

DISHONESTY IN CELESTE NG'S *EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU*

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Abstract: The study was done in the purpose of revealing the dishonesty in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*. In this study, qualitative research was used because the data are presented in the form of quotation or description. Primary Source is the source of data as in the novel entitled Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*. The secondary sources are documents and internet browsing . This study used objective approach in analyzing data. It means that this study was only focused on dishonesty found only in the novel as written, not in general. The result shows the dishonesty throughout the story. Marilyn assumed her daughter was a scientist, James thought she had a exclusive community of girlfriends, and Nath thought she had a sexual relationship with Jack all of which turn out to be untrue. These roots of lies are developed and become apparent in their actions and words as well. At the time when Lydia's body is found in the local lake, the delicate balancing act that has been keeping the Lee family together tumbles into chaos, forcing them to confront the long-kept secrets that have been slowly pulling them apart. James, consumed by guilt, sets out on a reckless path that may destroy his marriage. Regardless of the motives owned, lying is an act of manipulation of data that is done consciously so that the other party believes what people say.

Keywords: *Celeste Ng, Novel, Dishonesty, Qualitative Research, Literature*

INTRODUCTION

Dishonesty becomes common issue in human life. Dishonesty is not a character that shows weakness, lack, or not the formation of morals, but rather on psychological injuries (Bataha et al, 2021). Normal humans need a sense of

security and comfort. When someone wants others to be honest, then someone must proactively create an atmosphere or environment that is safe for others to be honest. Lying is a reality, but lying behavior is a different matter (Onthoni et al, 2022). When lying someone makes a conscious effort to harm others. Harming others psychologically can be said as aggression behavior. For example, someone lies to his parents, then he knows, deep in his heart, that his parents will not or cannot, care, provide security, or family love that he needs. Another concrete example, if a child who hopes to get a solution or just hear the problem (affection needs) by his parents, but what he gets is actually blamed, labeled, or even judged, then at other times it is better for him to lie if he experiences problems.

Nowadays it is really hard to find honesty in most of people. Every person in his life must have done a lie, this is very common in society because it has become part of the social facts themselves (Gustaman & Lolowang, 2021) and (Potu et al, 2021). But for readers who adhere to moralist principles, it will surely be a severe and wrong deviation because of course many lies are considered taboo. Even "liars" don't like being lied to at all, "criminals" don't like being "bullied" and "bullies" don't like "being bullied."

(Michaeli, 2007) argues that a lie is a matter that people often refer to as fraud, has the intention to deceive others with several purposes such as keeping a secret or reputation, protecting feelings, protecting someone or to avoid punishment or repulsion for an action. When we lie to someone, we try to make sure that someone will enter our "truth".

Literary work describes many phenomena of life. One of the literary works is novel. (Abram, 1979) explained that novel is a great variety of writing that has in common only the attribute of being extended works of fiction written. The elements of novel are character, plot, theme and setting.

In the novel entitled *Everything I Never Told You* written by Celeste Ng there was a woman named Lydia Lee, James and Marilyn Lee's favorite daughter, sister of Hannah and Nathan, smart, beautiful, and perfect in the eyes of her parents, was dead. Lydia, who is not a swimmer, was found floating in a lake. His parents immediately blamed outsiders. But Lydia, it turns out, is not what it seems. In the small town of Ohio in the 1970s, the Le family was an anomaly (Ibrahim et al, 2021). James is Chinese - Marilyn is white. Growing up, James was often the object of ridicule, and as an adult he still felt the pain of being ostracized. James put all his efforts into his education, and he excelled. But what James wants now for his daughter is popularity and compatibility - he wants her to fit.

Like James, Marilyn excelled in school. At university, she was often the only woman in her science class. Men never take it seriously, but Marilyn persists. But pregnancy changes all that. Now the mother of three children, Marilyn really wants Lydia to succeed where she fails. Lydia's parents always grumbled about school and friendship. He signed up for an accelerated science class, was given a pretty dress and told to go to a dance. As the pressure increased, Lydia became increasingly dishonest about who she really was. He could not maintain the perfection his parents hoped for. This leads to dishonesty and drives the writer to conduct a study on it.

