

Media Portrayal of Female Singers Reflected from Radio Interviews

Radha Andhra Swari^{1*}, Made Sani Damayanthi Muliawan²

Universitas Warmadewa^{1*,2}

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Corresponding Author: Radha Andhra Swari E-mail: radhaaswari@gmail.com	<p>Media has the power to influence the way people perceive things, as of why, there is the term “media portrayal”. Prior works have attempted to investigate on media portrayal, particularly how women are depicted in the media. Hence, this study examined the media portrayal of female singers in Elvis Duran and The Morning Show. Descriptive qualitative method was applied in this study. The data was gathered from Elvis Duran and The Morning Show’s official YouTube channel, and three interviews with different female singers were chosen. The analysis was conducted using a critical discourse analysis approach, namely Three Dimensional Approach. In addition to that, this study focuses on the lexical choices used by the radio hosts when interviewing the female singers. The findings were further analyzed by referring to gender-related theories. Based on the results, it is evident that there are certain words that are oftentimes associated with female singers, some of which are “feeling”, “relationships”, and “breakup song”. These portrayals of female singers support genderlect theories that women tend to use language to express their feelings and build intimate relationships with others.</p> <p>Keywords: Media Portrayal, Female Singers, Radio Interviews</p>

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INTRODUCTION

It is undebatable that media plays an essential role in shaping society’s ways of perceiving things, including gender roles. Gender is widely considered as a social construction, because it is not associated with physical appearance, which makes it different from biological sex. In addition to that, knowledge about gender roles can be obtained from various sources, such as family, friends, books, movies, or other kinds of media. These days, the role of the media varies from providing information to giving entertainment. Speaking of entertainment, the media also manages to portray the private life of public figures around the world. This happens because images and messages from these people are displayed in the media. Singers, as public figures, have experienced the same thing as well. For instance, female singers have different media portrayals if compared to the male ones, indicating that gender stereotypes also exist in the context of media discourse.

Based on the previous findings, it is evident that women have received less media coverage across countries (Shor and Rijt, 2019). Thus, it is essential to address issues on women and media portrayal these days. Furthermore, a study by Yin et al. (2019) revealed that it is more effective to portray Chinese women endorsers as “sexy” rather than “smart” when it comes to achieving successful luxury advertising. This is thought-provoking since the media has the power to influence the audience’s opinions towards this issue. Speaking of media discourse, Fairclough

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(Fairclough, 2005, p.38) elaborated that media can be categorized based on its communication channel. As an example, the one that uses visual channel is press or printed media, as the language is written. Another instance given by Fairclough is radio, since it is based on spoken language and communicated through oral channel (broadcasts). In addition to that, television can be identified as the mixture of broadcasting and sound-image recording. In spite of the differences, Fairclough (2005, p.16) suggested that the language used in all of these media types can be investigated through discourse analysis. Moreover, among all three kinds of media that have been mentioned, radio is the most interactive media because it enables the audience to join them in some sections when broadcasting. Most of the time, radio stations, particularly the music stations invite various singers as their guest stars. The form of interaction between the audience and the singers, as well as the broadcasters is realized through phone calls, where they can ask questions, give comments, and discuss other things.

In addition to analyzing media discourse, Fairclough proposed an approach named Three Dimensional Approach. There are three main points of this framework that should be highlighted, which are: a) texts, b) discourse practice, and c) social practice. The first step of the analysis is examining texts or the discourse itself. This is associated with linguistic findings from various aspects, namely lexical choices, grammatical features, meanings, and others. Analyzing discourse practice is the second step of this approach. When it comes to discourse practice, texts are produced and consumed, meaning that the analysis goes deeper than merely describing the linguistic aspects. Last but not least, the step of analyzing social practice enables researchers to look from a wider angle, by referring to theories from other sciences (e.g. gender, sociology, etc.). From this viewpoint, according to Fairclough, critical discourse analysis can be considered as the link between texts, discourse practices, and social practices, and it is suitable in examining media discourse.

