

## Love Relationships and Identity Development in Selected Asian American Chick Lit

Maryam Mazloomian

[maryam.mazloomian@gmail.com](mailto:maryam.mazloomian@gmail.com)

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Raihanah M. M.

[raihanah.mydin@gmail.com](mailto:raihanah.mydin@gmail.com)

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Shahizah Ismail@Hamdan

[sha@ukm.edu.my](mailto:sha@ukm.edu.my)

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the connections between love relationships and self-identity development of two selected heroines belonging to two different minority groups in America -- the Indian and the Chinese. For this purpose, two chick lit novels, Tanuja Desai Hidier's *Born Confused* (2002) and Kim Wong Keltner's *The Dim Sum of All Things* (2004) are selected. By employing a conceptualised framework, influenced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems of development and Berry's model of acculturation, the present paper focuses on the ethnic community and the American society in which the individuals are set. Comparing the love relationships as represented within both novels indicates how the connections and interactions between the selected heroines' and their self-identity development influence the ways they acculturate with the mainstream culture as well as retain their own ethnicity. Although the theme of love has always dominated the chick lit genre, the present paper aims to fuse the notion of romance with culture and diaspora. This investigation shows how the selected theme is significant in the identity development process of the female protagonists. Therefore, this paper explicates the different aspects of a love relationship with regards to the heroines' interactions with the ethnic community and the American society. The findings show different cultural orientations between choosing a love target who belongs to the same minority group of the selected heroine and that of the mainstream Caucasian society. Furthermore, the findings indicate the influential role of a love relationship on identity development as represented within the selected novels.

**Keywords:** diasporic chick lit; identity development; love relationship; Tanuja Desai Hidier; Kim Wong Keltner

### INTRODUCTION

The representation of love and romance is one of the central themes of mainstream chick lit. Being considered as one of the interpersonal relationships, the theme of love as represented in chick lit could be examined as a potential influence on self-identity development of the female protagonists. Similar to any other human relationship, romantic interactions of the individual with her potential love target could be effective in creating a well-developed self-identity. However, these influences become complicated when cultural and ethnic differences emerge. According to Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1995; 2005), the individual's psychosocial identity development significantly depends on the interactions between the self and

environment that occurs in five different “nested” levels that are micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems. According to this theory, different layers of identity development that are identified for the self are bidirectional and interactional. Therefore, depending on the context in which the love relationships are set or the cultural/social setting(s) which the love targets belong to, the theme of love and romantic life of the heroines could differ in terms of the interactional effect on their identity development and cultural recognition. In addition, Berry’s model of Acculturation takes into consideration the attitudinal and behavioural changes among racial or ethnic minority groups over time by both appearance and deep culture of the host country (Berry, 2003; 2001; 1997; Chun et al. 2003; Lau et al. 2009). Appearance culture denotes the surface of the culture such as costume, music, food, overt behaviour etc., while deep culture represents more profound and ingrained aspects of the culture (Organista, Marin & Chun, 2010). Hence, love relationship could be relevant to the way the ethnic heroines encounter both the mainstream and the minority culture as well as aspects of appearance and deep culture of the host country.

By applying a framework conceptualised by Bronfenbrenner’s grounded theory of ecological systems, this paper attempts to investigate the connections between the self-identity development and the love relationships set in two different social levels. The first is one that occurs within the minority group or ethnic community and the second is the one that occurs between members of the minority and the mainstream Caucasian society. Furthermore, by applying Berry’s model of acculturation, the current work attempts to explicate the heroines’ cultural recognition and accommodation and the influences of the love interests in terms of either the minority or the mainstream Caucasian culture.

For this purpose, two diasporic American chick lit novels written by the authors of two main American minorities, the Indian and the Chinese, are selected. The two are Tanuja Desai Hidier’s *Born Confused* (BC) and Kim Wong Keltner’s *The Dim Sum of All Things* (*TDSAT*). Both novels are set in America, portraying the life of the female protagonists of differing ethnic heritage. The objectives of the present paper are first, to explore the ways in which love relationships as represented within the selected novels influence the identity development of the selected heroines. Second, the paper analyses the effect of the selected heroines’ love relationships in intra and interethnic contexts and synthesizes the differences between the two.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Known as a genre written specifically for women, chick lit has always been reviewed in terms of identity representation (Séllei, 2006). The past research mainly focused on the major characters (Ruiz, 2011) while, incorporating the cultural issues as represented in the ethnic variations into the discussion of identity (Barber, 2006). This approach in reviewing chick lit caused the genre to be limited to feminist theories and the cultural frameworks alike. The current study is an attempt to add knowledge to the identity discussion in chick lit by conceptualising a framework which could link identity development with psychosocial contexts.

According to the theory of ecological systems, identity develops within five different psychosocial layers/contextes in which one is set. Hence the transition through these nested levels is bidirectional and requires self-development in both intra (psychological) and interpersonal (social i.e. family, community, society, cultural/historical contexts) relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In addition, some studies incorporate the cultural contribution to the discussion of identity development through examining the acculturation process and the individual’s assimilation into the mainstream culture through the

developmental stages (Mazloomian, Raihanah & Shahizah, 2015). In the current discussion, the argument focuses on the love relationship of the heroine and its possible connection with self-identity development within two levels that are the ethnic community and the American society. Also, cultural development of the heroines will be investigated by focusing on the potential influences of love relationships on the acculturation process they are going through.

Labelled as the new woman's fiction at the beginning of the millennium, chick lit genre has found a popular place in popular culture and literature in general (Ferris & Young, 2006; Harzewski, 2006). Although the genre is originally from the Anglo-American culture, the evolution of the genre into different cultures, classes, and races has obtained a fertile ground. One of these main reasons is caused by cultural cross-over of the genre that leads to the emergence of diasporic variation of chick lit mainstream. Similar to the mainstream chick lit, the diasporic variations of chick lit novels have some dominating themes and issues in common which make the sub-genre specific and distinct (Barber, 2006; Hong, 2009).

