



A STUDY OF PROTAGONIST' S SELF-CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

IN Can You Keep a Secret?



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A STUDY OF PROTAGONIST' S SELF-CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT
IN *Can You Keep a Secret?*



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THE MASTER'S PROJECT TITLED
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Nowadays, many people, especially those working in a highly competitive environment in a big city, confront various stress factors. To pursue a successful career, working people suffer from stress in the workplace, which affects their self-perception of themselves. Hence, people require interaction with others in society confirm their positive notion of self, which is also portrayed in the main character of Chick-lit. This study aimed to demonstrate the development of the self-concept of the protagonist in *Can You Keep a Secret?* The results of this study display how interaction with other people in society support self-concept development and the association between self-concept development and life success. The protagonist of *Can You Keep a Secret?* by the famous romance novel author Sophie Kinsella, is selected to display a working woman character who confronts the stress in the workplace and the social acceptance required. The protagonist character demonstrates the effect of interaction with others by keeping secrets and the notion of the self in women. The demand for social acceptance stimulated the protagonist to maintain positive relationships with others and improve her self-concept. As a result, interactions with others support her in developing self-concept and affected the life success tendency. Therefore, the results from this research will benefit the readers by displaying how women can develop their self-concept and support their attitude to overcome their life obstacles.

Keyword : Self-Concept Development Self-Esteem Self-Image Self-Actualization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The self-concept is the notion of self that influences the perception of a person's characteristics, actions, and feelings. Understanding who we are helps us realize our strengths, how we decide, or why we feel sad. How people see themselves is also related to other people's views. Not only are we learning to accept who we indeed are, but we are also learning to live with other people. According to Epstein (1978), the perception of other people also influences a person's notion of self. People tend to improve themselves because others' perceptions influence their views. Also, people are looking for a method to better themselves and improve their feelings and others' perceptions of them.

There are various factors that affect the way people perceive themselves. Ismail and Tekke (2015) stated Carl Roger's self-theory that self-concept can be formed in relation to the three components of self-concept: self-esteem, self-image, and self-actualization. The first factor is self-esteem, which is related to a person's view of their value. Self-esteem is associated with societal interaction skills because interaction with others supports the way others perceive a person, which affects a person forming their esteem. The second factor is self-image. The perception of a person's image impacts a person's feelings and thoughts, leading to their act (Ismail & Tekke, 2015). The last factor is self-actualization, or the ideal self. Self-actualization can be perceived as the need people need to pursue, which is related to people's life fulfilment until they can perceive who they want to be (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Ismail & Tekke, 2015). The forming of this self-concept's three components correlates to the way people perceive their current self and the consequences of their actions and behaviours.

The way people see themselves relates to their own experience. Beheshtifar and Rahimi-Nezhad (2012) stated Carl Roger's theory that people's experiences play a crucial role in shaping their self-concept because they impact how that person is aware of themselves, impacting their actions. The actions and interactions with others are

important to people's experiences. People interpret their good or bad experiences and use them to evaluate their perception of themselves. The idea of self, therefore, can be improved from the experiences selected and deployed in the evaluation process. Also, Alicke and Sedikides (2009) point out that people are likely to select and interpret their experiences in a way that does not intimidate their feelings. For example, people blame others for their failures and claim success when they reach their goals. The concept of self will be enhanced because the positive experiences will impact the three components of self-concept: In evaluating the perception of self, a positive experience will improve the thoughts and feelings about oneself. This improvement can create life satisfaction when people reach an ideal future. Thus, the enhanced view of self can indicate the development of the self-concept.

Nowadays, many people, especially those working in a highly competitive environment in a big city, confront various factors that impact their views of themselves. The pressure to succeed in a competitive environment can lead people to heightened stress levels, especially if they are not advancing in their careers or earning enough to meet their financial needs. This can contribute to feelings of anxiety and inadequacy, impacting the notion of self. Wentworth and Peterson (2001) state that the perception of not belonging to society or feeling like an outsider can exacerbate feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. The effect of not belonging to society impacts people's ability to find the factors to confirm their value. Associated to the study of Kumthekar (2004) point out the potential devaluation of workability due to a lack of interaction with others and the negative perspectives associated with navigating the city alone. Therefore, working life, especially in a big city, requires interaction with others in society to confirm their notion of self.

Moreover, interaction with other people in a romantic supports success in a career by developing the concept of self. According to Lewandowski Jr and Nardone (2010), the interaction in romantic relationships influences the notion of self. People will have a positive feeling toward themselves when they receive acceptance from a close relationship. Consequently, people will receive reinforcement from an intimate

relationship to pursue career advancement. Besides, the notion of self in a person can lead to a good relationship in romance. People who can positively maintain their view of themselves will attract other people's attention. A romantic relationship impacts people's views of self by increasing positive feelings toward themselves (Varanarasamma, 2019; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2015). It proves that the importance of a romantic relationship positively impacts the view of self that will lead to success in a career. On the other hand, being unacceptable in a close relationship, such as a partner, can cause a negative notion of self as unconfidently and unsuccessful (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Lewandowski Jr & Nardone, 2010; Murray et al., 2008). If this feeling of unacceptance from a partner remains in the long term, it will finally affect the relationship with the partner.

Romance novels always present the theme of the self-concept of the working people in a big city. The characteristics and the conflict of the working women in the novel represent the characteristics of working women in real life and the problems they confront. Most romance novels, especially Chick-lit, always display the story of a woman because the target group reader is women. The development of the Chick-lit's characters serves as a reflection of real-life challenges and aspirations. A female protagonist always has life obstacles until they fall in love and create a romantic relationship with a male protagonist. Both protagonists find a method to overcome the conflict, such as interaction with people in society, culture and social status, that can be resolved by the end. Meanwhile, both protagonists support each other in overcoming the conflict in this story; the relationship between them is enhanced and more intimate. Nowadays, the characters of female protagonists have changed to be more independent than in the past. Most of the protagonists in Chick-lit are always present as innocent, dependent, and motherly characters due to the changes in women's values regarding working women. Although society's values are changing, Chick-lit's main story still portrays how a good relationship with a male protagonist encourages the female protagonist to achieve life satisfaction as success in a career that supports the notion of self-development. A female protagonist's notion of self-development is influenced by her

experiences, personality, and attitudes, which concurrent occur while the relationship of the female protagonist and male protagonist is more intimate and supports the female protagonist to have good interaction with others in society (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2017; Mazloomian et al., 2016). Hence, the value of romance novels is not only for amusement but also presents the importance of relationships and the notion of self in women, which can reinforce women to achieve life satisfaction.

This research will study the self-concept development portrayed in *Can You Keep a Secret?*, one of Sophie Kinsella's famous Chick-lit. The main plot of this Chick-lit presents the character of a female protagonist who has obstacles to overcome, especially the problem about her self-concept or characteristic that does not correlate to other people in society's perception toward her. Emma, the protagonist of Chick-lit, displays dissatisfaction with her life, and her pursuit of success resonates with many working women who grapple with similar challenges in balancing personal fulfilment and societal expectations. Emma encounters obstacles in life success, which leads to her pursuit of success, serving her life satisfaction. The conflict Emma confronts impacts how she perceives herself, leading to her continuing to keep secrets to perceive only the best of her. The secret keeping behaviour is threatened by accidentally revealing secrets to Jack Harper, who is her boss. The more she gets close to Jack, the more she stimulates Emma's feelings about the secret being revealed to others. Although Emma still continues to conceal her secret, her notion of self improves from its behaviours until secrets are disclosed by Jack accidentally at the end, which will be analyzed in the analysis part.

There are many previous research studies on the development of self-concept in a protagonist in Chick-lit. Most of the previous research focuses on the development of the protagonist's self-concept supported by the romantic relationship. For instance, the previous study of Austina (2011) explored the change of self-concept from the development of romantic relationships between male and female protagonists. However, this research will explore the process of self-concept development through the change of self-concept's components.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate the development of self-concept and how it improved. This research will display how interaction with other people in society supports self-concept development. Also, it displays the association between self-concept development and the life success of working women. Moreover, the results of this research will portray how the self-concept of working women with characteristics similar to those of the protagonist can be developed. Regarding the study Putri (2017) stated that the characteristic of the protagonist is related to the natural woman because the character in the novel represents the characteristics of people in real life, this study correlates to the value of Chick-lit, which does not contain only a love story, reflected in the development of the protagonist's characteristics.

1.2.Objective

To analyze the self-concept development of the protagonist of *Can You Keep a Secret?* through the development of self-concept components.

1.3.Definition of Terms

Self-concept: a notion of self that is influenced by the evaluation of experiences and life situations.

Self-concept development: the notion of self that changes from positively improving the self-concept component.

Self-concept components: the feeling toward self, the notion of images and the ideal self

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides a brief review of the following topics related to this study: The Concept of Self-Concept, The Concept of Self-Concept Development and Related Studies About Self-Concept.

2.1. The Concept of Self-Concept

The self-concept is the notion of a person through experiences. The self-concept is constructed by evaluating people's experiences, such as the experience of talking with other people. Self-concept is shaped by both internal factors, such as personal experiences and evaluations, and external factors, such as feedback and interactions with others. The importance of self-concept is that it identifies "who am I?" which supports the behaviours and actions (Beheshtifar & Rahimi-Nezhad, 2012; Carroll et al., 2007). Correlate to Sedikides (2021), who points out the significant role that social interactions play in shaping individuals' self-concept. People's perceptions of how others see them can profoundly influence how people see themselves, leading to a continuous cycle of evaluation of self and adjustment. People's belief about themselves informs their interactions with the world around them, ultimately shaping their life experiences and trajectories.

The congruence between people's experiences and the notion of self plays a crucial role in shaping how people view themselves. When the experiences match how a person evaluates themselves, people's self-concept tends to increase positively. Also, if the experiences align with people's self-concept, it reinforces that image and enhances the sense of self-worth and confidence (Ismail & Tekke, 2015; Peixoto, 1991). For instance, the perception of a person's self-concept that is congruent to others will positively impact a person's self-concept. The development of a positive self-concept can support people in pursuing life satisfaction.

