

A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF KINSELLA'S MY (NOT SO) PERFECT LIFE

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A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Kinsella's My (not so) Perfect Life

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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Kinsella's My (not so) Perfect Life

This research explores the issues related to social identities with reference to *My (not so) Perfect Life* by Sophie Kinsella. An individual's identity is a combination of things outside an individual's control such as the society they belong to, the culture they are brought up in, the peers they interact with, the kind of education they acquire and many such as well as some things that an individual keep on the inside such as their beliefs, values, and such. This research develops a critique Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life* and to support the argument, the critique has been grounded in Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory. It explains what compels an individual to make fake social identities and its consequences. This research is qualitative in nature and has employed textual analysis method. The analysis shows that a person associates self-esteem with the group they identify with and one's social identity. If that individual finds himself inferior when compared to members in other social groups, then it leads to a lowered self-esteem. Low self-esteem pushes the individual to either leave their social group to enter the one they feel is better for them, which is called 'exit' or to raise the level and standing of their existing group so it stands as an equal in comparison to other groups, this is called 'voice'. This research is also significant as it studies identity from a social perspective that is inclusive of an individual's sensibilities.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to BTS and ARMY all around the world as the word goes; know yourself, love yourself, speak yourself.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, social identity formation is not merely associated to society, but also to social media. Social media serves as a channel that mediates social identity as it allows propagation of trends associated with a certain social group. The present-day world, with the advent of internet and social applications, has become a huge source of influence be it positive or negative. Trending things or fashion is one of the latest features of the social media that makes everyone blindly follow whatever their idols or famous icons are enacting. The need to feel accepted and admired in the world dominated by trendsetters on social media has, resultantly, surfaced as a problem. Social media allows dictation of elite trends and creates the most acceptable social groups. In order to become a part of the most acceptable social group, people allow themselves to be overpowered by false personas. The need to identify with a social group is marred by a need to remain affiliated with the social group that one originally identifies with because of their roots. However, physical displacement from a social group means that the social group one belongs to may or may not be held in high esteem in the group that one has entered. Thus, one maintains or changes identity accordingly to be accepted as a part of the social group.

Understanding of identity crisis from this perspective allows a comprehensible view of Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life* from the perspective of social identity crisis in the world of social media.

1.1 Individual Identity and Social Identity

Identity, according to Hogg and Abrams, is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (2). The concept of who a person is on his/her own keeps is capricious as people move from place to place. A sense of identity crisis develops, which, according to Erikson, is "a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at one's self" (6). It is an internalized conflict in any individual that

makes one confused about his/her role in a society especially in adolescence and often endangers the real personality of the person when one is exposed to a bigger range of influential individuals. Therefore, one's identity is vulnerable as it is easily threatened.

Identity is an overwhelming emotional force in the lives of people that begins to drive every action that the characters take. This leads to a quest for an individual's true personal identity which can at times can make a person take such paths in their lives that eventually have low substantial value.

This study investigates people's association with social identity to become a part of a social group that is held in high esteem. In order to do so, this thesis focuses on Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life* as a primary text in which this issue is explored. Before embarking upon the research and understanding social identity, a discussion of social identity is imperative because this discussion helps us understand social identity crisis as embodied in the characters in the novel. As social identity is a form of identity affiliated with as well as defining individual's self, the following passage explains the concept of identity crisis. This concept is, later on, linked to the understanding of social identity and social identity crisis and how it allows analysis of Sophie Kinsella's primary text selected for this study.

Identity, or individuality, is the definition that a person renders to one's self or is given by some external source. Social identity is related to the identity dependent on groups. Identity is something that an individual translates for his/her own selves in terms of gender, case, religion, class etc. At the same time, identity helps in defining one's self as well as in associating with people on the basis of similarities and differences. The association of people forms social identity.

Empirical evidence provided by social psychological theorists in the past few years has also emphasized and advocated the human social need to be associated with a group in order to find meaning. Social psychologists state that the uncertainty and absurdity sucks meaning out of life which leaves human beings with no choice but to make meaning on their own. They make meaning

by adhering to different cultural worldviews. Cultural worldviews bring meaning in an otherwise haphazardly moving life.

Identity cannot be easily discussed as individual identity as it is dependent on the relations with other people. Humans mostly identify themselves with how they are related to each other. This is essentially what constitutes an individual's social identity. "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose" (Taylor 27). Thus, identity is dependent on the social group one belongs to. The way our behavior is defined is indispensably dependent on how our group sets the standards of judgments. This is what Clifford questions when he considers, "yet what if identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject?" (Clifford 344). Since identity defines who one is and how one acts, "identity is any source of action not explicable from biophysical regularities, and to which observers can attribute meaning" (White 6). Thus, it can be said that social identity is also essentially dependent on behaviors that one commits to as a group.

Identity crisis is one of the leading problems currently and is mostly conceptualized at only individual level. Its roots can be traced into many different cultural and psychological dimensions but the most important of these is the advancing life and ever changing trends in present day that have started to become a norm for every human being. Advancement of communication modes have resulted in extreme and glorious expectations out of life that individuals often fall prey to the fake, iridescent advertisements and lives portrayed by the media. Chasing these false images, people often feel unsatisfied with themselves and this leads to the desire to change oneself into something that one is not. This longing for 'new' or a 'better' self gives way to false identities that people come up with in order to either satisfy their ego and to feel like inhabitant of a place or a society in which one feels inferior otherwise.

Social media allows a perfect propagation of this identity as people both learn the basics of becoming a part of the social group that they want to move in to and construct a lie about their identity through social media. While juggling multiple identities is hard for anyone and everyone, maintaining just one façade is just as intricate for it includes multiple specifics such as keeping up with inventing and remembering new and old lies, to whom what lie was told to and to whom was not. Most of the time such people are in constant conflict between their true and false identities that leads to anxiety over anyone, mostly their own family, finding out about their multiple personas.

Since it is stated that social media affects the formation and perpetuation of social identity, it is imperative to note that it brings about social identity crisis. This crisis results in anxiety which overpowers people who are disguised in false personas. As a psychological concept, anxiety is described by Scovel as “a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object” (qtd. In Tanveer 3). Spielberg also tried to mark a difference between anxiety and fear by stating that although anxiety and fear are both similar in many ways such as being “unpleasant emotional reactions to the stimulus conditions perceived as threatening,” (qtd. In Wang 13), fear is usually a resultant of a “real, objective danger in the external environment” (qtd. In Wang 13). In this case, though, the hostile triggers of anxiety may or may not be known. Spielberg, thus, defined anxiety as the “subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system.” (qtd. In Wilson 41). In the words of Morris, David, & Hutchings, development of anxiety is accompanied by two components “worry and emotionality” (qtd. In Wilson 41). This worry or “cognitive anxiety” (qtd. in Wilson 41) claimed that general anxiety consists of “negative expectations and cognitive concerns about oneself, the situation at hand, and possible consequences,” (Morris et al. qtd. in Wilson 4, also qtd. in Cubucku 134).

Anxieties, thus, create psychological anguish which creates a surfacing of social identity crisis. This crisis has become a part of today’s globalized world of social media. The boundaries have become transparent and, thus,

people vacillate from social identity crisis as false identities are propagated on social media. This understanding of anxieties is discussed in detail in chapter 3 because it allows a deeper look into the repercussions of social identity crisis portrayed in the selected novel for this study. My research cognizes this pattern of social identity, its alteration to another social identity and the resultant triggered anxiety leading to cataclysm. I specifically comprehend this in relation to the perpetuation of social identity on social media.

In line with this, my research explores the life of Katie Brenner, the protagonist of *Sophie Kinsella's My (Not So) Perfect Life*. It focuses on the life of the protagonist to highlight the problems she faces with her social identity. As expressed above, it apprehends the displacement of social identity and the crisis that follows. The novel explains how, a girl, Katie, tries to shift her personal identity from that of a village girl to a metropolitan girl in order to be acknowledged. However, her acceptance does not come with transition in identity because she leaves the group of village people she identifies with. My research understands and investigates the in-groups and out-groups. In-group refers to the social group that one is intrinsically and originally a part of. When one physically moves into a place where other inmates of his in-group are not present, the new social group is an out-group. My thesis observes how exit from an in-group is not merely dependent on physical mobility, but also on social media intervention in today's world. As social media establishes a standard to be met to be able to form a part of a social group, one tries to follow that standard. However, members of social groups mostly fabricate a deceitful persona on social media that other people strain to come up to. They are not aware of the fact that this image and identity is merely assembled on social media which is another social group in today's digitally advanced world.

Keeping in view this social identity crisis, my thesis focuses on the assessment of social identity crisis in Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life*. Everywhere the protagonist of the novel, Katie Brenner, looks, someone in her surrounding is leading a life that she has only ever dreamed of, especially her boss, Demeter Farlowe. Demeter is someone who seems to be living a perfectly poised and efficacious life with a happy husband, two kids, a beautiful house in

an extremely aristocratic area, making it on the front covers of top ranking magazines, the latest clothes, knowing about all the latest trends and openings while still being a brilliant and ingenious boss at her job. In the contrast, Katie is besieged with her day to day life where she has to continuously make changes to not just her appearance but also to her enunciation, trying to keep peace with her extremely odd flat-mates in an inexpensive zone of the city. Her commute to the job is a hassle as well thus it comes as no wonder that Katie tries to conceal her social life with a sheet of white lies mostly through the use of some not-quite-true Instagram posts, especially as she is frantic to make her dad proud. Kinsella, in her novel, has tried to depict the psychological barriers a person faces when they try to disassociate themselves from the true identity. Kinsella, with the help of her main character, has tried to present this problem with the issues that come as a package when one tries to defy their real identity and attempt to become a person that they think is perfect. As Kinsella has declared this novel a satire of the modern world, her protagonist's chase for new "Londoner" identity leads to many psychological clashes, ending in unsatisfied self-esteem which is only satisfied when she returns and associates herself with her original group. My research studies this implication of social identity in real life. This research helps one see how the problem is not only created in the novel but also how it operates in today's real world situations.

In the novel, Kinsella used her protagonist; Katie's, life as an example which has taken a shift because the globalized world of highly dominating media narratives demands her to be that way in order to be deemed superior. The false ideas of superiority and inferiority have led Katie to scuffle to associate herself with what she believes to be loftier. This is where her psychological conflicts start and it is not until late in the novel when she apprehends that the perfect life of others that she has been seeing is not so perfect after all. Identity crisis and social identity crisis, briefly discussed in this section, highlight the main concerns examined in the selected novel for this study.

1.2 Thesis Statement

The contemporary world has become highly complex because of the globalization and transparent borders that have accompanied the invention of social media. The selected novel depicts formation of a fake identity required to fit into a society which will otherwise make one stand out. Building and maintaining a fake identity is a huge pressure in itself that requires constant revising to adapt to the environment in order to remain in the high stream society and this results in constant anxiety and depression. As this problem is prevalent in today's society, my thesis explores this issue through application of Social Identity Theory on Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life*.

1.3 Delimitation

For the purpose of clarity and precision, the following research is restricted to the study of Sophie Kinsella's *My (Not So) Perfect Life*. The social identity theory has been selected for the sake of a real life understanding of problems, related to fake identities such as constant anxiety and disillusionment that have been highlighted in the selected novel.

1.4 Research Objectives

The following research aims to:

- Determine how the social demands of a metropolis persuade the protagonist to sculpt a fake identity for herself.
- Figure out the way in which the nature of a metropolitan life comes as disillusionment for the protagonist.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research intends to answer the following questions:

- In what ways do the social demands influence the protagonist to forge a fake identity for herself?

- How does the experience of an imposter identity trigger the protagonist's disillusionment with reference to the artificial nature of life in metropolis?

1.6 Research Methodology

In order to carry out a systematic analysis, this research follows a qualitative pattern to analyze the selected literary text. The research uses the method of textual analysis to analyze Sophie Kinsella's *My (Not So) Perfect Life*. The research is interpretive in nature, which implies that it is heavily reliant on the researcher's own interpretation, using the different incidents in the novel as key points. The analysis is dependent on the selected theory i.e. Social Identity Theory by Henri Tajfel and Turner and answers the research questions in the light of it.

1.7 Research Plan

This research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, entitled "introduction" introduces the whole thesis. It briefly discusses the social identity theory, the primary text and touches upon the research methodology and research questions that drive my thesis. This chapter also highlights the delimitations, the problem statement and significance of the study. The second chapter reviews literature related to identity, cultural identity and its crisis as well as literature written on the primary text. In light of the identified gaps, the third chapter dilates upon the theoretical framework employed for the application of the thesis. Moreover, this chapter also discusses the research methodology and methods that have been engaged with. In the fourth and fifth chapter, the only focus is the analysis of the primary text. The fourth chapter identifies the formation of social identity and the in-groups and out-groups as exposed in the novel. The fifth chapter, then, embarks upon an understanding of the association of various social groups like class, gender etc. and how each affects and produces anxiety. The sixth and final chapter, then, concludes the whole study and records the resolution of the analysis.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study is substantial because in the present world, the problem of identity is one of the most common issues that people struggle with. Although individual identity has been greatly discussed, social identity has been ignored, for the most part. The pressure posed by social media through establishment of a standard for each social group creates anxiety and tension in the society. Literature has been greatly researched from the perspective of issues of identity, yet, it has not been analyzed a lot from the perspective of psychological problems that come with association with social identities. The following study, in this regard, will be significant as it adds to the existing body of literature and provides a novice way of analysis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature related to my study. The purpose of this review of the literature is twofold: first, it contextualizes my research in the domain of social identity and secondly, it identifies the gaps present in the existing literature and fills those gaps with my research. In order to conduct a systematic literature review, I have divided it into two parts. The first part discusses the literature on social and cultural identity. The second part reviews the small amount of literature present on the novel to see in what perspectives has it been discussed previously. Since, the novel under discussion was published in January 2017, not much has been written about it. Thus this last part of the literature review encompasses not just the reviews from blogs and some online websites about this novel but also a slight overview of Kinsella's other publications as well.

2.1 Social Identity

Social identity comprises of two basic terms, "social" and "identity". Identity is the more basic term among these and according to Erik Erikson, who was one of the pioneering identity researchers, an enduring and continuous sense of who we are was coined as ego identity. He proposed the idea of an individual having multiple identities for different situations which collectively make up a person's ego identity. Therefore, we can say that our identity is multifaceted in that our personal identity defines ourselves not only as individuals but also in terms of their association to our personality traits defined by the social categories we associate with. Charles Taylor remarks that our "our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it" (Taylor 29). It is inextricably linked to our identity as a group. Identity allows us to "describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture" (Deng 1). Deng's definition proposes the notion that our selves cannot be understood in isolation but in terms of traits that we share with others as a group.

Thus, a more comprehensive definition of identity would be that it “refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities” (Jenkins 4).

