. The Protagonist's identity is performed only through online, shaped by attention and recognition, but lacks discipline offline. This showcases digital spaces simultaneously constructs and deconstructs one's identity.

The Deconstruction of Identity loses the self and individualism. In *No One Is Talking About This*, Lockwood's protagonist immerses herself in the online world and loses her physical identity. This results in being alienated from the physical world and she feels detached from the tangible environment.

"Mostly, thought, it passed into *you, you, you*, until she had no idea where she ended and the

rest of the crowd began" (Lockwood 11). The protagonist's identity merges with the online crowd, yet she loses her own physical self. This showcases how online self-blurs one's own self. She couldn't let out where her own thoughts initiated, resumed, and even stopped making herself to mingle with other people's thoughts. This made her to lose her personal self.

She had become famous for a post that said simply, *Can a dog*

be twins? That was it. Can a dog be twins? It had recently

reached the stage of penetration where teens posted the cry-

face emoji at her. They were in high school.

They were going

to remember "Can a dog be twins?" instead of the date of the

Treaty of Versailles, which, let's face it, she didn't know either. (Lockwood 13)

The protagonist of the novel become famous for her viral post *Can a dog be twins?*, She gains attention and recognition from this, but it also separates her from who she really is and from the deep inner connections. This demonstrates how digital recognition can connect people superficially while alienating them from genuine experiences and emotions by creating a gap between her online persona and her offline reality.

The online fame presents the protagonists absurdity in her own life. This represents how online fame is completely contradictory to talent, knowledge, and real achievement. People get false perception over how they appear in online platform and how others see them. It cannot replace real life experience and a genuine sense of self cannot be replaced by online control.

Her husband would sometimes come up behind her while she

was repeating the words *no, no, no or help, help, help* under her

breath, and lay a hand on the back of her neck like a Victorian

nursemaid. "Are you locked in?" he would ask, and she would



nod and then do the thing that always broke her out somehow, which was to google beautiful brown pictures of roast chickens— maybe because that's what women used to do with their days. (Lockwood 21)

This passage is used to illustrate the digital alienation as the protagonist is mentally imprisoned and cuts-off herself from the reality. Despite her husband's physical presence, she finds no solace in interpersonal relationships. Instead, she uses the internet to find consoling pictures to help her relax. Since emotional stability is derived from digital images rather than actual experiences, this demonstrates a loss of identity. Although the internet provides short-term respite, it strengthens her loneliness and increases her detachment from the reality.

One of the main characteristics of digital alienation in modern life is scrolling addiction. The user is kept emotionally empty but mentally occupied by constant scrolling. This constant switching between images or posts rather than engaging in introspection or meaningful conversation makes a person to live in a vacuum space. This habit leads to a fractured sense of self, diminished self-awareness, and weakened attention. While the screen offers continuous stimulation, it also hinders genuine connection and in-depth thoughts. The person eventually loses their sense of self and grows more detached from reality as they grow reliant on scrolling for solace.

"She could not feel her first fingertip" (Lockwood 21), exemplifies the physical numbness brought on by excessive scrolling. Constant screen time reduces awareness of the body and dulls physical sensation. While actual sensory experience diminishes, attention is still focused on digital movement. This numbness is a reflection of loss of self and digital alienation, where excessive use of digital media causes the body to become detached from consciousness. In digital culture, the continuously stimulating images of the online world frequently make real life seem dull. With their vivid

images, instantaneous updates, and never-ending novelty, screens make ordinary life seem dull and uninteresting.

Long-term screen time and scrolling addiction must not be encouraged. Real experiences lose their emotional depth and significance as focus turns to digital images. This imbalance eventually weakens one's presence in real life and increases feelings of alienation and loss of identity. Throughout the novel, Lockwood employs fragmented expressions, memes, and online language through the unnamed female protagonist. These components demonstrate the decline of meaningful language.

The novel frequently emphasises how digital immersion can lead to mental instability. The narrator feels emotionally numb, detached, and anxious. She feels alone and cuts-off from herself even though she is always connected. The internet is stimulating, but it doesn't provide emotional support. Inner emptiness results from this imbalance.

Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking about This* presents a clear and relevant look at losing self-identity in the digital age. Through fragmented narration, scrolling addiction, mental instability, and emotional detachment the novel illustrates how constant online engagement reshapes our sense of self. Real life becomes dull, while digital life feels vivid and consuming. Identity shifts from inner experience to external performance leading to feelings of alienation and emptiness. In the end, Lockwood suggests that while the internet dominates modern life, it cannot support a genuine identity. The novel serves as a warning about the dangers of losing oneself in the endless noise of the digital world.

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