Meanwhile, the incongruency negatively affects self-concepts if the experiences do not match how the person evaluates themselves. When there is

incongruence, it can indeed lead to negative effects on mental health, such as anxiety and low confidence (Epstein, 1978; Hepper et al., 2010; Ismail & Tekke, 2015; Peixoto, 1991). For instance, a person might feel anxious when they perceive others' perspectives toward them that do not correlate to their self-concept. A person will re-perceive themselves to maintain the long-term consistency of their self-concept and regard the positive experiences (Peixoto, 1991). It is the method people deploy against decreasing their positive self-concept by refusing to see the experiences as a threat to maintaining the consistency of self-concept.

The self-concept is combined with three essential components: self-esteem, self-image, and self-actualization. According to Carl Roger's research (1951, as cited in Ismail & Tekke, 2015), the self-concept comprises their self-esteem, self-image and self-actualization from the evaluation process, which impacts their experiences. The interaction skill plays a crucial role as a construction material of the self-concept's components.

The first component is self-esteem. Self-esteem indeed plays a pivotal role in how people perceive themselves and interact with others. Westfall et al. (2020) stated that interaction skills positively impact others' perceptions because perceptions from other people are reinforced by supporting a notion of self positively. It can be perceived that high self-esteem often correlates with better social interaction skills and confidence, which can lead to more positive perceptions from others. Conversely, low self-esteem may result in feelings of anxiety, stress, and insecurity, which can hinder social skills and the ability to maintain relationships (Tetzner et al., 2016; Varanarasamma, 2019; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2015). The interaction can be interpreted as an important function of self-esteem level, leading to self-concept shaping. If a person has a positive feeling toward self and perceives a value of self, a person tends to have a positive self-concept, too.

Self-image, the second component of self-concept, is influenced by various factors such as occupation, life satisfaction, and stereotypes. Interaction plays a significant role in supporting self-image as it impacts how people perceive themselves

and helps mitigate the fear of rejection from society (Monell et al., 2015; Zare & Flinchbaugh, 2019). Self-image is closely tied to people's feelings, which in turn influences behaviours, especially in social settings. Bailey (2003) points out that self-image is intertwined with others' perceptions as appearance and characteristics affect people's attractiveness, ultimately shaping our self-concept. It can be perceived the association of people with high self-esteem often exhibit a positive self-image due to their confidence.

The last component is self-actualization. Self-actualization is associated with the self-concept by motivating people to develop their self-concept. According to Faraci and Cannistraci (2015), self-actualization is a basic need, which is the highest goal people pursue for life satisfaction. Self-actualization is closely tied to the development and maintenance of a positive self-concept. Correlated with Hachem (2023) indicated that a person close to their self-actualization tends to have the ability to solve a problem and have a good relationship with others from their confidence. Hence, the interaction also plays an important role by supporting the congruence between self-actualization and experiences to help confirm people's positive perception of self.

2.2. The Concept of Self-Concept Development

The development of self-concept requires improving the self-concept's component by maintaining the other's perception of them, as it is an important factor reflecting how a person perceives themselves. Maintaining positive relationships with others can boost self-esteem and contribute to a more positive self-concept. This dynamic relationship between social acceptance and self-concept development highlights the importance of social connections in shaping our self-concept.

Women may face developing a positive self-concept, particularly in the context of societal norms and expectations. The reason is women tend to have lower self-concepts than men because the self-concept of women is related to the perception of their value from society's perspective (Carroll et al., 2007; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001). Nowadays, people perceive that success in a career or leadership belongs to men. According to the study of Appelbaum et al. (2019), leadership and success are

often associated with masculine traits. This can create barriers for women in career advancement and contribute to lower self-esteem and self-concept. This bias can affect how women are perceived and their opportunities for advancement, impacting their self-concept. The need for positive social interactions and support networks becomes crucial for women in developing and maintaining a positive self-concept. Most of working women in the United States are stressed from work and de-evaluate their values and self-concept even though they feel favourable to themselves (Kumthekar, 2004; McDowell, 2005). Interacting with others who provide validation and support can help counteract negative societal messages and bolster self-esteem. The working life of women in a big city affects feelings of loneliness and nostalgia (Brewis, 2004). Consequently, working women demand interaction with others to confirm their self-concept positively.

2.2.1. The Development of Self-Concept Through the Component of Self-Concept

The interaction can be perceived as a necessary factor for self-concept development. According to the Sociometer theory of Leary and Baumeister (2000), people find acceptance from society to reflect their notion of self and maintain relationships with others for their perception of them. This theory states the importance of social interaction as a need in human life because of social connections and acceptance in shaping people's perceptions of themselves and their place in society. The self-esteem level and closeness level in relationships with other people in society fluctuate to each other. People with high self-esteem tend to have closer relationships with others in society and vice versa. People are conscious of aspiring for acceptance from a society between them and other people when they perceive low relationships (Westfall et al., 2020). In particular, acceptance from close relationships, such as parents or friends, tends to positively influence self-esteem and self-concept, whereas rejection can have the opposite effect. (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Thus, the sociometer theory also indicates the effect of rejection and acceptance from society on people's self-esteem and self-concept. Moreover, the peers of other people in society, such as co-workers, have more effect on the values perception of people self than close

relationships, such as best friends (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Murray et al., 2008). It can be interpreted that a person's self-esteem level is influenced by their performance to increase closeness in relationships for the good perception of other people for their positive self-concept.

Meanwhile, people with low social interaction skills will have low self-esteem levels, which leads to dissatisfaction in relationships. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with people in society, which correlates to the sociometer theory because a good relationship impacts the perspective of others, which impacts self-esteem and self-concept. People with low self-esteem may struggle to interpret their partner's actions and intentions inaccurately. This misinterpretation can further exacerbate feelings of insecurity and negatively impact the quality of the relationship (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Lewandowski Jr & Nardone, 2010; Murray et al., 2008). Some people are less close with their partner to shield themselves from potential threats to their self-esteem. The reason is to protect themselves from decreasing self-esteem that impacts negative self-concept. People with low self-esteem severely tend to have an inconsistent belief in their partner's feelings and values them, even if it means sacrificing closeness in their relationships.

The desire to maintain close relationships can lead to behaviours that might not be beneficial for mental health in the long run. When people prioritize protecting their self-esteem through their relationships, they may engage in behaviours aimed at preserving a positive self-concept, even if it means suppressing their true feelings or conforming to their partner's wishes. (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Lewandowski Jr & Nardone, 2010). People feel pressure to constantly present themselves in a favourable light and fear rejection or disapproval. This fear of rejection can be particularly damaging, as it may lead people to suppress their own needs and desires in order to avoid conflict or maintain the relationship. For instance, when faced with rejection or criticism, people may experience a decrease in self-esteem and may avoid such situations in the future, even if it means sacrificing their own happiness or authenticity.

People are indeed often drawn to those who provide them with positive feedback and who share similar characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes. This tendency can foster a sense of belonging and validation, contributing to positive self-concept and self-esteem. For instance, a person rejected or ignored by strangers might feel unsatisfied with making a new relationship with others in society. Also, it increases self-esteem because closeness toward people with the same characteristics can support a person's attitude (Black, 2006; Ismail & Tekke, 2015; Kobayashi, 2003). When people create a relationship with others in society, they prefer to present their positive toward others rather than the negative. Conversely, interactions with dissimilar or negatively perceived people may lead to feelings of rejection or dissatisfaction (Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). Correlate the research of Murray et al. (2008) indicated a tendency for people to prefer those who belong to the same social group or exhibit similar traits, which can result in biases and prejudices towards out-groups. People have a bias toward the group they belong to by thinking their group is better than others because of the unfamiliar feeling that affects their current self-esteem.

The congruency between a people's notion of self and the experiences support a people's emotion is associated with self-concept development. The congruence between experiences and people's self-concept is important because it impacts positive behaviours (Carroll et al., 2007; Epstein, 1978; Keyes & Ryff, 2000; Sedikides, 2021). Moreover, there is a correlation between having positive self-concept components and experiencing positive emotions, which further reinforces self-concept development and life satisfaction. Keyes and Ryff (2000) point out that people with high self-esteem are motivated to enhance themselves, fostering a more consistent self-concept compared to those with low self-esteem. People with high self-esteem tend to navigate obstacles more effectively and experience greater life satisfaction compared to those with low self-esteem. In the face of inconsistent experiences, people may selectively attend to those that support their self-concept consistency while disregarding those that challenge it (Peixoto, 1991). This process helps maintain self-esteem and guards against mental health issues. Also, positive emotions play a significant role in

managing behaviours, relationships, and attitudes conducive to goal achievement and overall well-being (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001; Westfall et al., 2020). Thus, people with three positive self-concept components tend to have positive emotions, supporting the congruence between self-concept and experiences. In addition, it reinforces their development of self-concept

One of the methods for retaining the congruence between people's self-concept and their experiences is secret keeping. Davis et al. (2021) stated that secrets keeping behaviours are linked to self-concept and current well-being, especially in a romantic relationship with a partner. Regarding interaction as a crucial factor for a positive self-concept, the concealment of secrets may exacerbate mental health issues and increase the desire to continue concealing them. The secrets keeping behaviours have occurred from insecure feelings in relationships, guilt and dissatisfaction in the perception of self, impacting people's mental illness. Correlated to Richards and L. (2014) states that secret keeping behaviours affect people's mental health problem and their demand for secrets concealing. People's obsession with keeping secrets impacts their decision to conceal secrets from others by considering the consequences of the feedback. Most secret keepers are aware of the negative outcome, which affects their decision to control their secrets (Davis et al., 2021). However, Afifi and Caughlin (2006) also expressed that people with a negative self-concept may be more inclined to keep secrets as a means of seeking validation for their negative beliefs about themselves.

Although various research support the secret keeping behaviours and people's self-concept, there is no research indicating the association between the consequence of secrets keeping behaviours and the development of self-concept. This study will explore and analyze secret keeping as a crucial role in supporting self-concept components for self-concept development in the analysis section.