Dishonesty

(Sigar & Rorintulus, 2020) argued that dishonesty is a social fact in human life. There is no society without lies. Even so, what and how they lie don't get enough attention. Very rarely attention is paid to this one phenomenon. It is generally believed that lying means to say something that has no basis in reality. For example, say there is a storm at sea when there is none, say grieving when not grieving, say having a boyfriend even if you do not have, or declaring poor people in a country only 15% when 50%. A lie can also be interpreted to the contrary, which is to say something that does not exist even though it is in reality.

In everyday life, the word deception is usually used for someone who says something that is not true for personal gain (Rorintulus, 2018). For example, say that the original hours are sold at high prices. When in fact the watch is a fake item. In such cases, although the word lie can be used, the most commonly used is deception (the verb is deceptive). That is, there is clearly a difference between these words even though they all contain the meaning of something that is not in accordance with the reality that occurs or is expected. (Serota et al, 2010) also explains that the word 'lying' (the verb is lying) tends to be used for cases that are neutral and ordinary. Instead the word 'trick' is commonly used in cases that tend to cause harm to those who are lied to or cheated. The nuances tend to be more bleak or smell of crime than the word 'lie'. The word 'lie' (the verb is a lie) has a slightly complicated meaning (Rorintulus, 2020). This word seems to be used for a very heavy lie if weighed morally. The word 'lie' tends to be used when lying is done, as well as a denial of something that is believed to be true by most people. For example the phrase "he deceived religion", meant the denial of religious truth that was considered absolute. Someone who is said to lie as if he has committed a level of deviation is greater than just an ordinary lie.

Impressing the word 'boasting', which is a lie too, is another version of the word 'lying' for events that are either of little importance or are not considered important nor are they taken seriously. Someone who claims to have traveled to Antarctica, even though they have never even been told to the city, will rarely be told a lie, more likely if it is said 'boasting' because the lies do not affect anything and instead sound stupid.

However, there seems to be a special agreement where certain words are more suitable to be applied. The connotative nuances of each of these words also seem to differ. If sorted from those with negative negative connotations to the most negative ones in a row are hoaxes, hoaxes can be placed before or after boasting.

(Wantah et al, 2021) and (Rorintulus, 2018) argues that there are various types of dishonesty that include lies about feelings, achievements and knowledge, actions and plans and their existence, explanations and reasons, facts and ownership. Most often people lie about feelings; action, plan and location; and achievement and knowledge. The following is an explanation of each and examples.

Novel Information

Lydia Lee is dead, but all her family knows is that she hasn't come down to breakfast. Lydia's mother Marilyn goes up to her room to look for her, and finds everything in its place but no sign of Lydia. Lydia's siblings Nath and Hannah leave for school, while Marilyn begins to fear that something terrible may have happened. Meanwhile, Marilyn's husband James is at his office in Middlewood College, unaware that anything is wrong. James is a tenured professor of American History; one of his graduate student teaching assistants, Louisa Chen, knocks on his door and the two discuss their students' work. Their conversation is interrupted by Stanley Hewitt, who James finds irritating. Then Marilyn calls and asks James to come home.

Back at the house, police officers tell Lydia's family that teenagers often run away because they are angry with their parents, and that most come home within 24 hours. Officer Fiske asks about an incident in which Marilyn went missing 11 years before, but James quickly dismisses this as a "miscommunication." After the police leave, James and Marilyn write down a list of Lydia's friends. Nath says nothing, but knows that the girls on the list are not actually close to Lydia; she

doesn't have any friends except the Lee's neighbor, Jack Wolff, whom Nath strongly dislikes. However, even as James and Marilyn call all the girls they believe to be Lydia's friends, Nath doesn't mention Jack. Meanwhile, Hannah keeps quiet about the fact that at 2am the previous night, she'd seen Lydia walk across the front lawn away from the house. The next day, a passerby notices that there is a rowboat floating in the middle of the lake at the end of the Lee's street. The police ask James if Lydia can swim and he tells them she can't; a day later, Lydia's body is found in the water.

