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GOSSIP AS A CULTURAL FORMULA AND AS THE AUDIENCES' DESIRES IN SHONDA RHIMES' *BRIDGERTON SEASON 1* NETFLIX SERIES

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ABSTRACT

Gossip, in *Briderton Season 1* series, is a deeply held cultural practice in society; every community engages in discovering and sharing specific information through gossip. It captures viewers' interest, contributing to the show's popularity. It is shown by the audience's enthusiastic in Instagram posts through several comments. Cawelty's formula becomes the theoretical focus of this study, which is then linked to Lacan's concept of desire to demonstrate how the gossip formula functions as a cultural signifier and an expression of societal desire. The method applied is qualitative descriptive to elaborate the data. The data related with audiences are compiled from Instragram @bridgertonnetflix, included 10 post and 100 comments entangled to the posts. The results of this study indicate that gossip serves as a cultural formula deeply ingrained in the audience; the audience's active anaclitic and active narcissistic desires are fulfilled by the romance and gossip elements present in the *Bridgerton* series.

Keywords: Gossip, *Bridgerton*, Formula, Desire, Audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Gossip is a deeply ingrained social activity that is particularly popular among societies. Gossip also often serves as a mode of communication and a source of information about people in the local community. This makes gossip a very easy and inexpensive way to spread information. This is also because gossip can take place during downtime or while spending leisure time with relatives and friends. The conservative definition of gossip, stated by Chiel, et al. (2026), is the communication regarded as the instrumental informations transaction of status, fun, power, intimacy, and any other informations embedded to the people around through small talks. Thus, gossip is a deeply ingrained activity with the potential to serve as a social phenomenon within a community for sharing information about people in the immediate social

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circle. This concept was proposed by Sevilla-Troike (2003), who defined gossip as a form of human communication that involves sharing information about people in the immediate social circle and is segmented within a specific social group. In this context, gossip is an intriguing social phenomenon to explore, whether in literary works or academic writings, as it reflects the daily activities of a social group through conversations or written texts.

The *Bridgerton* series and its audience share a relationship of mutual need. The series needs its audience to generate revenue, while the audience needs the series to satisfy their desires—or, as some might say, as a means of escapism from a real world that is exhausting and full of stress. In line with the definition of gossip—which means communicating information about status, fun, power, intimacy, and other details associated with a person within a community—the Bridgerton series portrays gossip exactly as defined. The series is a hit Netflix production. Accordingly, viewers choose the series as a way to unwind. This is indicated by the popularity of the series, which achieved 82 million views in the first two weeks of release date, making it the number one Netflix series in 76 countries for season 1 in 2020. Then, it was also nominated for various awards and won categories such as Top Television Program, Best Television Series, Best Breakthrough Performance, and others (Andreeva, 2021). The storytelling style that incorporates gossip is a defining characteristic of the series. As can be seen, Lady Whistledown, a gossipmonger, has become a character much discussed by the audience. The audience, consisting of the general public who are deeply immersed in gossip, readily embraces the series. Through the series, the audience satisfies their desire to gossip, rather than simply enjoying the work for what it is. Furthermore, the series creators engage viewers in discussions through posts on Instagram. The Instagram account has over six million followers who actively follow updates about the show. Consequently, the *Bridgerton* series, in addition to its success as a popular Netflix series, has also captured the hearts of viewers who eagerly await the continuation of the story and its upcoming seasons.

The relationship between the Bridgerton series, the role of gossip, and the culture of gossip within society (the audience) constitutes a strategy for incorporating cultural elements that has successfully made the series a hit. Culturally speaking, gossip serves as a bridge that connects societal customs with the series. With gossip as this bridge, the audience easily relates to the way the characters communicate. Bridgerton is a series set during the Regency era, which is steeped in rigid cultural norms, whereas gossip is a simple social communication habit. The use of gossip to discuss the aristocracy makes the audience feel that these rigid social hierarchies are not an issue. Consequently, the series easily becomes popular among fans and even the general public. Thus, the role of gossip in the series and its connection to audience engagement warrant further discussion.

