CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the reasons for the selection of the corpus will be discussed. The methodology employed to answer the research questions will be explained and the instrumentation used to gather data will be described.

3.1 Corpus

The purpose of this study is to determine the existence of sexism in the mass media. Therefore, this researcher has to decide on the form of media that would provide the best indications of this. The selected media has to be a form that could allow this researcher to focus on the use of the English language as a tool for promoting sexism.

The basic assumption for the present study is that magazines are appropriate as a source for the study of contemporary language, with specific focus on the study of sexism in language. This assumption is based on two reasons. Firstly, according to Basow (1992), gender stereotypes abound in magazines because the market for magazines is so segmented. The magazines chosen as corpus for the present study are segmented along the lines of gender, with each magazine having a gender-
specific audience in mind. Secondly, according to a survey, the media has a profound impact on the Malaysian public. The survey reported in *Asiaweek* (January 15, 1999) indicates the literacy rate in Malaysia is as high as 89.3%. This is a good indication that the print media can have a particularly strong influence on the Malaysian society.

Before deciding on which particular magazine was to be used as the corpus for the present study, a quick survey of several bookshops (chosen at random) in the Klang Valley area indicated that there is a wide array of magazines in the market. Furthermore, this researcher also discovered the availability of a variety of magazines that catered specifically for either women or men. As the focus of the present study is on sexism in language used in two local magazines, this researcher felt that his study would yield clearer results if magazines with a gender-specific audience were used as the corpus for the purpose of comparison.

Since this researcher is interested in studying about the existence of sexism in a country where English is a second language, he narrowed his sample down to only locally published magazines. These local magazines would serve as a better reflection of the Malaysian society's attitude towards sexism. To determine the popularity of the magazines among Malaysian readers, this researcher chose to interview the bookstore clerks rather than the publishers of the magazines to avoid bias reporting since publishers have a responsibility to themselves to paint a good image of their magazine.
This researcher conducted ten (10) unstructured and informal interviews with bookstore clerks at ten (10) different bookstores in the Klang Valley area in order to find out which two local magazines were the most popular. As these interviews were conducted at the bookstores during working hours, they had to be brief and to the point. No tape recording or note taking was involved. The interviews involved loosely constructed questions that allowed for alterations based on the bookstore clerks’ responses to earlier questions. In essence, all questions were asked to identify the most popular magazines that were targeted at a gender specific audience. This researcher posed as a customer making inquiries about the best local magazines in the market. Therefore, the clerks were very relaxed and provided this researcher with honest answers.

The interviews around the Klang Valley indicated that Female was the most popular local magazine for women. Sales of magazines for men were relatively slower than sales of magazines for women and according to the bookstore clerks, no one particular men’s magazine was doing better than the others. As the sales of local magazines for men were almost equal, this researcher chose Men’s Review as the magazine which was representative of local magazines for men. The interviews with the bookstore clerks also revealed that the customers for both Female and Men’s Review were within the 20 to 40 year age bracket. Therefore, the two magazines that this researcher selected were assumed to be fairly popular representatives of local magazines in Malaysia for consumers between the specified age group and as such were suitable for gathering the required data for the present study.
This researcher determined that the two magazines he had selected for the purpose of the present study were targeted at the more educated, upwardly mobile members of the Malaysian community who fell between the 20 to 40 year age bracket. This was determined based on the following observations:

i. A quick survey of the articles that appeared in these magazines over a six-month period indicated that the editors of these magazines had the more educated and upwardly mobile Malaysian in mind. Articles that ranged from ones on the most fashionable restaurants in town (appearing every month in issues of Men's Review and Female) to articles on topics such as “Free Trade” (Men's Review, December 1997:77) suggested that the editors had the more educated, career-oriented and higher income individuals in mind.

ii. The advertisements indicated that publishers had the more affluent Malaysian in mind. The items that were advertised in these magazines included expensive perfumes, designer clothes, jewellery, watches and so on.

iii. The price of the magazines also served as an indication that they were targeted at the more upwardly mobile Malaysian community. The monthly issue of Female costs RM6.00 and Men's Review costs RM7.50 (correct at the time of writing this thesis). The price range of
these two magazines was relatively higher than the price of other easily available print media such as the newspaper.