Moreover, a review of previous studies reveals that chick lit's representation of identity usually correlates with themes and issues dominating the narratives such as beauty, relationships (e.g. love, friendship, and workplace) and female empowerment (Negra, 2004; Kent, 2007; Fest, 2009; Wyatt, 2008; Perez-Serano, 2009; Ruiz, 2011; Kaminski & Magee, 2013). Although past research has discussed the issue of identity with regards to the cultural differences between the mainstream and the ethnic chick lit, little work has been done on examining the identity development by focusing on the interactions and functions between the self and the environment. Examining the identity development in terms of the characters' interactions with the environment requires the review of studies on the chick lit within relevant disciplines such as developmental psychology and cultural studies. This investigation is conducted by conceptualising a new model within a psychosocial discourse in accord with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of Ecological Systems and Berry's (1997; 2001; 2003) model of Acculturation.

The interrelationship between feminist theories and developmental psychology has been a controversial issue. Some scholars in developmental psychology (Jacklin & McBride-Chang, 1991; Burman, 1994; Miller & Scholnick, 2000; Walkerdine, et al. 2001; Greene, 2003) tried to investigate the influence of feminist perspective on developmental psychology; however, others like Miller (2006) attempted to find relevance between the two disciplines albeit with a converse direction that is to explore the implications of developmental psychology for feminist theories' enrichment. Either direction resulted in shared issues (e.g., social institutions influences on individuals' identity development, cultural differences, psychological and social changes) that both fields address with a focus on "the processes by which change occurs" (Miller, 2006, p. 446).

Meanwhile, feminist scholars and psychologists whose concern is the socio-cultural influences on human development believe in the connectedness and relativity of identity development with other social sources (Doll, 2004). For instance, the political factors have great influences on one's experiences in life which should be considered in human's social development (Mazmi et al., 2012). Thus, the theme of love as represented in mainstream chick lit and the diasporic variation alike could be considered as one of the influential social interactions between the individual and the others.

Research has shown the difference between love representation in chick lit and contemporary romance (Balducci, 2011). While romance novel takes the love relationship between male and female into consideration, chick lit's focus is mainly on the female protagonist within the relationship and the developmental stages that she experiences. Therefore, the effect of romantic male-female relationship on the heroines of chick lit that may lead to "self-esteem" achievement or change in "attitude toward life" is more significant

than the love relationship as a romantic entity. This feature of chick lit in terms of love representation causes the genre to be defined as “antiromantic romances” or “novels of disillusionment” (Modleski, 2008, p. 24) which indicates the challenging characteristic of the theme within the canon. In this regard, some feminist cultural criticisms consider the genre as “the romance of postcontemporary cynical reason”, since in chick lit novels, “the whole idea of love as fulfilment” is avoided and instead is satirically/ironically represented in “bare realism” and “minimalist rhetoric” ways.

Current work attempts to investigate the connections between love relationships and self-identity development of two selected heroines belonging to two different minority groups in America, the Indian and the Chinese. Focusing on two different variations of diasporic chick lit novels, the present paper examines the mentioned influences as represented within the two mentioned ethnic minorities in America. Among the Asian diaspora, ethnic chick lit written by authors of Indian heritage are significant versions. Barber (2006) identified a new Indian version of mainstream chick lit that is called Indian chick lit. The term is used for chick lits that are written by Indian novelists living in different western societies such as Indo-American, Indo-British and Indo-European whose attempt for Indian chick lit is more than local Indian writers due to the growing influence of chick lit in the western culture (Talati-Parikh, 2007). This new subgenre, argues Barber (2006), focuses on a hybrid Indian identity due to the heroine’s cross-cultural experience that is led by her struggle to fit in with both the mainstream and diasporic society. However, this kind of hybridity makes the heroine of such novels difficult to identify with by the readers due to her sense of estrangement and bewilderment toward both the diasporic and the mainstream cultures. Perhaps it could be assumed that ethnic chick lit has a more complicated plot determined by cultural incorporations.

Another major ethnic variation within the Asian diaspora canon is chick lit novels written by the authors of Chinese minority. Some of the Asian American novels focus on the Asian-American women labour in the west. These novels mainly reflect the diligent and tremendous endeavour required for the working immigrant heroines to achieve success in life. Therefore, they are concerned more with the professional lives of heroines rather than their romantic lives. Some of the examples are *China Dolls: A Novel* (2007) by Michelle Yu and Blossom Kan and Sonia Singh’s *Goddess for Hire* (2009). These kinds of Asian American chick lit novels represent the neo-liberal romance with the labouring self as a substitute for displaying the romantic relationships between people (Thoma, 2013).

Studies that have been done on the minority groups mainly focus on the struggles and attempts made by the minority members to fill the gap between their ethnic culture and the dominant culture of the society (Organista, Marin & Chun, 2010). Similarly, some studies have been done on the Chinese and Indian immigrants in America (Ling & Austin, 2010) indicate how the members of the minority groups feel an urge to communicate with the host culture and maintain their traditions in order to strike a balance and to achieve an integrated cultural identity. In what follows, the conceptual framework and methodology for the current analysis will be elaborated.

## METHODOLOGY

The ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1995; 2005), originates in the idea of the evolving interaction between the developing individual and his/her environment. Based on this theory, human development denotes the lasting change in which a person perceives and deals with environment. Respectively, a set of nested structures - each inside the next but also extending to be more inclusive is distinguished as the ecological

environments within which human interacts and develops (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The mentioned nested systems are concerned with a life cycle from very early age to the end of life and are examined on five levels of analysis: the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and later Macrosystem and Chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Ceci, 2006). The Microsystem involves the direct interactions of the self with others in one's immediate surroundings – physically, socially and psychologically (Swick & Williams, 2006). Thus, the supportive and positive influence leads to enhancement in one's interactions, while the negative effect is destructive in social communications (Cox, Paley & Harter, 2001; McHale et al., 2002). The Mesosystem is defined by the connections between the other microsystems (e.g., family and the community including the relationships with the school, church, neighbourhood, and civic bodies). The Exosystem refers to social settings which are so influential in gaining experience albeit they are not in direct interactions with the developing person but have indirect effects on the person's Micro or Mesosystem. The constituents of Macrosystems include the beliefs, values and societal rules which create a hierarchy that directs and influences the interactions between families, schools and communities (Asmussen & Weizel, 2010). The influences - either positive or negative - interactively impact the individual's development via the support offered by inner environmental levels (Berk, 2013). Finally, the Chronosystem involves significant life events, including historical and cultural over time such as wars and exodus (White & Klein, 2008) which have great impact on identity development due to the serious changes they imposed on the individuals' life.

