

**Tribhuvan University**

**Identity Crisis in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You***

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Shrijana Chand has accomplished her thesis entitled "Identity Crisis in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*" under my supervision. She has completed her research work in April 2023. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Identity Crisis in Celeste Ng’s *Everything I Never Told You*” has been submitted to the Central Department, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## Identity Crisis in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*

### Abstract

*This paper undergoes complication of individual identity of the protagonist Lydia in the novel Everything I Never Told You by Celeste Ng's. The divided family background creates confusion and dilemmatic situation further to define personal choice of subject. Lydia, the female character, grows up in culturally divided family. During the period of adolescence, she hangs up between personal desire and society but she cannot communicate her complicated situation with family members. This indecisive position cannot consolidate her to have unified cultural identity. The reflection of dragon lady's image of the western society is experienced and Lydia has to be victim of the existing image and she struggles against it to establish her identity. Erik Erikson shows complicated contradiction between self and society in adolescent period which leads them towards negativity and frustration. Lydia undergoes contradiction between herself and society but she cannot communicate about it with society. This situation arises question of identity and then it causes mental suffering. Unfortunately, she is unable to communicate it to lessen her pressure and stress. This is how she is unable to find solution besides death. Because of racial, gender and psychological conflict with society, Lydia cannot establish her identity which causes her to death.*

**Key Words:** Adolescent, Identity Formation, Identity Crisis, Psychosocial Development, Alienation

The paper presents a woman character undergoing crucial identity crisis. She is alienated from family; society and the world are alienated. She does not find her inner self to be shared with them. Living with the society, she cannot develop social identity as she finds her a different one than rest of the others. It is crucial to construct her relationship with family members as well as society. The novel *Everything I Never Told You* introduces a family with interracial identity which lives in America. With having double cultural practice, it has to undergo unclear and complicated lifestyle.

The cultural difference creates somehow complication in terms of communication and some of the norms and values differentiate at exchanging emotion and thought. The major character Lydia undergoes complication as such within family and equally outside of the home. The situation never allows her to be open and carefree when she encounters dual values of cultures. Ultimately, this situation causes her death. Finding the reason of her death is complicated case however certain dominating aspects are the experiences of biracial society where she cannot find herself to outlet her repressed desires.

The novel, *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng's deals with a grievous observation of identity crisis upon the Lees family, an interracial family. Being an essential part of human life, identity is often used by people to find their places and constitute relationships among members of the society. People are inherently uncertain about their own identities because it is not only a self-conception existing in each individual, but also a reflected image in the eyes of "others. Here a story profoundly moves on Lydia's death, a sixteen years old and middle daughter of Marilyn and James Lee. Her body is discovered nearby a local lake, and her family understands the cause of her death.

Here, this novel is about the marginal culture of American society's half Chinese and half American family living in small town Ohio in 1970s. This research explores the sense of alienation and mixed racial problem that creates the gap between two cultures and two societies which never properly blend together. The Lee family goes through the obstacles which causes Lydia's death. All the children's backgrounds were mixed who often struggle to find their place. Here, Nathan is an elder son and Hannah is a youngest daughter in Lee family but Lydia is a major concern and priority of Lee family among these two children. She had already begun to feel it how hard it would be to inherit their parents' dreams and how suffocated to solve it. All this happened due to her parents are immigrants as her father James Lee is a Chinese immigrant and Marilyn is a white American both have faced some sort of discrimination.

Due to his racial identity, he was rejected from everywhere, he lost many opportunities despite the best graduate student and got rid of the post of assistant professor from History Department of Harvard University. He has no friend, no neighborhood and therefore loneliness and feeling of otherness kill him from inside and finds difficulty to adjust in the society. Marilyn though a white American also experiences the gender discrimination over there as a woman she faces many difficulties and discrimination. James Lee rejects some defining parts of him and makes every effort to construct a self-descriptive identity as he struggles to fit into the mainstream United States.

This discrimination in the society and difference between own origination and American culture made to think about own origin and identity. An immigrant is not treated well, American people behave as secondary citizen made others to think over and question own identity and root of own culture creates conflict. Anyone realizes

that the cause of this humiliation is the lack of cultural position and identity. It questions about root. This lack of belongingness gives a sense of estrangement and desire of attaining cultural community throws into confusion.

The novel introduces a stereotypical representation of the concept of dragon lady which is considered as negative image of woman in the western world where the symbolic meaning of dragon lady is a woman with objectification and immoral character. Even the novel shows similar experience of protagonist and the character fights against the preconceived image in American society. The western society observes Asian women with certain predetermining concepts that do not ensure equality and freedom in western world. Patton has asserted "the Asian Americans are often "trapped and controlled by stereotypical and marginalizing representations" (206). This kind of orientalism can be seen the novel in which the western eye to look at Asian women is fixed. No individual talent and personal capacity is recognized in the western society. The main character in the novel tries to establish herself however the preoccupied knowledge and perspective dilute to the western eyes. Similarly, the concept of orientalism is dominant therefore a fair lady should face challenge and should struggle into the western society.

In this novel, every character's life is with identity crisis. Marilyn and James experience gender and racial discrimination and feel like outcast in the society. The children and whole family members suffer from this pain is connected to Lydia's death. Feeling of loneliness makes her feel distress and unhappy. She engages in rebellious behavior like smoking, drinking with archetypal boy Jack Wolf, her neighbor who makes an affair with Nathan. The relationship between two men was not socially acceptable. The society does not accept the same sex partners' connection. However, Jack's refusal of Lydia's proposal also causes Lydia's death. She knows



that the relationship between Jack and Nathan and it also blazes her depression.

The characters always try to establish their identity, but, complex family dynamic obstacles the process of making fix identity in the novel. Some critical questions attract attention which is: How do the consequences leading to the death of Lydia pertain to the identity crisis? Why does the novel describe the character of James Lee and his identity as a Chinese American? What makes identity crisis the major issue? Seeking the answers of these questions makes the research meaningful.