Although, these definitions show that our identities are developed in relation to our connection with various social groups, those identities are still stable. A relation of identity with social groups like class, race, gender, ethnicity etc. does not make it unstable which means that identities can be observed as patterns of characteristics that can be seen in various groups. Wendt testifies to the stability of identities in his work “Anarchy is What State Makes of it” by stating that identities are “relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self” (Wendt 397). These definitions of identity allow me to perform a systematized research by leading up to an explication of social identity.

Individual identity is unsparingly reliant on social identity. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen considers 'identity' as multi-dimensional or pluralistic. There is an awesome assortment of classes in which an individual has a place at a single point in time. One can be in the meantime, as Sen contends, with no logical inconsistency, "an American native, of Caribbean inception, with African heritage, a Christian, a liberal, a lady, a vegan, a long distance sprinter, an antiquarian, a teacher, an author, a women's activist, a hetero, . . . to all of which this person all the while has a place gives her a specific identity." (Sen, 2006: xiii). In this way, it is obvious from Sen's proposal, that, human identity is pluralistic and cannot be defined to a solitary identity. It is dependent on the identity of a group which brands it as social identity. Along these lines, a solitary's way to deal with human identity offers approaches to misconceptions among various people and groups of the globe. In fact, it additionally triggers racial, religious and even civilizational emergency. The term 'identity' is itself exceptionally dangerous and has fluctuating degrees of extensions and implications, for example, — look for identity, loss of identity or the broadly utilized term 'identity emergency's and so forth. In the contemporary world, characters — both personal and national (which incorporate ethnic, social, semantic, religious, sexual etc.) -- are abundantly challenged.

There are occurrences of clashing characters everywhere throughout the globe. Kathryn Woodward makes an intriguing observation of identity in *Identity and Difference* where she says that “Characters in the contemporary world get from a variety of sources — from nationality, ethnicity, social class, network, sex, sexuality — sources which may strife in the development of identity positions and prompt conflicting divided personalities” (Woodward 1). She contends that one may encounter some battles between clashing identities in the light of one's distinctive positions on the planet: as an individual from a specific network, ethnicity, social class, religion and so forth. However, “identity gives us an area on the planet and presents the connection among us and the society in which we live” (Woodward 1). Thus, “[it] gives us a thought our identity and how we identify with others and to the world in which we live” (Woodward 1). Identity is frequently characterized by distinction this is it is characterized by what it isn't. Woodward proposes that identity denotes the manners by which we are the equivalent as other people who share that position, and once more, it also denotes the manners by which we are unique in relation to the individuals who don't (1-2).

Personalities are, in this manner, regularly changing in relation to other. These are actually double resistances, for example, — self/other, us/them, insider/outcast, in here/out there, dark/white, man/lady, enlightened/brute and so forth. Since identities are characterized, developed, expended and controlled with specific culture or society, the implications are made through “emblematic frameworks of portrayal about the identity positions” (Woodward, 1997: 2) inside that culture or society. That is the reason the development, which means and portrayal of personalities contrast from society to society, progress to human advancement since their way of life and esteem frameworks vary on the loose.

Before exploration and review of the literature on social identity, I conceptualize this term through the definitions of this term. According to Wendt,

social identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object. ...

[Social identities are] at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine 'who I am/we are' in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations. ("Collective Identity Formation and the International State" 395)

Thus, social identity is an explication of the attributes one shares with social groups he or she belongs to. It distinguishes one group from the other and also creates a polarity of superior and inferior. Herrigel defines social identity as a "desire for group distinction, dignity, and place within historically specific discourses (or frames of understanding) about the character, structure, and boundaries of the polity and the economy" (371). It is obvious, thus, that social identities create a class distinction which deems one group superior to the other. It is because of this association of superiority and inferiority that "the term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Katzenstein 59). The us vs. them dichotomy which makes this gap makes people struggle to associate with a superior group and develops identity crisis. This conceptualization of social identity creates room for the understanding of the social identity crisis which I explore in the selected primary text chosen for this study.

Social identity encompasses the cultural identity as its basis. Identity is the interface between a private sense of self that includes conscious and unconscious feelings, rational and irrational motivations, personal beliefs and values and those factors that constitute the social context in which we experience those feelings and motivations (for example age, ethnicity and sex). Everybody lives in different countries in the world, with different cultures, religions, personalities, and even ethnicities. These differences form his or her identity in society when they are interacting with one another. Therefore, identity recognizes the social status, such as races, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, etc. Cultural identity, which is a part of the social identity, belongs to a particular ethnic group and observes how that influences one's feeling, perception, and behavior (Dusek 162). This matter also explains that sense of belonging is an important factor in forming identity.

According to the book *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* by Stuart Hall, cultural identity is a shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, and more superficial or artificial imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. It is called as *identity as being* (which offers a sense of unity and commonality). This definition explains that cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural values that homogenize people as same. Since language is a kind of a culture, it implies that language is shared through culture. Besides, the strength of our cultural identities involves the degree to which we see our culture as important. It is imperative to the way we define ourselves. When we come back to our culture, we form our identities. As culture also defines a social group, cultural identity is basically social identity which the rest of the essay seeks to explore.

Issue of identity has been explored in depth largely by social psychologists, literary artists, anthropologists and theologians. That has lent a number of approaches to the analysis of identity. In social psychology, Erving Goffman's model of Impression Management provides a conceptual framework for the analysis of identity and identification process. Goffman, in his theory of Impression Management, confined his ideas to the idea of individual and the roles one performs in a specific situation or environment. In doing so, Goffman neglected the effect of the social relation factor on the formation of an individual identity and the role that a single person plays in that influx of interactions. Giddens notes that Goffman's reason for ignoring the interactions in particular situations lies in the fact that he sees them as mere performances by individuals posing as someone just to be accepted and appreciated (Giddens 103). For him, human beings behave in a certain way to be accepted by others. They behave in accordance with the kind of reply that they wish to receive in different situations (Giddens 103). Although Goffman's model analyses how the individuals manage their impressions in particular situations, this theory does not look into the affiliation of people within a society on the basis of a shared identity. Identifying this gap, my research probes in to this area and understand social identity as explored by Henri and Tajfel to comprehend what effect does social identity have on life dominated by social media.

Richard Jenkins' model of The Internal-external Dialectic of Identification takes a step further and does not remain confined to the analysis of identity in relation with situations only. Jenkins' view holds that all identities, whether individual or collective, are constituted (*Social Identity* 40). He saw society as having three spheres which were that of individuals themselves, their interactions and the institutions in the society (*Categorisation* 10). His work, however, was centered on the individuals as they were. He acknowledged "the social world as, in the first instance, a world of embodied individuals" (*Categorization* 10). Similarly, Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, generally abbreviated as MMDI, proposed by Jones and McEwen, observes the complexity of identity as the identity develops. This theoretical perspective allows one to see the relationship between identity and gender, race or sexual orientation, class or persona behaviors. Jones and McEwan's model states the impossibility of being able to see identity as identity itself. They believe in the analysis of identity in relation to other factors described above (Abes et. Al 15)

Among the number of theories on the issue of social identity, Tajfel and Turner's theory of social identity provides a framework for understanding the psychology of group identity. It speaks of the psychology behind the association with the groups in order to develop a sense of self-esteem. Tajfel and Turner's theory, therefore, provides the framework for the research to follow as it sees the psychology behind acts of people in terms of their behaviors. It analyses how various characters form the social identity and how their behaviors are determined by the possibility of the satisfaction of their self-esteem. Identity is a much discussed term in postcolonial writing.

C. J. McKinley, D. Mastro and K. M. Warber in their article, "Social Identity Theory as a Framework for Understanding the Effects of Exposure to Positive Media Images of Self and Other on Intergroup Outcomes", made use of Tajfel and Turner's theory to examine the influence of exposure to positive Latino media exemplars on ingroup (Latino) and outgroup (white) consumers. Specifically, the impact of exposure on interethnic evaluations as well as perceptions of self and other was evaluated. The results showed that although exposure to positive media depictions of Latinos can prompt more favorable

evaluations of in-group and self among Latinos, the same cannot necessarily be said for the effects of exposure to affirmative messages on judgments about Latinos among outgroup members.

In “Self and Social Identity”, published in 2002, Ellemers et al. wrote a joint article to understand different threats to individual and social identity. They dissected the self and identity by considering the different conditions under which these are affected by the groups to which people belong. They argued that, from a social identity perspective, group commitment, and features of the social context are crucial determinants of central identity concerns. They utilized an arrangement of situations to reflect the different concerns and motives that come into play as a result of threats to personal and group identity and degree of commitment to the group. The end result of their research showed how these issues of self and social identity impinged upon a broad variety of responses at the perceptual, affective, and behavioral level for each arrangement.

In the dissertation titled, “Iipseity: using the social identity perspective as a guide to character pseity: using the social identity perspective as a guide to character construction in realist fiction”, Dr. Luke Stott discussed about using the Tajel and Turner’s social identity theory for the purposes of creating more realistic and believable fictional characters in realist fiction. He wanted to share a method of usage for elements of Social Psychology, specifically the Social Identity Perspective that underpins the actions, interactions and motivations of the fictional characters to help in furthering realistic characterization, setting and even plot construction.

In their article entitled “Theoretical Borderlands: Using Multiple Theoretical Perspectives to Challenge Inequitable Power Structures in Student Development Theory”, published in 2009, Abes et.al revised the model to include the effect of meaning-making capacity of human beings on the idea of identity. They observed how the meaning making process plays a role in the formation of association with gender, religion, cast and class and how it leads to the establishment of an identity dependent on all of these factors. (Abes et al. 26). In the same line of thought, Muzafer Sharif presented The Realistic Conflict

Theory. In this theory, Muzafer identified the role of difference of ideology in the formation of a specific social identity (Tajfel and Turner 34). This theory explained the idea of conflict among different groups based on their beliefs. In this sense, this theory also reflects on the impact of meaning-making on the identity by probing into the importance of ideologies. Muzafer Sharif pointed out that everyone finds meaning in life and that meaning becomes the basis for the understanding. Whenever that meaning is threatened, people start advocating their ideologies by supporting their ideologies as a group. Therefore, the social identity is formed and leads to a negative prejudice among groups.

2.1.1 Social Identity in Social Media Context

The problem of identity in today's world dominated by social media is the most common and prevalent reason of social identity crisis. A discussion of identity and social identity is essential to contextualize the idea of social identity in the world of social media. As my research applies social identity theory on Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life* to see how social identity has been liquefied in today's world, I believe that a discussion of literature on social identity crisis in social media is of crucial importance. David Bell opines that "if we type ourselves into being in cyberspace... we can make and remake who we are endlessly" (116). It has been truly said because in the world of social media, social media sites give us personal space to express ourselves. We express ourselves in any way that we want to without having to testify to its authenticity. Thus, we build information about ourselves that can define us in front of a number of people. Bell is right when he says that our identities on social media are "liberated from the 'meat' of our RL [real life] bodies and all the identity-markers they carry" (116).

Bell's idea allows me to have an insight in to the life of Sophie Kinsella's protagonist from the perspective of social identity crisis on social media. It allows me to understand how Katie, the major character under examination, revamps herself while presenting herself on social media and to see whether it makes her suffer or not. Her construction of identity on social media stems from her desire to be accepted in the social circles. Thus, the information David Bell imparts keeps me conscious about the ability and openness to fabricate one's

identity on social media. Resultantly, it helps me understand the character of Katie by understanding whether establishment of a fake identity engenders a crisis or not.

Sherry Turkle, an anthropologist, noted the fabrication of multiple personas on internet through comprehension of gaming with multiple users. His interview with one student who played four such games allowed him to see that the student plays four different characters. He played an immodest woman, a cow boy, a neutral gendered hare and a masculine hero. All these identities were enacted by him simultaneously (Turkle 13). While he was enacting these identities, he was also able to play in real life. "Real life" in fact, was "just one more window" (Turkle 13) for him. He executed all these personalities perfectly. However, he unfortunately grappled with "one body, one identity" (Donath 29) concept which is sure to lead to identity crisis. Identity is a serious issues and taking many personas is sure to confuse one about his real personality. The primary text under study has a similar character who changes her identity on social media to promote the idea that she is of the elite class. Since she wishes to belong to the elite class, it is important to note that she also builds a fake persona. Turkle argument, in this sense, provides an understanding of how different identities can be easily administered on social media. However, it is conducive to crisis.

Identity issues on internet are not only responsible for the crisis because of one's own tendency to design a fake identity. Identity issues also surface because people take other people's disguises. Sherry Turkle once had to suffer from identity theft. A person started using her identity to conduct interviews and questionnaires. Turkle stated that she felt like "a little piece of [her] history [was] spinning out of control" (Turkle 16). Identity theft made her feel helpless as she was unable to do anything to stop the way her identity was being built. Social media is, thus, not harmless. It not only makes one propagate false identity, making room for crisis, but also creates problems in terms of identity theft. One can also face anxiety because of such theft.

Social media allows one to form whatever identity one wants to form. On social media, it is very easy to form whatever kind of personality one wants to. According to Bell, homepages are "a self-conscious articulation of self-identity" (118). It is unimaginable to neglect the role social media plays in constructing, reconstructing or deconstructing one's personality. In fact, Bell's assertion makes me realize that it is quite easy to materialize a persona. I am, thus, better able to understand why different personas are taken over by people. Internet easily allows to switch from one social group to the other. They can represent themselves as part of any social group that they want to. This is the reason that people use social media to switch identity. Bell, therefore, helps me understand the character of Katie in a better way. I am better able to comprehend Katie's motives behind moving from one social category to the other.

Moreover, switching personalities is so much easier because no one questions the formation of identity on social media. Yurchisin noted that one woman was satisfied with forming her identity on social media because she felt that "other people confirm [her] personality so it just has to be perfected" (742). This implies that social identity formed on social media is perfected and personalized in such a way that it goes unchallenged. What is essential to note at this point, however, is that Yurchisin states these auras are the ones that one wants to associate with. These "hoped-for possible selves" (Yurchisin 742) are the ones that make one feel superior. Thus, it is the matter of social category that one wants to affiliate with which remains extremely important.

For Yurchisin, "the way in which we believe that others see us" (736) is a most important part of who we want to become. Hence, it is the "reflexive evaluation" (Yurchisin 736) which makes it possible to understand, construct and present our identities. Yurchisin's ideas mainly focus on the way we build our identities but as explicated above, it helps me understand the motives behind social group coalitions.

While analyzing my primary text, I remain cognizant of the ways social identity can be easily revamped through social media. I also understand the ways in which we seek appreciation and merely construct an identity that appeals to people and makes one feel superior. The major character of Sophie

Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life* feels highly agitated in a setting which makes her feel inferior. It is in that setting that her major character decides to build her identity on social media.

