

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of Study**

Recent studies conducted on depictions of gender through popular culture, like television; books; newspapers; and advertisements have gradually grown to indicate interest in the area (Emerson 2002: 115). The cultural representations of gender are identified as the sex image in women or the supremacy images of men that is commoditized and sold through the entertainment industry for profitable gains (Houston 2008:8).

Hip hop or rap is an undeniably popular music genre among listeners of all ages and races, even in Malaysia. The art of the music not only generates entertainment, it also markets an influential lifestyle involving fashion, language, deejaying, graffiti art, break dancing, and social interaction practices (Chang 2006: 5). It is through this research, gender stereotypes in hip hop music videos and taboo language in hip hop lyrics will be combined as variables in investigating the influence hip hop has on gender setting among young adults in the Malaysian urban scene.

In advertisements, studies have shown that the image of women that has predominated magazine advertisements is of weak, dependent and secondary creatures compared to men, whereby not many women were shown as a professional or high-level business person; instead they are regarded as sex objects by men (Courtney and Lockeretz 1979: 93). Subsequently, in television, the portrayal of gender roles show that males are more likely to be portrayed in authorities and professional roles, whereas females tend to be portrayed as interviewers and demonstrators, parents, models, or sex objects (Furnham and Mak 1999: 420).

Similarly, in music videos artists are commoditized, represented and ultimately sold to audiences (Jones 2003:149). In most music videos, female characters are portrayed as two-dimensional, sex object, decoration, or victim, compared to male characters that are portrayed as influential individuals with charisma or authority (Andsager and Roe.1999:74). A similar observation can be made about hip hop music videos, whereby male characters are portrayed as powerful, sexually assertive and having a fair degree of sexual prowess, with women being portrayed as sexually available, scantily clad and often preening over the men (Wilson, 1995: 287).

According to the Malaysian media scene, *The Economist* (June 1994) reports that the booming progression of the local hip hop scene is viewed on a positive note, for it has resulted in acknowledgement by the local music industry that hip hop is a serious music genre that generates a musical revolution for healthy competition among local hip hop artistes. However, the Ministry of Information, Communications and Culture of Malaysia view portrayal of western cultures in musical acts, particularly international hip hop artistes, on a serious note (The Star Online, 27 August 2009). The ministry has taken serious measures in regulating the influence of negative social cultures of music by banning international artistes from performing in concerts in the country, partly due to the immodest clothing of the artistes that revealed little skin. The media disseminates a cultural product containing gender representation that is to be consumed by the end-users, which is the audience. This furthers support the claim that viewers, specifically the Malaysian youth, are consumers of the international media and are exposed to the possibility of social misperceptions on gender stereotypes (Signorielli, 1994: 38).

Hence, it would be interesting to analyse the language of hip hop song lyrics and the representation of genders by hip hop music videos as well as the perception of listeners, hip hop representatives and media representatives in Malaysia.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

As hip hop music continues to be a popular music genre among listeners of the younger generation in Malaysia, it would be timely to investigate the use of language, in particular, taboo words, if any, and the portrayal of gender of this music genre in the song lyrics. In Malaysia, local radio and television stations do air and televise hip hop songs and music videos in several local languages and English. As hip hop songs originate from the English-speaking countries, this study aims to examine this popular culture in the English language or its variety as found in this genre.

Subsequently, music videos are easily downloaded from the internet and watched from pay music channels and at entertainment hotspots, this study would like investigate how artists, both male and female, are portrayed in hip hop music videos. The question arises as to how genders are commoditized, represented and ultimately sold in music videos. As pointed out by Andsager and Roe (1999), in most music videos, it is the female characters that are portrayed as sex objects and portrayed as sexually available, scantily clad and often preening over the meanwhile male characters are portrayed as influential individuals with charisma or authority (Wilson, 1995). This study would be interested to investigate this phenomenon in terms of also how the local viewers perceive this form of portrayal of genders. It would be also worthwhile to compare their perception with that of the local media representatives who are ultimately the gatekeepers of the local music scene.

As hip hop is a serious music genre that generates a musical revolution for healthy competition among local hip hop artistes, perceptions of the audience in Malaysia and media representatives may reflect the acceptance level of the society towards hip hop music since there is a wide concern regarding the negative effects of hip hop culture and music towards youths in Malaysia, the main consumer of hip hop songs and music videos.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The objectives of this study are as follows.

1. To study the use of taboo language found in selected hip hop music lyrics
2. To explore how gender is represented in selected hip hop songs and music videos
3. To compare the perceptions of the Malaysian audience and music representatives towards hip hop genre to that of local media representatives involved in the journalism and broadcasting industry.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

In the attempt to meet the objectives of this research, five research questions have been constructed. They are as follows.

- RQ1: What types of taboo language are found in selected hip hop music lyrics?
- RQ2: How is gender represented in the lyrics of selected hip hop songs?
- RQ3: How is gender portrayed through the selected hip hop music videos?
- RQ4: What are the perceptions of the Malaysian audience and representatives of the local hip hop music scene in comparison to the local media representatives regarding taboo language in selected hip hop song lyrics?

RQ5: How do the Malaysian audience and representatives of the local hip hop music scene perceive the portrayal of gender in hip hop music videos in comparison to the local media representatives?

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

There are many studies conducted in investigating the content of hip hop music videos and the sociological effects it brings to the audience, in particular among the younger audience. There is a wide concern among the Malaysian society as to how hip hop culture can influence the local audience to contradicting western world values. Therefore, this study will shed a light on the types of ideologies of gender found in this genre and how it impacts on the local listeners and viewers.

In addition, the study will also investigate the parameters that exist in determining how certain words or phrases in hip hop music are considered a taboo for the local society. Findings will contribute to the pool of existing knowledge of language in the media popular culture and in particular, local media and language studies. The outcome of this study is considered a contribution to the local media industry as it will help to create a better understanding on the level of sociological impact hip hop music videos and song lyrics on the local audience, in particular the use of taboo language, gender portrayal and acceptance of local listeners and viewers of the hip hop music genre.

### **1.5 Scope of Study**

This study investigates the convention of taboo language as incorporated in selected hip hop song lyrics. This study will also explore into gender stereotypes concerning the physical and behavioral representations as depicted through male and

female characters in selected hip hop music videos. The focus of the research is to address the society's interpretations and attitudes regarding taboo language and representations of gender as commoditized by the media through hip hop music. Respondents of the research will comprise of urban audiences of hip hop music and several members of the local hip hop music scene.

Attitudes will be analyzed in terms of comparing the positive and negative acceptance of selected words and phrases as well as portrayals of gender as perceived by the audience in Malaysia. The perceptions of these two groups are further discussed to obtain an insight of representatives from the local media industry on issues regarding taboo language and certain gender ideologies in hip hop music continue to be essential thriving elements in the entertainment industry.

The theoretical framework for this study combines theories on Women's Language, Cultivation Theory and Objectification Theory. This study will look at whether a difference exists on the use of taboo language in (the male artistes' and females artistes') hip hop song lyrics of different genders, as well as to look at the perceptions towards gender stereotypes in hip hop music videos.

## **Summary**

In this study, hip hop music is examined through the convention of taboo language in the song lyrics and portrayal of gender stereotypes in the music videos. The language content in the song lyrics are studied based on the parameters that exist in determining how certain words or phrases in hip hop music are considered a taboo for the local society. The representation of gender in hip hop music videos is explored based on the positive and negative ideologies certain characters bring to the perceptions

of the local society. The sample in this study includes urban audience in Malaysia, representatives from the local hip hop music scene as well as the media industry.