

**Digital Hybridity and Identity Formation: A Study of Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This***

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**Abstract**

The research explores the concept of “digital hybridity” in Patricia Lockwood’s work *No One Is Talking About This*. It explores the interplay between physical and digital realms in the life of the protagonist. It studies the formation of identities in a culturally hybrid environment. Further extends the work of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha and moves it towards the digital hybridity, is a vital approach in this research. The psychological aspect of the protagonist plays a crucial role as she forms a culturally hybrid identity. Her actions, thoughts, and behavior are all affected by the virtual world. By examining the journey of the protagonist, the article provides crucial insights into the lives of people living in the digital era. With the help of this research, we can find how literature contributes to the study of people living in virtual environments, which effects on cultural and psychological development of individuals.

**Keywords:** Digital Hybridity, Virtual World, Cultural Development, Homi K. Bhabha.

**Introduction**

Literature delves into the lives of human beings and reflects their identities. One of the Patricia Lockwood’s contemporary works, *No One Is Talking About This*, explores the intersection of physical and virtual world and its impact on human identities. Human identities are deeply shaped by the mixing of these two cultures. As Homi K. Bhabha introduces the concept of hybridity as mixing of two cultures, but in this work, mixing of two cultures does not exist in real world by it happens virtually. While Bhabha’s work mainly examines postcolonial contexts, the journey of the protagonist in this novel provides a digital context where such cultural mixing takes place. The study aims to bridge the gap between evolving digital reality and Homi K. Bhabha’s seminal work on hybridity.

**Research objectives**

1. To understand the formation of hybrid identities in virtual world.
2. To foster our understanding on the psychological development of human beings as we are living in culturally hybrid environment.
3. To comprehends digital hybridity in a better way, as it offers a contemporary extension of Homi Bhabha’s ideas.

**Research questions**

The research aims to find answers to these research questions:

1. How does Patricia Lockwood’s work *No One Is Talking About This* portray the formation of hybrid identities within the realm of digital culture?

2. In what ways is the protagonist transformed into a culturally hybrid being through virtual and physical engagement?

### **Literature review**

The purpose of this research is to understand the role of the digital environment in shaping human identities. The review explores cultural hybridity and its psychological implications in the realm of virtual engagement. Homi K. Bhabha's theory on third space is central to this research. Hybridity is considered as a utopia in the world of globalization. Nowadays, the principles of cultural globalization play an important role towards a progressive path. There are many famous theorists of hybridity such as Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Garcia. They challenge all the false notions by the West regarding hybridity. Their work supports the blending of races and challenges imperial structures. They support cultural hybridity in the multicultural world. Moreover, a culture is connected with cognitive processes and it relates with the social structure of the society. The book *Debating Cultural Hybridity* describes "Culture feeds people tradition and guides them in their everyday thinking and acting" (Werbner & Modood, 2015, p. 167). Homi Bhabha gives different shape to cultural hybridity. According to him, the clash of multiple cultures gives birth to a new one. He views that mimicry weakens the stance of colonial powers as it creates ambivalence in colonial discourse. He justifies this upheaval in a new way in his work *The Location of Culture*, and termed it as "third space". This fusion of cultures formulates new practices, particularly in social contexts, which provides many benefits. Many cultural scholars have supported cultural hybridity but some scholars went against it due to unequal standards of researches (like Ahmad, 1995). This fusion of cultures formulates new practices most importantly socially which provides many benefits. He explains that in a new world order postcolonial studies link us with neo-colonial times as employing cultural hybrid conditions to the social conditions of metropolis and modernity. The concept of "beyond" and "in-between" spaces of cultural hybridity shows the notions of survival strategies. Bhabha's comments on the Fanon's work suggests that Fanon wants subordinated people to 'retrieve their indigenous culture'. He wants to change society by showing clear differences between black and white. For Bhabha, these proposals by Fanon are quite "audacious" and impossible to gain. Fixation of identities, after going through colonial processes, generates harmful impact in society. The conditions of "unhomeliness" felt by people due to cultural differences are of no use to make a strong stance in cultural diversity. These cultural differences have power which can be used for the betterment of the community. His work explains two types of traditional identities: one is philosophical which relates to nature and another is anthropological which relates to culture (p.66). He continues to explain cultural identity as a "strategy of survival is both transnational and translational" (p. 247). The main reason for cultural identity to be transnational is "cultural displacement". He wants us to take a deep look at the future benefits of cultural hybridity and to understand what it means to survive in the postcolonial world. A British postcolonial and cultural critic, Robert J. C. Young (2001), asserts that before the development of postcolonial culture, postcolonial mainly refers to Marxism. In a book entitled "Postcolonialism: An historical introduction", he describes that Postcolonial theory was first explained by imperial sides. The definition of Postcolonial studies called for reconsideration of Western ideologies. The famous critics also received education from Western academies like Bhabha, Hall, Said, etc. To him, this theory is developed from "anticolonialism of the past." He explains the use of hybrid language in the globalized world promoted by global societies. He views the concept of postcolonialism constitutes a theoretical hybrid language. It is because of the history of cultural interaction. Postcolonial studies make us aware of the response of cultural activities to the changing global conditions. In an interview entitled "A postcolonial aesthetic? In an interview with Robert Young" (2013), JC Young encourages Homi Bhabha's third space concept. He suggests, 'though