The study makes serious observation to the mental crisis and social predicament of Chinese Americans like James who are facing difficulty. The study even further explores the underlying causes of their identity crisis and anxiety. In the mixed cultures, since people can't always gain recognition from the target society by changing roles or by subjective self-categorization, the change of personal identity ultimately depends on the increased status of the group as a whole.

In the novel *Everything I Never Told You*, the writer depicts the characters like James Lee and Lydia Lee set in cross-ethnic family. The characters confuse regarding self-identity due to the then environment. The characters always try to establish their identity, but, complex family dynamic obstacles the process of making fix identity in the novel. At the same time, the characters experience both cultural practices which can be unique for them and always confuse them what is right and wrong regarding the happenings around them. They encounter everyday life as incalculable and problematic. This kind of unstable and unclear life and perspective cannot develop clear vision creating stress in their mind.

Researcher hypothesizes that the author aims at unravelling the chaos of losing identity and feeling of dislocation. In the novel the characters are in continuous dilemma, confusion, and struggle to be fit-in' somewhere in the society. As a result of

which the major character, Lydia has to pay her life. Moreover, all the characters are in constant negotiation of self in the society to be accepted by the society instead of being treated as the outsiders. Lydia is not able to communicate her experience and she does not have clear idea about what she experiences. Living at the particular place is not comfortable for her and her experience within home is complicated. Neither family and society understand her nor she can clearly convey her inner self.

The study brings common issue of people living in interracial community. In this age of multicultural world, many of us may have similar experience which can bring several options to discuss and deal with problems. We can find out complex problems among teenagers who live in multicultural world. It is the matter for everyone to make common opinion and interact which can find better route. Most of the complex problems should be discussed and studied in order to detect their root cause. Root cause analysis helps pave practical solution and prevent problems in the society. For this reason, the study further signifies its outcome and conclusion.

After its publication, the novel, *Everything I Never Told* by Celeste Ng's has been studied and critiqued by different writers in various perspectives. Having several interpretations and analyses upon the novel, it has been reviewed from numerous perspectives. The novel had numerous reviews among them one of the reviews is the following:

Yuan Shen and Jinyue Zhai put their review about characters' identity crises in the novel:

*Everything I Never Told You* revolves around the story of a typical Chinese-mixed family, in which the hero Lydia was born in a cross-ethnic family.

Lydia's father James is a second-generation American immigrant, but he has been plagued by identity crisis and lacks a sense of belonging as an American.

“He had never felt he belonged here, even though he had never set foot anywhere else”. (40)

The protagonist of the novel Lydia and her father James both are set in cross-cultural tension putting their identity under sway. Lydia is torn apart in the mixed family and James cannot think truly that he is an American. They both are beset in identity crisis.

Similarly, in a review article by Zhenhua Lyu, the writer mentions bitter reality about James’ identity crisis:

Moreover, the illegal status of James’s parents. In the novel, James’s father comes to the United States as “a paper son”. The phenomenon of “paper sons” is the result of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. The Chinese Exclusion Act was implemented from 1882 to 1943, which stipulates that he/she cannot immigrate to the United States unless the applicant is a businessman, diplomat, student, or the son or daughter of a U.S. citizen.

The extract makes clear that James’ parents are in illegal status. The Chinese Exclusion Act has made them illegal. Only the businesspersons, diplomats, students the sons or daughters of a U.S. citizen could enter the USA. James’ parents were none of them. This shows James’ insecure identity. Lyu makes clearer further:

In 1906, a San Francisco earthquake caused a major fire in San Francisco, which burned down the city council and destroyed all the files. This incident gave the Chinese who have been discriminated against for a long time under the Chinese Exclusion Act a glimmer of hope for immigrating to the United States. Therefore, many Chinese people pretended to be the sons and daughters of Chinese-Americans to apply for immigration to the United States. Those who entered the United States with these forged ID cards are called

“paper sons”. In this way, James’s parents manage to come to the United States.

James’s parents’ “paper son” status is the ground of James’ identity crisis. “Paper son” id is forged id. This id is made up with fake claim to be either of diplomat, businessman or student for the record files were already burned. “Paper son” status solidifies that James’s identity is not inherited as an American. Instead it is mixed up with inauthentic Chinese-American.

Further Zhenhua Lyu adds the context of James’ identity crisis:

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, James has always been ashamed of his Chinese ancestry. When James is a kid, he is unwilling to talk about his family to the class. Once he pretends to forget the family tree project assignment rather than draw his own complicated diagram.

This passage expresses about James’ bitter experience regarding his ancestral identity. He does not want to talk about his family in the class. He deliberately leaves family tree assignment and pretends to forget. He is frightened if his made up family identity is revealed. This shows the shaken ground of James’ identity.

He prays silently the teacher don’t ask him questions about his family in the class. Long before fifth grade, he has “stopped speaking with his parents at school at all” (Celeste Ng, 48). He doesn’t want his classmates to see the connection between him and his parents. When he is dating Marilyn, he tells her in very brief words that his parents both died after he started college. This is all the information he wants Marilyn to know about his parents.

James deliberately forgets his project assignment of drawing his family tree which reveals his fake ground of inheritance. Again, he does not provide clear cut information about his parents to his girl friend Marilyn. James strives his best to hide

his traumatic condition of identity.

Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz writes about Lydia's mystified identity:

Lydia's answer to Jack's question is both clarifying about her predicament and sad: "People decide what you're like before they even get to know you. [...] They think they know all about you. Except you're never who they think you are" (193). Unfortunately, in Lydia's case it is not just acquaintances and strangers that mistake her for what she is not, but her own family and friends too find it difficult to gain access to her inner self. This may be due to the surrounding culture, which in Attridge's words includes "habitual practices, mental frameworks, affective predispositions, and material conditions" that set the boundaries between "insiders" and "the others" (2011, 682). (181)

Different contextual factors yield that kind of situation in which even the family members do not percolate into the deep reality of Lydia. They cannot access into the deep reality of Lydia. Own family members do not know Lydia's real psychological reality. They become outsiders to her. Even what other people think about her is not reality. People make her picture that she is not. This shows Lydia's problematic identity.