The multicultural, multiracial American society includes different minority groups and communities. In relation to this multicultural context, Berry's model of Acculturation is a supplementary cultural contribution to the present approach based on particular individuals' intercultural contact and participation. According to Berry (2003; Berry et al., 2010) intercultural contact led by psychological and cultural changes is exposed to the effects of acculturation. However, the level of difficulty varies between the two main extremes of "cultural maintenance" and "contact and participation" even though the acculturation process occurs to all individuals. In other words, the two polarities of acculturation range from maintaining cultural purity to adapting to the new culture through contact and participation. Accordingly, four strategies of Integration, Marginalisation, Assimilation and Separation are posited as different responses to cultural change from which one may choose and/or shift from one to another due to their personal characteristics, attitudes and preferences toward both culture and the environment.

Since "emotional reactions" are significant to the process of acculturation (Berry, 1997, p. 19), it is hypothesised that love relationships and the emotional contact of the individuals could have mutual effect on the way the selected heroines acculturate with both cultures. In order to have a well-developed self-identity, an individual of any ethnic heritage requires achieving self-trust and self-confidence along with accepting and accommodating to the mainstream culture of the American society as well as their own minority cultures. Therefore, for the purpose of the current analysis, friendships, caregiving and companionships as the different embodiments of love are the sub-themes to be looked at within the third and fourth ecological systems.

The third and the fourth ecological systems – ethnic community and the society, are the two conceptualised social settings which one interacts with within the exo- and macrosystem. The community is the level in which the basis for the social interactions and interpersonal relationships with others outside the family members are established and developed into the next larger sub-system, the society. One of the distinctive features of diasporic chick lit which diverge from the mainstream genre is the representation of the

ethnic community and its overlapping boundary with the mainstream society (exosystem and macrosystem). For the purpose of the present paper, community as the third ecological subsystem, which the individual interacts with after family, is important due to its influences on the identity development of the protagonists. In the process of identity development, communications and social relationships are considered as the medium which causes the individual to get acquainted with other value systems rather than one's own. Meanwhile, love relationships in the current paper are externalised as one of the highest form of social communications of the self with the environment and social sources. Given the ethno-centred feature of the selected diasporic texts, communications of the heroines with their love relationships within the cultural and social contexts is the concern of this paper.

The core idea to Bronfenbrenner's theory is that identity development is in tandem with a multi-layered set of environments. Hence, it contextualises the development within the complexity of relationships that form one's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Moreover, conflict and change are considered as the inevitable factors which occur during transition through the developmental stages and one's progression to the next larger system requires conflict resolution, knowledge and the gaining of experience.

### **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Since Bronfenbrenner (2005) emphasises the importance of the bidirectional interactions of the five systems, it is necessary to take into consideration the individual's intra and inter-relationships in examining the theme of love as represented in the corpus. Within the intrapersonal context, feelings and cognitive attitudes are the two key concepts (Erikson, 1968; Bandura, 2001; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). Love as a feeling or attitude toward self or others is a positive emotion that has psychological origin (Ryan, 2001), therefore, it is exclusively related to self. This feeling develops by one's transition into the interpersonal levels, from which the first is the immediate family. Within the family context, one begins to put one's feelings and attitudes into practice by behaving toward family members and issues within the family circle such as family traditions and beliefs. The first conflicts may occur at this level if one finds the environmental demands different to one's cognitive images and attitudes (Kroger, 2007). The relationships that one develops in the subsequent contexts are critical to one's identity development since they are the commencement of one's interactions with the others outside the immediate family.

#### **DIMPLE LALA AND THE ETHNIC LOVE RELATIONSHIP: CULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY**

Hidier's novel *Born Confused* (BC) portrays Dimple Lala, a second-generation Indian-American adolescent who is experiencing change on the threshold of adulthood. Throughout the novel, conflicts and confusions are clearly represented even from the very beginning when the implied bewilderment is flagged out in the title of the novel, *Born Confused* inspired by the term ABCD –this term describes the second or third generations of American South Asian as American Born Confused Desi. One of the main conflicts faced by the heroine as depicted throughout the novel is cultural conflict. Dimple struggles to give preference to either the mainstream American culture or the Indian culture and family traditions, since she sees the two cultures in contrast.

Hidier represents three minor characters in her novel whose interactions have a great impact on the protagonist's identity development, cultural conflict resolution and the acculturation process. The first significant character in Dimple's exosystem is her elder

cousin (Kavita) who helps the heroine facilitate the transition to the society and acculturate with the dominant host culture. Since Dimple is living in a lonely world and feels no intimacy with any of her family members, she needs a proper mentor whom she can trust and count on. Dimple feels lonely that she is attracted to Kavita who could be considered as her role model. Kavita is an influential person of the same ethnic background as well as a supporter, friend and caregiver for Dimple, with whom she finds “a lot in common” (BC, p. 433).

Moreover, Kavita’s care and companionship could ease Dimple’s process of own cultural recognition and conflict resolution. Ethnic community is where one deals with one’s ethnicity practically. Even though the basis of this cultural practice has been formed in the family, at this level, one needs to choose between one’s own impression of ethnic roots influenced by family members and the one she recognizes within the members of the same community. Throughout the novel, Dimple encounters cultural conflict which has roots in her family. For instance, she feels alienated by the way of speaking within the minority groups when “it felt strange listening to them, like they’d all share another time, another planet, and you really had to have been there to get it” (p. 139). Also, Dimple feels lonely and finds herself as a “minority” (p. 195) who is “not Indian enough” (p. 13) in her own community since she thinks “nothing is Indian there”.

