

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter will review terminologies, theories and issues that surround the phenomena of gender setting by the media in general and in music videos, in particular.

### **2.1 Gender Schema Theory**

Revisiting the Gender Schema Theory (Bem 1981, 1985), children learn from the culture in which they live the concept of what it means to be men and women (Myers, 2007:132). In a way, children who eventually grow up as adults adjust their behaviour according to gender norms in the society. This theory states that children internalise gender lenses that are embedded in the discourse and social practices of the culture they are brought up in, and that these lenses predispose the individual to construct a self-identity that is consistent with these lenses. Furthermore, the gender schema theory suggests that the concept of maleness and femaleness an individual develops as they grow up and tends to have an infectious effect, whereby the same concept formulated by one individual can influence another individual's perceptions and behaviours (Myers, 2007:133).

There are negative consequences of growing up with a set of concepts on gender that is biased or unconventional in a modern society. This is due to the situation when standards of gender achievement are created from the male point of view (Lemons, 2007:93). For instance, taking the United States as an example, the gender concept suggested by the society is that the man rather than the woman proposes marriage, men have the advantage in community leadership and women's priorities are her family obligations rather than her profession (Lemons, 2007: 94). In relevance to

the Gender Schema Theory, when children grow up they are exposed to concepts on gender that might favour one gender over the other, like the concept of femininity being inferior to masculinity which is a common phenomenon even in modern times. A popular gender stereotype belief that children and adolescents grow up to believe is a man's success is usually attributed to skill, a woman's success on the identical task is usually attributed to luck; on the contrary, men's failure is attributed to bad luck while women's failure is attributed to low ability (Lemons, 2007:97).

In investigating the society's tendency to label certain description of gender stereotypes, especially as portrayed in the media, it is evocative to understand if the concepts of gender that they acquired and formulated when they were growing up are similar or contrary to their perceptions in the present day. If their concepts on gender stereotypes differ from when they were small to when they are adults, then it can be observed whether media, or hip hop music videos, in particular play a role as a contributing factor to their changing concepts of gender.

### **2.1.2 Definition of Sex and Gender**

It is imperative to define the basic concepts of the research field being conducted in order to sustain a clear direction of understanding and interest among the intended audience. In this research, the convention of gender setting in hip hop music videos is related to the field of language and gender. The term gender is often confused with the term sex. Coates (1993:33) refers sex to a biological distinction, whilst gender is the term used to describe socially constructed categories based on sex, which is in the terms of masculinity and femininity.

Gender attributes are defined as how to men and women are similar or different in psychological dimensions (Hyde 1988:55). Examples of gender attributes might

differ from the aspects of smiling, emotional expressiveness, sensitivity to nonverbal cues and attitudes about casual sex. For this reason, this study will not emphasize on distinctions of biological traits between males and females, or sex, it would relatively focus on representation of masculinity and femininity as socially constructed by the media that is in hip hop music videos and lyrics, in particular.

### **2.1.3 Definition of Gender Stereotypes**

Diekman and Eagle (2000:88) state that gender stereotypes present a conventionally simplified and standardized conception or image concerning the typical social roles of male and female, both domestically and socially. In addition, they elaborate that gender stereotypes as beliefs held about characteristics, traits, and activity-domains that are "deemed" appropriate for men and women. Stereotypes are viewed as something subjective and perfectly defined, for each individual's definition might change according to context and influence from existing factors. In support to this, stereotypes can misrepresent, over represent and under represent individuals and genders (Dyer 1993:120). Furthermore, individuals are typically influenced by what culture prescribes as stereotypical perceptions of female and male characters. This phenomenon originates in a time frame, whereby as early as the age of 5 years old an individual starts to acknowledge gender stereotypes, followed by their early school years where more exposure from different crowds will contribute to their existing knowledge, and finally at the age of adolescent default perceptions are formed in their minds (Crawford and Unger, 2004:137).

The society might have misconceptions on the term gender stereotypes, which is a precarious matter in obtaining truthful views on femininity and masculinity in whole. The four dimensions of gender stereotypes as cited by Deaux and Lewis (1983) are

traits, role behaviors, physical characteristics, and occupations. Crawford and Unger (2004:32) state that misconceptions are largely due to information processing that is influenced by the social system the individual lives in. Therefore if a large population of the social system prescribes certain stereotypical traits, individuals tend to conform to the same perception without much question. Therefore, individual beliefs are more bona fide and are clearly different from stereotype beliefs that function more as generalization of a particular group. It is through this research, representation of gender stereotypes in hip hop music videos will be explored from the perspectives of two types of audiences, which are viewers of hip hop music videos and members of the local hip hop music scene. Perspectives from these two groups will clarify the common traits both groups share in expressing masculinity and femininity, thus clearly distinguish between individual beliefs and stereotypical beliefs on gender.

## **2.2 Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory (Gerbner and Gross, 1967) suggests that a gradual change takes place in people exposed to media content over time, in which they begin to adopt or cultivate similar beliefs about the world that are presented through the media images or messages. This theory suggests that exposure to television, over time, subtly cultivates viewers' perceptions of reality and can even have an impact on light viewers of television.