2.2.2. The Association of Self-Concept Components and the Self-Concept Development.

The development of self-concept depends on the change of self-concept components, which need two elements: self-enhancement and self-protection to support. Both self-enhancement and self-protection are crucial for maintaining a

healthy self-concept. These two mechanisms navigate experiences and interactions in a way that preserves and supports their overall well-being. Self-enhancement and self-protection support selecting an experience that does not threaten the three components of self-concept. Self-enhancement involves the tendency to focus on and highlight positive aspects of oneself, leading to higher self-esteem. This process can strengthen the connection between one's self-image (how one sees oneself) and self-actualization (the realization of one's potential). On the other hand, self-protection comes into play when people face threats to their self-concept. It involves mechanisms such as denial or distortion of negative feedback or experiences to maintain self-esteem and protect the integrity of one's self-concept.

The two mechanisms support the positive self-concept by increasing the positivity of the self-concept's components. The study of Alicke and Sedikides (2009) indicated that self-enhancement and self-protection manifest in behaviours such as seeking out praise and validation, highlighting personal achievements, and attributing successes to internal factors while attributing failures to external factors. In addition, these two mechanisms involve strategies aimed at maintaining self-concept in the face of potential threats. Both mechanisms contribute to increasing self-esteem and fostering positive feelings toward self. By emphasizing successes and minimizing failures, people can maintain a positive self-image and bolster their self-esteem. Self-enhancement and self-protection are the mechanisms related to behaving in favour of positive feelings toward self and supporting the notion of self to correlate or be close to people's ideal self.

People adapted self-enhancement and self-protection to achieve their goals. Alicke and Sedikides (2009) offer an insightful framework for understanding how people pursue their goals through mechanisms of self-enhancement and self-protection. By delineating between primary and secondary control, they shed light on the adaptive strategies people employ in various situations. Primary control involves the pursuit of goals themselves, while secondary control focuses on the strategies people use to attain those goals. When people perceive limitations in achieving their goals through primary

control alone, they turn to secondary control mechanisms. These mechanisms serve to either broaden the positive aspects of an event or mitigate the negative aspects, thus allowing people to maintain a sense of control and agency over their circumstances. However, if secondary control proves ineffective, people may resort to alternative mechanisms in order to increase their chances of goal attainment. The ultimate aim of both primary and secondary control is to safeguard against negative self-concept components.

One of the processes is serving bias to protect and increase the three components of self-concept. Serving bias indeed plays a significant role in maintaining and enhancing one's self-concept. By attributing successes to oneself and failures to external factors, individuals safeguard their self-esteem and preserve a positive self-image. Alicke and Sedikides (2009) stated that people blame external sources for failure, not only claiming success for themselves. Self-enhancement, the tendency to attribute positive outcomes to internal factors such as skill or effort, helps bolster self-esteem and confidence. By taking credit for successes, people reinforce their belief in their abilities and worth. On the other hand, self-protection involves deflecting blame for failures onto external factors, such as bad luck or other people's actions. serving bias serves as a protective barrier against negative feedback and societal judgment.

Biases and errors support the three components of self-concept by supporting the selection of information and experiences for self-concept evaluation. Biases can influence the selection of information that people use to evaluate their self-concept. This can involve comparing themselves favourably to others or overestimating their own abilities or values relative to the situation (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides, 2021) They may be more inclined to focus on information that supports their existing beliefs or preferences, filtering out ambiguous or contradictory information. When faced with negative outcomes, individuals may be inclined to attribute blame to external factors rather than accepting responsibility themselves. For instance, a person derogates others with whom they have a prejudice instead of blaming themselves for protecting their self-concept. In response to negative experiences or failures, individuals

may engage in compensatory mechanisms to protect their self-concept. In addition, people believe that their weakness is expected to be acceptable, but their skills or abilities are a value that is sometimes overestimated. (Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). This process protects the negative toward self-concept components and increases the chance of self-concept components.

This bias often leads individuals to recall and focus more on positive experiences and feedback while downplaying or forgetting negative ones. This tendency to selectively remember positive memories strives for people to maintain or enhance their positive self-image. By emphasizing past successes and positive experiences, people may bolster their self-esteem and confidence, which can be particularly helpful when facing challenges or setbacks (Hepper et al., 2010; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). Remembering their positive memory better than their negative one that affects the perception of their ability, values and beliefs. Moreover, (Sedikides, 2021) point out that people also tend to underestimate their past abilities to satisfy their current abilities. People choose positive memories to serve them effectively in overcoming difficult situations

People also tend to skip over negative memories, which aligns with research on memory biases. This selective recall can indeed influence how we perceive ourselves and interpret new experiences. Past negative experiences can colour our present perceptions and affect our self-esteem. If people faced criticism or setbacks in the past, they might approach similar situations with heightened sensitivity or pessimism, which could impact our self-concept (Sedikides, 2021). On the other hand, people better remember the negative behaviours of others than their negative (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005; Sedikides, 2021). This bias serves memory selection to protect people's self-esteem by maintaining a more positive self-concept, even if it means distorting their memories.

People tend to adjust their self-beliefs in sometimes unrealistic ways for bias serving. It involves attributing positive events to personal traits or abilities, even if they may not be entirely accurate. For example, people might attribute winning a game

of chance to their own luck or skill, even if chance plays a significant role. Similarly, they might view their skills and abilities in a more favourable light, adapting them to fit their self-concept (Hepper et al., 2010; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). This bias serves the purpose of maintaining or boosting self-esteem and self-image, as well as achieving personal aspirations. People may envision themselves as lucky or capable of bolstering their confidence and motivation.

Deception can also indeed manifest as a bias serving to shield people from accepting negative aspects of their self-concept or acknowledging personal faults. This can include attributing failures to external factors rather than acknowledging personal responsibility. The need to deceive themselves positively can be indicated as an interest in preventing self-concept components from decreasing ((Alicke & Sedikides, 2009). For instance, a student blaming a challenging exam rather than their lack of preparation is a classic illustration of self-protection through deception. Self-protection relates to self-deception in the situation that people perceive as being unable to overcome a positive result and maintain their positive self-concept by avoiding confronting their shortcomings. For instance, parents might also engage in self-deception by justifying their actions to themselves, even when faced with clear evidence contradicting their beliefs or behaviours.

The last bias serving is the comparison process, which is self-enhancement and self-protection deployment for self-concept development. Comparing oneself to others is indeed a common strategy for boosting self-esteem and protecting one's self-concept. The aspiration to increase self-esteem stimulates a person to be concerned about the outcome, supporting people to compare themselves with others. Moreover, the outcome of a close relationship is to influence a person's feelings (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). For instance, the success of a close relationship stimulates the desire for success in a person's life. People also comparing one's current self to their past self is an intriguing point (Murray et al., 2008). Reflecting on past successes or happiness can serve as motivation to strive for similar achievements in the future.

Self-enhancement, or the tendency to view oneself positively, is indeed often associated with positive emotions and feelings of success. When people believe in their abilities and accomplishments, they may exude confidence and charisma, which can be attractive to others and beneficial for their careers. The idea that people are drawn to winners or those perceived as successful is evident not only in career contexts but also in other areas of life. For instance, in an election, people tend to vote for the candidate who is supposed to be the winner. Initially, people want to be in the same society of people who tend to succeed (Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). This phenomenon aligns with the sociometer theory, which suggests that people gauge their own worth and social standing based on how they perceive others' evaluations of them. People may be more inclined to vote for candidates who are perceived as frontrunners or likely to win because they want to align themselves with success and be associated with people who are seen as capable and competent.

Hence, positive self-enhancement and self-protection are important elements of self-concept development because they support the self-concept's components. Self-enhancement and self-protection mechanisms play vital roles in shaping overall self-concept's components. Positive self-esteem and self-image provide people with the confidence and resilience needed to navigate various life situations. Moreover, positive interactions with others can bolster and contribute to a positive self-concept. Conversely, negative interactions may trigger self-concept, influencing how individuals perceive themselves. The interplay between self-enhancement and self-protection through self-concept components supporting significant influences ultimately contributes to people's overall ideal self.

2.3. Related Studies About Self-Concept

The development of self-concept can be found in Chick-lit characters because of how it reflects people's behaviours in real life. Chick-lit is a novel emphasizing women's lives, especially urban women's lives in the current era. Suzanne and Mallory (2006) described how Chick-lit began and became a mass romantic novel genre nowadays. The definition of Chick-lit is a novel genre that emphasizes women in

mass culture who work and live in an urban city, and the characters are developed from the feminist movement. The protagonist's character in the Chick-lit genre is based on the changing of female characters regarding the feminist movement, which contrasts with the traditional female characters in society. Regarding the second wave of the feminist movement, women had more rights and roles in society, including in the workplace. However, people in society still expect women to be experts in their careers and can handle their motherhood duties. Chick-lit protagonists typically embody the complexities of modern womanhood, balancing career aspirations with personal relationships and societal expectations. Their self-concept evolves throughout the narrative, influenced by factors such as societal norms, feminist ideals, and personal experiences. By focusing on their own goals and desires, rather than conforming to traditional gender roles or societal expectations, these characters assert agency and autonomy in shaping their identities. The portrayal of sexuality and body image in Chick-lit also reflects changing attitudes towards these topics in contemporary society. Characters may embrace their sexuality as a source of empowerment rather than objectification while also grappling with societal pressures to adhere to unrealistic beauty standards. Through their experiences and interactions, Chick-lit characters navigate issues of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-expression, ultimately shaping their self-concept in a complex and nuanced manner.

The study of Mazloomian et al. (2016) supported the Chick-lit definition of Suzanne and Mallory's study delve into the dynamics of Chick-lit protagonists and how their development intertwines with societal norms and cultural influences. It suggests that these protagonists often navigate their identities within the backdrop of urban life, reflecting broader social and cultural trends, such as female empowerment and the complexities of relationships. protagonists typically undergo personal growth, often catalyzed by their experiences and relationships. The study highlights that romantic relationships play a significant role in this growth process, serving as a source of support and validation for the protagonist's self-discovery journey. According to this study, the two Chick-lit is studied and analyzed the protagonist develop and accept their

notion of self support from the romantic relationship. *Born Confused* and *The Dim Sum of All Things* female protagonists confront with their dual identities, negotiating between their American upbringing and their cultural heritage. Through their interactions with male protagonists and the development of romantic relationships, they confront and reconcile these identity conflicts. Ultimately, the study suggests that the resolution of these identity conflicts is intertwined with the protagonist's romantic relationships. As they come to terms with their sense of self, their relationships with their romantic partners also evolve, reflecting a mutual process of acceptance and adaptation within societal norms.