The series depicts London society in "*Bridgerton*" as viewing a gossip tabloid written by a female author, Lady Whistledown, with cynicism. Society considers it unimportant because it contains only information about one of

the families in London. The content of the tabloid consists mostly of mockery of that family, with only a little praise. However, as time goes on, with London in the midst of wedding and matchmaking season, the gossip written by Lady Whistledown begins to be eagerly awaited by the public, who want to learn about potential marriage partners. Furthermore, since the focus of the gossip was the London society itself, some families there hoped to be featured in the column, while others did not, depending on what Lady Whistledown wrote about them. In this context, the London public's view of gossip began to shift from one of cynicism to the realization that, whether consciously or unconsciously, gossip had become something of great importance to them (Rhimes, 2020).

The gossip in this context is a cultural element incorporated into a work of popular fiction. As proposed by (Cawelty, 1977), a formula is a cultural product embedded in a popular literary work to influence that work and to represent and connect various aspects within a specific society—in this case, the *Bridgerton* series portrays 19th-century London society, showcasing various images, symbols, themes, and myths present within that society. Thus, gossip can be considered a formula present in the *Bridgerton* series that represents the state of a society's culture. Radway also posits that popular fictional novels are read or enjoyed because they depict elements that are similar to or familiar within a society (Radway, 1991). This can also be interpreted to mean that consumers of popular fiction choose works that are familiar to their own lives for enjoyment. In this context, the *Bridgerton* series, which incorporates gossip, serves as a familiar formula within societal life.

The role of gossip in this series is a recurring overarching pattern that shapes the series' identity. The way gossip is positioned in the series makes the audience feel connected to and familiar with the narrative structure. If gossip is portrayed merely as a set of narrative devices, then the storytelling in the series would consist entirely of gossip; however, in this series, there is a universe larger than the gossip itself. Furthermore, if gossip were merely an additional motif, it would be nothing more than a figurative device that might not represent a specific cultural form deeply rooted in society at large. Therefore, gossip is positioned as a formula in this series. Moreover, gossip creates the illusion of a connection between the story's universe and reality, allowing the audience to enjoy it comfortably. Thus, the inclusion of gossip is not merely a marketing strategy.

Regarding formulas, it is simply impossible for a formula in a literary work to be included without a purpose. Cawelty notes that the relationship between formulas and the daily lives of popular fiction readers is intertwined. The formulas featured in such fiction serve as a form of escapism, as they can distract readers from their exhausting lives (Cawelty, 1977). Based on research findings from several comments by viewers of the *Bridgerton* series, they feel that they are engaging in escapism by watching the series. In connection with this, this study also applies Jacques Lacan's theory of desire

to elucidate the desires of viewers that are fulfilled through watching the *Bridgerton* series.

The use of the "gossip formula" in positioning a work within society requires evidence of audience engagement. Audience attachment to a work does not happen suddenly; rather, there is a psychological process that can be observed through the audience's desires. These desires can be explored through the lens of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. Popular literary theory can provide a technical explanation of a popular literary work within society. Meanwhile, Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, which explores the desires of audiences who enjoy literary works, can explain the psychological reasons why a work becomes popular. In other words, the massive acceptance of a work within society is not merely a technical phenomenon; there are underlying reasons that stimulate each individual to choose that work for enjoyment. Thus, this study not only examines the series but also considers audience comments to trace the stimuli through their responses to the series.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is evident that this study addresses several research questions. (1) How does gossip serve as a formula that captivates viewers of the *Bridgerton* series? (2) Why does gossip serve as a gateway to escapism for viewers of the *Bridgerton* series? Consequently, this study will examine gossip as a formula within popular fiction. Additionally, this study will explore how gossip can serve as a gateway to a form of escapism for viewers of the *Bridgerton* series.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To develop the ideas and arguments in this study, several previous studies that also discuss formulas, escapism, and *Bridgerton* were reviewed. In (Ayu, 2017; Putri & Saktiningrum, 2021; A'daillah, 2014; Rusdianti, 2019; Junida, 2018; H., 2017), the authors discuss escapism found in popular literary works, such as Korean dramas, novels, and so on. Additionally, Putri and Ningrum wrote about *Bridgerton* from a feminist perspective. Furthermore, the discussion of the deconstruction of gossip in the *Bridgerton* novel serves as a reference because it addresses the instability of the interpretation of gossip in the society depicted in the novel (Rusdianti & Pujiharto, 2023). The discussions about Brodgerton which are conducted by the previous studies only focus on the main text—the reading only specifically on the work. Meanwhile the text must be influencing and also influenced by the audience. Therefore, based on the reading on the previous studies, this research offers novelty in terms of its subject matter and the application of a more specific theory, namely a focus on gossip as a formula and a form of escapism within a popular fiction work, *Bridgerton*. Besides, the data of this research included the Instagram fandom and audience desire.