## **2.3 Objectification Theory**

According to the objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), women are sexually objectified in that they are seen as bodies or body parts that are meant for the pleasure and use by others. This occurs either in the media or through personal

experience (Bartky, 1990:26). This theory suggests that concepts of gender roles are affected, in the sense women are expected to acquire the standard physical appearance based on the observation of others, and at the same time being conscious that others are observing them too. This leads to inequality between sexes, giving the notion that men are not pressured to achieve the standard physical appearance as compared to women (Bartky, 1990:26). This also leads to women believing that their physical appearance is important to themselves and society (Fredrickson and Harrison, 2005:95).

Exposure to mass media can cause sexual objectification to occur among individuals (LeMoncheck, 1997:133). Research indicates that objectification theory is important in understanding how repeated visual images in the media are socialized and translated into mental health problems, including psychological consequences on the individual and the society (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997:82). In light of this theory, repeated visual images portraying the standard for women's physical appearance will influence individuals to reexamine what it means to being sexually desired. This is supported by the notion that music videos are viewed in the way they project sexuality, despite the fact they are already sexual in nature (Morgan and Neal 2006). Therefore in this research, it is imperative to become aware of the influence that stereotypical female characters in hip hop music videos have on the female viewers, as well as recognize the types of sexuality that male viewers desire from the female characters.

## **2.4 Gender Portrayal in the Media**

The media, consisting of traditional print and modern electronic mediums, has diversified in its transmission of messages to the society through advertisement, television, radio, and the internet. Furthermore, the phenomenon of standardized gender stereotyping in all branches of media has persisted even more.

Cultural presentations of gender are developed historically in the early period of visual media and now have been legitimized through repetition in film, television and music videos (Collins 2005:14).

Gender identity can be perceived through language and sexuality, as denoted in the workings of a 60's author Kathy Acker famous books *Blood and Guts in High School* and *Don Quixote* (San Petro, 2009:23). The content analysis revealed that taboos were used that were meant to surpass beyond the common gender setting of the male as the powerful gender, and initially break the social constructs of gender (Dieckmann,1985:197). The findings of this content analysis generally outlines how language is a powerful tool in constructing gender, controls portrayals of feminine sexuality in gender representation.

The media is a powerhouse in continually feeding sex themes to the mass audience. This is supported by the notion that cultural representations of gender are identified as the sex image in women that is commoditized and sold through the entertainment industry for profitable gains (Collins 1991:45). In support to this, the media and popular culture serve as a primary site for the dissemination and justification of ideologies of Black femininity and sexuality (Collins 1991:45).

In perspective, even though the media has prescribed their own gender portrayal of character roles that tend to be excessively fabricated for commercial means, the community as the consumers may have their own set of beliefs concerning gender expectations according to the norms as prescribed by the society. Therefore, this study will present findings from both groups, which are individuals involved in the media and local hip hop music scene, as well as viewers of hip hop music videos.

### **2.4.1 Gender Stereotyping in Advertisement**

In advertisement, studies have shown that a clear distinction exists between the female and male character roles in presenting the products. In one of the studies, findings showed that female character roles are often used for products for cleaning, food, beauty, drugs, clothing and home appliances. On the other hand, the male character roles are used for ads selling cars, travel, alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, banks, industrial products, entertainment media and industrial companies (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1979:93).

Although this particular study produced exceptional findings to the field of language and gender, gender stereotyping in the advertisement industry itself isn't exactly a new-found phenomenon. Dating back from 1911, the first American printed advertisement that used a sexist theme was for a soap product that featured a couple with the message "The Skin You Love to Touch" (Thompson 1971:2). The stereotypical image of how the effects of a certain soap brand can allure a man to touch a woman's skin is considered mild compared to modern advertisement today. Therefore, Courtney and Lockeretz's (1979:93) study provided more information on the current trend of images of women in advertising and how the stereotyping element of women seem to diversify even more. This is because relating to her findings that women are associated with beauty products in advertisements, the same phenomenon can even be traced back in 1911. In a way, the common stereotyping of women in advertisements hasn't changed much in 60 years.

### **2.4.2 Representation of Male and Female Characters in Music Videos**

Identities are represented daily through the powerful medium of music videos (Vernallis, 2004:17). Music videos aired on television and the internet is of a great

variety of genres and storyline themes. Each of this speciation is made to cater the masses' taste, preference and entertaining needs. In a way, audiences are exposed to different identities of a female or male according to the music genre's theme in the music videos. Identities of punk rock, post rock, gothic, hip hop, suicidal are projected through the physical attributes of the character roles in the storyline.

One of the widely used themes in music videos relates to sexism. Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski (1987:751) in their study examines the actions performed by female characters, which include dancing alluringly with seductive or little clothing on as part of the background decoration of the scene. The female-male contact scenes include the characters performing casual touching, kissing, hugging, heavy petting and implied lovemaking.

Similarly, hip hop music videos show African American women as hypersexual, materialistic and amoral subjects (Emerson, 2002:127). This kind of portrayal is often seen through the character's actions of dancing in the background or around the male singer, as well as performing suggestions of sexual favours to the male characters.

Gow (1993:319) states the dual function of music videos, both artistic and commercial, is important when analyzing influential production factors, or its mixture of entertainment and persuasion. He also states that through music videos, the artistes are selling a persona. Reflecting the three studies mentioned above, this study is connected to the idea of specific entertainment value associated with any genre of music videos, the images of gender like physical beauty, sexuality, and wealth which are frequently used to sell certain ways of life.