The study of Nugroho and Viladinia (2018) argue that in Sophie Kinsella's *Finding Audrey*, the protagonist Audrey frequently uses denial as a defense mechanism, followed by projection and identification. This means that throughout the story, Audrey mostly denies her uncomfortable feelings and creates her own 'comfort' fantasy to cope with her conflicts. Hence, Audrey frequently battles her own self due to fear and her feelings caused by anxiety, as well as the influence of people around her. This is because the conflict of a person versus themselves is the most frequently observed type of conflict throughout the story. Meanwhile, in dealing with her internal conflicts, Audrey tends to deny her uncomfortable feelings since denial is her most frequently used defence mechanism. Sometimes, the conflicts are a result of the anxiety itself, while at other times, it is her protection mechanisms that cause the conflicts. In the end, Audrey manages to handle her anxiety disorder better than before.

Some researchers studied the relationship between romantic relationships and self-concept development in female protagonists. The study of Austina (2011) provides valuable insights into the relationship between Chick-lit novels and the self-concept development of female protagonists. By examining how these novels impact women's construction of self and romantic feelings, Austina sheds light on the significant role Chick lit plays in reflecting and shaping women's experiences. According to the research, the Chick-lit novel creates a sense of intimacy and connection for woman readers, allowing them to escape into the fictional world while also relating it to their own

lives. As a result, the romantic formulations presented in Chick-lit novels can mirror and influence the way women perceive and navigate romantic relationships in real life.

This research study is on the two famous Chick-lit novels in which the protagonists are women who form a romantic relationship that leads them to the understanding of their self-concept. The researcher analyzes the interplay between career success, romantic relationships, and self-perception, using Andrea's character arc in *The Devil Wears Prada* as a case study. Andrea, a working woman, is chasing success in her career by working hard as an assistant to her evil boss. Andrea forms a romantic relationship with Christian because of their closeness, as he has a good social status and works in the same career field, which affects her breaking up with her boyfriend. The contrast between Andrea's initial aspirations and her eventual realization of her true self, influenced by her experiences in both her career and romantic life, highlights the nuanced exploration of identity in Chick-lit narratives. Andrea realizes that her personality and characteristics are more similar to her evil boss, which ruins the relationship between her and others. In the end, she improves herself against becoming the evil boss and loving her actual self.

Likewise, the protagonist of *Jemima Jones* forms a romantic feeling from the intimacy and the realization of her actual self and aspiration. Jemima's journey seems to be a reflection of society's pressures regarding beauty standards and the lengths individuals may go to in order to conform to them. Her initial decision to alter her appearance in order to attract Brad represents a common struggle many people face when seeking acceptance and love. Jemima begins by keeping a secret about her appearance by retouching her body image because she falls in love with Brad, the sexy guy. After Brad falls in love and expects to meet her, Jemima tries to diet and change her appearance. Finally, Jemima decides to meet Brad in LA after she becomes a thin woman. However, Jemima's realization that she doesn't need to change herself to find happiness is a powerful message. Then, Jemima meets Ben, her old friend, after breaking up with Brad accidentally. Jemima forms a romantic relationship with Ben,

which is grounded in honesty and mutual understanding. Ultimately underscores the importance of being true to oneself in matters of love and personal fulfillment.

This study concludes that romantic relationships are important in women's success and perception of themselves. The result reflects the presentation in Chick-lit about women's perception of themselves reflected in Chick-lit protagonists and draws inspiration from their romantic pursuits. The plot and narrative of the Chick-lit novel are similar to those of a woman in real life because women replace themselves as the main characters when reading a Chick-lit novel and hope to find a good romantic relationship that drives them to life satisfaction.

The results from Austina's study support how Chick-Lit demonstrated the conflict in women's notion of self in terms of adaptation to survive in society. The protagonists in Chick-lit reflect how women fight for society's acceptance; with the conflict on their notion of self, women encounter the need to perceive 'Who am I' while expressing their self-concept for society's acceptance. This study will focus on how Chick-lit protagonists shape and develop their self-concept by using Carl Roger's self-concept theory as a framework. The study will analyze the correlation between the components of self-concept that support the development of self-concept, which reinforces that the protagonist, who relates to the woman in the current era, gets along with others in society.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the methodology for this research. The selection of the novel, the procedure of the study and the analysis method will be described to demonstrate the procedure of this study.

3.1. The Selection of Novel

This research will illustrate the self-concept development in *Can You Keep a Secret?* by examining the protagonist's interactions with people in her social cycle, the research aims to show how enhancing the three components of the self-concept can lead the protagonist to greater life satisfaction. The analysis was conducted with a single objective.

Can You Keep a Secret? has been chosen for the analysis of this research. This novel is one of the famous romantic comedy novels written by Sophie Kinsella, a bestseller novel author who has over 40 million copies and has been published in 60 countries. This novel became a movie in 2019 with famous and exciting content. Also, it has intelligible content as the protagonist's character is related to working women in the city in real life. For this reason, it is appropriate to apply this novel to the study.

3.2. The Procedure of Study

3.1. Study the related research and information about the self-concept of the protagonist:

3.1.1. The concept of self-concept

3.1.2. Developing self-concept through the component of self-concept.

The information in Chapter 2 described the related theory and previous research on self-concept development and its components, which support life satisfaction.

3.2. Collect the data in "Can You Keep a Secret?" for analyzing

3.2.1. Romantic relationship of the protagonist

3.2.2. Interaction between the protagonist and other people in society

3.2.3. Life satisfaction of the protagonist at the end of the story

3.3. Analysis of the protagonist's self-concept development from the data collection

3.4. Discuss and conclude the analysis result.

3.5. Indicated the limit and the advice for future studies

3.3. The Analysis

The qualitative design was adopted to study the result of this research—The relationship between a protagonist and other characters in her social cycle indicated in a novel will apply to self-concept development analysis. The consequence of the analysis process will provide details of the interactions that lead to the protagonist's self-concept development. The theory of self-concept by Carl Rogers will be adapted to be a framework in this research. This theory indicates the association between self-concept and a person's experiences. The previous studies of Mark D. Alicke and Constantine Sedikides will be applied to demonstrate the process of self-enhancement and self-protection for evaluating themselves from the experiences as interaction with society that impact the 3 components of self-concept.

CHAPTER 4

AN ANALYSIS OF SELF-CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT IN *Can You Keep a Secret?*

This chapter aims to analyse the development of the protagonist's self-concept in *Can You Keep a Secret?* using Carl Rogers' self-concept theory. The focus will be on how Emma's self-concept is shaped by self-protection and self-enhancement as she seeks life satisfaction. The chapter will be divided into two sections: Self-Concept's Components Development through Secrets Keeping, Self-Esteem Development, Self-Image Development and Self-Actualization Development.

4.1. The Development of Self-Concept's Components

The protagonist's notion of self is reflected in the three components of her current level: self-esteem, self-image, and self-actualization. The situation that demonstrated Emma's actions and thoughts displayed her current self-concept components, which affect her current self-concept.

The pressure to embody the ideal of a perfect woman can be overwhelming, leading individuals like Emma to resort to secrecy as a means of upholding this image and safeguarding their self-esteem. Secret keeping becomes a strategy for Emma to conceal certain aspects of her life that may not align with the perceived notion of success. Thus, Emma's secret keeping can be perceived as an enhancement and protection process for her self-concept.

Emma's motivation to protect her self-esteem and positive self-image motivates her to withhold certain information, aiming to avoid negative consequences, which could potentially impact her self-concept. Therefore, keeping a secret can be indicated as a protection process by protecting Emma from the negative perception of self. Afifi and Caughlin (2006) suggest that people often conceal information to protect themselves from potential negative outcomes, including damage to their self-esteem or relationships. The awareness to prevent self-esteem and positive self-image from

decreasing motivates people to lie to others to prevent negative results, such as increasing bad relationships, which can impact their self-concept

Meanwhile, conforming to social expectations can boost Emma's self-esteem and self-image, moving individuals closer to self-actualization. Maintaining a secret can indeed serve as a buffer against negative perceptions, preserving one's positive self-image and self-esteem. Additionally, the act of convincing herself of a lie can paradoxically bolster confidence and self-esteem. Correlately to the studies of Afifi and Caughlin (2006) point out that people may strategically withhold certain aspects of themselves or their experiences in order to align more closely with societal expectations, ultimately leading to a more positive self-image and self-esteem potentially advancing towards self-actualization.

Emma can present herself in the best possible light and move closer to becoming the person she wants to be. She boosts her self-esteem and shields herself from potential damage to her self-concept in order to help her feel more in control of how others perceive her, especially in areas like her career and relationships, where she desires success.

4.2. Self-Esteem Development

Emma's low self-esteem is displayed at the beginning of the story. The lack of support and emotional distance from her parents likely contributes to her feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth.

Emma's sense of alienation and dissatisfaction with her family dynamic is palpable in her mom's birthday. Despite her efforts to contribute and be a part of her mom's birthday celebration, she feels sidelined in favour of Kerry, her sibling. Emma's frustration is exacerbated by the contrast between her own efforts to help and the attention lavished on Kerry. Emma feels like an outsider in her own family as if her contributions are not valued or appreciated in the same way as Kerry' because her mom acts as if she is a guest. Additionally, the situation triggers memories when Kerry first joined the family, highlighting Emma's sense of displacement and the shift in attention

and affection within the family. Emma shares love and attention from her family with Kerry because of her parents' empathy for Kerry after losing her parents.

“...Mum and Dad let her have a glass of wine. Mum kept telling me I had to be very kind to her because her mum had died. We all had to be very kind to Kerry. That was why she got my room.” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 57)

Kerry can be interpreted as threatening Emma's esteem because she lost her parents' attention and support. Emma, being the only beloved daughter, feels threatened by Kerry's arrival, which results in a decrease in her self-esteem. According to the study of Orth (2014) suggests that children typically have higher self-esteem than adolescents due to encountering fewer failures and receiving more support from their families. Emma's need for her parents' love and support is evident when she shares her feelings during a vulnerable moment, such as when the airplane accident. Emma splits all her secrets about her feelings toward her parents.