Just to feel superior, Katie tries her best to replicate the home pages of the people she has known. It stems from a desire to be associated with groups that are deemed superior. Thus, her social interaction can be easily upscaled if she has those followers who are superior. According to Van Doorn, "public displays of connection serve as vital identity signals that allow people to navigate the networked social world" (595). Hence, identity formation on social media testifies one's association with a certain group. Social media, in this way, remains a crucial motivation behind social identity creation. Jordan rightly concludes, "the power and paradox of cyberspace is its ability to liberate and dominate simultaneously" (2). Thus, as people are able to dominate, they are able to see themselves in relation to an 'other'. Stuart Hall argues that "all identities depend on exclusion, on 'otherness'. Who we are is defined by who we are not" (117). Before embarking upon the research done on Sophie Kinsella's novels, I believe it is important to understand how the idea of identity and issues pertaining to it have been explored in various novels. This allows me to carry out my textual analysis easily. Therefore, in the next section, I look into the way issue of identity has been explored in various novels. In order to make the study focused, I need to narrow it down to see the analysis of diasporic writings. Issue of identity has been explored extensively in this literature.

2.2 Identity Crisis in Literature

Padmore Agbemabiese explored the African American identities created by African American authors. He asserted in his research that in order to examine African American identities, it is imperative to analyze those people who "gave voice and authenticate black existence" (1). Through his research, Agbemabiese aims to highlight the use of identity crisis by African American writers. He raised a significant point in his research regarding the ongoing the issue of identity crisis. According to Agbemabiese,

It is also the time to examine just how far we have come close to dissolving the African American identity crisis since the historical sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois made his famous prediction that the twentieth century would be the century of the color line. (1)

This assertion highlights an important fact regarding the African American identity. As mentioned in the quote, the issue of African American identity crisis was raised many years ago by W. E. B. Du Bois. The critic claims that the struggle to end the politics surrounding identity in writings has continued for far too long and needs to end (1). In his research, Agbemabiese examined different literary forms to examine the depiction of Black identities in narratives. He refers to Langston Hughes's poetry along with works of other Black authors to show the struggle to set one's self free from mental slavery (17). His research is significant as it discusses the issues raised by African American writers regarding the depiction of Black identities by both Black and White authors.

Similarly, Mark Corcoran (2011) has examined the issue of identity crisis in James Joyce's *Dubliners*. In his research, Corcoran asserts, "the crossover between French and Irish culture has a long history" which is one of the reasons why identity crisis exists in France and Ireland (1). He further adds that the struggle to find the "right identity" can be found in the history of the aforementioned countries (1). To analyze this identity crisis, Corcoran selected James Joyce's major work *Dubliners* (1914). The novel is significant in its depiction of Ireland's struggle to acknowledge its own "historical crisis" (1). Through the analysis of Joyce's selected work, Corcoran aimed at highlighting the role played by societies in creating the crisis of identity (2). Furthermore, Corcoran highlighted that "Joyce's work suggests that a critique of culture and its structure is crucial, as family and religious structures are shown to be maintaining a religious and ethical paralysis in individuals" (8).

This assertion helps in understanding that the society urges its members to follow a set of established beliefs that are based upon illusions (8). Family structures, society, religion and other institutes are responsible for the shaping of an individual's identity. Joyce has shown the formation of individual

identities in his novel *Dubliners* by employing the technique of allusion (9). Moreover, Joyce shifted between first person narrative and third person narrative when narrating stories in *Dubliners*. Corcoran asserts, “The ostensibly omniscient narration of the stories that follow dramatizes the restrictions of human knowledge and the multiplicity of self in adult identity” (12). Corcoran’s research is significant as it highlights the role of societies and culture in shaping the identities of individuals which leads to an identity crisis.

Anne Marit K. Berge has carried a similar research on the application of identity crisis in postmodern literature. In her research “The Narrated Self and Characterization: Paul Auster’s Literary Personae” Anne explored the role of narration in creating identities (101). The critic highlights in her research that narration in postmodern literature is fragmented (101). Her research focuses on the function of narration in postmodern novels (102). She raises an important point that “in order to build an identity, one needs to be able to tell one’s story” (103). For this, the individual has to have the ability to see links between structures in order to establish details (103).

The search for identity is linked to the quest of meaning as every character tries to “re-define himself” (104). The situation created by the narrator and the imagery used in the narration allows the readers to create links and perceive the character’s identity (107). As discussed previously, familial relations are at the basis of identity formation. The absence of family ties as in Auster’s novels stand to be the reason behind the identity crisis (113). This research is crucial as it highlights the important aspects of postmodern literature. Through the research, identity crisis was viewed from different angles. It highlighted the vital role of narration in postmodern texts and narration creates identities with which readers can associate.

Another researcher, Patty de Graaf has examined the topic of identity and the use of stylistic effects, which contribute to the construction of identity. In her research “African American Identity and Translation Challenges in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*”, Graaf explores the construction of African American identities by black authors.

For her research, she selected Morrison's novel *Jazz*. Graaf claims

We create our individual identity by collecting features that apply to our inner and outer selves, such as skin color, gender, profession, sexual preferences, religion, language, etc. The combination of these features then distinguishes us from other people. It is also possible for a group of people to collect features that distinguish them from other groups, and it is even possible for people to separate others by using their features against them... (17)

This assertion helps in understanding how identities are created and how certain features can be found either similar or different among people. Graaf further highlights that there is one identity that an individual creates for himself and a second identity which the society constructs for that individual (18). If these two do not coincide then the individual suffers from an identity crisis (18). Furthermore, Graaf addresses the creation of African American identities in postcolonial texts (18). In America, African Americans were depicted as slaves and therefore, faced segregation by majority of the white community (18). To highlight this crisis of identity among African Americans, Graaf examined Morrison's *Jazz* which focuses on racial differences between people having different ethnical backgrounds (19).

In *Jazz* the search for identity is at the center of the novel's plot (20). The novel includes multiple voices representing the stories of the Black people whose voice had been taken away (23). In addition to this, Graaf also refers to the use of stylistic effects within a novel that play a significant role in shaping identities. This can be seen in the translation of African American Literature (23). Graaf's research helps in understanding how different stylistic effects can change the structures and forms of a narration as well as the voices present in the narration. When translating texts, it is imperative to know about the linguistic structures and syntactic patterns of a text. The mistranslation of a text can create identity issues in the narration.

Bina Shah has carried out a research on the depiction of identity crisis. Her research "Literature: The antidote to the Pakistani identity crisis" focuses

on the aspect of identity crisis prevalent in South Asian literature. For this purpose, Shah analyzed different Pakistani novels. She claims,

Pakistanis confront questions of identity on a daily basis, as the answers govern where they live, who their families are, where they go to school, what jobs or professions they undertake, whom they marry, how they raise their children, and how they worship. (3)

Her assertion highlights an important point when regarding the formulation of identity. For Pakistanis, identity is created based on aforementioned variables. This leads to the creation of multiple identities and ultimately makes the individual suffer from a fragmented self. Shah also takes into account the different South Asian writers who have depicted their own cultural roots through the use of English language. Among them, Pakistani writers have tried their hand at depicting the diversity prevalent in Pakistani society (8). The recent literature allows the readers to connect with the characters due to the inclusion of diversity. Shah claims, “This literature is powerful enough to heal Pakistan’s identity crisis, if it is allowed to flourish” (9). Her research is vital as examines the different South Asian literary texts that have touched upon the subject of identity crisis through their characters.

Sobia Kiran has also examined identity crisis in Pakistani Literature. For this purpose, she selected Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Hanif Kureishi’s *The Black Album*. She claims “Pakistan is a country in which people are living among rising conflicts, muslims dying at the hands of muslims, women being marginalized and minorities being deprived of their rights.” (34). All of these factors contribute to the manifestation of identity crisis among Pakistani citizens. Sobia explores a vital issue surrounding the identity crisis in Pakistani society. She writes,

Common man has no right to be someone important in the national fabric. This manipulation and maneuvering also makes his identity questionable. As a Pakistani, he is marginalized in his own country, and if he tries to escape from lawlessness and chaos of his own society as an immigrant abroad, he is looked at as a ‘Paki’ and a potential terrorist.

Thus, in 21st century, identity of a common person living in Pakistan has become more precarious than it was ever before.” (35)

This assertion allows an understanding of the identity issue created in Pakistani society. Different members of Pakistani society have been given different labels, which lead to a situation of unrest and violence (Kiran 35). Through the analysis of the selected novels, Kiran highlights the different extremes prevalent in the society, which cause a fragmentation of an individual's identity. In the article's conclusion, Kiran remarks, “To sum up, loss of identity is the major dilemma faced by people caught between two worlds (39).

Kiran's research is unique as it highlights the issues faced by people who migrate to other countries. She asserts that the natives treat the foreigner as the 'other'. This kind of treatment leads to violent behavior and a resistance to the social values of the foreign country. It also highlights that the treatment of natives can fragment a person's identity.

Asma Mansoor also examined identity crisis in a post 9/11 scenario. For this purpose, she selected H. M. Naqvi's novel *Home Boy*. Through this novel, Mansoor highlights the treatment of a Pakistani boy living in America and facing a post 9/11 scenario (21). The fall of Twin Towers created a sense of fear among the people living in America. In a situation like this, Chuck undergoes an identity crisis. Being a Pakistani and residing in America contributed to Chuck's dual identity. However, the terroristic attack on the Twin Towers created a sense of confusion for people like Chuck who had thought of themselves as members of the American society. Through her research, Mansoor highlights how the socio-political scenarios can fragment an individual's identity. By exploring H. M. Naqvi's selected novel, Mansoor discusses how a person is forced to confront the issue of identity.

One other researcher, Katina Lynn Rogers has identified the presence of identity crisis in the modern narratives. In her research “Identity Crisis: Modernity and Fragmentation”, Rogers claims “With the arrival of modernity, the concept of identity reaches a crisis” (1). A shift has been seen in the modern

era due to the changes in the different fields of life. Rogers examined different works of fiction to analyze how cities are responsible for fracturing an individual's identity.

The technological advancements and the changes in the structure of cities causes a distraction for people. Katina explained the role of cities in causing identity crisis in the following lines,

London... appears as a city of greater potential for plurality, with various centers emerging in different neighborhoods of the city's spread. With a variety of different voices finding their home in the city, the threat to identity in London seems to be less acute than that caused by the sharp line of definition as found in Paris. (7)

This assertion highlights that due to the diversity of individuals in London, the rate of identity crisis is lesser than the crisis in Paris. Therefore, the diversity and the shift in structures of the cities allows for an understanding of the concept of identity (42). Rogers' research highlights important aspects regarding identity and the reason behind its crisis. Through the research, she asserts that there is a need for moving beyond the traditional binaries (43). By doing so, people will be able to understand the problem of fragmentation that exists in modernity.

Tawfiq Yousef and Reem Abu-Samra have examined the depiction of identity crisis in Jean Rhy's *Wede Sargasso Sea* (1966). The novel presents a unique depiction of an individual who is caught between different cultures and is unable to have an independent identity (109). The pressure of society, culture and racial difference subject the protagonist to extreme forms of violence. All of these variables oppress the independent identity of the protagonist (111). Yousef and Abu-Samra highlight in their research that the protagonist from Rhy's selected novel suffers identity crisis mainly due to her ethnicity and race (112). She comes from mixed ancestry, which makes her a victim to her society (112). Having both white and black ancestry causes a conflict of identity, as she cannot complete associate herself with one race. Yousef and Abu-Samra state that the mixture of ancestries makes her a victim to both white and black cultures (112).

Another important aspect raised by Yousef and Abu-Samra is that the protagonist was marginalized from an early age (113). This highlights that for an individual such as the protagonist in Rhy's selected novel, marginalization on the basis of race begins early on. It also helps in understanding the way the society functions in terms of creating identities. Aside from identity crisis caused by race, Yousef and Abu-Samra remark that gender also contributes greatly to this issue as portrayed by Rhy in the novel (113). All of these elements in the novel point towards the manifestation of identity crisis. Yousef and Abu-Samra's research is important in terms of its exploration of the depiction of identity crisis in fiction. Through their research, the two researchers point out the role of society and culture in shaping and fracturing an individual's identity.

Saman A. H. Dizayi has researched the depiction of identity crisis in Postcolonial novel. In his research, Dizayi discusses the effects of colonialism on different cultures and communities (999). He writes,

Though there was a political change, many nations got independence and no more they are colonies, but culturally and economically there appeared many dilemma and crisis, they were still in confusion about their culture and identity. (999)

This assertion helps in understanding the creation of identity crisis due to colonialism. Meanwhile, the postcolonial era is identified by the colonized subject's need to gain independent identity. Saman remarks, "What characterizes postcolonial era is the resistance to colonialism and seeking identity to confirm their independence." (999). One of the effects of colonialism was the influence of the colonizer's culture on the colonized's culture. It led to the assimilation of two cultures. However, in postcolonial era, the colonized nations attempted to separate themselves from the influence of colonialism. Saman explores this aspect in the postcolonial novel. Saman claims that the postcolonial literature is filled with diverse themes and topics. He remarks that one of the main issues found in postcolonial novel is the native's search for identity. His research is significant as it highlights the role of postcolonial writers in attempting to establish their own independent identities. Saman also highlighted that the identity crisis was mainly caused by colonialism.

Matthew Russo also examined the depiction of identity crisis in his research “Exploring Identities in Motion in Diasporic and Global Literature”. Russo claims, “Whether conceived in terms of individuals or groups, identity has many precedents ranging from cultural backgrounds to the types of TV shows one grows up watching.” (para. 2). However, identity is fractured when different variables influence an individual such as “immigrants” and “refugees” (para. 2). Russo mentioned these two factors to point towards the effect of globalization. He refers to Aleksander Hemon’s novel *The Lazarus Project* (200) which focused on globalization and diaspora (para. 3). The novel highlights a diasporic individual’s search for identity (para. 3). As discussed in the previous articles, having two different cultures can cause a person to have a fragmented identity. This is what Russo discusses in his research. Globalization influences individuals in a number of ways be they social, cultural or political. These three different contexts create new identities in Diasporas. Another novel which Russo referred to in his research is *Persepolis*. The two novels highlight how ethnicity and citizenship contribute to the fragmentation of identity (para. 7). Russo’s research is unique in its exploration of identity crisis caused by immigration and globalization. The research helps in understanding the concept of identity crisis by discussing the different variables that influence an individual’s social and cultural situation.

To conclude, identity crisis has been used as a subject matter in different genres of literature over the years. The reviewed literature consisted of articles, theses and research papers all of which examined the depiction of identity crisis by various scholars and researchers. From the reviewed literature, it can be said that identity is created by multiple factors, all of which carry distinct features. An individual’s identity is created not only by his self but also by variables such as religion, skin color, race, community, family, profession and so on. All of these variables add up to create plural identities that can at times lead to fragmentation. Through literature, authors from different communities have created such identities. These authors have also incorporated different elements in their narrations that show that any element can fracture an individual’s identity. The reviewed literature also highlighted that with the change in the social and cultural roots, people can at times feel confused about their identities.

An example of this was given through the reference to Pakistani and African American literature in which the authors identified the reasons leading to identity crisis.

2.3 Review of Sophie Kinsella's Oeuvre

This section is divided in two parts. The first part explores the critical reception of Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life*. This understanding of the reception allows me to identify the gaps in the existing literature and fill them. The second part of this section looks in to the other works by Sophie Kinsella to understand the general premises upon which these works have been understood.