## 2.5 Definition of Foul Language

Several types of categories of foul language that have been identified in the English language, according to Jay (1992:4). The respective categories are cursing, profanity, blasphemy, taboo, obscenity, vulgarity, slang, epithets, slurs and scatology. In the media, all types of foul language are used in delivering impact in the intended message, regardless of censorship bodies. Hence, record albums, video games, and movies that contain foul language carry the explicit material warning, which acts as a reminder to the end users to be responsible for their own listening effects.

It is important to actually acknowledge the different types of foul language, in analyzing why they are used by each gender and what emotion the words represent. Cursing is defined as to call upon divine or supernatural power to send injury upon (Jay 1992:4). Cursing is expressing the desire to cause harm to the person by just using certain words and phrases, like *damn you*, and *eat shit and die*. Hughes (1991:45) refers curse words to spells and charms that have survived from primitive beliefs in world-magic, which he views as becoming less persuasive in the modern days. This might be due to the expansion of foul language as time evolves and the human race gets more inventive in expressing the back alley words of the English language.

According to Jay (1992:4), the second category, profanity is defined as the treatment of something sacred with abuse, irreverence, or contempt that include phrases like "*Jesus Christ, she's humongous!*", and "*Does the Pope wipe his own ass?*" Profanity is rooted from strong religious denotation, as agreed by Hughes (1991:246). It was first used to insult a temple and then evolved into more secular objects. Although profanity and blasphemy are interchangeably denoted carrying the same intent, they are actually quite different in reference, for profanity is more of the ignorance to be tolerant to the rules of religious order, whilst blasphemy is showing lack of reverence to God, or

something sacred (Jay 1992:3). Blasphemy phrases are like "*Screw the Pope!*" or "*Screw the church!*" Besides the conscious efforts of religious bodies with their strict punishing of blasphemy offenders, blasphemy connotation utterances in popular media has evolved into a norm without any sense of sensitivity towards the issue.

Another widely used type of foul language is taboo words, which are a prohibition instituted for the protection of a cultural group against supernatural reprisal (Jay 1992:4). Taboo words in the modern media are more focused on words of body parts like *dick* and *pussy*; body processes like *piss* and *shit* and sex like *screw* or *bang*. Similarly, scatology in foul language precisely refers to human waste products and wastes. A distinction of hardly accepted words and completely unacceptable words is shown by Hughes (1991:11) in clarifying the place of taboo words in the society. For instance *fart* and *piss* is viewed as hardly acceptable to be uttered in public, whilst uttering *shit* and *fuck* is labeled as completely unacceptable. This shows that there are different conventions of words that the society draws upon in lessening or strengthening the effect of the intended taboo word in their utterances.

On the other hand, obscenity is more directed to repulsive unprotected speech that is subject to the restrictions of a governing body (Jay 1992:5). They can either be physically violent in nature like 'kill' and 'murder', or more popularly consisting of sexual terms like *fuck*, *motherfucker*, *ass*, and *tits*, with *fuck* as the most widely used obscene term in the media. In whole, obscenity is coined similarly to abominable, disgusting, filthy, indecent and lewd words, where sexual specialization rooted as early as 1729 (Hughes 1991:248).

Vulgarity is the street language of the uneducated or low-class members of the society, whereby to be vulgar is viewed as being among the commoners (Jay 1992:6). One who utters vulgarity isn't necessarily viewed as a bad person; rather they represent

the rawness side of the language, with words like *bloody, slut, crap, and puke*. Similarly, slang is viewed as informal language associated with a particular group like teenagers, musicians, soldiers, and other sub groups signifying distinguishable profession, race, and age (Jay 1992:7), with words like *dweeb, jock, pimp and bennies*. Slang terms are comparably discreet in nature compared to profanity, vulgarity and obscenity that are louder in nature. In the case of musicians having their own code of jargon, this explains the phenomena of slang, or new words as interpreted by the listeners, being introduced in their songs for the audience to consume.

Epithets are strong expressions of emotionally loaded language in conveying frustration and aggression which are usually one word or two word utterances *like shit, son of a bitch, fuck you, and fuck off* (Jay 1992:7). Furthermore, epithets have the effect of being habitual in nature, which is true in observing the continuous subconscious usage of swearing words among the society.

Slurs are racial or social in nature indicating the stereotyping of the speaker towards the peculiar qualities of the targeted persons (Jay 1992:8). In the media, commonly heard slurs drive upon animal imagery like *bitch* and *jackass*, social deviations like *whore and slut; physicality like fatty and fag*; as well as racial precision like *nigger* and *pollack*.

### **2.5.1 Taboo Words**

Taboo words are described as the type of language that is censored by a particular society, which can occur in both oral and written types of language, according to Allan and Burridge (2006:1). The main categories of taboo language as cited by and Burridge (2006: 1) include:

- bodies and their effluvia (sweat, snot, faeces, menstrual fluid, etc;

- the organs and acts of sex, micturition and defecation;
- diseases, death and killing (including hunting and fishing)
- naming, addressing, touching and viewing persons and sacred beings, objects and places;
- food gathering, preparation and consumption.

Radcliffe-Brown (1939:51) states that the origin of the word taboo is derived from the Tongan word *tabu*, originating in the end of the eighteenth century. According to Radcliffe- Brown (1939:51) the word *tabu* in the Polynesian language refers to the meaning 'to forbid', 'forbidden' and can be applied to any sort of prohibition. In addition, the word *tabu* is also a form of rule of etiquette, an order issued by a chief, or a command to children not to meddle with the possessions of their elders.

