

An Analysis of Representation of Gossip in Lauren Weisberger's Everyone Worth Knowing

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ABSTRACT

Gossip has been famously regarded as one form of communication. People interact with each other and end up in gossiping about other people. The issue of gossip is still considered as trivial thing and the word gossip itself is still labeled with negative value. This research entitled "An Analysis of Representation of Gossip in Lauren Weisberger's Everyone Worth Knowing" attempts to reveal the benefits of gossip which becomes the main issue of the novel. Using James O. Young's representation theory and theory of gossip by Elaine Lui, this research provides another perspective of gossip by portraying the function and power of gossip, and also how gossip works in the society. The findings show that the issue of gossip is closely related to famous people like celebrity, and gossip has also been used as a commodity to reach certain purposes.

Keywords: *gossip, representation, celebrity*

INTRODUCTION

According to Cambridge dictionary, the word 'gossip' means a conversation or reports about other people's private lives which might be unkind, disapproving or not true. In their book entitled *Gossip: The Inside Scoop*, Levin and Arluke (1987) provide the example of how gossip is considered as a bad behavior. They give an example from one of the tribes in Africa, West African Ashanti, which conducted a punishment to a gossiper by cutting the gossiper's lip. In line with that statement, Nycyk (2015) argues that the effect of gossip and rumour can make somebody's identity and reputation labeled negatively. By looking at the two previous statements, gossip can be seen as unimportant activity which has no benefit. However, opposing two previous statements that highlight the negative value of gossip, Dunbar (2004) "argues that gossiping (perhaps not gossip in its malicious form) is the core of human social relationships, indeed of society itself. Without gossip, there would be no society" (p.100).

In the event of Tedx in Vancouver, Lui (2012), a professional gossip, states that gossip can be used as a source to learn about important things such as "social culture, social behavior, and humanity". Lui's statement about gossip can be seen as a new remark in comprehending gossip. It appears that many people still consider gossip as a trivial thing, or a distraction, and that is what makes people still value gossip as an unimportant activity. In his essay, Flynn (as cited in Spalding, 2010) states that "rumor and gossip are forms of mass behavior and social communication with specific functions in and impacts on society" (p. 26). Gossip exists in daily life and has a role in the communication process between people. Gossip itself is a society's product. When people talk about somebody's life or some accidents that happen to their neighbor for example, that form of communication can be considered as gossip.

In demonstrating other perspectives about gossip, this research uses the representation theory in examining the data. Hall

(1997) states that “representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced

and exchanged between members of a culture” (p.183). Hall further explains that the process of producing and exchanging meaning are exercised by using language, signs, and images which stands or represents things. Through the use of representation theory, this research establishes a better understanding regarding the issue of gossip that becomes the main theme in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing*. Using a representation theory is also one of the forms in showing that literary works can be source of knowledge (Young, 1999). Instead of relying to the concept of meaning and truth, Young (1999) argues that the concept of representation can be referred in order to show the cognitive values contained the literary works. Thus, the collected data in this research that focus on the issue of gossip in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* are analyzed using theory of illustrative representation that is proposed by James O. Young (1999) that focuses on three types of literary depictions.

The use of representation theory helps to reveal how gossip is represented in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* and to explore the issue of gossip in order to show other values of gossip that have been neglected before.

By examining the issue of gossip that appears in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* and analyzing it with the theory of representation that is proposed Young (1999) and Lui’s (2012) gossip theory, this research tries to fill the gap in the literature research regarding the study of gossip and representation. This research also supports previous research which also discusses the issue of gossip such as Dunbar’s research in 2004 which shows gossip as the requirement in people’s lives and Mc Andrew, Bell, and Garcia’s research in 2007 which shows the dynamics of gossip networks by presenting the fact that gossip can be used as a tool to enhance people’s social status. With the data which is collected from the chick lit novel, this research enriches the research that focuses on this particular genre. Lastly, this research tries to invite more research in the

future to use the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* as the material for the research since the novel is still rarely used by other research since it has the potential to be examined, not only in the terms of the issue of gossip, especially in the area of literature research that focus on the genre chick lit.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Types of Representation In Literature

In relation to the concept of representation, Hall (1997) proposes three theories regarding the representational system. He divides the theories of representations into three approaches which are the reflective approach, the intentional approach, and the constructionist approach. The reflective approach or it is also called the mimetic approach works as the words reflect the meaning that lies in the object, person, idea, or event that exist in the real world. This intentional approach shows that the meaning that is contained in words is the meaning that the author intentionally creates. The last approach is called the

constructivist approach. This approach argues that the meaning does not lie on the individual users of language or the material things.