After Lydia's disappearance, her family realizes that they know much less about her life than they thought they did, and that Lydia had been lying to them and not expressing her true thoughts and desires for many years. This realization raises the question of how possible it is to truly know other people (Tatipang, 2022). Not only does the Lee family not realize that Lydia was being dishonest until after her death, but each of them projected their own ideas about her life onto her. Marilyn thought her daughter was an enthusiastic budding scientist, James thought she had a close group of girlfriends, and Nath thought she had a sexual relationship with Jack—all of which turn out to be untrue. Yet was Lydia's secrecy and dishonesty the root cause of these misunderstandings, or was the problem actually the strength with which her family members believed in their own convictions?

Lydia's secrecy, dishonesty, and silence are hardly unique. Each character withholds and distorts the truth in different ways, and, to some extent, this is presented as being an inevitable part of family life. However, Lydia's death (along with other events, such as Marilyn's disappearance and James' affair) show that lack of honesty can have a devastating impact on family life. The title of the book evokes the feeling of regret that arises when the desire to be honest comes too late. The "I" and "you" in the phrase "everything I never told you" could describe several different combinations of characters; Doris and Marilyn, Jack and Nath, Lydia and her family. In each case, characters chose to withhold or misrepresent their true feelings in a way that ultimately drove them apart.

The major characters:

1) Lydia Lee

Lydia Lee is the middle child born to Marilyn and James Lee. She is repeatedly referred to as the "favorite child," mostly due to her fair complexion. At the beginning of the novel, the audience discovers that Lydia

has drowned in the town's lake. Though the circumstances for her death are not yet revealed, this moment is the catalyst for the realization of the Lee family's deep-seated familial tension.

2) Nath Lee

Nath is the eldest of the Lee children. During his childhood, Nath was resentful of the attention his parents gave to Lydia. This frustration culminated in Nath pushing Lydia, who does not know how to swim, into the local lake. However, after realizing the magnitude of his action, Nath saves his sister and simultaneously vows to comfort and support her. Nath is aware of Lydia's insecurities and of the pressure she feels from her parents.

3) James Lee

James Lee is a first-generation Chinese American. He was raised in a rural farm town in Iowa, where his father worked on the grounds of a boarding school. Due to his father's profession, James was able to attend the boarding school free of charge. While at this school, James was incessantly mocked for his Asian race and made to feel like an outsider. These motifs of isolation and social outcasting continue throughout the remainder of James's life and profoundly influence his career choice, his romantic pursuits, and how he treats his children. In the period leading up to Lydia's death, James rejects his relationship with Marilyn and begins having an affair with his teaching assistant, Louisa. Lydia is aware of this relationship, and she is deeply disturbed by her father's infidelity.

4) Marilyn Lee

Marilyn Lee is the wife of James Lee and mother of Nath, Lydia and Hannah Lee. She is described as a classically beautiful, American woman with blonde hair and blue eyes. Marilyn grew up in Virginia with a single mother who was a Home Economics teacher.

5) Hannah Lee

Hannah Lee is the youngest of the Lee children. In the story, it is said that she was "born and then forgotten." Hannah is often described as perching and hiding in the nooks of her home. She is very perceptive, observant, and sensitive, and she seems to understand her family's dynamics despite her young age.

6) Jack Wolff

Jack Wolff is the Lee's neighbor and the quintessential "bad boy" at Nath and Lydia's high school. His mother is a single mother who works as a doctor

at the local hospital, which further distinguishes him from his peers. Jack is known to drive different schoolgirls around in his car and take their virginities. In addition, he smokes cigarettes.

7) Doris Walker

Doris Walker is Marilyn's mother, and the "only home [economics] teacher at Patrick Henry Senior High." Doris does not support Marilyn's dream to become a doctor, and instead, she hopes her daughter will find a husband during her time at Radcliffe College. When Marilyn becomes engaged to James, Doris is unable to accept their relationship because of James's race.