This researcher feels that the existence of sexism in material aimed at this bracket of the Malaysian community indicates the attitude of educated Malaysians towards sexism. If the findings of the present study indicate a substantial amount of sexism in local magazines, two possible conclusions could be drawn. The presence of sexism can either be taken as an indication that a large portion of the educated Malaysian society is either relatively tolerant of the sexism they are exposed to, or that they do not even recognise sexist elements.

A sample is any part of a population regardless of whether it is representative or not (Burns, 1997:76). However, the key word in a sample population is representativeness. This is because it is not possible to make any valid generalisation about the population from which the sample is drawn unless the sample is representative.

In this study, the population would be all local magazines with either a female or a male audience in mind. This researcher narrowed down this population to two specific magazines, namely Men's Review and Female. However, it would not be possible to research every publication of these magazines. Since the larger the sample, the greater the accuracy, this researcher looked at the publication of Men's Review and Female for a six-month period. To avoid temporal bias, this researcher
focused on the publication of *Female* and *Men's Review* for the same length of time, that is, from October 1997 to March 1998.

As the magazines were sold in many bookstores that this researcher surveyed, they were easily available. This researcher purchased the January 1998 to March 1998 issues of *Female* and *Men's Review* from bookstores. However, the backdated issues were a little more difficult to obtain. After unsuccessful attempts to purchase the backdated issues from friends and second-hand bookstores, this researcher finally managed to obtain them directly from the publishers of the respective magazines.

3.2 Method

The *Female* and *Men's Review* magazines published from October 1997 to March 1998 were analysed. As it was not viable to look at every section of both magazines for a six-month period, this researcher had to narrow down further specific sections that he wanted to research. The methodologies employed for the analysis of the selected sections of the magazine were specifically to answer the research questions that have been outlined in Chapter One.
3.2.1 Topics

The first analysis involved the study of the table of contents of both magazines over a six-month period to identify a possible pattern in the choice of articles that these magazines published. To identify this pattern, this researcher had to categorise the topics that appeared in the table of contents of both magazines. This researcher went through the articles that appeared in both magazines over the six-month period and identified fourteen (14) categories into which each article could be placed. The various topics found in both the magazines were grouped into the following categories:

1. Business/Economy:
   Articles related to financial news, the countries economic woes etc.

2. Cosmetics/Beauty Care:
   Articles related to beauty care products, tips on beauty care etc.

3. Current Affairs:
   Articles encompassing current interests such as the Multimedia Super Corridor, the media’s role in the death of Princess Diana, Vision 2020 etc.

4. Entertainment:
   Articles on book reviews, restaurant reviews, movie reviews, travel etc.

5. Fashion:
   Articles on current fashion trends, accessories etc.
6. Health:
   Articles on health issues such as breast cancer, diet programmes, keeping fit etc.

7. Home Front:
   Articles on interior decoration and recipes.

8. Machines:
   Articles on cars, motorbikes, hi-fi systems, yachts etc.

9. Relationships:
   Articles concerning issues of relationships between men and women such as marriage, understanding the opposite sex, sexual relationships etc.

10. Outdoor Activities:
    Articles on jungle trekking, fishing, 4-wheel drive expeditions etc.

11. Personalities:
    Articles about famous actors, musicians, models etc.

12. Self-Improvement:
    Articles about career development and issues such as honesty, friendship etc.

13. The Opposite Sex:
    Articles concerning the opposite sex such as articles in Female about men's thoughts on the opposite sex, what interests men, men's fashion style etc.
14. Others:
Articles encompassing a wide range of general interests such as websites and shopping. As these topics could not be categorised in the above subsections, and as they did not influence the discussion on stereotypical roles, this researcher grouped them into this category.

3.2.2 Male-Female Relationships

This researcher analysed articles that dealt with the issue of male-female relationships because the present study assumes that this is an issue that should be of concern to both women and men and therefore, should be treated in a similar manner. Coincidentally, the six-month period during which the present study was based, included the month of February that brought into focus “Valentine’s Day”. An analysis of the February 1998 issue of Female and Men’s Review showed that the layout of both magazines had been revamped in conjunction with “Valentine’s Day”. As “Valentine’s Day” traditionally focuses on male-female relationships, the February issue of both magazines provided sufficient data for a qualitative analysis that could be used to further support the findings of the previous analysis on the choice of topics.

