WHAT'S HIP, WHAT'S HOP? DISHARMONIZED REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER IN MUSIC VIDEOS

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Abstract

Media representations of gender have always been an avenue for contestations in feminist media studies. Feminists have been concerned with how preoccupied the media are with women's appearances and bodies whilst at the same time giving focus to what men do with them. More often than not, the media emit a particular cultural message: men are players and master, while women are objects and subject. Such a message is abundant in popular music videos consumed by most young people today, including those in Malaysia. A content analysis study of three hip-hop music videos that had the highest ratings in the MTV chart during the fourth week of January 2007 – *That's That, Dangerous,* and *Tell Me* - discovered various oppressed representations of the female, while men are represented as powerful and central to everything. The hip-hop music videos focus on the female bodies ('hip') and how men behave towards them ('hop'). Such representations belittle the increasing effort of Malaysian policy makers to propagate gender harmony in the home, the workplace and society at large. What are the implications of such media consumption on the gender consciousness and sensitivity of young Malaysians? The article explores this issue based on a focus group discussion of male and female students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

APAKAH *HIP*? APAKAH *HOP*? KETAKHARMONIAN REPRESENTASI GENDER DALAM VIDEO MUZIK

Abstrak

Representasi media terhadap gender sentiasa menjadi landasan perdebatan dalam kajian feminisme media. Golongan feminis amat menitikberatkan bagaimana media terlalu taksub dengan penampilan dan penonjolan imej tubuh wanita dan pada masa yang sama meneliti apa yang gender lelaki lakukan terhadap mereka. Kerapkalinya media hanya menyampaikan satu mesej budaya: lelaki adalah pemegang peranan dan ketua, manakala wanita adalah objek dan subjek. Mesej seumpama ini amat berleluasa dalam video muzik popular yang banyak dikonsumpsi oleh remaja hari ini termasuklah di Malaysia. Satu kajian analisis kandungan ke atas tiga muzik video *hip-hop* yang mempunyai rating tertinggi di carta MTV pada minggu keempat Januari 2007 – *That's That, Dangerous* dan *Tell Me* – menunjukkan terdapat banyak representasi wanita bercorak eksploitasi, manakala lelaki ditonjolkan sebagai berkuasa dan ketua dalam segalanya. Video muzik *hip-hop* banyak berfokus kepada tubuh wanita ('hip' - bahagian pinggul) dan bagaimana lelaki bertindak iaitu dengan melompat ke arahnya ('hop'). Representasi seumpama ini memperkecilkan usaha pembuat dasar di Malaysia untuk memperjuangkan keharmonian gender di rumah, di tempat kerja dan dalam masyarakat. Persoalannya, apakah implikasi konsumpsi media ini terhadap kesedaran dan sensitiviti remaja di Malaysia? Makalah ini meneroka isu tersebut melalui perbincangan kumpulan fokus ke atas pelajar lelaki dan wanita di Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Keywords: *media representations, sexploitation, gender stereotypes, hip-hop music, National Policy on Women*

Introduction

Media representations of gender have always been an avenue for contestations in feminist media studies. Feminist media scholars have been concerned with how preoccupied the media are with women's appearances and bodies whilst at the same time giving focus to what men do with them. More often than not, the media emit a particular cultural message: men are players and master while women are objects and subject.

Feminism is a useful analytical tool to look at media content. Generally, femi-

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nism is a perspective in the critical theory genre that attempts to decipher meanings based on gender. Feminists are interested to see how dominance and power are divided according to gender in society. They view the world and human experiences as influenced by male dominance, and thus they set out to challenge such order, i.e., male dominance that oppresses women (Littlejohn, 1999). They criticize the situation as unjust because it brings various effects and implications in society. Although they are capable of doing so, opportunities for women to develop themselves as individuals are closed, just because they are women and men traditionally hold the power positions in social institutions. Feminists aim to change the social situation that are in favor of men and seek justice for women. There are many means to achieve this end, and one of them is through the popular mass media.