“I've never done anything to make my parents proud of me...It's true. Maybe they used to be proud of me. But then my cousin Kerry came to live with us, and all at once, it was like my parents couldn't see me anymore. All they could see was her. She was fourteen when she arrived, and I was ten, and I thought it was going to be great, you know. Like having an older sister. But it didn't work out like that...” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 32)

The lack of attention and support from her parents have a significant impact on Emma self-esteem and career trajectory. Emma's struggle to find her own talents and passions in the shadow of Kerry's success. For instance, Emma owes her dad for the photography course before becoming a junior in marketing but decided to reassign because of a lack of talent and favour in this career. The inability to find her ability and talent impacted Emma's success in her career. Emma's parents seem to have favoured Kerry over her, and how this favouritism has contributed to Emma's feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. Kerry's success and her own emphasize Emma's feeling of being worthless and her perception of her value. The untrust in Emma's ability affects her parents' ability to compare Emma with Kerry. Regarding the story, Emma's

parents always pursued Emma to behave like Kerry because they trusted Kerry's abilities. Her mom forces Emma to walk as Kerry's walking tip to become a businesswoman. Then, Emma's refusal to conform to her mother's expectations. Emma is blamed by her mom, emphasizing her unconfidence in her character and feeling more alienate.

“Kerry try to help you, Emma!” “You should be grateful! You are good to Emma, Kerry.” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 59)

The lack of parental support leads Emma to try to impress her family with her values. According to the story, Emma is striving to gain approval and validation from her family by making thoughtful gestures like giving her mother a spa coupon as a birthday present. Moreover, Emma asks her colleagues to add the free coupon for the Panther cola bar to the bowling magazine for her grandfather. By seeking to please her family members, Emma seeking validation and affirmation, which can contribute to her sense of worthiness and esteem.

Emma is using secret keeping as a strategy to bolster her self-esteem. The aim of keeping secrets is to retain Emma's esteem by maintaining others' perceptions of her. Secret keeping can be perceived as an element by which Emma protects her esteem to a tolerance level and enhances her worthy feeling.

First, Emma deploys secrets to refuse the bad memory of her bad behaviours toward others. Regarding Alicke and Sedikides (2009) studies, suggests that people tend to prioritize positive memories over negative ones to protect themselves from unpleasant feelings. By deploying secrets to refuse the bad memory of her past behaviors, Emma may indeed be attempting to shield herself from guilt and feelings of worthlessness. Focusing on positive memories and avoiding the recall of negative behaviors can serve as a protective mechanism for her psychological well-being. Additionally, keeping secrets about her past behaviors can serve as a protective mechanism by preventing the repetition of negative feelings associated with those memories.

Emma's refusal to remember her bad memories is conveyed once she gets back home for her mom's birthday. Emma's mom asks her to feed the golden fish because she is busy preparing food. Emma is struggling with feelings of guilt and is actively trying to suppress or forget those bad memories in order to protect her self-esteem. The request from Emma's mom reminds her of her bad memories of guilt because Emma replaced her parent's golden fish, Sammy, once her parents were not at home. Emma's decision to keep her guilt a secret from her parents suggests that she fears their disappointment or judgment if they were to find out what she did. This fear of negative consequences could be driving her desire to forget this bad memory for a while.

"Sammy, the goldfish at home isn't the same gold fish that Mom and Dad gave me to look after when they went to Egypt" (Kinsella, 2018, p. 12).

The truth about her guilt can also impact the relationship between Emma and her parents. Emma fears that her parents will view her even more negatively, which could further damage her self-esteem and desire for their support and approval. Emma feels she hasn't brought pride to her parents in the past, impact her seeking validation and closeness from them to support her feeling worthy. Secrets can indeed serve as a protective mechanism to protect the relationship with her parents for her esteem.

Another situation in which Emma refuses her bad memories for her self-esteem is when Emma fails to receive a chance at a career promotion. Emma begs her boss, Paul, to provide her with the opportunity to progress in her career. However, Paul cannot make Emma meet her expectations because of her failure at the meeting conference with the client and because Paul is unconvinced about Emma's ability. Then, Emma's response to avoid confronting her failure by distancing herself from her parents. Confronting disappointment and acknowledging setbacks can be challenging, especially when it involves disappointing loved ones or feeling inadequate in their eyes.

Second, secrets are also applied as the self-serving bias to protect self-esteem. Emma keep secrets about her destructive behaviors to maintain self-esteem and reduce feelings of guilt. By focusing on her perceived goodness and downplaying

her badness, she can shield herself from the negative consequences of her actions and maintain a higher level of self-esteem. Keeping secrets support her biased worthy of herself, Emma can effectively manage her self-esteem in the face of potentially damaging behaviours.

Emma biases her attitude to prevent her self-esteem from decreasing once she reveals her guilt about faking her grade. Emma, who has low self-esteem, faked her grade when applying to the Panthers as a junior marketing position because she had inadequate confidence in her ability. Emma keeps her actions a secret because revealing them would highlight her inadequacies and potentially jeopardize her career. Emma convince herself that what she did was justified or not as morally wrong as it actually is by realized that she is working hard after getting the job.

“And anyway, It’s not as if I faked my degree, is it? It’s not as if I’ve got a criminal record or something. I’m a good employee. I try hard and I don’t skive off that often, and I put in all that overtime with the sportswear promotion, and I organized the Christmas raffle...” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 79).

The flashback of bad memories can indeed be emotionally distressing, especially if they're linked to feelings of guilt. This guilt stems from feeling incapable or not living up to certain standards, which can definitely impact Emma's sense of value and esteem. Emma fears that if others were to find out about her bad actions, they might perceive her as a liar and an unreliable colleague. This fear is valid, as people's perceptions of Emma can greatly influence her self-esteem. Keeps her guilt a secret to shield her from others' negative perceptions, thus preserving her self-esteem.

Third, Emma blames others as a factor in her unsuccessful life instead of blaming herself to protect her esteem. Alicke and Sedikides (2009) state that people tend to attribute their successes to internal factors (like their own abilities) but attribute their failures to external factors (like other people or circumstances) in order to maintain positive self-esteem. Blaming others can be a mechanism people deploy to protect the risk feeling impacts their perception of their worth. By shifting the blame away from herself, Emma avoids feeling personally inadequate or incompetent.

Emma displays her behaviours by blaming others once she keeps secrets from her parents about her unsuccessful life. Emma keeps a secret about being unsupported by Kerry once she is applying for a job at Kerry's company. Kerry makes Emma feel humiliated and increases her feelings of being a loser. Not receiving support from her family emphasizes Emma's feeling worthless and decreases her confidence in being a successful woman. Keeping secrets about her failures and lack of support from Kerry is a way to shield herself from further judgment or disappointment, particularly from her parents. Blaming Kerry for her perceived failures could be a protection mechanism for Emma, allowing her to externalize her feelings of inadequacy and avoid confronting them directly.

"You knew exactly what you were doing! You knew how desperate I was! Ever since you've arrived in the family, you've tried to squash me down. You tease me about my crap career. You boast about yourself, and I spend my entire life feeling small and stupid." (Kinsella, 2018, p. 239).

Emma also uses secrets as an element to blame others for enhancing her self-esteem. Blaming others can serve as a way for her to avoid facing her own guilt or responsibility for negative behaviours. Emma increases her confidentiality by blaming others as a factor that forces her to engage in bad behaviour and increases her esteem by avoiding blaming herself.

Emma blames others for being righteous in her actions toward her colleagues. For instance, Emma keeps secrets about her bad behaviour on Artemis's plant. Emma, who feels like a loser, consistently receives the insulted act from Artemis. The bad behaviours from Artemis lead Emma to pour the orange juice into Artemis's plant when Artemis is not at her desk. Emma blames Artemis's bad behaviours as a factor that leads her to behave negatively instead of blaming her guilt. Blaming others for one's own actions is a common protection mechanism, and Emma is using it to justify her own behaviour while maintaining a facade of righteousness.

"When my colleague Artemis really annoys me, I feed her pants orange juices" (Kinsella, 2018, p. 12).

To avoid feeling guilty, Emma keeps her actions a secret because it impacts others' perception of her as a mean colleague. Others' perceptions emphasize Emma's guilt and decrease the opportunity to blame herself, affecting her worthy perception. Blaming others helps Emma keep secrets and enhances her self-esteem, enhancing her confidence in her actions.

Keeping secrets as a way to protect herself from negative feelings, particularly guilt, which she associates with low self-esteem. Emma maintains a positive view in the eyes of others to preserve her self-esteem. This aligns with the idea that people with low self-esteem may be more concerned about how they are perceived by others and may go to great lengths to avoid experiences that threaten their self-esteem (Westfall et al., 2020). Keeping secrets can ensure that others will positively perceive and attitude toward her by supporting her esteem.

4.3. Self-Image Development

Emma's self-image is displayed negatively through her relationship with Connor, her boyfriend. Emma's self-image is suffering, possibly due to comparisons she is making between herself and others, like Barbie, and through her romantic relationship with Connor. Emma's idealization of Connor as a perfect man resembles a *Ken* doll. However, Emma views herself as different from *Barbie*, who has a perfect image because she is an unsuccessful woman. This suggests that Emma is seeking validation and affirmation from external sources, such as physical appearance or societal status.

Feeling accepted and supported by a partner is indeed important for people's self-image and overall well-being. However, Connor never supports Emma's ability in her career path, which affects her perception as not belonging as a perfect woman image. For instance, Emma once gave her opinion during a meeting. Emma tries to convey her opinion about the Panther Bar development to others on the team and seeks others' agreement with her opinion, especially from her boyfriend. However, Connor ignored her opinion and said it was neither a good idea nor correlated with his research.