3.2.3 Gender Based Portrayal of Celebrities

This researcher then conducted a qualitative analysis of a regular section that appeared in both magazines that focused on a famous celebrity who was of the
opposite sex. *Female* always published an article about a male celebrity in a section entitled “Swoon”. *Men’s Review* published a corresponding article about a female celebrity in a section entitled “Woman of the World”. This researcher analysed all the articles on celebrities that appeared over the six-month period of study by making a comparison of the length of the articles. This was to show a pattern in which the articles on the male celebrities were far more detailed than the articles on the female celebrities.

To determine the length of each article, an average word count was done. The first three lines of each article were counted and an average was determined. The number of lines in the article was then multiplied by this average using the following formula:

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A + B + C = D
\]

\[
3
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A – first line

B – second line

C – third line

D – average number of words per line

Thus, \( D \times (\text{total number of lines per article}) = \text{approximate number of words per article} \)
This researcher also commented on the pictures of the celebrities that were published with each article over the six-month period of study. This was necessary because even though this researcher was focusing on language use, other elements such as the pictures that appeared also reinforced sexist attitudes. As such, this researcher felt that it was necessary to comment on the pictures to give a more accurate explanation of the overall effect of sexism in the mass media.

To further substantiate the findings of this section of the analysis, this researcher also analysed two articles, the December issue of “Swoon” and the corresponding issue of “Woman of the World”. Coincidentally, both magazines featured two actors who star in the popular television series, *Baywatch*. Both actors play the part of lifeguards.

“Swoon” featured actor David Chokachi and the December issue of “Woman of the World” featured Traci Bingham. This researcher hoped that making a comparison of these two articles would avoid any discrepancies in the validity of the findings. This was because both issues were about two individuals who played similar roles in a television show, the only variable being that one was a man and the other was a woman.
3.2.4 Female and Male Terms of Reference

The next analysis involved the listing down of all terms that were used to refer to a particular woman or man, or to women and men in general. These were terms that were found on the cover page and the table of contents of each magazine. The reason for carrying out this step was because the cover page and the table of contents are the first sections of a magazine that a reader would come into contact with. This researcher assumes that publishers and editors would generally word these sections in a way that would make the magazine desirable for further reading. In other words, these sections should not contain anything offensive such as sexist language.

In addition to the analysis of the cover pages and the tables of content over the six-month period of study, this researcher also analyzed four selected articles and using similar methods, identified all sexist terminology found in these articles. The articles were selected in a way that allowed this researcher to comment on the usage of sexist terminology based on the gender of the writer and the gender of the target audience. Two articles written by women and two articles written by men were selected. Furthermore, of the two articles written by women, one came from Female and the other from Men's Review. Similarly, of the two articles written by men, one came from Female and one from Men's Review. All four selected articles were on the theme of love and relationships. The selected articles were:
1. Article written by a woman in *Female*:
   Issue: November 1997
   Title: Women Who Play Dumb
   Writer: Julie Tan

2. Article written by a woman in *Men’s Review*:
   Issue: December 1997
   Title: Come Again
   Writer: Fay Khoo

3. Article written by a man in *Female*:
   Issue: February 1998
   Title: Communication Let Me Down
   Writer: Chris Toh

4. Article written by a man in *Men’s Review*:
   Issue: February 1998
   Title: Looking For Love in All the Wrong Places
   Writer: Andrew Leci

Having listed down all the terms that were used to refer to a particular man or woman, or to men and women in general, this researcher attempted to identify which of those terms were sexist. Although this researcher has outlined the various categories of sexist language in Chapter 2, he felt that it was the readers of such magazines who should decide on what was and was not sexist. Therefore, this researcher presented the list of terms to respondents via a questionnaire.

The respondents were asked to determine if they felt the terms had a positive connotation, a negative connotation or if they felt that the term was neutral. If a respondent identified a particular term as having a negative connotation, the implication was that the term was offensive when used on a woman or man.
Therefore, this researcher assumes that a term identified as having a negative connotation is most likely a sexist terminology.