Unfortunately, the mass media have not been supportive in this stance. In fact, media content is proliferated with gender stereotypes and sexploitation. Such a message is abundant in popular music videos consumed by most young people today, including those in Malaysia. With the global media gaining popularity among local audience, there is also an increasing consumption of its array of content. This paper follows from a content analysis study of three hip-hop music videos that had the highest rating in the MTV chart during the fourth week of January 2007 – *That's That, Dangerous,* and *Tell Me.* These music videos contained various disharmonies in their representations of gender through the lyrics, narratives, and audio and visual codes. Consuming such representations of gender cumulatively cultivates and consequently sanctions male domination vis-à-vis female subjugation. They can also belittle the increasing effort of Malaysian policy makers to propagate gender harmony in the home, the workplace and society at large, as demonstrated in *Dasar Wanita Negara* (the National Policy on Women). What are the implications of such media consumption on the gender consciousness and sensitivity of young Malaysians? The paper explores this issue based on a focus group discussion of male and female students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Gender in the media

Gender is quite a complex concept compared to sex. While sex is classified by biological characteristics, gender is a social, symbolic creation. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft declared that most differences between the sexes are socially constructed, not natural. The meaning of gender grows out of a society's values, beliefs, and preferred ways of organizing collective life and is not based on genetic factors (Wood, 2001).

Thus gender, unlike sex, is learned. From the time we are born into society, we are encouraged to conform to the gender that society prescribes for us. These are socially endorsed views of masculinity and femininity and they are taught to individuals through a variety of cultural means. Indeed individuals are social-

ized into gender. When socialization is effective in teaching us to adopt the gender society prescribes for our sex, biological males learn to be masculine and biological females become feminine (Wood, 2001). These learned meanings are communicated and further perpetuated through structures and practices of culture.

In our daily lives, we are surrounded by communication that announces social images of gender. We switch on the television and we see the corporate man leading his big company and then calling his wife at home to tell her that he will be back home late for dinner; we open the newspaper and we read a piece of news that a woman has been raped by her boyfriend; we turn on the radio and listen to a female singer crooning for the man she loves who has left her for another woman. We go to a restaurant and the waiter presents the check to the man; we participate in a project and a man is appointed the leader. Such experiences create the illusion that these are normal and natural roles for women and men to assume. In fact, it seems to persuade us to believe that these are proper and correct ways for men and women to behave. In relations to that, the repeated and cumulated similar gender images in the media also give the impression that they are sanctioned by society.

Wood (2001) suggests three ways in which the media interact with cultural images of gender: by mirroring, suggesting, and gatekeeping. In mirroring, media reflect cultural values and ideals about gender. They portray women, men, and women-men relationships in ways that mirror understandings and ideals widely shared in society. In suggesting, media reproduce cultural views of gender in individuals. By portraying women, men, and relationships between the sexes in "normal" ways, media suggest how we should be as women and men. In gatekeeping, media become filters of information and images. To a significant extent, they control what we see and know by deciding what programs to air, what news to feature, how to represent issues and events, and how to portray women and men. This is the selective characteristic of the media. By selectively regulating what we see, media influence how we perceive gender issues, ourselves, and women and men in general. Hence, the media mirror, suggest and filter our images of gender.

Thus the importance of mass media as image carriers should not be underestimated. The media have the potential to portray individuals or group of individuals in a negative or positive light, or in whatever directions they feel fit to describe. According to Faridah Ibrahim and Rahmah Hashim (1996) one cannot deny that opinions are formed in part by gathering pieces of information that have been portrayed through the mass media and comparing them with the images of events or people, which already have been stored in our minds. Negative portrayal of individuals or nations or group of people in the media, might conjure negative perceptions in the minds of the audience.

Faridah Ibrahim and Rahmah Hashim (1996) studied the coverage of women by the mass media during the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. They

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found that when the print media chose to allocate space for women news, devilish terms such as "burning bras", and "nude women running around the streets of Huairou" were freely printed. These messages would give the reader the impression that women who attended the Conference were radical beings with nothing better to do but to "burn bras." These depictions generally eclipsed the many positive accomplishments at the Conference.

According to Garcellano (1995) women are often times invisible and silenced in economics, politics, religion, science and technology but not so in media and advertising, where women are made to be highly visible yet "powerless". Through the mass media, we can see that the exploitation of women have gone beyond the traditional setting into the more sophisticated modern world where women's so-called natural weaknesses and femininity are being exploited both by men and women for economic gains. Women who are vocal and fight for their cause are being dubbed as hardcore feminists, while those who become commercial symbols, especially in media advertisements and television commercials, are portrayed as superficial and mindless (Fuziah & Faridah, 2004).