“To be honest, I feel a bit hurt. Why did Connor have to say that? I know he wants to be all professional and proper when we’re at work. But that’s not the same as being mean. Is it?” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 98)

The less support from a lover emphasizes Emma’s feeling that it is inappropriate to be a good lover for Connor. The reason is Emma’s self-esteem level also correlates with her negative self-image from feeling insecure in a romantic relationship. Emma’s unconfident impacts her retaining a good relationship with Connor. Correlate to the research Murray et al. (2008), with low self-esteem often struggle with feelings of insecurity within their relationships, fearing abandonment or rejection from their partner due to their perceived inadequacies. Emma, who views her image negatively, fears losing her boyfriend. Emma feels inappropriate to Connor because she is not a perfect girl. with low self-esteem often struggle with feelings of insecurity within their relationships, fearing abandonment or rejection due to their perceived inadequacies. In the beginning, once Emma returns to London after a failure to meet with the client, Connor presence at the airport upon her return to London serves as a tangible demonstration of his support for her career aspirations. Emma's expression of happiness and appreciation signifies the positive impact of Connor's encouragement on the relationship.

The insecurity in the relationship impacts her conforming to Connor because of Emma’s negative self-image. Emma feels insecure about herself and believes she doesn't belong, which affects her perception of Connor and herself. Emma sees Connor as *too good* for her, which further undermines her self-image. This insecurity leads her to conform to Connor's wishes and interests, even when she disagrees with them, in order to gain his approval and acceptance. According to Leary and Baumeister (2000), people hiding their true selves in relationships to gain acceptance resonates with Emma's situation. Emma, with her negative self-image, feels the need to seek approval from Connor, leading her to suppress her own desires and opinions to fit his expectations of her. Moving in together intensifies this dynamic, as

Emma feels pressured to meet Connor's demands, such as calling him 'darling', even if she doesn't feel comfortable with it.

“...took me to all these jazz concerts and I pretended to enjoy them to be polite, so now he thinks I love jazz...” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 35).

Emma's negative self-image impacts her demand to belong with him as a perfect girlfriend. Emma fears being seen as an inadequate partner and goes along with Connor's expectations to maintain the relationship and prevent a *bad girlfriend* from Connor's perception.

Keeping secrets can indeed be closely tied to how we want others to perceive us and how we perceive ourselves. Emma's desire to maintain a positive self-image and to be perceived positively by others can be a significant driving force behind her decision to keep secrets. Emma believes that others hold a positive perception of her, and keeping secrets could serve to maintain or enhance that perception, reinforcing her desired self-image.

First, Emma keeps secrets by deceiving herself to maintain her image and relationship with Connor. By deceiving herself about any negative aspects of their relationship or her own behaviour, Emma protects the self-image she presents to others because rejecting the truth negatively impacting self-image. Being Connor's girlfriend shapes Emma's image in others' perceptions as a good woman who is lucky to have a perfect boyfriend. The good relationship with Connor can be perceived as an important factor that prevents Emma from developing a good image.

“I've never been in love...”(Kinsella, 2018, p. 32)

Emma deceives herself about her real feelings and rejects the truth of her demand to break up with Connor by thinking of his goodness. struggling with guilt or discomfort about wanting to end the relationship, leading her to suppress those feelings and rationalize them as anxiety from the recent airplane accident.

“...This is ridiculous. I mean, there's so much that is wonderful about Connor. From hos...his long legs. Yes. And his broad shoulders. To the time he looked

after me when I had a flu. I mean, how many boyfriends do that? Exactly. I'm so lucky, I really am." (Kinsella, 2018, p. 23).

Deception, both towards herself and potentially towards Connor, seems to play a significant role in maintaining the relationship. Emma uses self-deception as a protection mechanism to avoid confronting her true desires or needs and to preserve a certain image of herself and her relationship with Connor. By convincing herself that Connor is good and that she is content with the relationship as it is, Emma is able to justify suppressing her real demands or desires for her self-image.

Emma also deceives herself about her true feelings for Jack as a protective mechanism, shielding her from potential consequences like damaging her relationship with Connor or altering others' perceptions of her. Once Emma realizes her feelings toward Jack, she keeps them a secret from everyone and deceives herself that the love feelings occur from the accident on the aeroplane. Accepting the truth of her feelings toward Jack would indeed be a significant upheaval for Emma. It forces her to confront her own desires and reassess her relationship with Connor.

Emma also deceives others about her unstable relationship with Connor to retain others' perception of her image. Emma discusses her decision to move to live with Connor for a close relationship with her best friend, Lissy. However, Lissy disagrees with her idea and asks Emma to ensure her relationship. Emma insists to Lissy that the relationship between her and Connor is normally the same as the other couple. Deceiving Lissy ensures Emma's image as a good girlfriend who demands to marry her boyfriend in the near future.

"Yes. There was a time by the river when I thought those big white birds were geese, and Connor thought they were swans. Exactly. We're normal. I know it."(Kinsella, 2018, p. 67)

Second, Emma blames others for enduring the relationship between her and Connor for her self-image. Blaming others for her own actions or emotions is a common mechanism people use to protect themselves from facing uncomfortable truths about themselves. The secret about her demand to break up with Connor and her

feelings toward them risk her image perception. Hence, Emma blames others for her fault instead of blaming herself for protecting her perception of being a bad woman.

The situation in which Emma blames others is once Emma avoids meeting Jack because of her fear of disclosing her real demands. By avoiding meeting Jack and attributing blame to him for her decisions, she's creating a shield to protect her self-image from the perceived stigma of breaking up with her boyfriend. Meeting Jack impacts Emma's realization of her feelings about breaking up with Connor, which impacts her bad image.

“You know, I wish I'd never sat next to you on that stupid plane! You go around, saying all these things to wind me up, behaving as though you know me better than anyone else - ” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 148)

Meanwhile, once Emma breaks up with Connor, she also rejects encountering situations to meet Connor because it impacts her negative feelings as a mean. Emma avoids situations that might exacerbate her negative feelings or lead to judgment from others. Also, meeting Connor emphasizes others' negative perception of her as a bad girlfriend who left the perfect man. The other's perception negatively impacts Emma's perception of herself, affecting her esteem and image because of her guilty feelings. Avoiding to meet Connor can prevent the decrease of good image and esteem from refusing her guilt.

Third, Emma keeps secrets to retain a good relationship with others by deploying a self-serving bias process. By keeping certain secrets, she maintains a positive self-image and reinforces the perception others have of her as a kind and trustworthy friend. Regarding the study by Kobayashi (2003), people always get close to others with the same personalities and favours because it can confirm a person's perception. Retaining a close relationship supports others' perception of her good image as a kind friend and increases her positive self-image.

To ensure her good image, Emma keeps secrets to retain their relationship with Katie, her close colleague. The secret keeping always occurs when Katie gives Emma her DIY crochet as a gift. Emma preserves their bond by not openly expressing

her dislike for crochet, consistently pretending to love the gifts and then lying about losing them

“For a few moments, I can’t move. A crochet head-scarf. - Katie

‘Katie’, I manage at last, turning it over in my fingers. ‘Really, you...you shouldn’t have!’ (Kinsella, 2018, p. 101).

Keeping her dislike a secret helps Emma increase her good image by receiving acceptance. Emma manages her image by keeping certain aspects of herself hidden to maintain a positive perception from others. Utilizing Katie's admiration and positive perception of her seems to be a key part of the self-serving bias strategy, reinforcing our own self-image.

Emma deployed Katie's positive perception of her to reinforce her own self-serving bias. By cultivating an image of herself as a good person with a perfect romantic relationship, Emma ensures that Katie's admiration and support further solidify her confidence in a good image.

Emma also deploys a self-serving bias process to righteous her bad act toward Jemima. Emma adapted self-serving bias to interpret situations in a way that benefits herself and protects her self-image. For instance, Emma always steals Jemima's outfit and keeps secret about this negative behaviour. To protect her negative view of her image, Emma thinks bias to her act as Jemima is a selfish flatmate who does not allow her to borrow the clothes and accessories. This attitude allows her to justify her actions and avoid feelings of guilt or remorse.

“...But in our defence, she has so many, she hardly ever notices. Plus, according to Lissy, it's a basic human right that flatmates should be able to borrow each other's clothes” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 48).

Emma's desire for a good image leads her to resort to stealing. Jemima's clothes are without regret because a good impression can support her good view of her image. The insecurities about her true appearance lead her to hide it from others. The self-serving bias process is deployed to justify her actions by convincing herself that they are necessary for maintaining her positive image

Emma uses self-serving bias and deception to protect her self-esteem and maintain a positive image in the eyes of others. By withholding information about her real appearance, Emma is likely trying to avoid potential judgment or criticism that could threaten her confidence. For instance, Emma lies to others about her real weight. Emma let Connor misunderstand her weight to support her good perception of her image.

"I weight 9 stone 3. Not 8 stone 3, like my boyfriend Corner thinks. (Although in my defence, I was planning to go on a diet when I told him that. And to be fair, it is only one number different)." (Kinsella, 2018, p. 11)

Emma justifies her lies about her weight loss efforts by focusing on the intention behind them (losing weight) rather than the dishonesty itself. Avoiding the guilt from bias on her lie helped enhance Emma's confidence in her good image.

4.4. Self-Actualization Development

Regarding her self-esteem and self-image at the beginning, Emma is far from success in her career because of her unworthy feelings and negative image. Pursuing success in her career can definitely help boost her confidence and sense of self-worth. Achieving her professional goals may also lead to receiving more recognition and validation from her parents, which could further bolster her self-esteem. Success in her career could positively impact Emma's relationship with Connor. It makes her feel more confident and secure in her role as his girlfriend, as success often brings a sense of fulfilment and empowerment. Moreover, being seen as an urban working woman can enhance Emma's self-image and contribute to her overall sense of identity and worth.

A woman's urban life influences Emma's demand to become a successful woman in her aspect. The study of Brewis (2004) indicated that urban environments create a culture of competitiveness where success is highly valued. The urban surroundings and the success of her peers, like Kerry and Lissy, strongly influence her aspirations and perception of success. Emma sees Kerry's entrepreneurial success and harmonious personal life, as well as Lissy's pursuit of her dream career, as benchmarks for success. (Murray et al., 2008) indicated that the success of close relationships influences personal goals and motivates people to strive for success in their careers.

Emma's comparison of her own achievements to those of Kerry and Lissy leads to feelings of inferiority. However, the other's success impacts her goal of becoming a successful working woman and belonging to the urban working woman society.