Kavita’s role in Dimple’s emotional and cognitive development is crucial. She insists on the importance of “taking authority on the feelings” which leads to the formation of a new self in Dimple. A self that is based on Dimple’s newly identified feelings which she believes can help her be true to herself and this, in turn, constructs a change that starts from inside-out, “In fact, when I thought back to those days when I felt otherwise it was as if it was an entirely different person I was talking about. It was as if I’d been a different person, too” (p. 433). By beginning to build a different self, Dimple reviews “tradition” as “an innovative idea” which is “like catching up with an old friend” (p. 428). This openness shows that she begins to accept her Indian identity. For example, Kavita makes a comparison between South Asian and the American people regarding marriage and love in their conversation, “Dimple, they say in the East you love the person you marry and in the West you marry the person you love” (p. 104). Dimple gradually realises and accepts it as a cultural difference that in Indian culture, love is formed during a marital relationship and the marriage is not merely to follow traditions which she once thought was important. Moreover, when Dimple expresses her worry regarding her cultural identity by saying that she was “not Indian enough for the Indians or American enough for the Americans, depending on who’s looking” (p. 382), Kavita explains to her that only Dimple’s own “feelings and attitudes towards her should be important to her not anyone else” (p. 382).

In addition, the process of acculturation occurs within two levels of surface and deep culture. Within the former level, the due changes are more rapid and are in the external features of one’s personality such as the changes in clothing and eating habits, music and outward feeling or expressions; on the other hand, within the latter level, acculturation process takes longer according to the more ingrained and intrinsic personal traits including value systems, cultural and religious beliefs, norms and standards and so on (Berry, 1997; 2003; Organista, Marin & Chun, 2010). Although Dimple is culturally conflicted about her Indian ethnicity, she is only at the surface of Indian culture which seems already unsatisfying or uninteresting to her. However, she begins to look at the Indian culture and traditions differently with the help from Kavita. She also insists on the significance of not thinking in binary (either Indian or American) but that one could fit into both worlds. Being influenced by Kavita, Dimple begins to have a new way of thinking regarding cultural issues.

The theme of love and romantic plot in Indian chick lit usually revolve around the “heroine’s arranged marriage” that is led by her family’s struggle to “find her a suitable

match” (Barber, 2006, p. 15). Similarly, in Hidier’s novel, the romantic element is represented through an arranged marriage that Dimple’s parents plan for her by choosing an old Indian friend’s son (Karsh) as her potential match. Although Dimple was opposed to her parents’ choice in the beginning, she later is attracted to him. Based on the theory of ecological systems, family plays an influential role in identity development due to the initial interactions with the self. At this level, one’s primary emotions are founded and by one’s transition to other larger systems such as the community and society, these basic emotions grow and are broadened to include other forms of feelings towards others such as “fear of strangers, shame, and romantic love” (Ryan, 2001, p. 17). Within Hidier’s novel, one may see how the protagonist’s learning about her parents’ pre-marriage “love story” affects her feelings toward her love match, Karsh; she is “really startled” when she feels herself to be a fruit of love. Although Dimple had so many conflicts with her parents, when she hears “her parents’ tale of courtship”, she feels so different and begins to compare her time with her parents’ time. This comparison causes Dimple to relate with her parents and she begins to try to understand them in her own way. This sense of belief and trust in her parents and identification with them triggered a change in her attitude and caused her to think about Karsh as her potential love, her “laddoo partner” (BC, p. 339). This evidence assures entering a natural and proper developmental passage.

Being a second-generation Indian-American, and heroine’s love target, Karsh is the second character who has a significant role in Dimple’s developmental process and cultural conflict resolution. Although Karsh criticises her fear and loneliness, he still praises her photographic talent, “you can’t let your fear stop you...you have to let it move you and move beyond it” which makes Dimple feels “overwhelmed” (BC, p. 218). The mutual understanding that Dimple feels between herself and Karsh could be considered as the primary reason that she is attracted to him. Previously, Dimple resisted thinking about Karsh; the reason of her refusal to be attracted to Karsh is left open for the reader; either he is a boy chosen by her parents or he is a member of the Indian minority in America with both of which she has conflicts. While in mainstream White chick lit the love relationship between the lovesick heroine and the love interest is determined by the sexuality, consumer culture and physical attraction, in the diasporic variation, more complexity ensues. Thence, the romantic relationship is represented as a fusion of heterosexual love and cultural attraction. In a similar vein, in Hidier’s novel, the protagonist was not attracted to Karsh until she begins to recognize her ethnic identity and is exposed to the process of cultural conflict resolution. However, other social sources and environmental communications have a great impact on this recognition and could be considered as the prerequisites.

Thus, it could be implied that Karsh represents the Indian culture and therefore, has a symbolic influence on Dimple’s cultural recognition as a member of the same generation of Indian-American. The final chapter of the novel entitled “Born” (BC, p. 493) portrays the blossomed love between Dimple and Karsh which coincides with Dimple’s beginning of cultural awareness. Hence, it metaphorically indicates Dimple’s rebirth by learning about her cultural identity and ethnicity.

Throughout the novel, besides Kavita and Karsh, Dimple is impressed by Zara, another member of the Indian minority who advises Dimple not to think about becoming “someone else” (p. 442), but she needs to become herself: “better to be bright than dim, that’s my philosophy. You have to show yourself, speak up for what you want” (p. 442). His friendship is so influential for Dimple when he introduces himself as a “regular person who has decided to be who I am in life. That’s all. That’s how you make your life magical-you take yourself in your own hands and rub a little. You activate your identity” (p. 442). Therefore, he tries to encourage Dimple to have a philosophy of life in which she could



develop her own identity as an individual in the society and “become herself by activating herself” (p. 442-443) otherwise she will be no good to anyone without finding and being her/his true self.