2.3.1 Critical reception of *My (not so) Perfect Life*

The selected work for this proposed research has been published recently in 2017 due to which there is a severe lacking of substantial criticism. However, there are some casual book reviews available online that hint towards the social problems discussed in the novel. Among various other things, these reviews also explore the possibility of the work's standing as a social satire. These reviews do not provide an insight to the novel but do give a generalized hint towards the major themes of the selected novel.

Defining the gist of the story, Vilma Gonzalez presents the gist of the story. She discusses the life of Katie in which she desperately uses social media to define her personality in the following terms:

Country girl Katie Brenner imagines an Instagram-perfect life of late-night pub outings with friends, sipping lattes at chic cafes and a work life full of bright ideas and impactful contributions.

Unfortunately, the reality behind her camera phone is quite different. With roommates who don't talk to her, no real friends — or even funds — for pub nights out and a boss who can't even remember her name, her life in London isn't as glamorous as she hoped it would be.
(Gonzalez, Vilma)

Gonzalez presents the life of Katie in a few words and makes one realize that the life that Katie is living is not her own. The only thing that is filtering and defining her life on social media is her mobile phone and its camera. She uses camera to capture the life that may or may not be her own. However, because that life is promoted through social media page owned by Katie herself, it presents to the world what she claims to be her identity. Gonzalez's review, although understanding how her life is a lie, does not discuss the possibility of identity construction. Her review helps me question Katie's need of affiliation with a different identity. It allows me to see that her motivation to do so may be based on social identity. Social identity coalition may be one of the reasons behind struggle to identify with one group or the other. In fact, it may be one of the ways in which she is searching meaning in her life by trying to find an identity.

Search for meaning is imperative to the character of Katie. Katie finds meaning in life that she associates with in London. It makes her feel superior to her original social group which was that of village life. Katie was, according to Sara, "Shattered but determined to stay positive" (Harlequin Review) when she had to retreat to her original social group where her roots lie. "Katie retreats to her family's farm in Somerset to help them set up a vacation business" (Harlequin Review). However, she has grappled with her roots by using social media to take up an identity which is not hers.

Sara notes that she faces the new identity once again as "London has never seemed so far away—until Demeter unexpectedly turns up as a guest. Secrets are spilled and relationships rejiggered" (Harlequin Review). It is because of the confrontation with Demeter that she is haunted by the identity she had taken up in London. In fact, her identity had been greatly inspired by Demeter. "As the stakes for Katie's future get higher, she must question her own assumptions about what makes for a truly meaningful life" (Harlequin Review)

Sara Harlequin's detailed review does not explicate how the search of meaning is linked to her desire to satisfy the self-esteem by being able to associate to a specific group. The following research fills this gap by seeing how Katie's movement from Somerset is not only a physical shift from Rural to

Urban but also a psychological shift from in-group to an out-group. This shift results from her desire to satisfy her self-esteem which is neither satisfied at her farm nor at her job in London.

Publishers Weekly review of the novel also highlights the problems that the major character, Katie Brenner, faces with her identity. The review highlights that “she becomes isolated and often feels like she’s playing a role. Still, she’s intent on projecting an image of perfection, both to her family and her Instagram followers.” (Publisher’s Weekly Review). The reason that Brenner wants to associate herself with a new image is that she wants to fit in the world by forming a social identity. Social media and her life in London provide that. London is superior as a group as deemed by many people in the novel. This is the reason that Katie wants to switch her social group. This is another aspect that has not been researched upon. As a researcher, I intend to probe into this matter in order to provide a better view of how the desire to exit the in-group leads her to an out-group which has multiple dimensions. That life has a dimension where social media dominates the real life and expects people to show a specific sort of life in order to find acceptability. Katie, in her search for a meaningful life, thinks that associating herself with an out-group is the best choice which is not.

Scarlett Leigh, in her review on Sophie Kinsella’s *My (Not So) Perfect Life*, titled “First Look: Sophie Kinsella’s *My (Not So) Perfect Life*”, also focuses on the way Katie Brenner struggles between her identity as a village girl and a girl in London. “While the setting is London, and then Somerset, it’s a story that is universal—small town girl wants to make it big in a sophisticate, cosmopolitan city. And to do that Katie thinks that she needs to leave the country girl behind” (Leigh).

Leigh is right in noticing how the shift from country to city life is a shift in the identity. It makes my research realize that capitalistic concerns also act as reasons behind association to a certain social group. Katie’s movement from village to city may not only be dependent on a desire to make this shift alone, it also stemmed from a desire to be associated with higher elite class. While conducting my analysis, I remain alert and conscious about this. In my analysis,

I also understand and look in to Katie's wish to be affiliated with elite class which has been defined by Demeter in the novel.

Karishma Attari also discusses a similar thing in her review "Book Review 'My Not So Perfect Life: Photoshopping a not-so-perfect life in vain'". She describes Katie's life in the following manner:

She has turned her back with regret on her loving and clumsy father and the family farm. She's intent on losing her provincial accent and her naturally wavy hair to fit in with the swish set of London girls. Her move has come at a cost. She stays in an apartment room so tiny that her belongings are contained in a hammock, and the arrangements with her flat-mates are even more unorthodox. Her commute takes forever, she can barely afford those networking pub nights she's been dreaming of, and her boss doesn't remember her name. (Attari, Karishma)

Katie's life, actually, has taken a shift because the globalized world of highly dominating media narratives demands her to be that way in order to be deemed superior. The false ideas of superiority and inferiority have led Katie to struggle to associate herself with what she believes to be superior. This is where her psychological conflicts start and it is not until late in the novel when she realizes that the perfect life of others that she has been seeing is not so perfect after all.

The literature on the novel suggests that Sophie Kinsella's *My (Not So) Perfect Life* has been reviewed from multiple perspectives. The reviews point out how Kinsella used her protagonist's the problems she faces with her identity. However, the research does not highlight how Katie faces problems with her social identity. Her self-esteem is not satisfied when she is a part of a group that has been written lower in the narratives. Her problems only complicate as she changes her social identity and changes physical and psychological barriers which ultimately lead her back to the original group she belonged.

2.3.2 Critical reception of Kinsella's other novels

Sophie Kinsella is actually a pen name for Madeleine Sophie Wickham.

She uses both her names to write novels. She is mostly known for her *Shopaholic* series. As Sophie Kinsella is celebrated as a chick-lit author, literature written for female audience, her works revolve around a female protagonist in either some kind of trouble or landing herself in one. The female protagonists in her novels mostly struggle with their classes which renders her works to an understanding from social psychological perspective.

Kinsella gained a lot of fame through her novel, “The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic”, which was later adapted into a film and thus the title was changed to “Confessions of a Shopaholic”. This novel series started with focus on the life through the eyes of a twenty-five years old Becky. Written in first person narration, the story gave the working and logics behind various life-threatening and back-leashing actions of a female who could not control her impulse to buy things. This novel was soon followed by others and soon made it into a series with eight novels so far. The latest novel in this series was published in 2016.

The novel series has been analyzed from financial and market point of views by many critics and researchers that tried to analyze the strategies used by the protagonist to juggle and avoid her ever mounting debts. The fact that Becky’s main job in the novel is as a journalist for finance management was the major factor for this. Her job as a journalist makes this novel similar to Kinsella’s *My (not so) Perfect Life*. Thus, social identity is also questioned in this novel. It also enters the media life. Although, much research has been done on this novel series, the novel taken for this research, *My (not so) Perfect life*, is fairly new and has not been researched upon yet. It helps me identify that because the protagonist takes loans, she is very poor. In fact, she is possibly trying to build an identity which does not keep her poverty stricken. This makes me realize that issue of struggle to associate with upper class is ever persistent in Kinsella’s novels.

Erlina Pranistiasari in her research, *Shopping Behavior as the Reflection of the Hierarchy of Human needs on the Main Character in the Film Confessions of a Shopaholic*, dissected the protagonist of the film on the basis of Abraham Maslow’s theory of human needs. The research talked about how

the character's needs and shopping behavior related to her esteem and self-actualization needs. Just like *My (not so) Perfect Life*, the symbol of shopping communicates struggle to associate with a class. Thus, having a better lifestyle communicates relation with a better class. Thus, it satisfies one's social identity affiliation. This is exactly what I explore in Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life*.

In the thesis, *The Social Conflict of Samantha in Sophie Kinsella's The Undomestic Goddess*, by Bahasa and Ilmu Budaya, another one of Kinsella's novels have been discussed. This thesis talks about how the main character struggles and fights against the societal pressure and gender norms. This work used structural method to analyze the changes in the main character, Samantha Sweetings who is a workaholic, Cambridge-educated lawyer who never bothered to tackle the fundamentals of boiling an egg and preparing a decent meal. This thesis also does not talk about how society pressurizes people regarding their looks, accent, personality etc., as the main focus of this study revolves around gender norms. However, although it has not been explored, a similar issue is described in *My (not so) Perfect Life* which I intend to investigate in this novel.

Kinsella's *The Gatecrasher* has not been researched upon as well as many other works of her. Her novels have been reviewed by websites like *good reads*, *publishers weekly* and many such. According to these, in this novel an enticing tale pivots around a glamorous, utterly irresistible and meticulously cunning, Fleur and her ability to gatecrash funerals of wealthy households in order to fleece off rich, vulnerable men. With a wardrobe of black, designer suits paired with her scheming personality, her gold digging skills help her to climb up the social ladder. That being her usual plan on her roster, Fleur finds herself in an unexpected situation when she stumbles across the affluent Richard Favour. After enchanting her way to the Favour's hearts in order to get access to a bank account in millions and platinum credit cards, Fleur finds herself in much stickier situation as she not only discerns that there is someone other than her after the Favour's wealth but also a new kind of genuine concern unlocking in her heart for her the widow and his family.

Swimming Pool Sunday, proclaimed to be the darkest novel ever to be written by Madeleine Wickham, centers around a group of people who are thrown in together by the author to develop the intensely dramatic plot. Thus diverging far from her usual light, chick-lit novels.

The story encircles the emotional conflict of the main protagonist, Louise, who is manipulated into taking actions that lead to dismantling old friendships and forging new ones as the village too splits to take sides. Louise Kember and her ex-husband Barnaby Kember find themselves falling apart even further after their younger daughter, Katie gets hurt at the Delany's annual, Sunday pool day opened for charity. The situation, aggravated as both of them find themselves on the conflicting end of the conundrum regarding whether to sue the already grief stricken, old acquaintances, The Delany's for their negligence. These reviews help me understand the ways in which Sophie Kinsella has been perceived. These reviews help me not only contextualize my research but also identify the gaps in existing literature. This way, I may be able to add to the existing body of literature.

This literature review has helped me in understanding the ways in which social identity theory is understood. Additionally, it has allowed me to understand the relation of individual identity with the social identity. Social identity is indispensably dependent on individual identity. Moreover, this chapter has also allowed me to see how the primary text in which I explore social identity has been previously explored. This helps me understand and recognize the gaps in the literature present on the primary novel. In the light of the gaps identified, I have chosen Henri and Tajfel's theory of social identity as my major theoretical framework. In the next chapter, I explore this theory in detail.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Keeping in view the gaps identified in the previous chapter, this chapter expounds the theory chosen for this. This study is grounded in a social-psychoanalytical theory and has been applied in the field of literature as literature cannot exist in isolation from social and psychological effects of the real world. This chapter, thus, specifically discusses Social Identity Theory, proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, as the framework for this thesis. In accordance with the theory, this chapter limits the focus on the description of the ideas put forward by Tajfel and Turner in their work on the theory. Tajfel and Turner's theory suggests that the concept that individuals build about themselves is not personally or individually formed. Instead, it is constructed around the cultural worldview provided by the social groups. The social groups form social identities as the ideologies at the foundations of social groups act as a gauge to measure the esteem of a person. The self-esteem of a person becomes dependent on the evaluation of the in-group; which is the group that individuals belong to. As the theoretical framework determines the application of the ideas on Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life*, it is instructive to discuss the methodology employed to carry out the analysis. Thus, I divide this chapter in to two parts. The first part explicates the selected theory and the second part dilates upon the research methodology employed to carry out the research.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework focuses itself on the theory of social identity proposed by Henri Tajfel. Henri Tajfel, which I am about to explore, theorized a lot in the field of social identity. He gave many theories such as Social Judgment Theory, Theory of intergroup Relations and Social Identity Theory. He considered it an indispensable need of human beings to form groups. As human beings live together, they behave and act in the ways that make them accepted in a group. Thus, they share their beliefs, customs etc. According to

Ramin, "His Social Identity Theory proposes that from the very beginning of our lives, we start to categorize ourselves due to the gender, sex, appearance and social class that we belong" (Ramin 95). It is his argument about this need of affiliating with social groups that helps us explain most of the social phenomena. "Social identification and social categorization, according to Tajfel, leads to social comparison in which the individual compares his/her physical, psychological and social characteristics to other members of the society" (Ramin 95). Due to this one starts forming coalitions with social groups and depending on them.

3.1.1 Social Identity Theory by Henri Tajfel

Henri Tajfel, in 1979, built upon the Realistic Conflict Theory of Muzafer Sherif to further his ideas on the construction of a social identity (Tajfel and Turner 34). The Realistic Conflict Theory suggested that groups identify with one social group whereas move away from the other social group based on the difference of their ideologies. (Tajfel and Turner 34). Tajfel and Turner noted that although realistic conflict theory highlights how the competition within groups is instigated because of the difference that people have among themselves; the realistic conflict theory "does not focus either upon the process underlying the development and maintenance of group identity nor upon the possibly autonomous effects upon the in-group and intergroup behavior of these 'subjective' aspects of group membership" (Tajfel and Turner 34). This ignored aspect of the theory was what Tajfel and Turner built upon. They stated that it was not only the competition of one group with the other that impelled human beings to seek respite in a social identity; it was also the desire to have a satisfied self-concept coupled with the satisfactory results of self-evaluation (Tajfel and Turner 40).

Self-esteem effects the personality of people. In brain science and sociology, personality is a person's understanding of their origin and enunciation of their exclusivity or gathering affiliations, (for example, national character and social personality). If the identity is affected, so is the personality and anxiety is mostly an unavoidable circumstance. Personality might be characterized as the unmistakable trademark having a place with some random

individual, or shared by all individuals from a specific social class or gathering. The term originates from the French word *identité*, which can be further traced to its semantic roots in the Latin thing *identitas*, - *tatis*, itself a derivation of the Latin descriptive word “*idem*” signifying "the equivalent." However, the arrangement of one's character happens through one's distinguishing pieces of proof with huge others (essentially with guardians and different people amid one's anecdotal encounters, and furthermore with 'gatherings' as they are seen). These others might be kind with the end goal that one tries to their attributes, qualities and convictions (a procedure of hopeful distinguishing proof), or censure when one wishes to dissociate from their qualities (a procedure of protective contra-ID) (Weinreich and Saunderson, 2003).