Media imagery of the female in movies is also profound. Over the past decades, a great deal of movie messages via Hollywood, Bollywood and even Mallywood (Malaysian movie industry as dubbed by many), has perpetuated the notion of women as property or commodities "available" for sexual and other use (Fuziah & Faridah, 2000). These messages are played over and over again in movies which show images of the female as the gentler sex, passive, weak, needing protection, subservient, scatter-brained, dependent, comforting, nurturing, caring as well as beautiful (so convenient as a sex-object), while the male images are forceful, strong, capable, aggressive, demanding, independent, successful, as tycoons, heroes, playboys and the stoic macho-men. According to a manual entitled Confronting Violence (1992) published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, it is these images that reinforce ideologies of masculinity and femininity, demonstrating that while the male is 'naturally' aggressive, the female is the 'natural' target for aggression.

The mass media not only help to carry the images of women across the masses but also reinforce cultural stereotypes formed in the minds of the masses – that women are basically the inferior ones of the sexes. With constant reminder, inferiority becomes habitual and familiar and even desirable (Faridah, 1989). Hence, for the women, the influence of the mass media can be viewed from two extremes. On one side of the coin, media are seen as powerful to shape behavior and capitalize on the potentials of women that can be used to their advantage, while on the other, media reinforce existing stereotyped attitudes, expectations and values that could hinder their advancement in societies.

In Malaysia, researchers began actively researching media representations of women since the early eighties. Asiah Sarji (1985) content analyzed images of women in five P. Ramlee (a reknown filmmaker in the golden age of the Malay cinema of the 1950s and 60s) movies released at different times, namely *Penarik*

Beca (1956), *Ali Baba Bujang Lapok* (1961), *Ibu Mertuaku* (1962), *Madu Tiga* (1964), and *Nasib Do Re Mi* (1966). Her analyses indicated that women were portrayed as emotional, sensitive and tearful. Basically, two types of women were depicted: the rich, materialistic and husband-hunting kind, and the poor, helpless, weak and polygamy-willing kind. In addition, women were most often characterized as widows, mothers, domestic helpers, singers, nurses and clerks.

Similar images are also seen in Jins Shamsuddin's (a reknown 1970s Malay filmmaker) movies of the seventies and early eighties. Soh Geok Choon (1988) content analyzed *Menanti Hari Esok* (released in 1977), *Esok Masih Ada* (1980), and *Esok Untuk Siapa* (1981). In these movies, Soh discovered that women were mainly depicted in a negative light, in that they were peripheralized, dependent on and submissive to men. Generally, they were made to appear as second-class citizens who are trapped in a patriarchal system that degraded their very existence.

Fuziah and Faridah (2005; 2000) looked at eleven Malay movies produced in the 1950s, the golden era of Malay movies. This qualitative-interpretative analysis demonstrated that stereotyped female images dominated the silver screen then. Women were portrayed in two extreme poles — the good-hearted, demure, submissive, domesticated and "ever-willing-to-sacrifice-everything' female; and the evil, scheming, conniving, home-wrecking, materialistic woman. Such characterizations not only added drama to the narratives, they also rhetorically functioned to propagate the conceptual metaphor of the desirable female as "pure, white and innocent" whereas the most undesirable one is "defiled, black and sinful." It is clear that the filmic rhetoric here is a good woman is one who is willing to sacrifice everything, including her life, for the benefit of others, such as the man she loves, and that she must accept her fate although it means suffering and hardships. More often than not the good woman is sacrificed at the end of the movie, such as through death, and is eventually exalted. Woman on the opposite end (the bad woman) is extremely bad, but alas she dies a tragic death. Good or bad, the woman usually dies one way or another. It is as if a woman's life is secondary compared to that of a man.

Although much of the empirical literature has focused on women, they are always studied in comparisons with the other gender. Generally, researchers discover several common themes of gender representations in the mass media. These themes include the under-representation of women; stereotypical portrayals of women and men; and the sexploitation and normalized violence of women by men. Such depictions are found in various genres of media content ranging from children's cartoons, news, television serials and music videos to blatant pornography. One thing that is clear in all these depictions is the constant absence of respect between women and men in their daily encounters and relationships. If respect between women and men is a key element that can propagate gender harmony, then what is the media doing to ensure that this is being communicated? Or have they ignored this issue altogether?