METHOD

The method applied in this study is a qualitative method using descriptive analysis. According to Creswell, qualitative research is research conducted to explore and understand the meanings of issues within the social sphere (2024). Gossip is an issue within the social sphere. Therefore, gossip can serve as a key factor in the popularity of the *Bridgerton* series. To further understand and elaborate the data, the qualitative research method, as outlined by Miles and Huberman, involves three steps: data reduction, data organization, and drawing conclusions from the analysis (2014). In conducting this study, the researcher collected data and then filtered comments from *Bridgerton* series viewers who follow the series' official account, @*Bridgerton*netflix, on the Instagram social media platform. The researcher selected 10 post which are showing the main characters, Daphne and Simon and Penelope as Lady Whistledown. During this filtering process, the researcher selected 100 specific and recent comments—as the actual dataset contained thousands of comments summed from 10 posts with many similarities—that demonstrated the fulfillment of desires and aligned with the gossip data category. The analysis was conducted by reviewing the comments and linking them to relevant theories. The data suggests that the gossip incorporated into the *Bridgerton* series captures viewers' attention and provides them with a sense of comfort while enjoying the series.

During the development of this study, the researcher also applied a method appropriate to this research, namely the psychoanalytic method. According to Adi (2016), the psychoanalytic method is a method for examining the relationship between literature, actions, and motives, as well as the nature of the text itself. Additionally, this study focuses on the language used in a narrative that represents both the researcher and the subject of the study. This aligns with the perspective proposed by (Tyson, 2015), who argues that psychoanalysis is a means of uncovering insights within a literary work that reflect the thoughts and psychological states mirrored by the narrative text. However, in this context, it is not only the narrative text that is analyzed but also the effect of the narrative on the audience. Thus, it could be assumed that when an audience who are considered as the member of the fandom write a text about what they experienced after watching the *Bridgerton* series, it would indicated discursive traces of desires or affective positioning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gossip as The Cultural Formula which Captivates The Audiences

The first discussion focuses on gossip as a formula in popular fiction. The choice of gossip elements featured in the *Bridgerton* series is culturally embedded to the audience. This is indicated by the public's enthusiastic reception of the series, which is delivered through a gossip-driven narrative style. In posts uploaded to Instagram that used the word "scandal," the content garnered significant attention from viewers, receiving thousands of comments

that indicate the use of gossip to convey the plot is the correct popular formula attract the audiences—particularly women—to follow the story.

Redeeming gossip is a fascinating topic to discuss anywhere. A popular Netflix series created by Shonda Rhimes, titled *Bridgerton*, incorporates gossip as a formula to capture viewers' attention. In the series, gossip—or what could also be called scandal—is a key element in drawing viewers' interest, encouraging them to choose the series as their entertainment during their free time. In this context, gossip can attract female viewers to enjoy the series' story through a culturally relevant narrative, as gossiping is, by nature, a common part of women's daily lives. Women tend to gossip to gather information about various matters. This is discussed in a CNN report, which reveals that women enjoy gossip and explains that women gossip to gather information regarding competition for a partner, whether about the man or their female rivals (CNN, 2020). However, Rosida & Handayani stated that gossip is not only practiced by women but also men. Culturally, women tend to be labelled as gossiper (2023). Thus, gossip serves as a means culturally for women to gather information so they can stay updated on current issues in their environment, particularly when seeking a partner. In addition to being a means of gathering information, gossip also serves as a weapon for women to bring down others. This is as argued by McAndrew the relationship between gossip and women, noting that women tend to use gossip as a substitute for physical attacks when targeting opponents (2014). Thus, gossip is culturally regarded also as tool (weapon) for women. In the world of women, information that is generally considered trivial by society can be used as a weapon to bring down opponents. Therefore in it could be comprehended that the series placed the Lady Whistledown Character as the gossiper.