At the very foundation of Tajfel and Turner's theory is the idea that human beings have a self-esteem that they desire to satisfy. It is the need to “obtain, maintain or enhance satisfactory self-esteem” (Farsides 16) which is the “motivational engine behind Social Identity Theory” (Farsides 16). Desire to satisfy self-esteem results in association with various social groups and identify with any of those, resulting in formation of Social Identity. They satisfy it by associating with the highly thought of ideas of the society. For them, who a person is, also gets defined by the social group and in that way, an individual identity is a social identity. Although, according to Tajfel and Turner, there are both personal and social identities that we, as human beings, hold. Our identities, along with our definition of the self are, however, dominated by the social groups that we affiliate ourselves with for the satisfaction of what Tajfel and Turner call our “self-esteem” (39)

Tajfel and Turner's assertion, if summarized, states that in order to make meaning in lives, human beings turn to cultural worldviews which satisfy their self-esteem by giving them a reason to be associated with either good or bad. These worldviews are inextricably linked with social groups. Whether that social group is identified on the basis of class, or religion, or nation or any other such group, they bestow life with meaning and make it easier to organize what makes meaning in life. Having ethical values in lives makes the ordinarily absurd and uncertain life seem meaningful. What this conclusion suggests is

that having a satisfied self-esteem is necessary. If human beings dwell in that necessity, then their self-esteem must be held in as much esteem as it is held by others. As Thomas Larcan Farsides puts it in his PhD dissertation entitled *Self-esteem, Social Comparison and Discrimination: A Reappraisal and Development of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory*,

Such self-esteem is satisfactory if it is both positive and secure; self-esteem is unsatisfactory if it is either negative or insecure. Because of the effects of social identity on self-esteem, therefore, individuals will strive to be members of securely and legitimately positively distinct in-groups. If in-groups are negatively distinct, or if their positive in-group distinctiveness is perceived to be illegitimate and/or unstable, membership of those groups will contribute to unsatisfactory social identity and self-esteem, and the individuals concerned will be motivated to take steps to become members of securely and legitimately positively distinct in-groups. (Farsides 19)

As Tajfel and Turner see, when the self-esteem is not satisfied with one social identity, the individuals might find an escape (45) towards another identity. Leaving the in-group, which is the group with which one identifies, is referred to as exit (Farsides 20). When the members join the other group, it is considered voice (Farsides 20). In case of voice, those who have exit the group basically struggle to be superior in their identity. This shows how their identity is unconditionally linked to the identity of social spectrum. When a human being finds it hard to identify with his/ her social identity, he/ she exeunt the group. This exit of the group is not always only physical but can also be psychological (Tajfel and Turner 43). The psychological exit is not coupled with the physical exit, though. Moreover, the exit is mostly physical, that brings about social mobility as people try to affiliate themselves with groups that are better in terms of social standing. (Farsides 20)

Tajfel and Turner clearly see the complications that leaving a group may entail. They see and understand that leaving a group might not always be possible as people form that group might “continue to treat one as the member of the group” (Farsides 20). In addition to that, the person exiting the group can

also always not exit as he/ she may suffer from overcoming the psychological barriers that come with leaving a group. A person leaving the group can face the obstacle of remaining in "conflict with important values which are themselves a part of [the individual's] acceptable self-image" (Tajfel 64). The psychological need to satisfy the self-esteem being nurtured by the ideas of the in-group come face to face with the ideas of the out-group which one might be seeing as the superior group.

Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory helps one see the ways in which the identity is formed and associated with different social groups. It explains the human psychology and the way it constructs, deconstructs, or reconstructs identity. This theory provides a focused lens to view the problems of identity that Katie Brenner, the main character of Kinsella's *My Not so Perfect Life*, faces as she struggles to find peace as a person.

3.2 Research Methodology

This thesis is interpretive in nature. The selected text, *My Not so Perfect Life* by Sophie Kinsella, is analyzed using the textual analysis method. Thus, for this research, the focus is strictly on textual analysis and mostly interpretation of the thoughts of the protagonist as described by the author. The selected literary text is written in first person narration thus giving the researcher access to the thought process and logical reasoning behind different actions and decisions of the protagonist. It, in effect, allows me to understand the formation of social identity as well as the subsequent alteration as well as crisis of that very social identity.

Textual analysis has been selected as the main method for this research as it allows the research to be conducted free of certain factors that exist outside the text. These include factors regarding the author such as the author's background, his biography, personal interests, others writings etc. Another factor that does not affect the research because of textual analysis is the reader, the reader's race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, political views etc., nothing matters. Similarly, the environmental factors such as the political situation,

social factors, economic conditions, religious setting of the origin of the text does not affect the analysis done solely on the basis of the text.

CHAPTER 4

RURAL VS. URBAN IDENTITY: REAL VS. SOCIAL IDENTITY

In this chapter I scrutinize Sophie Kinsella's *My (not so) Perfect Life*, originally published in 2017. I intend to analyze the novel from the perspective of Social Identity Theory as explicated under theoretical framework. Social Identity Theory allows me to look at the novel to analyze the character of Katie Brenner who identifies herself as Cat in London. As she struggles to become a part of the London business and elite class, she has to hide her real social identity which was formed as a result of her association with a rural family. Born and raised in a rural family of farmers, Katie tries to adjust in the life in London as an insider, for which she has to completely conceal her former identity. In order to find acceptance, she depends on a façade that she builds around life in London. As she moves there, her social identity allows one to probe into how social identities are formed and how they are upheld or disregarded by the owners of that social identity. The ideas explored and discussed in the previous chapter expounded upon by Tajfel and Turner in their Social Identity Theory help me understand the character of Katie in detail and allow me to explore the issues of identity construction in the face of injured self-esteem. As Cat or Katie Brenner moves into London, she realizes that her image as a village girl is neither accepted nor appreciated in the country life and makes her struggle to achieve a façade which corresponds to the life of the city. This makes her hold her self-esteem in high place.

Kinsella's selected work is a recent publication which gives an accurate image of today's life overwhelmed by digital social media. Her work focuses on everyday aspects of life that youngsters and teenagers have fully incorporated in their lives. The lives of all the characters, in this sense, are marred by lies that they tell on social media merely to be accepted by their social circle. They follow all the fads and trends that go viral on social media just to prove updated and part of a happy elite life. The lies that they build are what shatter the identities of these characters as their identities are also a fad.

These identities are defined by what is accepted and appreciated in the world of social media. This chapter sees how Katie Brenner formulates her identity around the life in London and what factors led her to denounce her social identification with her rural identity and instead try to associate with people who have a different social identity as a Londoner, as elites and as people who are not farmers. Thus, to sum it up, the rest of the chapter first provides a synopsis of the novel and discusses the identity formation of Katie in line with the urban life. It discusses how Katie has an enkindled desire to associate with Londoners and form a social identity by acting just like the Londoners.

A brief synopsis of the novel here is important as it helps me administer my analysis without diverging to replicate the story throughout. The novel, essentially, revolves around the struggles of Katie Brenner, a simple village girl, who moves to London to fulfil the dream of her life. She wishes to be a part of business life in London and be a super business woman as well as be considered a city girl. As she moves to her office in London, she dreams of having as perfect a life as her boss Demeter. Demeter's life is perfectly outlaid on her social media where her Instagram is filled with details about parties and daily achievements. Instagram is a social media site where people share their daily lives through images with their friends' circle. Her dinners, her shopping, her life in a nutshell is a perfect and a happy life that one can only wish for. Katie wishes to get that life, not knowing that Demeter's life also suffers from deceits and is not as perfect as her Instagram posts.

As Katie struggles to become a member of the out-groups (class and city), she changes her accent to that of the Londoners'. This marks her first attempt to identify with another social group. In fact, this attempt is accompanied by change in her name to Cat. However, her life in London is short-lived as she is fired by Demeter. Cat, thus, has to move back to her life as Katie. Avoiding to tell her parents Bidy and Mick, Katie lies that she is taking leave to help them with their business of 'glamping'. Glamping provides the view of village life with perfection and with the comforts of city life. Katie starts to run the business and designs the leaflets and arranges everything else according to what Londoners would look for. It is not long before Demeter

visits the glamping site with her family. However, she does not have any memory of Cat as her employee which Katie believes is typical of her because of her self-absorbed behavior.

In order to seek revenge on being fired, Katie uses Demeter's wish to find a substitute activity to turn on her. She fabricates an activity called Vedari in which she makes her suffer by placing stones on Demeter and by making her clean horses' waste. When Katie enters the stable, she is shocked to find Demeter crying by hugging a horse. This makes Katie realize that Demeter's life is not as perfect as she thinks. This also makes her feel sorry for Demeter and she resolves to help her later on in the novel when she comes to know that Alex, her other ex-boss and crush, is coming to fire Demeter. Katie helps by going to the office and meeting her older friends who confess that they made everything up to get Demeter fired. As they confess, she records everything and exposes their bullying attempts. Demeter not only gets her job back but also gets Katie hired and they all start working together happily.

4.1 Katie's Social Identity

According to Farsides, "individuals sometimes think of themselves and act toward others in terms of characteristics and situations they share with others" (13). As they do that, they actually operate "in terms of their social identities" (Farsides 13). My (not so) Perfect Life represents this issue of identification with groups and the formation of identity on that basis. The character of Katie expresses the issue of social identity in its extreme form as she wishes to be a part of city life and feels ashamed to be called "Farrmer Katie" (Kinsella 19). As she is made to feel embarrassed by her fellows to be what she is, she tries her best to become a part of the struggles of busy London life instead of her life in country side. The countryside becomes an icon of shame, an inferior group whose rituals and customs Katie did not want to follow so as to merge with the city life and form an identity that can be easily associated with city life. She forms a desire to be a part of the social group that is most commonly referred to as Londoners.

The first step that Katie takes to get away from her identity as a villager is changing her name. Considering the stylish naming in the city of London, Katie wishes to change her name. It makes her feel unique and cool, as the city life demands. The name forms the major part of her identity which Katie actually realizes as she gives her “full disclosure” (Kinsella 4) on the idea of her name. She expresses that “it’s not absolutely me. Not yet. I’m still part-Katie. I’ve been calling myself ‘Cat’ since I started this job, but for some reason it hasn’t fully taken” (Kinsella 4). Although she has started off by changing her name, the basic and major part forming her identity, she is not satisfied earlier on. “Sometimes I don’t respond as quickly as I should when people call out ‘Cat.’ I hesitate before I sign it” (Kinsella 4). Although it’s a little hard adjusting to the new identity she creates for herself by changing her name, Katie actually finds it to be a hideous crime to be revealed as a villager or through her name. For her, giving away would be quite hideous as according to her, “one hideous time I had to scrub out a ‘K’ I’d started writing on one of those big office birthday cards. Luckily no one saw. I mean, who doesn’t know their own name?” (Kinsella 4). It represents how Katie does not want to see herself as a village girl and depends on a new identity.

The reason behind formation of this identity lies in Cat’s lowered self-esteem by association with her identity as a villager. Thus, she satisfies herself by becoming “Cat Brenner from London. Cat Brenner who works in a cool office with distressed-brick walls and white shiny desks and funky chairs and a coat stand in the shape of a naked man” (Kinsella 4). This change in Katie can be easily linked to Yurchisin according to which individuals form identities based around the idea of how they think others perceive them and how they want others to perceive them, thus forming a “reflexive evaluation” (Kinsella 736). At the same time, this identity formation and changing does not necessarily include what others actually think about that very individual.

As stated above, the reason that Katie Brenner wishes to identify with a group which is those of Londoners lies in the feeling of inferiority that comes with the association with her rural group. The villagers are considered below in standard as they live closer to everything organic whereas the people of the city

live closer to artificiality and are facilitated by everything unnatural. As the boundaries are set and marked as superior and inferior, there is a natural desire to associate with the superior class as it satisfies one's self-esteem. According to Farsides, "all individuals whether operating in terms of their personal or social identities, have a need for satisfactory (positive) self-esteem" (13). This self-esteem is satisfied by joining the group which is deemed superior by the society. When Katie identifies herself with the members of city life, she actually satisfies her self-esteem by denouncing the shameful identity as farmer Katie. Thus, "because of the universal need for positive self-esteem, people try to belong to superior groups" (Farsides 13). Katie's desire to denounce the membership of village life and take on a whole new city life and its identity stems from this universal desire to have positive self-esteem.

Katie's self-esteem is so lowered by such associations that she even changes her accent. When she is asked about her accent, she feels insecure that her identity will be given away. Whenever the revelation of identity posits itself as a threat in front of Katie, she becomes defensive and struggles to conceal it. In *My (not so) Perfect Life*, Katie does this at one point and hides her identity saying that "I guess I'm just not an accent person," (Kinsella 11). She expresses her concern about hiding her identity and says that "I don't want to talk about where I'm from; I want to press on toward my goal" (Kinsella 11). Unfortunately, the problem is that achievement of her goal is dependent on being able to assimilate with the city people. If she keeps on her identity as a villager, a girl who is daughter of a farmer, her goal is threatened because of the unacceptance by the group she wants to be a part of. As the group that she belongs to is considered inferior, she has no option but to hide her identity to achieve her life goals. This happens because of the inter-group discrimination which Bagby & Rector emphasize. They write that "the mere categorization of individuals is all that is necessary to create ingroup favouritism" (emphasis added) (398). Espinoza & Garza also cite Tajfel to stress that "[a]ny social categorization which creates identifiable, distinct social groups (e.g., ethnicity, gender, Democrat/Republican) can be sufficient to evoke spontaneous biases in perception, attitude, and behaviour favouring one's group" (381). It is this

favoritism that makes Katie look for a life that is not marred by her former social identity.

4.1.1 Katie's Self-esteem and Identity Association

According to Hogg & Abrams, the "social categorization - the discontinuous classification of individuals into two distinct groups is sufficient to generate intergroup discrimination" (51). As stated earlier, the lowered self-esteem makes this distinction more evident and hurts the self-esteem. The discrimination, on the other hand, makes Katie have a lower self-esteem due to which she decides to switch her in-group. In case of Katie, one sees a bullying of her in-group which is the major possible reason of her wish to form an association with life in city. In one of the meetings held in the office, Demeter informs her juniors that a company selling dairy products requires branding. After a while, Demeter has to leave the room to tend to something which she handles by making Rosa deliver the ideas to the gathered team. As Rosa steps us, the conversation goes as follows:

“OK.” Rosa addresses the room. “So Demeter wanted me to tell you about this new potential client, CCY, or Contented Cow Yogurt. It’s a range of organic yogurt from some farm in Gloucestershire.” Rosa passes round a pile of cheaply printed brochures depicting yogurt pots with a plain Helvetica logo and blurry photo of a cow. “Their riff is how dairy farming is a threatened occupation but they’re really great and...er...” She peers at her notes. “They eat organic grass, something like that?” She looks up. “Does anyone know anything at all about dairy farming?”

Before I can even draw breath, there’s a burst of laughter round the table.