Min, LiLi raises particular identity of Asian community in America, along with it traces incommunicable cultural complexity between Asia and rest of the world.

In the novel, Lee's family life is a miniature of the whole second-generation Asian American migrants' life. As a Chinese American immigrant, the descendant of a paper son, James fearfulness of losing American identity is deeply imprinted on his consciousness. He thinks that the moment he admits his Chinese identity means he will lose his American identity immediately. The initiative discard of Chinese identity is not rare among Chinese

Americans. (965)

The above studies provide a comparatively deep and thorough understanding of the novel. However, since the novel focuses on revealing each member's untold secrets, James' psychological and spiritual trauma was the next reason of Lydia's death. The current research seldom discusses the fundamental reason of James identity crisis, that is, how do the conflicts between his categorical identity and practical identity cause his identity loss and the tragedy of Lydia.

The researcher has applied the concept of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development which emphasizes the social nature of our development. Through Erickson's self-identity theory, this paper analyzes Lydia's obstacles to self-cognition for abnormal heterosexual emotion and alienated peer relationship. The exploration of Lydia's identity crisis will help further interpret the theme of race, gender and self-cognition revealed in the novel.

Regarding the theory of psychosocial development discusses about self-identity in relation to personal relation which is constructed in society. Erikson's theory talks about identity formation process but is influenced by different phases of life. The interaction between society and psychology determines overall conflict of the person. It always remains in human psychological aspect which develops through conflict. Erikson develops the idea from Sigmund Freud's concept of Id, Ego and Superego that constitutes overall identity of human being.

Erikson has developed eight stage of human psychological development in which person can experience different psychological experience. The eight stages lead human identity and create crucial aspect of human identity and determine conflict between them. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development encompasses changes in people's understanding of themselves, one another, and the world around

them during the course of development' (Feldman 392).

According to Erikson, identity formation, while beginning in childhood, gains prominence during adolescence. Faced with physical growth and sexual maturation, adolescents must accomplish the task of integrating their prior experiences and characteristics into a personal identity (392). The experiences slaves are able to draw upon, however, are not capable of fulfilling their need for an identity because their experiences and relationships are limited due to the social and racial groups to which they belong.

Erikson explains about identity:

Being firmly convinced that he is a person on his own, the child must now find out what kind of a person he may become. He is, of course, deeply and exclusively "identified" with his parents, who most of the time appear to him to be powerful and beautiful, although often quite unreasonable, disagreeable, and even dangerous.

Erikson in this extract beautifully writes about significant phase of childhood identity formation. Every child is born anew. S/he shows her/his unique features. Social predispositions starts to rehearse power against child's distinctiveness. Society sees the child as not child but wild. This quake is the struggling process of child's identity formation. Erikson adds further regarding identity formation:

Three developments support this stage, while so serving to bring about its crisis: ( 1) the child learns to move around more freely and more violently and therefore establishes a wider and, to him, unlimited radius of goals; ( 2 ) his sense of language becomes perfected to the point where he understands and can ask incessantly about innumerable things, often hearing just enough to misunderstand them thoroughly; and (3) both language and locomotion permit

him to expand his imagination to so many roles that he cannot avoid frightening himself with what he himself has dreamed and thought up. Nevertheless, out of all this he must emerge with a sense of initiative as a basis for a realistic sense of ambition and purpose. (115)

As Erickson posits, identity formation during adolescent is hazardous. Adolescents' tendency remains debunking social norms and ethos. They want to explore the world freely along with their free dream. But, the society lays down certain traditional constraints and narrow down their ambition during the process of identity formation.

Erickson further delineates:

There is the traditional extreme of making early school life an extension of grim adulthood by emphasizing self-restraint and a strict sense of duty in doing what one is told to do, as opposed to the modern extreme of making it an extension of the natural tendency in childhood to find out by playing, to learn what one must do by doing what one likes to do. Both methods work for some children in some ways, but impose on others a special adjustment. The first trend, if carried to the extreme, exploits a tendency on the part of the preschool and grammar school child to become entirely dependent on prescribed duties. (126)

Traditional extremes suffocate adolescents' playfulness. Society fits the adolescents under traditional parameters. It imposes traditional norm to socialize the adolescents in the name of duty. Erasing self, tradition creates social identity. Modern extreme to some extent eases their playfulness. But, either of the ways constrict adolescents' identity in the name of social adjustment.

Erickson sees identity crisis in creative individuals too:

We can study the identity crisis also in the lives of creative individuals who



could resolve it for themselves only by offering to their contemporaries a new model of resolution such as that expressed in works of art or in original deeds, and who furthermore are eager to tell us all about it in diaries, letters, and self-representations. And even as the neuroses of a given period reflect the ever-present inner chaos of man's existence in a new way, the creative crises point to the period's unique solutions.

Creative persons deal with their identity crises through works of art. They carve their inner crisis through creative works like writing diaries, letters etc. They express in some ways and relieve themselves. Identity is the matter of freedom of quest instead of tradition's continuation.

Furthermore, Erickson goes on explicating the condition of identity formation and its crisis:

The loss of a sense of identity is often expressed in a scornful and snobbish hostility toward the roles offered as proper and desirable in one's family or immediate community. Any aspect of the required role, or all of it—be it masculinity or femininity, nationality or class membership—can become the main focus of the young person's acid disdain. (172-273)

Identity crisis is displayed adolescents' disdainful scorns and hostility. While family or community impose roles, contemptuous resentments become apparent.

Erickson additionally speculates, "individuals who reached early adulthood without having established a sense of identity would be incapable of intimacy" (372). Identity is understood in process or it is continuation process when a person can feel different and cannot realize previous one when the person moves from one stage of another.