Gossip as such a formula can be based on the theory of the formula proposed by Cawelty (1977:71) that a formula is a cultural product deeply rooted in society that tends to be depicted through symbols, images, myths, and themes. Gossip is a form of social communication that incorporates the four aspects mentioned above. In *Bridgerton* series, the formula is embodied by the gossip that permeates society. The character of Lady Whistledown is portrayed through a woman's voice. As discussed earlier, gossip is typically spread by women. Thus, the formula in the series is further established by this phenomenon. Additionally, the opening line frequently used by Lady Whistledown in her tabloid—namely, "Dearest Gentle Reader"—is a characteristic greeting from the gossipmonger to her audience. This greeting is a very friendly way for the gossipmonger to communicate with their gossip partner, given that gossip is a common form of communication practiced across all social classes in society.

Hence, according to Cawelty, a formula is a cultural product. Drawing a parallel with the *Bridgerton* series, which uses gossip as a tool to draw in viewers, this work is exceptionally well-crafted and engaging in terms of storytelling. In this particular case, not all popular fiction aired by Netflix or other streaming platforms employs gossip as a storytelling technique;

however, it can be concluded that this gossip-based formula is what constitutes a unique and compelling element. Yet, it is also a culturally ingrained formula because it draws from a culture deeply rooted in society and is subsequently incorporated into popular fiction. This point is further argued by Cawelty, *"A formula is one such pattern. When we have successfully defined a formula we have isolated at least one basis for the popularity of a large number of works. Of course, some formulaic writers are more successful than others, and their unique popularity remains a problem that must be explored in its own right (Cawelty, 1977: 21)*." Thus, based on the explanation of the formula developed by Cawelty, it can be assumed that the gossip—which serves as the unique formula of this popular fiction—sets it apart from other works and is what makes this fiction popular and appealing to the audience.

This is proven by the audience's warm reception of Lady Whistledown as the gossipmonger. The receptions are shown by the screenshots pictures of Instagram post comments (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022). The picture is selected due to indicate the data, especially data related to the Lady Whistledown. The commentators are regarded as anonym in order to respect their privacy.

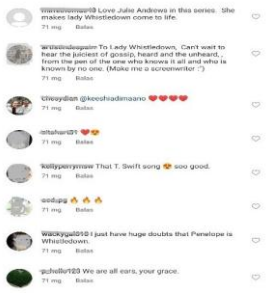


Figure1: Comments Related to Lady Whistledown 1, (Instagram @Bridgertonnetflix, 2022).

The screenshot shows that Lady Whistledown, the gossipmonger, has captured the audience's attention. This demonstrates that gossip and gossipmongers are deeply ingrained in society. The culture of gossip within a community is a casual, everyday activity aimed at obtaining specific information about one or more people. In the context of the gossip portrayed in the *Bridgerton* series, gossip is a crucial element that significantly impacts the lives of the characters in the series. However, in reality, viewers watching the series are relaxing and enjoying their free time, and they enjoy the gossip provided by the series. Thus, even though there is tension in the series caused by gossip, viewers still enjoy it casually, because at its core, gossip within society is essentially casual conversation.

Referring to comments related to the discussion, in this case the author provides several coding labels to the comments for further analysis, such as Anticipation (A), Speculation (S), praise (Pr), and participation (Pt). The comment from @A**********r, who wrote code A. There's also a comment from @a*******n who is stating, code S. This shows that Lady Whistledown, as

the source of the gossip, has become a fan favorite by speculating Penelope who is regarded as the wall flower—who is ignored in the series—as Lady Whistledown. Gossip serves as the key to keeping viewers engaged and preventing boredom when watching series of the same genre, namely romance. Gossip, as a cultural phenomenon, is a means of spreading information and gaining insights into the surrounding community (Rusdianti & Pujiharto, 2023). Even trivial gossip can become significant because it is deeply ingrained in society; in fact, people can even weave their own "agenda" into the gossip. From the strategy employed by the creators of the *Bridgerton* series—who weave their "agenda" through the gossip embedded in their work—it is evident that gossip plays a significant role in human life. Such is the audience's love for the gossip packaged in the series that even the voice actor for the gossip has become the focus of attention, as seen in the comment by @M*********40, who wrote a comment with code Pr indicated Actress Julie Andrews praised for doing a voice act as Lady Whistledown's voice in the series, not the main character. However, her name appears in the credits and her role is well highlighted, even better than the actors and actresses who became supporting characters in the series. Gossip, in this series is not only used as a mere content insert, but is also used as a way to promote the continuation of the previous series. Posts on the instagram account @*Bridgerton*netflix often contain the writings of Lady Whistledown. The audience is made, as if part of the audience that is in the world of stories. Comment from @P_********3 who wrote code Pt which indicated that audiences are part of *The Ton* in the series. This engagement made the series attract more and more attention from other viewers, seeing that there were thousands of comments for the post.

