

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 RATIONALE FOR CHOICE OF SAMPLE.

The basic assumption for the present study is that magazines are appropriate as a source of studying how women are portrayed in the media. This assumption is based on two reasons. Firstly, according to Bascow (1992), gender stereotypes abound in magazines because the market for a magazine is so segmented. The magazine chosen for the present study is segmented along the lines of gender, with every issue focusing on a gender specific audience in mind. Secondly, according to a survey, the media has a profound impact on the Malaysian public. According to Parameswary (1999) the survey reported in *AsiaWeek* (January 15, 1999) indicates that the literacy rate in Malaysia is as high as 89.3%. This is a good indication that the print media can have particularly strong influence on the Malaysian society.

Before deciding on which particular magazine was to be used as the sample for the present study, a quick survey of several bookshops (chosen at random) in the Malacca and Kuala Lumpur areas indicated that there is a wide array of magazines in the market. Furthermore, the researcher also discovered the availability of a variety of magazines that catered specifically for either men or women. As the focus of the present study is on the portrayal of women in magazines, this researcher felt that her study would yield clearer results if magazines with two editions and with a gender-specific audience were used as the sample for the purpose of comparison.

To determine the popularity of the magazines among Malaysian readers, this researcher chose to interview the bookstore clerks rather than the publishers of the magazine to avoid bias since the publishers have a responsibility to themselves to paint a good image of their magazine. The interviews were carried out in an informal manner as to not make the retailers feel uncomfortable. The researcher posed as a customer making inquiries about the best local and foreign magazine (with two editions in mind) in the market. Therefore, the clerks were very relaxed and provided the researcher with honest answers.

The interview with the bookstore clerks indicated that *FHM* was the most popular local and foreign edition. Based on their experience, they claimed that *FHM* is one of the fast selling magazines in their store. The interviews with the bookstore clerk also revealed that the customers for both *FHM* (local and foreign edition) were within the 20 to 40 years age bracket. Therefore, the two editions that this researcher selected were assumed to be fairly popular representatives of local and foreign edited magazines in Malaysia for consumers between the specified age group and as such were suitable for gathering the required data for the present study.

The researcher also gathered from the interview that the magazines she had selected for the purpose of the present study were targeted at the more educated, upwardly mobile members of the Malaysian community. In addition to all the above resources, McGeacy (2000) states that audiences are 'very hungry for the contents of the *FHM* magazine' and 'there's market for it, a very strong market'.

Keeping this in mind, the researcher decided to work on *FHM* as the sample of the study. Targeted at male readers between the ages of 20-40, it epitomises what being a man is all about, teaching the man to become more of a winner, to be the life of the party and to impress the women of their dreams. It features interviews, long articles, short articles, advice columns, consumer features, fashion spreads, opinion polls horoscopes and many more.

3.2 DESIGN OF THE STUDY.

This is an exploratory study using content analysis to observe data pertaining to the portrayal of women in the *FHM* magazine. In order to explore the topic area, the study used grounded theory. Grounded theory here means deriving theories from an analysis of patterns discovered in observational data. The corpus will be based on the *FHM* magazine where two editions of the magazine will be discussed. However, it would not be possible to work on every issue of the magazine. Since the larger the sample, the greater the accuracy, the researcher looked at the publication of *FHM* for a period of three-months. To avoid temporal bias, the researcher focused on the publication of *FHM* for the same length of time, that is, from January to March 2003. Five issues from the 2 editions were used as data for the present study. The reason for using 5 issues is because in the foreign edition, the January and February issues had been combined into one copy. Therefore the researcher used 3 local issues and 2 foreign issues for the present study.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS.

The researcher had decided to work on specific areas to see how women are portrayed in the magazines. The researcher worked on:

- (a) how women are pictured and portrayed in the *FHM* magazine
- (b) terms used to describe women

Before attempting to collect the data required, the researcher went through both the editions and looked through the table of contents. Looking through the table of contents in the magazine, it was possible to divide the content of each issue into eight different categories. The various categories published are:

1. Fashion:

Articles on current fashion trend, accessories.

2. Business:

Articles related to current news, financial news and current economic woes.

3. The opposite sex:

Articles on the opposite sex such as what interests women, their likes and dislikes, behaviour etc.

4. Interviews:

Interviews on featured celebrities.

5. Machines:

Articles on cars, bikes, accessories, hi-fi system.

6. Outdoor Activities:

Articles on jungle trekking, fishing, and 4-wheel drive expeditions etc

7. Bar room jokes:

Articles on men's prescription for laughter.

8. Reviews:

Reviews of movies that are worth watching.

From the categories mentioned, the researcher decided to work on the interview category for the current study. In the interview category, questions were posed to the interviewee, and pictures and terms were discussed. These are the very essence of the study. The researcher worked on all the interviews featured in the local and foreign editions. There were 12 interviews in the local edition and 6 interviews in the foreign edition. The researcher also noticed that in the local edition, the number of interviews for every issue was consistent; meaning there were always three interviews in every issue. These interviews appeared faithfully in the 'Reporter' section, 'Cili Padi' section and one section for the artist featured on the front cover. 'The Reporter' section usually publishes interviews on famous artists such as MTV Vee-jays, local singers and actresses whereas in the 'Cili Padi' section, upcoming Malaysian hopefuls who intend to break into the show business world are interviewed. For the foreign edition, the number of interviews seems to vary from issue to issue. In the January/February issue, there are 4 interviews whereas in the March issue, only 2 interviews are featured. Like the local edition, the interviews are also featured in special sections. The interviews were published in the Cover Girl section, the Reporter section and the 100 Questions section.

The researcher left out the other articles in the magazine because the articles did not contain pictures or interviews that were useful for the study. The other articles such as fashions, business, jokes and others did not seem to give attention to the language used. There were much Malaysian slang used in the sections mentioned and that was

not important for the study as the researcher was interested in locating terms used to describe women.

The researcher also noticed that *FHM*, being a men's magazine, the interviewees were mostly men. The eye of the discussion was mostly on men's perception of women and how they would like women to be portrayed. Thus the questions posed to the interviewee catered towards men's needs and sexual desires.

The data for the study were collected manually. The researcher counted each page and divided the pages into sub categories such as advertisements, interviews and pictures. Since this study was based partially on the portrayal of women, the researcher counted the number of pages where she found women to be scantily dressed. Secondly she read through the articles featured throughout the magazine to locate terms that were used to describe women. This was mainly done for the interviews featured in each issue. The researcher then analysed the discourse of the text and pictures. The data was then transferred into tables to give the researcher a clearer view on how women are portrayed in the *FHM* magazine. The researcher based her work on comparison done on both issues, which covers language (words) used to describe women, pictures of celebrities and a comparison study of how women are portrayed in the local and foreign edition.