Therefore, this research employs the theory of representation that is proposed by Young. The three types of literary depiction that can be found in literature which includes the formal depiction, the verbal depiction and the descriptive depiction are used as the theoretical framework in analyzing the representation of gossip in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* by Lauren Weisberger. Young (1999) explains that these three types of literary depictions are part of the use of language that portrays the illustrative representation. In his essay, Young (1999) describes that

In verbal depiction, instances of what sorts of things people say (or think) are used in representing their characters, states of mind or other of their characteristics. In descriptive depiction, descriptions of an object are used, not to make statements about it, but to represent it by means of examples. An instance of formal depiction uses the

formal properties of the literary text to represent some object. The formal properties of the text have some relevant property in common with what is represented. (p. 139)

In this research, the representation of the issue of gossip is examined by the using those three types of literary depiction. The depictions that are found in the novel are limited only on the issue of gossip.

GOSSIP AND CELEBRITY

Celebrity gossip creates a system that requires all the participants, which are the media, the celebrity itself and the fans, to sustain its growth. Rojek (2001, 2012) as cited in Driessens (2013) states that a status as a celebrity can be accomplished through the power of media. The example of this is the reality television star and socialites who acquire their celebrity status with the help of media. Lui (2012) points out the function of the fans and media in supporting the career of a celebrity. Lui treated the celebrity as an ecosystem where to maintain his or her popularity, a celebrity needs the work of media, in this case it is the

paparazzi, to give the fans, which play the role as the consumer, a big amount of information about the celebrity. It can be seen from this explanation that there is some kind of demand towards the information related to celebrity. Madow (1993) states that “celebrity has generated the economic values” (p. 129). Using the data from Consumer Magazine Circulation, Madow (1993) states that one of the indications of the relation between celebrities and the economic is “there is a demand for information about the lives and doing of celebrities-for news stories, gossip items, biographies, interviews, and docudramas” (p. 129). Thus, it appears that celebrity gossip has a complex cycle which cannot be seen only as a form of unimportant communication.

THE FUNCTION OF GOSSIP

Levin and Arluke (1987) state that “gossip is talk about the public or private lives of other people-both negative and positive, bad and good-especially when those other people are not around to hear it” (p. 7). Even though gossip is often recognized with the bad reputation, it cannot be

neglected that gossip actually does have benefits. "Gossip brings people together by creating an intimate common world in which private standards of morality apply to what is and what is not acceptable behavior" (Hermes, 1995, p. 132 as cited in Petersen 2011, p. 24). However, since the twentieth century the word gossip is labeled as small discussion that refers to the sin, sexual issue, and slander (Levin and Arluke, 1987). Besides being labeled as an unimportant communication, gossip also carries a double standard. Levin and Arluke (1987) state that gossip has been considered more as the activity that associates with woman. Levin and Arluke point out that a small talk that happen between men is not always considered as gossip even if the discussion contains the same content as women's talk when they are gossiping. Therefore, it can be seen that gossip cannot be regarded only as a small talk that seems unimportant, but it also contain several elements that can be examined further.

This research links the literary depictions that are found in the novel

Everyone Worth Knowing with Lui's statement regarding gossip. Those depictions are limited to the representation of the issue of gossip that appears in the novel. Those depictions are analyzed based on the three functions of gossip from Lui. Lui's theory is suitable to analyze the literary depiction since the issue of gossip that appears in the novel relates to the area of celebrity gossip which become the focus of Lui's theory.

RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative descriptive method is chosen for this study because the main data that is analyzed is in the form of novel which entails the words, phrases, and sentences of the novel. The textual evidence from the novel is taken to support the interpretation in analyzing the data. Several theories of representation and gossip are employed to produce the interpretation of the data.

There are four procedures that are performed in analyzing the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* by Lauren Weisberger which focuses on the

literary depictions and the issue of gossip in the novel.