From this series, it is evident that gossip is deeply ingrained in society and serves as a cultural bridge between the work and its fans. Gossip is used as a narrative device in the series—not only as part of the narrative devices, but also as a cultural element that helps popularize the literary work. Comments written by fans of the series often demonstrate their engagement with the work through gossip. The character Penelope serves as a focal point of discussion, due to her portrayal as a neglected girl within the story. However, because she is Lady Whistledown, Penelope becomes a character whose future story is eagerly anticipated. Additionally, the actress who does not even appear on screen in the series, Julie Andrews, has received praise for her performance voicing Lady Whistledown. Through Instagram, gossip has become a new space for creating a narrative universe beyond the series by involving fans. In this context, Instagram is not merely a platform for promoting the series; it has also become an alternate universe that bridges reality with the series, with gossip serving as the perfect bridge.

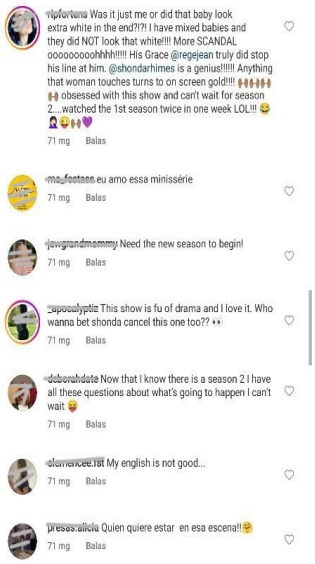
Furthermore, audience engagement through gossip which is casual chatter and very easily accepted by the public, especially women, has led many followers of @*Bridgerton*netflix Instagram account to comment on what was shown in the series, which was then turned into Instagram posts by the creator.



Figure 2: Comments Related to Gossips 1(@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022)



Figure 3: Comments Related to Gossips 2 (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022)



ıre 4: Comments Related to sips 3 (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2)

Comments shown in the screenshots indicate that viewers of the series do not merely enjoy the gossip presented within the narrative, but also actively engage in gossiping about the events in *Bridgerton* and extend these discussions into real-life contexts, effectively reproducing gossip beyond the text itself. This can be observed in the comment sections, where viewers invite others to participate in discussions, speculate about the storyline, and discuss the actors and actresses involved in the series. In this context, the focus on actors and actresses emerges because they become the primary objects of discussion, particularly in their absence from the digital space where these conversations take place. Relating with the definition of gossip which is argued by Foster (2004) that gossip is a type of communication where the third parties are absent is producing wider speculations and many different kind of "new information", the absence of the actors and actress in the forum, especially the post where the comments are written made the gossip in the storyline moreover in the alternative universe culturally engaged.

In discussing actors and actresses within the comment sections, viewers frequently employ the hashtag "#scandal." The use of this hashtag indicates that gossip, as a formula, fosters a sense of attachment between the text and its audience. Comments such as "We did successful meet ups with #Scandal we will do it again with a #NYC*Bridgerton*Ball are you in? Contact us!!" (Pr2) and "Xoxo. Gossip Girl" (Pr3) suggest that the familiarity of gossip as a cultural practice enables audiences to easily express their (imagining) participation in the series, or they felt like included as the characters in the series

Moreover, the audience desire is realized not only through the inclusivity of gossip but also through the broader inclusivity presented by the series, particularly in the casting of Black actors and actresses. This can be seen in a comment by @r****s, which states, "Was it just me or did that baby look extra white in the end?!?! I have mixed babies and they did NOT look that white!!!! More SCANDAL 00000000ohhhh!!!!! His Grace @regejean [The Instagram ID of the actor who portrays The Duke of Hastings] truly did stop his line at him. @shondarhimes [The Instagram ID of Series creator] is a genius!!!!!! Anything that woman touches turns to on screen gold!!!! A++ # obsessed with this show and can't wait for season 2.... watched the 1st season twice in one week LOL!!!" (Pr4). The use of the term "scandal" in this comment reflects the impact of gossip as a formula embedded within the series. In this sense, audience participation extends beyond passive consumption, they also involve to consider about the involvement of actors who are casted in the series, as viewers actively produce testimonies—predominantly positive ones—through communicative practices that resemble gossip itself.