This researcher did not ask the respondents to identify a term as sexist or non-sexist because Graddol and Swann (1989) and Ivy and Backlund (1994) have already concluded that it is not easy to categorize a term as being sexist, especially if it is taken out of context. By asking the respondents to identify terms as having a positive or a negative connotation, this researcher hoped to discover if the respondents agreed with feminists and linguists on what is and what is not sexist terminology. For example, it might be possible for respondents to identify a term as having a positive connotation even though feminists and linguists have concluded that the term is sexist.

3.2.5 Usage of Sexist Language

This researcher wanted to analyse the usage of sexist language by the writers of the articles when they had a gender specific audience in mind. To answer this question, this researcher listed down twenty (20) sentences in a questionnaire that were taken from the following articles in Female and Men's Review:

a. Articles from Female:

i. Issue: November 1997
Title: Smart Love
Writer: Sarah Lewis
ii. Issue: November 1997  
Title: Women Have Gross Habits  
Writer: Wang Tjin How

iii. Issue: December 1997  
Title: Watching the Boy  
Writer: John Kercher

iv. Issue: January 1998  
Title: It's A War Zone  
Writer: Madeleine Lai

v. Issue: February 1998  
Title: Communication Let Me Down  
Writer: Chris Toh

b. Articles from *Men's Review*:

i. Issue: October 1997  
Title: Trysts with Destiny  
Writer: Fay Khoo

ii. Issue: November 1997  
Title: Closet Desires  
Writer: Fay Khoo

iii. Issue: December 1997  
Title: Come Again  
Writer: Fay Khoo

iv. Issue: January 1998  
Title: Female Concerns  
Writer: Rehman Rashid

v. Issue: February 1998  
Title: Looking For Love in All the Wrong Places  
Writer: Andrew Leci

Of the twenty (20) sentences that were quoted in the questionnaire, ten (10) sentences were written by women and ten (10) were written by men. The twenty (20) sentences selected by this researcher each had some form of sexism contained
within them. This researcher made a conscious effort to select sentences that had some sexist element within them as he wanted to determine the ability of the respondents in recognizing the sentences as sexist. Furthermore, this researcher wanted the respondents to determine to what degree they thought the sentences were sexist.

As the sentences allowed the respondents to view the sexist element within the context of the sentence, this researcher used the term “sexist” in the questionnaire instead of merely asking them to identify the sentences as having a positive or a negative connotation. The twenty (20) sentences that were quoted are given below together with this researcher’s comments on why they are regarded as containing sexist elements. Selected words are underlined for emphasis and are looked at in the discussion of each sentence.

1. **But we’re not even talking about the few obvious choices in your office—your aggressive boss, your bitchy co-worker or your tale-telling secretary.**

   *(Female, January 1998:90)*

   *Considered to be sexist because:*

   The terms “bitchy” and “tale-telling” are stereotypical terms for women. A man is “aggressive” but a woman is “bitchy”. Basow (1992) describes the use of animal terms as a way to deprecate women.
2. Once you've successfully acquired a woman, maintenance is usually a matter of continuing to apply the techniques of acquisition.

(Men's Review, January 1998:16)

Considered to be sexist because:

The woman is portrayed as an object to be “acquired” and “maintained” by man. Basow (1992) defines this practice as depersonalisation.

3. For instance, when a man says “She's got good tits”, he actually means she's a nice package and is pretty.

(Female, February 1998:142)

Considered to be sexist because:

Uncalled for references to the female anatomy are used in the sentence above and the woman is referred to as a “package” which is similar to being an object. This is again an example of depersonalisation (Basow:1992).

4. Just because the generous sod is willing to lend you his precious titanium fishing rod or newly acquired wheels, it in no way implies that he similarly does not mind you playing hide-the-sausage with his girl.

(Men's Review, October 1997:152)

Considered to be sexist because:

The sexual connotation to the phrase “hide-the-sausage” and the woman being suggested as the passive recipient of such an act only encourages the practice of sexualizing women (Ivy and Backlund:1994). Furthermore, the term “girl” when referring to a woman is trivializing (Lakoff:1975).
5. Your client wants to go to court because he’s the "ass hole" referred to in the column.  