Apart from Radcliffe-Brown, Cook (1967:153, 1967:948) describes taboo as the behaviour of Polynesians towards things that were not to be done, entered, seen or touches that can relatively be universal for other societies as well. Allan and Burrige (2006:4) elaborates universal taboos as mostly religion-based customs, like the vegetarianisms of Hindus and the prescription of pork in Islam, fasting of Jews at Passover and Muslims during Ramadhan, and the proscription of meat on Fridays among Roman Catholics. Moreover, Allan and Burrige (2006:4) also examines on how taboo can be based on bad manners, which is one subject to the social sanction of severe disapproval. An example of taboo in the form of bad behaviour would be one eating with their fingers rather than using cutlery when dining in a restaurant.

Based on the authors' theories on the definition of taboo language, it can be seen that forbidden behaviour or language varies from one society to another. However in

some cases, certain contexts that relate to rule of etiquette might similarly be shared as a taboo by some societies.

Another characteristic of taboo language is that it contains 'dirty language', which is a persistent belief that the form of expression somehow communicates the essential nature of whatever is being referred to and denotes people's attitudes toward the denotations and connotations of the words, according to Allan and Burrige (2006: 40). An example to refer to Allan and Burrige (2006:40) description would be the dysphemism *whore* is no more dirty than the word *prostitute* nor the euphemism *call girl*.

In essence, taboo language that contains 'dirty words' as specified by Allan and Burrige (2006: 41) consist of terms for:

- bodily organs of sexual desire, stimulation and gratification and/or used for micturition and defecation;
- activities involving sex, micturition, defecation organs;
- bodily effluvia issuing from these SMD organs.

Like any other artistic forms of expression in arts or media, hip hop song lyrics consist of particular slang words that are open for interpretation by the listeners. Allan and Burrige (2006:88) describe slang as language of a highly colloquial and contemporary type, considered stylistically inferior to standard formal, and even polite informal speech. In relevance to the function of slang words being used in hip hop songs, Allan and Burrige (2006:88) explain that the primary motivation of for slang is to operate as a device for dissimulation and even as a secret sublanguage, as anti-language, with respect to out-groupers. In relevance to swearing using taboo or dirty

words in hip hop lyrics, it is regarded as response to frustration, pain and anger as an emotive response.

Sexual connotations are also perceived as part of a taboo topic in most cultures. The sexual connotations as used in hip hop lyrics are perceived as one of the strongest taboos because non-procreative sex and sexual intercourse outside of a family unit sanctioned by religion and lore of legislation, as cited Allan and Burridge (2006:145).

### **2.5.2 Gender and Taboo Words**

According to Kleinman (2000:6) there is a relationship between language use and social reality. In a way, words matter and language choices have consequences. Flexner (1960) states that most American slang is created and used by males, and Lakoff also persists that men use stronger expletives like damn, shit than women like oh dear, goodness. Gomm (1981:32) in her study on the frequency of swear words used by males and females found that men swear more than female speakers. In addition, both sexes swear more in the company of the same sex group conversations, but swearing by male speakers declines in the company of mixed-sex group conversations.

As for gender differences in reaction to dirty words, studies showed that females are more offended by dirty words as compared to males (Jay 1992:87). This can be observed through the usage of dirty words in hip hop music videos, as to observe if women are still insulted by the foul language used in entertainment, or if males react the same way too. These studies are relevant to the conclusion derived from Sanders and Robinson (1979) (as cited in Jay 1992:175) suggesting that the public or social norms exist for how we are to engage in private communication about sex. Subsequently, Fine and Johnson (1984, as cited in Jay 1992:185) revealed that males

and females had different motives for using obscenity in conversations, with expressing anger or feelings as the main motives.

In regards to this study, swearing and taboo words are in abundance in the song lyrics of the hip hop music videos. Furthermore, there are also distinct sexual innuendos used to refer to the female body parts and their sexual demeanor. Theorists and authors feel that the swearing and taboo words used in hip hop are linked to the individual sentiments of the artiste himself, in particular the male rapper. Black men have so few resources that the physical body, threat of violence and the use of words to project become a mean to project masculinity (Katz 1999:54).

Undeniably, the media has an influence on the society in introducing or repeatedly injecting swearing and taboo words. In hip hop music videos, one of the reasons this phenomenon is continuously taking place is for the self identity the rapper is promoting as a means of showing off his masculinity, without considering the consequences of his actions to the viewers. A study in England, (Wober, 1980 as cited in Jay 1992:175) showed that viewers were most offended by foul language on television, relative to sex or violence as reported in the Independent Broadcasting Authority. The factor that led to their offensiveness towards dirty words was the link to their religiosity, similarly to the factor of the eastern culture. Another research The Massachusetts 1978 Ratings (as cited in Jay 1992:162), listed down types of dirty words used in the media that college students at Kent State University found offensive to general public. Offensive dirty words that topped the list were *motherfucker*, *cunt*, *cocksucker*, *fuck*, *blow job*, *cock and pussy*. The interesting angle of this study was that the researcher was focused on how words can be ranked offensive despite the subject's own ideas or background.

This shows that even though dirty words can be judged as negative things by subjects, it does not necessarily mean that they don't utter dirty words themselves. The main concern Malaysians have when it comes to hearing dirty words in popular media, in particular hip hop songs is that the affect it will have on the younger generation. Fine and Johnson (1984, as cited in Jay 1992:185) confirms this by citing that both females and males are concerned that younger people use more obscenity in their speech compared to adults. The scenario could not be any more different between eastern and western worlds, for the influence of dirty words on the youngsters is always put in consideration.