From the analysis of audience comments, "Pr" comments were the most dominant. "Pr" comments indicate that the audience gets involved in internal gossip within the series and then carries it over into another universe (reality). There were also comments concerning the casting decisions for the actors and actresses playing roles in the series. The audience's enthusiastic involvement in gossiping on social media—which serves as an alternative universe—is a form of expression for their desires that are suppressed by reality. The conclusion that can be drawn from the discussion regarding gossip is that it serves as an attraction for audiences to watch the *Bridgerton* series through Instagram posts. Viewers are invited to enjoy the gossip embedded within the series' narrative. By engaging with this gossip, audiences can follow the storyline more casually, as gossip functions as a form of relaxed conversation. Furthermore, viewers are encouraged to gossip beyond the series itself, as they can interact on Instagram to share their personal experiences while watching the series, seek information about its developments, and discuss the actors and actresses involved in the show.

Gossip as a bridge to Bridgerton Series Audience Escapism

Related to the discussion above, gossip functions as a cultural formula capable of attracting the audience's attention. This is also connected to the way viewers engage in escapism through the gossip presented in the series. To link the concepts of formula, escapism, and audience engagement, this study employs the theory of desire proposed by Jacques Lacan. Lacan posits that there are four types of desire corresponding to different structures inherent in human beings, active narcissistic, passive narcissistic, active anaclitic, and passive anaclitic. The context of desire constructed by Lacan reflects the fulfillment of individual needs for each *Bridgerton* viewer. The concept articulated by Lacan is the three orders of the human order, namely the imaginary order, the symbolic order, and the real order. These three orders are expressed through the desires mentioned earlier. Narcissistic desire is

associated with the imaginary order. Humans have a desire to become a specific identity; active narcissistic desire indicates that humans seek to recognize themselves as a specific being in society. Passive narcissistic desire, on the other hand, reflects a human's tendency to seek recognition as a specific identity by others. Analytic desire relates to the symbolic order. Within society, humans naturally seek to be either a subject or an object; active analytic desire drives humans to become the subject of certain things or human being, while passive analytic desire indicates a human's tendency to become the object of certain things or human being (Bracher, 2009). In this context, viewers exhibit different desires in enjoying the *Bridgerton* series. This can be observed in how viewers express their comments on posts related to the series on Instagram. In other words, when viewers gossip in comment sections, they are simultaneously expressing their personal desires within that discourse.

1. Audience's active anaclitic desire caused addiction to Bridgerton Series

Anaclitic desire refers to the desire to possess the Other—in this study, the *Bridgerton* series—to achieve satisfaction (Bracher, 2009). In relation to viewers' comments on Instagram, the majority expressed a desire to continue watching the series. This indicates that they use the series to fulfill their wishes and attain satisfaction. This aligns with the concept of escapism, where individuals seek to temporarily escape from the pressures of reality into a more relaxed popular fiction. When people experience unavoidable fatigue, they look for something to divert their attention, and in this case, that diversion is the *Bridgerton* series. Moreover, while engaging in gossip, they are also able to fulfill their latent desires.

This is reflected in comments that reveal how addicted viewers are to the series and their desire to watch it repeatedly. Beyond wanting to re-watch, they also demand the production of subsequent seasons, considering that there are multiple novels written by Julia Quinn in the *Bridgerton* series. Consequently, viewers who are also readers of these novels naturally expect other novels to be adapted as well. At the time of data collection, Netflix has only produced the second season of the series. The first season—which is the focus of this study—is the adaptation of the novel *Bridgerton: The Duke and I*, while the second season continues the adaptation from the second novel, *Bridgerton: The Viscount Who Loved Me*.



Figure 5: Comments Related to Anaclitic Desires 1 (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022)



Figure 6: Comments Related to Anaclitic Desires 2 (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022)



Figure 7: Comments Related to Anaclitic Desires 3 (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022)



Figure 8: Comments Related to Anaclitic Desires 4 (@Bridgertonnetfilx, 2022)

These comments indicate that the *Bridgerton* series functions as a tool for fulfilling viewers' desires to escape from the exhausting realities of life. They seek to satisfy their desires by watching the series.