(Men’s Review, November 1997:142)

Considered to be sexist because:

Words such as “ass hole” are generally categorized as profanity and research suggests that it is an assumption that profanity is only acceptable in a male domain (Coates:1986).

6. If you want boys to like you, you must behave like a lady.  

(Female, January 1998:90)

Considered to be sexist because:

Linguists and feminists have suggested that the term “lady” is an example of a euphemism that is sexist (Lakoff:1975).

7. He is blond, bronzed, handsome, fit and ready for action, and the dream man of millions of girls around the world in 100 countries who tune in to Cody Madison in Baywatch.  

(Female, December 1997:213)

Considered to be sexist because:

The actor is referred to as a “man” but his female fans are reduced to “girls”, a term that is considered patronizing (Ivy and Backlund:1994).

8. Weren’t you absolutely thrilled to meet someone who shared your loose philosophy, who loved pool and pizza and who, conveniently, also owned a vagina?  

(Men’s Review, November 1997:168)

Considered to be sexist because:
Uncalled for references to the female anatomy which are regarded as taboo words, are used in the sentence above. Cameron (1985) notes that there are more taboo words to refer to women’s body than to men’s.

9. **Like cars, guns, cameras and dumb girls with big tits, musical fascism is pretty much a male bastion.**

   *(Men's Review, March 1998:83)*

*Considered to be sexist because:*

The reference to women as “dumb girls” is insulting (Ivy and Backlund:1994) and the uncalled for references to the female anatomy is described by Cameron (1985) as insulting.

10. **It took me months before I finally realized what an underhanded cow Mary really is.**

   *(Female, January 1998:90)*

*Considered to be sexist because:*

The usage of animal terms when referring to a woman is a form of deprecation (Basow:1992).

11. **Before your reputation with the babes plunges to even lower depths, I’d strongly advise you throwing your trademark moves out of the window and starting afresh.**

   *(Men's Review, December 1997:144)*

*Considered to be sexist because:*

The reference to women as “babes” trivializes women and is another example of depersonalization (Basow:1992).
12. There is an air of little-girlness about the designer.  
(Female, March 1998:86)

Considered to be sexist because:

The use of the term "little-girlness" when the writer refers to a woman, in this case a career woman, again helps to trivialize her (Basow:1992).

13. Oh! Beautiful, black, big breasted, bodacious Baywatch babe, Oh! Bingham.  
(Men's Review, December 1997:142)

Considered to be sexist because:

Referring to a woman as a babe is an example of depersonalisation (Basow:1992) and the unnecessary reference to the anatomy of a woman which is insulting (Cameron:1985).

14. For someone who has the female world at his feet, he is extremely humble.  
(Female, December 1997:213)

Considered to be sexist because:

The implied connotation being that women are men's subordinate and this is yet another way of trivializing women (Basow:1992).

15. He seems to have gleaned an air of superiority from rubbing privates with fancy chicks.  
(Men's Review, February 1998:70)

Considered to be sexist because:
The sexual connotation of the phrase “rubbing privates with” helps to sexualize women and the use of the animal term “chicks” depersonalizes them (Basow:1992).

16. Fann, usually so bubbly and ready to **blab**, panicked and went into hiding.

     *(Female, March 1998:40)*

*Considered to be sexist because:*

The verb “blab” is a term stereotypically associated with women and is defined in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (1987) as “talk foolishly or indiscreetly”.

17. He soon realizes that the only thing which will make his life complete is an appendage to call his own; a little local flavour if you like; ... someone different from the **bitches** back home...


*Considered to be sexist because:*

The derogatory references to women as “bitches” which suggest that women share certain properties with certain types of animals is an example of deprecation (Basow:1992).

18. She spends half her waking hours **whining** about how you never tell her anything/ how you feel/ what you think, while the other half is dedicated to systematically prying your Life Before Her out of you.

     *(Men’s Review, November 1997:168)*

*Considered to be sexist because:*

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The usage of the verb “whining” which is defined in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (1987) as a “long complaining cry or high-pitched sound (e.g. as made by a miserable dog, a siren, a motor or a shell in flight)”.