Emma is facing a challenging environment in her workplace, with competitiveness and negative attitudes from her colleagues impacting her self-esteem and confidence. Regarding the story, Emma always receives insults from Nick, her colleague, because of her position as a junior in marketing. Nick's behaviour seems particularly hurtful, as he always undermines her ideas and contributes to her feeling undervalued. For instance, once Paul, her boss, informs Nick to provide a new idea about Panther's Bar. Emma has an idea to promote Panther's Bar by creating a coupon for the bowling magazine. Emma tries to convey her idea to Nick, but Nick insults her idea by behaving to her as a fool.

"Panther Bars are your product, aren't they?"

"If you can call them a product" – Nick said, rolling his eyes. (Kinsella, 2018)

Emma also receives insulted action from Althemis, another team colleague who sits beside her. Being publicly belittled or humiliated can indeed have a significant impact on Emma's values and sense of belonging in the workplace. For instance, once Althemis call with her parents. She tells her parents that Emma is her assistant because Emma's position is junior.

"Emma" "Did you hear that? I want you to find the leaflet we did for Tesco promotion two years ago. Sorry, Mummy." "Just telling my assistant something." (Kinsella, 2018, p. 92)

Also, Emma is facing a situation where her abilities are being underestimated and undervalued by her colleagues. At the beginning of the story, Paul, Emma's boss, sends Emma to a meeting with the client because he is sure that Emma cannot persuade the client to agree. According to Brewis (2004), people in society have a gender bias in the workplace, where women often encounter barriers to recognition and advancement despite their qualifications and skills. Paul's behaviour towards Emma, such as sending her to meetings with low expectations of success and assigning her

less important tasks, mirrors the findings of Brewis's study regarding societal underestimation of women's abilities. Emma's limited engagement in meaningful tasks impacts her to socialize with colleagues rather than focus on substantive work due to the lack of recognition of her abilities.

The story demonstrates Emma's desire for success and advancement in her career. Once Paul sends Emma to the meeting with the client, Emma expects that this meeting will be successful because she expects to receive a promotion chance. However, Emma's failure to deliver effectively during the meeting showcases the challenges she faces in achieving her goals.

Although Emma was unsuccessful in the meeting, Emma is persistent in pleading for a promotion from Paul. This situation can reflect Emma's self-actualization to become a successful working woman.

"It said. It said in the ad of my job... Possible promotion after a year. It says it right there"(Kinsella, 2018, p. 89).

The position of junior in marketing cannot help Emma become a successful working woman who belongs to the urban society. Being stuck in a junior position impacts others' perception of Emma as a loser. Emma seeks a promotion as a means of validating her worth and overcoming feelings of inferiority in the workplace. Increasing her positive self-image and self-esteem can support her to pursue self-actualization as a successful woman.

Emma deploys secrets to develop her self-esteem and self-image until she achieves her self-actualization. Keeping secrets aims to develop Emma's esteem and perception of her image until she feels close to her ideal self. Secrets can be perceived as an element that enhances and protects Emma's self-actualization.

First, Emma keeps secrets about her jealous feelings to ensure her positive perception. Emma hides her feelings and convinces herself that Jemima's life isn't as perfect as it seems. Emma's jealousy towards Jemima appears to stem from a sense of inferiority she feels in comparison to her. Despite Jemima not having a successful career, Emma perceives her as leading a perfect life, with a flawless image and

satisfaction in her romantic relationship. Emma's struggle with her own jealousy and the need to maintain a positive perception of herself leads her to deny or downplay Jemima's positive attributes. The reason is Jemima is a confident woman who is satisfied with her romantic relationship without having a perfect boyfriend. Jemima's character leads Emma to keep her jealous feelings a secret and deceive herself.

"...She's wearing a pale pink jeans and tight white top and as usual, she looks perfectly tanned and groomed. In theory, Jemima has a job working in a sculpture gallery. But all she ever seems to do is have bits her waxed and plucked and massaged, and go on dates with city bankers, whose salary she always checked out before she says yes." (Kinsella, 2018, p. 45).

The secret about Emma's jealousy of Jemima serves as a protection mechanism for Emma, allowing her to distance herself from confronting aspects of herself that she perceives as less than ideal. Accepting Jemima's character, which embodies traits that Emma perceives as superior or more aligned with her ideal self, may indeed negatively impact Emma's self-image. Murray et al. (2008) point out that people are less receptive to those who are significantly different from them or who evoke negative self-concepts. Emma's feeling of not belonging to urban life leads to her set of characteristics associated with urban living, which she perceives Jemima as embodying more fully. This further complicates Emma's struggle with her self-image and her ability to pursue her self-actualization.

Second, Emma keeps secrets about her real character and pretends to be someone else to feel close to her self-actualization. Emma presents herself in a way that she believes will be socially acceptable or favourable. Pretending to be others supports others' positive perception of Emma as an urban woman from her good image. It supports her value perception, increasing her chance to be close to her self-actualization.

"She wears lucky underwear on the first dates...she borrows designer shoes from her flatmate and passes them off as her own." (Kinsella, 2018, p. 263)

Emma is engaging in a form of impression management, where she presents herself in a way that she believes will garner social acceptance and support from others. Correlate to Alicke and Sedikides (2009) indicated that people may set secondary goals if they are unable to achieve their primary goals. In Emma's case, her primary goal of achieving her ideal self may be hindered by low self-esteem and negative self-perception. As a result, she may resort to adopting the persona of others whom she perceives as embodying traits she desires, thereby receive the social acceptance that impacts her feeling close to her ideal self.

Also, Emma keeps secrets and pretends to be a sophisticate in others' perception. Emma feels the need to present herself a positive way, even if it means hiding her true feelings from someone she is close to. The situation displays Lissy perception of Emma once Lissy and Emma go to the secret bar. Lissy forces Emma to act as a celebrity by forbidding Emma to stare at celebrities at a bar. Hence, Emma tries to keep her excitement a secret to maintain her character as a sophisticated woman.

"Honestly. Who does Lissy think I am? I'm a cool and sophisticated Londoner. I don't get excited by stupid celebrities. I was just *mentioning* it, that's all." (Kinsella, 2018, p. 129)

The secret keeping on Emma's attitude helps retain her image as an urban woman, which increases Emma's feeling close to her ideal self. Emma, who cannot achieve her primary goal as an urban woman, set her second goal as a sophisticated woman. The achievement of the second goal supports Emma's prevention of her feeling too far from her ideal self.

Another situation in which Emma keeps secrets is to pretend to be sophisticated and urbanity to impress Jack. Emma pretends to be an urban woman to impress Jack by planning to bring him to a secret bar. However, Emma her memory lapse regarding the address of the secret bar throws a bit of a wrench into her plans. Instead of admitting her forgetfulness, Emma improvises by taking Jack to another venue, hoping to keep up the façade and continue to impress him. Jack's impressment reinforces her perception of herself as a perfect lover.

Third, Emma keeps secrets by deceiving about her feelings and demands a romantic relationship. The situation displays her deception is once Connor asks Emma to call him a darling to increase their intimate feeling when she decides to live with him. By deceiving herself and going along with Connor even though she doesn't agree with it, Emma is avoiding addressing her true feelings and desires.

“Absolutely!’ I say quickly. ‘I mean, you’re right. Of course we should.’ I clear my throat. ‘Darling!’ (Kinsella, 2018, p. 43)

Emma feels close to her ideal self as a perfect lover when she receives acceptance from Connor. Lewandowski Jr and Nardone (2010) stated that people with low self-esteem might be more curious about the love from their partner from an unsatisfactory relationship than people with high self-esteem. Emma seems to seek validation and acceptance from Connor because she sees him as someone who embodies traits she admires or desires in herself. However, her perception of Connor as *too perfect* could be contributing to her feelings of instability in the relationship. Emma’s willingness to conform to Connor's interests and preferences is driven by a desire to maintain closeness and acceptance in the relationship. By aligning herself with Connor's likes and dislikes, Emma demands to strengthen their bond and feel more secure in his affection.

Emma also deceives herself to conform to Jack’s idea by keeping her real demands a secret. By concealing her true wishes and conforming to Jack’s expectations, Emma demands to gain his approval and feel closer to what she perceives as the ideal partner. Emma conforms to Jack’s idea once she dates Jack at the perfect restaurant. Jack orders everything in Emma’s dream of a perfect date without asking Emma’s demands. However, Emma needs to make her own decision about her dish. Emma conforms to Jack’s decisions and keeps her real demand to impress Jack as his perfect lover.

“I wonder what the watermelon drink tastes like

Stop it. Champagne is perfect. Jack's right, this is the perfect start to a date” (Kinsella, 2018, p. 177).

Keeping her real demands a secret and conforming to Jack's expectations to maintain a positive image in his eyes. By keeping her real demands a secret and aligning herself with what she perceives Jack wants, Emma feels closer to her ideal self. Ultimately, acceptance and admiration from Jack boost Emma's confidence, driving her towards self-actualization as a good partner.

Emma also deceives herself about her romantic relationship to ensure she feels close to a perfect lover. By presenting herself as having a perfect lover and emphasizing shared interests and attitudes with Jack, Emma attempts to convince herself and others that she has found an ideal partner. However, her friend Lissy seems to be questioning the authenticity of Emma's claims, pointing out that Emma is the only one sharing information, which suggests a lack of reciprocal communication from Jack. Emma deceives by confirming that Jack shares everything with her to ensure she feels close to having a perfect romantic relationship.

"We're sharing with each other' I say, looking away and fiddling with a fridge magnet. Which is true, I tell myself firmly. Jack's shared loads with me! I mean, he's told me...He's told me all about... Well, anyway. He probably just hasn't been in the mood for talking very much. Is that a crime?" (Kinsella, 2018, p. 251).

The deception process helps Emma to prevent her curiosity about Jack's feelings toward her. The secret about her curiosity toward Jack's feelings can impact Emma's perception of having a perfect lover. The secret keeping of her real attitude toward Jack enhances Emma's confidence to have a perfect romantic life.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study is conducted to study the development of the self-concept through the Chick-lit protagonist in *Can You Keep a Secret?* Carl Roger's theory of self-concept is chosen to explain what self-concept is, how it forms, and how it evolves through the components of self-concept. This chapter presents the findings about developing the protagonist's self-concept and how it links to her goal achievement. At the end of this chapter, there are also research ideas for further investigation.