colonial encounters are painful and traumatic, we still can come out of those experiences by carrying the legacy of positive creative thinking in ongoing anti-colonial struggles.' He talks about empowerment, which involves thinking and acting appropriately in present conditions. Bhabha's work has not only been applied in Postcolonial discourse but his notions revolve around other reasons for the formation of cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity happens because of colonialism but it is not the sole reason. Many research has been done by applying Fanon's theory on identity crises. Rabindranath S. Polito in his work *The Filipino Identity in Gumerindo Rafanan's Poetry: A Postcolonial Analysis* applied Bhabha's and Fanon's theories to analyze identity crises in Postcolonial times in the Philippines. For this purpose, the researcher analyzes the poetry of Gumerindo Rafanan. Through this research, it is shown that the Philippines encourages cultural hybridity. Also because of continuous resistance to and acceptance of cultures from colonizers. The research paves a path for further research to analyze poetry to understand postcolonial societies in cultural hybrid conditions. Moving forward, these researchers have focused the realm of physical cultural hybridity. The work of Patricia gives us a new lens to see the virtual realm as well. In the case of virtual reality, digital era plays a crucial role. In digital era, there is a real and virtual blur. Existing studies highlight the impact digital world on individual's identities. In the research, *Hybridity and the Quest for Self-Identity: A Critical Analysis of Nadia Hashimi's 'Sparks Like Stars'*, the researcher finds the effects of multiple cultural hybridity on the individual's identity, therefore enhancing the discourse on multicultural literature. In another work, *Media and Cultural Hybridity in the Digital Humanities*, the author proposes media cultural hybridity as a framework. He argues that cross cultural exchanges foster various identities, and they affect digital humanities on various levels. Development in digital media has caused profound change in cultural practices. Through an analysis of Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*, this research explores the manifestation of digital hybridity, where identity and psychological state get transformed. Bhabha's theoretical insights on third space make it easier to create virtual space in digital era.

## **Analysis and discussion**

### **Hybrid Identities Formation**

In Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* identity formation plays a crucial role. The protagonist uses the metaphor "portal" for the internet world, which reveals the role of the digital world in human lives. The protagonist writes "She had become famous for a post that said, 'Can a dog be twins?'" (Lockwood 4), is a perfect example of identifying the mixing of her identity as she experiences the humor in her real life as well. The internet content affects her real life, and she becomes an amalgam of internet trends and personal expression. At another point, she is overwhelmed by the voices of the portal: "It was as if a divine chorus had descended, each voice screaming its own opinion" (Lockwood 5). It exemplifies the mixing of two cultures, digital and real, which shapes her identity. Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity primarily focuses on postcolonial dynamics, but the protagonist's existence is not limited to the real world. It extends into virtual reality, which now shapes human identities in what can be termed a "third space." Bhabha's theory of hybridity posits that new identities emerge in a "third space," a site of negotiation between cultures (Bhabha 36). The protagonist has a hybridized consciousness as Lockwood says, "her mind lived in two dimensions, the real and the digital" (Lockwood 10). Even her linguistic patterns are fragmented and hybridized. It happens when she is constantly living in both digital and real worlds. She is experiencing duality in her patterns in every walk of her life. She relies on internet language like memes and trends and she applies the same pattern in her real life as well. This leads to the blurring of physical and virtual reality in her life. The journey of the protagonist is constantly shifting between digital and portal worlds. Firstly, she is consumed by the irony and detachment of portal life, where she is a queen of portal life. She even uses slang in her

