CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the general information of the study. It consists of the background of the study, the research questions, the aims of the study, the scope of the study, the research methodology, the significance of the study, the clarification of key terms, and the organization of the paper.

1.1. Background of the Study

As a human being, a person needs to socialize with other people to fulfill his or her social needs. Guerin (2003, 2004) as cited in Guerin and Miyazaki (2006) explains that "everything we do requires the involvement of other people, directly or indirectly. What we find, then, is a huge range of ways of talking that promote the formation and maintenance of social relationship" (p. 26). The social needs such as having an interaction with other people can be achieved through the process of communication. Foster (2004) states that people need to acknowledge other people through the amount of information that they get about them in order to be able to live effectively in this kind of social situation that is considered complicated. Gossip, then, becomes one of the tools that people use in reinforcing the bond in social relation.

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 an 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.

People might not realize that they engage gossip in every conversation that they have. Gossip is considered as an unofficial way of daily communication that relates to the process of placing, interpreting, and rebuilding the information that oppose the situation of one's particular social status and advantage (Meyers, 2010). Until now, some people still think gossip as a distraction, or unimportant thing that seems to have no benefit. The word gossip then usually relates to the phenomenon of celebrity and fame: "celebrities are ideal objects of gossip talk because their widely circulated images are easily accessible ideological symbols" (Schickel, 1986; Dyer, 1998; Turner, 2004 as cited in Meyers, 2010, p. 6). In addition to the relation between gossip and celebrity, Turner (2004) as cited in Meyers (2010) points out that that idea of celebrity is different compared to other public figures because when people become celebrities means that they should be ready to allow other people, even strangers, to come into their private lives which means in this case that the private

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lives of celebrities become more interesting than the achievement that they already get because it will maintain the celebrities' popularity. The phenomenon of gossip that appears in some popular literary works such as *Gossip Girl*, and *Everyone Worth Knowing* also indicate the relation between famous people and gossip. In relation to the value of the celebrity, Meyers (2009) suggest that

> the celebrity persona is more than false value, rather it is a site of tension and ambiguity in which an active audience has the space to make meaning of their world by accepting or rejecting the social values embodied by a celebrity image. (p. 891)

It can be seen then that the issue of gossip is closely related to the celebrity since the idea of celebrity can be seen as the "warming welcome" to invite people to start talking about the celebrity's private live.

Gossip, in general, exists at every level of society regardless of their personal background. "Gossip and even scandal unite group within a larger society, or against another group, in several way" (Gluckman, 1963, p. 313). This particular aspect of gossip can be seen in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* where the main character, Bette Robinson, is trapped in the social circle that consist of several figures which is bonded by their social status as public figures. Gluckman (1963) also points out that "the important things about gossip and scandal are that generally these are enjoyed by people about others with whom they are in close social relationship" (p. 313). In the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing*, the main character is encouraged to appear in the gossip column, and the result of her appearance, at the beginning, is praised by the people in her social circle.

It is widely known that there are some people who get social acknowledgement by appearing in some gossip news. Birchall (2006) states that gossip has been regarded as a supporting tool in entertainment industry. Products such as film or music use gossip to create a story as a part of their product promotion. Even though it seems loaded by negativity, appearing in some gossip column does have some benefit to gain a certain social status. Lui (2012) argues that appearing in gossip is one of the critical elements in celebrity ecosystem. In the celebrity ecosystem as explained by Lui, gossip helps people, in this case the celebrity, to stay

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in the spotlight, to maintain their social reputation. "Gossip offers a means of manipulating other's reputation by passing on negative information about competitors or enemies, as well as a means of detecting betrayal by others in our important relationship" (Shackelford, 1997; Spacks, 1985 as cited in McAndrew, Bell, and Garcia, 2007, p. 1564). In the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* by Lauren Weisberger, there is an example of how gossip has influential power to change one person's life through the promotion of her social status. In supporting the statement about the role of gossip in social life, Birchal (2006) states that "popular knowledges, like gossip, become the latest, fodder for an ever-expanding economy looking for new products, new markets, and new ways of selling" (p. 127). In line with Birchall's statement, the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* shows how gossip has become a commodity that is used to reach a particular goal of some characters in the novel. Thus, this research tries to show other perspectives regarding the issue of gossip which has been labeled with more negative value by showing the benefit of gossip that can be found through its representation in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing*.