Nearly each character in [*Everything I Never Told You*](#) is overly concerned about their external appearance. After Lydia's death, the Lee family must grapple with the fact that their obsession with the external has prevented them from resolving their internal struggles with insecurity. When Lydia disappears, the Lee family becomes profoundly vulnerable. Their internal vulnerabilities manifest externally, causing them to recognize the disparities between their inner and outer lives.

One example of appearance versus reality throughout the novel is James's assumptions about Lydia. From his perspective, James believes that Lydia is well-liked by her classmates. Similarly, Marilyn is convinced that Lydia has a keen interest in science and aspires to be a doctor. Lydia, overwhelmed by the pressure she feels from her parents, conceals her dissatisfaction and confirms the impression that she is well-adjusted socially and academically. However, in the aftermath of Lydia's death, James and Marilyn must grapple with the unsettling truth that they never knew who their daughter really was.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, qualitative research was used. In data collection, it occurs interaction between data researchers with data sources. In this interaction both researchers and data sources have different backgrounds, views, beliefs, values, interests and perceptions, so that in data collection, analysis, and report generation will be bound by their respective values. (Sugiyono 2015: 21)

Characteristics of qualitative research by Bogdan and Biklen (1992:39) is as follows:

1. Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and researcher is the key instruments

2. Qualitative research is descriptive. The data collected is in the form of words or pictures rather than number
3. Qualitative research are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products
4. Qualitative research tend to analyze their data inductively
5. "Meaning" is of essential to the qualitative approach

Data collection can be done in various settings, various sources, and various ways. Then the data collection can use primary source and Secondary Source. Primary Source is the source of data as in the novel entitled Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*. The secondary source is a source that does not directly provide data to data collectors, for example through others or through documents and internet browsing . (Sugiyono 2015: 193). This study used objective approach in analyzing data. (Abrams, 1979) stated that: "Objective approach is only focused on the literary work it self without looking at the external aspects of the library works. The series of events happen in the drama because of the supporting from the elements of drama, plot, setting, theme, and character." It means that this study was only focused on dishonesty found only in the novel as written, not in general.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dishonesty in Self-Identity

Lydia's parents begin to be more careful in trusting her. When the parents wonder the things she may be hiding, this proves that the parents less trust Lydia in some cases. They feel that there are still a set of certain things that still have been said yet. In other words, those things are left unsaid (Makalew et al, 2022). Separated from the reason behind it, whether in intention or unintentionally done, Lydia will not be indicated in miscommunication.

Both James and Marilyn were in a state of denial about the nature of their daughter. Instead of using the photo Hannah suggested, James chose a photo that showed Lydia more glamorous and happy than her true self. Meanwhile, Marilyn refuses to believe that it is possible that Lydia chose to run away, even though this is statistically far more likely than the possibility that she was abducted by "psycho." While what actually happened is still unclear, the tension between James

and Marilyn's opinion and the opinion of the police shows that the truth may be difficult to reveal.

Hannah knows nothing about that summer, of her mother's long-ago disappearance. For as long as she's been alive, the family has never spoken of it, and even if they had, it would have changed nothing. She is furious with her sister for vanishing, bewildered that Lydia would leave them all behind; knowing would only have made her more furious, more bewildered. *How could you*, she would have thought, *when you knew what it was like?* As it is, imagining her sister sinking into the lake, all she can think now is: *How?* And: *What was it like?* (66)

According to the quotation above, it can be understood that in the family there is no openness. It is actually an important aspect that needs to be applied. In various cases, openness matters and this is regarded as key to the harmony in the family. When there is no chance to let everything being known by family members, this will lead to a lot of conflicts and there could be any other negative thoughts. Consequently, this is not a good condition to be in the family.