5.1. Discussion

Emma developed her self-concept from the changing of her self-esteem and self-image until she closed to self-actualization. Emma deploys secret keeping as an element to enhance and protect her self-esteem and self-image for self-actualization. As a result, Emma feels close to self-actualization, which impacts how she evaluates her positive self-concept.

5.1.1. Achieving Goal as a Perfect Daughter

Emma's self-concept at the beginning of the novel is negative because of her low self-esteem and negative self-image. Emma's upbringing, characterized by a lack of parental care and support, indeed seems to have a significant impact on her self-esteem and self-image. This aligns with Carl Rogers' self-concept theory, which emphasizes the role of experiences, especially early ones, in shaping how individuals perceive themselves. This aligns with Carl Rogers' self-concept theory. (1951, as cited in Ismail & Tekke, 2015), which emphasizes the role of experiences, especially early ones, in shaping how individuals perceive themselves. Emma's comparison to her sibling Kerry, who receives support and achieves success, further exacerbates her negative self-concept. This comparison likely reinforces her feelings of inadequacy and contributes to her belief that she is a loser compared to Kerry. The lack of parental acknowledgement of Emma's achievements could also deepen her sense of worthlessness and hinder her confidence in pursuing her own path or career.

Secret keeping is a function of self-protection and self-enhancement that supports Emma's relationship with her parents. The demand of a positive image in her parents' eyes and feels motivated to succeed, especially when compared to her successful sibling Kerry. Emma keeps her failures in her work life a secret and deploys Kerry's successful life to stimulate her demand to develop herself. This comparison acts as a catalyst for Emma to strive for success, not only for herself but also to fulfil her parents' expectations and pride in becoming a perfect daughter. The pressure to succeed in her job and meet promotion demands may drive her to conceal any setbacks or negative behaviours at work.

In addition, Emma keeps secrets about her negative behaviours to protect her relationship with her parents closely. The good relationship with her parents supports Emma in retaining her feeling of worthiness as a beloved daughter and a good working employee even though she cannot bring pride to her parents. Retaining the relationship with her parents supports Emma's self-esteem and self-image at a tolerant level. Emma's parents' favourable impression of her derived from their awareness of Emma's poor actions and unsuccessful life, which could help Emma build a positive sense of herself. The positive perception from their parents impacts her notion of improvement, which supports Emma in pursuing her success in her career and achieving it in the end.

5.1.2. Achieving Goal as a Perfect Working Woman

In the beginning, Emma is experiencing a significant challenge in her workplace, where her colleagues' perceptions of her are affecting her self-esteem and confidence. Emma's colleagues perceive her as a loser in office and unprovided her to prove her ability. Westfall et al. (2020) stated that others' perceptions of a person impact a person's perception of themselves by supporting negative and positive perceptions. Emma has less confidence and pride in her life and perceives a more negative self-image. The consequence is that Emma has less confidence to express her ideas and attitude. The less confidence because of her unsuccessful life impacts her self-esteem

level and negative self-image. As a result, Emma decides to maintain her privacy in order to improve her sense of self-worth and positivity.

Secrets keeping has a function as self-enhancement by enhancing Emma's demand to develop herself by keeping secrets. By comparing herself to successful peers like Kerry, Emma hides her own failures and shortcomings from others, particularly her parents, in order to maintain a positive self-image and bolster her confidence in pursuing her goals. Also, the secret about Emma's failure supports Emma in perceiving her good image appropriately so that she can compare herself with others who are successful. Emma also compares herself with her close friend and flatmate's success to set her goal by developing self-esteem and self-image. The demand to be successful as her close friend and flatmate impacts Emma's keeping her negative secret for her good image and more confidence.

Emma's good self-image and self-esteem are also hindered by the secret. Emma likewise places the blame for her low self-esteem and negative self-image on others while keeping her dangerously secret about her remorse. Emma tries to hide her failure by not contacting her parents once she doesn't get the promotion because it highlights her miserable life. Emma's perceived lack of achievement and her image as a failure diminish her value in the eyes of others. Hiding her shame about her bad habits from her colleagues also contributed to her knowledge of her declining self-esteem and self-image. Emma's good reputation and self-esteem are supported by others' positive perceptions of her, which she maintains by keeping her bad behaviour a secret.

Emma feels that she realizes her potential as a successful woman, which is supported by her unwillingness to discuss her negative behaviours and her comparison of others' achievements. Emma's positive perception, among others, is maintained by shielding her from the truth about her guilt, thus enhancing her self-esteem and positive self-image. Emma gains confidence and a positive self-concept from the comparison process, which enhances her degree of self-esteem and positive self-image. Finally, Emma feels more successful in her work path because of her growing sense of self-esteem and self-image.

5.1.3. Achieving Goal as a Perfect Lover

The secret keeping also supports Emma's self-concept, which develops as a success in a romantic relationship from retaining the relationship with her boyfriend. Secret keeping, by concealing Emma's feelings and attitude toward her partner, is used to protect and enhance the romantic relationship.

Keeping a secret about her true emotions and mindset strengthens her intimate bond with her spouse and helps her feel worthy and secure in her relationship. After Emma and Connor start dating, Emma tries to preserve her self-worth and positive reputation by asserting that she still loves Connor. The loss of Connor, her pride and sole pride, will make her feel less proud and lower her self-esteem. Additionally, losing Connor makes her seem like a poor girlfriend, which lowers her self-esteem. Emma also safeguards her reputation and worth by compromising to win over a lover. Emma is able to avoid unpleasant feelings by receiving approval from a partner based on how they see her.

Meanwhile, the acceptance and others' positive perception of unknowing the truth enhance Emma's self-esteem and self-image as a self-enhancement process. The other's perception of Emma as a lucky woman who has a perfect romantic life from secret keeping supports Emma's demand to have a perfect romantic life. Emma's self-actualization was to become the ideal girlfriend and use other people's positive opinions of her to boost her self-esteem and confidence. Emma benefits from maintaining secrets because it helps her establish a favourable self-image and boosts people's positive opinions of her, both of which help her achieve self-actualization.

Emma's self-concept is supported by her evolving sense of self-esteem and self-image, which arises from her decision to maintain a connection with a partner rather than conceal her true sentiments. Emma's development of her self-concept ultimately results from her self-actualization as a good girlfriend.

In the end, Emma, who develops her self-esteem and self-image from secrets, achieves her self-actualization by feeling close to being a perfect woman. Self-

esteem and self-image development support Emma's evaluation of her current worth and image. Emma derives her sense of worth and identity from trying to achieve self-actualization by recognizing her value by relying on secrets. This growth in self-esteem and self-image enables her to pursue her goals with confidence, including her career aspirations, and it also impacts her relationships, including her relationship with her parents and her romantic partner.

The result from this study is related to the previous study about the association between secret keeper's behaviour and self-concept. At the beginning of the story, Emma's consideration of the consequences of revealing secrets and her decision to keep them aligned with research suggest that people with negative self-concepts are more likely to be cautious about disclosing secrets. Emma's behaviours, supported by the previous research, stated that people with negative self-concepts are always concerned about the consequences of revealing secrets before making their decision (Afifi & Caughlin, 2006; Davis et al., 2021; Richards & L., 2014). Emma decides to keep her secrets from the evaluation of the result, increasing her addiction to secrets for her evaluation of herself.

On the other hand, Emma displays her self-concept development from secrets keeping addiction after the meeting failure. The previous study of Afifi and Caughlin (2006) stated that people with a negative self-concept may disclose their secrets to reaffirm their negative beliefs about themselves. Emma, on the other hand, maintains her secrecy despite achieving success in her romantic relationship and career. Emma's actions and behaviours support her intention to keep secrets until the end of the story. Although Jack reveals Emma's secret, Emma still keeps her others afterwards even though she is achieved in her romantic relationship and her career progress. Emma's secrets keeping addiction supports her self-concept development as having a positive self-concept.

This study correlated with the previous study by Austina (2011), which studied the relationship between self-concept development and romantic relationships. Emma's self-concept can develop positively from a good romantic relationship with

Jack, increasing the components of her positive self-concept. Emma feels supported and respected in the relationship and doesn't have to hide who she really is, which helps her view of herself to change for the better. A romantic relationship supports a person's self-concept development because the perception and acceptance of a partner influence a person's self-concept positively (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Lewandowski Jr & Nardone, 2010; Murray et al., 2008). The good relationship and acceptance from her partner increase her positive self-concept by accepting her actual self and having a perfect boyfriend. By the end of the story, Emma feels more like the accomplished woman she always wanted to be because of the shifts in her self-concept. In a similar vein, the protagonist in *The Devil's Wear Prada* shapes her identity based on her need for professional achievement. By the end of the story, *Finding Audrea*, the protagonist, has fulfilled her dream of having a fulfilling romantic relationship.

5.2. Conclusion

The study's findings emphasize how changes in the elements of self-concept, which have to do with how people see their own needs and capacities, is able to help people grow their sense of who they are. As Chick-lit is inspired by real-world women, more research should inquire the significance of self-concept and how it supports the protagonist's achievement of life happiness.

The result of this study displays the importance of self-concept components as an element in developing people's self-concept. Secrets, which people employ as tools for enhancement and protection, can influence self-esteem and self-image until they feel they are approaching self-actualization. Secrets are conducted to develop people's self-concept from various perspectives. To avoid negative outcomes impacting self-concept, secrets are performed to prevent people's guilt and negative feedback from others. By keeping secrets, people sustain positive relationships with others to enhance their positive attitude, impacting their close to the ideal self.

All of the perspectives on how self-concept development displays the importance of self-concept development in women. In addition, a woman in the 21st

century becomes a working woman, a team leader, and eventually an executive due to changes in women's responsibilities. However, masculine values still remain in the perception of some people in society, which affects the inequality of progress in careers between genders.

5.3. Suggestion for Further Studies

Future research requires concentrating on how working women's growth of their self-concepts affects their acceptance at work. Future research on how self-concept development helps a woman's success will serve to reinforce the need of working women's self-development in order to thrive in the real world.



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