Maria Nikolajeva explains, "convey exactly an adolescent's inability to

understand the world and other people; the confusion and anxiety of being young; the discomfort about the profound changes in mind and body” (88). Young adult period indicates a crucial period of mental and physical development in which a process of creating social identity from inner world to external world. A child in early teenager period does not know outer world, mainly social norms and values. Even the child does not show interest toward it rather child enjoys own world. Peter Scales claims:

Young people need in adolescence to effectively transition to a successful young adulthood, as well as the developmental relationships and opportunities young adults need for continued well-being. We name eight social, psychological, behavioral, educational, occupational, health, ethical, and civic dimensions of successful young adult development, and suggest that only a minority of adolescents are well-prepared to make a transition to successful young adulthood.(150)

Young adult literature particularly examines psychological makeup of young adult group. According to the psychoanalysis theory the young age refers to period of identity formation in which young enters into symbolic stage. During the symbolic period, young undergo conflict between self and other. Young comes across the self-centric situation and enters into symbolic stage of identity formation during the period, young encounters against social norms and values because young do not assimilate social norms and values. In this way, the period is critical and crucial period to form own identity with assimilating social norms and values.

The research concerns with the concept of psychosocial development which problematizes identity formation during the youth phase. It creates conflict between self and society that causes sense of alienation, and detachment from society. Having unique experience of the world, one cannot adjust within society and it causes

psychological dilemma. The continuous interaction between society and self creates confusion and crucial situation and it ultimately defines identity. Ryan Michaelviews, “concerned with the dynamics of interpersonal relations and with the way subjectivity is formed through interactions with its familial and socio-cultural environment”(103). It is concerned either with the unconscious and the instincts or with the family, personal history and social world that shapes the subjectivity.

As the frameworks to critique the novel *Everything I Never Told You* go on, Sonia Shah writes: “Asian women who immigrated to the US during the mid-nineteenth century, who were disempowered (690). Asian women in western world are not equally treated as the women of the west society. It can cause of alienated from power privilege of equal right and opportunity.

The writer goes on:

“Similarly, the reason to talk about Asian American women as a single group is because we all share the same rung on the racial hierarchy and on the gender hierarchy. It is not that our lives are so similar in substance, but that our lives are all monumentally shaped by three major driving forces in U. S. society: racism and patriarchy most immediately, and ultimately, imperial aggression against Asians well (691).

Asian women in the west society are double marginalized: racial segregation and gender bias. They are maltreated as Asian and women. They face same treatment governed by imperial ideology replete with racism and patriarchy.

Similarly, in reference to racial issue James Clifford calls “dwelling-in-displacement” (254). For the racially discriminated in immigrated western society, people are located in uncomely like dislocation.

The novel presents a setting which is cultural juncture. This particular

situation is significant for creating identity crisis. The novel represents a typical cultural situation in which the major character undergoes crucial identity. Having crucial existence of the character, the major character struggles against situation in order to reshape and posits own identity. Living in dual cultural zone, the character cannot adopt and adjust in new situation therefore, the character finds complicated situation and cannot define own identity.

Being a young adult, her understanding and point of view to observe the world is self-centric with which she cannot understand society and social reality. From the very beginning, she fights against her perspective. Not having normal familial and social upbringing, she cannot define society. She explains extreme painful experiences, she only undergoes physical and psychological tortures. It is extreme emotional distress to tolerate and reconstruct young psychology and it is emotional crisis. The protagonist Lydia separates her personal self; however, she cannot associate with social power wherein her conflict remains as a question for oneself. To form own identity in society, it becomes question for further more complicated. She encounters some unexpected results which terrorizes her to face all kinds of pangs of suffering.

The novel presents American society wherein a Chinese family struggles in new situation however, the family has own cultural background and practice. Being stocked within own cultural background, it is difficult to adjust in new situation. This causes alienation and frustration among them. The mixed raced family cannot define own social role and existence, it has become problematic to be empowered and freed in the same society. The major character Lydia undergoes social obstacles therefore she is alienated from the mainstream culture and society. Lydia feels isolated from the society when she does not find her voice and ideology in society. Whatever she

thinks about the world and it is guided by her own cultural dogmas, however she is away from own cultural location. This new scenario and situation always create problem because her values are contrast to the society. The internal and external factors are the causes of her death and all the complicated situation ultimately leads to the death of Lydia. The narration of the novel moves around inspection of possible causes of her death. Lydia is a just 16 year old girl however, she possibly commits suicide. This inquiry leads to the narration and tries to analyze reason and cause of her unwanted and untimely death.

The novel depicts the teenager's world and shows its complexity to form social identity. It discusses how teenagers undergo indecisive situation that causes identity problem. It is an important stage of life in which period teenagers have inner conflicts and confusion. This age group has ego-centric thought that can be reflected in their behaviors. Lydia, the major character of the novel, struggles for social identity in her transitional period when she turns into mature stage. She was self-centric and egocentric at her adulthood but she is pressurized by social forces when she realizes society which reflects complexity of identity formation in transition phase in which the teen's conflict between ego- centricism and social identity is depicted. Lydia seeks her self-world but society does not accept her individuality. The contemporary issues are relevant to observe on it and which are more prominent at determining identity.

Stuart Hall says: "Identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves a new, through transformation and difference" (119). Our identity is linked with many social issues such as; cultural identity, geographical identity, individual identity, professional identity and social norms, values like birth, marriage, divorce, single family, living together, friendships, neighbor's faith and so many concepts are redefining in accordance with change and such multiple

dimensions of society has networked with many things together and any individual is weaved.

The novel opens with the declaration of death of Lydia. Her death follows the rest of narration in which her death is taken as a complicated case. The novel creates circumstance and situation in which Lydia cannot fit her to be adjusted. The circumstances are liable enough to create stressful situation to force her to die. Lydia cannot tolerate such situation therefore she decides to die rather than accept existential suffering. Newbold Bruce says "Lifetime measure of return and onward migration that use of birth may be rather arbitrary as they may not capture the essence of home region and therefore may not adequately represent ties to place, including where an individual grew up"(2). Mainly push factors and pull factors play significant role in migration. Now people are being centralized in urban city to get more facilities and better life.