Moreover, Zara praises love and freedom as the two essential factors required to enjoy life, “...there’s no love with this kind of division and denial” (BC, p. 444). Belonging to the Indian community, Zara believes that Dimple and Karsh “could be a tasty combination”, even though Dimple expresses a doubt, “I don’t think he finds me appetizing [since she mistakenly thought he was attracted to Gwyn]” (p. 441). All these lead to a better life when Zara counsels Dimple, “you must live every moment of your life in such a way that if you had to live it over and over again till infinity, this would be a good thing” (p. 448). Both Kavita and Zara are members of the Indian minority who have been successful in acculturating with the dominant culture of the American society and have outstanding influences on changing Dimple’s worldview particularly towards love.

### **LINDSEY OWYANG AND THE CAUCASIAN LOVE RELATIONSHIP: RECONCILIATION WITH THE WHITE AMERICAN SOCIETY**

The second novel, *The Dim Sum of All Things*, is selected from the Chinese minority living in America and narrates the story of 25-year-old American-born Chinese. Similar to Dimple, Lindsey is not either happy with her ethnic signs or being known as an ABC (American Born Chinese). She is scared of being related to the “rejected minority” in the American society and ardently considers herself as an American, speaking and understanding only English. Resembling to *Born Confused*, hesitance, doubt, bewilderment and conflict of the heroine are the dominating themes as depicted throughout the novel. While Lindsey’s sense of belonging is more inclined towards being American rather than Chinese, she avoids White men due to her self-made theory of “Hoarders of All Things Asian” (TDSAT, p. 35). She believes that White men’s love towards Asian girls is only due to their mysteriousness and being exotic. She has such a firm belief in this theory that she even doubts falling in love with Michael Cartier, the White travel editor of a magazine.

Lindsey is represented as a conflicted American born Chinese girl (ABC) who could neither trust a White man nor could she accept a relationship with a Chinese man. Having such an attitude causes Lindsey to keep expressing negative and pessimistic behaviour towards those men in the American society as she considers them as “typical Hoarders...who hang around, pretending to be your friend, but all they want from you guys is access to your sisters and girlfriends” (TDSAT, p. 35). This pessimism stems from the time she was studying at college, when she felt herself condemned and blamed for being with “the Whites”; this indicated that she was annoyed by her Chinese college mates who discriminated between the Whites and the Chinese, to which she opposed. Consequently, she has doubts about Chinese males too; in a conversation between Lindsey and Kevin (Lindsey’s brother) regarding an arranged marriage to a Chinese man, when he, jokingly, recommends Lindsey to date the so-called “eggs... who are white on the outside and yellow inside...who are born white but deep they wish they were Asian”, she decides that she is “not going out with a traditional Chinese man who wants a subservient, house-cleaning concubine” (p. 36). This cynical attitude that has its basis in family shapes Lindsey’s bewilderment and provokes her loneliness. As discussed earlier, based on Bronfenbrenner’s theory, emotional and attitudinal growth primarily occurs in family settings and will be further developed in other larger systems. This theoretical perspective is clearly in tandem with Keltner’s narrative in which the heroine’s feelings and attitudes towards the Caucasian opposite sex are fostered under the

family and other social influences. This indicates how the interpersonal interactions affect self-identity development that one carries with oneself in transition to other ecological levels. Furthermore, within the family context, Lindsey's grandmother (Pau Pau) is the most influential and the most significant member who holds the key role in the family and is crucial in making Lindsey interested in the family traditions. Lindsey's love towards Pau Pau creates a pleasant curiosity for Lindsey to explore the family rituals. In addition, Pau Pau could be considered as a proper mentor within the family circle who gives Lindsey the chance and freedom to make decisions tactfully and independently. For instance, Pau Pau expresses her opinion about Michael by telling Lindsey that she has met her "handsome white boyfriend" (TDSAT, p. 313) even though she wants Lindsey to be with a Chinese man; however, she believes that Lindsey is the one who needs to "Good *think* before making decision" on whether it is "okay if Michael comes home, or she goes out with him". The freedom of choice along with the indirect mentorship and the trust are all counted in defining Lindsey's beginning of identity development process.

Outside the family circle, the community structure and the inter-relationships existing between the self and others are also important. Here is the context in which one gets acquainted with the ethnic culture from other minority members' viewpoint rather than family members'. In Lindsey's case, there is a lack of social contact within her ethnic community, even though within the Chinese community, the relationships among the members are not determined by blood but by tribal connection, meaning that "all Chinese people they knew were given automatic title of Uncle or Auntie, even neighbours" (TDSAT, p. 66). As a result, there could be found a sense of cohesiveness within the members of the Chinese community, regardless of blood which emphasises the close connections and interrelationships among the members. However, as Chinese minority living in America, they may not limit themselves to remain within the community but they need to acculturate with the surrounding American society. This requires an acceptance of the cultural change to facilitate the transition from the community to the mainstream society.

Contrary to the heroine of the first novel, the romantic love as represented in the Chinese variation is set within the fourth level, Macrosystem. Michael is a Caucasian who belongs to the mainstream American society and Lindsey is interested in him so that she decides to gain more information about the Chinese "interracial marriage". Lindsey begins to experience the cultural exchange as occurs in the process of acculturation. She develops a preoccupation with the notion of "being killed by the Chinese mafia" if a Chinese marries a White, for "the Whites are considered as enemy" (TDSAT, p. 113). In addition, there is a prejudice among the Chinese within the community against the Whites as they are not really interested in Asian girls. Rather, their attraction stems from their "fetishist" attitude toward Asians (the term Lindsey labels as the Hoarder). However, on one hand, Lindsey sees interracial marriage as a way to have a safe transition to the American society, when she metaphorically talks about "a sea of black-haired heads dotted with the occasional dishwater blond of a Hoarder married to a distant relative" (p. 68); while on the other hand, she opposes to that kind of marriage which highlights another conflict she faces within the community:

She saw so many of these ascetically mismatched couples that she worried people might think Asian girls would settle for any old homely boor as long as he was White. On the contrary, she knew Chinese like her were the pickiest of all...and proud of it!  
(TDSAT, p. 68)

Nevertheless, when she asks her cousin Stephanie who is married to a Caucasian (Mike) on how "she got away with marrying the enemy" (TDSAT, p. 113), she finds out that although Stephanie's father was opposed to the marriage in the beginning, he starts to accept

Mike (his Caucasian son-in-law), when he tries to draw her father's affection and attention by following some Chinese traditions. These traditions are externalised in his attempt to please his in-laws through some activities including "doing his time in the chores", "clearing the thorn bushes", "painting the whole house" and "fixing some water damage in the garage" (p. 114); this is how Mike tries to build a bond and intimacy between him and Stephanie's father which could be indicative of the concept of filial piety as one of the unique features of Chinese culture (Qi, 2015). This could also be considered as a reverse acculturation that basically focuses on changes occurring in "cultural orientation" and "attitudes of majority people toward migrant or minority groups" (Berry, 2001; Fons, 2003, p. 249). Therefore, it could be derived that as a Caucasian, Mike tries to get accepted by his wife's Chinese family which shows a reverse acculturation.