“*Dairy farming?*” (Kinsella 19)

The way Rosa consciously proves her lack of knowledge about farming represents the demeaned nature of the job. As a part of the social circle who gets everything ready made in city life, Rosa considers it a demeaned job to

make the yogurt. In fact, the ones who make the yogurt become inferior because they facilitate the people in the city life. Thus, this becomes one of the reasons Katie does not want to be associated with her in-group. What she belongs to is insignificant for the people of the out-group and hurts her self-esteem. According to Van Doorn, "public displays of connection serve as vital identity signals that allow people to navigate the networked social world" (595). It is because of this that Katie is forced to conceal her identity. When the discussion is on board, Katie wonders, "do I know anything about cows? I grew up on a dairy farm. But something's stopping me from speaking" (Kinsella 19).

It is the injured self-esteem that comes with her association with life at farm that makes her conceal the reality about herself more strongly. In fact, she is hit by a similarly painful flashback as her mind replays "the memory of those girls in Birmingham calling me 'Farrmer Katie' flashes into my brain, making me wince. Maybe I'll just see how the conversation goes for a few moments" (Kinsella 19). She wants to take her time to make sure that her former identity is not too inferior. It turns out, however, that it is greatly degraded in her out-group. When Rosa "stands up and reaches for a marker" (Kinsella 19) to "do a bit of word association" (Kinsella 19) with the word "Countryside" (Kinsella 19), she is spontaneously answered with words like "Smelly" and "Scary" (Kinsella 19). The association with what forms Katie's identity are smelly and scary making her draw in and not respond to them or reassert their identity. Instead, she decides to leave that identity and hide it completely

4.1.2 In-Groups and Out-Groups in Katie's Life

Social Identity Theory focuses on both in-groups and out-groups. The understanding of both in-group and out-group is necessary for the analysis of the novel as this understanding creates delineation of groups that Katie associates with. In-group refers to the group that one is a part of. The group, in social identity theory refers to the people who have a similar identity based on similarity of ethnicity, race etc. However, as noted in *My (not so) Perfect Life*, Katie comes across a number of group associations. Before she moves to London, Katie's in-group is that of a countryside girl whereas the out-group for her is the city life. As she moves to city, she struggles to become a part of this

out-group. However, this is not the only out-group for her. Katie also belongs to a lower class, unlike her boss Demeter, and also wants to be a part of this class based group. She wants to be a part of the elite class.

Elite class also becomes a part of out-group and she tries to follow and become a part of that out-group. The last out-group that Katie wishes to be a part of is social media. The life that she has cannot be represented on digital social media because it is totally opposite of what is expected. Her life is not so perfect and that gives her a feeling of banishment from that group as well. Throughout the novel, Katie struggles to become a part of these out-groups. According to David Bell "if we type ourselves into being in cyberspace... we can make and remake who we are endlessly" (116). Bell reinforces the idea that social media identities are not bound by what an individual want to hide in their real life. If someone wants to hide something from the social or lie about anything, it is, in fact, that easy.

Katie does not form an out-group with every other out-group. What forms out-groups for her have been inevitably defined in terms of contrasts formed with her in-groups. "In-groups do not compare themselves with every cognitively available out-group: the out-group must be perceived as a relevant out-group" (Tajfel & Turner 41, emphasis added). As stated by Tajfel and Turner, her out-group must define the in-group that Katie belongs to. As she is a villager, her out-group becomes city life. As she is a member of low class, her out-group becomes the elite and professional class which is followed by Demeter. This class is actually defined by social media, as it sets the standards of higher class. In fact, as Katie realizes, she can become a part of that class only if she follows what has been shown and prompted in magazines. The life has been defined by magazines and social media. What goes viral on social media has to be lived up to, which is why Katie considers building her life up on a lie. Katie's life is, thus, marked by a struggle to become a part of these two out-groups, which can be shown off in the third out-group called social media. She uses the third one to build a lie around which her life revolves.

Considering the rural and urban life conflict, Katie's life also becomes a conflict in itself as she faces an identity crises and feels a nostalgia for her life

in countryside. However, she is unable to fully comprehend the nostalgia because her wish to dissociate with the inferior countryside is stronger than her nostalgia for home. In the very beginning of the novel after getting out of a horrible commute, Katie has a “a sudden flashback to Dad pushing open our kitchen door, stepping outside, spreading his arms wide to take in the view of fields and endless sky,” (Kinsella 2). As compared to the stuffy roads, trains, offices of London, she is taken back to pen and serene fields. It represents a completely different lifestyle which Katie misses but does not want to identify with because of its inferior status. Her nostalgia is instantly suppressed as she thinks of her boss and introduces her. “This is my boss. This is Demeter” (Kinsella 2). For Katie, Demeter is a “woman with the perfect life” (Kinsella 2). She is the person from the out group who inspires her to find a similar perfection in her life. In fact, she starts associating with this out group to find that identity. Thus, the nostalgia for her home and her initial social identity is easily overpowered by her desire to seek the identity of perfection, so that her self-esteem remains satisfied.

Her nostalgia for home surfaces in the form of her guilt about leaving her home. When Katie’s father asks her if she has met many people in London, Katie becomes defensive and thinks, “yes, I’m probably defensive, but he doesn’t understand, and it really doesn’t help when he starts wincing and shaking his head” (Kinsella 5). What Katie doesn’t realize is that she is hiding her disappointment from her father because she is nostalgic about her past and that life. She misses that communication and does not want to let this feeling overpower her lest it becomes a hurdle in the path of her goals. Therefore, when he asks “And you’re really happy in the Big Smoke, Katie my love?” (Kinsella 5), she assures herself that “I am happy. But that doesn’t mean it’s not hard.” (Kinsella 5). Katie considers her decision about leaving the countryside and states that she “had a choice: Follow my heart or don’t break his. I think in the end I broke a bit of both our hearts” (Kinsella 5). She realizes that her separation from her own initial social identity is a pain that only she will understand. It is something “which the rest of the world doesn’t understand, because they think it’s normal to move out and away from home. But they aren’t my dad and me, who lived together, just us, for all those years” (Kinsella 5). Katie does have a

nostalgia for home but she does not realize this that early on in the novel. She is missing home, she wants to be like her father, have that social identity but she doesn't realize that she is forming her identity by identifying with all of this.

4.2 Katie's 'Exit' and 'Voice'

Tajfel and Turner note that when people are dissatisfied with their self-esteem as created by the distinctiveness of their in-group with other groups, the group association becomes unsatisfactory as well. People try to associate with those groups that are held in high self-esteem. In the face of insecure self-esteem, people are left with two options primarily, "leaving the unsatisfactory in-group (i.e. 'exit') or changing the in-group so that it becomes satisfactory (i.e. 'voice')" (Farsides 20). Katie's self-esteem is not satisfied with her association with the in-group which is her village, therefore, she exits that group and joins the out-group. Her response which is materialized in her leaving the group is "essentially an individualistic response to unsatisfactory social identity" (Farsides 20). As Katie is not satisfied with her life as a village girl, she joins the other group. The exit of group can both be "actual, where individuals physically leave the unsatisfactory group, or psychological, where individuals physically remain in the same group but psychologically distance themselves from it" (Farsides 20). Katie's leave of the group is both physical and psychological as she becomes hybrid and faces an identity crisis. She is a different person on the inside when she joins the city life but a completely different person on the outside. This outside person is marked by her association with the city life and her forceful identification with it.

The first option that Katie takes is the 'exit' which means that she leaves her in-group and enters another group. She moves to London and starts associating with that new identity as a Londoner. That marks her exit from her social identity as a countryside girl. Although she takes on a new name and takes on another identity, she still cannot sustain the newer identity for quite long a period of time. After spending sometime at her office in London successfully disguised under the false pretense of a girl hailing from Birmingham, she is fired and has to go back to the countryside. As she goes

back to the countryside, she struggles once again to exit the group. She tries her hardest to exit it by sending numerous applications for jobs in London but she is unable to find any. Her search implies that she is looking for an 'exit' from her initial in-group once again. She desperately wishes to cling on to the identity she has formed with people in London. Her exit is not by choice, it's a necessity.

One reason of identity crises that Katie faces is that she has an opposite acceptance in both her original in-group and out-group. Katie's exit, although easy in physical terms is not as easy in the abstract terms. She changes her in-group and joins the out-group but members of her original in-group keep treating her as one of the in-group. Farsides considers mobility to another group in such a scenario as "physically impossible, e.g. where others continue to treat one as a member of the group no matter how one tries to distance oneself from it" (Farsides 20). Katie is treated as a member of in-group by her family members no matter how hard she tries to leave that group. She is associated with it and she is unable to jerk it off. As she is fired and she moves back to village, she tries to use "voice" (Farsides 20) as a second option. As pointed out by Tajfel and Turner, 1979, there are many options of using this strategy of satisfying one's self-esteem without necessarily having to leave the group. Where one option is associating the other group with negative self-esteem, another option is modifying one's in-group for satisfactory self-esteem by reaching the standard of out-group. This is what Katie tries to do. She uses 'voice' to bring the inferior standard of her in-group to meet the superior standard of out-group which she now wants to identify with.

When Katie is fired and has to return to her family in Somerset, she tries to change the ideas of her father. She does not agree with what her father wants to do. Her father wants to start a business of camping for the people hailing from city. Whatever idea that Katie's father come up is not like or accepted by Katie. She wants to assert her ideas which have been transformed by her residence in the London. She considers her knowledge of people's demands. She knows of those demands because she has tried to live up to those demands and has allowed their choices to define hers as well. Therefore, she tells her father that it would be a good idea to have yurts instead of old style tents. She

even tells her father that having high prices is a very good idea because people love high process (Kinsella 37). She knows that people in London want to have things that cost them a lot. This is one way of associating themselves with the elite classes. Therefore, Katie tells her parents that “People love high prices,” (Kinsella 37). Although her dad “looks skeptical” (Kinsella 37) and say that “I think you’re wrong there, love.” (Kinsella 37), she still knows what she is doing. Katie tells her father ““If you’re going to open a glamping business, it has to be cool. It has to be...’ I search for the right word. ‘Hip. Authentic. Not crappy tents from Dave Yarnett.’” (Kinsella 36). Her idea of cool is defined by city life. She is forcing that group here in village.

Katie actually tries to meet the demands of the people as she believes that she knows what they want. She refuses her dad’s opinion of buying tents as she says that “no one will come and glamp in cut-price tents from Dave Yarnett! Whereas if you bought some yurts, made them look nice, put up some bunting, cleared up the yard...” (Kinsella 36). She informs her father that she is not wrong. High process and a luxurious standard is not a silly thing to do. “It’s prestige pricing. They see the prices and they think it must be good. If you’ve got some money to invest, high-end is the way to go. You’ll need luxury tents, for a start.” (Kinsella 36). Therefore, she asserts that he buys “Yurts or tepees or whatever. And proper beds” (Kinsella 37).

Katie “search[es] around in my mind for things I’ve seen on Instagram. ‘High thread count’” (Kinsella 37). What Katie doesn’t realize is that she is using ‘voice’ to change her in-group and make it look like her out-group. She looks at the spacious airy grounds and “landscape with a new eye” (Kinsella 36). She knows that “the view is spectacular. The land stretches away from us, green and lush, the grass rippling in the breeze. I can see, in the distance, the sun glinting on our little lake” (Kinsella 36). She is so inspired by the life in London, that in her desperate attempt to make her in-group the same, she wants to alter the geographical setting with which her group is defined. She thinks that “we could buy a new rowing boat. Kids would love it. Maybe a rope swing. We could have fire pits...barbecues...an outdoor pizza oven, maybe....” (Kinsella

36). All these things actually inform her use of 'voice' to form an association with out-group if not physically possible.

This chapter looks deeply at the identity formation of Kinsella's novel's major character Katie. The protagonist Katie's identity oscillates between her two identities one of which is that of a Londoner while the other one is that of her original identity. Her original identity is that of a countryside girl. However, it is because of her lowered self-esteem that she finds an identity that is held in esteem. As a little girl, she is faced by criticism on being a farmer which leads her to become one of those successful women who make it on magazines and do not do the farm chores. She wants to be a Londoner in accent, in name, in profession and in everything related to her life. The analysis shows that Katie forms her social identity by associating with people in London because of the high esteem in which city people are held. The next chapter follows the analysis of this novel to see how Katie also struggles to associate her social identity with that of elite class for which she uses social media. She presents a fake life on social media leading her to identity crises.

CHAPTER 5

THE ANXIETES AND DISILLILUSIONMENT

The previous chapter explored and comprehended the social identity formation of Katie and her in-groups and out-groups. In order to meticulously understand the social identity issues, in this chapter, I analyze the same novel *My (not so) Perfect Life* by Sophie Kinsella to see how the identity formation is a complex phenomenon. It is not formed individually but is created through contact with various groups existing within societies. This chapter realizes that Katie's social identity is not only confined to association with and dissociation from rural class but also leaps over to enter the domain of class-based circles. Katie Brenner also endlessly tries to associate with the elite class of London. She struggles to form a similar exterior as those of elite class people. Her attempts materialize in the form of her attire, her choice of eateries, her selection of behavior etc. In her efforts, she highlights how her competition is not with one social group but crosses over to a variety of them. Katie's behavioral changes stem out from her desire to be accepted in various groups which shows her social identification. In fact, her identity switching concurs with Tajfel and Turner's idea that social identification is "not only the competition of one group with the other that impelled human beings to seek respite in a social identity; it was also the desire to have a satisfied self-concept coupled with the satisfactory results of self-evaluation" (Tajfel and Turner 40). Thus, the chapter sees some more ways in which Katie's social identification clearly stems from a desire to have positive self-assertion.

This chapter explores the dilemmas and anxieties that Katie faces while struggling to find her social identity. Her attempts center on her wish to be associated with an elite class. Her utmost struggles bring her out as a person who is fashioned as an elite person merely on social media. She fabricates her life around a lie as she speaks of the parties she never had, food she never ate and clothes she never wore. This develops her identity on social media and renders her quite alone. She is unable to associate with her family at home because of the disguise she has in London. Similarly, she cannot wear off this disguise in London for the fear that she will not be accepted. This leads her to

face an identity crisis and have a communicative distance with both her family and her colleagues. This chapter explores Katie's struggle to achieve the social identity of an elite person which only leads her to anxieties and dilemmas through social media perpetuation of lies.

5.1 The city of Capitals: Cat's Struggle of Social Mobility

Katie Brenner's migration to London makes Katie move into a new out-group. This out-group is characterized by a strong class struggle, along with a struggle to reach the heights of success. Katie notices that "commuting in London is basically warfare. It's a constant campaign of claiming territory; inching forward; never relaxing for a moment. Because if you do, someone will step past you. Or step on you" (Kinsella 1). The sketch of London that is drawn calls attention to the capitalistic domain of London. She struggles to be like the people within her out-group, London. In fact, she goes to the extent of being like these people by wearing the kinds of clothes they wear. The problem lies in the fact that Katie's movement is characterized by looking at something in high esteem. This means that Katie is holding her out-group in higher esteem than her in-group. As a matter of fact, what becomes evident from Katie's behavior is that she needs to "obtain, maintain or enhance satisfactory self-esteem" (Farsides 16). According to Farsides, this is the "motivational engine behind Social Identity Theory" (Farsides 16). This is precisely what becomes important for Katie to feel confident about her identity. Thus, she switches from the identity of her ingroup to the identity of her out-group.