Since the 1800's, the use of the word 'fuck' became wide spread as an indicator of anger, whereby references to sex acts, sex organs, and sexual deviations were used to insult the other party (Flexner, 1976 as cited in Jay 1992:76). The expression of anger through dirty words are dependent on several factors, which are the context of the conversation or scenario, the relationship between the speakers and the prosodic features of the speech (Jay 1999:83).

Males and females swear in both contexts, that is when they are alone and when they are among other people. However, it is the status of the relationship between the speaker and the audience that acts as an indicator of the extent of vulgarity used, thus drawing to the conclusion that individuals have their own distinct comfort zones when it comes to swearing. The context of anger expression falls under the etiquette of using dirty words, as applied by both the females and males. Cameron (1969) conducted a research on dirty word usage as a function of social-physical setting. Findings showed that 8% of college students used dirty words in conversations at leisure, 3% of adult conversation on the job and 13% of adult leisure conversation. This clearly indicates the usage of dirty words vary from age, context and place of conversation, and more



clearly according to sex. This is shown through the findings in the distinction of male and female occupations, showing that males cursed more than females. The top five male occupations that use dirty words include athletic coach, janitor, policeman, groundkeeper and janitor, whilst the top five female occupations are athletic coach, cook, maid, secretary and bookstore employee. In regarding the phenomena of using dirty words among both genders, it is most pertinent to understand what influences them pick up the habit of doing so. Judging from the fact the study discussed was conducted forty years ago, it is acceptable to say that males and females of today's era are more exposed to the influence of dirty words as used in popular media. Thus, the occupational and educational background of individuals is no longer a factor in determining their likeliness to use dirty words, but the context of the speech act is deemed more relevant.

In addition, the findings in the content analysis of the language used in hip hop lyrics revealed that the terminologies and phrases used denote that men have the ability to have control over women; women are compared to objects and the function of woman's attire in sexually attracting the man. The study did not include the positive and negative criterion of male character roles as the study was focused on the portrayal of female character roles and its effect on young women's health (Wilson, 1995:287).

In literature and in spoken discourse, there has been gender related terms used to refer to the other gender in a foul tone. They are not limited to one race or minority and are used based on assumptions made on the target addresses' personality or physical flaws and social interaction behaviors (Jay 1999:178). The only categorization is the target's gender, whereby there are different words that will offend the males and females differently. Hughes (1991:208) lists gender of terms for male insults as *prick*, *pig*, *bugger* ; and gender of terms for female insults as *cunt* and *bitch* with *fucker* as an

intermediate term serving both genders. Jay (1992:178) lists *queer*, *motherfucker* and *cocksucker* as the most offensive male related gender terms, with *cunt* ; *bitch* ; *dyke* as the most offensive female related gender terms. *Bitch*, which is used in abundance in hip hop music videos and song lyrics, is described as Jay (1992:178) is offensive when used by both women and men. Men refer to women as bitches when they feel the women are needy, smothering and overly demanding. On the other hand, women use *bitch* to refer to other women the woman has a social problem. However, Fine and Johnson (1984, as cited in Jay 1992:185) clearly state that females are less likely to use anatomy words like *breast* and *dick* than males for they feel are still a taboo, unlike men who feel the opposite way. This clearly shows that gender specific insults, the word *bitch* in particular, are more disparaging for womanhood and women tend to be more polite compared to men when it comes to anatomical references.

Hughes (1991:208) also expresses how historically there is an extreme dichotomy of both praise and abuse in feminine prototypes, meaning for every pleasant term a woman is called, there are also many unpleasant terms in existence as well. This can be detected as early as 1100, whereby in favorable terms a woman is referred to a maiden, but otherwise the unfavorable term would be a whore. In addition, new terms to refer to women negatively are created and expand within the turn of time, due to what Hughes (1991:208) believes is due to the society's decline in religious and superstitious beliefs in not uttering taboo words. Another factor mentioned is due to the society's openness towards sex, they are no longer shy to adapt words associated with sex organs and sex acts to incorporate in their gender related insults. The media, particularly, display openness towards portrayal of sexual innuendos and sexist language which in turn delivers the message that it's a norm to be no longer shy of sexual taboo words.

The underlying reason for the usage of gender specific insults among male and female speakers is that each gender view the world differently based on different cognitive models and metaphors for sexual and interpersonal behaviors (Jay 1992:181). In other words, men and women choose gender related terms to insult or express anger based on the philosophy that women operate in a world concerned with intimacy; social desirability and security. Men, they are concerned with sex, power and physical attractiveness.

## **2.6 Background on Hip Hop**

Hip hop surfaced from a strong rebellious act against white supremacy in America, emerging out of the social upheaval of the 1970s in New York's Bronx where blacks and Latinos battled with government neglect, high unemployment rates and slum-like housing (Chang, 2006:14). Hip hop origin is the combination of the lack of work and social services which is popularly categorized as an underclass of urban minorities that do not have the advantage of sufficient training, opportunities or services available to allow themselves to escape poverty. The oppression felt by the children of New York and Civil Rights generation caused them to be trapped in urban centres that provide no available outlet to express their creative energies. Music was creatively produced by using the tape recorder and connecting turntables to sample music. The process was playing a certain segment of songs while mixing them with samples of different records at the same time. The music making prodigy was brought public to housing projects, parks where rappers would share their life experiences and hardship on poverty, ghetto life, and fighting the power against White supremacy through the spontaneous emceeing spinning of words.