The active anaclitic desire of *Bridgerton* viewers can also be assumed to be a need that must be fulfilled when individuals engage in escapism through popular fiction. It is undeniable that, when facing an exhausting world, people require other tools to satisfy their desires, such as this series. Through the narrative constructed in the series, viewers can fulfill desires that cannot be satisfied in real life. Therefore, active anaclitic desire can also be assumed to be a driving factor behind the human need for escapism.

Further discussion, several comments which are labeled as "AAD" indicate the expression of the active anaclitic desire. In the *Bridgerton* series, gossip is embedded to allow viewers to easily channel their desires. While romance series are abundant, *Bridgerton* incorporates gossip as a formula, enabling audiences to connect more readily with the work. For instance, a comment from @l****28 reads, *"Dearest Gentle Readers," (AAD1) aligning with Lady Whistledown's catchphrase. The comment AAD1 indicate the desire to have a place in the forum. The commentator express the common knowledge as the loyal audience. Thus with this kind of expression, the commentator could fulfill his/her active anaclitic desire. Another commentator, @b*****ns*, writes, "Are you aware of any scandal next season? Involving a viscount?" (AAD2). AAD2 indicated the realization of having more information and desire to give other people his/her knowledge. In this case the commentator him/herself has the desire to make other people his/her object by hottest gossip that has been known. Additionally, @b****ns comments, "This account is what keeping me alive atm (emoji) whoever runs it deserves a gold medal (emoji)" (AAD3). AAD3 indicated different kond of active anaclitic desire as previous AADs. As argued by Bracher (2009) that anaclitic desire also express the life-sustaining. In this case the commentator as a subject who enjoy the series actively and the series itself fulfill his/her desire. Lastly, @s**a writes, "If anyone knows how to move on from *Bridgerton*, don't tell me because I'm not planning to do

(emoji)" (AAD4). Similar with AAD3, this comments also indicate the desire of life-sustaining fulfillment. The way the series promotes itself and conveys its narrative through gossip allows viewers to feel involved in the world of *Bridgerton*, thus fulfilling their desire to immerse themselves in the alternative universe constructed by the series creators.

Gossip, once again, becomes a manifestation of viewers' desires—specifically, their active anaclitic desire through the style of communication within the series. Supporting this analysis, a comment—which are labelled as AADG—by @A*****e reads**,** "Loved all the scandal, that's what made the full season interesting" (AADG1). This clearly demonstrates that gossip serves as a manifestation of viewers' desires, fulfilled through the series they enjoy. The validation of desire through the series increases audience engagement and addiction to *Bridgerton***.** Several comments indicate that viewers want to watch repeatedly, even anticipating subsequent seasons. For example, @I******c wrote, "Now I need to watch the series again!" (AADG2), @T******h_ commented, "watching it again as we speak (emoji) I need season 2 now!!" (AADG3), @B*****d wrote, "I and (tagged account) were very thirsty indeed (emoji). Thank you (tagged account)!!" (AADG4) and @E******e commented, "so good!!!!!!!! I need more (emoji 3x)" (AADG5). The comments reveal that viewers, "thirsty" for the validation of their desires through the series, become increasingly addicted. The gossip technique facilitates the communication of emotions between viewers and the work, allowing viewers' desires to be easily validated and fulfilled.

The discussion regarding the relationship between gossip, viewers, the work, and audience fantasy illustrates an interconnected dynamic between viewers' latent active anaclitic desires in the real world and cultural habits of instinctive communication, gossiping, and having an open arena for audiences to express their desires. The creators of the work seek popularity, crafting the series in a way that resonates with societal habits. Simultaneously, audiences need a safe space to channel their instinct for gossip. Gossip serves as the bridge that fulfills both needs. Thus, the manifestation of desire through embedded gossip, as a formula in the *Bridgerton* romance series, successfully meets the expectations of both viewers and the series creators.

2. Audiences' active narcissistic desire caused addiction to Bridgerton series

Active narcissistic desire is a form of desire that reflects an individual's aspiration to become the other or something beyond themselves (Bracher, 2009). This desire pertains to a person's identity, which evolves over time. In the context of this study, viewers who engage in escapism through popular fiction can be assumed to have lives that do not align with their desires or aspirations, and through the *Bridgerton* series, they are able to fulfill them. This is expressed by comments from viewers who are married couples watching the series together. Beyond married couples, many single viewers also imagine having lives similar to those depicted in the *Bridgerton* series.