Media has the power to influence people through the messages and images they choose to display every day (Sinani and Matoshi, 2019). As an instance, Shor and Rijt (2019) claimed that men in the media are generally perceived as “more competent, interesting, and worthy of both their positions and public attention” if compared to women. Because of this, women are apprehended as inferior to men, and they continue to become underrepresented by the media. As Lakoff (2009, p.48) put it, society’s point of view believes and accepts that women are incapable of holding such power because of the nature of their behaviors. Furthermore, Tannen (1990) in the Difference Theory pointed out that women have a greater tendency to seek or give sympathy and advice when it comes to using language, in order to build strong relationships with their peers. Recent works by researchers who are interested in conducting studies on gender and media strengthen this point (Alam and Educators, 2023; S and Joseph, 2023)

Despite the fact that previous researchers have conducted studies on women portrayal in the media, there has not yet been a study that discusses media portrayal of female singers. In addition to that, previous works have attempted to use various kinds of media, i.e. newspapers, advertisements, TV shows, and music videos. However, research on women portrayal in radio shows has not been carried out. Hence, in this present study, the researcher intends to explore how female singers are represented in Elvis Duran and the Morning Show. Based on the background of the study, the research problems are formulated as follows: 1) What lexical choices are used by the hosts of Elvis Duran and The Morning Show when interviewing the female singers? 2) How do these lexical choices reflect portrayal of female singers in the media?

METHODS

This study aims to delve into the media portrayal of female singers as reflected from Elvis Duran and The Morning Show’s interviews. Hence, the researcher believes that descriptive qualitative method is suitable for this study, since it is intended to explore a language phenomenon. The data was collected from Elvis Duran and The Morning Show’s official YouTube channel. This show belongs to Z100 Radio Station, which is New York’s #1 Hit Music Station. Hosted by Elvis Duran, Danielle Monaro, Medha Gandhi and more, Elvis Duran and The Morning Show mainly discusses about music and pop culture. Their YouTube channel currently holds 208.000 subscribers, and the episodes are posted three times a week.

The researcher selected three videos from Elvis Duran and The Morning Show's YouTube channel, each of which has different female singer as their guest star. The female singers chosen are the most popular ones these past few years, namely Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, and Camila Cabello. After watching the selected videos repeatedly, the researcher transcribed the data. It needs to be highlighted that the analysis focused on the lexical choices of the radio hosts, because they represent how the media portray these female singers as public figures. Since the data was analyzed using Fairclough's Three Dimensional Approach (1995), it was done in some steps. First of all, the researcher examined the lexical choices of the radio hosts. The next step was identifying the discourse practice, which is how the interview was conducted by Elvis Duran and The Morning Show as the chosen media. After gathering all the findings, the researcher analyzed the data further, by referring to gender-related theories from Lakoff (1973) and Tannen (1990). Last but not least, the researcher was able to draw the conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, there are some certain lexical choices that are always associated with female singers. In order to give a clearer picture, the data from the first interview (with Taylor Swift) are listed as follows:

- (1) "...You're a cat lady, doesn't mean you're *emotionally unstable*..." [04:29]
- (2) "...But when you talk about *love*, you know, you're saying, having a *breakup* song on Lover album..." [15:21]
- (3) "...Looking at her, I'm gonna say it to you guys, the *happiness* on her face..." [23:45]

In datum (1), the radio host disagrees with society's perception that women who like cats are considered as "emotionally unstable", after discussing Taylor Swift's interest for cats. This somewhat implies how women are often related to topics about emotions. Similarly, datum (2) shows that the topic being discussed is still relatable to feelings, particularly from the words "love" and "breakup song". Female singers are portrayed as more likely to have songs about love or breakups, which may be the reason why one of the radio hosts asked whether Taylor Swift has a breakup song on her recent album. Likewise, there is the word "happiness" in datum (3). In this case, the radio host is telling the audience how happy Taylor Swift seems, which strengthens the point that the frequently-discussed topic with female singers is related to emotions. In addition to that, the findings from the second interview (with Selena Gomez) also show the same pattern, as in the following data:

- (4) "...Obviously best piece of *advice* you could give yourself or anyone else..." [03:53]
- (5) "...I think a lot of people *feel* what you're *feeling*..." [04:46]
- (6) "...When was the last time you *cried* because you were *overjoyed*?..." [19:32]