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The research findings

This section of the paper reports on research findings of a content analysis of the three selected music videos in the study and the qualitative analysis of a focus group of university students discussing their readings of the music videos and the larger implications toward gender harmony. In the study, gender harmony is understood as the presence of mutual respect between women and men in everyday social life such that both sexes recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses as persons, thus enabling each other to play equal, balanced and complimentary roles in the home, the workplace and society in general. In this position, the domination of one sex over another does not occur since complimentary behavior nullifies it.

The music videos

Music videos are a type of short film or video that contained the complete creation of a musical composition. They are produced as a vehicle or advertisement to promote and market a song, and are especially targeted for the young and music-loving audience. In USA alone, the music video industry is a billion-dollar enterprise. Although music videos have been around for quite some time, they became a worldwide phenomenon with the advent of the music television format as a broadcast genre in the 1980s and 1990s. In Malaysia, both MTV and Channel V are popular channels, thus spurring the creation of a local music television channel, Hitz.TV, on Astro, the Malaysian satellite television broadcaster. This local channel does not necessarily air local music videos; in fact, it is heavy on foreign music videos since local artists do not really invest in music videos to market their albums, as they are expensive to produce. Hence, the music television channels show more foreign music videos compared to local ones for local consumption.

 Music videos are heavy on the senses as they can manipulate audio and visual codes through camera and editing techniques as well as special effects and multimedia pacing. Among the various music genres that utilize music videos to win global audiences, the hip-hop genre is most prevalent. Hip–hop is a music genre that is said to have originated from the ghettos of America when African-American youth began singing about their oppression and discrimination by the white majority using their unique style and rhythm to voice their protests, thus establishing a new musical identity different from mainstream white music. The hip-hop genre is sometimes referred to as rap music as they include rapping (mcing) and djing (audio mixing and scratching). Interestingly, hip-hop music videos always have a dance choreography that demonstrates traditional African influence, breakdancing, krumping and crotch-grabbing, and other sexy body movements.

   In this study, the three hip-hop music videos analyzed are *That's That* by Snoop Dogg featuring R. Kelly, *Dangerous* by the Ying Yang Twins featuring Wyclef

Jean, and *Tell Me* by P. Diddy featuring Christina Aguilera. These music videos are media texts, and as media texts, they are polysemic in nature, thus inviting various readings and interpretations. In this analysis, a basic feminist framework is used to look at various semiotic units such as lyrics, narratives, characters and characterizations, camera angles, shots and framings, mise-en-scene, costumes and make-up, facial expressions, as well as dance and body movements. This paper does not account the details of the semiotic analysis conducted, rather it only excerpts the main findings of their gender representations and images as seen comprehensively from their narratives.

That's That depicts two rich and heavily-bling-ed (wearing shiny accessories) men driving to an exclusive party where they meet up with heavily made-up and scantily-clad women who performed wild and erotic dance moves for the pleasure of the onlooking men. The dances became more sensuous and sexy when money is thrown all over and around them. The word "shit" is repeated in the lyrics as if to degrade the female dancers who would do anything and everything for money. The use of water in the earlier *mise-en-scene* of the music video is a subliminal play of the oncoming seduction and sexual tone. There are many close-up shots of the woman's body, especially hips and breasts, as she gyrates and moves to the beat and rhythm of the music. The final frames show Dogg and Kelly driving home with satisfied looks as Snoop wipes his lips and winks to the camera.

In *Dangerous*, the Ying Yang Twins tell of their adventure in a fictional place, Twin City, where they seem to be in charge, yet some women try to overpower them wherever they go by using their sexuality and charm. The women are shown in seductive costumes, poses and dances so as to lure and capture the twins for their luxury car and money. In some close-up shots, a woman is shown to have fangs, which immediately emphasizes and foregrounds her evil character and intention. Eventually, the final frames indicate the force behind the women's behavior. In actual fact, the women are being used by Wyclef Jean to deceive the Ying Yang Twins, hence reaffirming the power of men over women and how men can always use women, even in the execution of dangerous and criminal acts.

Tell Me portrays a relational episode between a man and a woman, whereby each is communicating to the other their wants and needs in the relationship. In the beginning, P. Diddy is presented a remote control by a woman who, upon his instruction, puts on a DVD to be played. Diddy takes the remote control and points to the DVD player. At the touch of a button, Christina Aguilera appears on a flat screen television, singing and dancing to a tense and fast tempo. The audience is next transported to a "wind tunnel" where Aguilera is singing and dancing, and then Diddy walks in confidently rapping and singing. Again there are many close up shots of Aguilera gyrating and touching her body seductively. This is interspersed rapidly with close-up shots of another woman's body as she seductively dances, while long and medium shots of Diddy show him walking

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confidently, unperturbed and in control. A listening of the lyrics indicate a dialogue between Aguilera and Diddy in which she tells him what she wants to do and he responds with repeated "do that" and "I want." Although he says "I don't want to control you but I want to console you," his command of "do that, do that" indicates otherwise. In short, a man has a way of making a woman thinks she is in control even when she is not.