Lydia is a young girl undergoes transition phase between her inner self and social identity. This crucial phase creates confusion, dilemma and illusion within her. While recreating and reforming own identity in relation to society, she finds crucial situation and cannot understand the society. Adolescence phase is a crucial phase of identity formation of children and it is threatened by external forces. The way they involve in society matters their identity formation. Instead of coping with external forces, she seeks an escape from the society. Having confusion and dilemma, she becomes alone, and alienated.

As Lydia faced communication gap between her and society, it creates problem within her. During the adolescence phase, youngsters undergo crucial period due to the interaction with self to society. This causes problem when young come out from ego centric mindset. Erik Erikson argues:

A youth does not accomplish such intimate relationships with others and I would add, with his own inner resources in late adolescence or early adulthood, he may settle for highly stereotyped interpersonal relations and come to retain a deep sense of isolation. If the times favor an impersonal kind of interpersonal pattern, a man can go far very far in life and yet harbor a severe character problem doubly painful because he will never feel really himself, although everyone says he is somebody. (136)

This critic discusses about psychological status of young who are focused on personal choice. Young minds cannot maintain parallel relationship because of self-centric mental status. Adulthood is crucial stage in which young can't go beyond personal world and are unable to understand world beyond own periphery. Lydia's world is divided into that one is indoor and another outdoor. Dual cultural existence complicates her understanding and perspectives. As she says her experience in school, she feels isolated, "Each day she watched her classmates, clumsy in thimble fingers, sucking the ends of thread, squinting for the needle's eye" (15). The school where she used to study finds it alien and her friends, too, exclude her. A feeling discrimination can be experienced after being from different origin. The society was different to her.

The novel *Everything I Never Told You* presents Lee family and their individual suffering respectively. However, Lydia is one who represents adulthood psychology. The almost all characters undergo identity crisis who try finding own self-contained world based on culture and society. Among them Lydia is representative character who always seeks stable identity or finds own defined identity. The Lee family is complicated composition in which cultural background and disintegrated family is indirect cause of communication gap among family. However, the family is cause of entire Lydia's suffering.

Lydia undergoes both personal and familial complicated relationship and it creates longing of finding fix identity in the novel. The family is guided by personal choices and it is directed by cultural background because cultural psychology even creates sense of truth and reality. This is underlying wound of Lydia who is compelled to be alone because she cannot share her feelings. This is belonging of family legacy which is cause of disintegration because of cultural background.

Lydia is depicted in the novel as:

Some evenings she sits for hours on the window seat on the landing, the phone base cradled in her lap, receiver wedged between ear and shoulder. When their parents walk by, she lowers her voice to a confidential murmur, twirling the cord around her little finger until they go away.

But Nath's seen Lydia at school, how in the cafeteria she sits silent while the others chatter; how, when they've finished copying her homework, she quietly slides her notebook back into her bookbag. After school, she walks to the bus alone and settles into the seat beside him in silence. (15)

Lydia is seen unfriendly towards her parents. When her parents walk by she murmurs in low voice. She cannot frankly share her matters with her parents. Nath, her brother observes her reserved manner. She does not interact with her classmates in school. She comes from the school alone. Even her brother behaves merely as an onlooker at her condition. These evident show communication gap and alienation between Lydia and her family members.

Her father even undergoes suffering and lives in memories of own cultural root. This is equally responsible for Lydia's life. Therefore, her father assimilates the fact:

He had never felt he belonged here, even though he had been born on



American social, even though he had never set foot anywhere else. His father had come to California under a false name, pretending to be the son of a neighbor who had emigrated there some years earlier. America was a melting pot, but Congress, terrified that the molten mixture was becoming a shade too yellow, had banned all immigrants from China. Only the children of those already in the States could enter. So James's father had taken the name of his neighbors' son who had drowned in the river the year before, and come to join his father in San Francisco. (23)

James Lee's nostalgic experience and real experience of humiliation in society always creates a gap and he is divided. Getting married with an American woman, he partially belongs to American culture however his originality is Chinese one. It becomes a root cause of suffering because having different cultural roots create a gap as well as conflict between husband and wife. Later on its impact upon children created more problems. In this way, family itself is split. At the same time, the characters experience both cultural practices which can be unique for them and always confuse them about the right and wrong about what is happening around them.

More than other issues they encounter everyday life are incalculable and difficult. This kind of unstable and unclear life and perspective cannot develop clear vision but it created stress in their mind. Even Lydian's friend Jack finds her always frustrated and upset, but she cannot reveal her problems, "Jack responds, Lydia was always upset because of you, Nath thinks. Her throat is so tight the words cannot squeeze through" (37). Her family never asks about her internal problems she ever comes across. It gradually becomes a habit of her not to communicate with others. Even friends could feel her problems but she never attempts to overcome them.

James's wife Marilyn a white American is another reason of family problem.

Being irresponsible in family, she tries to control family. Her ambition of being doctor rather than to be responsive mother, as an individual character she looks for own ambition and ignores her children. During the time, James takes responsibility of society where he has to be alienated:

By the time they were married, Marilyn would be only three months along and it wouldn't show. To her, she said, you can come back and finish that last year, when the baby is older. It would be almost eight years before school would seem real and possible and tangible again, but Marilyn didn't know that. As she left the dean's office, an indefinite leave secured, she was certain that everything she had dreamed for herself medical school, doctor hood, that new and important life- sat poised for her return, like a well-trained dog awaiting its master. (29)

Since Marilyn's pregnancy, the family undergoes fragmented experience when mother leaves family in order to fulfill own personal choice. James' intention was different because of family sentiment but it does not happen when Marilyn disagrees to sacrifice own desire. This situation planted a tragic separation in family and it becomes destiny of their life. Even this situation seeded ultimate death of Lydia too. For this reason, she has to remain silent, "Lydia had shooed her out when she came to vacuum and dust and tidy. I am busy, Mom, she had said" (41). This communicative gap leads her to complicated situation then she always looks for personal solution rather than communicate others.