It is evident that the word "advice" can be found on datum (4), where the radio host is talking about one of Selena Gomez's songs entitled "Lose You To Love Me". In other words, the radio host considers the song as a great advice that can be passed to other people because of the lyrics. Another radio host agrees by stating "I think a lot of people feel what you're feeling", as shown on datum (5). Here, the word "feeling" appears, leading back to the point that women and feelings are inseparable. Besides, datum (6) presents two other words related to emotions, which are "cried" and "overjoyed". It becomes clear that female singers are portrayed based on how women in general are depicted by the society. In addition to that, findings from the third interview (with Camila Cabello) provide more lexical choices used by the radio hosts to portray female singers, which are listed as follows:

- (7) "...We're letting everyone know that you were coming in today, and the number one thing they said was, "Don't talk about her *dating life*." ..." [00:47]
- (8) "...I mean are you really *ready* for that? Cause that's a lot of work..." [01:19]
- (9) "...When you put out an album that talks about your *feelings*..." [07:13]

- (10) “...Have you ever had any *relationships mended or broken* through some of the songs that you wrote?...” [10:03]

The highlight of datum (7) is the term “dating life”, even though the radio host did not intend to ask that question to the guest, that is Camila Cabello. Looking at the context, it can be implied that female singers frequently get asked about their dating lives. Meanwhile, datum (8) depicts the question related to Camila Cabello’s feeling about going on tour, particularly whether or not she is “ready” for that. Speaking of feelings, the word “feelings” reappears on this interview, as in datum (9). Moreover, from this datum, it can be inferred that female singers are more likely to release an album based on their feelings. The topic about dating life continues, since in datum (10), one of the broadcasters used the word “relationships” and questioned whether there are songs that “mended” or “broken” the guest’s romantic relationships. This brings a similar idea to datum (7) that the dating lives of female singers have greater tendency to be exposed by the media. Hence, as people who work in the media, it is not a rare event for the radio hosts to use such lexical choices when interviewing their guests, particularly female singers.

In order to delve further into the way these lexical choices represent portrayal of female singers in the media, it is essential to address the discourse practice beforehand, according to Fairclough’s framework (1995). The interviews where Elvis Duran and The Morning Show took place involved approximately three radio hosts and a guest. From the videos, it is evident that the radio hosts began the interviews by greeting the guests before asking questions, and they made the interviews as casual as possible. Additionally, in this case Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, and Camila Cabello were already familiar with Elvis Duran as the main broadcaster, since it was not the first time they were interviewed in that radio show. Hence, the interviews seem less forced and more like casual talking for these three female singers. The casualness of the interviews may as well influence the lexical choices used by the radio hosts.

The findings from the interviews already show that the lexical choices are mostly related to feelings, which include “emotionally unstable”, “love”, “happiness”, “feeling”, “cried”, “overjoyed”, and “ready”. Lakoff (1973) and Tannen (1990) claimed that women are more likely to use language to articulate their feelings, which may be the reason why the radio hosts discussed certain topics with the female singers using lexical choices related to feelings. Speaking of feelings, “dating life” and “relationships” terms are also present in the findings. It is not a rare event for people who work for the media to expose the dating lives of the female singers, and thus, this may depict how female singers are treated by the media in general. In addition to that, there is an appearance of the term “breakup song”, which is used by one of the radio hosts when discussing about Taylor Swift’s recent album. This strengthens the previous point that when it comes to female singers, one of the media’s interests is always related to their dating lives. Last but not least, the use of the word “advice” in one of the interviews also supports Tannen’s theory (1990) that women have a greater tendency to exchange advice with their peers when using language. These findings show that Lakoff’s (1973) and Tannen’s (1990) gender theories are still applicable to this day, specifically in terms of media portrayal of female singers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Elvis Duran and The Morning Show’s interviews reflect how female singers are generally portrayed by the media, specifically through certain lexical choices such as “feeling”, “dating life”, “breakup song”, and others. Additionally, these words indicate the topics that are always linked to female singers in various kinds of media, and in this case, a radio show. The findings are also in line with Lakoff’s (1973) and Tannen’s (1990) gender theories that women tend to use language to express their feelings and build intimate relationships. It is expected that this research will raise the readers’ awareness regarding the portrayal of female singers in the media, and it is suggested for future researchers to conduct more studies on this topic across different types of media.

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