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

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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.

1.2. Research Question

Based on the focus of the issue that has been explained in the background of study section, there is one following question that is proposed to reach the purpose of this research which is "How is gossip represented in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* by Lauren Weisberger?"

1.3. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the issue of gossip that is depicted in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* by Lauren Weisberger and to explores how gossip is used by the author as a tool to show the function of gossip.

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1.4. Scope of the Study

In this study, the analysis of how the issue of gossip that is depicted in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* is limited around the life of the main character, Bette Robinson. The analysis focuses on the area of Bette's life starting from her personal relationship with her family, her friendship, her love life, and her relationship with her co-workers in her new office. The area of life of supporting characters or the antagonist characters is presented briefly to support the analysis of the central character, not to be included as the focus of attention in the study. The representation of gossip is divided into three categories which are the verbal, descriptive, and formal depiction and further they are connected to the theory of gossip that is proposed by Lui (2012) which revolves around the notion of celebrity gossip to provides other values about gossip.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Generally, the result of the study is expected to give contribution to critical analysis of prose and popular literature, especially in the issue of gossip that appears in literary works. The book *Everyone Worth Knowing* has not become the subject of research before. Therefore, the study broadens the research about gossip in literary works.

1.6. Research Method

The issue of gossip that appears in the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* is the center of analysis of this research. This research uses theory of representation that is proposed by James O Young (1999) and centers on the three most important types of depiction that can be found in literature. This approach focuses on the verbal depiction, descriptive depiction, and formal depiction. Then, the theory of gossip that is proposed by Elaine Lui (2012) is used to examine the result of literary depictions that are found on the novel *Everyone Worth Knowing*.

The data is in the form of a novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* by Lauren Weisberger which was published in 2005. The data is collected after doing a close reading on the novel, and they are in the form of words, phrases, and sentences. They

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are gathered by identifying the series of events that are experienced by the main character and it is limited on the event that contains the issue of gossip that relates to the life the main character. The illustrative representation that is proposed by Young (1999) is used as a tool to analyze the representation of the issue of gossip in the novel.

1.7. Clarification of Key Terms
Here are some clarifications of key terms that are used mostly in this paper:

1. Gossip : Conversation or reports about other people's private lives which might be unkind, disapproving or not true (Cambridge Dictionary).

2. Illustrative Representation : A representation that does not assert some state of affairs. Rather, it is (in a sense to be explicated) a depiction. Depiction can be pictorial, but it can also be verbal (Young, 1999).

3. Formal depiction : A representation 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 (Young, 1999).

4. Verbal depiction : 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 (Young, 1999).

5. Descriptive depiction : In descriptive depiction, descriptions of an object are used, not to make statements about it,

but to represent it by means of examples (Young, 1999).

6. Celebrity : Someone who is famous, especially in the entertainment industry (Cambridge Dictionary).

1.8. Organization of the Paper

This paper is composed in this following organization:

1. Abstract

    This section functions as summary of the paper presenting brief information about the content that is elaborated further in the next sections.

2. Introduction

    This chapter deals with background of the study which explains what drives the writer to analyze the chosen topic, the purpose or personal intention of the writer in writing the study, the significance of the study describing that becomes the study's contribution in an individual or a society, and presentation of research questions.

3. Literature Review

    This part of the study examines the bases of theories (theoretical framework) used in the study and also what other researchers have found in the earlier studies.

4. Methodology

    This section presents the methods used in the study and also the details such as: who are involved, where the data are obtained, and how the data are collected.

5. Findings and Discussion

    This chapter deals with the findings when the study or analysis is finished. The findings are transcribed, analyzed, and finally discussed to answer the research question

6. Conclusion

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This section sums up all the information from the chapters and concludes an idea as the result of the analysis. In this section, suggestions for further research are also presented.