Hip hop from the East Coast of America soon spread to the West Coast, where similar oppression was taking place in Los Angeles in terms of dying hope of jobs, education and comfortable living (Chang, 2006:20). ‘Gangsta’ rap emerged, in protest to the city’s rejection of South Central Los Angeles neighborhoods faced with drug abuse and violence. Rappers would fight against brutal policies against the Black population, mainly regarding the unjust treatment by the police.

Mainstream hip hop today is quite different from what it was back in the originating days of rebellion. Themes often flee from poverty to portrayal of wealth in the form of luxurious cars, jets, diamond jewellery, high fashion apparel and accessories and expensive liquors (Mahiri and Conner 2003:40). However, messages of glamorizing criminal activity and experiences of drug dealing are still popular in the lyrics.

Music videos are viewed as similar to commercial advertisements, selling a product which is music, as well as a lifestyle (Gow, 1993:319). In addition, Williams (2003:310) states that through image and sound, music videos both construct culture, and are an “expression of culture.”

This study is focused on investigating the influences of hip hop culture in music videos through the depiction of male and female characters. A common theme in the portrayal of female characters in hip hop music videos is the sexual imagery as explained by Arnett (2002:256):

a typical music video...features one or more men performing while beautiful, scantily clad young women dance and writhe lasciviously. Often the men dance, too, but the women always have fewer clothes on. The women are mostly just props...They appear for a fraction of a second, long enough to shake their butts a couple of times, then the camera moves on.

Arganbright and Lee (2007:20) conducted a study on the objectification of women, sexual permissiveness and gender attitudes through a content analysis of hip hop music videos and found that men were portrayed as powerful, sexually assertive and as having a fair degree of sexual prowess. On the other hand, women were portrayed as sexually available, scantily clad and often preening over the men. The sexual image in hip hop music videos is supported by Gines (2007:81) who stated that "sex is an image that sells...once again, the bodies of Black women and women of other color are being commoditised and sold through the entertainment industry for economic gain.

It is from recognising the background of hip hop music, a thorough analysis can be made in relevance to the study's findings on the representation of gender in music videos as well as the language used to describe gender as found in the music lyrics.

### **2.6.1 Language Used in Hip Hop Music Lyrics**

Lyrics of songs accompany the visual representations of character roles and storylines in a music video. It is through the lyrics, the audience can use it as a medium of instruction in learning new words, be entertained by the creativity of the words arranged as well as obtain imagery in the sense of how the gender roles of the characters in the song are portrayed. However, music lyrics belong in the free world, for their creativity is not as strictly judged like a book or a painting. The quality of the lyrics is open to the judgment of its own users, and in particular the hip hop lyrics, whereby the quality of the song words are often arguable. Some view it as poetry, whilst some view it as random mumbling. Houston (2005:8) asserts that the purpose of commercial rap is to offer a product to the widest audience as possible without

considering the quality. Therefore, quality in the hip hop product, ranging from the music videos and lyrics offered is open to free judgment by its own consumers.

A study was conducted among listeners of hip hop music who were asked for their perception on how hip hop lyrics can provide positive messages (Weiner, 2008: 8). Respondents of this study revealed that hip hop lyrics increases personal independence, motivates confidence, disseminate knowledge and promote social change and resist oppression (Weiner, 2008:9). As for negative messages, respondents revealed their concerns when sexism, violence, glorification of money is incorporated in the lyrics. In addition, other negative elements the respondents felt were incorporated in hip hop music lyrics were negative stereotypes of men and women; prominent use of the “N” (*nigga*) word; the shame of drugs, sex and gangs. Another negative imagery of femininity as portrayed by male rappers in hip hop include the depiction of women as overly sexualized, devoid of its physical, emotional and psychic components (Lorde, 1984:110). Furthermore, women are presented as caricatures, sexual objects and less than human (Shelton 1997:116).

Hip hop lyrics can not be tied solely to a negative category of the language product (Houston, 2008:16). In fact, hip hop can function as a critical pedagogy tool in exposing expressive elements as well be used as a basis for learning gender and promote anti sexist practice. In a way, Houston’s study is deemed as turning a controversial product of language and culture into positive revenue for emancipatory and liberatory pedagogy. It is emancipatory and liberatory in the sense it promotes lived experience, emotion and a meaningful commitment to transformation of lives on the margin (Houston, 2008:16). In addition, apart from sexuality, there are hip hop lyrics send revolutionary messages regarding hardship, inequality and oppression (Chang, 2005:71). These lyrics offer the audience an alternative to the consistently

negative messages found in most other media outlets (Powell, 2000:187). Furthermore, there are also hip hop lyrics written and performed female artistes that challenge dominant portrayals of women found in the media, whereby messages of racial and gendered equality are expressed (Collins, 2000:143).

Even though hip hop music is predominantly performed by male rappers, there are female rappers who tend to represent femininity with independent and autonomy images in their songs (Guevara 1996:49). Some of the positive messages inserted in the female rappers' songs include heterosexual courtship, domestic violence and sexism from the perspectives of women (Guevara 1996:49). Another look at how female artistes in hip hop music challenge male sexism is by using the same figurative speech and behaviors as their male counterparts by including narratives in their lyrics that include seducing, repressing and sexually emasculating male characters as well as provoking their female or male competitors in the industry (Keyes, 2004:256). This shows that womanhood is redefined by female hip hop artistes showing that women too can incorporate profanity and sexuality in their song lyrics just like the male rappers.