From these examples, it can be assumed that when engaging in escapism through popular fiction, individuals channel desires that cannot be directly expressed in the real world.



Figure 9:Comments Related to Narcissistic Desires 1 (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022)



Figure 10: Comments Related to Narcissistic Desires 2 (@Bridgertonnetflix, 2022)

From the sample comments, it can be concluded that viewers with active narcissistic desire express their latent desires through the language they use. Symbolically, they convey their desires through the comments they write.

Further discussion, several comments which are labeled as "AND" indicate the expression of the active anaclitic desire. The relationship between gossip and viewers' anaclitic desire can be observed in the most specific comments, such as the one by @B*****l, who wrote, "My husband and I sort of escaped. No one, apart from our closest family, were at our small wedding. The next day we flew to Paris" (AND1). AND1 indicated the validation that the commentator felt though the series. By using the phrase "sort of escaped," they explicitly acknowledge that the work serves as a diversion from a world that is not as ideal as depicted in the series. The difference between active anaclitic desire, discussed previously, and active narcissistic desire is that the subject wants to become a character fantasized in the story. In this case, the married couple did not experience the family gathering as portrayed in the series.

In addition, a comment by @T*******n reads, "Best couple ever!!!!! S0000000 addicted to this series it hurts (emoji 3x)" (AND2). AND2 shows the use of exclamation marks indicates that the viewer desires a relationship as sweet as that of the characters in the series. Furthermore, the expression "it hurts" demonstrates how the melodramatic expression of attachment employed by the commentator reflects the reality oppressed the desire, meanwhile she/he validate the fulfillment of the desire through watching the series and commenting on the Instagram posting.

Further discussion shows that the sample comments also indicate self-identification as characters involved in the series. Viewers' engagement is closely tied to how the narrative is constructed through the gossip system, with both gossip subjects and objects. Audiences seem to become gossip subjects themselves, in close proximity to Lady Whistledown. This argument is supported by the following comments: @H*****w wrote, "So there is to be a wedding season 2 and we find out about how Daphne and Simons

relash[t]ionship had a dip with not every love being perfect xx," (AND3) and @J*****g wrote, "Imagine Lady Whistledown wrote 'And they were roommates,'" (AND4) while @G*****l wrote, "Nothing like Lady W to keep us posted" (AND5). Through AND3-AND5 indicated the commentators are imagining themselves as characters or part of "The Ton," viewers are free to express their desires through gossip.

In conclusion, the desires expressed in viewers' comments are active desires—both active anaclitic and active narcissistic. This indicates that when viewers watch the series, they position the series as the object and themselves as the subject. It can also be assumed that viewers attain their own subjectivity while watching the series. This can further be connected to how individuals engage in escapism from reality in order to regain their subjectivity.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion that can be drawn from the discussion in this study is that gossip is a cultural element in the Bridgerton series. Gossip is not merely a narrative device in this series; rather, it is a means of mapping a literary work within society. By incorporating gossip into the series, the public has responded enthusiastically, as evidenced by audience engagement in the comments on posts uploaded by the @Bridgertonnetflix Instagram account, thereby contributing to the series' popularity. Instagram has become an alternative space for audiences to express their passions through comments using the gossip-based communication method. Viewers can express themselves as if they were the gossipers in the series, such as Lady Whistledown, or they can express themselves as if they were part of "The Ton." In this case, gossip serves as a bridge between the viewers' desires and the reality they create for themselves within this new space (the Instagram comments section).

The desires that emerged from the comments sampled in this study are active analytic desires and active narcissistic desires. The audience demonstrates a desire to become subjects; in other words, they can escape their reality, which oppresses their subjectivity. Furthermore, the audience can also fulfill their life-sustaining needs by watching the series and engaging in gossip on comment forums. Moreover, the audience can express their narcissistic desires by envisioning themselves as their ideal "self," modeled after characters in the series. They can fulfill their desire for "social recognition" through the validation they create for themselves within the forum's virtual universe. Thus, the act of gossiping serves as a bridge for the desires of an audience whose subjectivity is suppressed by reality.

This study may contribute to new insights in the fields of popular literature and media studies. Readers and researchers can build upon the findings of this study by adding data and defining clear data specifications

from social media. This study utilized the Instagram social media platform. However, future readers and researchers can expand the scope of the data by incorporating other platforms, such as TikTok, YouTube, X, and others.

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