Adolescent period comes across many changes and crisis. It is transition phase; it is related to psychological makeup of mind which brings difference in mindset. Being influenced by external environment, young adults create their social identity. As the period remains indecisive state, the external factors penetrate

psychology and remains long term effect to own social identity. This is the age before being matured.

During the age, young encounters many internal and external behaviors and its patterns. The patterns of behaviors cause problems and they are unable to manage their performative behaviors. It ultimately related to any individual identity in the same society. Chris Crowe puts his view, "The experience changes him from a self-centered, self-pitying adolescent into a thoughtful young man (146). Young adult is characterized as a subversive in society. Being self-centered and egocentric, they create own world however it goes against the real and practicable world. It ultimately leads them toward conflict and ongoing conflict between society and themselves creates identity.

Lydia undergoes personal, familial and social alienation when she cannot communicate her personal issue. This leads toward personal complexity which is indefinable. The developing situation around her alienates her. As the novel introduces Chinese American family, it presents complexity of life. Being an outsider family, the American society recognizes them and behaves partially. It causes self-humiliation which always creates fear to be exposed in front of the society. Lee family undergoes emotional suffering though having economic prosperity. Even Lee gets nurturing from both Chinese and American family then Lydia experiences both cultural traits. This kind of divided mentality begins suffering in her life as the extract explains:

Lydia's ink-black instead of their mother's honey-blond. He and Hannah take after their father, once a woman stopped them two of them in the grocery store and asked, Chinese? And when they said yes not wanting to get into halves and wholes she had nodded sagely. I knew it, she said. By the eyes she had

tugged the corner of each eye outward with a fingertip. But Lydia, defying genetics, somehow has her mother's blue eyes, and they know this is one more reason she is their mother's favorite. And their father's too. (2)

Lydia finds emotional gap between herself and society. With having own cultural practice, she cannot find her thoughts, aspiration and intention. This causes problem within herself. Her aspiration about life cannot be matched with society therefore she gets frustrated in life. Moreover, her intention about family, society and personal life is different. This genetic problem is inherited by father who was Chinese one but married to American girl. This causes conflict within house and his children grew up such conflict led situation. The family split created confusion, dilution of familial relation. This was root of communication gap among family which ultimately victimized all members of family and they lived alone.

When Lydia turns young age, she comes across with several psychological problems which are unbearable for her. She never gets support from family members and she is unable to communicate her personal choices, problems and desires. Even she did not know what is right and wrong that she has been convinced herself. At the beginning she was confused about the family relationship but when she becomes young then she is depressed due to the indifference of family and society. This gradually leads toward psychic complexity. This is how her personal desire explained:

Since childhood, Lydia had wanted to be a doctor, just as her mother once had. Last summer she had even taken a biology course at the college so that she could skip ahead into physics. On the bulletin board hand blue ribbons from years of science fairs, an illustrated periodic table, a real stethoscope that Marilyn had special ordered for her thirteenth birthday. The bookshelf is so full of books that some are crammed in sideways at the top: A brief History of

Medicine, she reads upside down. (42)

Since her childhood, Lydia had bitter experience of disintegration of family. Her mother left all family to fulfill her personal desire due to the reason; Lydia cannot have good experience of family. Without mother, Lydia undergoes hardship and emotional shock because father cannot take care of them. The feeling of loneliness always pushes her toward depression. This beginning of the family relation becomes root of Lydia suffering.

Her mother also suffered and encountered ups and down which changed her life then she comes back at home. Then she cannot continue her career then she forced her daughter to fulfill her own quitted dream. This is another reason for suffering of Lydia then she cannot find own self and personal life.

Lydia, meanwhile, said nothing at all during the confused rest of the evening in which their father called the police and then all the neighbors but forgo about dinner, and bedtime, as their policemen took note after note until she and Nath fell asleep on the living room floor. She awoke in the middle of the night in her own bed where her father had deposited her, shoes still on and felt for the diary her mother had given her at Christmas. At last something important had occurred, something that she ought to write down. But she did not know how to explain what had happened how everything had changed in just one day, how someone she loved so dearly could be there one minute, and the next minute gone. (57)

Lydia was gradually changed her social behaviors because of her homely environment. She was frank, open-minded and social but her homely situation created introverted and reserved. She never finds situation which might be favorable and supportive. She is unable to find suitable situation what she would imagine. The gap

between own hopes, aspiration, her familial and societal expectation kills own self.

Her familial relationship and upbringing exercise narrow mind and conflicted mind set up her mind which ultimately becomes her predicament. With having lonely habits, she gradually becomes introvert and cannot share her feelings with family. Her family environment stopped her being familiar with family members then she realizes her position. As a result, she is alienated from family and society.

Lydia's quietness, her lack of friends. Her recent sinking grades. And, in truth, the strangeness of her family. A family with no friends, a family of misfits. All this shines so brightly that, in the eyes of the police, Jack falls into shadow. A girl like that and a boy like him, who can have—does have—any girl he wants? It is impossible for them to imagine what Nath knows to be true, let alone what he himself imagines. (64)

Lydia's personality changes after she cannot find her desired world. Even she cannot imagine perfect world because her thinking and mindset divides because of family composition. With cultural values of dual society, she cannot act as being a single person which means she cannot find cultural identity too. Her father and mother teach her dual things on the basis of cultural background. Lydia's identity connects her father cultural identity who works as an assistant professor however he is now an American citizen. James often visits own memories which always detaches him from American one. Even James gives cultural teaching to own children and it indirectly affects their life.