The influence of traditions and customs within the community is immense in both attitudinal and behavioural change. In Lindsey's case, the normative resistance against the White causes her to be reluctant to be accompanied by a Caucasian (Michael), for a date within the Chinese community. The reason is not that she doesn't like Michael but it is due to the community disapproval of inter-cultural relationship with Caucasians. Lindsey is aware of this attitude and could not be "apathetic" to the misbehaviours she witnesses within the Chinese community towards the White. "Worried about getting stares" (TDSAT, p. 207), Lindsey "ambivalently" avoided holding Michael's hand which is another indication of her different behaviours in Chinatown. Moreover, Lindsey rejected a drink offered by Michael because the Chinese girls were not allowed to drink. She tries to avoid the "Chinese rumor-mill", so, "she couldn't risk going into a bar because anyone could be watching her at any given moment" (p. 208). However, Lindsey's cautious behaviour and her concern about what others would think change when they leave Chinatown. The missing intimacy between them is formed again by hugging and kissing: "he kissed her, and she pressed against him, suddenly not caring at all if anyone was watching" (p. 209).

According to the conceptualised framework in the light of Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological system, the Macrosystem and the society structure is of great importance for they provide a larger context in which an individual practices the mainstream culture with which s/he gets the chance to compare the traditional view of his/her own ethnic culture. This is experienced by Lindsey, when she begins to compare the American society which Michael belongs to with her own ethnic community. This comparison leads her to think of the positive points within the Chinese community which was "safety and belongings". And she attributes her sense of belonging and safety while in China town" (TDSAT, p. 257). Therefore, one may infer that the society's influence on Lindsey's deeper thinking and attitudinal change toward her ethnic community occur when she is placed in the mainstream society. In other words, she experiences the acculturation process when she achieves and acknowledges a deeper awareness of the two cultures.

Perhaps one could consider the turning point in the process of Lindsey's identity development that is when Michael (a Caucasian lover) triggers something in her by using the word "slant" (TDSAT, p. 254). Slant is a derogatory word that is used to call people of Asian heritage. Although Michael explained that he used the word to refer to the "magazine's new humour column" Lindsey takes it as a "racial slur" (p. 254), Lindsey has always rejected the "stereotypes" imposed by the world that is "characterizing Asians as unscrupulous, deceitful, and foolish" (p. 256). Therefore, although she does not consider herself as a "Chinese", or as an "American born Chinese", she gets offended by being addressed as a "slant". Lindsey wonders "how could Michael know the terrible loneliness, or feel the awful embarrassment, helplessness, and anger she felt when she heard a word like "slant" used so nonchalantly"

when she thinks that “he has never experienced subtle mistreatment or outright hostility due to race” (p. 257).

While Lindsey is pondering about all that had happened between her and Michael, she:

knew that she gained certain strength in not being able to hide who she was and to cope with her cultural conflict. And now she reflected on her upbringing filled with Empress of China dinners, New Year parade, and calligraphy lessons, she realised that each experience had formed and impressed her identity and augmenting her development layer by layer like an intricate design carved over a thousand hours in soft cinnabar. Every experience even the unpleasant ones, had helped to slowly build her character, creating one-of-a-kind Chinese American named Lindsey Owyang”

(TDSAT, p. 258)

Furthermore, regarding the meaning of the word, “slant” which is “a different point of view, or... a different take on things” (TDSAT, p. 255), one could consider the word an irony. This irony refers to the detour she gets which enables her to look at her self-identity. Although Michael is considered as the one who provokes the idea in her mind, Lindsey herself begins to think about her identity from a different perspective. This prompt - using the word ‘slant’- by Michael could be regarded as a trigger which leads Lindsey to have a different point of view that she gradually begins to accept her cultural identity regardless of any prejudiced attitudes. All these incidents guide Lindsey in examining her true feelings toward Michael that she calls it “romantic optimism” based on which she wants him to instantly know the “depth of her heart and mind”. As a result, she wonders if she has “the strength to relive in order to teach him or love him” (p. 258).

Lindsey comes up with a new way of thinking about Michael and her feelings towards him to wonder if “a True love” begins with a “shy courage” (TDSAT, p. 258). Lindsey’s new viewpoint is considered as a beginning of a “ripened” feeling toward Michael that she had never thought before. Michael, as the representative of American society, represents the fact that one of the preliminary important factors in accepting and accommodating the mainstream culture is positiveness and reliance on the mainstream culture. Therefore, Lindsey stops having a generalised look at people. Before, she herself had her philosophy which was “all white guys are hoarders”, however, now she begins to change her philosophy that it is “just a cliché” (p. 324). This philosophy change illustrates the overall change that is happening in Lindsey’s attitude toward life.