All the three hip-hop music videos stereotyped and sexploited women in almost similar ways, through the narratives, visual depictions and nonverbal body politics. The music videos show that women are the oppressed gender or second-class citizens whose existence are defined and controlled by men and that they are sexual objects that fulfill the pornographic fantasies of men. In contradistinction, men are represented as powerful, stylish, cool, cunning and central to everything that they are able to use women at their whims and fancies.

The various degrading representations of the female in the music videos vis-à-vis the consistent strong representations of the male is a deliberate effort to construct ambivalent female images, hence the lack of identity, while men are given the dominant and powerful presence, hence the master of all. The props, fancy cars and sophisticated remote control, as well as expensive costumes, dark shades, jewelries and blings, are all symbols of the powerful male, whilst less costume and more flesh, alluring make-up and seductive body movements semiotically explained the objectification of the female. In short, the hip-hop music videos focus on the female bodies ('hip') and how men behave towards them ('hop').

The focus group discussion

Four boys and girls participated in the focus group discussion. They are Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia undergraduates who are studying in the Media Communication program at the second year level (sophomore). This is purposively done to underscore their concerns about gender representations in the music videos given that this is a subject that they are exposed to and thus need to be critical about. In terms of social background, they are quite heterogeneous as they come from urban and rural settings, have parents of different educational and occupational status, hail from big, medium and small-sized families, and have different media habits. Theoretically, such a social background would have equipped them with different cultural tools, yet their academic exposure had more or less neutralized this expectation. Hence, their readings of the gender representations of the music videos and their perceived implications on the gender consciousness and sensitivity of young Malaysians are generally similar.

All the students, both male and female, agree that the hip-hop music videos portray disharmonized gender representations. They echo that all the men in the music videos appear cool, rich, strong, muscular, "so powerful and in control", while the women are "so, so, so low and gets lower and lower" because they have nothing but their sexuality in order to survive in this social world. The

women seem nothing more than objects of sexual desire or "trophy" for men to own and parade around as a token and symbol of their strength and position. One of the female students suggests that women have "sexual power" and that this power can "melt down any man", although the women may not intend to do so. This suggestion invites a male student to respond that women usually use their sexuality for material motives, which most men can provide. He rationalizes that "no cat will turn away if it sees a fish dangling in its face." When asked if this is a typical male response, the boys believe it is so in their culture but do not think it is necessarily unmanly to act otherwise.

Albeit so, all the students do not condone the use of female sexuality for material gain. The girls are concern that men have such a perception about women. They insist that a woman "pretties herself for her own satisfaction" and are sad that men think that this is done to "seduce them." One of the female students expresses worry that such imbalanced portrayal of men and women in the music videos can propagate the "already popular notion that guys give love to have sex, and gals give sex to have love." The rest of the students agree that this idea is dangerous and can trap any young girl and young boy into superficial relational commitments. They urge the media not to foster such a portrayal for, "in the long run, it is harmful to young and vulnerable audiences, such as my little brother and little sister."

The gender representations may not harm their own gender consciousness because "being media students, we know better that the images are just *merepek* (nonsensical and false)." However, they feel that "younger people who are not thinking" can be "harmfully influenced by the hedonistic portrayal" in the music videos. To make matters worse, hip-hop music and their stars are considered "icon of pornographic music videos" because of the sexual depictions and concentration of the body in their dances. The students posit that the media can "disrupt family socialization, parental role and proper upbringing" because gender images are stereotyped and repeated in the media in both direct and "more subtle ways."

Do music videos like these belittle the effort in Malaysia to achieve gender harmony and equality as espoused in the National Policy on Women (NPW)? NPW, endorsed by the Malaysian government in 1989, "articulates the needs, interests and situations of women and ensures that these concerns are included in mainstream development policy and programs with women participating as full and equal partners at the community and national levels" (Pelan Tindakan Pembangunan Wanita, 1997). The overall objectives of the NPW are:

- To ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources and information as well as access to opportunities and benefits of development, for both men and women; and
- To integrate women into all sectors of national development in line with their abilities and needs in order to improve the quality of life,

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eradicate poverty, abolish ignorance and illiteracy and ensure a peaceful and prosperous nation.