The first step is doing the close reading to the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing*. The issue of gossip that appears in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* is the focus of the analysis. The result of the close reading of the novel is the data collection, in this case is the textual evidence from the novel, which centers on the issue of gossip that appears in the novel. The textual evidences are divided into two categories of gossip which are the primary gossip and secondary gossip. The primary gossip is the gossip that revolves around the relationship between Bette, the main character, and the guy named Philip. The secondary gossip covers the gossip outside Bette and Philip's relationship.

The second step is determining the literary representations that appear on the novel by applying the theory of representation that is proposed by Young (1999). Those representations that have been found are still limited

into the area of the issue of gossip and celebrity in the novel.

The third step is connecting the literary representations that have been found with Lui's theory (2012) about celebrity gossip. The relation between the literary representations and the issue of gossip is used to help interpreting the data. It is in line with the purpose of this research which explores the issue of gossip that appears in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing*.

Lastly, after the analysis is conducted, the conclusion is drawn to see how the issue of gossip is represented in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing*. The conclusion is drawn based on the relation of the literary representations and the theory of gossip that is used as the main tools in analyzing the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

rotagonist) and Philip's (the antagonist) relationship which becomes the primary gossip in the novel and gossip about other characters' lives outside Bette and Philip's relationship that is labeled as

secondary gossip. The elaboration of findings is presented below.

VERBAL DEPICTION

After collecting the data from the novel by selecting the parts that relate to the issue of gossip, it is found the process of selecting verbal depiction becomes the easiest process compares to other literary depictions selecting process in the novel. Young (1999) states that verbal depiction is the utterance or the thoughts towards certain issue that are produced by the characters in the story which represents their characteristic or states of mind. The complete findings of verbal depictions are listed below.

Primary Gossip

Gossip is considered true if its news contains several evidences such as photos that can strengthen the assumption of the story. Bette's second time appearance in the gossip column is accompanied by her photos and Philip which become one of the powers of the gossip. The photos become the evidence that strengthen the gossip about Bette's relationship with Philip even though Bette is

trying to refute the gossip by stating that she does not do anything with Phillip after they meet in the club.

“...There is a picture of you climbing into the cab with Philip and this absolutely gorgeous girl, so I guess it's not hard to figure out what the gossip is suggesting...” Kelly continued smiling. She looked like she couldn't be any happier.

“Bette, honey, I don't care if it's true, I just care that it is being covered. You've done wonderful things for the team in the short amount of time you've been with us...” (pp. 156-157)

In this case, it is clearly known that Kelly does not care about the effect of gossip that affects Bette's life. The evidence shows that Kelly clearly uses the gossip only for her own benefit. It seems that Bette also does not refuse to appear in the gossip column since she has discovered the worst thing that can happen to her life. Gossip here has been used as the powerful tool to enhance the company's popularity.

Secondary Gossip

Bette is a member of a book club whose members are only women who read only romance novels. When they gather, besides discussing the novel that they have read, they also share about their personal life. There is a moment when Bette and her friends in the book club talks about their own boss. Bette who just quits her job as banker told everyone that she just can't stand it anymore working in a bank. And then when one member, Janie, says that she has been going with her boss for a while, everyone seems to be surprised with Janie since they seem to know Janie very well.

“Speaking of bosses... I, uh, had an incident with mine.”
“Did you sleep with him?” Alex asked.
“Please say yes. That would really make my whole night. Investment banker Bette up and quits her job with no backup plan and you screw your boss? I'd feel like I was finally starting to have some influence around here.”
(pp. 58-59)

That conversation about their boss especially about Janie and her boss shows their attitude towards certain

issue. The statement about sleeping with their boss cannot only be considered as joke but also indicates something else. It seems that having sexual relationship with boss is considered as an achievement which shows the standard of morality among those girls. It also represents the human behavior in certain society.

DESCRIPTIVE DEPICTION

The process of identifying descriptive depiction in this study is started by looking at the description or the narrator's voice in the novel. Below are the complete findings of descriptive depictions that are found in the novel.