Consequently, Lindsey finds two points in common between herself and Michael; first, she finds out that Michael is also raised by his Chinese grandmother. Second, when Michael is talking about his vague memory of favourite Chinese dessert that his grandmother used to make, Lindsey understands that it was *neen-goh* her favourite dessert too. This indicates Michael’s closeness to Lindsey’s own cultural background that impressed Lindsey when she finds some clues to relate to Michael. These conversation and common points make them get closer to each other which reflect Lindsey’s acceptance of her own culture. Thereupon, Lindsey’s feelings toward Michael begin to change from deep inside which is the beginning of a new pleasant and desirable feeling she has never experienced before toward anyone,

Lindsey felt something in her cells awaken, like protons in an oscillator, or night-blooming jasmine opening in fragile petals. Up until this day, she had kept Michael an arm’s length from her heart as if he was a stranger, and now, unconsciously, she decided to trust him

(TDSAT, p. 334)

After this meeting, Lindsey feels “strong” (TDSAT, p. 334). Before, Lindsey was the one who had a low self-esteem, and was dependent on her grandmother. She was the one who thought that Michael is a hoarder, like all other White men, but now she begins to feel different due to her interest in Michael and the trust in him that she gained by knowing him as well as her own culture.

Following all the changes she feels in herself, Lindsey begins to see that the border between San Francisco and Chinatown is not obvious anymore. This also could be considered as what happened within her and how her feeling toward her American identity is beginning to change to Chinese-American. This upheaval and transition from being solely spun off in the cocoon towards a more inclusive worldview makes her feel good, “She probably should take a hint from Pau Pau and not look to the past so much. After all, Pau Pau often said, ‘Now is the best time in my life,’ and Lindsey wanted to feel that way, too” (TDSAT, p. 337). Indeed, Lindsey is indebted to Pau Pau who gave her the hints for this view.

### CONCLUSION

In the developmental pathways, social interactions and communications between self and the environment are the core concepts that occur in different ecological contexts. Focusing on the cultural and identity development of the protagonists, the current article explored the effects of the heroines’ search for identity and the ways they view love and companionship. As represented within two diasporic chick lit novels written by American authors of Indian and Chinese heritage, the theme of love and romantic relationships are considered as the most intimate human communications which has connections with self-identity development and ethnic recognition.

Within a safe process of ethnic identity development, individuals are heading to a bicultural identity that is to acculturate with and accommodate both ethnic and dominant cultures. This passage requires one’s transition through different ecological settings. The developmental process and acculturating with another culture begins with self-discovery and self-evaluation which are possible through achieving and following individualistic way of thought. Since one’s first social contact occurs in the minority groups of his/her own ethnicity after the family context, the communications within the ethnic community and the surrounding society as the next social levels were focused on. Accordingly, the love matches are selected from the two discussed contexts; either from their own ethnicity or from the dominant Caucasian culture. However, the individual’s positive or negative attitude towards both cultures has a significant effect in this choice. Hence, one’s acceptance of love and trust towards the others as the social sources are in tandem with one’s acquisition and assimilation with one’s own ethnicity and dominant culture within the society.

In the Indian-American novel as discussed in the present article, one may see that although the heroine has different social contact within the community, she finally accepts her lover who belongs to her own ethnic group (an Indian-American boy), that is aligned with her becoming interested in her own Indian culture which she once feels conflicted with. Also, caregivers and friends from the same ethnic minority groups ease her cultural conflict resolution and acceptance. Likewise, one reads how the Chinese-American heroine prefers a Caucasian as her love interest despite the negative feelings and attitudes as existed within the Chinese community towards the White as portrayed in the novel. However, his Chinese cultural background is also one of the reasons that causes her to be attracted to him which seems to have an impact on her feelings towards him. Therefore, it could be inferred that love relationship is in tandem with the acculturation and the self-developmental process. Besides, the transition through the ecological systems is bidirectional; while identity develops layer by

layer through going forth from a smaller ecological level to a more inclusive one, it is possible to go back from a more inclusive context such as the society, to a smaller one like ethnic community. Regardless of whether the romantic relationships are set within the community or the society; they are led to a bicultural composition. In other words, even though both selected protagonists encounter cultural conflicts, one chooses her love match from her own minority group, while the other is attracted to a person who belongs to the White dominant culture of the society. However, eventually, both characters attempt to construct their bicultural identity. Moreover, the difference in making this choice between the individuals indicates diversity and heterogeneity in chick lit's love representation and its connection with cultural and environmental influences.

## REFERENCE

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (2005). The Influence of Attitudes on Behavior. In D. Albarracín, B. T. Johnson, & M. P. Zanna, (Ed.). *The Handbook of Attitudes* (pp.173-221). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Asmussen, K, and Weizel, K. (2010). *Evaluating the Evidence: What all Practitioners Need to Know to Deliver Evidence Based Parenting Support*. London: National Academy for parenting Practitioners.
- Balducci, F. (2011). A Different Shades of Pink: Literary Thresholds and Cultural Intersections in Italian Chick Lit.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*. 52, 1-26. Retrieve July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
- Barber, J. P. (2006). Indian Chick-lit: Form and Consumerism. University of North Carolina, Washington.
- Berk, L. E. (2013). *Child Development*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*. 46, 5-68.
- Berry, J. W. (2001). A Psychology of Immigration. *Journal of Social Issues*. 57, 615-631.
- Berry, J. W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to Acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P. Balls Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.). *Acculturation, Advances in Theory, Measurement, and Applied Research* (pp. 17-37). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Berry, J. W., Phinney, J. S., Sam, D. L., & Vedder, P. (2010). Immigrant Youth. Acculturation, Identity and Adaptation. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*. 55, 17-43.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature And Design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). The Bioecological Theory of Human Development. In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.). *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development* (pp. 3-15). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. *Handbook of Child Psychology*.
- Burman, E. (1994). *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Ceci, S. 2006. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005). *American Psychologist*. 61(2), 173-174.
- Chun, K. M., Organista, P. B. & Marin, G. (2003). *Acculturation: Advances in Theory, Measurement, and Applied Research*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