Sexist language has its effect, which is it can influence the hearer and speaker automatically without conscious awareness (Freud 1995 and Piaget 1974 as cited in Koziar, 2008:23). A study on the sexist language used regarding women involved in the sports on television revealed that there were several ways language was used in degrading women's involvement in the man dominated arena (Speer 2002 as cited in Koziar, 2008:24). The words used namely described women's injury as always in excessive risk as compared to men's injury that was described moderately. Furthermore, the finding also included that a certain television broadcast commented on the tendency of female activity in investing on make-up, hair and nail fashion would

eventually be unprofitable as their participation in sports would damage their investment.

This study embraces the observation how language forms attitudes and leads to a specific behavior. In other words, if the language used free from any kind of gender oppression portrayal, then it can form a positive outlook on how people perceive gender and how they attach positive behaviors as male and female in the society. In the case of hip hop lyrics, the language that the artiste uses in his story telling contributes to the attitude and behavior forming of the listeners. The artiste has the power to send a subliminal message of how gender should be perceived. This is supported by Sweeney (1993) who cites that sexist language causes us to view the world from a patriarchal vantage point and repetition reinforces attitudes that lead to behavior. Both of these studies relate to the theory Linguistic Relativity (Sweeney 1993 as cited in Koziar, 2008: 29) as proposed by the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Sapir 1949, Whorf 1956). The theory basically expresses how language has a tremendous effect on the society.

### **2.6.2 African American English Terms for Females and Males in Hip Hop Genre**

Popular hip hop songs are predominantly performed by African American English speakers, with lyrics containing specific labels referring to male and female persons (Green, 2002:78). Although the terms are not related to foul language, they are however labelled as slang terms with particular meanings that have the influence to attract viewers and listeners to incorporate into their daily language use. Green (2002:78) lists popular terms for females as *ma*; *shorty*; *bopper* whilst male terms consist of *balla*; *dawg*; and *playa*.

Some of the words do contain negative connotations like *bopper* which refers to materialistic women and *dawg* is used for males who mistreat women. Hence, in



relevance to this study, it is important to recognize the common gender specific terms used in hip hop music lyrics and their connotation in analyzing the function and the influence such terms brings to the listeners of hip hop music.

### **2.6.3 Themes in Hip Hop Lyrics**

In conducting content analysis of hip hop lyrics of this research, four concurrent themes will be used in tabulating the occurrences of the categories of language used, as adapted by the research conducted by (Balaji, 2009:24). The themes are bravado, alcohol and drug consumption, verbal insults to other counterparts and sexuality. The bravado theme relates to lyrics that engages in verbal self-aggrandizement and depicts the artiste as the dreams of the audience symbolizing triumph and accomplishment against the odds (Smitherman 1997:13). The alcohol and drug consumption theme indicate messages of the artiste being involved potentially harmful behaviors with the consumption of the alcohol and illegal substances. This is followed by the verbal insults to other counterparts theme which categorises language that denote rhetorical strategies of critical offensiveness (Smitherman 1997:13). As for the sexuality theme, this relates to language in hip hop lyrics that closely relate to the convention of pornography (Perry, 2003: 49). Two kinds of sexuality will be examined, which is the convention of females as sexual objects and innuendos of sexual actions between males and females (McFarland, 2003: 92).

### **2.6.4 Representation of Male and Female Characters in Hip Hop Music Videos**

The purpose of commercial hip hop is to offer a product to the widest possible audience without consideration of the quality of content (Houston, 2008:2). One of the

many ways in measuring the quality of content of hip hop music is to investigate on how concepts of masculinity and femininity are projected in the music videos.

A content analysis of 203 hip hop music videos on Black Entertainment Television (BET) reported that 42% of the videos depicted fondling and 58% of videos featured women dancing sexually (Hansbrough, 2005:164). The use of sexuality in hip hop music videos is closely related to the convention of pornography (Perry, 2003:49). According to this research, positive criterion of a female character role included confidence, possessing beauty and perfect body figures, and negative criterion included the use of sexuality in their appearance and actions, and notions of violence against women. Furthermore, according to the respondents, the degree of the qualities portrayed affects its negative or positive criteria, meaning if one element is used in appropriate taste and amount, it is deemed as positive, hence if the same element is overused and overrated then it is deemed as a negative quality of a gender. For instance, the female's physical appearance is deemed positive if it isn't used for the male's sexual object or desire.

In addition, Washington and Shaver (1997:49) claim some of the prevalent social themes in rap music videos include disparaging and negative depictions of treatment towards women. Disparaging treatment is not only depicted through the actions performed by the character roles, but the language in the lyrics as well. Sexual and violent innuendos are injected in the lyrics that might not only have entertainment purposes, but communicate a message by the rapper to the viewers that thinks it's acceptable to treat a woman in a certain way, and so there's no harm if the viewers think the same way too. This is supported by the claim that females are the fetish objects of men as spectators as portrayed in the media, therefore influencing the environment at the dance clubs where women are expected to take on passive quality to

be sexually alluring to be looked at (Mulvey, 1975:6). However, female character roles that are scantily dressed in dance club scenes are not necessarily perceived as a negative thing, for it can also portray that women like to dress up and look good to please herself when she goes to a club (Joan, 1999:57).