Lydia grows with collective desire of the family but the family ignores her personal desire. Lydia at the time of teenage phase, she seeks own identity. Adolescent phase is a crucial phase of identity formation of children and it is threatened by external forces. The way they involve in society matters their identity

formation. During the phase of identity formation, her complicated understanding about life is unable to understand his self and society. The complicated psychological mindset creates a kind of conflict within her. Talking about young adult phase, it is always crucial for everyone. The individual undergoes drastic change that is reflected both physically and mentally. However, while interacting with society to specify personal role and creating self-identity, it creates massive tension between individual and society. Jeffery Jansen opines here:

Overall, then, the years of emerging adulthood are characterized by a high degree of demographic diversity and instability, reflecting the emphasis on change and exploration. It is only in the transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood in the late twenties that the diversity narrows and the instability eases, as young people make. (469)

A young adult stage is a psychologically crucial phase in which several physical and mental changes take place. It is difficult for them to adopt each and every change of society. If the changes are wrongly addressed, it distracts them from usual social practice and they are unsocial. Each and every matter for young adult is related to the formation of social identity. If not guided by the social values and principles, they lose own control and accustomed in unsocial practice. In this way, adolescence engage in forming own self in relation to society but their experience and guidance always influence them to be part of society.

Lydia undergoes a complicated circumstance in which she cannot understand the reality that she has been living. While interacting with reality, she finds contrast between herself and society. Having excluded feeling, she cannot adjust within the same situation however she even cannot escape or face the society. Undergoing in complication, she cannot reveal her personal experiences. A young adult finds conflict

between own self and society. In general, it is difficult to communicate own problem with anyone and express own personal matter. Even the young adult stage is transition phase; therefore, all crucial changes cannot be experienced. This conflict creates many obstacles and incommunicable complexity within her.

Lydia had her eyes shut now against the sun. But the moment flashed lightning-bright to Hannah. Years of yearning had made her sensitive, the way a starving dog twitches its nostrils at the faintest scent of food. She could not mistake it. She recognized it at once: love, one-way deep adoration that bounced off and did not bounce back; careful, quiet love that didn't care and went on anyway. It was too familiar to be surprising. Something deep inside her stretched out and curled around Jack like a shawl, but he didn't notice.

(121)

Now the situation becomes sickness for her and cannot fight against it. While searching her identity, she has both father and mother dreams ahead but those are not choice of her personal life. By embedded those unexpected and unwanted targets of life, she cannot shoulder those responsibility. Those forceful desires suffocate her to move ahead in life. In fact her choice in life is different than what her parents imposed.

Lydia has not good relations with parents when they use and exploit her in order to shoulder their dreams of life. She cannot communicate with them about own personal choice and priority of life. Many more complication in her life invites frustration and depression. Her mother treats her as:

I didn't care. I knew what I wanted. I was going to be a doctor. She glares at James, as if he has contradicted her. Then—fortunately—I came to my senses. I stopped trying to be different. I did just what all the other girls were doing. I



got married. I gave all that up. A thick bitterness coats her tongue. "Do what everyone else is doing. That's all you ever said to Lydia. Make friends. Fit in. But I didn't want her to be just like everyone else. The rims of her eyes ignite. I wanted her to be exceptional. (140)

Now Lydia loses her own confidence and only experiences frustration. Her mother is not ready to understand her feeling. Being a daughter, she cannot live with personal values because she has to carry out her mother's dream. It is one of the discouraging factors in her life that always demotivates her. But, her mother ignores her personal feeling. Lydia loses all social and cultural notions when she is entangled within domestic problems. Being fragile by domestic problems, she cannot fight for personal space and public life. Lydia frequently expresses her dissatisfaction against parents' dreams which are unconcerned with her life but she has to continue those unfulfilled dreams.

That long-ago day, sitting in this very spot on the dock, she had already begun to feel it: how hard it would be to inherit their parents' dreams. How suffocating to be so loved. She had felt Nath's hands on her shoulders and been almost grateful to fall forward, to let herself sink... Don't let me sink, she had thought as she reached for his hand, and he had promised not to when he took it. This moment, Lydia thought. This is where it all went wrong.

While facing identity crisis during transition period which invites several conflicts within themselves. It can raise as many questions about oneself and society. Young adult undergoes separation and alienation if they cannot communicate personal matters. A society becomes target of them since it is followed by tradition. If the conflict is not softened or compromised, it leads them toward alienation, depression and exclusion of society. Not having personal role and attachment with society, it

produces negative forces. Being guided by own self ego, it avoids others.

Adolescence undergoes intricacy of self and other. It is the phase of socialization when the person comes out of self-centered psychology and struggles against social identity formation. During the phase, adolescence undergoes complicated situation while facing society. It creates a confused situation in which children cannot find distinction between them. The phase always intends to explore self-identity however, it is traditionally defined. Arnett claims here:

The identity explorations of emerging adulthood make it an especially full and intense time of life for many people; these explorations are not always experienced as enjoyable. Explorations in love sometimes result in disappointment, disillusionment, or rejection. Explorations in work sometimes result in a failure to achieve the occupation most desired or in an inability to find work that is satisfying and fulfilling. Explorations in worldviews sometimes lead to rejection of childhood beliefs without the construction of anything more compelling in their place. (473)

The formation of human identity is related to our society, circumstances and both real and unreal worlds. In case of young adult's identity, it is critical stage of forming social identity. A young adult hardly finds difference between self and other which can be reflected in process of adopting new values of society. If the society is engaged in war, insurgency and disturbed situation, a young adult is scared by the terrible situation and identity is shaped as it is affected. It develops a complexity and a young adult experience the world that creates confusion and more complication.

Regarding young adult literature, it particularly examines concept of abjection in relation to teenagers' psychological complexity and contradictory relation with society. With the idea of abjection, it explores an adult's experience of struggling for

formation of personal as well as social identity. As the novel opens, it projects a tragic scene that Lydia's death causes suffering of the family. In fact, overall story projects complication of her life and she finally unable to tackle both personal and public life because of numerous problems within her.