Katie's transition into an out-group is marked by her struggle to be one of the elite class whom she fancies. She was warned about the capitalistic endeavors of the Londoners by her father hailing from countryside very early on in the novel. "My dad always says: If you can't run with the big dogs, stay under the porch. And I want to run with the big dogs. That's why I'm here." (Kinsella 1). Despite her father's assertion, Kinsella is resolved in her mind to become one of the out-groups. She is on a capitalist run which makes her leave behind her former identification with her in-group in a rural setting. She wishes to be a part of the urban setting. This results from her dissatisfaction with the esteem in which her in-group is held. It is almost as if her self-esteem is not

satisfied with one social identity, thus as an individual she tries to find an escape (Tajfel and Turner 45) towards another identity. This entails that she wishes to be elite and she knows that in order to successfully merge with the life in London, she has to follow the herd-instinct. She has to run in every walk of life so that she can be appreciated and her self-esteem can be satisfied. Although, according to Tajfel and Turner, our identities, along with our definition of the self are, however, dominated by the social groups that we affiliate ourselves with for the satisfaction of what Tajfel and Turner call our “self-esteem” (39).

Since Katie holds her in-group in low esteem, she involuntarily starts exiting that group. In fact, this point marks the initiation towards her social mobility. Exit refers to the transition from one identity to another because the former identity does not allow the subject to hold himself in high esteem. Thus, as noted by Farsides,

Occasionally exit alone can occur, i.e. exiting individuals simply renounce membership of the unsatisfactory group without attempting to join (or establish) a more satisfactory one (i.e. rather than "exchanging" an unsatisfactory social identity for a more satisfactory one, such individuals exit from the unsatisfactory group in order to simply operate in terms of more satisfactory personal identities). (20)

Katie seeks to socially reach a higher standard. She wants to be known as a member of the elite and in doing so, she begins to exit her in-group. An important thing to notice in Katie's identity transformation, however, is that Katie does both the things simultaneously; that is renounce her group and find personal success which also allows her to identify with the elite social group. Katie's movement from in-group is not only a renouncement of the in-group. It is what Farsides refers to as "social mobility" (Farsides 20). Thus, her feelings of dissatisfaction materialize in the form of her social identification with a different group. Basically, Katie's identity transformation marks because she does not merely transition her identity from a villager to a Londoner but also from a low class to an elite class. However, this identity transformation is not complete and subtle in case of Katie. Social mobility makes her identity dubious, as she is unable to suddenly join a new class. Her entry requires a

number of fulfilments like a specific style of clothing, a specific choice of restaurants to eat at etc. Her choices require her to be elite to be identified not only as a Londoner, but an elite Londoner. What Katie does, thus, is that she moves to this class by making choices that Londoners make even if she does not like these choices. Thus, since Katie's self-esteem is not satisfied, she decides to escape into a new realm of social identities.

Katie's dissatisfaction with her own social identity stems from lower self-esteem in which her in-group is held by the society. She understands that her social group is held in low self-esteem by everyone around her, which implies that her social identification is dependent on those around her. The feelings of low self-esteem created for her group by the society are a result of the distinction of classes. The upper and lower classes are distinct leading the elite class to discriminate against the poor class. This discrimination may not always require a specific condition to trigger the feelings. Tajfel and Turner note that there is a sufficiency condition within social identity theory which states "that the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups that is, social categorization per se -is sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination favoring the in-group" (38).

Katie's desire to leave her in-group stems from this discrimination that she knows people of lower class face. Therefore, as she belongs to the lower class, she tries to be like the upper class. She knows that she will not be respected in London if she does not wear expensive brands or eat from expensive restaurants. This is "because of the universal need for positive self-esteem" (Farsides 13) due to which people "try to belong to superior groups and/or try to make the groups they are members of positively distinct, via intergroup discrimination if necessary" (Farsides 13).

One such example of Katie's social identification lies in her choice of food. Katie brings her food from her home but she does not find it the trendiest thing to do which ultimately leads her to hide the truth about what she eats. She is unable to openly admit her eating choices. In order to avoid such discrimination, Katie needs to form such an identity that makes her look all stylish and expensive in her entire attire. As it happens, Katie hides the fact that

she brings her own sandwich from home and instead lies to her colleague telling her that she actually got her sandwich from a random stranger. This makes her colleague throw Katie's sandwich into a bin. When Katie tries to retrieve the sandwich, she receives a contemptuous look and behavior from a passerby. Just because the social categorization is different, Katie is looked down upon. Katie feels utterly conflicted because she likes something else but has to express otherwise Katie says:

OK, this is the most excruciating moment of my life. There's no point explaining the truth to this woman; it'll be too mortifying for both of us. And, by the way, I know my hair isn't blow-dried or anything and I know my shoes need re-heeling—but do I really look to her like someone who lives on the streets? Are my clothes that terrible compared to the average Notting Hill outfit? (Kinsella 30)

These thoughts of Katie following the incident in which the woman humiliates her first and then becomes kind towards her reflect her desperate desire to be among those who are not like her own people. This stresses the importance of finding superiority amongst others. These others might be kind with the end goal that one tries to adopt their attributes, qualities and convictions (a procedure of hopeful distinguishing proof), or censure when one wishes to dissociate from their qualities (a procedure of protective contra-ID) (Weinreich and Saunderson). The fact that homeless people and people following brands differ from each other is sufficient to make them feel divided and different. She wishes to be rich which is inevitably decided by her appearance. For her, the perfect embodiment of rich and perfect is Demeter, her boss.

5.1.1 Demeter as an Epitome of Elite Class

Katie's boss Demeter is a perfect person in Katie's eyes because she has fulfilled all the desires that Katie wants to fulfill. She is an urban woman, a boss and a person with a seemingly perfect life. Knowing that her self-esteem has been injured because of her association with her older in-group (that of a countryside girl), Katie associates Demeter with a positive self-esteem. Demeter, in this sense, becomes an embodiment of the elite, making Katie

desperately wish to have a life like hers. In the beginning of the novel, with her first introduction, Katie refers to her physical perfection as she defines Demeter as “tall and slim” (Kinsella 3) who “has shiny brunette hair and, as I already mentioned, amazing eyebrows” (Kinsella 3). Demeter’s face is a perfect face just like her life and her name. Katie notes the superiority of identity that Demeter’s name gives her. Unlike Katie, who has to change her name from Katie to Cat, “she’s just Demeter. Like Madonna. ‘Hi’” (Kinsella 2), Katie hears “saying on the phone, in that confident, louder-than-average voice of hers. ‘It’s De-meeee-ter.’ Demeter is so well known that she does not need to use her surname Farlowe. That is how her identity is formed and held in high esteem. Demeter’s appearance and her identity associated with her name is important because she is a person from elite class everything about whom is considered perfect. In order to be associated with elite class, Katie tries to follow her in all her aspects. A look at her life in general also shows it to be perfect which Katie follows later on in the novel. Katie sees that

She has zillions of friends she’s known ‘forever’ and is always going to parties and events and design awards. Sometimes she’ll sigh and say it’s her third night out that week and exclaim, ‘Glutton for punishment!’ as she changes into her Miu Miu shoes. (Kinsella 3)

In the world of today’s media what Demeter has is amazing and inspiring. That is exactly what Katie wants. Katie associates this perfect life depicted on Demeter’s social media with elite class and finds it superior. She sees that Demeter has a perfect life. In fact,

She’s intimidating. She can’t be easily impressed. She always had a better weekend than anyone else; she always has a better holiday story than anyone else; if someone spots a celebrity in the street, she always went to school with them or has a godchild going out with their brother, or something. (Kinsella 9)

The problem is that Cat also needs to know what elite life is like for which she finds Demeter’s life to be a perfect example. Having a perfect example is important because according to Farsides, if their positive in-group

distinctiveness is perceived to be illegitimate and/or unstable, membership of those groups will contribute to unsatisfactory social identity and self-esteem, and the individuals concerned will be motivated to take steps to become members of securely and legitimately positively distinct in-groups (Kinsella 19). In order to be accepted, she has to be a part of that in-group too. She wants to be like Demeter because her life is perfect and perfection satisfies her self-esteem by making her be involved with highest of classes which are capitalistically defined relations.

Katie struggles to enter a new in-group for capitalistic pursuits and wishes to be associated with the elite class. Katie's house stands as the standard house which further defines her class as elite. While thinking of Demeter, Katie thinks that "I don't know what she earns, but she lives in Shepherd's Bush in this stunning house which apparently she paid over two million for—my friend Flora told me" (Kinsella 3). Katie knows that her house defines Demeter's worth. Social identification and social categorization, according to Tajfel, leads to social comparison in which the individual compares his/her physical, psychological and social characteristics to other members of the society". (Ramin 95). The house that Demeter lives in is situated in Shepherd's Bush which means that she lives in an area occupied by elite class people. The class distinction becomes apparent as the beautiful houses are supposed to be in this vicinity.

Katie wants to switch her social identity from one class to another and although she has already become a part of London by physically moving in the place, she still needs to do a lot to become a part of the social class that Demeter belongs to. The house that Demeter lives in is so perfect that Katie thinks, "It is a house in a magazine. It's been profiled in Living etc, with Demeter standing in her all-white kitchen, looking elegant and creative in a retro-print top" (Kinsella 3). At another instance, Katie wonders how Demeter's house is "heart-achingly tasteful" (Kinsella 3). She again stresses the similarity of the house with a house in magazine. "It looks like a house in a magazine. It is a house in a magazine. It's been profiled in Living etc, with Demeter standing in her all-white kitchen, looking elegant and creative in a retro-print top" (Kinsella 3). It

is this life that Katie craves as Demeter is known and appreciated for what she has and it satisfies her sense of self-esteem. Katie also wants herself to be held in high esteem. As according to Farsides, because of the universal need for positive self-esteem, people try to belong to superior groups" (Farsides 13).

5.2 Price Tags: Defining Class Based Identity

Social identification on the bases of class distinction has been noted by Tajfel and Turner who see that in such cases, the elite class always forms the in-group that everyone wants to be in. The reason lies in the luxuriousness that brings a feeling of superiority and hence, of self-esteem. The class consciousness has so deeply penetrated in the minds of people in London that the price tags define the worth of people. Katie knows that what she wears and what she eats defines her self-worth. Thus she considers elite class as another out-group which she wants to become her in-group. According to Tajfel, another option to get satisfaction is modifying one's in-group for satisfactory self-esteem by reaching the standard of out-group.

Katie believes that the price tags on her clothes define her which is true in a sense that Londoners associate class with what one wears and what one is able to afford. Katie thinks, "my coat's pretty warm, even though it cost £9.99 and came from the flea market. It had a label in it, CHRISTIN BIOR, but I cut it out as soon as I got home" (Kinsella 1). She knows that she will not be respected for the inexpensive clothes she is wearing because "you can't work where I work and have CHRISTIN BIOR in your coat. You could have a genuine vintage Christian Dior label." (Kinsella 1). This, in fact, forms the very beginning of the novel.

In the very opening pages of the novel, Katie exposes the class based thematic concern of the novel. She begins by analyzing her outer look because that is the first thing that makes her identical to her in-group. Now, this becomes her out-group as she starts perceiving herself as a part of the out-group to be accepted and have her self-esteem satisfied. The brands that she names and believes should be worn are actually promoted by social media, e.g through magazines. Social media, in this sense, defines perfection for all the people. Just

like Demeter's house was like a house in the magazine, the clothing in the magazine is needed the set standard that has to be followed. As a person finding social mobility, media influences her a lot. Media sets the standard for her and it is this standard that she finds everywhere. Because that standard can satisfy her self-esteem as not only a person who wishes to be associated with rural class but a person who is an elite rural person. Therefore, she Katie uses social media to create an illusion of the life that she is not actually living.

5.3 Social Media Perpetuation of Ideal Identity

The various in-group that Katie associates with, like London and elite class, can only be easily expressed through social media. Katie and Demeter both present their live on social media and show how they are a part of the group. The only difference is that Demeter's life is not a lie whereas Katie uses social media to channelize a lie and become a part of the in-groups that she admires in real life. Social media promotes an image of an ideal identity which most of the people want to follow. Demeter actually promotes this identity by posting pictures on Facebook, Instagram and other digital social media sites. The standard that she has to maintain has been set by social media as well. As Tajfel and Turner see, when the self-esteem is not satisfied with one social identity, the individuals might find an escape (45) towards another identity even if Katie lies about her newly formed identity.

When Katie starts the Glamping business for her father in Somerset, Demeter brings her children on a vacation to Katie's farm. When she visits this place, she wears what she believes is village dress, learnt through social media. When Katie sees Demeter on her farm, "she's sitting on the deck, all alone, wearing the perfect, glossy magazine version of country clothes. Slouchy trousers in a slubby gray linen, together with a collarless shirt and some Moroccan-looking leather slippers" (Kinsella 55). Demeter does not realize what kind of clothes are worn by the villagers because her self-esteem is already held high because of her association with the elite class. Only social media or digital media defines the kind of dresses she needs to wear in such a place. She is so strongly and so completely controlled by the world of social media that she wears what she has seen in magazines. In fact, it is the modern version of the

village life that has attracted her. It has not happened out of nowhere. Her sudden interest in this place has been intrigued by the mention of the farm in a magazine. “Ansters Farm. Yes, it’s very new. Didn’t you see the write-up in *The Guardian*?” (Kinsella 55). It is a review in the magazine that prompts her interest.

It is not only Demeter who is influenced by social media. Other people who cannot afford to be like Demeter also find her life on social media to be perfect. It is this perfection on social media, this ability to live up to the highest and most luxurious standards that make Katie look for association with this in-group which is defined by class. Thus, it is because of this that Katie’s idea is not only that of staying confined to a shift from urban to rural area but also associating with another class. That class is digitally defined. As stated by Farsides, it is the need to “obtain, maintain or enhance satisfactory self-esteem” (Farsides 16). Therefore, what Katie does is lie on social media to become a part of the in-group which is held in high esteem because of its capital domination. She states that “I need to stop seething. I need to calm down and be Zen. I will therefore distract myself” (Kinsella 18).

Katie distracts herself by creating an image of herself on social media which is totally different from who she really is. After having a very hectic day, Katie returns home and finds her “Instagram account, consider for a moment, then post a picture of the Shard, with the caption: Another amazing day, balancing work, play, and not much rest!!” (Kinsella 18). Katie hides her imperfect day because the lives of the elite are perfect. The perfection is seen on social media everyday by Katie. As Tajfel and Turner see, if the self-esteem is not satisfied with one social identity, the individuals might find an escape (45) towards another identity and try to maintain it by any means.

