

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The topic of gender representation or gender orientation is a very common topic in our daily life nowadays. The subject of gender things has been a broad public consumption in modern life. Everywhere we go we will find some things that show the prominence of one gender, either masculinity or femininity. This can be found in any forms from magazines, newspapers, printed and digital advertisements, news and information from television, radio and other media—even songs.

These days there are certain things, occasions, activities or other aspects that clearly show such different preference to one gender. A few simple examples that can be easily spotted are the aisles in toy stores which are color-coded—pink for girl toys and blue for boys; certain kinds of food and drink which are marketed to women while others are exclusively marketed to men; sports that require physical contacts are usually, labeled as men's, while gymnastics or yoga which requires supple and gentle movements and also has less physical contacts is more typically women-like;

women are supposed to like romantic comedies, while men are supposed to like action films.

Despite many obvious examples and vivid phenomena, many people still have the wrong understanding of 'gender.' The most common understanding of 'gender' from society is that it is related to one's sex. However, that is a long-established misunderstanding which we as commoners accept because that is what we were told to believe. In fact, based on *Oxford Advanced Learner's English Dictionary*, gender means "the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology" (Hornby, 2010, p. 622). It is clearly mentioned that 'gender' is not about one's sex or biological condition but more about social and cultural perspectives; in discussing gender usually we use the terms "masculinity" and "femininity" to identify a set of characteristics, values, and meanings.

This intriguing case is the reason why I am interested in analyzing gender as my thesis topic. Nonetheless, I have decided to focus only on masculinity because in many societies, especially Western society, the values of masculinity are seen as superior to femininity. This does not necessarily mean that men are superior to women; rather, it suggests that the characteristics associated with masculinity are culturally valued above those associated with femininity (The Critical Media Project, "Gender", n.d.). For me personally as a man, I believe this masculinity topic is something that is noteworthy and I would like to see how masculinity is actually seen in the wide world, which is another reason for doing this research.

I choose to use a semiotic approach in analyzing the topic. Semiotics, also known as semiology, itself can be easily understood as the study of sign (Chandler, 2007, p. 2). In a more complex definition, semiotics or semiology is a field of study which concerns about everything that can be taken as a sign, no matter what shapes or forms it takes. A sign may be in the form of a picture, color, gesture or anything (ibid). On that account, a semiotic approach is one of the best approaches to do a comprehensive and detailed analysis because it can be used to analyze everything as long as it is seen or considered a sign.

I will use Saussurean semiotic theory as the basic theory and guidance in my analysis. In Saussure's semiotics, the most important concept is that a 'sign' is divided into two elements: the physical part, which he terms as the *signifier*, and the conceptual part, which he calls the *signified* (Danesi, 2004, p. 24). This will be elaborated more in Chapter Two (Theoretical Framework).

In discussing masculinity as the main topic of this thesis, I choose a magazine because it is an item which is very common and easy to find and a lot of people read it and a magazine can also show or display clearly a gender prominence, especially the one with pictures and texts. Therefore, I choose *Men's Health* magazine covers as the main data source.

In particular, I will use the cover of *Men's Health* magazine of June 2014, USA edition and February 2016, Australia edition. As clearly suggested by the name of the magazine, it is directed exclusively at men as all the articles particularly talk about everything relating to men, especially that of health. I choose the front cover of the magazine because it has a lot of things that can be analyzed such as visual images

and texts. Furthermore, a magazine front cover is the first thing one sees when one looks at a magazine. Therefore, a cover is a very important part as it has the function of giving the first impression and delivering the idea or the identity of the magazine itself; in this magazine that identity is 'masculinity'. The decision for choosing the different areas and years of the publication is to find out whether this magazine is consistent in maintaining its idea and identity of masculinity.

This thesis is significant as it can be useful and helpful for readers, not only in gaining more information about gender representation but also in understanding more that gender representation, especially masculinity, is always displayed around us without us being aware of it.

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1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problems of this study are formulated below:

1. What are the visual and textual signifiers found in the magazine covers?
2. How are the signifieds of those signifiers related to masculinity?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Based on the problems above, the purposes of this study are:

1. To find out the visual and textual signifiers in the magazine covers.
2. To find out how the signifieds of those signifiers are related to masculinity.

1.4 Method of Research

In conducting this research, first, I read and learnt about semiotics and its approaches from books and other sources. I also searched for the concept of masculinity and the theories related to it. Then, I chose the data, which are *Men's Health* magazine covers of June 2014, USA edition, and February 2016, Australia edition to be my data sources of analysis. Afterwards I observed every element on the magazine covers and analyzed them using the theories above before writing a research report.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One is Introduction, where Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis are presented. Chapter Two is Theoretical Framework, which contains the elaboration of the theories that are used as the main references in order to analyze the data. In Chapter Three, the elements of the data are analyzed and elaborated using the theories. Last, Chapter Four is the conclusion of the thesis. Last, Bibliography and Appendices are presented at the end of the thesis.