19. **Have you ever seen a man borrowing his friend’s blue navy socks so they will match his suit? No. Now girls are different.**  
(Female, November 1997:234)  

*Considered to be sexist because:*  
A man is referred to as “man” but women are referred to as “girls”. The term “girl” brings to mind frivolity, immaturity and irresponsibility when used to refer to a woman (Lakoff:1975).

20. **“It was a tough shoot,” tells the dishy hunk who is dressed in an elegant Armani suit.**  
(Female, January 1998:167)  

*Considered to be sexist because:*  
The phrase “dishy hunk” is an example of referring to an individual with a food term. The usage of food terms ultimately trivializes people Ivy and Backlund (1994).

### 3.3 Instrumentation

This researcher designed a questionnaire to help answer the following three questions:
i. Is there a greater number of sexist terms used in reference for women than there are for men?

ii. Do articles written by male writers demonstrate greater use of sexist language than articles written by female writers?

iii. Do writers in local magazines use more sexist language when they have a gender specific audience in mind?

The respondents' questionnaire (refer to Appendix D for a sample of the questionnaire) consisted of three parts. In the first part, the respondents had to briefly complete the section with some personal particulars. This section merely required the respondents to identify their sex, age and educational background.

In the second section, the respondents had to first decide if a male or a female writer most likely wrote each sentence. They then had to read each sentence again and decide how sexist each sentence was. They had to make their decision based on a four-point scale, with the responses being "Non-sexist", "Quite sexist", "Sexist" and "Very Sexist".

In the final part, the respondents had to decide if the terminology presented to them had a negative or a positive connotation when used on a woman or on a man. All these terms were terms that this researcher identified in his analysis of the cover page, the table of contents and the articles that he has mentioned in section 3.2.4 of this chapter.
The questionnaires were given to each respondent personally and were collected back immediately after completion as it took about 15 minutes for each of the respondents to complete the questionnaire. The respondents were advised to go through the list of sentences in Section Two and also go through the list of sexist terminology in Section Three of the questionnaire and give their feedback on how they regarded each sentence or terminology.

3.4 Respondents

The questionnaires were distributed to forty (40) respondents, twenty (20) women and twenty (20) men. All forty (40) respondents were either colleagues of this researcher who were English language teachers or fellow course-mates of this researcher who were pursuing their Master's in English as a Second Language. All respondents have some form of tertiary education because it is this researchers assumption that this group of individuals would be most aware of sexism. Therefore, their responses were taken as a reflection of the educated Malaysian's perception of sexism in language.

All respondents were people who use English widely, either in their homes or in their working environment. It was important to have respondents who possessed a fairly good command of the English language because of the nature of this questionnaire that included sentences reflecting contemporary usage of English. The
comprehension of words, phrases and even sentences in this questionnaire demanded a fairly good command of English.

3.5 Pilot Test

This researcher personally administered the questionnaire to a sample of ten (10) respondents. All respondents possessed at least a first degree in English and were all currently pursuing their Master’s degree in English as a Second Language at the time this pilot test was administered. This researcher selected these respondents because he believed that they were in a better position to identify any possible flaws in the questionnaire and therefore would be able to provide constructive criticism. The respondents were asked to pay particular attention to the instructions and the layout of the questionnaire. This researcher also used this pilot test to estimate the length of time that would be taken to complete the questionnaire.

As a result of the pilot test, suggestions given by the respondents were taken into consideration. For the final questionnaire, some instructions were rephrased and some amendments were made to the layout.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using qualitative and quantitative methods. Frequency counts and corresponding percentages were obtained where possible.
The calculations were done manually with the aid of a calculator as the data was only quantified in terms of frequency and percentage. The data was presented in tables and analyzed. Findings and conclusions were gleaned from the data. Data from the questionnaire was used to further substantiate the findings of the qualitative analysis.

3.7 Summary

This chapter began with explanations on reasons behind the selection of the corpus. Next, the methods involved in the five sections of the analysis were explained in detail. The instrumentation used and the selection of the respondents were also discussed. The following chapter will deal with the outcome of the analysis.