Besides the effort of the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also galvanized to spearhead the NPW. One such NGO was the National Council of Women's Organizations Malaysia (NCWO), which formed several commissions to work out action plans for the implementation of the Policy.

One of the commissions established was the Commission on Media, whose action plan includes the elimination of negative portrayal of women in the media and sensitizing gender awareness in media programs. It has been almost two decades now since NPW was endorsed, and although discourses remain alive, most of the action plans are "merely documents on paper." With the onslaught of globalization and the global media, it became more and more difficult to realize the NPW's media objectives, since the borderless world means media content is beyond a nation's control. As such, music videos such as these hip-hop ones with disharmonized gender representations can be found abundantly in the content industry.

The students, being aware of NPW, realize that the gender images in the music videos can be detrimental to the country's effort to create gender equality and harmony. However, they also believe that there is no way to stop such media content since banning or jamming is "not the solution to the problem, what more with the new media and its technology." Although the students said that not everyone is gullible to media messages, efforts must be continuous to counter the effects of imbalanced gender representations. "We cannot shut down or hide such programming in the global media from our people, less we will be like *katak di bawah tempurung* (literally, frog under a coconut shell), so we must build resistance within ourselves." One student suggests that the media authority rates music videos in the same manner that movies are rated. This rating will make us more aware of the content of the music videos and so become more cautious and selective in our viewing. It will also help "parents supervise their children's viewing."

To the suggestion of increasing media literacy by introducing it as a curriculum in primary schools, the students think that it is sound and rational. They feel that Malaysians need to be prepared at an earlier age because "an understanding of the process, system, effects and appreciation of the media can help us become critical and discerning users of the mass media." The students expressed their disappointment at some of their campus mates who seem oblivious to gender discourses in the media and therefore are "not fit to be university students." One boy states that everyone should promote gender awareness and that we should not "leave it to the authorities alone to combat" disharmonized gender representations in the media. The students in the focus group conclude that knowing how to resist unwanted images in the media is becoming increasingly important in the era of global media, and that this a more meaningful action compared to

"shutting down our skies and banning foreign content."

Conclusion

Modern women are already in the public sphere, out of the homes and into organizations in this new era. At a time when women are contributing much towards society's progress, some of the portrayals in the media are irrelevant; they only perpetuate the ideology of male dominance-female submissiveness. From a communication perspective, the use of this conceptual paradigm in a medium deemed so influential to young minds is culturally detrimental. We need to continuously advocate a change so that we can ultimately practice the humanistic view of gender equality in our daily lives. This can propagate gender respect and gender harmony, and thus can help eliminate crime and violence against women.

The mass media have the potential to be a vehicle of change. The study of gender images and representations in the mass media is an apt starting point to start a dialogue with the folks behind the scene so that they may be gender-sensitive in their work. For now, it is obvious that the content industry of the mass media is dominated by a male perspective and does not reflect the realities of being female. Although the content may circle around a woman's life, the storytelling is very much male. Perhaps this is a consequent of the lack of female players and decision-makers in the industry. Still, increasing the number does not mean the situation can be rectified because in the final analysis, "the crucial question is not who is telling the story, but how the story is told" (Gallagher, 2001).

As Wood points out, the media mirror, suggest and filter images and this influences our constructions. Media content is not limited to be a symbol of reality. More important, it must also be a symbol for reality. This means gender portrayal in the mass media can be used as advocacy materials to change whatever is necessary for the betterment of society. It is time for media producers to view their content from a wider and deeper perspective, specifically as rhetorical tools to gain adherence to gender-sensitive practices (Fuziah, 2005; 2003).

In communication, the media are powerful tools for gender setting (Gallagher, 2001), i.e., a device to help individuals rethink the true meaning of being a woman and a man so as to add dignity to our positions and roles in society. In this manner, proper portrayals of gender relations in the media can educate our women and men about gender roles and responsibilities and along the way promote gender respect and harmony. Clearly, music videos are influential tools for gender advocacy among young people, but it is unfortunate that the producers and performers are not doing enough toward this end. The push for a conscientization process among the industry folks should be included in our gender-setting, whilst at the same time promoting media literacy among the consumers.

About the auhors

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