The novel incorporates racial issue as well. We can find racial discrimination in the novel. Marilyn observes her boyfriend who is Chinese American as if he was a different species, "How skinny he was, she thought, how wide his shoulders were, like a swimmer's, his skin the color of tea, of fall leaves toasted by the sun. She had never seen anyone like him" (35). Marilyn's observation is replete with racial ideology. Her interiorized perception sees her boyfriend having tea colored skin, like roasted by the sun and quite strange man like never ever seen the type of person.

As the magazine covers news about Lydia's death, "They are drawn by the spectacle of sudden death. For the past week, ever since the police dragged the lake, the headlines in the *Middlewood Monitor* have all been about Lydia. Oriental Girl Found Drowned in Pond" (41). This news coverage also is full of racial ideology. The next racial stereotype is evident in the line: "quiet and hardworking and clean (30). Chinese are stereotyped as quiet and hardworking. They are merely termed as coolies.

James claims: "Well, I *am* American," he says when people blink, a barb of defensiveness in his tone" (11). This James defensive utterance is an output of racial reference. He claims to be an American because he could get rid of racial maltreatment.

James does not feel integrated in American land: "He had never felt he belonged here, even though he'd been born on American soil, even though he had never set foot anywhere else (29). He feels estranged in own land. He was born in America and gone nowhere, but feels alienated in own land.

The next evidence of racial discrimination is: "Later, when Nath was too slight for the football team, too short for the basketball team, too clumsy for the baseball team (60). Nath's does not fit himself for any sport like football, basketball, baseball etc. merely for being from being Chinese origin.

"Think about your children," she said. "Where will you live? You won't fit in anywhere. You'll be sorry for the rest of your life" (38). Marilyn's mother tries to dissuade her not to marry James. This dissuasion is because of James' inferior racial identity.

Lydia is discriminated under racial issue:

But Nath's seen Lydia at school, how in the cafeteria she sits silent while the others chatter; how, when they've finished copying her homework, she quietly slides her notebook back into her bookbag. After school, she walks to the bus alone and settles into the seat beside him in silence. (15)

Lydia remains silent while others chatter, she sits silently in the cafeteria and walks to the bus alone after school. This evident show that she is racially differentiated and alone. No one talks well with her. She does not interact with none.

The novel *Everything I Never Told You* also is rich in gender issue, "her mother promised to teach them everything a young lady needed to keep a house (22). In this extract, Marilyn's mother promises to teach her how to keep a house. This promise carries on an ideology that ladies are specially for keeping house. They are not as free as the sons.

"Lydia is dead. But they don't know this yet. 1977, May 3, six thirty in the morning, no one knows anything but this innocuous fact: Lydia is late for breakfast (7). This extract shows that Lydia in the family is less concerned about. For too late too, family members were unaware of her situation after she disappeared.

"Everything she had dreamed for herself faded away, like fine mist on a breeze.

She could not remember now why she thought it had all been possible (91). It is the situation of daughters in the then American society. Daughters' dream was disregarded. In this extract, Lydia's dream is destroyed. Her mother had imposed concocted dream of becoming a doctor that Lydia was not interested in.

"Then fortunately came to my senses. I stopped trying to be different. I did just what all the other girls were doing. I got married. I gave all that up." This is the bitter expression of Marilyn. She tried her best to pursue her own sort of dream, but, patriarchal pressure compelled her forsake her ambition. Ultimately, she was made bound to be womanish.

"At home, alone on the landing, Lydia cradled the handset in her hands for a long time after the click. The tears that had choked off her voice dried away (162). Lydia, the protagonist of the novel is not happy in her own home. Her stay alone and drying tears show her pathetic plight as a daughter in her own family. The novel *Everything I Never Told You* is the reflection of the then American society. The tragic situation of Chinese-American people is depicted in the novel. It reflects psychological, racial and gender identity crisis of Chinese-American people.

The novel has examined a complicated identity formation of adolescence which caused to death of the character in novel *Everything I Never Told You*. The major character Lydia, a young girl, experiences a complicated world in which she cannot understand outer world and limited within own world that results depression. Having confused world, neither she is clear about neither oneself nor the outer world. Entrapped such complicated situation she cannot define own personal identity in relation to society then she makes decision of ending one life.

The novel presents character Lydia, a young girl of Chinese-American family, encounters alienated life in both inside and outside world. The family is guided by individual principal rather than familial relationship. Father James is connected with

Chinese cultural memories and is fragmented. Mother Marilyn quits home in order to fulfill own desire to be a doctor. Having embedded by personal desires, the family has communication gap and lack of exchange feeling and emotions. Behind undergoing crucial familial relationship, cultural traits and inherited practice are liable to create problem in family.

The major character Lydia undergoes psychological experience that is conflict between her-self and society. Being self-centric she avoids social and cultural values and attempts to seek own desire, choice and aim of life. A young girl weaves personal choice but society is different than what she has expected. When she encounters social behaviors, then she experiences obstacles of society. Moreover, having dual cultural background, she is confused to find out own identity.

By undergoing psychological as well as physical difficulties, she cannot proper guidance and support from the family. Her family has cultural as well as individual conflict which hinders to communicate with family as well as society. Lydia cannot get support from friends, family and neighbors that's why she becomes sick of own desire. In order to achieve own dream, she cannot find proper career. When she is forced to carry out parents' dream, she is more frustrated. No family members support her to understand own dream and life career.

The research emphasizes frequently recurred crucial identity of Lydia who undergoes racial, gender and psychological distress because of split identity. Living in hyphenated family, she experiences difficulty to find out social and cultural identity when she is in adolescence phase which is identity formation stage. Having confused mentality during the phase, she cannot identify her own self. This is the cause of mental sickness that ultimately misleads her. Even the complicated phase, she is unable to communicate her problems with family as well as friends. This is how she cannot identify her social identity.

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