Primary Gossip

The novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* has shown how gossip plays an important role in the society. Gossip is exploited to gain a lot of personal benefits by certain people. The main gossip revolves around Bette's relationship with Philip. The gossip is highlighted by the appearance of gossip column that makes their relationship the main consumption for

its readers. The first evidence of the descriptive depiction is when Bette appears in the gossip column for the first time after she spends the night with Philip. The headline of the gossip, "MYSTERY GIRL CHECKS INTO WESTON'S HOTEL" (p.118) has indicated that there is something happening between Bette and Philip after their first encounter. Particularly, the headline of the gossip gives the image that Bette and Philip had sex when they actually did not do that. The power of gossip is sensed in this case when all Bette's coworkers think that she just had sex with Philip. The gossip has led its reader to the conclusion that a hot guy and a girl are having sex when they are spotted checking into the hotel together.

Secondary Gossip

In *Kelly & Co.*, there is a single weapon that plays a crucial role in driving the company success. It is called 'The List'. Kelly explains to Bette what 'The List' is by explaining it as "the most comprehensive list of tastemakers ever, anywhere" (p.121). It contains the list of figures from

several areas such as entertainment industry, literary figures, media elites, finance, fashion, newspaper, and other areas that are considered important for the company. The list does not only contain names but the personal information and the latest gossip of the figures. That information later is used by the company to trade it with the media for their coverage of the events that the company handles. 'The List' has shown that gossip is a powerful tool that can be used as a currency. From this working cycle, it can be also seen that gossip has tied other areas in the company working cycle which affects the whole process of that cycle.

FORMAL DEPICTION

In describing formal depiction, Young (1999) states that formal features of literary text such as diction and settings are utilized to represent the object. Below are the findings of formal depictions that are found in the novel.

Primary Gossip

The next evidence is taken from the caption of the gossip column when

Bette appears in the gossip column for the fourth time.

Philip Weston, heir to the Weston fortune and member of the British Brat Pack in New York, raised eyebrows last week when he was spotted at the Roxy, the notoriously flamboyant Chelsea nightclub. Weston, who has been linked in the press to various Vogue fashion editor, Brazilian models, and Hollywood starlets, was spotted snuggling with an unidentified male in the club's VIP room, sources say. Wen Weston apparently realized that he'd been sighted, he hastily Vespaed to the home of his current fling, Bettina Robinson, an associate at Kelly & Company (see sidebar). Weston's publicist refused to comment. (p. 313)

The caption of the gossip reveals something interesting about society's perception towards a guy like Philip. Philip has been labeled as the 'Nightlife Adonis' which makes him the man of women's dream. When the gossip about his sexuality sparks out, there is a tendency that a guy like him should follow certain convention in

the society; he cannot be gay because he is handsome, rich, famous, and has been linked to many pretty women before. Lui (2012) states gossip reveals the human behavior in certain society which relates to the caption of gossip about Philip's sexuality. The portrayal of Philip as homosexual will break the society's perception towards guy like him. It seems that there has been unspoken agreement that a guy like Philip cannot be gay.

Secondary Gossip

Lui (2012) mentions that one of the points about gossip is that it is the conversation that exposes who we are. The evidence below portrays how one conversation can give an image about a person's characteristic. When Bette meets Abby and they start talking about Penelope and her fiancé, Avery, Abby directly shows her antipathy toward the engagement news.

“Does anyone need a reason to have a little fun? Ohmigod, is that Avery Wainwright? We haven't had a chance to catch up recently. That boy *grew* into very

handsome man, don't you think?"
"He's engaged," I snapped. "To Penelope. You remember Penelope, don't you?"
She feigned cluelessness. "Hmm. Well, you know what they say ..."
"No, what's that?"
"Nothing's final until the vows are exchanged." She rubbed her hands together as though she was anticipating very delicious or exciting. (p. 147)

That conversation shows that Abby is not afraid of expressing what she has in mind when it comes to attractive guy like Avery. The sentence "nothing's final until the vows are exchanged" shows her intention and reveals her character. In that case, Abby shows her characteristic by adoring Avery and is not afraid of showing it in front of Bette, who in this case is Penelope's best friend. The conversation also shows Abby's perception towards a relationship which makes Bette think that she is not scared to do something crazy to get what she wants.