real life as well. She is well aware of the portal life when she comments “the portal did not ask for depth, only engagement” (Lockwood 7), a critique on the superficiality of portal life. At another point she observes, “Everything became a feeling, distilled to its smallest size: Look at this, how dare they, and I am not okay” (Lockwood 8), highlighting her struggle in a fragmented digital age. This shows that how portal life simplifies complex experiences into distilled emotions, capturing the nature of online interactions. Even the novel’s opening reveals the essence of fragmented online identity, “she opened the portal, and the mind met her more than halfway,” the self she used to have melted away” (Lockwood 1). This demonstrates how online experiences can distort the previous identities, leading to a hybrid existence. In the second part of the novel, when the narrator’s sister gives birth to a child with Proteus syndrome, the protagonist becomes confused in handling her emotions. She begins to learn how to handle the world outside the portal life reflecting, “The portal could not contain this. It did not know how to handle life outside its walls” (Lockwood 116). Here narrator finds herself in the tangible reality of her family life. She gets to experience the connection and culture of physical life. This phase reveals the tension between her virtual persona and her physical self, underscoring the duality of her digital hybridity. Lockwood’s novel extends Bhabha’s theory of hybridity to the digital age, where cultural interactions occur in a new “third space”. Bhabha says that hybridity occurs in spaces of negotiation where identities are constantly constructed and reconstructed (Bhabha 112). In *No One Is Talking About This*, individuals encounter and adapt to globalized trends, with the portal acting as a third space. For instance, the protagonist reflects on her understanding of reality: “It was a map of what mattered, but it shifted daily, almost hourly” (Lockwood 13). This constant flux aligns with bhabha’s theory on cultural negotiation, emphasizing that identities are context based and continuously evolving. Narrator observes, “The portal allowed her to witness every crisis in the world, but only in fragments” (Lockwood 15). Her hybrid consciousness leads her to reflect upon the global issues and her detachment from physical reality. Her identity becomes a synthesis of digital connectivity and a sense of separation in a mediated environment, extending Bhabha’s notion of hybridity into the digital landscape.

### **Transformation of Psychology within a Digital Environment**

The protagonist’s psychological growth is closely connected to her digital hybridity. She expresses the portal as “a private universe where everyone screamed their opinions into the void” (Lockwood 9), a metaphor for endless voices echoing in her head due to digital hybridity. This constant burden of different voices deeply affects her cognitive self. Her mind’s struggle further intensifies when she depends on the portal world for validation and connection. Patricia Lockwood writes, “She checked the portal compulsively, searching for meaning in its endless scroll” (Lockwood 20). This expresses the addictive nature of portal world where individuals seek validation through comments, likes, and shares. In the second part of the work, the birth of her niece proves to be a turning point in her psychological development. As she realizes that portal life is shallow, it does not fulfill the requirements of physical love and connection. She says, “The portal did not understand love. It could only mimic it in emojis and gifs” (Lockwood 119). This realization underscores the environment of digital hybridity, where people balance the ephemeral bonds of online spaces with the weight and intimacy of real-life relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Patricia Lockwood’s work *No One Is Talking About This* negotiates the intersection realms between physical and virtual worlds. It discusses how identities are formed while living in culturally hybrid environment due to digital approach. Through the lens of the protagonist, we come to know the complexities and difficulties individuals face due to digital culture. One of the vital contributions

of this research is the extension of Homi K. Bhabha's work in Digital age, as we come to realize how digital culture is shaping selfhood. As Homi K. Bhabha explains that in a new world order postcolonial studies link us with neo-colonial times as employing cultural hybrid conditions to the social conditions of metropolis and modernity. The concept of "beyond" and "in-between" spaces of cultural hybridity shows the notions of survival strategies. By extending this theory in the realm of digital environment, we come to know that hybrid identities and third space is not only formed due to mixing of two cultures but also interacting with the virtual environment, and still culturally hybrid identities can be formed. The research reveals that psychology of the protagonist is constantly affected by her physical and virtual realms. Her behavior and emotional well-being are profoundly under the effect of the use of digital platforms, as she is the queen of "portal" world. The word portal is given to the life on the internet, as protagonist spends most of her time on internet and connecting with individuals on the internet. This dual existence of her life transforms into culturally hybrid being. In conclusion, the novel gives a powerful metaphor for cultural and psychological dissonance in digital era where identities are not fixed. It demonstrates the transformative power of digital hybridity in shaping the lives of individuals in the digital age.

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