Williams (2008: 44) conducted a research on how black women with womanist identity view their body image towards images of black women portrayed in rap music videos. Findings suggest that a relationship exists between accepting a personal and positive definition of womanhood with the ability to perceive sexual stereotypes in rap music videos. In achieving the hypothesis, distinguishing the dependent and independent variables proved to be important in testing the hypothesis. The dependent variables were attitudes towards black women in hip hop music videos, body image and body self-esteem in comparison to black women in hip hop music videos. From these dependent variables, they were tested by investigating the independent variables among the subjects, which were their music preference, women's identity, and background information regarding educational, social and occupational information. Each variable were investigated by using different lengthy individual questionnaires. In conclusion, the study showed that the stronger a woman felt about her womanhood, the more she would reject the oppression of women portrayed in hip hop music videos. This further relates to Stephens (2007:56) theory that exposure to stereotypical sexual imagery in music videos is associated with adolescents; sexual identity development, sexual behaviours and sexual experiences.

In gender portrayal of character roles, it is not only the female that falls under the stereotype category, for the male gender is also associated with stereotypical roles as well concerning hyper masculinity. Balaji (2009:33) conducted an in depth analysis on interpreting Black masculinity in hip hop music videos, by analyzing how their

manhood is prescribed according to the artistes' own attempt of self-definition, the social norms that relate to a typical Black male behavior, and the sub-cultural messaging attempting to reach a certain in-group within the mass audience. His findings conclude that a gray area exists in finding the roots of the structure of black masculinity in hip hop music videos and is open to the interpretation of the audience.

The typical hyper masculinity characteristics portrayed in hip hop music videos include from a low class to a high class gangster, the rich affluent persona involved in vice activities and the sexually hyped playboy. This is supported by the claim that hip hop culture is predominantly male and decidedly masculine, whereby masculinity is represented through pimp and playas that possess economic capital in the abundance of material goods (Judy, 2004:108). Masculinity in male character roles in hip hop music videos primarily feature the *thug*, *the hustler*, *the playa*, *the nigga* and the inmate or ex-con (Judy, 2004:111). *Nigga* refers to a man who is hardcore forgets feelings, instead expresses hard core image of anger, rage and intense pleasure (Judy, 2004: 111). *Playa* is a guy who is sustaining supposedly exclusive relationships with multiple girls simultaneously (Poulson-Bryant, 2005:102). The *nigga* and *playa* persona explains the common scenes in hip hop music videos where scantily dressed women are draped and paraded around such *nigga* and *playa* male characters, thus sending the messages women are sexual objects whom male characters can denigrate and dominate at their whim (Pinn, 1996:23). Male artistes that have marketed themselves well in the hip hop music scene with manufacturing images of thug and playa personas as means of selling records and projecting their masculine identities include Fifty Cent, Young Jeezy, Fat Joe, T.I., Snoop Dogg and Jay-Z (Alexander, 2006:15). An example of how Fifty Cent injects persona in his thug and playa appeal is by glorifying consumption of his world which consist of repeated shots of cars, money, buildings and women.

(Balaji, 2009: 26) Therefore, it is through these images of *nigga* and *playa*, stereotypes are reinforced and create an essential definition of Black masculinity (Cooks, 2002: 115).

Rappers embrace the gangster or thug image as a fashionable persona of masculinity, which started by Tupac Shakur (Dyson, 2001:103). In addition there is also the typical *pimp* persona adding to the list of hyper masculinity characteristics of a Black man in hip hop music videos. A *pimp* is viewed as the ringleader in prostitution activities and this personality is usually commercialized as an entertaining character oozing of sex and authority appeal and as someone who is taking structural oppression and turning the tables (Boyd 2004:327). However, as tyrannizing as the pimp persona is, the hyper masculinity value in hip hop music videos seem to get away with making it sound like the pimp lifestyle is what the female characters desire and need. This is supported by the fact that men of color in particular have so few resources that the physical body, threat of violence and the use of words are used to project masculinity (Katz, 2000:56). Despite the typical images of black men in music as *thug* and *playa* personalities, there are some artistes choose to shy away from the stereotype in order to sell their own original self identity (Kelley 2005:244). Therefore, the scope of masculinity in hip hop music needs to be widened to character roles that are pro-feminist, anti-homophobic and nurturing (Neal, 2005:78).

Many studies conducted are aimed at pinpointing only the negative qualities and its impact on the viewers or youth. In reference to Botta, (1999:73), she concluded that female adolescents look to media images and their representations as a way to gauge how one “should” look like, and may adopt damaging behaviors or perceptions to meet these ideals. Botta's study (1999:73) discovered that negative portrayal of the importance of physical beauty and wealth possession in hip hop music videos actually

help to motivate viewers to take better care of their health and transmit the message that physical beauty and wealth can be achieved by anyone in real life. Therefore, this indicates that even though there is emphasis placed on physical beauty and wealth possession in female and male characters roles, it does not necessarily carry a negative impact on the concept of gender, for it can also carry a positive motivating message for the viewers.

## **2.7 Summary**

The present study consists of two areas, which are observing the prescribed gender roles in hip hop music videos as well as the gender specific insults contained in the hip hop song lyrics. The link between these two areas is finding out what the society perceive as positive, negative, realistic, acceptable and unacceptable elements. The extension would be investigating the influence of these two areas in the subjects' lifestyles and daily language use. Therefore relevant literature as discussed above will further help to support the findings of this study.