Dishonesty in Family

James and Marilyn's impression of Lydia's life was quickly expressed as highly inaccurate. It's clear that Lydia's parents believe that her life is much happier and less innocent than it actually happened. However, even though Nath knew more about the reality of Lydia's life, she also refused to openly admit this truth. In a different way, all members of the Lee family were invested in maintaining the appearance of happiness and normalcy, even if this impeded their chances of finding Lydia. At the time, Marilyn had laughed. What secrets could a daughter keep from her mother, anyway? Still, every year, she gave Lydia another diary. Now she thinks of all those crossed-out phone numbers, that long list of girls who said they barely knew Lydia at all. Of boys from school. Of strange men who might lurch out of the shadows. With one finger, she tugs out the last diary: 1977. It will tell her, she thinks. Everything Lydia no longer can. Who she had been seeing. Why she had lied to them. Why she went down to the lake.

In the quotation, it can be seen that there is a dishonest action. Dishonesty occurs when something which is hid by someone and it hurts more painfully when it happens among family members. It gives more destructive impacts and those effects tend to be longer-term. It may create trauma or day by day there will be no trust anymore to those who lie. In the family environment it is very sensitive when lies are talked about. It is the place where love and protection are really mattered and it also gives chance to those who speak untrue.

Dishonesty to Increase Self-Worth

Marilyn believes that she and James have connections because of the shared nature - they are both "different." However, James has a very different impression about Marilyn; when he looked at him, he saw someone who suited the Harvard-Radcliffe community. Both James and Marilyn felt an instant interest in each other, but for completely different reasons. Furthermore, Marilyn likes something in James that she doesn't like in herself, and vice versa. So, even though the beginning of their love story is fun and romantic, it still paves the way for future misunderstanding and miscommunication.

If Jack hears them coming, he doesn't show it. He stays there, looking out over the water, until Nath is standing right over him. "Did you think I wouldn't see you?" Nath says. Jack doesn't reply. Slowly, he gets to his feet, facing Nath with his hands tucked in the back pockets of his jeans. As if, Nath thinks, he's not even worth fighting. "You can't hide forever." "I know it," Jack says. At his feet, the dog utters a low, moaning whine. "Nath," Hannah whispers. "Let's go home. Please." Nath ignores her. "I hope you were thinking about how sorry you are," he says. (176)

The quotation above simply gives description that being untrue or dishonest will not be endless. It has final step or there will be time when every lie stops and truth wins. It never shows that truth can be defeated by lies or lies will be the new truth. Lying is used to improve one's image or self-concept. Usually the perpetrators actually have a bad self-concept, so they need to continually lie to make a self-image that looks more positive in the social environment. This is commonly found in life.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The dishonesty evidences are clear throughout the story. Marilyn assumed her daughter was a scientist, James thought she had a exclusive community of girlfriends, and Nath thought she had a sexual relationship with Jack all of which turn out to be untrue. These roots of lies are developed and become apparent in their actions and words as well. At the time when Lydia's body is found in the local lake, the delicate balancing act that has been keeping the Lee family together tumbles into chaos, forcing them to confront the long-kept secrets that have been slowly pulling them apart. James, consumed by guilt, sets out on a reckless path that may destroy his marriage.

Regardless of the motives owned, lying is an act of manipulation of data that is done consciously so that the other party believes what people say. A skilled liar will

give a number of reasons why you shouldn't talk to someone who can confirm or deny a story. This may be a lie in itself, so it might be useful to overcome discomfort feeling and investigate the person who have been warned.

People who lie will gradually regret it. Unfortunately because it is used so it can not be separated from lying habits. Even if you have succeeded in telling the truth one or two times, the temptation to lie will always come. Honestly it hurts and lying looks sweet but it is all fake. The truth is honest is sweet and lying is bitter. To see the effects of honesty and lies is not instant. It takes a long time to see the effects of being honest and lying. Even if it is considered instantly, lying is beneficial, but for a long time, lying actually destroys people to the ground.

To the lecturers, the study result that lying leads to negative consequences commonly occurred in the family life. To keep harmonizing the family relationship and also other intimate relationship, lies are needed to avoid since it invites more lies to come or do. There will be no one and only lie. Academic life when it contains lies it will lead to unsuccessful journey or achievement. Next researchers may study lies in other literary works, such as drama, poetry, short story. It is also suggested to use other criticisms to study the same novel.

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