- Cox, M. J., Paley, B., & Harter, K. (2001). Interparental Conflict and Parent-Child Relationships. In J. H. Grych & F. D. Finchman (Ed.). *Interparental Conflict and Child Development: Theory, Research and Applications* (pp. 249-272). New York: Cambridge.
- Doll, M. (2004). Sexuality and Gender Roles among Mexican-American Female Adolescents. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global*. Retrieve March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from <http://search.proquest.com.ezplib.ukm.my/docview/305054812?accountid=41453>
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity Youth and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Ferris, S. & Young, M. (2006). (Ed.). *Chick Lit, The New Women's Fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- Fest, K. (2009). Angels in the House or Girl Power: Working Women in Nineteenth-Century Novels and Contemporary Chick Lit. *Women's Studies*. 38(1), 43-62.
- Fons, J. (2003). Multiculturalism and acculturation: Views of Dutch and Turkish-Dutch. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 33, 249-266.
- Greene, Sheila. (2003). *The Psychological Development of Girls and Women: Rethinking Change in Time*. London: Routledge.
- Harzewski, S. (2006). The New Novel of Manners: Chick Lit and Postfeminist Sexual Politics. *ProQuest Dissertations and These Global*. Retrieve November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012 from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305256373?accountid-41453>
- Hidier, T.D. (2002). *Born Confused*. New York: PUSH.
- Hong, C. K. (2009). "Funny Asians": Comedy and Humour in Asian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global*. Retrieve December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013 from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304854211?accountid=41453>
- Jacklin, C, & McBride-Chang, C. (1991). The Effects of Feminist Scholarship on Developmental Psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. 15(4), 549-56.
- Kaminski, M.J. & Magee, R.G. (2013). Does this Book Make Me Look Fat? The Effect of Protagonist Body Weight and Body Esteem on Female Readers' Body Esteem. *Body Image*. 10(2), 255-258.
- Keltner, K.W. (2004). *The Dim Sum of All Things*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.
- Kent, P.R. (2007). Think Pink and High High heels: Women and Beauty as Represented in Chick Lit Novels. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global*. Retrieve October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304717624?accountid=41453>
- Kroger, J. (2007). *Identity Development: Adolescence through Adulthood*. California: Sage Publications.
- Lau, M., Markham, C., Lin, H., Flores, G., & Chacko, M. R. (2009). Dating and Sexual Attitudes In Asian-American Adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*. 24(1), 91-113.
- Ling, H. & Austin, A. W. (2010). *Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopaedia*. New York: Routledge.
- Mazloomian, M., Raihanah M.M., & Shahizah Ismail Hamdan. (2015). Becoming Latina, Becoming Americana: Shifting Identities in Lara Rios's Chick Lit. *3L: Language Linguistics Literature®*, *Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*. 21(3), 69-83.
- Mazmi Maarof, Ruzy Suliza Hashim, Noraini Md Yusof, & Raihanah Mohd Mydin. (2012). Young Women Speak Out: Healing the Selves through Narrative Therapy. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*. 12(2) (Special Issue), 392-405.
- McHale. J. P. Lauretti, A., Talbot, J., & Pouquette, C. (2002). Retrospect and Prospect in Psychological of Coparenting and Family Group Process. In J. P McHale & W. S.

- Grolnick (Eds.). *Retrospect and Prospect in the Psychological Study of Families* (pp. 127-165). Mahwa, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Miller, P. H. (2006). Contemporary Perspectives from Human Development: Implications for Feminist Scholarship. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 31(2), 445-469. The University of Chicago Press. Retrieve January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/491680>
- Miller, P., & Scholnick, E. (2000). *Toward a Feminist Developmental Psychology*. New York: Routledge.
- Modleski, T. (2008). *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*. New York: Routledge.
- Negra, D. (2004) Quality Postfeminism? Sex and the Single Girl on HBO. *Genders*, 39. Retrieve October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from [http://www.genders.org/g39/g39\\_negra.html](http://www.genders.org/g39/g39_negra.html)
- Organista, P.B., Marin, G., & Chun K.M. (2010). *The Psychology of Ethnic Groups in the United States*. California: SAGE Publications.
- Pe´rez-Serrano, E. (2009). Growing Old Before Old Age: Ageing in the Fiction of Marian Keyes. *Educational Gerontology*. 35(2), 135-145.
- Qi, X. (2015). Filial Obligation in Contemporary China: Evolution of the Culture-System. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. 45(1), 141-161.
- Ruiz, V. (2011). Of Bridgets, Rebeccas, and Carries: Chick Culture Defines Woman. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global*. Retrieve October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/993146015?accountid=41453>
- Ryan, D. P. J. (2001). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Retrieved September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://pt3.nl.edu/paquetteryanwebquest.pdf>
- Séleji, N. (2006). Bridget Jones and Hungarian Chick Lit. In Ferris and Young (Ed.). *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction* (pp. 173-189). New York: Routledge.
- Singh, S. (2009). *Goddess for Hire*. Harper Collins.
- Swick, K. J., & Williams, R. D. (2006). An Analysis of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Perspective for Early Childhood Educators: Implications for Working with Families Experiencing Stress. *Early Childhood Educational Journal*. 33(5), 371-378 DOI: [10.1007/s10643-006-0078-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-006-0078-y)
- Talati-Parikh, S. (2007). Chick lit for the Soul. *Verve*. 15(4), 1-12.
- Thoma, P. (2013). Romancing the Self and Negotiating Consumer Citizenship in Asian American Labor Lit. *Contemporary Women's Writing*. Retrieve October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013 from <http://cww.oxfordjournals.org/>
- Walkerline, V, Lucey, H., & Melody, J. (2001). *Growing Up Girl: Psycho-Social Explorations of Class and Gender*. New York: New York University Press.
- White, J. M. & Klein, D. M. 2008. *Family Theories*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Yu, M., & Kan, B. (2007). *China Dolls: A Novel*. Macmillan.
- Wyatt, J. L. (2008). Every Woman Wants to Be Skinny, Right? A Critical Examination of the Fat Female Body within Bigger Girl Lit. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global*. Retrieve November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304816946?accountid=41453>



### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Maryam Mazloomian is a Ph.D candidate at Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM. Her research interests include Popular Culture, Diaspora and Cultural Studies. This article is a part of her PhD thesis, “Heterogeneous Landscape in Selected Diasporic American Chick Lit: A Psychosocial Approach”.

Raihanah M.M. is an Associate Professor of Literary Studies at Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM.

Shahizah Ismail@Hamdan (Ph.D) teaches literature at the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM. Her research interests include Science Fiction and Posthumanism as well as Gender and Popular Culture.