In conclusion, all of the literary depictions that are found in

the novel represent the similar characteristic of gossip which relates to the human behavior. Lui's theory (2012) that has three important points about celebrity helps the analysis in leading the findings into a final result of the study. By borrowing one of the important points of gossip that is proposed by Lui, this study discovers that gossip in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* is represented as the reflection of modern human behavior that becomes one of the features of certain society.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the novel shows that gossip in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* is represented as the reflection of modern human behavior in certain society. Borrowing Lui's statement (2012) which says the celebrity gossip is the reflection of modern human's behavior in culture, the findings indicates that the issue of gossip in the novel entails several important points which relates to society's behavior. There are several aspects that show that the gossip in the novel relates to the modern

society. The setting of the novel takes place in the 21st century which indicates that it is a modern era, but it is not only seen from the setting of the novel because there are several factors such as the mentions of celebrities' name, and also how society consider gossip as a tool to gain certain benefits has led to a conclusion that it relates to the modern era.

Regarding the literary depictions in the novel, gossip is mostly represented in the form of verbal depiction. Since gossip itself is verbal action, it is easier to find the depiction of gossip in the verbal form in the novel compared to other depictions. Young's (1999) literary depiction is not only the tool that is used to analyze the data in this study, but it also helps the process of discovering the issue of gossip in the novel. By using Young's theory of literary representation, gossip has gained values that can make people consider it as the source of knowledge. Young who is also concerned with whether or not that literary text can be the source of knowledge, has proved it that by

highlighting the literary depiction that is contained in the literary text, it directly gives the value to that literary text.

Lui's (2012) theory about gossip which becomes the foundation in analyzing the representation in the novels covers three main important points. They are celebrity gossip as a reflection of modern human behavior in culture, as a reflection of a current standard morality, and a conversation that exposes who we are. In analyzing the representation of gossip in the novel, those three important points are not taken as a whole, but it is modified without eliminating the essence of each theory.

This study also discovers that gossip is not merely about small discussion or its relation with popularity, but also contains a different perspective towards certain gender which resulted in a bias. Bette, the main character in the novel, is labeled with bad reputation when she appears as the main content of the gossip. In the other hand, Philip successfully maintains his popularity by appearing in the gossip column and still holds the status as the

'hottest bachelor that every woman should date'. Gossip in this case has led into one conclusion that the effect of its appearance reacts differently towards a certain gender. Even though gossip is regarded as women's talk, but its effect is usually more dangerous if it happens to a woman.

The study supports several previous studies which already put gossip as their concern. Dunbar's research in 2004 which analyzes gossip through the evolutionary perspective points out the benefits of gossip which are not only regarded as the social bonding but also as the "fundamental prerequisite of human condition." For the literary society, there are already several famous novels which contain the issue of gossip such as *Emma* by Jane Austen and *Gossip Girl* by Cecily Von Ziegesar. By choosing *Everyone Worth Knowing*, this study gives the alternatives of gossip study that involved literary works in it.

It is fair now not to consider gossip as the trivial activity which has no meaning at all. This study has provided some different perspectives towards the issue of gossip by

examining its power and function. Even though the content of gossip is still regarded as insignificant, or label as the backstabbing which could harm people, gossip can be still regarded as the crucial property in people's lives since it seems unavoidable. People have a tendency to always gossip. It is best to conclude this discussion section by quoting a powerful remark about gossip that is found in the novel *Gossip Girl* written by Cecily Von Ziegesar, "you are nobody until you are being talked about."

CONCLUSION

As a final remark, this study is conducted to provide alternative understanding towards gossip. Gossip that has negative label such as the damage of reputation is portrayed in different ways in this novel. Although the negative side of gossip is also shown in the novel, it is reasonable now to treat gossip in a different way. Gossip actually can be brought into academic level since it contains aspects that have become the area of study such as gender issue, power, and literary research. Therefore, this study also neutralizes

negative label of gossip by showing its social function.

SUGGESTION

It appears that there has not been any study which analyses the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* by Lauren Weisberger before. The fact that this novel is less popular compared to Lauren's first novel probably becomes the reason why the novel has not been examined before. Other research about gossip in literary works usually uses more popular books such as *Emma* and *Gossip Girl* as their main data. This is actually a good opportunity for further research to make this novel as the content of the research to provide an alternative in the area of gossip study in the literary works. The novel contains some issues besides gossip that can be explored further such as the idea of popularity, the issue of celebrity, and power relation between the characters in the novel. The issue of gossip also can be examined by using the power relation theory to see the relation that happens between the characters in the novel. Since gossip in the novel is not only used as the tool to enhance people's social status, its influence

can affect the relationship in certain working environment which can be analyzed by using power relation.

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