To associate more strongly with the elite class, she also pitches in a picture that proves her to be able to afford expensive restaurants. She

find[s] a gorgeous photo of a hot chocolate with marshmallows, which I took the other day. It wasn’t actually my hot chocolate, it was on an

outside table at a café in Marylebone. The girl had gone to the ladies' and I swooped in for a picture (Kinsella 18)

Katie fully discloses later on that she stalks “expensive cafés for Instagrammable pictures. Is there anything wrong with that?” (Kinsella 18). She even defends the lies that she builds by articulating that “I’m not saying I drank the hot chocolate. I’m saying, Look: hot chocolate! If people assume it was mine...well, that’s up to them.” (Kinsella 18). Her life is built around a lie because it satisfies her self-esteem by associating with an in-group (elite class) within an in-group (city life). Katie finds it delightful as “the whole thing is like a feel-good movie, and what’s wrong with that? Loads of people use colored filters or whatever on Instagram. Well, my filter is the ‘this is how I’d like it to be’ filter” (Kinsella 19). She knows that she has been “in those places, even if I couldn’t afford a hot chocolate” (Kinsella 19). As, Farsides has said, "all individuals whether operating in terms of their personal or social identities, have a need for satisfactory (positive) self-esteem" (13). Actually, what Katie does not realize is that it makes her move further away from the life she is looking for. She even becomes distant from herself as she does not realize that her identity is facing a crisis. She lies to herself and says that

It’s just I don’t dwell on any of the not-so-great stuff in my life, like the commute or the prices or having to keep all my stuff in a hammock. Let alone vanilla-whey-coated eggs and obnoxious leachy flat mates. And the point is, it’s something to aspire to, something to hope for. One day my life will match my Instagram posts. One day. (Kinsella 19).

Although Katie can penetrate into the social media in-group through these lies, she is unable to penetrate into elite in-group outside social media. She lies about everything in her life because that makes room for her entry into the world of elites. She becomes a member of the elite class by lying about it. The truth is that; she doesn’t have the life she lies to be enjoying on social media. She is once asked by her colleagues if she wants to go to Portobello market which makes her all excited. “Don’t sound so overexcited, I chide myself. It’s only going to Portobello market. It’s no big deal. People do this all the time” (Kinsella 23). She wants to show that she has loved Portobello and has visited

it a number of times. The truth, however, is that she hasn't. "But the truth is, I don't. Weekends can be a bit lonely for me, not that I'd ever admit it" (Kinsella 23).

Katie wants to prove that she has been to this place many a times so that she can form a part of a social media in-group. This happens because, if their positive in-group distinctiveness is perceived to be illegitimate and/or unstable, membership of those groups will contribute to unsatisfactory social identity and self-esteem, and the individuals concerned will be motivated to take steps to become members of securely and legitimately positively distinct in-groups. (Farsides 19)

5.3.1 Social Media Identity Crisis

When Katie builds her life around lies, she becomes unable to deliver her true feelings and thus becomes a victim of lack of communication. When it comes to her in-group, they are unable to communicate with her, or to understand her because they do not share the similar social identity. They become strangers living in one place, as they are different from inside. Katie has associated herself with another social identity which his father is unable to apprehend. Similarly, her life is a lie in London due to which she cannot be who she is in London. This inevitably leads to identity crisis.

Identity crisis is an inevitable result of association with various in-groups and out-groups. When Katie switches from her village in-group to her city out-group and then when she switches back from city out-group to countryside in-group, she unknowingly loses a part of herself and her happiness. The hybridity that follows becomes a part of her identity which she does not even realize. As explained by Tajfel and Turner, the exit from a group is not always only physical but can also be psychological (Tajfel and Turner 43). After spending time at London, her return changes her back to the happier person that she was before leaving for countryside. Her change in identity when Katie left and the obvious change after her return are noted by her father who expresses his concern and tells Katie, "Katie, love... ' Dad's face crumples with concern. 'I feel like we've been getting you back these last months. You're not so thin.

Not so anxious. That girl up there...that's not you.'" (Kinsella 52). The girl in London was not Katie and they could not communicate with her. They notice the change that her identity went through as she tried to be a part of various out-groups.

The major reason that Katie suffers from this identity crisis is that the out-group of city life and elite class is suffering from identity crises itself. Social media has also turned their lives into a desire to meet many demands but an inability to do so. Social media defines and channelizes what is best for them and creates hybrid auras for them, like a mixture of city and country life where the people of city do not feel exposed to what they feel inferior about but still enjoy the healthy and green aura. The city people, as stated earlier, find it a demeaned job to milk the cows as they find them smelly. Tajfel and Turner note that when people are dissatisfied with their self-esteem as created by the distinctiveness of their in-group with other groups, the group association becomes unsatisfactory as well. People try to associate with those groups that are held in high self-esteem. In the face of insecure self-esteem, people are left with two options primarily, "leaving the unsatisfactory in-group (i.e. 'exit') or changing the in-group so that it becomes satisfactory (i.e. 'voice')" (Farsides 20). Thus, she starts feeling inferior when associated with such an identity as a farmer. Therefore, when she proposes the idea of Glamping business, she proposes that it is a mixture of city and urban life.

Katie understands the identity crisis that city people also go through as they desperately try to enter the in-group defined by media. Katie realizes this and tells her parents that people hailing from London want this. She is responded to by Bidy who gets confused at this and says, "but you just said they want to be urban! Make up your mind, Katie!" (Kinsella 37). Katie expresses the hybridity that their identity has. She says, "they do and they don't." (Kinsella 37). She struggles to explain, "They want nice soap, but they want to use it looking at the sky, listening to cows. They want to feel rural...but not actually be rural." (Kinsella 37) This hybridity has entered Katie as well. She decides to cater to the social media image that the city people have set in mind owing to the magazines and does not proffer their identity crises. She tells

Biddy the plan, “We mix traditional values with modern comforts in a haven from modern life,” reads Biddy. ‘Oh, Katie, that does sound good.’” (Kinsella 38).

Katie believes that Demeter’s life is perfect which is not true either. She also faces a crisis as she tries to live the life of social media standards which, she, unlike Katie, can easily afford. Katie believes that Demeter has a perfect life as she can fulfill all the social media perpetuated standards. Although she can fulfill those standards, she still has an identity crisis because she cannot be who she really wants to be.

Katie feels that she has to fulfill those standards no matter what. She has detached herself from her very soul merely to be a part of the social media in-group. Demeter visits Katie’s farm to enjoy Glamping. Seeking a revenge on Demeter for firing her, Katie makes Demeter clean horses’ stable. She tells Demeter that it is a refreshing activity. Despite the fact that it’s all fabricated and she freezes under stones that Katie promises provide warmth, she doesn’t let the truth spill. She falsely tells Katie that she loved the activity and it was as she promised. She is so detached from who she is that she merely tries to live that standard. After cleaning the horse, Demeter’s hard exterior collapses and she cries with Carlo, the horse which makes Katie think “the only thing that puzzles me now is—why? Demeter has the perfect life. Why is she sobbing into Carlo’s mane, for crying out loud?” (Kinsella 62).

Katie does not realize that Demeter’s life is not perfect either. She also faces some sort of dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction probably stems from her façade that she builds on the social media. Social media creates room for lies, a desire to become a part of the in-group of high class. This high class is defined by social media. Just like Katie’s lies can on social media can make her feel a part of the in-group, Demeter’s lies also make her feel part of an in-group defined by class. Both these women, however, face an identity crisis as the hybridity in their life makes them fall a victim to the lies they have created for themselves. She has put up a façade which Katie is able to see at the farm house when she falls in to tears. When Katie asks Demeter if she is alright, Demeter only says that she is fine, and that it’s not like her at all.

“Of course I’m all right!” she says, without looking me in the eye. “Just a bit tired, that’s all. I’m so sorry I lost control. Very embarrassing. It’s not like me at all.”

She’s right. It’s not—at least not the Demeter I know. (Kinsella 63)

According to Hogg & Abrams, the "social categorization - the discontinuous classification of individuals into two distinct groups is sufficient to generate intergroup discrimination" (51). Katie also changes and resumes her true self after she has returned to her parents. She had changed her accent to become a part of the London’s in-group and elite class in-group. But when she returns to her parents, she changes her accent.

My London accent has gone. No point trying to sound urban here. It was always a bit of a strain, and the glampers don’t want to hear London; they want to hear Somerset. Thick, creamy Zummerzet, the way I was brought up. (Kinsella 51).

When she is at her parent’s place, or in the rural life, she has to be like a village girl. She has to conform to that social identity. However, she still does not realize that she has to keep up her identity for herself and not because this is what glampers want. She has so inevitably detached herself from her initial in-group that she is finding reasons to associate with that in-group. She feels comfortable in that in-group but still needs reasons to feel her self-esteem held high. As Farsides says, "because of the universal need for positive self-esteem, people try to belong to superior groups" (Farsides 13). She is told by Alex that she is beautiful the way she is, and has the best social identity that she should have.

“It’s not irrelevant. And, anyway, it’s not just your family, it’s...” He pauses. “I don’t know, the way you talk about the land. The skylarks. It’s in you. It’s your heritage. You’re a Somerset girl, Katie. You shouldn’t deny that. You shouldn’t lose your accent, change your hair. It’s you.” (Kinsella 89)

Alex, in this way, becomes the only person who understands and appreciates the country side and the social group that Katie internally wants to associate with without even knowing. It makes her self-esteem a bit elated instead of injured as always. This leads her to uphold her identity later on in the novel. In fact, later on in the novel, when she rejoins her office, she tries to inspire others to be real and remain connected to their initial in-groups. A girl joins her office whom Katie tells that it's okay to have a miserable commute. (Kinsella 117). The new girl testifies to the desire to associate with the in-group which is superior and also proves itself to be superior. This happens because of the inter-group discrimination which Bagby & Rector emphasize. They write that "the mere categorization of individuals is all that is necessary to create ingroup favouritism" (emphasis added) (398).

5.4 Communicative Distance and Feeling of Loneliness

The identity crisis leads to a communicative distance as everyone gets busy in their phones to try to prove their association with a certain class on digital social media. Demeter's life is marred by a struggle to show what she can afford and how perfect her life is but she is also overwhelmed by a communicative distance at home. The people at her home are totally neglectful of each other and live busy in building their lives around lies on social media. On Glamping site, Demeter faces this as she tries to get the attention of her children who are totally engrossed in their mobile phones. Katie hears her children tell her that she "thought we said no phones at mealtimes," (Kinsella 63) Demeter "waves a hand to get the attention of her children, but they totally ignore her" (Kinsella 63). These people are engrossed in their phones, no time for themselves. They are busy building fake lives on digital social media. However, Demeter's life is not as perfect as she makes it sound. Even her children are not happy with her because she is also busy making her life sound perfect Her children call her "the invisible mum" (Kinsella 66). The struggle to make identity on social media and part of the in-group that social media has perpetuated as elite is what makes her life miserable in reality and renders all these people alone as they have to conceal their true selves in front of everyone and lived with an unbearable self.

This chapter has helped me understand the identity crisis that takes place as a result of association with various out-groups. Katie tries to link herself with a class-based identity. She tries to be a part of the elite class which is actually an out-group for her. This out-group creates a feeling of inferiority and in order to overcome that feeling Katie starts using social media to build a fake identity. Her fake identity surpasses her real identity and renders her alone until her original identity is appreciated by Alex. This allows her to see her in-group held in high esteem for the first time, and Katie, thus, realizes that the roots of her social identity are what define her. The next chapter more fully focuses on concluding the whole thesis.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I started this research with the proposition that Sophie Kinsella's novel *My (not so) Perfect Life* explores the issue of social identity and reflects how the dissatisfaction with one's social identity leads to dissatisfaction with one's own self and results in switching of group identity. The change in group identity brings a state of identity crises which is further aggravated by fabrication of a false identity and a pretense on digital social media. I have used Social Identity Theory proposed by Tajfel & Turner to understand the implications and repercussions of switching from one identity to another. My study has focused on the in-groups and out-groups and how the characters affiliate themselves with one in-group and then the out-group based on how their self-esteem has been trampled with. The theory allows me to understand the reasons behind the fabrication and promotion of an identity on social media in today's world. As my research is qualitative and interpretative in nature, the findings of my research are not easily generalizable.

My research has first started with the review of the literature that focuses on the issue of identity and identity crisis in general. I have explored various theoretical frameworks produced that discuss this issue in its entirety. The issue of personal identity, which has also been explored at length in literature, has intrigued me to look for a comprehension of social identity, which has not been used to analyze literature in general. The social identity theory allows me to administer my research in this new direction and analyze the identity creation in this era overwhelmed by digital social media. It has also helped me in contextualizing social identity theory before embarking upon its research and application. In addition to this, I have also reviewed the literature related to the novel under study. I have read and reviewed the critical appraisal of the novel as well to contextualize the analysis of *My (not so) Perfect Life*.

I have employed qualitative research, interpretative in nature which has made me analyze the texts in detail. I have applied the Social Identity Theory on the novels and used textual evidence to support my argument. The chapters

on my textual analysis have been driven by my research questions that I ventured upon in my first chapter. In the first chapter of my analysis, I have thrown light upon Katie's formation of Social Identity and her shift from her initial in-group. In the second chapter I have explored elite class and social media perpetuation of the elite image as an out-group for Katie. As I have discussed the analysis briefly, discussing it in the light of the textual analysis will make it clearer. Thus, in the rest of the chapter I explore the findings of my thesis.

As stated earlier, the findings of this study are not generalizable because of the interpretative nature of the study. The first finding based on the textual analysis is that self-esteem is very crucial in the formation of an affiliation with a social identity. The protagonist of the novel, Katie's injured self-esteem is what makes her identify herself with a new group. Her identity as a village girl, which also happens to be that of a farmer has been criticized, leading her to feel discriminated and leave her in-group to find a place where her self-esteem can be satisfied.

6.1 Conclusion

The novel shows a discrimination among groups as well which also stems from the desire to maintain self-esteem. As characters try to maintain self-esteem, they start discriminating the other group, leading to an inter-group discrimination. As the inter-group discrimination increases, the superiority and inferiority complexes are strengthened. This stands as another finding of the study which has helped me understand the issue of social identity in its entirety.

Moreover, my study has helped me find out the ways in which the protagonist of the novel exits or uses 'voice' in the novel. She exits the social group that she finds inferior and instead joins the other social group. When that does not work, she uses 'voice' as a strategy to make her in-group similar to the out-group which Katie deems superior.

Such behavior which makes Katie dissociate and re-associate with other groups is also established through social media. This is another finding of the

study, that social media creates the image of various groups that are held in high esteem. This makes the people in another group look up to the group that is established as superior by social media.

The identity crisis is also furthered by the social media perpetuation of identity by those who are looking up to social media as an out-group. Social media allows people to propagate a false identity disguise. This results in identity crises which cannot be easily resolved.

The findings of the study help me explore the issue of social identity and also create room for the exploration of this particular identity in future research. As a researcher who has employed this theory in literature, I believe this theory can be used to understand the prevalent issue of social identity in the world overwhelmed by digital social media.

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